
Chapter 1

GENDER AND RURALITY

This book was sparked off by my doctoral thesis in anthropology¹ which examined the gendered experiences of rural and farm women as well as notions of femininity² in Slavonia. During fieldwork for this thesis, my own taken-for-granted cultural assumptions were quickly unsettled as I discovered ‘new’ ways of ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ gender³ in rural spaces. From the onset, it became quite clear that being a ‘woman’ or ‘man’ / ‘girl’ or ‘boy’ is something that has different meanings at different times and places and is not a permanently, unitary phenomenon. Importantly, I hope that this book will reveal how our enactments of femininities and masculinities change as we move between groups, between places and spaces, and through time. In other words, how we inevitably shape gender to the specific local contexts in which we find ourselves – we practice it and we shape it.

This collection of works also echoes my personal and intellectual development that expanded following fieldwork for my doctoral dissertation and subsequent research. Following the re-reading of my field notes, transcriptions and texts, I have discovered themes or connec-

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- 1 This Ph.D. thesis was entitled ‘Gendered Experiences and Femininities among Women in Rural Spaces of Slavonia, Croatia’. This dissertation was defended in 2005 under the mentorship of Prof. Dr. Svetlana Slapšak at the *Institutum Studiorum Humanitatis* Faculty for Postgraduate Studies, Ljubljana, Slovenia.
 - 2 It should be noted that words such as womanhood / womanliness (femininity), which relate to cultural constructions or experiences have the same root as words that describe biological sex, such as woman / female in Croatian. Moreover, the Croatian word for woman also means wife / spouse and ‘the experience of being a woman’ is not easily translated into Croatian.
 - 3 ‘Doing gender’ was coined by West and Zimmerman (1987) who argued that gender is not something we are, but something we do while ‘undoing gender’ is a more recent term that refers to social interactions that reduce gender difference (Deutsch 2007: 122). Aptly, Deutsch (2007) argues that although the definition of ‘doing gender’ encompasses both conformity and resistance, the commonsense use of the language orients us towards conformity while ‘undoing gender’ evokes resistance.

tions that I originally overlooked as my concerns and interests have changed over time. Aptly Kohn (2010: 197) points out that events are not just variously interpreted, but they are multiply remembered against very different personal and deeply emotional associations, which change through time. Overall, I found that undertaking qualitative research can be a life-changing experience that provides opportunities for researchers to assess certain aspects of their lives and to examine how inevitably this has an impact on their research.

In short, this study was a response to a need to conduct anthropological research, which focuses on the experiences of different rural women⁴ in Croatia. Lived experiences, particularly among women, have remained largely untheorised and marginalised from rural research conducted in Croatia. However, this is not simply a study of women because gender is socially organised, culturally constructed and negotiated in everyday interaction so it involves both men and women (Connell 1995; Kessler & McKenna 1978). One of the key concepts underlying this book is that our identities are constructed and performed in particular ways which help us understand who we are and how we fit in the world. This means that these identities are constantly changing according to where we are, what we are doing and whom we are with. Hence, this study does not examine the objective category of 'women' but engages with the subjective ideas and practices making up different femininities. Its purpose is to reveal the diverse and multifaceted gendered experiences of rural and farm women in rural areas. In other words, an underlying assumption of this work is that the experience of being a woman (or man) is often complex, ambiguous, and fluid rather than homogeneous. It mainly focuses on women's domestic identities in the context of 'changing' rural spaces and assesses how these identities are informed by domestic constructions of rural femininities and the ways socio-cultural expectations shape women's self perceptions. Importantly, this study rejects totalising claims about male dominance and female subordination; instead it seeks to understand and challenge how at particular times and in specific spaces inequalities are produced and contested between women and men and further between groups of women. Moreover, this study does not approach rural society as a given; a naturally existing phenomenon

4 The term 'rural women' here generally refers to all the women who live in rural areas but also includes a separate group of women that are farm women i.e., women that are part of and contribute to farm households.

that can be identified and mapped. In line with postmodern and post-structural scholarship, it approaches rural societies as socio-cultural constructions – spaces, landscapes and texts that can be read for meaning and values. The ways in which these constructions impact on gendered identities is of relevance in this study.

