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UNDOING GENDER: AN ANALYSIS OF HOW WOMEN COMMUNICATE  
WITHIN THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

BY

SHALA R. LARSON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science

Major in Communication Studies and Journalism

Specialization in Communication Studies

South Dakota State University

2019

UNDOING GENDER:  
AN ANALYSIS OF HOW WOMEN COMMUNICATE  
WITHIN THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

This thesis is approved as a credible and independent investigation by a candidate for the Master of Science in Communication Studies and Journalism degree and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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This thesis is dedicated to the women who wake up at dawn and are a vital part to the agricultural backbone of this country, all first-generation college students that have grit in their step and a sparkle in their eye for the future, and for the man who told me that because of my economic background, I would undoubtedly drop out of college by the time I was 19. Cheers.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Where to begin? As a first-generation college student, earning a college education alone was a huge task, let alone continuing on to graduate school. The experience of graduate school has stretched my academic boundaries beyond imaginable. Because of the School of Communication Studies and Journalism, I am a critical thinker, an eloquent written and verbal communicator, a better community member, and am now able to clearly see what I am made of. This process has taught me grit, and because of that, I know that I can go forth and conquer whatever is in front of me.

I want to first and foremost, thank the members of the Communication Studies faculty. I never felt unwelcome to ask a question or vent my issues whether academically related or otherwise. Every person in that hallway will ask you how you are and truly mean it. Thank you to my graduate student colleagues and friends for helping keep my head above water at times in the academic setting, but also making sure that we had fun and de-stressed occasionally to keep us sane. Thank you to my fluffy bundle of joy, Briggs. Your butt wiggles, fluffy tail, and snuggles got me through some of the hardest times. Thank you to my family for understanding that I couldn't always be around the dinner table for events, and often had to leave home early on long weekends because I had to put my nose to the grindstone and get back to Brookings. But most of all, thank you to God for giving me the strength and grit I needed for this process.

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ABSTRACT

UNDOING GENDER:  
AN ANALYSIS OF HOW WOMEN COMMUNICATE  
WITHIN THE AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY

SHALA LARSON

2019

In recent history, women have entered more business-like positions in the agricultural industry. This thesis seeks to understand how women in agriculture describe their workplace communication and whether they feel they are part of a muted group. Twelve women were interviewed regarding their experiences as women in agriculture and were asked whether they feel valued in their positions and how they communicate with their male co-workers. Specifically, interviewees were asked if they ever felt the need to alter their communication to complement, emulate, or otherwise adjust to masculine communication styles. The majority of women interviewed reported having to strategically choose when to use masculine versus feminine communication styles in order to achieve effective outcomes when communicating with men in the agricultural workplace. Implications based on these findings are discussed, as well as directions for future research.

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“American Gothic,” painted by Grant Wood in 1930, is a perfect representation of how social dynamics in American agriculture have appeared, historically, in the United States. In the painting, an elderly couple stands in front of their house which appears to be their farmyard. The man holds a pitchfork and is the more prominent figure. However, next to him stands his wife in an apron. Rather than facing forward like him, she has her body angled slightly towards him, but her face gazes over his shoulder. In observing the picture, the man is the clear head of the household, not only by singularly holding farming equipment but also by standing slightly in front of his wife where his stance shows a bit of dominance and her slight subordination. This painting creates a visualization that embodies the reason I have chosen to dedicate my master’s thesis to the topic of how women communicate within agriculture.

Although women were, historically, expected to be quiet farm wives as illustrated in “American Gothic,” as women have entered the agricultural workforce, new communication challenges have emerged. Born in rural South Dakota, growing up with family farm experience, traveling the state of South Dakota as a State FFA Officer advocating for agriculture, and majoring in agricultural leadership while attending South Dakota State during my undergraduate experience has allowed me to witness not only the growing number of women within the agricultural industry but also some of those potential communication challenges for women. During my early teen years, I noticed that women changed the tone of their voices when speaking to men about agricultural topics. I have clear memories of this: my aunt changing her tone when discussing harvest

with a man at the gas station; my cousin changing her communication style when speaking with her dad about selling heifers and potential vaccines they may need; and, my female supervisor in an agricultural cooperative's unnecessarily stern voice in the workplace amongst her male employees. As such, this thesis explores the communication challenges of women currently in agriculture.

