ABSTRACT

WHITAKER, ABIGAIL VAN. The Lived Experience of Female Cattle Producers. (Under the direction of Dr. Jacklyn Bruce).

This qualitative phenomenological study describes the lived experiences of female cattle producers. Women in agriculture control over 14% of the farmland in our country, creating a footprint for 30% of US agriculture (USDA, 2012). While they may be present in the industry, women are not equally represented in the literature. Society has expectations of groups instead of allowing individuals to define themselves and what categories they do or do not fit into. This study was framed by psychoanalytic, cognitive-developmental, biological, and social cognitive theories of gender identity and development. Using a phenomenological approach, the following themes emerged most prevalently - doubt, sacrifice, expectations, mentoring, and acceptance. No two female cattle producers look the same. Their stories, day to day lives, experiences, and outlooks differ from one woman to the next. They face a set of challenges that center on others expectations of their lives, careers, and roles in their families rather than what the woman would define herself as. This study concludes that when dealing with people in any situation, they need to be treated as individuals rather than representatives of groups. Organizations, work places, and even social settings must see the person and not the category.
The Lived Experience of Female Cattle Producers

by
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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the women who come behind me. Accept, support, and encourage each other. I hope and pray that the findings that I am reaching now will be obsolete when you read my study in years to come.
BIOGRAPHY

Abigail Van Whitaker (Abby) grew up in the small town of Mooresboro, North Carolina. She attended North Carolina State University in Raleigh, North Carolina where she received her bachelor’s degree in agricultural science with minors in extension education, animal science, and agricultural business management. She was involved with the AEE club, enjoyed playing and listening to bluegrass music with her friends, and spent her spare time convincing everyone in her life to take the Myers-Briggs personality test. During the summers of her undergraduate degree, Abby worked in her county’s extension office, on a row crop farm, and a blackberry farm. It was through these working experiences that Abby gained a true love for the combination of agriculture and adult education. After graduating with her bachelor’s, Abby returned to NC State to pursue her Master’s degree in Agriculture and Extension Education. She plans on graduating and working as a county agriculture agent.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This study highlights a population that contributes to feeding the world, and one that deserves to be studied and recognized for their efforts: female cattle producers. Women in agriculture control over 14% of the farmland in our country, creating a footprint for 30% of US agriculture (USDA, 2012). Female principal operators own and/or operate 14% of farms in America, meaning that she is in charge of the day-to-day operations (2012). The second largest commodity produced by farms with a female principal operator is beef cattle, with over 66,000 operations nationwide (2012). These statistics paint a picture showing women’s presence in agriculture. However, while women are present in the industry, they are not equally represented in the literature, especially with regard to cattle producers. This study will examine the lived experience of female cattle producers in effort to begin bringing their stories and experiences to light.

The presence of women in agriculture in developing countries is studied more often than in developed nations. It has been found that women become increasingly more important to the agriculture industry in developing countries as their economies grow because “men often leave rural areas to seek work in new industries” (Ball, 2014, p. 593). However, in developed countries, the agriculture industry is masculinized and the vast majority of workers are male. Studies are more interested in women’s formal labor presence, such as leadership positions in large companies, rather than on the farm (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970).

“Farm women in developed countries were caught between the facts that economists researching women’s issues were not interested in agriculture because so few women were farmers and that women were not of particular concern to rural development policy makers because so few farmers were women” (Ball, 2014, p. 593).
Research on women in agriculture has been conducted by rural, sociology, and gender studies, but “scholarship on the topic of women as main operators of their farms is still relatively scarce” (Ball, 2014, p. 594). It is time that the women of agriculture be brought to light and their stories told. There is power in sharing the experiences of those who are often overlooked because their words may speak to those in similar situations. The more that successful women in male-dominated industries, such as agriculture, are talked about, their struggles exposed, and their advice given, the more likely young women are to believe in their ability to make their dreams come true. Everyone needs someone to look up to and while all heroes do not wear capes, female cattle producers are wearing boots that young women, like myself, hope to one day wear and walk in. It is time to tell their stories so that others believe they can write their own.

**Conceptual Framework**

**Gender & Gender Construct**

“Gender is a social construct that outlines the roles, behaviors, activities and features that a particular society believes are appropriate for men and women” (Hasanovic, 2015). It is human nature to have a need to categorize elements of the world around us, and gender features have become an area of social classification (Anker, 1997). The appropriate behaviors and classifications for men include being tough, providing for the family, being dominant, and leading (Hasanovic, 2015). Women are expected to be more caring, nurturing, attentive, and more emotional (2015).

The problem with a rigid definition of gender and the human need for categorizing is that there is little room for variance. Those who wish to go defy definition or blur the category are not accepted (2015). These expectations can create a sense of doubt as to what is available and/or possible for either gender wishing to expand beyond the standard definition that society supports.
The social construct of gender creates a divide between the behaviors, emotions, qualities, roles, and careers are deemed acceptable for men and women individually (Anker, 1997). Society created these standards, and how people have acted upon them throughout history has reinforced the beliefs.

The term identity is rooted from the meaning of “same”, implying that one must view oneself as having parallels with others (Steensma, Kreukels, de Vries, Cohen-Kettenis, 2013). When discussing gender, “gender identity refers to the extent to which a person experiences oneself to be like others of one gender” (2013, p. 21). This sense of self and how it aligns with gender is impacted by how one views themselves, it typically aligns with physical characteristics of gender (2013).

While toddlers are able to place gender identifying labels on inanimate objects at a young age, a child’s personal identity is still forming during adolescence (Steensma, Keukels, de Vries, Cohen-Kettenis, 2013). This identity includes “values, principles, and roles an individual has adopted as his or her own” (2013, p. 23). This is an individual process where young people are deciding on what defines them in multiple areas of their lives. Hill and Lynch (1983) argued that conflict of personal identity sources from the pressure to conform to societal gender roles, or gender intensification. “Through adolescence, the time in gendered social contexts generally showed to be associated with the development of more gender stereotyped qualities” (Steensma, Keukels, de Vries, Cohen-Kettenis, 2013, p. 25). This means that as children get older, they are exposed more to what society deems acceptable as gender roles. The farther along in life they get, the more pressure that they feel to conform to these roles (2013). Therefore, while gender identity may source from childhood, conformity influences personal identity as they age.
“At its simplest, the basic hypothesis of identity development that the transition from adolescence to adulthood involves a progressive strengthening in the sense of identity” (Waterman, 1982, p. 342). Waterman argued that identity is something that is established young but develops as age progresses. “At some point prior to adolescence, it can be said that that no one has yet explored identity alternatives… certainly by college years… there is substantial evidence that both exploration and commitment are occurring” (Waterman, 1999, p. 608).

“Movement from adolescence to adulthood involves a preponderance of changes in identity status which can be characterized as progressive developmental shifts” (Waterman, 1982, p. 343). Waterman argues that as someone’s life continues they have more experiences to draw from and have explored more possibilities, meaning that they will become more committed to their identity (Waterman, 1999).

Waterman (1982) study expanded on the topic of gender identity in adulthood and concluded that identity development does not differ between males and females (Waterman, 1982). Societal differences are at play and can influence identity development differences in gender. However, these variations do not root from gender differences in identity development theories (1982).

Men and women both, as they age have new experiences and perspectives, which influence their lives. This means that as they get older, their identity may not change, but it should develop. These changes are not specific to a gender, but are related to what one is exposed to later in life. Meaning that how one’s identity develops is situationally dependent.

Hoffman and Hurst (1990) hypothesized that gender stereotypes came to be in attempt to rationalize the distribution in both occupational and social roles. This means that there are separate expectations of each gender for both the workplace and everyday life. The set of
expected traits for men include independence, strong, and self-confident (Whitley & Kite, 2010). While women are expected to have higher tendencies of being emotional, helpful, and kind (2010). Those who fall outside of these expectations of how they should behave tend to be viewed negatively (2010).

Career settings are known to harbor the existence of gender stereotypes (Yang, 2010). Within the workplace, men are thought to possess more achievement oriented traits, while women are thought to be more social oriented (Bakan, 1966). Men are labeled more often as aggressive, forceful, independent, and decisive, while women are sympathetic and concerned about others in the work environment (1966). Gender stereotypes tend to be viewed as polarized (Bem, 1993) or exclusive, meaning that what is feminine is not masculine and what is masculine is not feminine (Whitley & Kite, 2010).

With these assumptions and gender stereotypes being prevalent in today’s workplaces, it is expected that this is what reinforces the inequalities between men and women, which emphasizes men’s higher power status (Bruckmuller, Hegarty, & Abele, 2012). This means that gender stereotypes contribute to sex-segregation of acceptable career choices and outlooks for men and women. Individuals who fall outside of the societally deemed acceptable role are viewed negatively. Therefore creating an additional set of challenges for those wishing to go against the status quo.

**Historical Context of Feminism**

Throughout history, women have been expected to stay within a line of work that keeps them localized to the home. They were not supported or accepted in fields other than what was deemed appropriate for them, rather than them making the choice themselves. Women have not always known that they could have more than what their household could contain. When the
census data surveys in the early 1900s would ask for women’s occupation, it was common for them to enter *housewife*, as that was the most prevalent line of work for women during this time ("Statistics of Women at Work", 1900). It was expected that women would find their fulfillment as wives and mothers, because home and family was the highest achievement available to them (Friedan, 1963). The argument was not that women were inferior to men, but that they should be viewed as different (1963). Their identity was rooted in the role that they played at home with their husband, caring for him, the house, and the children.

Women did not have a right to their own voice until August of 1920 when the 19th amendment passed and granted them the right to vote. W.E.B. Du Bois once said that “Women are mothers of men; if men vote, why not women?” (Watkins, 2016, p. 3). There were men that realized the importance of women gaining their political voice and fought to make sure it happened. Frederick Douglass said that

“No man, however eloquent, can speak for woman as woman can for herself. Nonetheless, I hold that this cause is not altogether an exclusively woman’s cause. It is the cause of human brotherhood as well as the cause of human sisterhood, and both must rise or fall together. Woman cannot be elevated without elevating man, and man cannot be depressed without depressing woman also” (Douglass, 1888, p. 116).

These men realized that their voice could not speak for women and their experiences, nor could they grow society as a whole if they did not support half of the population. After earning the right to vote, women began to feel as if there was still something missing from their lives; however, since they did not know what more they could have, this feeling began to be referred to as ‘the problem with no name’ (Friedan, 1963). Housewives were going to the doctor with large red blisters on their bodies with no medical explanations, and they reported feelings of incompleteness and emptiness. These symptoms would later lead to the term ‘housewives blight’ (1963). These women knew that they wanted more than to live their lives completely inside of
their house, but did not know how to put into words that a career and their own identity was what they needed. As one individual described, “The problem is always being the children’s mommy, or the minister’s wife and never being myself” (1963, p. 73). This marked the beginning of women recognizing that they yearned for more in their life, such as a career, but women could expect an uphill battle in terms of being recognized as equal and worthy.

President Richard Nixon was quoted in 1971 saying, in response to why he would not appoint a woman to the US Supreme Court, “I don’t think a woman should be in any government job, whatsoever… mainly because they are erratic. And emotional. Men are erratic and emotional, too, but the point is a woman is more likely to be” (Eagly, 2007). This is one documentation of powerful men not accepting what were perceived to be feminine traits, such as emotions, as leadership qualities. Men tended to believe that because women differed from them, that it must mean they were not fit for a job (2007).

During and before the 1960s and 70s, men were perceived as the providers, protectors, decision makers, and were often in charge of the household, while women were expected to be more nurturing (Friedan, 1998), and were primarily relegated to the home sphere. These assumptions lie outside the fact that women, by this time, were working jobs, had lifelong careers, and possessed skill sets equal to men. Women who were working jobs, however, faced opposition within (often) male dominated career fields, such as lesser pay, fewer opportunities to advance, and less hands on work (“Statistics of Women at Work”, 1900). While women may have made their way out of the home, they did not receive an entirely warm welcome into the workplace.

Despite the female population increasing presence in the workforce since the early 1900’s, women are still being paid dimes to a man’s dollar (Warner, 2014). By the early 2000s,
women represented 50% of the United States population and earned 60% of undergraduate and graduate degrees; however, they represented only 14.6% of executive officers and less than 5% of Fortune 500 CEOs (2014). Women are now able to steadily rise up in companies but hit an invisible barrier just as the executive positions come into view and are also disproportionately represented in low wage jobs (Eagly, 2007). What this means is that women are educated and are working jobs that should be leading them to higher wages and titles. However, they often never bridge the gap to equal that of a man’s pay or title, when having equal experience and education.

**Feminism**

Feminism addresses the need for women to know that they have more opportunities than what lies within the four walls of their home and are just as capable of pursuing these opportunities as their male counterparts (Eagly, 2007). Our society believes that “feminism is a bunch of angry women who want to be like men” (hooks, 2000, p. vii). Feminism is not about women wallowing in victimhood, or anger at the male population, but about understanding the complex interrelationship between women and men (Friedan, 1998). Women simply seek the power that allows them to change the possibility of their own lives (1998).

While it is true that there are more women leaders, CEOs, governors, and senators than in the past, women are not walking the same path to those same positions (Eagly, 2007). The metaphor of the glass ceiling is outdated because it implies that all women who advance to a certain point are stopped from advancing any further. Within the many female success stories that people like to tell, what is often left out is *how* women arrived where they are.

Eagly describes a much more appropriate metaphor for women’s career trajectory when she uses the term “labyrinth”, representing the complex journey a woman must take to reach a goal (2007). It symbolizes that goals are attainable for women, but their journey will have more
twists and turns than that of their male counterparts. Even in female dominated professions like nursing, library science, elementary education, and social work, men climb the career ladder more quickly than women and are often placed in leadership roles sooner and with less experience (2007). The males that are placed in those leadership roles are consistently rated more favorably than women in evaluations by their employees, especially in male dominated fields (2007).

As the years have passed, the issues that feminism includes have grown and changed. The need for feminism goes beyond just the workplace and has become an issue of inclusivity.

“The best kinds of contemporary feminisms are for me, inclusive, empathetic, and constantly striving to do more. Feminism today is important for the same reason it has always been important: because women still face continued and consistent oppressions. These oppressions may have changed and evolved over time, but they still exist. Changes in feminism are due to a change in oppressions, but also because feminism has needed to adapt to the demands of its growing community. Rightly so, the feminist movement that I subscribe to is inclusive of women of color, trans women, queer women, sex workers, disabled women, and other women that face oppressions outside of those that white, middle class feminists can sometimes only be seen to address. As a result, feminism today needs to remain always inclusive, always adaptable, and always open to further growth and learning” (Gleeson, 2016)

Feminism in today’s world will need to continue to evolve, as this movement is a process. While true feminism is quite simply described as desiring equal opportunities no matter the circumstances, it is an issue that encompasses much more (Eagly, 2007). It is an everyday battle for a woman’s right to comfort in her own skin. It goes beyond the difference in the numbers on pay stubs. Feminism lives in the hearts of all, men and women, who believe that gender should not be a barrier.

Women in Male Dominated Industries

A long history of male visibility and domination in leadership roles has made it easier for people to associate leadership traits with male figures (Eagly, 2007). Behaviors for men in a
professional setting, such as pointing at people or extended eye contact, are accepted as dominance but if performed by a woman, are seen as damaging to her career because women are not associated with these traits (2007). Women are expected to perform as equals to their male counterparts but the same kind of behavior men use with success can often be seen as negative when used by women.

Women seeking leadership roles are first confronted with a two-pronged issue, expectations of her behavior not matching with normative leadership traits. In order to surpass gender stereotypes of competence, a woman must come across as confident and assertive (Rudman, Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012). “Thus, women's first hurdle to leadership is the “lack of fit” between feminine stereotypes and leadership qualities” (2012, p. 165). For example, a study found that while women are expected to be more helpful than men, an increased level of helpfulness by both genders resulted in more promotions for the men, while it did not advance the careers of the women (Eagly, 2007). In a work setting, women are expected to be friendly, polite, answer questions, show more compassion and affection, and to be more sympathetic. However, people expect highly effective women to be less likable and nice, while highly effective men are thought to be more assertive and controlling (2007). For example, Kim Campbell, who served as the prime minister of Canada in 1993, described her experience as a female leader by saying “I don’t have a traditionally female way of speaking… I’m quite assertive. If I didn’t speak the way I do, I wouldn’t have been seen as a leader… It was the right way for a leader to speak, but it wasn’t the right way for a woman to speak” (2007, p. 102). A study on gender hierarchy “suggests that backlash functions to preserve male dominance by reinforcing a double standard for power and control” (Rudman, Racusin, Phelan, & Nauts, 2012, p. 165). Women are not viewed equally in positions of power and are expected to be nice simply
because of their gender. However, the kinder and more emotional expectations of women are not viewed as leadership traits. Therefore, the standards society sets for women in leadership roles work to prevent their success in these roles.

Women in leadership roles have an additional challenge brought upon her workplace: trying to find the balance that her coworkers are comfortable with, rather than being accepted for who she is. When women are in leadership roles, it is more difficult for our society to accept their style of leadership because it does not match their male counterpart (2007). Women are challenged to forge a path, and a leadership style, that is unique to their voice and their experiences. “I think that there is a real penalty for a woman who behaves like a man. The men don’t like it and the women don’t either” (Eagly, 2007, p. 168). Female leaders worry about the image they portray. In fact, studies found that 96% of female executives think it is critical or fairly important for them to develop a leadership style that their male managers are comfortable with (2007). Feminine qualities are not viewed as leadership traits, however no one is comfortable with a woman that behaves like a man (2007). Because general expectations for women leaders do not align with their male counterparts, females are forced into a constant state of adaptation.

A study on women in the workplace asked participants to “compare women’s general status at work with that of men” and to “describe their specific experiences in this regard” (Bergman & Hallberg, 2002, p. 311). What they found was that two main areas of concern arose, “perceived burdens on me (the individual woman) and perceived burdens on women” (2002, p. 311).

Perceived burdens on me centered around the “women’s experiences of possibilities for equality at work” which were based on “energy, ambitions, and action” (2002, p. 315). This
includes everything from women feeling the need to be more assertive to gain the same opportunities as a man, to being more pushy to get promoted, and the feeling of needing to be extra prepared before talking to men in a professional setting (2002). These factors demonstrate “a need for mental strength to cope with inequality in order to be accepted in the male dominated industry” (2002, p. 315). Women are having to put extra energy and effort into being accepted in the same situations as men. Women gave testimonies, for example, of double preparing for simple presentations when the audience would be predominately male.

*Perceived burdens on women* are focused on “perceived general attitudes that women must meet to work in a male dominated industry” (2002, p. 315). This includes negative attitudes about working life, receiving unfair judgments, and fewer opportunities. An underlying theme emerged that women felt it was expected of them to have a negative outlook on being in the minority in their workplace. An example would be expecting a woman to complain about not having many other women in the workplace to talk to at lunch. Their male coworkers expected this to bother the women, and imagined that women had more gender-related preferences in the workplace, rather than workplace preferences unrelated to gender.

These findings show the need and importance of social support for women and the benefits this brings socially, mentally, and emotionally (2002). Society has generalized ways we think about work and those tend to be categorized into masculine and feminine roles, with men receiving the benefit (2002). Being a woman in a male dominated field requires “mental strength to apply different coping strategies” (2002, p. 320). It is not easy being a woman in a man’s world, but it is possible with extra strength and skill sets that it should not require.
Women & Agriculture

Women have always had a role in agriculture, but the initial role was as farmwife who tended to the house and home (Sachs, Barbercheck, Braiser, Kiernan, Terman, 2016). Not unlike her city-dwelling counterparts, farm women’s jobs were centralized around the location of the home. For example, women were not going to town to do business with the banks or suppliers; that was her husband’s, father’s, or brother’s job. Men were the face of the operation and women worked behind the scenes (2016). Men have dominated the production agriculture industry because the work is predominantly labor intensive, and outside the home. Women were expected to be the caretakers of the house and if they were to work elsewhere, they needed a job that would allow them to work away from, as well as within, the home. Because traditionally women have been expected to manage only the household sphere, motivated women striving for a career within the production agriculture industry face the challenge of being accepted in an industry originally intended for men (2016). Males in female dominated industries, like teaching and nursing, are often praised and paid more because of their gender, as male nurses make an average of $7678 more annually than female coworkers (Muench, Sindelar, Busch, Buerhaus, 2015). Women in male dominated fields, such as agriculture, have not been given a similar welcome. Women make up 31% of farmers in America and tend over 300,000 acres, with a $12.9 billion economic impact (USDA, 2012). Women’s presence in production agriculture does not go without notice, but it is not always fostered.

Even in agricultural fields that are off the farm, including academia, men have historically been in leadership positions more often than females and are still reluctant to accept a woman having a non-traditional, (something outside of a housewife), role in the industry (Sachs, Barbercheck, Braiser, Kiernan, Terman, 2016).
“As researchers, we are all currently, or were previously, faculty members and graduate students in land-grant universities in colleges of agriculture… We have been asked multiple times why we focus on women farmers and if they are really farmers. One would expect that in an academic setting, in an era of diversity training, institutional civil rights reviews, and general political correctness around the issue of diversity, we would have progressed beyond the need to explain women’s contribution to agriculture or any profession perceived as the traditional province of men.” (2016, pg. 2-3)

The women in the agriculture industry, whether it be production or academia, who are recognized as successful are often connected to a husband, father, or brother who helped her get to where she is, rather than being recognized on her own. Her hard work and dedication to her career are not enough to make her stand out or stand away from a male in the same position; she all too often has to be tied to a successful male for her achievements to be accepted as valid.

Women’s success

“…depends on creating opportunities for access to resources, knowledge, and social support through nontraditional means. While these women can accomplish much on their own, their efforts are thwarted without the support of agricultural institutions to create equal opportunities for them…” (2016, p. 4)

A study from 2014 on women in agriculture stated that there are

“three changes largely responsible for women increasing their representation in the occupation; an increase in the demand for niche products, a decrease in the average farm size, and greater societal acceptance of women as farmers” (Ball, 2014, p. 593)

Women in agriculture are becoming more publicized as farmers in articles and stories in the popular media, believed to have been influenced by the publication of the 2002 USDA Agricultural Census (2014).

“Common themes of these stories include a growing acceptance and support of women as farmers, how women are more likely than men to run small, sustainable farms or ranches as opposed to larger, single-product organizations, and how women often cite the connection or service to the community as a motivation for farming or ranching” (2014, p. 594).
The trends in women’s trajectory within the agriculture industry and ideas on why they are becoming more accepted are connected to emotions and other women. Women tend to hold the purchasing power in the home when it comes to food (2014). Studies show that women are also more likely than men to buy organic or sustainably grown food (2014). Sustainable practices are often correlated with feminine qualities because they stem back to concern for the environment or health of consumers. Products grown sustainably, or in a niche market in agriculture, tend to be sold at farmers markets or places where consumers interact with the producer (2014). So if women tend to buy the food and tend to buy niche market products, which are more likely to be grown by women than conventional products, this means that women are the driving force behind women being accepted as farmers (2014). This is an interesting trend because men often are more reluctant to accept feminine qualities as leadership qualities, and this case represents women and their “emotional ties” to their work being accepted by other women.

Conventional farmers, men and women, face a different challenge when it comes to consumers. Their products are sold to a broker and not to a consumer. Very rarely do they interact with a direct consumer of their specific product because it generally leaves their operation to be processed before sold. Farmers are self-employed and hiring practices are not regulated as commonly as they are in large companies and organizations (2014). This is the root of the problem for females in conventional and organic farming, as they are not protected by regulations or non-discrimination policies (2014). Farmers have to find buyers for their product, as they have the effect on the demand for the commodities that farmers are producing (2014). The fact that conventional farmers rarely interacting with consumers is problematic for female farmers. The trend of females being more widely accepted in niche markets in agriculture is likely related to the interaction with the female customer (2014). Conventional female farmers do
not have the same benefit and therefore are facing the greater challenge of lack of respect and acceptance in their field of choice (2014).

Women hold an important role in the agriculture industry and are becoming increasingly more accepted in some sectors. While this is improvement, it is important to recognize that there is still work to be done. Women in agriculture, organic and conventional, need to be equally represented in literature, their stories need to be just as available, and their presence needs to be known so that more people like them can be drawn to the agriculture industry.

Contextual Framework

This study focused on female cattle producers in North Carolina. In order to put the study into context, the following areas must be considered: agriculture, women in agriculture, and beef production each within North Carolina.

Agriculture in North Carolina

The agriculture industry in North Carolina has an export value of almost $4 billion, farming over 8 million acres, the average age of the principal operator being 58.9 years old (NCDA, 2016). A principal operator is defined as the person who is in charge of the day to day functions of an operation, whether or not they are the primary owner, thus including farm managers (NCDA, 2012). The commodities produced by farmers in the state include tobacco, sweet potatoes, broilers, hogs, and beef cattle, making NC the second most agriculturally diverse state in the country, after California. For being only the 10th largest state in the country by amount of land, agriculture earns its keep in North Carolina by being the number one industry in the state (American Farmland Trust, 2015). From the mountains to the coast, the land provides enough variation for the farmers in the state to noticeably contribute to feeding the world.
Women in Agriculture in North Carolina

Of the 50,000 farmers in North Carolina, almost 6,500 are women and principal operators of the farm (NCDA, 2012). A principal operator tends to be in charge of decision making processes, whether these be financial or mechanical. If they employ workers, the principal operator is the go-to, in charge, front of the line person. This means that almost 13% of farmers, principal operators, and farm managers are women and this number is growing every day. With the average age of a farmer increasing, the presence of farmers-- male or female-- should increase as well in order to continue to meet the growing demands of a rising population.