To uncover the lived and sometimes ‘hidden’ experiences of rural women, the grounded and comparative empiricism of anthropology provides opportunities to move beyond statistics and gender stereotypes to explore specific aspects of rural gendered life. In an attempt to understand women’s ‘realities’, perceptions, as well as their engagement in these worlds, I began exploration from their personal perspectives and from there moved outwards to learn about their homes, families, and wider social networks. In this way, this book undertakes to contextualise women’s circumstances and to learn about their lives, perspectives and actions. It also illuminates the larger structures and processes that mediate their experiences in rural areas. Since rural space shapes the way people live and think about gender, this collection is a move to understand the ways in which women were enmeshed in their social worlds and how they themselves perceived and interpreted these enmeshments. It aims to explore how powerfully traditionally feminine identities (acceptable rural femininities) are embedded and reinforced in the performance of gender but how they are also negotiated and contested by some women. Rather than seeing rural women as passive victims of patriarchal structures, this study attempts to bring out their agency and the creative ways they take control of their lives in often difficult circumstances. In sum, research focus is on how women experience rural life, how rural communities construct cultural meanings and control space and how women negotiate unequal and sometimes contest social relations and structures. Although gender is taken as the key focus, this study also investigates how women’s experiences are influenced by the interweaving influences of age, marital/maternal status, education, employment, religion and personal/familial background. The importance of ‘domestic’ to the gender identities of rural women within the contexts of the socially constructed and contested categories of rurality and womanhood is also assessed. Analogously, in this analysis, the ‘domestic sphere’ is treated as a legitimate realm of research that is often neglected and marginalised in mainstream analysis.

Outline of the book

In the first part of this book, concepts such as rurality, gender, femininities and masculinities will be discussed, summarising the different ways in which these concepts have been conceptualised and used by international scholars. Following this, a brief overview of rural gender studies will be given. Noticeably, this research has become more theoretically informed and moved on from 'adding women' and focus on women's subordination to a more substantive critique of the dominant paradigms in rural research.

In the second chapter of this book attention is on methodology. First, the methodological approaches used in rural studies are outlined in which the contextual influences within/beyond society, philosophical foci applied to rural social scholarship and practices of rural social research are presented. The methodological approaches that were chosen in this study to document women's everyday lives, social practices, values and meanings in rural spaces will then be outlined. The reasons as well as drawbacks of these choices are provided. This section is followed by ethical considerations that need to be taken into account in qualitative research. The two main qualitative research methods used in this study – *participant observation* and *qualitative research interviews* are also discussed in this chapter. The final section of this chapter is devoted to the field research of this study including a detailed description of the sample of persons that participated.

The following chapter entitled 'Foregrounding the self in fieldwork' shows how personal experiences in the field are an important and accessible source of ethnographic data and for this reason the researcher should not be rendered invisible in the ethnography but rather foregrounded as an embodied, situated and subjective self. This chapter covers my positionality and research orientations as well as access, rapport, research dilemmas and challenges in the field. It shows that our personal experiences and memories as well as our temperaments and personalities inevitably influence our choice of research sites, themes, design and theoretical approaches. Further, all that constitutes the self has a further impact on research relations and interactions (access) in the field where new knowledge is created, shaped and negotiated.

Chapter 4 is on 'Gendered values and attitudes' and explores to what extent we can talk about a 'return to tradition' following transition in villages that were included

in this study. It asks whether there was ever really a departure from traditional gendered values and attitudes during socialism and whether these gendered values and attitudes have subsequently been given new meaning in the post-transition/war period. Principally based on rural women's accounts of their experiences, it presents the prevailing gendered values and attitudes by examining cultural patterns, expectations, roles, ideals and practices in these communities and questions whether they stem from the past.