Between 1970 and 1979, women in farming occupations made up less than two percent of the employed population in the United States (Rosenfeld, 1985). However, women's employment in agriculture is on the rise. According to the United States Department of Agriculture (2012), in South Dakota alone, 12,132 women farmers comprise 6% of the farmers in the state and make a \$197.1 million-dollar in revenue. Furthermore, the number of degrees conferred in agriculture and natural resources for both men and women increased by 15 percent between 2004–05 and 2009–10 and then by 38 percent between 2009–10 and 2014–15 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Because so many women have graduated with agricultural degrees in recent years, a rising number of women have entered the agrarian workforce in sales, science, or education. Furthermore, due to the influx of women within the workplace of an ordinarily male-dominated industry, the central questions remain: has workplace communication adaptation taken place and, if so, to what extent and in what forms has it occurred?

Despite the significant increase of women within the agricultural workplace (USDA, 2012), there appears to be a lack of scholarship concerning gender's impacts on communication in agriculture, leaving a gap in the research regarding women's communication in agriculture. When researching this topic, I searched under

communication databases through my local university, Google Scholar, and communication experts' office libraries; however, topic-specific information with search terms such as "female agriculturist communication," "women in agriculture communication," and "agrarian communication styles" revealed no evidence of current scholarship. Due to the dearth of research specific to women in agriculture in the communication studies discipline, this study is underpinned by researching rural studies, communication, and gender scholarship separately. Rural studies scholarship has examined the under-representation of women in farming organizations as well as the clichéd depictions of men and women in the farming media, asserting that these representations reinforce the conception of farm work as masculine (Bock & Shortall, 2006). This representation appears to depict farms as rarely being owned by women. This perception, in turn, reifies gender power divisions and reinforces males' patriarchal roles in society's eyes (Shortall, 1999). Thus, women have been unable to gain respect in agricultural careers within the United States which, in turn, may have created a communicative divide when these women have entered the workforce of agriculture and attempted to gain respect (Shortall, 1999).

The purpose of this study was to examine how women characterize their communicative patterns with their male counterparts while working within the agricultural industry. My overarching research questions are "Are there commonalities in the narratives of workplace communication experiences described by women in agriculture?" and "Do women in the agricultural field describe their communication in ways that might show evidence that they are a muted group?" This descriptive study delves into the narrative of women in agricultural positions through interviews. Literature

to build the case for this study is grounded in the background of women in agriculture, the narrative paradigm and muted group theory.

In this chapter, I examine the background of women's communication in agricultural careers by discussing a statement of the problems related to the topic of women in agriculture, as well as the background of the problem, purpose of the study, and definitions of relevant terms for the proposed study. In the background section, I introduce the two theoretical lenses through which this study will take place: narrative theory to discover how women within agriculture tell their stories (Fisher, 1984); and muted group theory (Kramarae, 1981), to address the problems inherent to the current gap in research. In the second chapter, I review previous research regarding these women and the barriers they may face. I also investigate further the two theories that will guide the research. In chapter three, I describe the sampling and interview processes that was employed to assist in filling the gap in the literature surrounding communication by women in agriculture.

The analysis will focus on the unique experiences of women within agriculture. Research exploring narratives employed by agricultural women is crucial because women's stories concerning communication in their roles as agriculturalists are currently lacking in the extant research. This study contributes to the communication studies discipline by expanding on existing literature surrounding the narrative paradigm and muted group theory and by applying these theories in a new setting—that of agricultural communication between men and women in the industry.

## Statement of the Problem

The U.S. agricultural industry has built itself around masculine ideals and the universal social construct that the farmer is male (Stoneman & Jinnah, 2017). Until the last few decades, these male-oriented ideals may have been correct. However, with the rising number of women in the agriculture business, communication issues may present themselves. Women's function in agriculture is deeply-rooted in U.S. history.