Beef Production in North Carolina

There are over 370,000 head of beef cattle produced in North Carolina, with the top three producing counties being Randolph, Chatham, and Wilkes (2012). Beef production in North Carolina is usually either cow-calf or seed stock operations. Cow-calf is what is most prevalent in this area, due to the lay of the land not being suited for feedlots. Land that cannot be used for crop production is often put into pasture for cows to graze. While this is an efficient use of an otherwise agriculturally useless piece of property, it also explains why beef production is more common in the western part of North Carolina. The land is not as flat nor as suitable for large crop production, but cows are able to eat the grass. This efficiency contributes to North Carolina being agriculturally competitive, despite not being one of the largest states.

These statistics show that both women and beef cattle are present in the agriculture industry of North Carolina. While specific numbers on how many female farmers produce beef cattle are not available, it is not a stretch to believe that the two intersect. Farming operations across the state will have beef cattle, even if it is not their main focus. Sometimes women find their role focusing on the cattle, while their partner focuses on the crops, for example. There are
also farms that are focused solely on cattle. Many different roles, takes, perspectives, outlooks, and operations exist, all come with the same purpose--producing quality cattle, regardless of whether the principal operator is male or female.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experience of female cattle producers. Women have a presence and an impact in agriculture, but the literature does not reflect this impact. By understanding the lives and experiences of these women who work day in and day out in a career that is expected to be filled by a man, one can better grasp what it takes to be in their position. Feminism is an evolving issue and encompasses equal opportunities for all. It is time for light to be shed on the female cattle producers’ roles and on what it means to be a woman in a field where equal opportunities are not always available. Their stories can be told from their perspective and used as inspiration for rising women agriculturists and especially those striving to be female cattle producers. The average age of the farmer is 58.3 years old (USDA, 2012) and the population is expected to grow to 9.7 billion by 2050 (UN, 2012). From the production agriculture point of view, this study is needed to encourage young women to pursue agriculture as a viable option for their future. We will need them to help feed the world. In the end, we cannot look at a pepper and determine if it has been grown by a man or a woman, nor is food grown by one gender more nutritious than the other. The greater good of the agriculture industry is to feed the world and the growing population. We know that this will be a challenge, therefore we need to encourage any and all hands that are willing to work to put safe and nutritious food on the plates of those worldwide. If we expect to be able to continue to provide for those around us, the agriculture industry needs to accept women in conventional and organic farms because they will help reach the goal of feeding 9 billion mouths.
Young women benefit from role models who can help them understand that their hopes and dreams are possible. Being an industry that serves everyone, agriculture should also be a place where everyone is welcome, but also one where everyone is equally regarded for their efforts. This study shows that women contribute to feeding the world but face unique and unnecessary barriers that their male counterparts do not.

**Definitions**

In order to fully understand the context of the study, the following definitions must be recognized.

- Female cattle producers- the primary owner and operator of a cattle operation that accounts for at least 50% of their personal income.
- Gender- “a social construct that outlines the roles, behaviors, activities and features that a particular society believes are appropriate for men and women” (Hasanovic, 2015).
- Gender identity- “the extent to which a person experiences oneself to be like others of one gender” (Steensma, Kreukels, de Vries, Cohen-Kettenis, 2013, p. 21)
- Female- “a body that produces eggs” (Meyer, 2016, p. 557)
- Woman- “the female sex” (2016, p. 573)
- Barrier- “something that impedes or separates, prevents or prolongs something from happening” (Sklet, 2006, p. 495)
- Agriculture- “the science, art, or practice of cultivating the soil, producing crops, and raising livestock and in varying degrees the preparation and marketing of the resulting products” (Tey, Y., Li, E., Bruwer, J., Abdullah, A. M., Cummins, J., Radam, A., . . . Darham, S., 2012, p. 383)
Assumptions

It is assumed that the information provided by the female cattle producers interviewed were representative of the individual. It is also assumed that all personal examples, anecdotes, answers, reflections, etc. were truthfully and factually recounted to the researcher.

Limitations

This study was limited to five females who live and work on a cattle operation, which is a male dominated career within a majority male industry. All participants live in North Carolina. Consequently, some factors contributing to their experience may be unique to this group only and may not be transferable to groups outside of this population.

Chapter Summary

Females have been a part of agriculture for centuries, but are not always welcomed into the male dominated sectors of the industry. Historically, women had expected roles and were pressured into remaining within very limited realms. Feminism is rooted in the belief that women have an equal chance at whatever opportunity fits their path and interests. This study explores the experiences of women in agriculture, an industry where they are a minority. Through this study we can begin to understand their life history, identity, and experiences. This research represents the first step in bridging the gap in the literature that ignores women in agriculture, despite their contribution to feeding the world.
CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Framework and Review of Salient Literature

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework for this study as well as review salient and related literature. This study will be framed by social cognitive theory, which explains gender development using a triadic reciprocal causation, meaning it recognizes three modes of influence (Bandura & Bussey 1999).

Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory is based on the human capability for symbolization and observational learning (Bandura & Bussey 1999). Symbolization is a tool used for comprehending, creating, and regulating environmental conditions in everyday life (1999). Humans are able to ascribe meaning and create connections between information and interactions in their lives, therefore they are able to assign symbols to gender and identifying labels (1999). Humans go about acquiring these symbols and labels through observational learning (1999). This is the ability to “expand their knowledge and skills rapidly through information conveyed by modeling influences without having to go through the… process of learning by response consequences (1999, p. 683-684). Humans learn by seeing, not just by doing, so people are able to learn attributes of gender by more than just their individual experiences and feelings within their own self. These learning experiences come from three sources-- personal factors such as gender-linked conceptions, behavioral patterns related to gender, and environmental factors, including social influences (1999). Social cognitive theory espouses that multiple aspects of everyday life influence gender identity development, rather than fully attributing gender identity development to only one factor (1999). While this explains
how children are exposed to gender identity, the theory also explains that gender-linked ideas are acquired and processed through modes of influence in children’s lives (1999). One of the modes is modeling, which will be a focus within this study.

**Modeling**

Children are exposed to a vast array of gender-linked information from a variety of sources in their life, including parents, peers, significant persons, and mass media (1999). Children begin to form their own behaviors, opinions, and linkages of gender and identity by what they are exposed to, which is called modeling (1999). Modeling is not an act of mimicry; it is abstract learning through observation (1999). “Once observers extract the rules and structure underlying the modeled activities, they can generate new patterns of behavior that conform to the structural properties…” (1999, p. 686). “Children can learn gender stereotypes from observing differential performances of male and female models” (1999, p. 686-687) and this is what begins to form what they consider appropriate for each gender (1999). Children are exposed to and learn from both female and male stereotypes, but how they apply the behaviors to their own lives is situational (1999). It depends greatly on the availability of opportunities to put modeled activities into practice and the social reactions it causes when the behaviors are enacted, i.e. if they are accepted or not (1999). Recognizing that this occurs through observational learning is important because it highlights that each experience and interaction a child has is shaping who they are, what they believe, and how they will act upon it.

Perception of gender and the process of assigning appropriateness to models of behavior, are guided by preconceptions (1999). “Observers’ [children’s] cognitive competencies and perceptual sets dispose them to look for some things and not others” (1999, p. 687). The more that children learn and are exposed to, the more information that they have contributing to how
they perceive same-gender and other-gender models (1999). This tends to rise with age, as older children have greater cognitive skills and prior knowledge than younger ones (1999). As children get older they “pay greater attention to and learn more about modeled conduct that they regard as personally relevant” (1999, p. 687). This is important because children are processing what they are exposed to and using it to determine their perception of gender and what is and is not appropriate.

A contributing factor related to perception is the “structural arrangements of human interactions and associative networks” (1999, 687). The society that a child is surrounded by influences how available observable differences in the gender-models are (1999). For example, western societies tend to display what is called traditional gender conduct, which makes “differences in gender-typed behavior readily observable” (1999, p. 687). Mass media is also heavily influential in western societies and gender roles and stereotypes tend to be televised even more traditionally than what is actually taking place (1999). This is important to understand as children are raised in a virtually connected society that exposes them to more rigid gender roles and influences, and therefore affects the way they perceive themselves and those around them in relation to gender (1999).

The symbolic connections of gender and identity that are made through observational learning are then “translated into appropriate courses of action” (1999, p. 687). Children take what they have learned about gender and then use that knowledge to guide their behaviors (1999). This also speaks to why variations occur among children and how they act upon gender, because they are not all generally exposed to the same experiences (1999). Children also do not act upon everything they learn; for example, young boys are exposed to maternal modeling but tend not to adopt those behaviors for their own lifestyle (1999). Understanding that children are
taking what they are learning about gender and turning it into actions is important because what they are exposed to influences what they deem acceptable for not only themselves, but also others (1999).

When choosing the gender based behaviors to act upon in their own lives, children are more likely to adopt models that result in positive outcomes, rather than negative ones (1999). Meaning that if a child perceives the possibility of a negative reaction to a certain behavior model, they may tend to not choose it.

“People are motivated by the success of others who are similar to themselves, but they are discouraged from pursuing courses of behavior that they have seen often result in aversive consequences. The evaluative reactions people generate to their own conduct also regulate which observationally learned activities they are most likely to pursue. They express what they find self-satisfying and reject what they personally disapprove.” (1999, p. 687-688)

Children are influenced by what other people deem acceptable and the consequences that are applied to courses of action. They are making judgement calls on models of behavior based on how they think the actions would be perceived, meaning they may sometimes go against what they feels natural in order to be accepted or deemed successful (1999). This also translates into how children view each other and often hold their peers to the same standards that they have chosen for themselves (1999). This is problematic for the children who wish to go against the status quo but do not feel comfortable doing so for fear of rejection (1999).

Children learn through observing the models of behavior they are exposed to and tend to choose a path with the least amount of negative consequences (1999). Gender norms including behaviors, roles, and expectations are being reinforced because they people pattern themselves after people who are “more like them” (1999, p. 688), to determine what behavior will be successful. Children are constantly exposed to modeling and are processing the perceived reactions and consequences of some actions over others (1999). “Children extract, weigh, and
integrate this… information in constructing guides for conduct (1999, p. 689). Social Cognitive Theory argues that the modeling course of action is one mode of influence that directs children towards their own beliefs, perceptions, and courses of action based on gender identity (1999).

**The Female Cattle Producer & Gender**

It is important to understand that the cattlewoman’s gender identity does not source from one single experience or influence, but is built around her lifetime of experiences and models of behavior that she has encountered (Bandura & Bussey, 1999). When we begin to view the female cattle producer as a sum of experiences, rather than a single sector in her life, we begin to connect the concept of her identity to her what she has modeled her life after. This is key in understanding the influence of the world, and most importantly will be essential in understanding how the cattle producer came to be engaged in the agricultural industry and in determining her lived experience. One must be aware of what has happened over the lifetime of the female cattle producer in order to comprehend the current situation she faces (1999). When trying to understand her story, it is important to recognize that her gender identity did not begin with her career, but formulated over years of stimuli, situations, and experiences both within and outside of workplace environments (1999). This creates the need to understand her life as a whole, not simply a single segment.

**Salient Literature**

The following subject areas must be covered to contextualize this study and to understand the challenges that women in male dominated industries, specifically agriculture, face. These are not single-faceted issues, nor are they experienced exactly the same from woman to woman. The following literature was woven together to demonstrate that women present in male dominated industries face a different set of challenges than their male counterparts, so their presence should
be fostered and adjusted for, rather than ignored and expected to conform. As discussed in the research of Bandura & Bussey (1999) on social cognitive theory, gender identity development is situationally influenced; the following areas covered are influences that the population in this study may have been impacted by.

**Gender Identity Development**

Levy & Haaf (1994) sought to discover how gender identification and patterns correlate with children’s age and development. The researchers conducted a habituation procedure, where male or female faces were shown and paired with specific objects (1994). They found that infants can begin to distinguish male and female faces as early as three to four months of age and at ten months are able to form stereotypic associations between faces of women and men and gender-typed objects (e.g., a scarf, a hammer) (1994). Additionally, children between 24-30 months could categorize what gender group that they and others would be placed in (1994). Children are developing associations between objects and individuals in relation to gender and are deciding what belongs where. This is important to know that defining and categorization along gender lines begins as early as less than a year of age demonstrating that gender identifying factors are seen as defined categories from the start of a child’s life.

A correlating study examined the naturally occurring instances of gender labels (e.g., girl, boy, woman, man, etc.) and if those related to children's’ understanding of gender (Zosuls, 2009). Researchers gathered information from speech diaries that parents kept beginning when their child was 10 months of age. The entries were examined for the use of gender labels in correlation to age (2009). “The results showed that 25% of children used gender labels by 17 months and 68% by 21 months” (2009, p. 356). “On average, girls produced labels at 18 months, one month earlier than did boys” (2009, p. 356). The results also showed that children start to
process gender types when selecting toys to play with before they are two years of age (2009). Gender is not only recognized but also utilized in speech patterns and that gender identifying factors are normalized as a part of categorizing individuals at an early age (2009). The concern with these results is that because categorization occurs so early, their influence lasts longer and influences the way children behave (2009). Children begin to associate their own gender with norms of gender appropriate toys, terms, behaviors, etc, and start to hold themselves and others to these standards (2009). These associations and norms tend to become more influential as children age and begin to place value on gender labels (2009).

As children age, there also tends to be an in group and outgroup effect (2009). Zosuls (2009) also demonstrated that preschool and elementary age children tend to feel more positively about their own sex over the opposite. This is the beginning of what creates a divide in young children, often seen in recess time or play centers in a classroom, where boys and girls tend to be separated in their activities (2009). It is not clear if actual hostile feelings toward the opposite sex exists or if it is simple favoritism for kids that are more like them (2009). The researcher argued that this is an early example of children applying gender norms to their own lives and deeming what is and is not acceptable, such as which activity they choose for recess or play centers (2009). The boys tend to be more involved in the sports, such as a football or kickball game, while the young girls may be more likely to be found playing house (2009). This is not applicable to every child in every play center, but rather is about the interaction of what is accepted as appropriate among the children. Children sense what is appropriate or expected of them, tend to follow those guidelines, and may not pursue their recess activity of choice for fear of rejection (2009). This shows that as children age, they begin to apply right and wrong values to the gender categories created for them. They see roles, behaviors, objects, and features as
fitting into one or the other, male or female (2009). This is problematic for the children who would rather participate in activities outside of what is deemed acceptable for their gender. The pressure of living by held expectations for their gender is felt early in their lives and influences the simple activities they choose to be a part of (2009). This could be argued to be the early stages of what later turns into young people feeling confined to careers, life paths, behaviors, or roles that are inside of a very limiting “box” drawn for their gender.

Bigler (2008) examined children's’ perceptions of gender discrimination, including males holding all of the elected presidential positions in United States history. The researcher talked to 205 children between the ages of 5-10, 119 girls and 86 boys, about the lack of women presidents in America (2008). Individual interviews were conducted with questions centering around beliefs and knowledge about the gender of U.S. presidents (2008). This was followed with a debriefing session that explained the legal eligibility requirements to run for president and gave information on women political leaders in other positions (2008). The children were then asked why they thought there had never been a woman president. Only 30% of the children associated it with discrimination (2008). Interestingly enough, the most common explanation among the children was in group bias, meaning that the children more readily associate male’s success with interpersonal rather than institutional discrimination (2008). Children associated the results with that men do not vote for women, rather than attributing the issue to discrimination in the political system (2008). In a follow up question, the children would begin to see it as discrimination but only when prompted with contextual social cues (2008). In this study, children are able to see and understand the presence of in group bias, but also weigh it as more influential than institutional discrimination (2008). The children saw the issue as men versus women, one category separate from the other, as in the results being caused from men not being
willing to vote for women (2009). Children interpreting the lack of female presidents as an interpersonal problem rather than institutional discrimination, speaks to the issue of children being socialized to see genders as separate categories with differing qualities, behaviors, or roles.

Kornienko, Santos, Martin, & Granger (2016) sought to determine the influence of peers on gender identity. Researchers examined peer influence on four factors of gender identity, intergroup bias, felt pressure for gender conformity, typicality, and contentedness (2016). Over 600 students in the seventh and eighth grades were surveyed about their identity, psychological and educational outcomes, and friendship nominations (2016). The results showed that there were “stronger peer influence effects on between-gender dimensions [of gender identity] (intergroup bias and felt pressure for gender conformity) than on within-gender dimensions [of gender identity] (typicality and contentedness)” (2016, p. 1578). In other words, peer influence is felt on each gender’s view of the other, intergroup bias, and the pressure to conform to an individual gender type (2016). Children’s peers are impacting the way they perceive the other gender, meaning that girls, for example, may start to view boys as stinky or gross, because of the influence of their female peers (2016). Each gender may start to view their gender as superior to the other, because of their relations to their peers of the same gender (2016). Consistent, daily influences that school age children are subject to exposes them to outside expectations at a higher rate than young children (2016). This causes them to feel more pressure to conform to the ideas, behaviors, and roles that their peers have deemed appropriate for their gender type (2016). These are more visible, outward expressions of gender identity, which aligns with being impacted by an outside influence, peers (2016).

The study explained that the results showed that friend groups self-reported levels of felt pressure within in their group (2016). The friend groups also reported that they believed their
attitudes about gender influenced their peer’s outward expression, meaning they recognize that not only themselves, but also their peers, have a tendency to conform (2016). As time goes on, youth tend to become similar to their friend group in relation to gender identity and expression (2016). Peer influence and attitudes about gender relates to the pressure to conform to gender norms because children perceive expected consequences if they act outside of accepted behaviors or norms for their gender (2016). Individuals are influenced by the beliefs of who they surround themselves with, especially during adolescence. This is important to recognize because gender identity development is a process that may establish early on, but is heavily influenced as children age (1999). Understanding that children feel pressure from their peers is important to know because who they surround themselves with leads them to have beliefs of what is and is not acceptable for their own lives.

Steensma, Keukels, de Vries, Cohen-Kettenis, (2013) and Kornienko, Santos, Martin, & Granger, (2016) show that a common pressure of gender identity in adolescents comes from the felt need to conform. Norms or widely held beliefs are reinforced through the desire to fit in. Individuals are afraid to go against the status quo for fear of rejection.

A study in 2014 placed 45 girls and 41 boys ranging in age from 10-13 in focus groups and asked them about their experiences with their gender identity (Brinkman, Rabenstein, Rosen, & Zimmerman, 2014). Questions included “Have you had any experiences where you were treated differently or badly because you were a boy or a girl?” and “Do you think there are things boys can do that girls should not do?” and vice versa (2014, p. 841). The researchers found that students believed that boxes had been drawn for their gender and expectations were in place (2014). They expressed desire to want to go outside of their given box but were concerned with the social consequences they would face, as one student said “In 5th grade I always used to see
the boys playing football… but I was scared because I didn’t know how to play football and I didn’t want to make myself feel bad because I didn’t know how to play” (2014). Examples included a girl wanting to play with an airplane rather than a Barbie but did not because her peers expected her to favor the doll over the plane (2014). These are simple examples of child play, yet the situations are directed by the need to be accepted based on gender identity and everyday choices (2014). Children understood there could be consequences for staying in the box because of pressure, meaning they may not be able to fully be themselves, but were still hesitant to admit being comfortable to stepping out (2014). Children are aware that they should be able to make decisions based on their personal preferences rather than social expectations, however the weight that these expectations hold is too heavy for children to actively go against stereotypes and norms of their gender. This is important because children should be allowed to become who they are rather than who their peers and society expects them to be.

The study concluded that “children are active decision makers in a process of expressing their gender identity in which they weigh the benefits of authenticity against potential consequences of nonconformity” (2014, p. 849). These children experience and observe reactions to gender prejudice and create further judgement about whether or not they are comfortable acting outside of their social gender norm (2014).

The results of this study show that children are aware of the expectations that society places upon them (2014). The children expressed discomfort in knowing social consequences existed and wished for more freedom in expression of who they and their friends truly are (2014). It seems the children in the study simply wish to feel comfortable wearing a hoodie and jeans, for example, rather than a skirt, or to enjoy babies more than sports when society tells them the opposite based upon their gender (2014). They may not know how to express in words
the pressure created by those expectations, or know when to act within traditional gender norms or out of them, but they know expectations exist (2014). Children feel the pressure of gender norms and the consequences if they act outside of the expectations held for them. It is within their nature to take the path of the least amount of negative social consequences, so the children tend to stick to what is expected of them (2014). This reinforces gender identity norms and teaches children that there are right and wrong behaviors, ideas, paths, toys, clothes, etc. based on gender. This matters because this norm reinforcement begins young, children are influential in conformity based on gender.

Halim, Ruble, Tamis-LeMonda, Zosuls, Lurye, & Greulich (2014) conducted a study to examine “whether appearance rigidity was connected to children’s gender identification and understanding of gender stability” (2014, p. 1093). Appearance rigidity is the “adherence to conforming to gender norms in one’s appearance through gender-stereotypical dress” (2014, p. 1092). 76 children were interviewed and asked questions related to how “important and positive being a girl or boy was to them” (2014, p. 1096). These answers were compared to evaluations of their appearance rigidity from their parents (2014). The results showed that the overall centrality and evaluation of their own gender was high, with no gender differences found (2014). This means that “gender centrality/evaluation positively predicted children’s current appearance rigidity” (2014, p. 1096). “These data indicate that children’s current appearance rigidity might mark a solidified commitment to their gender identities” (2014, p. 1097). If children highly identify with their gender, they are more likely to dress stereotypically, for example dresses or skirts in bright colors for girls, or shorts and t-shirts for boys (2014). This indicates a sense of understanding by children of gender norms related to their clothing. The study shows that children are aware and are conforming to ideas correlated to their gender, therefore enforcing
norms related to dress (2014). This is important to understand because the impact of conformity is not limited to play, but also translates into choices that the children make before they are surrounded by their peers at school. Gender norms are impacting children and their decisions at home and at school.

Lagaert, Van Houtte, & Roose (2017) studied choice of interests in males and females in relation to gender identity. Over 5,000 seventh graders were surveyed about their career interests, how they spend their spare time, and what they enjoy participating in, all in relation to their gender identity (2017). The results showed that higher typical gender identity correlates to a higher pressure to conform to gender stereotypes in relation to interests outside of school (2017). The young women showed preference to the arts, literature, or theater, while the young men’s interests in the same subject areas were much lower, with both genders showing strong gender identity (2017). “This difference indicates that identity-related processes and interactional conformity pressures are… reinforcing the gendering of… tastes” (2017). Teenagers feel the need to conform their interests outside of their schoolwork towards what is expected of their gender, meaning that they may be pushing aside subject areas where their true passions lie (2017). This is problematic because this study also argued that around the age of 12-14 is when young people’s interests are impressionable upon their future and their career (2017). If young teenagers do not feel comfortable expressing their interests because it does not fit their gender stereotypical choices, this may prevent them from pursuing careers also not identified as appropriate.

Sinclair & Carlsson (2013) studied the impact of gender identity threat on occupational preferences. 297 high school students were questioned using a procedure that is based on the participants own inferences about their qualities (2013). This was achieved by having two
groups, one affirmed and one threatened in their gender identity and capability (2013). A pilot study was conducted to insure that it was appropriate for the target population and would be measuring what was intended (2013). The researcher discovered that the students that felt their gender identity was threatened became increasingly stereotypical in their occupational choices (2013). This finding suggests a connection between threatened gender identity and stereotypical preferences in occupation (2013). This study suggests that the pressure to conform to stereotypes about one’s gender brings about a sense of security, as if choosing a job that is deemed appropriate for their gender is a safer choice than one that is not. These results are important because they suggest “that threats to adolescents’ gender identity may contribute to the large gender segregation on the labor market (2013). This is problematic because young people may be avoiding career paths because of outside perceived judgement of their capabilities and identity, rather than following their true passion. It is also problematic for the young people that do step outside of the box, because when they do not conform, they open themselves up to more criticism for their choices.

Conformity is one of the main themes in the literature regarding gender identity in children and adolescence ((Steensma, Keukels, de Vries, Cohen-Kettenis, 2013; Kornienko, Santos, Martin, & Granger, 2016; Brinkman, Rabenstein, Rosen, & Zimmerman, 2014; Halim, Ruble, Tamis-LeMonda, Zosuls, Lurie, & Greulich, 2014; Lagaert, Van Houtte, & Roose, 2017; Sinclair & Carlsson, 2013). There is the social pressure of fitting into the accepted norms for a specific gender, but then the secondary pressure of the felt need to align with those in a friend group. Society places pressure on children to fit in, but they also apply the pressure to each other. Gender identity is heavily influenced by the felt need to conform, and conforming reinforces gender norms. This influence is seen as early as child play and as late as occupational
preferences in high school, meaning that gender norms, stereotypes, and identity are impacting choices throughout lives and into their careers.

**Women’s Work Identity and Resilience**

A study of the experience of women in male-dominated occupations sought to clarify the challenges these women face and coping strategies they use (Martin & Barnard, 2013). The participants were interviewed about their experiences working in a male dominated field (2013). The study found that women consistently faced negative work-identity perceptions, meaning that the women struggled with knowing who they could and could not be at work (2013). Further, the study showed that the women had low-self-esteem, low-self efficacy, and negative self-perceptions which lead to lack of confidence in their competence (2013).

The participant’s described methods of coping with their work environment leading to them to stay (2013). They noted appreciation of their feminine advantage and adopting male qualities as two coping mechanisms (2013, p. 7). Some of the participants touched on their appreciation and reliance on their feminine qualities and how they found it necessary to implement that into their work identity (2013, p. 7). One woman explained that she valued her feminine qualities in the workplace because she was able to see the big picture better than her male coworkers (2013). While other participants had adopted male qualities including being more aggressive in verbal and nonverbal behaviors, or wearing less attractive clothes to avoid unwanted attention to better fit into their working environment (2013). The felt need to conform to gender stereotypes and expectations continues to be an issue in adulthood and in the workplace.