The aim of Chapter 5 entitled 'Meanings experiences and effects of domestic labour' is to investigate to what extent women's roles in unpaid domestic labour has an effect on their well-being and whether this presents a barrier to their empowerment or their ability 'to do and be' what they value. This chapter draws on rural women's (and men's) accounts of their meanings and experiences in unpaid domestic labour. Pertaining to this labour, it also reviews their contribution as well as their (lack of) access to well-being in the family and wider community. Findings show that women's engagement in domestic labour has both positive and negative effects on women's well-being, as well as their families and the wider community.

Chapter 6 entitled 'Women's contribution to rural development' evaluates rural/farm women's position and the extent of their vulnerability and social exclusion in an area of Slavonia that was a part of this study. Through the use of interview and fieldwork data an attempt is made to identify and elaborate their roles, participation in decision-making and the obstacles/constraints that rural women face in these rural communities to evaluate the extent of their contribution to rural development. Further, another aim is to explore if rural women represent an untapped resource in rural spaces that would contribute to rural development and raise the quality of life in these areas.

Finally, in Chapter 7, the main points and findings that were discussed in the chapters will be recapitulated and recommendations based on this material will be proposed in the first part of this chapter. In the second part, recommendations that broadly relate to education, mobility and leisure will be proposed. Drawing from ethnographic material as well as quantitative data in this section, I show how these three potential areas for development and change intersect with gender and how rural and farm women are in a particularly disadvantageous position. Recommendations show how rural and farm women would benefit intellectually, economically, physically and socially from participation in these areas that are often taken for granted.

Gender

Gender has been recognised as a contentious concept in anthropology; increasingly being debated and deployed in sophisticated and highly theoretical ways (see Di Leonardo 1991; Moore 1994). The study of gender has been influenced by many intellectual movements in anthropology, particularly the move from structural/functional approaches from studying culture strictly as bounded entities that were inherently stable and marked by structural harmony and the growing discomfort of some anthropologists with positivistic narratives more generally (Lewin 2006: 20). Specifically, anthropologists are interested in analysing how gender shapes cultural systems and how gender varies across time as well as space and in cross cultural contexts. In any society, the concept of gender affects and tells people what it means to be masculine and feminine, how the physical body is interpreted and used, how work and resources should be distributed, and how marriage, kinship and reproduction are understood. Since gender is so pervasive, it is easily assumed that it is bred into our genes. However, as a result of the work done by feminists in anthropology and other disciplines, 'the contemporary social sciences now take it as axiomatic that gender is a cultural construct, that, far from being natural objects, women and men are fundamentally cultural constructions' (Moore 1994: 71).

Across social science disciplines, gender has been elaborated as something simple and unambiguous – one variable added to others – to being looked upon as something fairly complex, dynamic and ambiguous (Harding 1987). Within these latter frameworks, conceptions such as men and women, male and female are seen increasingly as ambiguous and floating (Flax 1990; Fraser & Nicholson 1988; Weedon 1987).⁵ Presently, gender is seen as a process rather than a 'role' reflecting a more active or fluid understanding of gender – a shift from 'having' a gender to 'doing' a gender.⁶ Most people find it hard to believe that gender is constantly created and re-created out of hu-

5 Most human constitute their gender identities as one of two, opposite choices: male or female. Cases of three genders have been acknowledged in other societies (i.e., men, women and *berdaches* or *hijras* or *xaniths*) (see Williams, W. L. 1992; Nanda 1990; Wikan 1982 respectively).

6 In support of a further shift, Deutsch (2007) argues that we need to move from talk about doing gender to illuminating how we can undo gender. "Doing gender" she asserts brings to mind the accomplishment of gender difference rather than the dismantling of difference (see footnote 3 for further explanation).