Traditionally, a woman's role in agriculture was to be a homemaker who prepared meals and reared children while her husband was working as a farmer. Historically, a woman's identity in agriculture was based on her marital status (Sachs, 1996). However, as previously mentioned, presently, universities and tech schools are graduating higher numbers of female students than ever in degrees in agricultural fields. Some agricultural occupations that women participate in include agronomy, agri-business, agricultural education, and soil science. There has been a rise of women in all areas of agriculture, one area being agronomy, which studies plant life and appropriate nutrition for cropland (Litke, 2015). A rise in female agronomists is of particular interest due to hands-on work with science and agricultural practices that have, in the past, typically been done by males to assess potential crop yield and the family's financial well-being (Litke, 2015). Women entered agricultural science careers at an increasing rate throughout the 1970s, but the growth slowed in the 1980s (McCallister et al., 2005). However, female agronomy graduates remained stable during the following 20 years, while males decreased (McCallister et al., 2005). This research provides data to show women with 4-year agricultural degrees have risen.

Despite an influx of women entering the work field, remaining traces of patriarchal working styles persist within the industry. Exclusion can occur in agriculture when male agriculturists attempt to limit females' use of farm machinery and when men build rapport with other male customers of an agri-businesses to assert dominance and sustain those relationships (Saugeres, 2002). Furthermore, women within the agricultural industry tend to live in rural areas, hence minimizing their ability to venture into more urban settings where their knowledge base may yield higher respect (Little, 2009). The literature presented indicates a present need to investigate communication within the agricultural industry, specifically between women and men. Thus, this study is justified to add to the communication discipline's understanding of communication challenges that may occur for women within the agricultural setting.

According to scholarship, masculine communication centers around establishing status and control. Masculine speakers are reported to possess a tendency to assert ideas and authority while maintaining control and independence of their thoughts and actions (Wood & Fixmer-Oriaz, 2015). To provide an example of what scholars have deemed masculine communication styles, Wood and Fixmer-Oriaz (2015) stated "One way to exhibit knowledge and control is to give advice. For example, a person might say, "The way you should handle that is..." or "Don't let your boss get to you" (p.114). Masculine communication, therefore, has been the label applied to communication that aims to build dominance through problem-solving, social dominance, and establishing status and control (Wood & Fixmer-Oriaz, 2015).

Masculine communication in the workplace can also be shown through the use of humor. In a study analyzing workplace communication in the manufacturing setting,

Clason and Turner (2011) found that many men felt that their workplace was treated more like a fraternity that often leaves women out of the loop. For example, a participant in Clason and Turner's (2011) study shared that their company has a golf league every Wednesday and that everybody makes jokes about it the next day. The participant went on to say that most women do not participate in golf, so therefore when he said, "everybody jokes the next day," women did not fit the category of "everybody."

Feminine communication is defined by scholarship as embodying relationship-building and maintenance. Additionally, a feminine communication style reportedly "fosters connections, supports closeness in relationships and the workplace and creates mutual understanding" (Ye & Palomares, 2013, p.112). Examples of what scholars have deemed feminine communication are offered by Wood and Fixmer-Oriaz (2015), who stated, "to achieve symmetry, (feminine) communicators often match experiences to indicate "You're not alone in how you feel." Typical ways to communicate equality would include, "I've felt just like that" or "I totally know what you mean" (p. 112)." The feminine communication style is purported to offer support, understanding, and the overall attempt to understand and relate.

The phenomenon of workers in a field that is dominated by members of another gender was researched by McDonald (2013) and Pruitt (2017). Males who enter the female-dominated career of nursing find themselves in a working environment where they are the minority gender. Even though they worked hard to enter the field of nursing, men still feel the need to hide their specific occupation. McDonald (2013) stated that many studies have proven that when males enter a female-dominated occupation, they downplay the specifics of their work, especially the tasks that relate most to feminine-



related work. Such findings could imply that for men to participate in gender conformity they have to try to avoid participating in or communicating about certain tasks deemed feminine to keep their masculine reputation. Conversely, women in male-dominated occupations find themselves putting in extra effort for respect.