These women reported having come to enjoy their jobs and the challenge that comes with the circumstances (2013). There was a sense of accomplishment and pride in their answers about
overcoming challenges, proving others wrong, and doing more than what they thought was initially possible (2013). This is what pushes these women to move forward in their careers is the feeling of their hard work accomplishing a task (2013). When women do persist in the male-dominated work fields, they can come to a sense of completion and satisfaction with what they have done. The women in the study showed no interest in leaving their occupations, but “demonstrated a reluctance to progress into the more intensely competitive male roles because of these negative self-perceptions” (2013, p. 7). Possessing the skills to get a job is not the only necessity for being able to perform; one must believe in one’s own competence in order to move forward in their career.

Yang (2016) worked to examine the impact of “career-related power, the gender of the perceiver, and the gender of the perceived on the endorsement of gender stereotypes, of sexist attitudes, and of gender discrimination” on women’s career development (2016, p. ix). Participants in the study were asked to complete questionnaires and scenarios, related to gender, the workplace, and power status (2016). The study determined that one of the factors that has created considerable barriers for women’s career development is gender stereotypes, and that men with high power and women with low power are often the one acting on these societally formed expectations (2016). These stereotypes are preset expectations of individual’s capabilities, behaviors, and roles in relation to their career (2016). When women enter the workforce, ideas about her path are already held for her, simply because she is a woman, rather than only being decided because of her qualifications. This is important to understand because when women are beginning a career in a male dominated field, they are facing an additional set of expectations and criticism due to her gender than if she were to be entering a more gender stereotypical job.
Gender Identity in Agriculture

Agriculture is a male dominated field and opportunities for women are not as common as they are for men (Shaeffer, 2015). Shaeffer (2015) conducted a survey with mailed and emailed questionnaires to a sample of 196 female cattle producers to discover their educational needs and barriers they faced. The questions were both open and close ended and consisted of three major sections—“scale for recording competency levels, training needs, and educational resources, scale for recording barriers that limited the ability to become more successful, and questions for recording demographic information” (2015, p. 22). The female cattle producers had a need for an educational environment that welcomed them and supported their skill set without passing judgment on their gender (2015). The women felt a disconnect within the beef industry in that they “are not taken as seriously as men, [that there is a] lack of women in roles in the beef industry, and [that there is a] need for women liaisons or contacts...” (2015, p. ix). This study highlights that a small population of women in a male dominated field need additional resources and relationships in the agriculture industry in order to give them the opportunity to be more successful in their field (2015). This is important to recognize because the women in this study are from a comparable population and face the similar situations. These women face barriers every day that source from gender stereotypes and because they did not conform to the expectations of which society held for them. When individuals choose to step outside of accepted gender norms, they require a level of support than can be sourced from mentoring relationships (Harlander, 1996).

Career Calling

Definitions of a career calling tend to fall between the areas of a sense of duty and an internal drive (Duffy & Dik, 2013). Internal drive motivation tends to come from previous
interests or experiences, fit with others with similar paths (2013), or core self-evaluations (Hirschi & Herrman, 2012). A sense of duty motivation tends to result from either a personal experience or having a close loved-one involved in the subject area (Creed, Kjoelaas, & Hood, 2015).

Creed, Kjoelaas, & Hood (2015) used a Likert-type 15 item career calling scale to assess 213 young adults in an introductory college class about the motivation behind their future plans (2015). The study found that having a career calling was associated with positive outcomes for the individuals, as they followed their progress in the class (2015). Duffy & Dik (2013) argue that a properly fostered career calling is one of the most important factors for the beginning of a career. This means that individuals who have a sense of where they are going with their pursuits often report higher satisfaction with their career. This is important to understand because individuals who go against standards of society, including gender stereotypical careers, may be following a calling and seeking higher self-satisfaction within their career.

**Mentoring**

Managers recognize that a variety of people are necessary for their workplace to be effective. They needed to know how to create an environment in which everyone would like to work. Harlander (1996) investigated what barriers women faced and what opportunities they needed to become successful in the male-dominated workplace. Harlander interviewed women who worked in large corporations to find what had helped them break through the glass ceiling in their respective situations (1996). The study found that gender diversity needs to be supported by “examination of quality life issues, training and development, organizational policies and practices, and management accountability” (1996, p. 2849). Companies need to be prepared for a woman’s presence in the workplace including an understanding that rules, regulations, policies,
and considerations must be in place to be an equal opportunity employer (1996). For example, having accessible restrooms, separate dressing facilities, or maternity policies are all important. Harlander suggested the use of mentoring programs because establishing relationships of understanding, wisdom, and investment create an environment of support (1996). The study suggested that a woman’s experience in male dominated field is vastly different than that of a man’s (1996). A man is not fully capable of understanding things from a woman’s perspective, because he holds a completely different one (1996). Mentoring could create relationships that connect women in the workplace with each other, as lack of a mentor is commonly reported as the greatest deficiency in career development (Sanfey, Hollands, & Gantt, 2013). Women in male dominated fields need relationships that are built on understanding and empathy.

Martin & Barnard (2013) conducted a study to gain additional understanding of the experiences of females in male-dominated workplaces. Women were interviewed about their experiences at work, what they endured, how they managed, and what it felt like to be them (2013). The women named mentorship as one of the top three coping mechanisms they use at their jobs in order to succeed (Martin & Barnard, 2013). Mentoring was viewed as a “means of gaining support and guidance in the organization and of achieving career success” (2013, p. 8). All of the participants expressed strong interest and need for a mentoring support system as a coping strategy, but especially for women mentors in particular (2013). Women felt the need to seek out support in their workplace and they desire a system that guides them to being successful in their careers (2013). This is important to recognize because these relationships need to be encouraged, fostered, and initiated for women in male dominated fields.

Sanfey, Hollands, & Gantt (2013) sought to find how mentoring relationships began and were successfully sustained. After surveying individuals who identify as being in a mentoring
relationship, the researchers found that mentoring relationships often begin from a commonality, including interests, goals, work style, strengths, or weaknesses (2013). Because mentors are usually a source of support, it makes sense for the two parties in a mentoring relationship to be able to connect over their subject area. The study suggested that the mentee have set goals in mind that they are seeking assistance with, rather than looking for guidance starting from scratch (2013). The mentee needs to enter the relationship with ideas, goals, or dreams in place, as this sets up areas for which the mentor can be helpful in (2013). “Qualities of a successful relationship include honesty, active listening, flexibility, reciprocity, mutual respect, a personal connection, and shared values” (2013, p. 715). In order for mentoring relationships to be beneficial, it must be an environment of investment and shared understanding, by both the mentee and the mentor.

Walters, Eddleston, & Simione (2010) sought to determine if gender identity mattered in mentoring relationships. They administered surveys to managers or professionals that were identified as mentors of students in MBA programs at large universities in the Eastern United States to assess relationship satisfaction in mentoring situations. (2010). Students who identified more with masculine qualities and traditionally masculine career goals were more satisfied with mentors who were similarly minded (2010). Likewise, those participants who “based their career success using socio-emotional-based criteria” were more satisfied with mentors who offered psychosocial support (2010). This is important to know and understand when matching mentors and mentees, and is one reason why it is crucial to understand people as individuals and not make assumptions because of gender. There is not a formula for successful mentoring relationships, rather each one needs to be individually fostered and evaluated (2010). Different people need different things and it is essential to not assume correlation with gender, gender
identity, and workplace preferences. Each individual has unique preferences for their workplace, that may have nothing to do with what society or stereotypes say they should. Individuals should be treated as individuals.

The findings of this study relate to the suggestions of the need for a personal connection and shared values in a mentoring relationship (Sanfey, Hollands, & Gantt, 2013) and the need for the availability of women mentors for women in male-dominated workplaces (Martin & Barnard, 2013). Goals, needs, and values must be aligned and understanding gender identity is a step in the right direction for creating long lasting mentor-mentee relationships because when these factors align, the connection tends to be more successful (Walters, Eddleston, & Simione, 2010).

Ramaswami, Dreher, Bretz, & Wiethoff (2010) conducted a study to determine the importance of mentoring relationships in relation to gender. Surveys were sent to graduates of a larger (over 11,000 enrolled) university that had at least 15 years of post-undergraduate-degree experience, with a total of 1,022 responses in the study (2010). The questions asked about the presence of a mentoring relationship, career success, and demographics (2010). The study found that the connection between mentoring and career progress satisfaction was greatest in women working in male-dominated fields (2010). Women who are the minority in their workplace need mentoring relationships to assist in career development and satisfaction. This is important to consider because women in the workplace need to be fostered and establishing mentoring relationships is a step in achieving that.

Chapter Summary

Gender is a complex issue, as it is influenced by what children experience (Bandura & Bussey, 1999), develops over time in children (Martin & Ruble, 2009), and affects the way children act in social situations (Brinkman, Rabenstein, Rosen, & Zimmerman, 2014). Gender
identity does not stop in childhood, as its influence is just as heavy in the workplace and mentoring relationships of adulthood (Walters, Eddleston, & Simione, 2010). Children experience the pressures of norms as early as school age through gender typed play (Zosuls, 2009), and continues into their decision making processes of their interests outside of school and eventually career paths (Lagaert, Van Houtte, & Roose, 2017). Gender norms and stereotypes create ideas and images of what is considered appropriate for men or women to pursue, rather than embracing individual preferences, dreams, or goals free of an attachment to gender. Men and women may be different, and they deserve the same opportunities and resources that will allow them to be successful. Understanding gender identity can help begin to reshape the mindset of those who may assign certain traits, roles, and needs upon certain groups. This is a significant step toward treating people, whether they are employees, coworkers, friends, or neighbors, as individual people rather than as a category in which society places them.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology used in completing this study of the lived experience of female cattle producers, including the researcher’s bias and contextual connection, the research design, population, participant selection, data collection, analysis strategies, bracketing, the researcher’s epoch, and demonstration of the trustworthiness of the study.

Introduction to the Method

To gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of female cattle producers, a qualitative approach was chosen for this study. Merriam tells us that qualitative research is about “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experience” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 7). Qualitative research goes beyond determining the cause and effect or distribution in a population, and is meant to unveil the meaning behind a phenomenon for those involved (2016).

A qualitative approach allows research to be done in a natural setting where the phenomenon can be interpreted “in terms of meaning people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994 p. 2). The goal of the research is to gain an insider’s point of view instead of an outsider’s perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative research is known for having rich and descriptive data often found through interviews, field notes, and observations, which all build to describe the lived experience (2016).

Phenomenology is a study of people's conscious experience of their everyday life and social action (Merriam, 2016). It is a way to access their world as they experience it pre-reflectively and it depicts the basic structure of their experience (2016). This means that the answers to their questions are based on descriptions of their own personal experiences, rather
than reflections. “The notion of pre-reflective self-awareness is related to the idea that experiences have a subjective ‘feel’ to them, a certain (phenomenal) quality of ‘what it is like’ or what it ‘feels’ like to have them” (Gallagher & Zahavi, 2016). This study lent itself to a phenomenological approach, which dictates how one’s experience is transformed into consciousness (Vagle, 2014). Determining the lived experience of the female cattle producers was the goal of the research and a phenomenological study allows the most pure collection of data. Using the participant’s answers without personal interpretation by the researcher creates the most accurate results within this context.

**Guiding Research Questions**

This study is a phenomenological journey of discovering the lived experience of female cattle producers. No guiding research questions were posed because the true essence of phenomenology research is allowing the study dictate the findings, rather than setting a predetermined course to follow. The themes are presented in order to tell the story of the female cattle producers are as follows: off the farm experience, doubt, sacrifice, comparison, outside connections, commitment, belief, individuals not categories, and feminine traits not being accepted as leadership traits.

**Epistemological Position**

This study was conducted under the constructivist philosophy. Because the purpose of this study was to understand and describe the lived experiences of female cattle producers, constructivism lent itself to being the most appropriate guide for the research. Merriam & Tisdell state that interpretive research, which is used interchangeably with constructivism, “assumes that reality is socially constructed; that there is no single, observable reality…” and that “Researchers do not “find” knowledge; they construct it” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9).
Population

The population for this study was female cattle producers. Five women were discussed and selected with collaboration from an extension research specialist, April Shaeffer, who conducts workshops for women in agriculture. The working definition of female cattle producer for the purposes of this study is “a woman who is the primary owner and operator of a cattle operation that accounts for at least 50% of her yearly income”. The participants range in age from 22 to 65 years old. They live in five different counties across the state of North Carolina, with a representation from a variety of regions. In order to have a deeper understanding of the population, the researcher used thick description (Geertz, 1973). Using a thick description when discussing the population helps maintain anonymity among the participants (Ponterotto, 2006).

Research Design

At its most basic level, phenomenology is the study of phenomena that manifests or appears (Merriam, 2016). Heidegger tells us that a phenomenon is that which manifests; this theory suggests that phenomena exist through our living in the world (Vagle, 2014, p. 20). The word phenomenon does not refer to unexplainable occurrences, but rather the ways we find ourselves being in relation to the world through our day to day existence (2014). Using phenomenology as a research method is to study “what it is like as we find-ourselves-being-in-relation-with others” (2014, pg. 20).

Humans do not construct an experience; rather, they find themselves in an experience (Vagle 2014). The word find is not being used to refer to a discovery, but a “careful, reflexive, contemplative examination of how it is to be in the world”, rather than creating a reality or experience of their own (2014, pg. 20). It is a reflective experience in the same sense as looking in a mirror, you see what is, rather than what was as one would normally think of reflecting
This study is less interested in what someone decides than how they experience their decision making. This means that the emphasis is not simply on the final destination, but rather how and why one got there. Why do cattle producers make the decisions they do? What is it about their past that influences the way they make their decisions?

Vagle argues that phenomena appear instead of being built inside someone’s mind. Phenomenology aims to “contemplate and theorize the ways that things manifest and appear in and through our being in the world” (2014, pg. 20). Using phenomenology in this study will help to slow down the experience of female cattle producers and open up what it means to live their life. Husserl says that phenomenologists want to study the lifeworld, which is the world as it is lived, not how it is measured or transformed (2014). This research will study the lifeworld of female cattle producers and will provide perspective for other women in agriculture or male-dominated fields, allowing them a glimpse into what it means to be in the lifeworld of female cattle producers.

Within a phenomenological study, the researcher does not add nor subtract from the experience, or alter how the interviewee chooses to communicate their experience (Anderson, Charmaz, Josselson, McMullen, McSpadden, & Wertz, 2011). The purpose is to reflect on and gain insight that helps describe the how and what of the experience (2011). Through this process, the researcher can depict the essence and basic structure of being a female cattle producer.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Giorgi’s descriptive method of phenomenology is a modified version of Husserlian’s approach, but focuses more on the “importance of going to the descriptions of others; assuming the attitude of the phenomenological reduction (bracketing); and the search for an invariant psychological meaning…” (Vagle, 2014, pg. 52-53). The research was conducted using three
rounds of one-on-one interviews with five participants. Each session lasted no longer than one hour (Giorgi, 2009). Interviews were recorded to be transcribed later. Before each interview, the researcher explored her own experiences to become aware of personal prejudices, dimensions, viewpoints, and assumptions, a process called epoche. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This was accomplished by the researcher journaling before and after each session, including a revealing of her personal experiences (before) and the experience with the cattle woman she spoke with (after).

At the conclusion of each recorded interview, all data that is collected must be transcribed and analyzed, with nothing being left out (Vagle, 2014). It is of the utmost importance to resist the urge to interpret what the interviewee says and to leave it at face value (2014). Through horizontalization, the researcher treats all data with equality, being careful not to interpret the interviewee’s statements. The data is organized into themes, or clusters. “A descriptive analysis, however, in principle, does not try to go beyond the given… [it] attempts to understand the meaning of the description based solely upon what is presented in the data. It does not try to resolve ambiguities …” (Giorgi, 2009, pg. 127). This is for the researcher to leave their personal bias and interpretation out of the analysis. The data will be sorted at face value and will not be interpreted by the researcher (2009).

Giorgi uses the word description to refer to the data that will be collected by the researcher but also to describe the researcher’s method of communicating their findings after the analysis (2014). Giorgi defines the research participant’s role as “being responsible for describing the experience from the natural attitude, that is, the everyday, taken for granted way we tend to move through the lifeworld, and to provide a description that is faithful as possible to the lived through” (Giorgi, 2009, pg. 96). This will be done by the whole-part-whole analysis
method and by member-checking. Whole-part-whole forces the researcher into revisiting the data a minimum of three times, each with a different view (2009), causing the researcher to be involved with the words of the participants rather than a mere skim-through (2009). Member-checking will be conducted by taking the themes developed back to the participants and asking if their responses were gauged correctly (2009). This will allow them to give feedback on the conclusions drawn by the researcher.

“The researcher’s role is to take this raw data and analyze it from within the phenomenological reduction” (Vagle, 2014, pg. 53). Reduction is the process of continually returning to the essence of the experience so that the inner structure can be derived and the phenomena can be isolated in order to comprehend its essence (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Giorgi emphasizes the importance of detaching from one’s personal experience, understanding, and knowledge in order to analyze the data from a fresh perspective (Vagle, 2014). This will be done by journaling before and after each interview and providing an epoche from the researcher. Being aware of personal bias is the first step in eliminating it as much as possible (2014).

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the phenomenological whole-part-whole method. This method is outlined below (Vagle, 2014):

- Holistic Reading - Entire Text
  - The initial reading familiarizes the researcher with the data and gives the researcher the opportunity to begin taking notes. This is not an in-depth reading.

- First Line-By-Line Reading
  - This reading is used to mark large chunks of data that appear to contain initial meaning. It is important to focus on what the data actually says and not place personal bias and upon the information as the researcher begins to create
categories within the information. The researcher must stay true to the participants’ words rather than forming categories that they wish to see form.

- **Second Line-By-Line Reading**
  - This reading is used to articulate meanings based on data already identified and to formulate themes based upon categories identified in the first line-by-line reading. The researcher must constantly refer back to the data to be sure that the meaning that arises are derived from the data and not from researcher interpretation. This will be reinforced by member-checking from the participants.

- **Holistic Reading**
  - The final reading is used to find “tentative manifestations”, “themes”, “patterns of meaning”, or “meaning units”. The phenomenon will become apparent; in this case, what the lived experience of a female cattle producer is. These themes will serve to answer the research questions.

**Presentation of Phenomenological Data**

Phenomenology data, by nature of its unique approach, presents differently than other qualitative data. “Giorgi consistently uses the word “description” to communicate both the data one collects from those who have experienced the phenomenon and what the researcher crafts…” to be able to “communicate the invariant meanings based on his or her analysis” (Vagle, 2014, p. 53). Giorgi also describes the researcher’s role in presenting the data by “describing the experience from the natural attitude, that is, the every-day, taken-for-granted way we tend to move through the lifeworld, and to provide a description “that is as faithful as possible to the lived through” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 96; Vagle, 2014, p. 53). This means that the
researcher remains as true to the data and experiences of the participants as possible, while documenting themes that emerge.

Phenomenological data is presented in themes, which emerge from commonalities in the data collected from the participants (Vagle, 2014). The data does not center around guiding research questions; therefore, the findings are an accurate representation of the participants’ lived experiences, rather than an answer to a predetermined set of questions.

**Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research may be seen as less verifiable because the small sample sizes involved are not “generalizable” (Dooley, 2007). Because of this challenge, qualitative researchers must be diligent in demonstrating the trustworthiness of their study (Ingerson, 2013). The researcher addresses this by increasing credibility, transferability, and dependability of this study.

**Credibility**

Credibility is the question of how well the research findings align with the study’s focus (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ratcliffe (1983) instructs researchers to remember that “1. data do not speak for themselves; there is always an interpreter, or a translator” (p. 149); “2. one cannot observe or measure a phenomenon/ event without changing it…” and “3. Numbers, equations, and words are all abstract, symbolic representations of reality, but not reality itself” (p. 150). A researcher’s findings must credibly align with the data presented (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The ways credibility is achieved in this study are through peer debriefs and member checking.

Peer debriefing uses external sources to keep the research process in check and keep the researcher honest (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A committee of four professional individuals, familiar with the study and research methods, was convened by the researcher and
asked to participate in the debriefing of the study. After each round of interviews with the participants, the researcher crafted a memorandum to send to the committee to update them on the progress of the study and the findings. The committee provided feedback as well as approval of themes and findings as they emerged. Once the feedback was recorded, the researcher could then proceed with the next round of interviews. Peer debrief memorandums sent to the peer debrief committee can be found in Appendices D-F.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe member checking as being the most important part of establishing credible research. Member checks are when a researcher takes the “data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account” (Creswell, 1998, p. 203). In this study, after themes emerged and were discussed by the peer debrief committee, the researcher returned to the participants and asked if they agreed with the themes. The participants were then able to further clarify, agree, or disagree with the themes and drafts of the researcher’s work.

**Transferability**

Research is transferable when “the findings fit into contexts outside the study situation that are determined by the degree of similarity or goodness of fit between the two contexts” (Krefting, 1991, p. 216). Creswell argues that one method of allowing readers “to make decisions regarding transferability” is through the creation of “rich, thick description” (Creswell, 1998, p. 203). Thick description “goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that joins persons to one another… it inserts history into experience” (Denzin, 1989, p.83). The thick details presented from the interviews within this study allow readers to “transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred” (Creswell, 1998, p. 203). Krefting asserts that
“Transferability is more the responsibility of the person wanting to transfer the findings to another situation or population than that of the researcher and the original study” (1991, p. 216).

**Dependability**

“‘Dependability’ is a concept in qualitative research that is closely related to ‘reliability’” (Golafshani, 2003); dependability is a show of consistency within the study (Seale, 1999). Berg (2004) argues that an essential part of verification and dependability is that “another researcher could potentially replicate the study and the analysis procedures and draw comparable conclusions” (p.40). In order for this to be accomplished, all details must be clearly presented and explained.

The researcher took two steps to establish dependability in this study. The first step was tracking the processes used to provide a trail of documentation regarding the researcher’s decisions and conclusions. The researcher took thorough notes throughout the process, including an Excel sheet marking each contact made with participants. This information included when they were contacted, when they responded, interview details, and any observations or decisions made by the researcher. This was updated after each step of the research process.

The second step was journaling, which helps to maintain objectivity in qualitative research and within the phenomenology approach, because the researcher must confront personal bias throughout the entire process (Vagle, 2014). By journaling before and after each interview, the researcher was able to keep track of thoughts, opinions, impressions, potential personal bias, pertaining either to the interview process or to previous experiences of the researcher, as both impact the data collected (Vagle, 2014).
**Epoche**

Epoche is a method of identifying personal experiences and bias before conducting research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is important for the phenomenological researcher to be aware of their past experiences and knowledge of the situation with which they are working (Vagle, 2014).

**Researcher’s Epoche**

If I can properly reflect upon my situation and understand what it means to me, then I am preparing my personal bias to have minimum impact on the study. I am a woman and come from a cattle background, so the use of epoche is vital in my study.

I was raised on a small beef cattle operation in Cleveland County, North Carolina. My grandfather, my father, and I are all involved in raising our cattle and growing hay to feed them. I am an only child, so from an early age I have been expected to participate on the farm. My mother and father both work full time as educators and my grandfather is a retired mechanic.

I am the only female in our family that is directly involved in our cattle operation. I learned to drive as soon as my feet could reach the pedals. I remember being a small child and helping castrate calves in the barn with Pop-paw or going to middle school and talking about hauling hay and working cows, while none of the other girls understood or could relate. Agriculture was a part of my life before I knew that I would one day need to put into words that it was acceptable for me to be a female and to be involved in a traditionally male-centered industry.

My family never expected any less of me because I was a girl. I was never given the easiest job; rather, I was taught how to do the hardest ones, so that one day I would be able to continue on without the men in my family. There are countless times that I remember my Dad
looking over at me in the cab of his truck while we were in the midst of working and saying
“Abby, I bet no other girls your age are doing this right now”. This made me feel almost
invincible, for at the end of the day my dad’s approval is all I have ever sought. I never felt like I
had to prove myself to him because I was a girl, but more so because I was his offspring and
carried his last name. I am an only child and I know my dad loves me more than anything in this
world. He has never once expressed to me that he wished he had a son instead of only a
daughter, for we are too good of a fit for each other. As I have aged and had more opportunity to
reflect on my relationship with my dad, I realize that he sees in me what he lacks. I have more
patience, more compassion, more understanding, and more acceptance. We are two pieces of the
same puzzle that have grown to appreciate that we bring different traits to the table, but in a
similar manner. He has challenged me for my entire life and I have no doubt that he will
continue to do so, but I would not believe in myself as much as I do if I did not hear him say
every night “Abby I am proud of you and you are capable”.

When I started high school, I joined FFA and began to find a place where I fit in. I found
a group of people that thought like me, enjoyed the same things, and understood what I meant
when I talked about my cows. This is the first time in my life that I remember feeling as if I
belonged with my group of friends and realized that my interests did not make me any less
feminine. I learned the textbook side of agriculture beyond what I had been exposed to at home.
My studies in my agriculture classes made me realize how academically capable I was because I
was able to apply my skills from other classes, such as calculus and chemistry, to a subject that I
cared about. I became an officer and joined competition teams that allowed me to travel to
Raleigh, Indianapolis, and Washington, DC for the first time. My time spent in FFA solidified
my confidence in the hands on agriculture skills that I had gained from my work experience at
home. However, it also showed me a skill set that I did not know I possessed, public speaking and leadership. This is when I began to see that my future would be in the people sector of agriculture.