man interaction and out of social life. Yet gender like culture is a human production that depends on everyone constantly 'doing gender' (West & Zimmerman 1987). Butler (1990: 33) argues that 'gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts with a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being'. She also claimed that it should be seen as a fluid, flexible variable; the way we behave at different times and in different situations rather than who we are. She explains one's gender has to do with how one acts at a given moment, but that these actions are not who one is – one's gender is a performance that can shift and change; it is not fixed and connected to an 'essence'. Moreover, Butler says that becoming a woman (or man) is not something you accomplish once and for all at an early stage of life. Gender has to be constantly reaffirmed and publicly displayed by repeatedly performing particular acts in accordance with the cultural norms (themselves historically and socially constructed and consequently variable) which define 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. Similarly, Kaplan (1998: 16) argues that 'doing' or 'performing' gender is never finished and also implies that in principle we may 'do' or 'perform' gender differently in different contexts – even at the level of the individual woman or man, there is not necessarily any core of gendered behaviour that cannot vary or change. Gender, as Thorne (1992) writes, 'is not something that one "is" or "has" but we continually create and recreate gender relations through social interaction and collective practices'. Daily practices are neither random nor specific to particular locations. They are repeated and re-created in similar settings throughout a society. Similar needs recur, similar discourses are available, and so similar solutions to problems are adopted.

In this book, gender is viewed as a social process that is relational, dynamic as well as socio-culturally, socio-politically and historically specific (Šikić-Mićanović 1997; Witz, Halford & Savage 1996). Analogously, gender divisions and identities (meanings about what it is to be a man or a woman) are understood as socially, culturally, spatially, and temporally constituted and subject to constant contestation and revision. This conceptualisation of gender is far removed from that which characterises it as stable, fixed and a binary entity – associated with the biological bodies of 'men' and 'women.' It has also been noted that this marks a shift in the discussion of gender from treating it as a noun with 'thing like' or more or less fixed connotations towards treating it as an adjective or as a verb e.g.,

when we use the words gendered or gendering (Kvande 2002). Obviously, there are some natural bases of gender distinctions, and of sexual and reproductive behaviour, but these are relatively minimal in terms in which gender, sexuality, and reproduction are culturally defined, shaped, and woven into the social fabric in any given society at any given time (Ortner & Whitehead 1981). Importantly, differences exist within societies, hence it is inaccurate to assume a 'single society' because it is more likely that members of the same gender category, located differentially in the social structure, both subjectively and literally occupy different social worlds and realities. Thus, gender is never constructed in a vacuum, but always within a field of other constructions of inequality that both feed it and naturalise it (Dirks, Eley, & Ortner 1994: 35). Invariably, gender involves men as well as women both separately and in relation to each other. Such relationships are shaped by both differences and inequalities. Academic investigations and theories of rural society have increasingly acknowledged gender differences in all aspects of rural life and gender has been recognised as an analytical axis around which social groups and rural life is differentiated e.g., organisation of agricultural production, social relations and spatial politics occurring in rural communities (Panelli 2006: 74). For this reason, the study of gender has become increasingly recognised as crucial to the understanding of rural social and economic relations (Whatmore, Marsden & Lowe 1994; Little & Morris 2005).

Femininities and Masculinities

In similar ways, femininities and masculinities (the experience and expressions of gender) are socially constructed and history also plays a part in their constructions. Any discussion of these concepts need to include the idea of plural or multiple variations as well as take into the consideration the interaction between representation and practices of masculinities and femininities. Femininity and masculinity can be defined as the values, experiences, and meanings that are culturally interpreted as either masculine or feminine and typically feel 'natural' for or are ascribed to men or women respectively in a particular socio-cultural context. Goffman (1979: 7) asserts that femininity and masculinity are in a sense the prototypes of essential expression – something that can be conveyed fleetingly in any social situation and yet something that strikes us as the most basic characterisation of the individual. To understand these concepts, we need to