In a similar vein, Pruitt (2017) conducted a study of women entering into the funeral-director industry. Due to funeral-directors being predominantly male, Pruitt's participants shared how they had to prove their physical and emotional strength daily. For example, during an interview, a participant named Debbie stated:

When you go to make a removal, a lot of times people are expecting a man. And unfortunately, I'm not. I mean, they're a little disappointed, and they expect me not to be able to pick up their loved one. Most of the time people don't want to stick around and actually see the removal, but occasionally they do. And I hold my own. (p.157)

Debbie's comment is congruent with many participants within Pruitt's study. Women often reported feeling that they had to work extra hard around both co-workers and clients to gain respect and trust. In chapter two, additional narratives expressed by female participants in Pruitt's (2017) study are discussed. Gaining stories such as Debbie's could help describe how women feel when communicating within the agricultural industry.

The first research question in this study is to assess narratives of those who identify as female within the agricultural industry to identify whether they find themselves purposefully choosing masculine communication styles versus feminine communication styles to persuade, gain credibility, or build rapport with peers, co-workers, and clients when working within agriculture. Beyond differentiating between

male and female communication patterns or tendencies, however, when reflecting on women's communication styles in an environment that has historically been dominated by males, feminist scholarship such as Kramarae's (1981) muted group theory provides a crucial lens. The next section will discuss the historical background of the differences in men's and women's involvement in agriculture, followed by a discussion of the theoretical lenses offered through the narrative paradigm and muted group theory.

### **Background of the Problem**

Literature suggests that men in the agricultural industry often overlook women's work even though women have been a crucial asset to society and agricultural practices (Shortall, 1992; Zimmerman & Olaf, 2010). Historically, men have been related to agriculture through their work, connection to the land, and masculine traits. On the contrary, historically, women were connected to agriculture through their marital status, taking on the role of a homemaker (Sachs, 1996). Traditionally, when women married into agriculture, they asserted themselves with the position of a 'farmwife' (Bock, 2006).

**History of Women in Agriculture.** Agriculture has originated in patriarchy and is male-dominated (Sanderson, Dukeshire, & Rangel, 2010). In agriculture, patriarchy has been pervasive for many years and, when women are in the farming role, they are typically called on to be in the position of a farm wife (Bock, 2006). As women take on the position of being a farm wife they are often expected to stay in the home versus "boots on the ground" type of work. Normal expectations for a farm wife may include not getting paid for her work. Instead, farm wives are generally expected to find pride in taking care of their families and to leave the public face of the farming operation to the patriarch of the family (Brandth, 2002). Patriarchy may lead women to feel their work is

underappreciated. However, Riley (2009) found an interesting conclusion after interviewing more than 200 farm women from 64 farms. These women offered perspectives on farm women's roles, and many of them were happy to be a part of their family farm advancement even though they were behind the scenes.

Additionally, the women shared how they were proud of doing fewer tasks outside and focusing on household duties. The women felt that they played a prominent role in setting a positive atmosphere, so their family could work in one place (home). However, Allen and Sachs (2007) proposed that some women have felt they were underappreciated due to the agrarian ideology that has set the tone of men above women within agricultural practices. Specifically, a feminist ideology might be seen as a rebellion against values set for them in their childhood and upbringing in agrarian ideology.