I served on 4 different officer teams during my high school career, all of which were predominantly male. My junior and senior year I served as President and held high expectations for my fellow officers. I worked hard to never ask them to do something that I would not do or they had not seen me do before. A fellow officer, who was male, was a constant struggle to work with. I was made aware at the end of my senior year, after three years of working with this young man that he had been actively working against me. He had competed in opportunities just to try to beat me, had been undermining my efforts in leading the team, and expressed his lack of confidence in my abilities behind my back, all while smiling to my face and acting like a friend.

I took the news hard and skipped senior English class one day to talk it out with my male FFA advisor. I sat and cried in his office and asked him what I had done wrong. I sat back and reevaluated everything that I had done, looking for a singular mistake that must have been the cause of his discontent. Finally, I looked at my advisor and asked, “Is this because of something I did or is it because I’m a woman?” I’ll never forget the look on his face when he had say to me that my peer’s behavior was because of my gender. This is the first time that I remember recognizing a situation where I was devalued because I am a woman. When I look back on this experience in FFA, I think about how it made me feel. I remember feeling thankful that I had not known all along and thinking that it made it easier for me to work with him because I wasn’t aware of his prejudices against me. This tells me that there was not much, if anything, I could have done to have prevented his actions against me. It is not my fault that I am a woman nor that he had a problem with it. I could not have changed him or his view of me, but not knowing about
it allowed me to conduct myself in such a manner that did not show it bothered me. This is a personal flaw of not liking to show any weakness, but looking back I almost feel as if it would have given him more power if he had seen me upset because of what he was doing. It could have justified his feelings to him because I showed emotions, which would have caused the situation to go further. It is sad that it was easier left alone than approached, but at the age I was at the time, I was not prepared to have to stand up for myself in such a way that I did not know was disadvantageous until this point.

Working with two older men for the entirety of my life has given me some beneficial skills. I have learned to gauge the situation as a whole, predict what is coming, and to read my father and grandfather because they all too often do not verbalize everything they expect of me; however, it still has to get done. I learned to leave most of my emotions behind and to put my head down and work through any situation, no matter how tough. I adjusted to the male environment that I was in. I learned to work like the Whitaker men. I learned to become one of them. This is an example in my own life where female qualities were not taken as leadership qualities and because of that, I subconsciously adjusted.

I did not fully recognize how much I had subconsciously adjusted until I went to work on a farm the summer after my sophomore year of college. I was placed on a farm that is operated by four men, two brothers and their two sons. The first day, I could tell they were gauging my abilities to see how much I knew, had been exposed to, and was willing to do. They would ask me questions about my life, my family, what we farmed, etc. They were getting to know me and starting to establish a relationship, while also getting an idea for what they were getting into as far as my experiences. I knew little about the actual row crop portion of their farm, but expressed my interest in their cattle early on. I remember a specific time that I worked cows with the son
that managed that part of the farm. It was only he and I and he immediately expressed his doubts about only the two of us being able to get the job done. We worked on and completed the job. Nothing was said that day, but when my internship supervisor came for a site visit, my boss expressed that he was surprised at how much help I was with the cows and around the farm. He said “When they told us we were getting a girl for the summer, I said, ‘Well there goes my chances of getting any help with the cows’. But after working with her one time, I would not hesitate to let her manage my herd.” In the moment, I was gleaming with pride. I had proven myself and broken through the idea of my gender hindering my abilities. Reflectively, I see how it was not fair for something I cannot control to determine if I am given a chance or not. I am thankful that this particular summer, I worked with men who were open minded enough to change their opinion of me. That did not always happen.

The following summer I worked on a berry farm in my home county. I lived at home and drove 45 minutes to work every day, arriving no later than 6:45 am. My boss was a 76 year old farmer who never once mentioned my gender. He asked me about my work experience, my background, my schooling, my career goals, and my family. He strived to understand me as a person and where I was going, then adjusted himself and his approach to being my boss. Over the course of the summer, he made sure that I was learning things that pushed me further to my goals. He gave me jobs that pushed my capabilities and used it as an opportunity to teach me. A fellow employee did not see the situation like my boss did. My coworker had been working on the farm for 25 years and was in charge of the seasonal labor. I had never worked on the farm before this summer and had to learn how to do things the first time, before doing them on my own. Even late into the summer, when I was comfortable and good at my job, he would go behind me and inspect my work and then go report to the boss. This is not something that my
boss had asked him to do, nor was I doing work under the coworker, as in he was not responsible for my performance. My boss would later call me over to the work that I had done and ask me questions. He would see that I had usually done the work exactly as he had asked, or if mistakes were made, they tended to be something I would not have known about. This situation made me feel undermined because I was doing what I was told but still being criticized and never in a way that was intended for improvement. I could not trust this coworker and found myself avoiding interacting with him. This was an inconvenient situation because we could and should have been great resources for each other on the farm. However, he made me feel as if that was not possible with his attitude towards me so I did not push to establish that relationship. This situation was a prime example of a male not being able to accept that I was both female and good at my job. Having learned to work in a man’s world from my father and grandfather helped me prove myself to the farmers I was working with and demonstrate that just because I was a girl did not mean that I was incapable. The problem with this is that I should not have to prove myself. I should not have to start a job in the negative just because I am girl, when a guy would most likely get to start the job with a clean slate or positive expectations. However, while it is not fair, there was a lesson to be learned. This was a turning point when I realized that I could do whatever was asked of me, even outside of the comfort of my own farm. I could be one of them, because after all, is that not what is expected?

It is easier to talk about men doubting a woman’s abilities, but I think it is important to note that I faced criticism from the other side as well. Women, no matter the age, have often questioned my path in life. Growing up in a southern baptist church and being the great-grandchild of a living and practicing baptist preacher for 21 years of my life, forces upon me a certain set of expectations. Women in the church are neat, well-kept, often more reserved and
polite. Not that I cannot make myself this way, but I do not always give this first impression. I remember getting older in the church and youth group and having my leadership questioned. A female cousin of mine, the same age as me, looked at me and asked how I could possibly run a boy’s club like FFA and expect boys to like me. As in, how could I expect for a boy to want to date me if I was in charge of him? She was implying that my leadership abilities would make me less desirable as a partner. Interestingly enough, she is now a vocal feminist and married to a man that will follow her around the country as she pursues her career as a doctor. It has always been pointed out to me by female peers and relatives that if I focus too much on my career and goals, I will not find or have time for a husband. When I came to school at NC State, ladies from home would ask me if I had found me a rich farmer boyfriend yet, winking and insinuating that the purpose of my education was to find a husband that will be able to take care of me. While I value many of the things that they pointed out to me, I remember being frustrated with being looked down upon because my priorities were in a different order. I expressed these frustrations to my dad and he would always encourage me to follow my heart. He motivated me to be who I was naturally supposed to be, even if that was different from everyone else and their expectations.

Women tend to expect women to look like other women and tend to have a hard time accepting those who do not initially fit in. I have always been the girl that did not fit in nor have I lived my life by set of standard expectations. I think this comes from my dad influencing me to believe that I was meant to be different. He and my mom both would challenge my clothing choices in middle school and ask if I was wearing it because it was what was expected of me or because it was Abby’s style. Being in middle school, I had a hard time with this. I appreciate it now because I soon reverted back to my classic t-shirt, jeans, and boots look that still serves me
well today. I am the girl that does not focus on my outward image consistently, nor do I get concerned with the latest styles. Sometimes I feel as if other women are intimidated by me because I am so comfortable with who I am. I tend to be dominant, practical, grounded, and hopefully well rounded. I can be independent to a fault but I think this plays into why my self-image comes from so far within rather than from other people. These are traits that I am incredibly thankful for, as they help me keep my head on my shoulders when traveling through rough waters.

When I look back and think about what I believe has made me into the woman I am today, I think about these experiences and the important men in my life. My Dad jokes with me that I spend all my time playing music and working with a bunch of old men, but when I think about where I am going in my life, I see myself working with old men. I think that I have been, and will continue to be, successful with working with men because it is all I have ever known in agricultural settings. I get frustrated with that I may have to prove myself capable to men and women, but honestly in my experience, the men tend to be more accepting once proven wrong than women. It is more frustrating to me not to be accepted and empowered by other women than to be questioned by a man. I say this to show that I truly believe it is a two sided issue and we cannot begin to solve it if women do not empower other women. This study spoke to me because it is a step in the right direction in finding my voice and using it to speak up for women in agriculture. I need to do my part in being accepting toward others, as well as empowering them in order to move forward into a future where this issue no longer exists for women in agriculture.

The women that I interact with in agriculture have predominantly been farm wives, secretaries, and sales representatives. I cannot name an independent female farmer but have felt an inner desire for years to have cows on my own. I do not have a strong female mentor in
production agriculture and I think that this pushes me even harder to become successful on my own, and to prove to the men in my life that I am able. I’m good at working with men and I enjoy it, but there is a large part of me that feels the need to stand on my own to prove myself. I have spent my life proving myself to grown men and women. I have had to convince the men that I am capable and I have had to convince the women that what I am doing is not a job only for men. Not all women push other young women to stand on their own or to do a “man’s” job. They may find security in staying in something that is expected of them. I wish that no matter who I was telling about my future aspirations that they would say “Those dreams are meant for who Abby is as a person. That fits her.” Rather than looking at it as “Is that not a man’s job? Do you not want something less dirty?” I find that when I talk about my aspirations to be a livestock agent, people are more accepting of this plan. It is an educational position that puts me in an office sometimes and provides benefits. It is a safer choice, in their eyes, if you will, than farming. It is a “good fit” for a teacher’s kid. This made extension a comfortable life path because it is something I would be good at but is also acceptable in my social circles. As I come to the close of my graduate career, I am beginning the process of considering changing my life plans. While I like to talk about being independent and solid in my grounding, the doubt of what other people would think of me if my career path changed creeped into my mind faster than I would like to admit. It is human nature in the society that we live in, but it should not have to be that way.

I find strength in my immediate friend group at school that also consists of young females fighting to make a name for themselves in the agricultural community. I find my sisterhood in these young women that understand what it means to not get a second interview for a production agriculture job, or hearing the comments “We will consider you for the job because we need
more women like you”. If we are not overlooked because of our gender, we are often picked out because of it. We are not looking for special treatment, but equal treatment. This is something as simple as, please do not judge us based off our name before you read the rest of my resume that explains my qualifications, something that I would be okay with you forming an opinion of me based off of. Let me start with a clean slate, rather than making me climb up before even reaching the bottom of the ladder that a male counterpart would start at.

I also find incredible strength in having a large group of immediate guy friends at school. My dad told me before I moved to Raleigh that one of the smartest things I would do would be finding a group of solid guy friends. Five years later with at least four tried and true best friends being guys, I cannot argue with my dad’s advice. It is important to note that it took me time to find the right guys to be friends with. I have weeded through the ones that did not accept me for who I am or who wanted to change me. Today, I have a circle of guy friends, 10-12 wide that I know I can call and talk to them about anything. They know me better and accept me more than any group of female friends I have ever been a part of. They see me for who I am and accept me with all of my challenges and flaws, but still push me towards growing and being the best version of myself. I cannot explain the value that I find in having my boys; they honestly changed my entire collegiate experience and will be the people that I will want standing beside me on my wedding day in the place of traditional female bridesmaids. This tells me that we need to find the people in our lives that truly love and support us, no matter their gender, sexual orientation, race, career path, or any other identifying factor that has no direct impact on the quality of their heart.

I believe that without the important men in my life, I would have taken a different path. I may never have joined FFA and may have found myself at a different university. It was a male
mentor of mine that explained to me the importance of continuing my education in today’s society, because it’s something that can never be taken from me. I am thankful for the influence of the men in my life, for with it came valuable life lessons and opportunities. However, I do realize that young women after me deserve an equal work environment. While my experiences may have been overall positive and in instances, beneficial, this is not the same for every woman. I have a voice and can share my story, what I needed, what I received, what was helpful and what was not. Every story told, every perspective shared, is a step in making everyone, men and women, more aware of what it means to be a woman in a male dominated field.

A greater sense of understanding is the first step in moving toward a society and work environment that is more accepting of any marginalized group. So this is me, the researcher, realizing that where I come from, what I have experienced, and who I have worked for impacts the way that I view this study. This is also me, encouraging you, the reader, to understand the same about yourself. Moving forward, not just in this study, but in life, I think we all need a deeper understanding of how who we are impacts how we view others. I am asking myself and for you to read their stories for how they tell them, not how you interpret them. Let them be them and the story will tell itself.

The more I read materials in my research, the more I began thinking about my hesitations about feminism before this year. I was afraid of being “radical” and too outspoken, because being opinionated is a consistent comment that people make about me. It is known that I usually stand true to what I believe. I was afraid of changing my mind, of being wrong, and really of being challenged. I tried to stay “neutral” in my stance on feminism because I was trying to avoid conflict and confrontation. When I started my thesis proposal journey, I had my serious doubts about my ability to write about gender issues. I thought for sure that I was not the person
for the job. I think what caused this state of mind was growing up in a man’s world. I did not want to be against men because all I have ever known is working, living, and spending my free time with older men. As an only child who is extremely close with her dad, my formative years have been surrounded by him and his friends. I did not want a “radical viewpoint” to cause me to think differently of them, because it is them who I attribute most of my learning process to. I did not think that I would be qualified to write about feminism because it had never been a word in my frequently used vocabulary until 18 months ago.

After much research, reading of The Second Sex, and writing, I came to find that feminism was everything that I needed it to be. It is not a man-hating club, it is not radical beliefs; it is simply the push for the second half of the population to be considered alongside the first, instead of after. I feel a tug at my heart in reading passages that articulate the feelings and experiences that I have had, but at the time did not know they could be put into words. For example, De Beauvior argues that women who fight for total independence are often caught up in living in a man’s world (1949). I have always taken pride in being independent and knowing that I could make it on my own, if the situation required. My parents raised me that way. But when reading this passage, I thought to myself: does this mean that I am trying to live my life in the way I would if I was a man? My experiences thus far would have been much different if I had been male. Physical labor would have been expected, rather than me having to prove my capabilities, for example. But when I think about the ways my life would have been different, I see lessons that I have learned that would be lost.

Studying feminism has been an empowering, but also personally reflective, journey for me. I have had to come to terms with why I believed what I did, but also why it is okay for those beliefs to evolve and mature. Every experience, reading, and opportunity is another lesson in
helping me understand my personal feminism journey. After all, females are not all that complicated, we just take time, effort, and reflection to understand, even if you are one.

Chapter Summary

This phenomenological qualitative study was designed in three-round interviews with five female cattle producers, with the data being analyzed by the whole-part-whole method. Phenomenological data is presented through descriptions and themes that emerge through analysis. Trustworthiness of this study was established by increasing credibility, transferability, and dependability through note taking, peer debriefing, journaling, and member-checking.

Because the researcher could personally identify with many of the experiences of the participants, an epoche was written to address the awareness of the presence of personal bias. The continuous journaling throughout the research process kept the researcher aware of her personal experiences and presence impacting the study.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The findings of this study are presented in a story-like fashion. This approach is taken in order to maintain the phenomenological view of the participant’s experience, with the goal being to understand the participants’ lives from their own perspective. The most appropriate way to tell their story is through creating an experience for the reader. It must feel as if the reader is standing in the boots and looking through the eyes of the female cattle producer to see the workday, the farm, and the life set before them in a way that only she could describe herself.

Participants

The five women who participated in this study ranged in age from early 20’s to late 60’s and were located in a variety of counties across North Carolina. Three of the five did not grow up farming, and only one of the others returned to an existing family farm. Two women married into the farm, while two were a part of the start-up of their operation. Three of the five women pursued agricultural degrees and two obtained educational degrees. Two women continued their education and graduated with their master’s degree. The participants will be labeled P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 in the written results.

The purpose of this study was to determine the lived experience of female cattle producers. As no two stories, farms, women, or cows are the same, neither do the experiences and perspectives of the women interviewed for this study. However, the following themes emerged from the data collected and the story begins with what brought the women to the farm.

A Calling

Each of the women spoke of experiences that they had that lead to them believing they were called to be back on the farm. All of these solidifying experiences occurred while they were
off the farm. They believe these experiences showed them that they were meant to be farming. Not all of the women started on the farm, so it was not necessarily that they had to leave the farm to understand that they were meant to come back, but rather they each had an experience that lead to a calling to get them to where they are now. This was described by participants as “I felt it [the farm] in my heart. It was a part of me I knew that I was meant to be in the pasture” (P3). “I just knew I had to come back. I was not fulfilled elsewhere and when my mind wondered, it wondered here. So I came home” (P1). “There was something pulling me to the cows, I still don’t know exactly where it came from but we would drive down the road and see cows and I knew I had to get to farming” (P5). “My job didn’t fit me but this [farming] felt right, I feel at home on the farm” (P2). “I felt it [farming] click, once I knew this could be an option, I knew it was the only option” (P4). So begins the story of the lived experience of female cattle producers and the accounts of what it took for the women to get to the farm. Let’s begin with the moment that they knew they had to get their hands and boots dirty.

**Career Change.** While the feeling of needing to come back to the farm can source from quite a few experiences, some participants described holding a full-time job as what pulled them to the pasture.

“I realized that after pouring my soul into a degree, emptying my pockets for a piece of paper, that I now had to work a job that I was not happy with long enough to line my pockets with enough [money] so that I could leave it. It was almost like a horse smelling the barn at the end of a trail ride. I was okay with being in school and the workforce until I got the whiff of the barn, then it was all I could do to get back. Once I got here, I was never quite sure of why I ever left. But I sure did intend to stay this time and I did.” (P1)

She went on to explain that she had followed a career dream that she felt had been laid out for her out of protection, to push her off the farm to make a better life for herself.

“It was always expected of me to go off to school, to get a job, start my life closer to town, and eventually have a family. My life could not look more
different than that now but those were the expectations of me from my family. I see it as them wanting more for me than what they had and I could not help but buy into the life that they had planned for me but the Good Lord had other plans.” (P1)

She worked the job for almost five years and was successful at it on paper, but said “in my heart I knew this was not my purpose in life” (P1). She knew the farm was in her blood and that she had to come back. While she never understood her reasoning for leaving, she was glad she did. When she came back she knew for sure that being back on the farm was where she was meant to be. “The confirmation of knowing this is right from having experienced what was wrong is a good feeling, one that is easy to act on and plan around. Having the pullback made it all more justifiable for me to come home” (P1). This experience made her feel as if she had found the next step and it was one that she knew would be a better fit for her destiny.

Another participant described her career as being one of “I was trying to find myself and I searched for a long while” (P2). She said she noticed that she spent more time dreaming of the next step instead of being happy with where she was. “I would daze off at work or while driving home and kept thinking of what else could be out there, almost felt like I knew I was not happy but didn’t know that’s what I was feeling” (P2). She kept jumping at the next opportunity until she finally realized that she was not meant to be in her previous career, she was meant to be on the farm. “I chased a few dreams and jumped at a few career changes until I had a reality check of I needed to come home” (P2). She described this journey of hers as being one of guess and check. “I was almost willing to give any job a chance because I wasn’t sure of what I was seeking” (P2). Later in life she realized that she had known all along she was meant to farm, but chose to ignore it.

“Once I came to my senses about quitting my job and coming home, I felt a sense of peace and comfort. It was a serene feeling that allowed me to follow through on my decision. I was finally ready to stop chasing the next big thing and
realize that what I may have been viewing as a little thing was actually pretty large, or really and truly one of the biggest. I felt it in my heart the first day I stayed home, I knew I was finally figuratively and literally at home in the workplace.” (P2)

This participant went on to explain that when she looked at everything on paper when planning out her options of taking the next job or coming home, she visually saw all of the pieces click. “I had to map everything out for my own sanity… it pieced together like I never expected. I did not understand it but I also kind of knew better than to question it… I saw what was laid out in front of me and I felt it in my gut after I finally quit ignoring it, and here I am today. I wouldn’t take anything to go back to what I had” (P2). She explained that this made her feel as if she had found a missing piece of her puzzle, almost as if she felt whole again after recognizing the feeling that she had been ignoring all along. “It all clicked and fell into place once I admitted I was meant to come home” (P2).

Both of the previously mentioned participants spoke about their career path being influenced by other people’s expectations of them and their life. “I left because it was what I was told to do but I never think that leaving could have ever been considered part of my plans or dreams” (P1). “Influential people in my life saw me going places, taking off, but that was their dream, not mine” (P2). They were thankful they spent time working off the farm because now they do not take one day working on the farm for granted. “It was almost as if I had to experience what I could have to realize that I truly wanted what I have always had, and that it was ok for me to go back. I never saw it as a step backwards because I feel the amount of satisfaction in my heart when I wake up already at work every morning” (P1). The participants expressed a sense of appreciation for where they are now because they did experience something that was not fully fitting. “Looking back, I understand. I had to know what I didn’t want so that I could appreciate the real thing when I finally found myself here (P2).
**Calling through College.** Another participant described her experience of a calling beginning on the first day of her college career (P3). She stepped foot into classes that were giving her the knowledge and resources that she needed to put her dreams into action.

“Before school I never truly believed that I could farm. I had dreamed of farming my entire life but I never thought it could be my reality… Over the course of my education and what I was learning through my classes, I just could not suppress the urge to farm. There was a huge catch of not having much in the department of resources, but something told me that we could just make it work. It was all worth the risk, an educated risk at least, but we’re still making it for now.” (P3)

She explained that learning from the textbook was not enough for her, but it put a drive behind her to learn how she could use what she was learning.

“Every time I would learn something new, it was like my fire would get relit, almost like a spark in a never ending pile of dry leaves… that fire is still in me today, but now my dreams are real. They are in front of me now and in my everyday life, but I would not have gotten here if it had not been for that first spark.” (P3)

She expressed a feeling of her dreams becoming attainable after starting college and the sense of believing in herself. “I felt like I was gaining a toolbox and inside was what I needed to make my dreams a reality” (P3).

A similar story was told by another participant who explained that her off the farm experience was also while at college, but hers was more of a drive to hurry up and get home and use what she was learning.

“I felt the rush to get through school because going into I knew exactly what I was going to use it for. It was not until I had to spend a large chunk of time away from the only way of life I had ever known that I realized just how strong the pull to go back was. I always knew it was there, but I am thankful for the affirmation of my feelings that college brought.” (P4)

This participant expressed more of a sense of urgency and return through her calling. “I wanted to hurry up and get home, so I could put all this to good use” (P4). There was also a sense of
accomplishment and applicability with what she was learning and she craved for the chance to use her new skills and knowledge to be successful. “I knew what I was learning was going to take our farm to the next step. I knew I had to use what I was taught and do my part in keeping the farm moving forward” (P4).

**Not Fitting**

The final participant explained her feeling of a calling as one of not belonging. “I grew up in a place that I knew from the time I started school that I did not fit in… This led me to years of yearning to leave and all I ever wanted was the exact opposite of what I had. I knew there was more to life than concrete sidewalks and playgrounds” (P5). She said there was nothing about her hometown that appealed to her and she dreamed of grass as far as you could see.

“I had to get out. I knew there was more. I left and I do not regret not looking back. Of course I wish I had had this life all along, but maybe I had to see what the other side of the fence looked like to know I didn’t want to cross back over it.” (P5)

This is a similar sense of having to experience something different to come to appreciate the farming lifestyle now, but her difference was it was not a yearning to get back to the farm, but to get there initially. “I wasn’t able to grow up on a farm, but I always knew and felt that I was meant to be on the farm” (P5). It was also more of an inward pull to something she had not yet experienced or been exposed to, but a gut feeling of knowing she was meant for something different. “I knew I didn’t fit the city life and I’m thankful for the feeling that pulled me away from sidewalks and towards the pasture” (P5).

The common theme among all of the yearnings to get to the farm was that the women each came to their own realization of knowing their current situation was not the right fit and feeling a call to the farm. Each one of them questioned their lifestyle at the time and this caused them to see where they wanted to go. They each spoke to some extent about doubting the calling
or knowing they would no longer fulfill others expectations of them. One participant said that “I knew as soon as I had the feeling of wanting to quit and go home to farm, there would people who wouldn’t see my dream the same as me, they may not even believe in me” (P1). These experiences of disbelief caused these women to have a voice in the back of their mind that have them question reality, creating a gray and questionable landscape. Question, hesitation, or doubt is omnipresent for these women.

**Doubt**

“Doubt is a sword that cuts you no matter what angle it comes from” (P3); unknowingly summed up this entire theme. In this case, doubt comes from within and from others; it may be from family, friends, coworkers, strangers, or peers. Although they felt the calling and were brave enough to follow their dream, does not mean that life afterward comes without hardships, trials, and questioning family members. Doubt is expressed in something as simple as a shift in the eyes, a change in the tone of voice, or hesitation. Doubt does not require verbal explanation or justification and is experienced from within themselves and from other people.

**Doubt in Themselves.** Production agriculture is a physically demanding job, whether it’s lifting 50 pound bags of feed or being able to working with and on equipment. The women each spoke about these aspects of their job when describing their operation or explaining other answers. Doubt is framed in the context of the topics and conversation.