understand the changing social contexts in which particular representations and practices of femininity and masculinity emerge. In accounts of masculinity and femininity, Bourdieu's term (2001) *doxa*⁷ is also useful. He defined this as the end result of many processes and practices that eventually create an established and accepted set of behaviours that signify masculinity or femininity. *Doxa* is what people in a particular social situation come to accept as the normal, natural and accepted version of masculinity or femininity in their lives. Every version of masculine and feminine *doxa* has not only been constructed through quite specific historical, social processes but will be continually transformed and contested as time goes by. Undisputedly, femininity and masculinity are as various and as variable as society itself. Moreover, femininity exists only in relation to masculinity and vice versa (Brandth 1994: 130). Masculinities do not first exist, and then come into contact with femininities; they are produced together, in the process that constitutes a gender order (Connell 1997). All societies have a gender order constructed by several ideas about what is seen as feminine and masculine. Although Connell (1987) recognises the possibility of many different masculinities and femininities existing as multiple gender identities, he argues that two constructions of gender identities are most common. These are 'hegemonic masculinity', in which men are defined by their physical power and economic strength, and 'emphasised femininity', where women are constructed as nurturing and compliant. Such identities are understood as having common roots in heterosexuality and as relational, involving each other in their own construction. The identity of hegemonic masculinity is the dominant pole of the dualism, with emphasised femininity and other male and female identities located in a subordinate position. Despite its recognition in academic circles, some researchers have contended that Connell's conceptualisation of an emphasised femininity is limited in its ability to accommodate the complexity of 'fragmented and competing versions of femininity' that have evolved over the last twenty years (Morris & Evans 2001: 388).

Clearly, femininities are not simple, homogeneous patterns/statuses; there are multiple definitions, patterns, and expressions of femininity. These are amenable to change, decomposition, reconstruction and contestation.

7 Bourdieu (1977) used the term *doxa* to denote what is taken for granted in any particular society. The *doxa*, in his view, is the experience by which 'the natural and social world appears as self-evident'.

Moreover, there are definite relations between different femininities (that lead to inclusion or exclusion or being honoured or dishonoured). As patterns of gender practices, they are sustained and enacted not only by individuals, but also by groups and institutions and they come into existence as people act. Undisputedly, there is continual debate on what appropriate femininity/masculinity is and what is not. Thus, femininity or masculinity is not something that is just there; it is something that is done, something we practice, something we do and something that we do over and over again trying to get it right as we best understand that rightness.

Specifically, there have been various constructions of what is to be an 'ideal woman'. Across disciplines, cultures, spheres and societies the 'ideal woman' has become associated with modes of femininity and 'proper' behaviour. Political theories, ideologies, legal institutions and religious faiths have defined rights and duties; virtues and vices and condemned those who do not conform. This book seeks to interrogate constructions of ideal femininity in rural spaces and how such models have been reiterated and reinvented while other constructions have been challenged and rejected. Obviously, the affirmation of an identity must necessarily involve the disavowal of alternative identities. Thus, any attempt at celebrating an ideal notion of woman or femininity will reproduce relations of degradation and subordination. Ideals are not constant but fluctuating as they are historically and discursively constructed, always in relation to other categories. Thus, there is no single unified way of doing femininity, of being a woman since there are usually many different versions of femininity available to us. A dominant mode of femininity that was associated with the 'ideal woman' could be best summarised as *respectable* femininity and was prevalent in this study. This mode dictates that a good or 'true' woman must essentially be firmly rooted in and largely confined to the domain of the home, obsessed with pleasing and working for others. She is a virtuous wife and devoted mother, as well as a dutiful sister and daughter. Motherhood is expected of a married woman and is seen as an affirmation of her identity as well as her highest achievement. She is respectable, obedient, humble, pious, patient, lives in the shadow of others as well as diligent and has little leisure time. A woman who strays too far from conventional definitions of 'proper' femininity risks being stripped of her gender-based protections and cast into the role of the fallen woman. Improper behaviour for a 'respectable' woman includes: disorderly living, laziness, lack

of concern for other members of the family, unrestricted mobility, provocative dressing, promiscuity, illegitimate births, alcoholism, and drug addiction, etc. The bounds of proper femininity are vigilantly policed by family, friends, church, community, gossip, local institutions, and the state. In contrast, another version of femininity such as *sexually alluring* femininity is degraded and subordinated. This mode requires women to spend staggering amounts of time and money decorating and reshaping their bodies such that women become caught in the craving to 'attract and captivate' as well as obsessed with pleasing and dressing up for others. Likewise, *self-reliant* femininity that espouses women's autonomy, dominance, strength/resistance, personal development, own decision-making, lifestyle changes, perseverance is downplayed. Nevertheless, multiple femininities could be found in narratives from the same woman. In any case, femininity is an achievement (with varying degrees of success) as well as an investment in not one but many intermeshing and often contradictory 'domains' or 'fields'. It is also used as a sign of collective belonging (e.g., to a peer group, community group, etc.). Clearly, being, becoming, practicing, and doing femininity involves very different things for different women. This is done in many different ways, through all aspects of behaviour and deportment, through the way we dress, the way we move and the way we talk (see Coates 1998: 302). Moreover, the ability to engage in a type of femininity is a matter of social positioning, access to texts and different forms of capital. In any case, learning to be female and 'performing' femininity is hard and serious work; it requires a constant self-surveillance of the body to meet a ubiquitous female ideal (Bloustein 1999: 84).