Stoneman and Jinnah (2017) conducted a study where they interviewed farming parents on their parenting styles. They found that many couples shared parenting responsibilities; however, a third of the women they interviewed shared that they are the primary caregiver for the children. Furthermore, Stoneman and Jinnah (2017) found that an overwhelming number of fathers mainly held the responsibilities of planting and harvesting of crops, supervising the youth in outdoor tasks (mostly little boys), and machinery maintenance and operation (Stoneman & Jinnah, 2017). Exclusion often starts at an early age where sons are more likely to be taught how to operate tractors and other heavy equipment (Sanderson, Dukeshire, & Rangel, 2010). Furthermore, Stoneman and Jinnah (2017) found that only 50% of the farm wives they interviewed had operated a tractor in the past year. Even though women are less likely to operate machinery or to teach their children about safety with heavy equipment, they are often the main child-

rearers. This disparity can lead to an increased risk of farm injuries when women do become involved in the outdoor aspects of farming, since women who are less involved in operating machinery may lack the accurate knowledge to teach their children how to run the equipment properly (Anderson & Lundqvist, 2014).

**Exclusion of Women in Agriculture.** Not only do women experience disparity in the distribution of responsibilities, but furthermore, some women agree that men are better for agricultural jobs. Heggem (2014) interviewed the owners of 28 agricultural properties (17 men and 11 women farmers) to shed further light on potential gender differences within the industry. Without being asked a question specifically requesting this information, 20 of these 28 farmers revealed that they believed there is a distinct difference between men and women in their ability to become farmers. The farmers shared that they do not use gender to determine who the farm is passed down to and that they did try to avoid favoring their sons over their daughters. However, even though they tried to prevent favoring their sons, both male and female farmers shared their perceptions that they could not avoid the fact that their sons were better suited for farming than their daughters (Heggem, 2014).

Due to this built-in patriarchal set of standards through agrarian ideology, many girls choose to leave the farm and not return after they receive post-secondary education. Beach (2013) interviewed 15 farmers in hopes of learning more about generational transitions of the farm. When the farmers were interviewed concerning their daughters, 11 of them shared that their daughters had left the farm. Some had gone to other states, some to towns nearby and some had chosen to live in large cities. This finding underpins

the importance of the potential contributions of this study on women's perceptions of gendered differences in agricultural communication.

The presence of patriarchy stimulated women's rights reforms which led to the feminist movement. Feminism, essentially, began during the women's suffrage era of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Collins, 2001). "Feminism is a social, political ideology with a broad purpose of advancing the status of women" (Collins, 2001, pg. 3). Since that era, there has been a rise of feminism (Collins, 2001) and even more recently, a rise of women in business-related agricultural roles (Litke, 2015). Because of the history of exclusion of women within agriculture, these women might be considered a "muted group" (Kramarae, 1981). Muted group theory is an idea created by scholars Ardener and Ardener (1975). The theory explains that in every society there are cultural groups who are traditionally muted which means they are offered less opportunity than members of the dominant groups to interject concerns and policies (Kramarae, 1981). One of the primary objectives of the current study is to assess whether or not women appear to be a part of a muted group within the agricultural industry. Muted group theory will be discussed more thoroughly after examining the theory underpinning data collection for this study—the narrative paradigm (Fischer, 1984).

The narrative paradigm is defined using two main ideas. First, the concept assumes that humans are story-telling beings, and, secondly, that we are actors on a stage of life which in turn makes the narrative a natural and normal human function (Fischer, 1984). Data for this study will be gathered through interviews to shed light on how women within the agrarian industry express their beliefs about their communication. Qualitative methods such as interviews allow for gaining personal narratives from

participants, inviting examples of occurrences that have happened to them. Kent (2015) declared that humans are natural storytellers and feel a strong need to share personal experiences to strengthen our own stories. Research revolving around narratives will benefit the communication studies discipline by sharing rich, descriptive data directly from the participants. In-depth interviews help researchers understand social phenomena by creating acquaintanceship and familiarity (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2000).

Asking others to use storytelling to share their experiences is not a new concept. Greek and Roman philosophers initially used oral traditions to pass knowledge to new generations of cultural practices, religion, superstitions and anecdotes (Kent, 2015). According to Burke (1996), the use of narrative serves two primary purposes. The first purpose is explaining that humans are natural storytellers who assign meaning to different factors within the world which, in turn, influences other people. The second primary purpose of the use of narrative is brought by Fisher (1984) who explained that humans are all actors on a stage of life which in turn makes narrative a natural human function. Essentially, humans are symbol making, symbol-using, and symbol misusing animals (Burke, 1966). The impulse to share narratives is a part of human existence because narrativity is a natural process of socialization and acceptance (Krashen, 1982). Thus, using the lens of narrative theory while researching this study illuminates the lives and communication styles of women within agriculture.