One participant brought up mechanical work on the farm, and as she did her tone of voice and wording quickly became less confident. She did not feel comfortable working on her own tractors so she often called someone in to help her. “Mechanical work is not my strong suite and because I need my stuff to work, I call in someone that knows” (P1). While this is not an abnormal practice for farmers of either gender, this woman was easily the most independent and
self-sufficient of the participants. “Here on my farm, I run the show by myself. It’s my deal and my baby” (P1). She had framed almost all of her previous answers in such a way that had me convinced she was superwoman and worked alone 95% of the time. “I’ve learned to do just about everything else on my own… but this I just ain’t so sure about” (P1). It was obvious that she was not comfortable with admitting that she was unable to do her own mechanical work and having to ask for help. “I just call in help. One of those things that I just don’t try anymore” (P1). The light in which she spoke about this was different than before. She used words and phrases including “well I guess…”, “I’m not sure”, “I would have to ask”, or “I really do not think I could…” (P1) when previously she was cut and dry and sure of herself. This was the first example I saw of doubt within themselves.

Another participant explained that she felt the hardest part of her job was when an animal does not make it and that sometimes she feels as if her emotions are a disadvantage (P2). She said “I tend to hold on too long…”, “I care too much and that doesn’t always help…”, or “My feelings just get in the way” (P2). She disapproved of her own emotions and talked about it in such a way that showed she felt as if they made her less qualified for her job. “I see the softness that my emotions bring to the job. I know I don’t have time to sit and cry over every less than ideal situation, and I wish I had the ability to pack them [emotions] up and stow them away, it’d make me better at this I guess” (P2). This same participant would often follow her answers with “this may not be the best way” or “I know other people do this better” (P2). The way she worded her answers indicated she was questioning or unsure of herself.

Three participants spoke about the physical abilities that farming requires and how being short or not being strong enough made their job more difficult. They would say “I can’t quite get that done so someone else just does it” (P2) or “I don’t even try to do that because I don’t think
I’m strong enough” (P3). They tended to see the differences in their physical attributes and equate them with being less capable of getting the job done. “I tend to be on the short side so I just know what I can’t do” (P3). “There is an additional set of challenges to the workday when you are just not built for the job” (P5).

**Doubt from Others.** As if dealing with doubt from within is not challenging enough, people in the lives of the participants are also sources of questioning feelings and hesitations. The participants talked about the “dark cloud” (P5) or “the voice in your ear that you try not to hear” (P2). These were experiences that caused them to see these people in their lives differently. These expressions of doubt showed that they did not believe in the participants.

One participant explained that her experiences when she calls a mechanic. “He doesn’t see me as a real farmer and he puts me at the bottom of his to do list every time” (P1). She said “Just by hearing that my voice over the phone, he decides that I ain’t a priority because I could not possibly need my tractor as bad as a man. I hear the change when he realizes who he is talking to, he puts on the patronizing voice and thinks I don’t know what I want” (P1). She said that the most frustrating thing about the situation is that she cannot change his mind. “He does not come out to my farm to see me working and how my daily operations depend upon the tractor he is putting off fixing, he just stays in his garage and keeps thinking of me as less important” (P1). She now has her male cousin call in her work requests or mechanical questions because the turn-around time is much shorter and the responses are much more serious. “It is ridiculous how much quicker I get my tractor back, you’d think he’d know it’s mine when he gets in the shop, but when it is finished after my cousin calls, it’s usually cheaper. Now what sense does that make?” (P1). She said this causes a simple fix problem to be much more complex with extra steps are required because of something outside of her control. “It should not be this
hard to get a service that I am paying for with money just like a man, his dollar don’t count no more than mine does” (P1). She said that these experiences make her extremely frustrated and almost burnt out on asking for help. “I wish I wasn’t dependent on him, I wish I had someone else to ask, but for now, I wiggle my way around it. I shouldn’t have to, but I value my tractor being on my farm and working, same as me, we’re better off when we’re here” (P1).

Another participant explained that on many instances salespeople, men and women, would come and visit their farm. They pull up on the farm and get out, look around and eventually find me, look me up and down and say, “Hey honey, where’s your Daddy at?” or “Where can I find who’s in charge here? I can hear it in their voice that they are not even considering I may be a vital part of this operation” (P4). Despite her education level and age increasing, this situation remains the same. She said “I can see the question in their eyes when I respond with that I am, in fact, in charge and can handle any situation or answer any question they may have. It’s like they see my ponytail and think that I am not capable of being anything more than an errand runner or a messenger, when I actually do help run this place and am invested” (P4). These interactions have caused her to have a knee jerk reaction when people visit the farm. “I find myself getting increasingly frustrated when these situations arise and that I feel as if I have to constantly justify my role on the farm to people that were not born or raised here” (P4).

A common area where doubt from others arose was when they were discussing their career choice. One participant talked about her parents’ reaction to her career change by saying “You know we won’t bail you out when this fails, right?” (P1) She said “They did not even give me a chance to breathe, much less succeed before they showed they did not believe in me” (P1). Another said her family asked “Are you sure you want to give up everything you’ve worked for
now?” (P2). This made her desire a supportive response from them and caused her to question why they did not see that it was not a step backwards, but rather her pushing herself forward. “I don’t understand why they didn’t see what I saw or feel what I feel about the move, I wanted them to understand the good gut feeling that I had about all of this” (P2). One woman said that a previous colleague asked her “Are you sure it’s ok for a girl to farm? Isn’t that for boys?” (P4). This interaction left her speechless and searching for a way to explain that she was not less qualified for a job simply because she is a female. “I sat there with my mouth open wondering why I had to justify my dreams to someone with no impact on my future, so I didn’t” (P4). Another participant had a stranger ask her “Shouldn’t a man be driving a truck and trailer like that?” when she was going to sell her calves (P5). She looked back at him and said “I don’t know, should he? I’ve never heard my truck complain that I’m a woman” (P5).

Questioning looks, a change in the tone of voice, a delayed response, a higher price estimate than that given to a man, or never being assumed to be in charge are only a few of the challenges that these women face when dealing with doubt on a daily basis. Not believing in their abilities, both from themselves and others is a very real piece of their daily lives.

**Against All Odds**

When the participants were directly questioned about how they handle doubt from themselves and others, the answers gave a sense of beating the odds one day at a time. One participant said “I do see it [doubt] in their eyes and I feel it hit me on the inside, but I am generally able to let it fuel my fire to prove them wrong rather than letting it get me down for too long” (P4). Another one talked about how sometimes she focuses on overcoming a task to prove herself wrong. She said “If I don’t believe in myself, how can I expect anyone else to? So I try to start changing that right here with my attitude. It doesn’t always happen, nor is it quick, but I try
to keep on keeping on” (P1). She explained that she realizes that life is not all about what happens to you, but rather how you react to it. She said “I am the only part of the situation that I can control so I choose to attempt to regulate my emotions and reactions to the doubt” (P1). She said that this is a challenging process but one that she finds easier than dealing with the full effects of letting someone else’s questions sit in her mind for too long. “If I sit there and let it brew, I never try. So I do my best to pick up and move on, it ain’t easy but better than them having too much power over my life” (P1).

Another participant explained that her take on doubt is to not listen to it. “I don’t entertain anyone’s doubts on my abilities because my performance on my farm does not affect their ability to do their job, generally speaking, so why would I let an irrelevant opinion alter my view of myself?” (P5). She said that she tries to consistently conduct herself in such a way that shows people she is not entertaining their questions or doubts of her. “I don’t let them see if they do get to me. I don’t want them to get the satisfaction of finding a weak spot” (P5). She recognizes that doubt exists, but attempts to not give it the time of day. “It’s there and I know it, but I don’t like it and I try hard to ignore it, it works some of the times” (P5). She went on to explain that she counteracts self-doubt by forcing herself to learn new things. She said “The more prepared I feel, the less doubt I encounters from myself and the easier I can knock doubt from outside on its knees” (P5).

These women face criticism and doubts from many directions, including from within, and the sword cuts, no matter where it comes from. These doubts can stay in their minds for just a few hours but sometimes years. “Sometimes they stick around too long, longer than I would like to admit. Sometime it cuts deep and it just does not heal quickly” (P2). Doubt is a cloud that when it hovers, it begins the process of comparison, looking at other people and wondering if
what they have or do is better than yours. Hearing the questioning words of others has made some of the participants wonder if what they have given up was worth it to get them to where they are.

**Sacrifice and Comparison**

Sacrifice and comparison are pieces of this story. The participant’s journey has taken them through times of trials and tribulations, where all of them have had to give up something in another aspect of their life in order to make one sector more successful. While this is brave of them, it does not come without comparison. Because so few women in their close circles and area are cattle producers as well, they find themselves comparing their life with those of women in more common roles, with jobs that provide insurance or a consistent income. Sometimes, they even take a look back and compare their lives now with the one they previously held before the farm.

**Sacrifice.** “In order to gain something new, I must get rid of something old. I cannot create new space in my life and I only stretch so far. So I found that with each step forward that I took, I had to look back one less step as well” (P3). The participants gave up important pieces of their lives to be where they are today. However, their outlook on the sacrifices they made is even more inspiring than what they chose to give up.

**Sacrifice of Career.** Participants gave up the potential to pursue a life in a conventional career, involving health insurance, consistent paychecks, more “normal” work hours, etc. They chose to leave conventional behind and come home to the farm. A few of the women spoke about the sacrifices of that transition.
One participant said she had to believe that what she was gaining would eventually outweigh what she was in the process of giving up, but said she felt the pull in her heart of having to let that go:

“When I drove away from my job on the last day, the list of things playing in my mind was one of everything I was leaving behind. Things that I would have to find a way to provide on my own time now. Things like insurance and the same pay at the same time of the month, sure, but also things like guaranteed time off during the same weeks every year, planning for holidays, paid days off for travel... Really what I was giving up was structured freedom. I knew I was gaining much more in that aspect, but I truly did not have it at that point, the new benefits were yet to come.” (P2)

She spoke strongly on the topic of making decisions and sacrifices that are right for an individual and their situation, rather than expecting what someone else is doing to fit her own scenario.

“All, many years later in my life, I see that what I had was not what I needed, nor what my future kids would need from me. I’m at home now and am way more invested in their lives and their future than what my career path would have allowed me to be. It was just the right sacrifice for me to make for me and mine.” (P2)

Another participant shared that she gave up on the idea of looking for full-time employment outside the farm after college (P4).

“I had worked internships, I had gained all the skills, but I just knew I was supposed to be back here. I felt it in my gut. But that came with times of questioning and also realizing that I was passing up the time in my life to go out and do and be and see who I wanted to be. I was choosing to come back to what I already knew and giving up the chance for adventure.” (P4)

She went on to explain that even though she knew she was where she was supposed to be, she could not help but wonder what could have been if she had followed a path more similar to her friends.

“The hardest part was when people would ask me what my plans were after graduation and when I would say I’m going home to farm, I could see the pity in their eyes. As if, they felt bad for me for not being on a more normal path, if you will... I think there was true value in me having to stand up for my choices though. I wondered sometimes what it would have been like to have taken a
company job and work 40 hour weeks, but I know I’d be doing this after my 9 to 5. With every point I had to make for staying home to farm, I felt my choices be solidified. I knew had I had given up the right things for me.” (P4)

This participant also sacrificed time with a loved one because of the distance that going home to farm put in between the two of them. “Choosing the farm was the right choice but was not always easy, I knew that everything I was missing out on was better lost because I was experiencing something not all people are able to and that the things worth having would still be there in the end” (P4).

Both of these participants explained their encounter with questioning their career path but also both expressed a sense of justification when looking back. They both knew that what they gave up was not more important than what they gained, but that it required more of a transition and an adjustment to a new lifestyle and mindset. They recognized the need for the sacrifice now rather than potential feelings of regret later. The tone they used and emotions displayed demonstrate a sense of understanding that in order to gain what they now have, they had to lose what they once held onto.

Sacrifice of Family and Friends. While most of the women felt that choosing the farming lifestyle was one that allowed them increased focus on their family, one participant had a very different story. She chose to invest everything she had, financially, emotionally, mentally, and all of her time into the farm, so she did not find herself on the dating scene all too often. “The farm has my heart, I married my career, so I put my heart and soul into it” (P1). She has never married and has continued to work mostly alone on her operation and comments that, “I don’t think much about not having a husband, but now I realize I gave up the chance of ever being a grandmother.” This was the area of her life that she felt the most regret for her sacrifice and felt a sense of what could have been. “I don’t mind being here alone, but thinking about that
there could have been kids running around the yard appeals to me more at this age than it did in my younger days. I see it now what I couldn’t see then” (P1).

She spoke about how she knows choosing her career was a wise business move but she realizes now that a balance could have been achieved; because she was not willing to sacrifice in one area of her life, she missed out elsewhere. “It seemed right at the time that I needed to put everything into the farm, but now I see that I could have made more time for life, it didn’t all have to be work” (P1).

“I knew this was a personal choice, I had an idea of what I would miss out but I used to justify it by saying I would not have had the time to have spent working on the farm if I had been raising a family, but now I see it as I could have been raising my children to love the land and cattle as I do.” (P1)

On one hand she attempted to invest more heavily in the farm, but sees now that she may have even shortchanged herself in a business sense because there is not a next generation to take over. “I will have to sell the farm. I have no immediate family to pass this on to. I’ve never minded being by myself because I have always had the farm, but I never thought about when the farm won’t have me anymore” (P1). She went on to finish the conversation with “I have cousins and neighbors who have young children, I am not totally without young people to invest in, but I see now that other people made it work for them and I could have had something similar at this point in my life if I had been more flexible… Oh well” (P1).

Another participant spoke about how being on the farm made her travels much more limited and how that decreased her time with friends.

“After college, we all dispersed into the world and went our own ways. There was this unsaid agreement that we would make true effort to see each other, more than texts and stuff you know, go and travel and see them. Time. I made that promise and was able to do a decent job of holding up my end while I was still working [my full time job], but once I moved here I tend to stay put because of my responsibilities being geographically localized to here…” (P2)
She went on to explain that because her work ties her so closely to the land and is so stationary, she stopped being able to make all the effort to go and see her friends. “The farm ties you down, the land doesn’t move, so it stays so I stay, and my friends aren’t always close by” (P2).

“I do feel lonely here some days, other days I am thankful for the solitude… I’ve come to realize though that what I lost through that was surface level friends… My true friends stuck by me and as we grow older we understand life can’t always be as it was… We accept different forms of communication as keeping up, now long phone calls have to suffice because I can’t up and travel across the state and country every few months.” (P2)

She explained that while sacrifices were made, she sees now that her choices cleared some clutter out of her life. “The friendships that stayed had deeper roots than those that chose to leave” (P2). So while she did experience loss through her sacrifice, she was left with quality over quantity. “Real friends, true relationships, they make it through” (P2). Something she described as “a true benefit of growing older” (P2).

**Sacrifice from the Farm.** While this woman’s experience with sacrifice did not quite fit in with the rest, it still carries an impactful message about how sacrifice does not always mean choosing the farm over everything. The participant found herself having to take time away from the farm to work a part-time job in order to have health insurance for her family. She spoke about the decision making process of her returning to work off the farm. She said that she chose to take time away from home to work elsewhere so that if something were to arise later in life, she would have to sacrifice less time and money for health issues because of the cushion she believed her insurance plan provided. “I could not fathom the idea of all of us working such dangerous jobs on the farm without being protected. I wanted to know I had help if I needed it for my family. So I got a job and provided that help. It’s what we needed, so it’s what I did” (P5). She said that this was an easy decision for their family because they knew what they valued. “We’ve always made it work before, so we looked at the challenge ahead and said who’s
to say the Good Lord won’t see us through this time of change too” (P5). Her sacrifice looked different from the other participants, but at the root of it all, every woman was doing what she felt was best for her and her situation.

**Protected from “Traditional” Sacrifice.** One participant worked a full career in a job before retiring to the farm. She spoke about the disadvantages of her gender in the workplace and talked about how she felt as if she had been protected from many of the sacrifices that women tend to make in the workplace or on the farm. This participant felt as if she had experienced an opportunity that was not afforded to most, and was aware of the sacrifices that she did not have to make. She said “I spent my career in a workplace where my presence was valued, my work was acknowledged and I was treated as a contributing part of the team, because I was” (P3). She said this environment was possible because her boss refused to ask her to give up anything in the workplace just because she was a woman.

“I spent my career in a place that had policies to protect me. I did not realize how up and coming it was for my male boss to be enforcing these policies. Even after years of reflection, I feel as if my presence was valued and I was looked after… I know that this wasn’t the case for many women my age and even still now. I felt like I didn’t have to give up anything in my job because I was a woman.” (P3)

This participant felt as if she had experienced an opportunity that was not afforded to most, and was aware of the sacrifices that she did not have to make.

The participants each faced a unique situation, one’s sacrifice did not look exactly like the others. They each have a different life and a different set of challenges, but every one faced choices throughout their lives and careers. However, the fact that the topic of sacrifice arose so often, especially since not directly asked about, shows that this is common in their day to day lives and relevant when they reflect on their career paths as farmers. The saying goes that there is no such thing as a free lunch (the economical term being opportunity cost), and very rarely does
anyone progress without giving something up. Whether it be sacrificing a girls’ weekend because it is calving season (P2), choosing to leave a job to invest in the farm (P1), or choosing to leave the farm to better protect their family (P5), women are making choices every day trying to do what is best for their situation. While they evaluate their own needs and what move they are going to make next, comparisons are made between themselves and others, but also to their life before the farm.

Comparison

“I can’t help but look at other mom’s lives and think how maybe a little more structure would make my life easier. I love our chaos most days, but some days it’s hard not to see that what looks to be greener grass on the other side of the fence” (P2). The two prevalent areas of comparison from the participants of this study were comparing themselves to other and comparing their current self to their previous self (to their life before transitioning to the farm).

Comparison to Others. Throughout their discussions, the participants would use someone else’s job, situation, or role and compare it with theirs. It would be something as simple as explaining their husband’s roles on the farm first and then using that explanation to build her own off of (P2, P3, & P5). Wording such as “my husband does [lists jobs], but I just do [lists jobs]” (P2, P3, & P5) was used in three of the five participants’ interviews. Participants would express sentiments such as “well other women my age aren’t still having to work this hard” (P1), “people with work week jobs have a more reliable schedule” (P2), or “people younger than me may be able to…” (P5). The women brought up other people within their answers to questions about themselves; rather than explaining her first, she would explain someone else. The other person may or may not be related to the situation that was explained, but they were included in the participants’ answers. The participants used other people as a gauge to situate themselves,
continuously appraising their own value, performance, effort, situation, or even happiness by this type of comparison.

One participant expressed that she does not view herself as being in the workforce anymore. She said “I see all these people going to work in an office or truly just leaving home to work, while I stay here. I don’t consider myself to be in the workforce like everyone else because I no longer receive a steady paycheck” (P2). Instead of viewing the countless hours that she puts into fixing fence, raking hay, checking cows, feeding calves, raising her children, etc. as a workday, she compares herself to those that get up, leave the house, and work a 9 to 5 job. “I don’t contribute to that lifestyle anymore, or at least not at the same level as everyone else” (P2).

She later discusses times that she questioned her parenting choices of letting her kids be so involved on the farm at such a young age and that other kids their age did not understand their interests. “I know that when they see other kids, because they spend so much time here and are so heavily involved in things that other kids could never begin to understand, I know that it’s the right thing, but I worry that they will get picked on because they’re different, I wonder if I’m making the choice that’s best for them or am I parenting by what’s convenient for me?” (P2). Here she compared herself to other parents, their lifestyle to non-farming families, and her kids’ passions to other kids’ passions.

“Other parents don’t send their child to work all day with their dad with only a cooler of drinks and snacks in hand, they’ve grown up so differently and have such drastically different interests. It’s not just that but it’s also how much they know about it. They’re smart and they’ve learned so much from working, but they come across so passionate about cattle or farming when they talk about it and other kids just don’t know how to take it because they truly don’t understand… I worry for the day they realize they are so different.” (P2)

She did not see it as simply different lifestyles, but rather as which lifestyle was comparatively better or worse. “I don’t know which is better or if I make all the right choices as a parent, but
I’ll never know for certain if it would have been better for them socially to have been raised differently” (P2).

**Comparison to Previous Self.** When explaining their journey to the farm, participants would often paint a picture of their previous life, whether that be in a career, childhood, or college experience. This picture would later become a frame of reference (whether positive or negative was situationally dependent). The participants would refer back to their former self with phrases such as “back in my younger days I would have taken that jump, that risk no looking back” (P1), “when I was working that job I used to have to spend so much time and so many nights away from home” (P2), or “before all of this happened I was a totally different person” (P5). It was a referral to a previous way of thought, behavior, or action, as if they were comparing their current state of mind to a previous one.

Comparisons were not limited to one category of people in their lives, but rather all across the spectrum. “I think about the lives that my peers have at this point and sometimes I crave the formality and the structure that they seem to have…” (P4). The comparisons were made to both males and females in their lives: they would mention their husbands, parents, males in the industry, other moms, or females their age. “I talk to other cattle producers in the county, mostly men, and I listen to what they do versus what we do… (P5). “My husband is better at handling the equipment than me” (P3). “I think about the lives that my parents had making all of this a reality and I see that my life is much different” (P4). “Other moms and their lives look so much different than mine…” (P2). “Women my age are spending time with grandkids and doing things for them, I’m with my cows and doing things for them” (P1).

The participants interact with many different people in their day to day lives, and while comparisons do occur, so do priceless relationships that make their lifestyle and career possible.
Outside Connections

People cannot function in this world completely alone and the participants discussed how they rely on others in their day to day lives. These people ranged from a good friend to talk to on the phone (P2), to a family member down the road (P1), or a professional network (P3, P5). Through these connections the women have found strength in resources, a wealth of knowledge, differing experiences, and mentor opportunities. They each expressed the value they see in knowing who to call in a time of need. One participant said that “There’s no need to reinvent the wheel when someone a phone call away has the answer for ya”. One participant explained “If you know who to ask and if you are not afraid to call, you can find just about anything out, but you have to be willing to ask” (P1).

Resources. Throughout life’s journey each of the women have come in contact with people who have helped them and contributed to making their dreams possible. These interactions have been an encouraging word in a short conversation, or someone working with them to help them gain access to grant funds to improve their farm. People and their contributions are often a force behind why the women in this study are able to continue learning and farming.

One participant explained that her long-distance friend was one of the greatest contributors to her success. She described their friendship as one of great depth, understanding, and grace. “She has a way of understanding what I am going through even though she’s not here. She listens to understand me and so her advice or comforting words are so graceful. No judgement, just a shoulder to lean on and a hand to hold” (P2). She explained that her friend would send a thoughtful text at just the right moment or always pick up the phone to be a listening ear. “It was never monetary support, but fully emotional. That truly meant more. I
needed her supportive nature way more than I ever needed her money and there have been some tight times around here, let me tell ya girl…” She had found value in this emotional support from outside of her farm, which she referred to as neutral ground. “She’s not invested in what goes on here, so it’s never one sided advice of everything needing to be business oriented… she gets it” (P2). Having a system in place for meeting her emotional support needs was her version of using outside connections to make her day to day life easier.

Another participant explained how she and her husband have found value in investing in the commodity associations. She said that by participating in their meetings, field days, trial workshops, and other educational opportunities the association offers, they are able to gain firsthand experience and further their knowledge on subjects that specifically impact their farm. “The guest speakers and topics that they cover each bring a new perspective to what we are doing. Sometimes we get stuck in a rut in our operation, but these fresh ideas get us back going” (P3).

She also explained that through their interactions with the individuals in the association, they are able to create lasting relationships that benefit them through shared knowledge, experiences, and resources: “We have people to call when we need something and that means more than one could ever put a dollar sign on.” The association also exposes the farmers to opportunities for grant money that they can invest back to their farm. “We have been able to receive money for improvements in watering systems, fencing, and a grazing program, without this money our farm would not be advancing as quickly as it is, and it is because of the association that we are aware of the availability of the funds” (P3). She said that she feels a sense of trust and investment to the group. She feels that if she is able to invest in the cause, then the association will choose to invest in her farm when the time arises. “It’s a support system and I
have seen the cycle of us investing in the association and then the association investing in us, you get out what you put in” (P3).

Another participant explained that she values her connection with the cooperative extension office in her county. She said that without this resource her only form of learning would be through her mistakes. “I try to be a lifelong learner and the programs that my county office provides is helping me do that. I have tried to keep myself and my farm up to date. I notoriously fall behind but extension is one thing that keeps pushing me forward” (P1). She expressed strong ties and appreciation for the office and their attempts in providing programs that met the needs of the local farming community. “When I hear about the topics that will be covered, I am thankful that most of them are so applicable to us farmers… they take our needs into consideration” (P1). She said that the workshops, field days, and informational meetings she has attended continuously broaden her horizons and scope of what could be coming next to her farm. “I don’t always know what I don’t know, but extension is a good way for me to stay current. I keep learning from what they are providing” (P1). She explained that this relationship was one that made her feel invested in and looked out for, especially since the topic areas are applicable to her operation.

“When I walk into a meeting knowing that our needs are looked out for, I am bound to get more out of it from the beginning. It’s going to mean more and I will learn more because it shows there is a relationship there between the extension office and the needs of the farmers.” (P1)

Another participant expressed the true value that she has found through social media and the agriculture groups she has joined and participated in online.

“Once I knew that this other world existed, it was if I could not get there fast enough… Now I have all of these people at my fingertips that are just like me. Their everyday life struggles are parallel with mine… I found people I do not have to explain myself to because they just get the life that I am living.” (P2)
This participant appreciated the bond that she was able to create with other people in her situation. “These are men and women in all kinds of Ag operations, but it’s relationships that I couldn’t find locally” (P2). She felt a sense of belonging and understanding that went beyond someone simply listening to her problems. “It’s nice to talk to people in Ag that aren’t your direct competition or trying to sell to you… they understand the struggles this life brings...” (P2). She expressed that what she loved most about connecting with other agriculture people was that they were able to give real life advice. “... and their perspective can bring great advice!” (P2).