Rurality

The early 1990s marked a significant change in the way academics understood the rural. Rather than identifying a single object called 'the rural', researchers have written about the variety of ways the concept 'rural' is used by academics and wider society (see Philo 1992, 1993; Murdock & Pratt 1993, 1994; Halfacree 1995; Pratt 1996). A substantial body of literature began to rethink and redefine rurality as dynamic, unstable social constructions rather than as fixed geographical entities (Halfacree 1993). In any case, the definition of 'rural'⁸ is far from simple and

8 In Croatia, there is no official definition of rural areas and usually it is accepted that rural areas are 'all areas outside urban areas' (Country report 2006: 55).

researchers have attempted to define it in different ways (see Sachs 2006: 13-16 for a comprehensive review). For example, in a very general way, the rural has been identified as those particular spaces that are not metropolitan; as the opposite to urban. Other descriptions propose the more rural the more *Gemeinschaft* (community-like) life is likely to be; the more urban, the more *Gesellschaft* (society-like) life is likely to be. However, there are plenty of urban villages in city neighbourhoods that have all the same qualities of so-called rural life. Others have attempted to characterise the rural by distinction through demographic and geographical means, e.g. where there are rural-low density areas of population or by virtue of the existence of particular industries, such as agriculture. However, there is no 'one-fits-all' definition of rurality as these are socio-cultural constructions i.e., spaces that can be read for meaning and values. For this reason, Hughes (1997a: 170) emphasises that the rural must be conceptualised as more than a physical space but as a symbolic construction which incorporates specific ideas of the worth of community, kinship networks and natural lifestyles. This marks a shift from trying to define one 'real' rural to trying to understand multiple rurals since definitions depend on socio-cultural historical contexts. Moreover, the rural stands both as a significant imaginative space connected with all kinds of cultural meanings ranging from the idyllic to the oppressive (Cloke 2006: 18). Some common values and notions associated with the social meanings of rurality or the 'rural idyll' have been proposed (see Bryant & Pini 2011). For instance, these include: a focus on the centrality of nature, community cohesion, safety and physical gains associated with outdoor lifestyles, harmony, permanence, security, family values, and emblematic nationhood (Rye 2006; Short 2006). These qualities and values associated with the rural suggest that the countryside is a place 'untouched' by the harsh influences of urban life (Halfacree 1993). In sharp contrast, the rural has also been constructed as premodern, as a backwater or as dull and traditional (Cruikshank 2009; Jentsch & Shucksmith 2004). Importantly, social meanings must be understood as shifting and context specific since material, social and cultural conditions will mediate how the rural is understood. Finally, the rural idyll is critical to defining who is included and who is excluded from rural spaces. For example, those who fit within hegemonic (re)constructions of rurality are the authentic protagonists in rural life, and those who do not are marginal, for they are seen as lacking and illegitimate.

Over the last forty years, many important issues have been studied and many new important fields of studies have been discovered in rural gender studies (e.g., design of new theoretical concepts and frameworks, new research methods and tools). Initial research on farm women tended to present subordinate women and dominant men as static and homogeneous categories and sought structural and causal explanations (Brandth 2002; Berg 2004). More recently, choice, agency, resistance, and the altering of gender identities over time have become more prominent in the research agenda (Bock 2006: 21). For instance, women on farms are not simply accepting victims of patriarchal relations but rather are active agents constructing and shaping their roles within farming. Notably, in more contemporary research, gender and rurality are treated not as fixed unchanging categories but as unstable and interactive reference points (Whatmore et al., 1994: 4) constructed through social and cultural practices which have given them meaning in everyday life. Likewise, poststructuralist theories emphasise that meanings or definitions are indeterminate: 'we cannot simply "read" one unchanging meaning into behaviour or issues. Rather our experiences are made up of a constant series of intersections between power, gender, individuality, society, and ideology and material practices' (Sachs 2006: 12).