The women have found people in their lives that make their day to day operations go more smoothly. These are relationships that they view as worth investing in because they see the benefits these connections bring to their life and career. Each participant that spoke about people in her life did so in an admiring and appreciative light (P1, P2, & P3). They all used phrases that indicated they were able to identify and connect with these outside resources: “They understand what we need, they know what it means to be in our shoes” (P3), “They work to provide us with applicable materials, because they know what we need and what it looks like from this side of the table” (P1), “They understand my life and get where I am coming from, that’s a bond that can’t be made up” (P3). Because the participants have people in their lives that took an interest and continue to help them, some of them have chosen to return the favor and invest in others.

**Mentoring.** Four of the five participants explained that they have found a way to give back to the community and the industry by investing in someone newer to the industry. When questioned about mentoring, the participants all answered that they did not have one (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5). The next sentence for some of them was an explanation that they had people invest in them but never was one person enough of a guiding hand to be considered a mentor. “My
grandmother was a huge part of my life and was a great influence, but I wouldn’t call her a mentor, especially for my career” (P2). “My dad taught me a lot of what I know about the work and the land, he answered all of my questions, but when I came home to farm, he didn’t support the full time move, so the mentoring aspect was lost there” (P1). “I had professors and old bosses that truly had my best interest at heart and would give me advice when I asked for it, but I had to seek it out, it wasn’t a constant relationship” (P3). “My dad is super important in everything we do, he’s a constant resource and advocate of mine, but there’s some things he just doesn’t understand” (P4). They each took this experience in their life and decided to invest in someone newer to the industry when the opportunity arose.

One participant explained that through her involvement in an organization she had met a young couple in her area that wanted to start a small farm. She began to reflect on the experiences in her and her husband’s early years and knew just how tough the early years of a farming career could be (P3). “This couple laid heavy on my heart for a few weeks and so I approached my husband with an idea. We came up with an agreement between our farm and the young couple, which started a relationship that would be the beginning of these people’s dreams becoming a reality” (P3). She said that her and her husband plan to phase out as far as financial investment, but want to serve as lifelong resources for the couple. “We’re just wanting to be the solid first stepping stone in making this possible, the rest of the way we want them to know we are here and can help, but the goal is for them to do it themselves eventually” (P3). She described it as something small to them, but for the couple it would mean the difference of reaching their goals years sooner than expected. “For us, this isn’t that big of a financial commitment but we already have our farm up and running… they don’t… so if we help them, they’re more likely to have an operation up and running a lot sooner” (P3). The feeling of knowing that the people they
invest in will continue to grow and invest back in the agriculture industry is what drove this participant to help the couple. “We know what it’s like to be starting up, but we also know what it’s like to be twenty years down the road and being established. They can take this opportunity and grow, and hopefully do the same for someone in return later on” (P3).

Another participant spoke of her method of choosing who she hires as seasonal labor for her farm. She said “There are local high school boys, usually involved in the FFA program, who are interested in agriculture and have the ability to work, but nowhere to learn and put it to good use” (P1). She explained that she sees value in teaching someone how to work with their hands and chose to make her farm a place where young people with limited experience could have the chance to learn. “I know the value of being able to use your hands, fancy work ain’t for everybody, so I like for them to be able to come and learn here” (P1). She said that these boys are usually looking to make a little extra spending money and that she is always in need of extra sets of hands. “Young boys always need money and I always need help, seems like a good match up, right?” (P1). The combination of the two needs and her willingness to invest in inexperienced labor created the opportunity for a mentorship. “They ain’t gonna learn this stuff unless they do it and I need for it to be done, so here we are” (P1).

The participant takes in the young local boys and teaches them about her farm. “I show them where everything goes, why it goes there, what gets done in what order, and how I expect it to get done” (P1). She said that this is creating their foundation of knowledge of why their work matters in the grand scheme of things. “I like for them to understand the whole production before I truly trust them to work fully on their own… they gotta know why it all matters” (P1). To her, one key component in being their mentor is showing them the long term value of the industry. “It motivates them to do better work because they see what it is leading up to and have a better
understanding of slacking at the beginning of the process creates more work at the end” (P1). To her, this process involves a sense of pride and investment. “I can see what I am investing in and how they are improving” (P1). When they are able to move on and pursue their dreams with the skills that they have learned from working on her farm, she feels a sense of accomplishment and investment in the future of agriculture. “When they call me and tell me what they’re doing now and how my work taught them something, I tend to beam from the inside out. I’m proud of them, first and foremost, but I also see that what I am doing is worth it and that’s why I keep calling for them, you gotta invest in the ones who don’t have it all to bring more people into what we do” (P1).

One participant explained that she feels that by making her story known, mostly through her social media presence, she is able to let other young women know that their dreams are worth pursuing, no matter the context. “I want them to see me and read my story and understand that one day they can be in a spot that they may not even know to dream about yet” (P2). She explained that when she transitioned to the farm from her full-time job, she felt the need to have someone to look up to and be inspired by. “There were great women all around me, but none were in my shoes. It helped to see that they were brave and moving forward, but I needed someone like me” (P2). Her hope is that by sharing her story and being open about her struggles through her sites that someone will see that she made it and be inspired that they can as well.

“I find strength in knowing that other people struggle. We get in this box and think we’re the only ones, but truly we’re not. So if I can give them a taste of hey she doesn’t have her stuff together either, then I’m not alone, then I’ve accomplished my purpose in my online presence.” (P2)

She emphasized that her online presence it is not about creating a picture-perfect view of her life because she feels as if people get led into thinking that a flawless life is attainable. “This life is messy, it’s hard, it’s weird, but it’s funny, it’s joyous, and it’s worth having. I want people
to see that through me” (P2). She feels this is her contribution to investing in the next generation, but also in the overall attitude or outlook of the agriculture industry by striving for a more holistic, realistic, and honest view of what she calls farm life. “We gotta be more real with each other, people bond over hardships much more than successes. We gotta let people know the real side of this mess, let’s be open and honest with each other but also consumers” (P2).

The last participant spoke about her family. She explained that each member of her family looks at the next youngest and invests in them. “There’s a bunch of us so we just tag team and do what we can for the next one” (P4). She has younger siblings who are following a path similar to her own. She spoke about her off the farm experience being vital in her appreciation of the farm. “It was so beneficial for me to spend time off of the farm when I was younger and in school because it showed me different perspectives but also made it apparent to me that I wanted to return home and invest back into our operation” (P4). She spoke highly of the experiences she was able to have and has insisted upon doing her part in making it possible for her younger siblings to have the same opportunity.

“I want them to see the farm from the outside looking in and not just from our side. I want them to experience things and meet new people. This was how I was so sure that I wanted to come back, I had those times in my life and it showed me how I could come back and use what I learned. I want them to be sure in the next steps in their lives and the only way I know how to do that is to make them try new and different things.” (P4)

She spoke of the importance of making sure the next step is the right one for you as an individual, rather than swaying towards what other people think and expect of you. “I had people all along question my choices, but because I knew what I wanted I was able to stay true…” (P4). She said her experiences dealing with making tough choices led her to further invest in her siblings so they would be encouraged to be themselves, even if that is different than what people expect. “I just want them to feel okay with being them, so I try to show them that I am
comfortable being me, we don’t fit in boxes around here and I want them to know that it’s ok” (P4). She chose to mentor them because wants to be a resource in their lives when they have similar experiences down the road. “If I let them into my life and my struggles now, they’ll learn from it some now, but more so have something to reflect back on and know that I can be a resource. I’ve been where they’ve been and where they’re going” (P4).

The women in this study have dealt with doubt, sacrifice, and comparison in their lives. They know what it means to create success in an industry that people did not expect you to be able to make it through (P1, P2, P3, P4, & P5). They have heard people question their choices (P2, P4) and dealt with close loved ones not believing in them (P1). However, the women have taken the negativity and chose to channel it into something positive. They saw the need for investing in someone younger and chose for that to be a part of their contribution back to the industry (P1, P2, P3, & P4). They chose to lift someone else up and provide to others the resources and support they didn’t have a the same stage in their careers. They are committed to and invest in not only their farm’s future, but the industry’s next generation of agriculturalists.

Commitment

The women are committed to believing in themselves, pursuing their own dreams, having a deeper sense of self, and staying true to their farm. They have faced times of questioning, unfulfilling careers, sacrifice, and doubt, and have turned the hard times into life lessons. Being in their shoes does not come without hard work, grit, and the power to stand your ground. Being producers in the agriculture industry calls for a high commitment to producing high quality end products, in this case, beef. The women show true commitment to the agriculture industry and what it stands for, but have fought equally hard to stay true to themselves.
Commitment to the Cause. When discussing the impact of their work, the women spoke about contributing to the agricultural cause: “We know the greater good of our work, the world is growing so we gotta feed them” (P4), “Our products are going to feeding the world and we’re committed to that” (P2), or “Our farm is committed to providing healthy, nutritious, and consistently high quality food products” (P5). They understand their work contributes to something larger than themselves and extends well beyond their farms. One participant explained, “We do not finish our calves here, so the end product does not come from us. But it is our duty to do our job to the best of our abilities so that when our cattle makes it to the end, it is a quality product that we would be satisfied feeding to our own families and selling to yours” (P4). She grasps that her work is not just about her, and not just about the farm, but that it also encompasses the consumer and the marketplace.

The women are committed to providing healthy food products for a growing population. A participant explained that when in meetings with varying organizations, they speak about how much more food will have to be produced in the next 30 years to feed the billions more people in the world by then. “They tell us how what we are doing matters because the population is multiplying and our food supply needs to as well” (P3). She understands that her farm cannot feed the world alone, but she knows that she can do her part in producing quality beef for people to consume. “We can’t do this by ourselves, but we can make sure we do our part right” (P3).

Another participant explained that she feels a strong pull to protect the land that she has been blessed with. “Land is not being made, so what we have is the most we will ever have again” (P4). She views it as her responsibility to take care of and cherish the land she has and to work with it in such a way that it will exist for generations to come. One participant explains, “I live by the saying of that I have not inherited the land from my ancestors, but rather I am renting
it from my grandchildren” (P4). This mindset causes her to be in tune with the impact of her choices and the practices she chooses to implement. “I recognize that my work effects beyond the somewhat immediate results I see. I know that what I choose to do to the land cannot be undone” (P4). She recognizes that her work goes beyond what she needs to do right now, but that it continues into preserving the land for farmers to come: “I won’t be the last one to tend this land, but I can make sure to do my part that it is still here for them to use” (P4).

This was a common theme among the participants-- they are dedicated to the cause of their job, which is ultimately putting food on someone else’s table and protecting the land they have been given. One participant summarized:

“I feed my family what we grow every day. We produce beef that I am willingly feeding to my children. I rest easy at night knowing that if I am comfortable feeding it to my children, then it is good enough to send on down the line to someone else’s children too. That’s our thought process here, to do what we can to provide the best possible product and I feel confident in our ability to do that.” (P2)

The women know that their work is “what’s for dinner” and they are committed to doing their job right so that the dinner is as safe, healthy, and nutritious as possible. “My work leaves here before it is completed. But when it reaches its point of usefulness, it’s on the plate of someone and that person is someone’s family. My work matters because of that, that is why I do my job so well” (P1). “Every action we do or do not take for the cows impacts the quality of the end product in some way or fashion, we’re aware of that so we do this as correct and ethical as we know how” (P5).

The work of these female cattle producers goes into making quality food products for people to consume, and to meet this goal the women recognize they must also remain true to who they are as farmers and as individuals.
Commitment to Themselves. While all of the participants were eager to talk about their commitment to the growing population, only a few touched on their commitment to themselves. It became apparent in phrases like “I work hard to stay true to who I am because sometimes it’s easy to lose touch of that with so many competing ideas of who you should be are floating around” (P4), “I keep sticking by what I believe and it gets me through” (P2), and “Knowing that at the end of the day I am pursuing my dreams and destiny, that’s what is keeping me going” (P3). When faced with times of doubt, the women tended to turn inward and pull from within themselves who they are and what they need. They spoke about the importance of making decisions based on what was right for them rather than following suit to prescribed societal expectations. One woman said,

“I learned to choose me a long time ago. I realized that I have to watch out for myself and that it’s ok to do so. It’s not selfish to make my choices for me, it’s much more than that. Its self-love and I have to be at a point in my life where I declare it okay for us to love ourselves. If I don’t choose me and fight for me, who will?” (P4)

She feels as if she must be her biggest advocate and supporter. “I chose this life and I believe in it. I gotta believe in me because at the end of the day, I truly only have myself, so I have to keep me going” (P4). She sees the need for investing in herself so that she can invest in others and in her farm. “I value the longevity of the farm but realize that if I run myself ragged or don’t believe in myself then things will go downhill quickly” (P4).

Belief

The most influential components of agriculture are out of the farmers’ control; these are weather and market prices. A participant quoted a famous saying: “Despite all our achievements we owe our existence to a six-inch layer of topsoil and the fact that it rains” (P1). This sets the tone for how the participants discussed what is to come.
One participant spoke about her motivation to continue her farming endeavors and she explained that she sees hope on the farm every day. “Whether it be the sun rising again, the birth of a new calf, or watching a momma cow follow pure instinct to raise her offspring, you have to believe that things will work out the way that they are supposed to” (P5). She countered her statement with the acknowledgment that things do not always go as planned or expected, and her way of dealing with those challenging situations is continually choosing hope and looking for the lesson in trying times. “We try our best to plan, but at the end of the day we can’t control all of what happens. So we look for the good, learn from the bad, keep moving, and look forward to having a tomorrow” (P5).

Another participant told the story of the latest drought she encountered. “My cattle are heavily dependent upon having grass to graze and I plan around having hay to bale every year. A drought makes these two things much harder to come by and there was only so much action I could take” (P1). She explained that she did what she could as far as finding outside sources of hay and feed, but at the end of the day the land needed one thing that she could not provide, rain. “The grass just needs water and I just can’t make it rain. I do what I can for supplements, but I just can’t make it rain” (P1). She said that every day during that summer she spent time hoping, praying, and believing in that it would rain and needs would be provided for. “Better days came,” she said. “It took some time and some faith but we made it” (P1). She said that believing in the next day is what keeps getting her there and that the feeling of hope is peaceful for her. “Having something to believe in and work towards is motivating” (P1).

Another participant explained that her belief in God is what pushes her through. “I pray every day because this is not an easy life. It is a blessed one but not easy. Praying gives me the hope that I need to move on to tomorrow, it gives me the peace that what I am worried about
today will be okay (P2). She said that without her faith, the heartbreak that the farm can bring would be too much. “Cattle die, despite all of efforts, sometimes things happen and that’s hard for me to understand, but I know that through all of the tough times, the unexplained complications, God will see us through, without him my heart could not handle this” (P2).

Having a sense of hope for the future of the farm is what keeps the women fueled and working hard. However, they realize that they must do their part in order for things to fall into place as they should. Another participant talked about knowing her every day duty to the farm. “It’s my job to do what I can with what I have, where I am. I work hard every day to make the most of it and know that if I do my part, things will continue to ebb and flow” (P1). Another participant talked about strategies and moving forward. “Of course there are challenging days, but we have not hit a problem yet that couldn’t be fixed by a little more elbow grease and a whole lot more faith” (P5). While she understands that some problems are out of her control, she realizes that working hard now will prevent or minimize potential challenges down the road. “Working hard now makes life a little easier later, it won’t fix everything, but it sure won’t hurt” (P5). She said that her belief in the farm and the work that she does is what gives her the motivation to continue in the business. “I know what we do here matters. I believe in the farm, I believe in what we do and that is why we keep moving forward” (P5). For her, it’s important to believe that tomorrow will come and that the farm will continue to prosper. “If the farm moves forward, we do too. We work today for what we will have and do tomorrow. So by working today, we’re saying we believe that tomorrow is coming and that what we need will be there” (P5).
Post Epoche

When I began this journey, I had an idea of what feminism was, where I fit into the concept, and where I was going with my life. I had a different view of my past and was not in a place where I was open to accepting things outside of the boxes that I had drawn for my own life. Thankfully, this process pushed me. I had the “Aha” moment of “so this is why I need feminism” one day while sitting on the couch in my advisor’s office. I did not know what to expect of this process and I was not entirely sure of where it would take me.

Today, I write this more than a year and a half after I began exploring this subject and this study. I have spent months reading, writing, thinking, exploring, meeting, interacting, and interviewing. I met five incredibly inspiring women, all of who I would be proud to be like one day. I saw life lessons in the stories they told me and gained insight into things that are happening in my own life.

One of the most challenging aspects of this study was regulating the impact of my presence. I found myself more consciously aware of that than I normally am or expected to be. I made sure to wear the exact same outfit to all of the first meetings with these women. I kept it to what I considered a neutral outfit of jeans, a t-shirt, and boots. I later realized that what I was doing was attempting to be accepted by them from the moment they saw me. While this is very much so in my everyday wear, I also wear Birkenstocks but had chosen to leave those at home. Why? Because I draw boxes and have expectations. I am human and with something as simple as what I chose to wear, I bought into the idea of having expectations and being accepted.

One participant told me that as soon as she saw I was driving an old farm truck and “not a Prius,” she knew I was alright. Another participant explained that she had never been questioned about the influence of her gender on her career before, but that she was glad she was being
questioned by a woman. Things about myself that I did not realize nor could I necessarily control impacted the way these women felt in their interviews.

I had an interesting time establishing a relationship of trust so the participants would open up to me, but doing so in such a way that did not reveal my own experiences. I walked a fine line of creating rapport while trying to minimize my effect on their answers. I did not want them to know that I had grown up having cattle or that I wanted to be just like some of them as I grew up. I spent a lot of time agreeing with them and encouraging their responses through positive follow up questions such as, “Oh yes, I understand, that makes sense, how did that make you feel?” Since I knew that I could not share many details about my history, I tried to make it as comfortable to talk to me as possible.

The more I learned about the women, the more I realized how I approached this research topic in such a way that I am now writing against. I drew a box that I expected these women to fit into. My findings lead me to the conclusion that this is a problem in how we approach people in general, yet it is ironically how this research started. We create categories in our head and we see people in groups rather than as individuals. I approached this research seeing female cattle producers as a category, I drew a box, and I was honestly surprised when they all did not fit into it. It seems common sense to say that we need to treat people as individuals rather than categories and I honestly doubted that my research was coming to any valid conclusions. It hit me later that the fact that this was the point I was coming to, proved that it needed to be said, which in turn indicates something still needs to be done. This is a lesson that stretches beyond just female cattle producers and can apply to any group of people in a multitude of situations.

As the study came to a close, I saw the true benefit in having designed it in three rounds. The information I was asking about got increasingly more sensitive and I needed to spend more
time with participants to get to a point of being comfortable touching those topics, from my side and theirs. While we still do not know each other well, it being the third time they saw my face rather than the first truly helped in easing into questions about their gender identity rather than just details about their farm. This shows that it is impossible to truly understand someone when meeting them for the first time, or even for the third. I approached all of this from a research standpoint and tried to learn as much as possible, but still the picture I paint of them will be incomplete. This shows that learning people is a continuous process; it does not need to end, as people change and so do circumstances.

The three life lessons I learned were to see people as individuals, be aware of your presence, and never stop learning about people. Sometimes I sense myself feeling as if I know someone well enough to suffice. My best friend of almost six years told me a story about herself the other week that completely caught me off guard. She made the comment “Well, Abby, there are lots of things you don’t know about me.” I think we reach a point where our willingness to learn anything new about a person cases because they seem to fit into the box we have drawn for them in our heads. If there is something new about them, then they may not fit that box anymore and that makes us uncomfortable.

I have realized that I cannot control how people choose to view me and what their expectations are of me. What I can control is if I let those expectations define me and if I choose to move past them or allow them to limit me. What truly matters is that I am happy in my heart with who I am, what I am doing, and where I am going. I have grown to truly value the people in my life that see me for who I am, faults and all. I desire to be understood and accepted as a whole, not just for the good side of Abby that has her stuff together that I let most people see. I think that in my own life I contribute to the expectations that people have for me by not showing
my faults enough. Human nature, sure, but I create the image of myself that I want people to see. I reflected on things such as what I choose to post on social media. On Facebook, where a generally older audience views my posts, I stay extremely positive and post about my successes. On Instagram, where too many of my high school classmates still follow me, I post the pictures that look just so or the memories of the “good times” we all had. But the catch is that on twitter, where I have the least amount of followers, I post things that are more geared toward my faults, if you will. I deal with hardships in my life by making fun of myself, I make my own life the butt of the joke. It forces me to laugh about my situation, but I also feel as if it is something that people can relate to. My point is that I hold expectations for myself and I draw those boxes every day. I let the people in my life dictate which side of Abby they get to see. I doubt that this is farfetched for anyone to relate to, but it is simply something that we do not talk about. However, I think that is time to do that.

As my study comes to a close and my project nears its end, I feel a sense of wonder as to where all of this will go. I do not expect my few words to make a huge or lasting impact, but I know that it is worth trying. This subject is something that can apply to almost anyone, as most people want to be appreciated for who they are rather than being forced into a set of expectations. My hope for this project, the future, and my mindset is that we begin to celebrate the individual rather than the category, and that we start to see people for what they are working towards and what they can accomplish, rather than in the shadows our opinions cast upon them. We each have our own lives, and it is time that we cherish that and allow one another the opportunities we all deserve.
Chapter Summary

The following themes emerged from this phenomenological study of female cattle producers: calling, doubt, sacrifice, comparison, outside connections, commitment, belief, individuals and not categories, and feminine traits not being accepted as leadership traits. The researcher found that because of society-enforced expectations, feminine traits are often not accepted as leadership traits. Humans have preconceived notions of what other people should be like and how they should act, and when individuals do not fit into those categories, it causes discomfort. The women who participated in this study experienced many trials and challenging situations in their lives because they do not fit into the description that society provides for women. The participants work in an industry and have made choices outside of the norm and this makes other people, both men and women, uncomfortable results in their doubts and judgments about the participants.
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover the lived experience of female cattle producers. The study explored the life history, reflections, and meaning of the participants’ experiences throughout their career in order to establish an understanding of what it means to be a female cattle producer. In order to accomplish the phenomenological purpose of this study, no guiding research questions were posed. This decision was made in order to allow the data to better represent the lived experience rather than initiating the research from a stance of personal bias from the beginning.

Summary of Conceptual Framework

Hasanovic states that “Gender is a social construct that outlines the roles, behaviors, activities and features that a particular society believes are appropriate for men and women” (2015). These appropriate behaviors and classifications for men include being tough, providing for the family, being dominant, and leading (2015). Women are expected to be more caring, nurturing, attentive, and more emotional (2015). The social construct of gender creates a divide between what behaviors, emotions, qualities, roles, and careers are deemed “acceptable” for men and women individually (Anker, 1997). Society created these standards, but how people have acted upon them throughout history has reinforced the beliefs.

Women did not have a right to their own public voice until August 1920 when the 19th amendment passed and granted them the right to vote. Even though western society has moved towards a system that is more supportive of all women, this does not mean that women are free of their constraints. [She]… “Is not freed from the male just because she has a ballot paper in her hands… she remains a vassal, imprisoned in her condition” (de Beauvior, 1949, p. 721).
Women in the 1900’s were expected to keep their work within the confines of the home, and those who worked jobs outside of the domestic sphere faced opposition within these (often) male dominated career fields. They were also treated differently, in the form of lesser pay, fewer opportunities to advance, and less hands-on work (U.S. Census Bureau, 1907). Presently, women are 50% of the United States population and earn 60% of undergraduate and graduate degrees; however, they are only 14.6% of executive officers and less than 5% of Fortune 500 CEOs (Warner, 2014). Eagly describes a metaphor for women’s career trajectory when she uses the term “labyrinth”, representing the complex journey a woman must take to reach a goal (2007). Feminism addresses the need for women to know they have more opportunities than what lies within the four walls of their home and are equally capable of pursuing those opportunities as their male counterparts (Eagly, 2007). Feminism lives in the hearts of all those, men and women, who believe that gender should not be a barrier to fulfillment or success.

A long history of male visibility and domination in leadership roles and positions has made it easier for people to associate leadership traits with male figures (Eagly, 2007). In a work setting, women are expected to be friendly, polite, answer questions, and be more compassionate, affectionate, and sympathetic. However, people expect highly effective women to be less likable and nice, while men are accepted to be more assertive and controlling (2007). Women are not viewed equally in positions of power and are expected to be nice simply because of their gender. However, the kinder and more emotional expectations of women are not viewed as leadership traits. Therefore, the standards society sets for women in leadership roles creates difficulty for women.

Males in female-dominated industries, like teaching and nursing, are often praised and paid more because of their gender, as male nurses make an average of $7678 more annually than
female coworkers (Muench, Sindelar, Busch, Buerhaus, 2015). Women in male dominated fields, such as agriculture, have not been given a similar welcome as they make dimes to a man’s dollar (Warner, 2014). Women make up 31% of farmers in America and tend over 300,000 acres, with a $12.9 billion economic impact (USDA, 2014). Women’s presence in production agriculture does not go without notice, but it is not always welcomed and fostered.

Trends in women’s position within the agriculture industry and ideas on why they are becoming more accepted are connected to emotions and other women (2014). Women tend to buy the food and tend to buy niche market products, which are more likely to be grown by women than conventional products. This means that women are the driving force of women being accepted as farmers (2014). While this is improvement, it is important to recognize that there is still work to be done. Women in agriculture, organic and conventional, need to be equally represented in literature, their stories need to be just as available, and their presence needs to be known so that more people like them can be drawn to the agriculture industry.

Summary of Contextual Framework

The following areas were considered to put the study in context: agriculture, women in agriculture, and beef production, all within North Carolina. The agriculture industry in North Carolina has an export value of almost $4 billion, with over 8 million acres farmed, and the average age of the principal operator being 58.9 years old (NCDA, 2016). Of the 50,000 farmers in North Carolina, almost 6,500 are women and principal operators of the farm (2016). There are over 370,000 head of beef cattle produced in North Carolina (2016). The top three producing counties are Randolph, Chatham, and Wilkes (2016). Beef production in North Carolina is usually either cow-calf or seed stock operations.
Summary of Theoretical Framework

This study was framed by social cognitive theory, which explains gender development using a triadic reciprocal causation, meaning it recognizes three modes of influence (Bandura & Bussey, 1999). Social cognitive theory is based on the human capability for symbolization and observational learning, meaning that gender-linked ideas are acquired through modes of influence, one of which is modeling (1999).

Modeling is not an act of mimicry, but rather abstract learning through observation (1999). “Once observers extract the rules and structure underlying the modeled activities, they can generate new patterns of behavior that conform to the structural properties…” (1999, p. 686). Recognizing that this occurs through observational learning is important because it highlights that each experience and interaction a child has shapes who they are, what they believe, and how they will act. This means that as children get older they “pay greater attention to and learn more about modeled conduct they regard as personally relevant” (1999, p. 687). Children process what they are exposed to and use it to craft their perception of gender and determine what is and is not appropriate.

The symbolic connections of gender and identity that are made through observational learning are then “translated into appropriate courses of action” (1999, p. 687). This means that children take what they have learned about gender and then use those connections to guide their behaviors (1999). Children learn through observing the models of behavior they are exposed to and tend to choose a path with the least amount of negative consequences (1999). This means that gender norms of behaviors, roles, and expectations are being reinforced because they look to people who are “more like them” (1999, p. 688), to determine what behavior will be successful.
Social Cognitive Theory argues that the modeling course of action influence directs children towards their own beliefs, perceptions, and courses of action based on gender identity (1999).

**Summary of Salient Literature**

Martin and Ruble (2009) and Zosuls (2009) studied gender identification and labeling. The studies found that children are able to assign gender to faces by three to four months of age and to objects (e.g., scarf or hammer), by ten months (Martin & Ruble, 2009). “The results showed that 25% of children used gender labels by 17 months and 68% by 21 months” (Zosuls, 2009, p. 356). This shows us that gender is not only recognized but also utilized in speech patterns and that gender identifying factors are normalized as a part of categorizing at an early age (2009).

Bigler (2008) examined children’s perspective of gender discrimination with the example of only males being elected to the U.S. presidency in the history of the United States. Results showed that the children associated the lack of women presidents with in group bias (2008).

Kornienko, Santos, Martin, & Granger (2016) sought to determine the influence of peers on gender identity. The results displayed that peer influence is felt on each gender’s view of the other, intergroup bias, and the pressure to conform to a gender type (2016). The results also demonstrated that friend groups self-reported levels of pressure within their group and the awareness of their friends conforming (2016).

Brinkman, Rabenstein, Rosen, & Zimmerman (2014) studied the experiences of children ages 10-14 with their gender identity. The study found that children knew that expectations were in place for them based on their gender and the students who desired to go against status quo felt the pressure of consequences and were hesitant to act outside of the norms (2014).
Halim, Ruble, Tamis-LeMonda, Zosuls, Lurye, & Greulich (2014) conducted a study to determine “whether appearance rigidity was connected to children’s gender identification and understanding of gender stability” (2014, p. 1093). The results showed that the overall centrality and evaluation of their own gender was high, which means that “gender centrality/evaluation positively predicted children’s current appearance rigidity” (2014, p. 1096). The study shows that children are aware of and are conforming to ideas correlated to their gender, therefore enforcing norms related to dress (2014).

Lagaert, Van Houtte, & Roose (2017) studied choice of interests in males and females in relation to gender identity. The results showed that higher typical gender identity correlates to a higher pressure to conform to gender stereotypes in relation to their interests outside of school (2017). This study shows that teenagers feel the need to conform their interests outside of their schoolwork toward what is expected of their gender, meaning that they may be pushing aside subject areas where their true passions lie (2017).

Sinclair & Carlsson (2013) studied the impact of gender identity threat on occupational preferences. The study found that as the students’ gender identity was threatened, they became increasingly stereotypical in their occupational choices (2013). This finding suggests a connection between threatened gender identity and stereotypical preferences in occupation (2013).

Harlander (1996) investigated what barriers women faced and what opportunities they needed to become successful in the male-dominated workplace (1996). The study found that gender diversity needs to be supported by “examination of quality life issues, training and development, organizational policies and practices, and management accountability” (1996, p. 111).
Harlander suggested the use of mentoring programs because establishing relationships of understanding, wisdom, and investment create an environment of support (1996).

Martin & Barnard (2013) conducted a study to further understand the experiences of females in male dominated workplaces. All of the participants expressed strong interest and need for a mentoring support system as a coping strategy, but especially a need for women mentors in particular (2013). This means that women felt the need to seek out support in their workplace and they desire a system that guides them to being successful in their careers (2013).

Sanfey, Hollands, & Gantt (2013) sought to find how mentoring relationships began and contributes to a successful mentoring experience. The study identified that these relationships often begin from a commonality, whether it be interests, goals, work style, strengths, or weaknesses (2013). This shows that in order for mentoring relationships to be beneficial, there must be an environment of investment and shared understanding, by both the mentee and the mentor.

Walters, Eddleston, & Simione (2010) sought to determine if gender identity mattered in mentoring relationships (2010). Students who identified more with masculine qualities and traditionally masculine career goals were more satisfied with mentors who were similarly minded, while those participants who “based their career success using socio-emotional-based criteria” were more satisfied with mentors who offered psychosocial support (2010).

Ramaswami, Dreher, Bretz, & Wiethoff (2010) conducted a study to determine the importance of mentoring relationships in relation to gender. The study found that the connection between mentoring and career progress satisfaction was greatest in women working in male-dominated fields (2010).
Martin & Barnard (2013) interviewed females about their experiences working in a male-dominated field and found that a challenge the women consistently faced was negative work-identity perceptions, meaning that the women struggled with knowing who they could and could not be at work. The women in the study showed no interest in leaving their occupations, but “demonstrated a reluctance to progress into the more intensely competitive male roles because of these negative self-perceptions” (2013, p. 7).

Yang (2016) worked to examine the impact of “career-related power, the gender of the perceiver, and the gender of the perceived on the endorsement of gender stereotypes, of sexist attitudes, and of gender discrimination” on women’s career development (2016, p. ix). The study determined that one of the factors that has created considerable barriers for women's career development is gender stereotypes, and that men with high power and women with low power are often the ones acting on these beliefs (2016).

Shaeffer (2015) conducted a study to discover the educational needs and barriers of female cattle producers. The female cattle producers had a need for an educational environment that welcomed them and their skill set without passing judgment on their gender (2015). The women felt a disconnect within the beef industry in that they “are not taken as seriously as men, [that there is a] lack of women in roles in the beef industry, and [that there is a] need for women liaisons or contacts...” (2015, p. ix).

Creed, Kjoelass, & Hood (2015) used a Likert-type 15 item career calling scale to assess 213 young adults in an introductory college class about the motivation behind their future plans (2015). The study found that having a career calling was associated with positive outcomes for the individuals, as they followed their progress in the class (2015). Individuals who have a sense of where they are going with their pursuits often report higher satisfaction with their career.
Summary of Methodology

To gain a deeper understanding of the lived experience of female cattle producers, a qualitative approach was chosen for this study. Phenomenology is a study of people's conscious experience of their everyday life and social action (Merriam, 2016). It is a way to access their world as they experience it pre-reflectively and depicts the basic structure of their experience (2016). The answers to their questions are firmly grounded in descriptions of their own personal experiences, rather than reflections. The study lent itself to a phenomenological approach, which dictates how the experience is transformed into consciousness (Vagle, 2014). Determining the lived experience of the female cattle producers was the goal of the research and a phenomenological study would allow the most pure collection of data. Using the participant’s answers without personal interpretation by the researcher creates the most accurate results in this context.

No guiding research questions were posed because the true essence of phenomenology research is allowing the study to dictate the findings, rather than setting a predetermined course to follow. The themes that were presented to tell the story of the female cattle producers in the study are as follows: Off the farm experience, doubt, sacrifice, comparison, outside connections, commitment, and belief.

The population for this study was female cattle producers. Five women were selected with collaboration from an extension research specialist, April Shaeffer, who conducts workshops for women in agriculture. The working definition of female cattle producer was “a woman who is the primary owner and operator of a cattle operation that accounts for at least 50% of her yearly income.” The participants ranged in age from 22 to 65 years old. They live in five different counties across the state of North Carolina, representing a variety of regions.
The research was conducted using three rounds of one-on-one interviews with the participants. Each session lasted no longer than one hour (Giorgi, 2009). Interviews were recorded and transcribed later. Before each interview, the researcher explored her own experiences to become aware of personal prejudices, dimensions, viewpoints, and assumptions, a process called epoche. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This was accomplished by the researcher journaling before and after each session, including a revealing of her personal experiences (before) and the experience with the cattle woman she spoke with (after).

At the conclusion of each recorded interview, all data that is collected must be transcribed and analyzed, with nothing being left out (Vagle, 2014). It is of the utmost importance to resist the urge to interpret what the interviewee says and to accept the info gathered from the participant at face value (2014). Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the phenomenological whole-part-whole method.

Qualitative research tends to be seen as less verifiable because small sample sizes involved are not “generalizable” (Dooley, 2007). Because of this challenge, qualitative researchers must take caution in proving the trustworthiness of their study (Ingerson, 2013). The researcher did this by increasing credibility through peer debriefs and member checking, transferability through thick description, and dependability through an audit trail and journaling.

Epoche is a method of identifying personal experiences and bias before conducting research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is important for the phenomenological researcher to be aware of their past experiences and knowledge of the situation with which they are working (Vagle, 2014). The researcher explored her own life because she is too a woman and comes from a cattle background.
Key Findings and Conclusions

Due to the nature of this study, key findings are presented with the conclusions for each theme.

The results of this study found that no two female cattle producers are alike, so their stories will look as different as their farms do. Despite the variations, themes emerged that reflected their experiences including: a sense of a calling, doubt, sacrifice, comparison, connections, commitment, and belief.

To understand the story of the female cattle producers, one must understand how they got to the farm. Each of them explained their own version of having a calling that lead them to the farm. For one it was a need to find herself, another felt she it was coming back to her roots, one had a desire to apply what she was learning in school, and another felt she did not belong in her current lifestyle. For each of them, they spent some amount of time away from the farm and that was what drove them to come to the farm full time. Creed, Kjoelass, & Hood’s (2015) study found that having a career calling was associated with positive outcomes for progress. Duffy & Dik (2013) argue that a career calling is one of the most important factors for the beginning of a career because of the motivation to pursue the opportunity. This study supported these results because all of the participants expressed having a career calling and being satisfied with their career choices. Thus, it is implied that experiencing a career calling can be associated with career satisfaction and being motivated to pursue the opportunity.

These female cattle producers were brave enough to follow their dreams, but it did not mean that the next step came without trials and tribulations. Several spoke directly about the doubt that they faced from friends, family, previous coworkers, and even from themselves. This
doubt was expressed in ways as simple as a shift in the eyes or a change in the tone of voice from others, but also dealing with the questioning of their own capabilities.

Shaeffer (2015) found that women felt as if they were not taken seriously in the cattle industry because of their gender and Yang (2016) found that gender stereotypes were one of the greatest barriers that women face in male-dominated fields. Stereotypes are preset expectations of individual’s capabilities, behaviors, and roles and in these studies are related to their careers (2016). The female cattle producers in this study faced doubt in their career because of their gender, in ways including individuals questioning their abilities or importance (P1, P2, P4, & P5). They spoke about the impact that facing doubt had on their outlook. This implies a relationship between doubt and gender stereotypes, meaning that women are not taken as seriously in roles in which it is not stereotypically common for them to hold, which may increase doubt in their own abilities.

As humans, we tend to categorize things and approach topics with boxes that we have drawn for them (Anker, 1997). The participants in this study faced doubt from people in their lives because the choice to take the life path of agriculture meant that they no longer fit into the stereotype society had placed upon them (Yang, 2016). While this tendency stems from societal influence, it is problematic because the women are placed at an undeserved disadvantage by those bound by their own stereotypical notions.

The participants in this study reported low-self efficacy, doubt, and negative self-perceptions in physical and mechanical aspects of their career (P1, P2, P3, & P4). This included working on equipment and being strong enough to perform certain tasks. This supports the results of the Martin & Barnard (2013) study of women in male-dominated fields often experiencing self-doubt, low-self efficacy, and negative self-perceptions. This implies that
working in environments not common to their gender brings about a set of challenges including comparisons, doubts, and hesitations about their abilities.

Because of the path that these women chose for their lives, they all had to make sacrifices along the way. Some participants spoke about moving on from a previous career (P1, P2, & P4), or the time that their farms cause them to spend away from loved ones (P2 & P4). One participant spoke about her unique perspective of having chosen her farm’s success over everything, in turn sacrificing the chance to raise a family and now the opportunity of having grandchildren (P1). Another woman chose to pursue a job with steady health insurance benefits to continue to protect her family, so she chose to give up time on the farm (P5). The lifestyle they live comes with its own set of choices to be made and these women each painted the picture of sacrifice, they chose to give up things that matter to them in order to put the farm first. This implies that there are sacrifices that women in farming make that stretch beyond balancing having children and working.

When viewing their own lives, participants often resorted to comparison, to others, and to their previous selves. This was present in their wording of roles on their farm such as “my husband does [lists jobs], but I just do [lists jobs]” (P2, P3, P5). Other participants would say things such as “well other women my age” (P1), “people with work week jobs” (P2), or “people younger than me may be able to…” (P5). These women were bringing other people into their answers to questions about themselves; rather than explaining her first, she would explain someone else. Often when explaining their journey to the farm, they would paint a picture of their previous life, whether that be in a career, childhood, or college experience and compare her current life to that. This implies that these women are evaluating their own lives in a reflective manner.
The participants compared themselves to individuals who fit the norms of each situation. Their husband is accepted in his career, women their age are not usually found on the farm, people [women] with more traditional jobs are generally more accepted, and younger people tend to be more physically capable. The women of this study are in a career that society does not align with being acceptable for their gender. Studies (Steensma, Keukels, de Vries, Cohen-Kettenis, 2013; Kornienko, Santos, Martin, & Granger, 2016; Brinkman, Rabenstein, Rosen, & Zimmerman, 2014; Halim, Ruble, Tamis-LeMonda, Zosuls, Lurye, & Greulich, 2014; Lagaert, Van Houtte, & Roose, 2017; & Sinclair & Carlsson, 2013) show that the felt-need to conform to accepted behaviors, roles, and ideas of one’s gender puts pressure on individuals. The women in this study have people in their lives that do fit into gender norms and because of the pressure to conform to these standards, comparisons are made. This implies that women in non-gender conforming roles may compare themselves to women in traditional careers because of societally reinforced gender norms.

Each of the participants spoke of people outside of their farm that made that their jobs and lives possible-- this included friends, family, extension agents, or commodity associations. The women seek out resources in order to assist them in their operations and they established relationships with these people. The women talked about these connections being the reason for their farm continuing to improve and keeping up to date on trends and best practices of the industry. Therefore, they associate some sense of their success to these resources. When asked about the presence of a mentor in their life, these women all answered no but four of the five women have turned that into an opportunity to invest themselves in a young person. They saw a need through their situation and chose to mentor someone who could benefit from their help.
Mentoring relationships are one way of establishing a more welcoming and supportive work environment, especially for women in male dominated fields (Harlander, 1996; Martin & Barnard, 2013). Factors that influence their success are having goals, a common interest, personal connection, shared values, and mutual investment (Sanfey, Hollands, & Gantt, 2013). The participants in this study saw a need for investing in someone else because they were not invested in when they embarked on their career. They reported the relationships being based on common interests, mutual investments, and personal connections. This supports the basis of mentoring relationships found by Sanfey, Hollands, & Gantt (2013) and solidifies the need for mentoring relationships as found by Harlander, (1996) & Martin, & Barnard, (2013). This implies that mentoring relationships should be founded on actual needs of the mentee rather than assumed gender identity.

Dealing with challenging situations while making their way to where they are now has created a sense of commitment in the participants. They have experienced situations when people doubted them, their careers, or their lifestyles, times of sacrifice, and having loved ones question their next step. Nevertheless, they have persisted and their commitment has only deepened for their work, their cause, and themselves. This implies that hard times have pushed them forward despite the challenges they face.

Sinclair & Carlsson (2013) argued that threats to gender identity cause individuals to increasingly conform to gender expectations. Martin & Barnard (2013) found that overcoming challenges in the workplace creates a sense of pride, accomplishment, and commitment to the work. When women are able to persist and overcome challenges, including doubts towards their career because of their gender, they tend to move forward in their careers (2013). As the individuals in this study spoke about the threats to their gender identity that they persisted
through, they displayed commitment to their lifestyle, choices, and career. They committed to the greater good of their work and continue in their careers despite the doubt and frustrations they encounter. This supports of the relationship of commitment with overcoming challenges (Martin & Barnard, 2013).

Throughout the day to day operations on their farms, these ladies are able to see rays of hope, whether it be in the rain after a long drought or a cow successfully taking a calf for the first time. The participants talked about their religious faith being a basis of the hope they find in the farm. Participants that mentioned a sense of hope and belief come after they have done everything they can to create a successful farm and with the acceptance that the rest is out of their control. They have a sense of belief that the farm will continue to prosper or that the rain will come after many dry days.

The women in this study deserve to be seen for who they are and not as what people wish they were. When faced with doubts or questions, they continuously drew within and created a stronger sense of self. They strive to accept themselves, regardless of outside expectations and standards. What if people were able to decide their path for themselves rather than having to exist within preconceived notions of others, particularly those that do not know the women well enough to assign a label to them?

Feminine qualities could be argued to include being more in touch with feelings, having sympathy, personal communication skills, or the expectations of not being physically or emotionally capable of handling what would be considered “man’s work” (Whitley & Kite, 2010). When you reflect upon the experiences of the women in this study and compare those experiences with the list of traits above, you will begin to see that the struggles that they face source from other people’s expectations of them to be more of what society deems as
“feminine”. Or if they were being more “feminine”, society deemed it inappropriate. This created comparisons and doubts that have infiltrated their years in a male-dominated industry.

The participant that explained her experiences with salespeople coming to their farm intending to speak about business matters with her father instead of assuming she could be in charge, explained that she felt as if her appearance was what caused them to doubt her role (P4). The image that one thinks of when picturing a farmer is an older, white male, in dirty worn work clothes, and probably smelling of oil, grease, or animal manure, as if they had just come in from a long work day. The salespeople that arrive at her farm arrive with a preconceived notion of what they will find on the farm. They have an image in their mind of who they are looking for and when approached by someone who does not fit that, being the participant in this study, the reaction is to ask for who they were expecting.

It is the same scenario when the women encountered questions about their career choices. When people in their lives asked if they were sure, or if it was a man’s job, or if they were sure that they would be okay getting that dirty, these people were holding the participants to a set of societal feminine traits. They boxed the women into a set of expectations, again one that the women did not choose to bring upon themselves. When the women chose to step outside of the box, people in their lives became uncomfortable. This leads to the participants’ doubts, questions, and hesitations about being women in jobs, fields, and careers that are not already deemed acceptable by those around them. Human beings do not like being uncomfortable, so instead of stretching to understand these women and meeting them where they are, the women have for years faced the challenge of their feminine traits preventing them from being fully accepted in their roles.
Recommendations

This study provided a way to gain an understanding of the lived experience of female cattle producers. Based on the findings, the researcher has suggestions for both further research and future practices.

Further Research Suggestions:

1. Since a variety of factors, including researcher presence, influence the female cattle producers’ openness to responding, it is suggested to interview the women more often over a longer span of time to establish more openness in responses.

2. Since this study was limited to North Carolina, it is suggested that in additional studies women in other states should be studied as well to increase understanding of the lived experience.

3. This study was limited by time and resources, so it is suggested that more women be involved in the study to create a broader understanding of experiences.

4. This study was limited to female cattle producers, so women in other sectors of agriculture could be studied in future research to further our understanding of the lived experience that could be more broadly applied to females in agriculture.

5. The relationships between the women and their mentees could be studied to determine the nature of their mentoring style, relationship, and motivation to further determine needs of mentoring relationships.

6. Future research should utilize the theoretical framework of this study- Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura & Bussey, 1999) to understand that gender identity is not a single sourced subject and that it varies from one individual to the next.
Suggestions for Practice:

1. Supportive networks should be encouraged. Pairings should not be based on gender, but rather individual needs. As discussed in Walters, Eddleston, & Simione (2010), individuals are more satisfied with mentors who are similarly minded to them (2010). Different people need different things and it is necessary to not assume correlation with gender, gender identity, and preferences. Some individuals are more career, goal, and logic-minded and thrive with mentors who align with these preferences, as those who use more socio-emotional-based criteria need more psychosocial support (2010). If matching mentors and mentees based on gender identity and workplace preferences is prioritized, individuals will gain more from the mentoring relationships and will invest more of themselves into the mentoring experience.

2. View people as individuals and not categories, and give them the chance to define themselves before you do it for them. Individuals may look or seem as if they would fit into certain boxes that other people or society has drawn for them, but that is a generalization. Going forward in a situation as simple as a brief conversation in passing to one as large as hiring someone for a job, making assumptions that degrade an individual’s value is an unacceptable practice. In establishing relationships with students, farmers, clients, coworkers, etc. it is recommended to minimize assumptions and judgements of individuals and how they would like to be treated.

3. Establish programs or educational opportunities centering on the recipient’s needs. The participants in this study expressed strong appreciation for programs that were developed in accordance with their specific needs, which echoes the findings of Shaeffer’s study (2015).
4. Conduct self-evaluations on one’s own interactions with gender identity, stereotypes, and norms. Understanding one’s own experiences with gender identity, stereotypes, or reinforced norms is a step toward the creation of a more welcoming educational environment. Having a grasp on the reasoning behind one’s own perspective generally leads to being more understanding of others.

5. It is important to address women in male-dominated fields with an understanding that they face an additional set of challenges. It is recommended to reorient extension agents, agriculture teachers, and other professionals in the agriculture industry to understand their approach and impact on these women. An environment of understanding, inclusivity, support, teaching, and access to opportunities and resources needs to be made equally available to individuals despite their gender.
References


Duffy, R., & Dik, B. (2013). Research on calling: What have we learned and where are we going? *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 83*.


APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction:

Thank you, [name] for taking the time to talk with me today. I really appreciate it.

In interviewing you, I would like to learn more about your experiences as a female cattle producer. There will be three rounds of interviews, each one taking no more than an hour. I would like to emphasize that I am interested in learning about your life from your perspective, so please answer as honest and open as you’re willing.

Please read over this consent form and let me know what questions I can answer for you.

During the interview, I will be writing notes. These notes will be used as a way to remember points that I can follow up with you about later in the interview, so I apologize for any delay. I will also ask questions to guide our discussion, but I am very interested in what you have to say.

Do you have any questions?

Let’s begin recording!

Interview Questions

- Interview 1- Focused Life History: This interview will be focused on putting the female cattle producer’s experience into context. The researcher wants to understand where she, her identity, and her career came from.
  - What’s your name?
  - Where do you live?
  - Where are you from?
  - Are you married?
  - Tell me about your life growing up.
  - Did you always have an interest in agriculture or cattle?
  - Did you grow up on a cattle operation?
  - What did your parents do for a living?
  - Who are the most influential people in your childhood?
  - What did they do for a living?
  - What does the term female cattle producer mean to you?
  - Is there another term you prefer?
  - What lead to you being a female cattle producer?
  - What do you think it was about your environment growing up that enabled you to continue on to this lifestyle?
  - Where did your interest in cattle come from?
  - Describe an average day in your life.
○ What about an average week?
○ Tell me about life outside of being a cattle producer.
○ Tell me about your operation.

● Interview 2- Details of Experience: This session will be geared toward gaining the details of the female’s experience in her career.
  ○ Describe your operation.
  ○ Who do you sell to?
  ○ Who do you buy from?
  ○ What type of operation is your farm?
  ○ What type of update practices are you implementing on your operation?
  ○ What is it like to be a female cattle producer?
  ○ Describe what your career means to you.
  ○ Who has been an important asset in your success?
  ○ Describe the role that any mentors may have played in your success.
  ○ What is it about these specific mentors that allowed them to help you?
  ○ What does your husband/partner do for a living?
  ○ Are you from the same place?
  ○ If not, how was it decided where you would live?
  ○ Describe barriers you face.
  ○ How has your gender been a barrier?

● Interview 3- Reflection on the meaning: This interview will be focused on how the factors of their experience influences their present lives.
  ○ How would you describe your identity?
  ○ How does your identity impact your day-to-day life?
  ○ How does your career connect with your identity?
  ○ How does your gender connect with your identity?
  ○ Which do you feel is more strongly connected with your identity, your career or your gender?
  ○ Can you describe a situation where being a female cattle producer was emotional for you?
  ○ How did you handle this or what came out of the situation?
  ○ Tell me about a time that you experienced your gender as an advantage in your career.
  ○ Tell me about a time that you experienced your gender as a disadvantage in your career.
APPENDIX B: EMAIL TO PROSPECTIVE INTERVIEWEES

Dear Potential Research Participant,

I am a graduate student in the Department of Agricultural and Human Sciences in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences working on a research project. As part of this project I am looking to gain an understanding of the lived experience of female cattle producers to do this I am asking you to participate in an interview regarding your experiences as a female cattle producer.