Specifically, early studies of gender and rurality tended to be restricted to the examination of gender roles within agriculture, particularly family farms (Gasson 1980; Sachs 1983; Symes & Marsden 1983). Since then a diverse range of rural topics, relations and processes have been covered and have been grouped as follows: 1) *gender and community*; 2) *gender and work*; 3) *gender and rural environment*; and 4) *gender and sexuality* (see Little & Panelli 2003 for a comprehensive review).

1) *Gender and community*. This research examined the uneven roles of women and men in rural communities as well as the patriarchal relations underpinning these roles. It comprises critical analyses of how unequal patriarchal gender relations and divisions of labour affected not only farms but whole rural communities. Researchers noted that men experienced substantial authority and control in communities, while women were expected to engage in activities and behaviours that would nurture, service and maintain traditional values, practices and relations within the community (Stebbing (1984; Dempsey, 1990, 1992;

Poiner, 1990). This research has also dealt with the ways in which social constructions and practices of rural communities are highly gendered (Davidoff, L'Esperance & Newby 1976; Little & Austin 1996). For example, Little and Austin (1996: 110) argue that notions of a rural idyll support gender inequalities and promote limitations for women: the rural idyll operate[s] in support of traditional gender relations, prioritizing women's mothering role and fostering their centrality within the rural community.

Moreover, the traditional culture of 'domestic rural womanhood' is often expected and perpetuated (Hughes 1997a b). The expectation that women are the 'backbone of the village community' and that this involves both material and cultural constructions of community and gender in that 'women's lives ... are influenced by, and negotiated through, not only material space but also their understandings of the symbolic meanings underlying rural places' (Hughes 1997a: 182–183). Evidently, within research on gender and community there was a move from a descriptive recording of gender differences to more theoretically informed analysis in studies on gender and community.

2) *Gender and work*. This research initially focused attention on the reproductive and productive roles of women on farms and the patriarchal relationships within which their on-farm contributions (that had been previously neglected and undervalued) are situated (Whatmore 1991). Feminist analyses sought to demonstrate the vital nature of women's domestic work to the survival of the family farm business and to identify how that work extended to include agricultural labour on both an emergency and routine basis (Little & Panelli 2003: 283). Subsequently, studies moved from a focus on recording the work done by farm women to explaining the patriarchal gender relations behind the division of labour on the farm and within the farm household (Whatmore 1991; Shortall 1992). It was argued that rurality itself influenced women's involvement in employment, not only through the practical barriers (of, for example, access to and a lack of childcare and other services) but also through the social and cultural expectations surrounding women's roles. Research showed how the traditional ideas of femininity, particularly women's roles as mothers, that were central to the dominant cultural constructions of rurality, served to restrict women's opportunities within the rural labour market. Rural women, it was claimed, were seen first as mothers, and their paid work, and critically, their career aspirations, were expected

to take a secondary role (Hughes, 1997a b; Little, 1997; 2002). Similarly, analyses of gender and rural work have shifted from examining the structures and relations that have underpinned rural gender inequality to exploring the cultures, values and meanings underpinning gender identities.

3) *Gender and rural environment*. Research in which the constitution of gendered identities has been explored in particular types of rural environment. Researchers have identified how concepts of nature, landscape and space are implicated in the uneven and dynamic expression of gender. In part, this has been informed by critiques of nature (Whatmore, 1999) and where nature/culture distinctions are argued to maintain 'gender power relations and the subordination of women' (Little, 2002: 49).

4) *Gender and sexuality*. Research into the diversity of gay experiences in rural settings (Bell 2000) has recently been complemented by work concerned with the construction and performance of more mainstream, heterosexual identities in the context of agricultural and rural communities more generally (Little 2003).