If you choose to participate in the study, three rounds of in person one-on-one interviews will be performed. A time and date will be agreed upon prior to the interview. Participation in this interview is entirely voluntary and will only take about an hour for each interview. Your input could provide insight into what it means to be a female in a male dominated industry. All responses to this interview will remain confidential.

Please find an attached consent form and read over it. We will review it when we meet just in the event that you have any questions or concerns. Once all questions have been answered I will ask that you sign it.

Again, I encourage you to take part in this research study, but participation is strictly voluntary. All responses will be kept confidential. Please let me know if you are willing to be interviewed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Abigail V. Whitaker
Principal Investigator
NCSU AHS Graduate Student
avwhitak@ncsu.edu
704.418.5347
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH
The Lived Experience of Female Cattle Producers
Abby Whitaker and Dr. Jacklyn Bruce

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue. You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to determine what it means to female cattle producers to be them and to live and work in a male dominated field.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in 3 rounds of interviews, each consisting of no more than 30-45 minutes. The researcher will drive to you and ask you questions.

Risks
There are no risks involved in this study.

Benefits
There is no direct benefit from participating in this study other than being a part of the making of a support system for young women who want to be in production agriculture.

Confidentiality
The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely on a password protected device and in a locked drawer. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. You will NOT be asked to write your name on any study materials so that no one can match your identity to the answers that you provide.

Compensation
For participating in this study you will receive no compensation. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will receive no compensation.
What if you have questions about this study?
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Abby Whitaker, at 704-418-5347 or avwhitak@ncsu.edu at any time.

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator at dapaxton@ncsu.edu or by phone at 1-919-515-4514.

Consent to Participate
“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature____________________________________ Date _________________
Investigator's signature__________________________________ Date _________________
Research Update:
At this point, the first round of interviews has been completed, as five cattlewomen have been interviewed once. All five interviews have been transcribed and analyzed by the phenomenological whole-part-whole method. This method is outlined as following (Vagle, 2014):

1. Holistic Reading - Entire Text
   a. This first reading is to use to get familiar with the data and to jot a few notes down. This is not in depth, but rather used to get in the right frame of mind.

2. First Line-By-Line Reading
   a. This reading is used to mark large chunks of data that go appear to contain initial meaning. It is important to be aware of what the data is actually saying and not placing personal bias and creating categories based on that.

3. Second Line-By-Line Reading
   a. This reading is used to articulate meanings based on the large chunks of data already identified. This is the beginning of identifying themes.

4. Holistic Reading
   a. This final reading is used to find “tentative manifestations”. “Themes”, “patterns of meaning”, or “meaning units”.

The following themes are emerging-

- General thoughts and takeaways
  - The ladies are extremely nice and willing to participate. Some have more to say when telling their stories and others require more questioning. They each have a different story but the similarities are interesting.
○ My personal reflections center around being constantly aware of what kind of presence I have during the process. I was particular about what kind of clothes I wore to each interview, being sure to look like what I thought they would, jeans, t-shirt, and my worn work boots. I did not want to be viewed as the person coming to ask questions that did not have any idea of what they do. One lady told me that it put her at ease that I came driving up in an old farm truck rather than “some smart Prius car”. I also had to be conscious of how much I revealed about myself before asking them the questions. I found myself walking the fine line of building rapport and not wanting to skew their answers because of what they know about me. This got easier with time and I figured out that a smile and being thankful for their participation was all the rapport building that was absolutely necessary before the questions. Being aware of my presence was the largest personal reflection that came from this first round.

○ The deeper that I got into the interviews the more I realized how rigid we had drawn the box for stipulations of who qualifies to participate. The wording of my definition of female cattle producer was not as strict as the image that I had painted in my head. Each of these ladies fits into the category of being a female cattle producer, but their stories make me want to revisit how I define that and how we as a team think of them. After some self-reflection, I found that my own drive for independence had an impact on the definition basically excluding a husband’s presence in the operation at all. However, after the interviews I found that all but one lady has a male figure heavily involved on the farm in general. We also need to take into consideration that there is almost always more than one sector to a farm. These ladies are more so involved in the cattle than her male counterpart is, so therefore I now believe that she should qualify to be in the study. Only one lady fit entirely into the box that I had drawn, but after interviewing them once, I now see they are all female cattle producers and have a story that is worth telling and will fit into my study.

● The following bold words are the categories that I found when reading the transcriptions as a whole, the sub bullets are details from each.

● Education
○ One lady has a two year degree, the other four have at least a bachelor’s, and two have a Master’s degree.
  ■ 1 associate degree
  ■ 3 bachelor’s in animal science, 1 bachelor’s in history
  ■ 1 master’s in AEE, 1 master’s in animal nutrition
○ I also found it important that when a female influence was mentioned, she was also formally educated beyond high school.
  ■ A grandmother who had a master’s degree and was a school principal
  ■ 3 mothers who had a bachelor’s degree
○ Four of the five participants had at least one parent or grandparent who was employed as an educator.
  ■ Two NCSU employees, one school principal, two public school

● Work
○ All of the participants mentioned an influential part of their childhood being someone teaching them the importance of hard work.
○ All of the participants mentioned work being
  ■ inconsistent,
  ■ dependent upon the season or weather,
  ■ or doing what needs to be done that day
    ● (‘putting out fires’)

● Background
○ Only two participants grew up on a cattle operation
  ■ Both worked with their Dad’s on the farm
○ The remaining three participants grew up in less rural areas
  ■ Apex, Charlotte, Salisbury
○ Three participants said their interest in cattle stemmed from an interest in horses
  ■ Two of which pursued animal science degrees

● Husband
○ Three participants married into the cattle operation. The female participant has a large role in the cattle portion of their operation but the start of their role sourced from their husband.
• Female Presence
  ○ An influential female presence was mentioned by four of the participants, mothers and grandmothers.
    ■ All 4 female influences were said to have worked outside of the home and had formal education.
  ○ When asked what it was about their childhood that lead them to their lifestyle now, the female influence was mentioned to be a part of this.
• Money
  ○ All participants mentioned that cattle farming is not a get rich quick scheme
• Love
  ○ All participants mentioned loving what they do on their operation.
• Hay
  ○ Four of the participants mentioned hay being a part of their operation.
• Other employment
  ○ Two of the participants are currently earning additional income themselves, one is a photographer and the other works as a secretary.
• Female Cattle producer
  ○ When asked about the term and if they preferred another
    ■ Two said Female cattle producer was fine
    ■ Two said cattlewoman
    ■ One said “just cattle producer”
• Family
  ○ All mentioned that family is an important aspect of what they do.
    ■ Allows them to be with family
    ■ Allows them to provide for family
    ■ Work with family
    ■ Teach children
Research Update:
At this point, the second round of interviews has been completed, as five cattlewomen have been interviewed twice. The first round was focused on the participant’s life history, the second one on details of her experiences, and the last will be about the meaning of her experience. All five interviews of the first and second round have been transcribed and analyzed by the phenomenological whole-part-whole method. This method is outlined as following (Vagle, 2014):

1. Holistic Reading- Entire Text
   a. This first reading is to use to get familiar with the data and to jot a few notes down. This is not in depth, but rather used to get in the right frame of mind.

2. First Line-By-Line Reading
   a. This reading is used to mark large chunks of data that appear to contain initial meaning. It is important to be aware of what the data is actually saying and not placing personal bias and creating categories based on that.

3. Second Line-By-Line Reading
   a. This reading is used to articulate meanings based on the large chunks of data already identified. This is the beginning of identifying themes.

4. Holistic Reading
   a. This final reading is used to find “tentative manifestations”, “themes”, “patterns of meaning”, or “meaning units”.

The following themes are emerging-

- General thoughts and takeaways
○ The ladies are extremely nice and still willing to participate. Each participant was much more open to sharing with me in the second round. The questions flowed smoother and answers were longer, more detailed, and more personal towards the end.

○ "My personal reflections center around being constantly aware of what kind of presence I have during the process. I was particular about what kind of clothes I wore to each interview, being sure to look like what I thought they would, jeans, t-shirt, and my worn work boots. I did not want to be viewed as the person coming to ask questions that did not have any idea of what they do. One lady told me that it put her at ease that I came driving up in an old farm truck rather than "some smart Prius car". I also had to be conscious of how much I revealed about myself before asking them the questions. I found myself walking the fine line of building rapport and not wanting to skew their answers because of what they know about me. This got easier with time and I figured out that a smile and being thankful for their participation was all the rapport building that was absolutely necessary before the questions. Being aware of my presence was the largest personal reflection that came from this first round."**

■ I left this in here because I wanted to build on it. My presence had a different kind of impact this round. I was more observant to it since I had written on it before. During these interviews, when I would show up, my presence was not new. They did not have to spend as much time figuring me out or observing what I was driving or wearing. I was still conscious to wear the same type outfit when going as to keep a consistent impression. I found myself chatting with them easily after the interview about what the next few months bring for myself and their farm. Since my presence was not new, it had already been established that we were familiar enough with each other to get through the interview comfortably. The questions started and flowed with ease. I felt the same pressure of walking the fine line of letting them know me enough so they would open up to me, but still not showing all my cards to keep from having an impact on their answers. I felt this same pressure in how I reacted to their answers. I wanted to show
enough agreement to encourage them to keep talking, but I found it
difficult to not react if I truly identified with something they would say. I
tried to play it off as something I wanted to take notes on and avoided
commenting on my experiences. This was hard for me because I want to
be their friend in the process, but realize I don’t need to influence their
answers. I also tried hard to be consistent in how I asked follow up
questions. This was an interesting challenge because each of their answers
looked different, so follow up had to look different. After each interview, I
made notes and changes to my interview questions. I would jot down what
I had asked the person before, just to keep myself in the same mindset of
how I framed the questions. I felt myself being much more relaxed in this
process than the initial interview. I was familiar with where I was going,
who I was looking for, and where I would be meeting them at. It was
comfortable. I found that relaxing but also was aware of still needing to be
on my toes and in control of my words, reactions, expressions, and
anything else that had to do with my presence. I felt like I was walking on
a line the entire time.

○ The more times I asked the question “how has your gender been a barrier?” I
realized that this looked different for every single one of them. One immediately
responded “I’m just not physically strong enough”, while one said “I have a man
make calls for me because he is taken more seriously”. Another said “I work with
my mom and four sisters and that proves to be a challenge to have so many
women”. Another participant said “I have duties at home that occupy time that my
husband is out working on the farm”, while the last participant said she has never
experienced her gender as a barrier because from her perspective, she doesn’t let
it be one. I think this one question was one of the most interesting experiences of
the interviews because it showed that women all experience a comparable
lifestyle differently. When I was thinking about all of their different answers, I
kept thinking about how I had drawn the “female cattle producer” box so rigidly.
After having experienced just five completely different stories, I realized we may
draw the box for women and their experiences too rigidly as well. There are social
ideas and pressures for everything to relate back to being a wife or mother, or if she is career focused, this must mean that the previous is not on her radar. Society as a whole, groups, employers, individuals, and even myself have an idea in their head of what it means to be a woman. Any and all circumstances aside, what it means to be a woman looks different for every female. People are individuals and need to be treated and regarded as such.

● The following bold words are the themes that I found when reading the transcriptions as a whole, the sub bullets are details from each.

● **Sacrifice**
  ○ When talking about their situations, lifestyles, relationships, etc. a common theme that arose was that these women had made sacrifices in order to get where they were. One participant quit her full time job in order to move home, raise kids, and farm. She gave up her personal steady income to come home. Another lady had a similar situation of resigning from her full time position to move home by herself and farm, with no financial support of a husband or family members. This particular participant spoke on the topic of she had chosen her career as a farmer over everything in her life and now looking back can see how she missed opportunities to be with someone, and wishes now that she would have the opportunity to be a grandmother. However, another participant sacrifices time on the farm by working as a secretary in order for her and her husband to have health insurance. The youngest participant sacrifices living close to her fiancé in order to be home and farm. The last participant mentioned how she was protected in her job with non-discrimination policies from the state. Her testimony about how these rules helped her, showed that she understood what she did not have to sacrifice at her job.

● **Comparison**
  ○ When asking questions about gender and experiences, the ladies always compared themselves to something. Sometimes it was men, but it was also other women or other cattle producers too. When they would talk about an experience or their identity, they might say something like “I don’t know about other women, but…”
or “unlike a man...”. These sayings lead me to believe that there is a state of comparison when they are thinking reflectively.

- **Off the farm experience**
  - I was not sure how to title this theme, but the point I was trying to get across was that they all had an off the farm experience that lead them to a desire to come back to or start a farm. One went off to school two hours from home, three had full time jobs after graduating from college, and the last was raised in the city. When asking how they got to the farm, the answer from all of them was that they felt the calling but it took getting away from the farm, or not being raised on one, to be able to recognize that feeling of needing to come back to it. One lady worded it as “I felt a pull in my heart that was bringing me back to my one true love, the farm.” They all felt a calling, they all love what they do, but they all mentioned having to see the farm from afar in order to appreciate and understand their desire to return or begin a farm.

- **Outside connections**
  - These women realize that they are not in this role on their own. Throughout the questions the ladies would mention extension agents, commodity groups, social media support, Young Farmers and Ranchers, or the Cattlemen's Association. The mentioning of these showed me that they see the value in outside connections and resources. It was not always a formal group, it was sometimes a cousin that lives down the road or a family friend they have come to rely on. People need other people and they showed this in their responses.

- **Commitment**
  - They all showed an overall commitment to the farm and their work in general, but also to the agriculture industry and the consumers. They all mentioned the importance of producing a quality, safe, and healthy product to be sold and consumed. They are committed to their work but also to the greater good of what it is all going towards. They understand that their work has an impact and see the value in being dedicated to the cause.

- **Faith/Hope/Effort**
When talking about their work, their lives, their roles, etc. they kept speaking about things in such a hopeful but faithful manner. Religious beliefs were involved for some, but the overall theme was that they believed in the farm and their ability to work on it. They have faith in their process and have to be hopeful in their work. Having faith that the cows will accept their calves, having faith that it will rain, believing that prices will maintain a decent level, and so on and so on. There are a lot of factors in their industry, but they have found hope and have faith that it will all work as it is supposed to. This is also backed by them doing their part of working hard to make things happen. They all realized that in order for things to fall in place, they cannot just sit around and wait, they must put in considerable effort.

**Individuals and not categories**

- I specifically asked the participants about what term they preferred to be called in reference to their career. While they had somewhat consistent answers with being fine with female cattle producer or just cattle producer, what I noticed was that they did not call themselves this in their responses. They only used any sort of term related to cattle producer when referencing other people. What I mean is that when talking about their operation, day to day operations, answers about their experiences, they never referred to themselves as a female cattle producer, it was almost always “mother, wife, helper, daughter”. This excludes the participant who is older and single, she most often referred to herself as a farmer. I found this interesting in relation to their response to if they are okay with the term female cattle producer, ⅗ said yes, while ⅖ said just cattle producer. But even with 5/5 identifying to a term with the word “producer” in it, only 1 somewhat refers to herself in that fashion.

**Doubt**

- When asking questions more geared towards gender type answers, I could sense the doubt in their responses. It could be something as not being as physically capable, needing a male to call to be taken seriously because salesmen can tell she’s a woman by her voice, or even just the tone of voice in answer to a general question. There tends to be an unsaid sense of doubt in themselves. This mostly
came up when talking about daily operations. Their answers would be worded in such a sense that was centered around their husband, dad, cousin, business partner, etc. When explaining their role, they most often explained their male counterpart’s role first, then used that to bounce off of to explain theirs. It was as if they believe that their role is dependent upon the male in the picture. Again, excluding the older, single producer. When explaining aspects of the farm it would most often be worded as “well when “enter husband’s name here” does such and such”, but rarely about her own role. However, when I would specifically ask about what they do, they would list their jobs. It’s not that they do not do anything, it’s that they are much more comfortable in talking about the male’s role first.

- All of these tied together, I find create an interesting theme. There is less acceptance of more-female like traits, such as emotions, feelings, empathy, etc., being associated under leadership traits. These women feel the pressure to be more rigid, of not having a lower voice, of being physically weaker due to no fault of her own, or being less mechanically minded. They are expected to be more like men to be accepted in a predominately male role.
APPENDIX F: PEER DEBRIEF MEMORANDUM #3

To: Peer Debrief Team  
From: Abigail V. Whitaker  
Subject: Thesis Research- Data Analysis Thus Far  
Date: 11/08/17

Research Update:

At this point, the second round of interviews has been completed, as five cattlewomen have been interviewed twice. The first round was focused on the participant’s life history, the second one on details of her experiences, and the last will be about the meaning of her experience. All five interviews of the first and second round have been transcribed and analyzed by the phenomenological whole-part-whole method. This method is outlined as following (Vagle, 2014):

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3. Second Line-By-Line Reading
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4. Holistic Reading
   a. This final reading is used to find “tentative manifestations”, “themes”, “patterns of meaning”, or “meaning units”.

The following themes are emerging-

- General thoughts and takeaways
  - The ladies are extremely nice and still willing to participate. Each participant was much more open to sharing with me in the second round. The questions flowed
smoother and answers were longer, more detailed, and more personal towards the end.

**“My personal reflections center around being constantly aware of what kind of presence I have during the process. I was particular about what kind of clothes I wore to each interview, being sure to look like what I thought they would, jeans, t-shirt, and my worn work boots. I did not want to be viewed as the person coming to ask questions that did not have any idea of what they do. One lady told me that it put her at ease that I came driving up in an old farm truck rather than “some smart Prius car”. I also had to be conscious of how much I revealed about myself before asking them the questions. I found myself walking the fine line of building rapport and not wanting to skew their answers because of what they know about me. This got easier with time and I figured out that a smile and being thankful for their participation was all the rapport building that was absolutely necessary before the questions. Being aware of my presence was the largest personal reflection that came from this first round.”**

- I left this in here because I wanted to build on it. My presence had a different kind of impact this round. I was more observant to it since I had written on it before. During these interviews, when I would show up, my presence was not new. They did not have to spend as much time figuring me out or observing what I was driving or wearing. I was still conscious to wear the same type outfit when going as to keep a consistent impression. I found myself chatting with them easily after the interview about what the next few months bring for myself and their farm. Since my presence was not new, it had already been established that we were familiar enough with each other to get through the interview comfortably. The questions started and flowed with ease. I felt the same pressure of walking the fine line of letting them know me enough so they would open up to me, but still not showing all my cards to keep from having an impact on their answers. I felt this same pressure in how I reacted to their answers. I wanted to show enough agreement to encourage them to keep talking, but I found it difficult to not react if I truly identified with something they would say. I
tried to play it off as something I wanted to take notes on and avoided commenting on my experiences. This was hard for me because I want to be their friend in the process, but realize I don’t need to influence their answers. I also tried hard to be consistent in how I asked follow up questions. This was an interesting challenge because each of their answers looked different, so follow up had to look different. After each interview, I made notes and changes to my interview questions. I would jot down what I had asked the person before, just to keep myself in the same mindset of how I framed the questions. I felt myself being much more relaxed in this process than the initial interview. I was familiar with where I was going, who I was looking for, and where I would be meeting them at. It was comfortable. I found that relaxing but also was aware of still needing to be on my toes and in control of my words, reactions, expressions, and anything else that had to do with my presence. I felt like I was walking on a line the entire time.

The more times I asked the question “how has your gender been a barrier?” I realized that this looked different for every single one of them. One immediately responded “I’m just not physically strong enough”, while one said “I have a man make calls for me because he is taken more seriously”. Another said “I work with my mom and four sisters and that proves to be a challenge to have so many women”. Another participant said “I have duties at home that occupy time that my husband is out working on the farm”, while the last participant said she has never experienced her gender as a barrier because from her perspective, she doesn’t let it be one. I think this one question was one of the most interesting experiences of the interviews because it showed that women all experience a comparable lifestyle differently. When I was thinking about all of their different answers, I kept thinking about how I had drawn the “female cattle producer” box so rigidly. After having experienced just five completely different stories, I realized we may draw the box for women and their experiences too rigidly as well. There are social ideas and pressures for everything to relate back to being a wife or mother, or if she is career focused, this must mean that the previous is not on her radar. Society
as a whole, groups, employers, individuals, and even myself have an idea in their head of what it means to be a woman. Any and all circumstances aside, what it means to be a woman looks different for every female. People are individuals and need to be treated and regarded as such.

- The following bold words are the themes that I found when reading the transcriptions as a whole, the sub bullets are details from each.

- **Sacrifice**
  - When talking about their situations, lifestyles, relationships, etc. a common theme that arose was that these women had made sacrifices in order to get where they were. One participant quit her full time job in order to move home, raise kids, and farm. She gave up her personal steady income to come home. Another lady had a similar situation of resigning from her full time position to move home by herself and farm, with no financial support of a husband or family members. This particular participant spoke on the topic of she had chosen her career as a farmer over everything in her life and now looking back can see how she missed opportunities to be with someone, and wishes now that she would have the opportunity to be a grandmother. However, another participant sacrifices time on the farm by working as a secretary in order for her and her husband to have health insurance. The youngest participant sacrifices living close to her fiancé in order to be home and farm. The last participant mentioned how she was protected in her job with non-discrimination policies from the state. Her testimony about how these rules helped her, showed that she understood what she did not have to sacrifice at her job.

- **Comparison**
  - When asking questions about gender and experiences, the ladies always compared themselves to something. Sometimes it was men, but it was also other women or other cattle producers too. When they would talk about an experience or their identity, they might say something like “I don’t know about other women, but…” or “unlike a man…” These sayings lead me to believe that there is a state of comparison when they are thinking reflectively.
● **Off the farm experience**
  ○ I was not sure how to title this theme, but the point I was trying to get across was that they all had an off the farm experience that lead them to a desire to come back to or start a farm. One went off to school two hours from home, three had full time jobs after graduating from college, and the last was raised in the city. When asking how they got to the farm, the answer from all of them was that they felt the calling but it took getting away from the farm, or not being raised on one, to be able to recognize that feeling of needing to come back to it. One lady worded it as “I felt a pull in my heart that was bringing me back to my one true love, the farm.” They all felt a calling, they all love what they do, but they all mentioned having to see the farm from afar in order to appreciate and understand their desire to return or begin a farm.

● **Outside connections**
  ○ These women realize that they are not in this role on their own. Throughout the questions the ladies would mention extension agents, commodity groups, social media support, Young Farmers and Ranchers, or the Cattlemen's Association. The mentioning of these showed me that they see the value in outside connections and resources. It was not always a formal group, it was sometimes a cousin that lives down the road or a family friend they have come to rely on. People need other people and they showed this in their responses.

● **Commitment**
  ○ They all showed an overall commitment to the farm and their work in general, but also to the agriculture industry and the consumers. They all mentioned the importance of producing a quality, safe, and healthy product to be sold and consumed. They are committed to their work but also to the greater good of what it is all going towards. They understand that their work has an impact and see the value in being dedicated to the cause.

● **Faith/Hope/Effort**
  ○ When talking about their work, their lives, their roles, etc. they kept speaking about things in such a hopeful but faithful manner. Religious beliefs were involved for some, but the overall theme was that they believed in the farm and
their ability to work on it. They have faith in their process and have to be hopeful in their work. Having faith that the cows will accept their calves, having faith that it will rain, believing that prices will maintain a decent level, and so on and so on. There are a lot of factors in their industry, but they have found hope and have faith that it will all work as it is supposed to. This is also backed by them doing their part of working hard to make things happen. They all realized that in order for things to fall in place, they cannot just sit around and wait, they must put in considerable effort.

- **Individuals and not categories**
  - I specifically asked the participants about what term they preferred to be called in reference to their career. While they had somewhat consistent answers with being fine with female cattle producer or just cattle producer, what I noticed was that they did not call themselves this in their responses. They only used any sort of term related to cattle producer when referencing other people. What I mean is that when talking about their operation, day to day operations, answers about their experiences, they never referred to themselves as a female cattle producer, it was almost always “mother, wife, helper, daughter”. This excludes the participant who is older and single, she most often referred to herself as a farmer. I found this interesting in relation to their response to if they are okay with the term female cattle producer, ⅗ said yes, while ⅖ said just cattle producer. But even with 5/5 identifying to a term with the word “producer” in it, only 1 somewhat refers to herself in that fashion.

- **Doubt**
  - When asking questions more geared towards gender type answers, I could sense the doubt in their responses. It could be something as not being as physically capable, needing a male to call to be taken seriously because salesmen can tell she’s a woman by her voice, or even just the tone of voice in answer to a general question. There tends to be an unsaid sense of doubt in themselves. This mostly came up when talking about daily operations. Their answers would be worded in such a sense that was centered around their husband, dad, cousin, business partner, etc. When explaining their role, they most often explained their male
counterpart’s role first, then used that to bounce off of to explain theirs. It was as if they believe that their role is dependent upon the male in the picture. Again, excluding the older, single producer. When explaining aspects of the farm it would most often be worded as “well when “enter husband’s name here” does such and such”, but rarely about her own role. However, when I would specifically ask about what they do, they would list their jobs. It’s not that they do not do anything, it’s that they are much more comfortable in talking about the male’s role first.

- All of these tied together, I find create an interesting theme. There is less acceptance of more-female like traits, such as emotions, feelings, empathy, etc., being associated under leadership traits. These women feel the pressure to be more rigid, of not having a lower voice, of being physically weaker due to no fault of her own, or being less mechanically minded. They are expected to be more like men to be accepted in a predominately male role.