Narrative theory can also look further into communication issues between genders in the agriculture industry. White (1978) explained that there is more than one code of communication that spans across all humans and cultures which in turn creates trans-cultural communication. One of these trans-cultural communication styles could be

associated with those who are affiliated with agriculture. Essentially, a narrative is a significant factor for women in the workplace because it permits them to comprehend the actions of others while understanding their own actions and experiences, especially in agricultural careers where their communication styles may not be native to the work environment (MacIntyre, 1981).

Through the interview process, personal narratives highlight subjects' perceptions of communication styles and reflect on their own experiences. Emplotment and re-plotment are critical points of recalling events and harnessing the purpose of the story (Fisher, 1984). Essentially, emplotment and re-plotment are the steps people take as storytellers to remember what had happened to us, and then to re-evaluate the content to make sure it resonates with the storyteller's perception of correct information.

Commentary or changes in detail within a narrative are not just garnishes to a story but instead offer the storyteller the opportunity to reflect on their position within their narrative (Davies & Harré, 1990). This idea was strengthened by Chafe (1998) when he explained that storytellers are "unique windows of the mind" when they choose to express their experiences while keeping language variation in mind due to multiple depictions of a particular experience (p. 284). The "tint" on the glass of these windows may be different due to upbringing and experiences. Therefore, interviewing participants can illuminate whether women in agriculture share such a "tint" in the form of shared, unique communication perspectives on working within this career field.

Muted group theory is the second theory that underpinned my study. Muted group theory can be boiled down to the argument that not all speakers become equally served while using language because not all speakers using the language created the language

(Turner, 1992). Wall & Gannon-Leary (1999) stated that the muted group theory discusses three fundamental factors about how dominant and subordinate groups communicate with each other. In the case of the current analysis, the dominant group consists of men in the agriculture industry, while the subordinate group consists of women in that industry. According to the theory, men and women observe the world in different ways due to diverse experiences because society has created a separation of labor. Because men have historically been politically dominating, the communication style they use is seen to be more dominant in the public eye compared to women. Therefore, women are forced to use dominant expressions instead of their own to participate in society and express themselves. Ultimately, to be successful, especially in a male-dominated realm such as agriculture, women must become bilingual in both men's and women's communication styles (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999).

In addition to expectations that they will be bilingual, women within agriculture face additional hurdles in making sure that they become understood by their male counterparts. Kramarae (1981) explained that, when refusing to conform to social organizations set by dominant public modes of expression, females could change what is socially dominant. Additionally, Kramarae (1981) distributed two hypotheses that link to muted group theory. First, she declared that although women may have trouble matching their interaction to fit the dominant (male) form of expression, their male peers also have difficulty understanding what women mean. Both verbal and nonverbal situations subject females to being held accountable to find ways to express themselves outside the governing public modes of expression used by males to make any change. Secondly, Kramarae stated that women would need to state dissatisfaction with the dominant public



method of communication in order to enact changes to improve the current status of communication.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe current communication differences between men and women within the agricultural field. Future research could build off of this work and analysis found in this study could communicate to agricultural businesses that they may want to focus on incorporating interpersonal communication training into their workplace. The agricultural industry has seen a steady rise in women who are taking on business roles versus just being farm wives and mothers (McIntosh & Simmons, 2008). This study sheds light on current communication styles and issues that are happening in the agriculture industry between the genders.

Practical implications of this study will benefit women in agriculture. Not only does this study display current communication issues, but it could help women entering the field have a better understanding of what to anticipate in the workplace. With women continuously entering the agricultural field, awareness of current communicational issues between genders would be beneficial to all. Additionally, this research could offer workshop material for training supervisors, employees, and human resources offices on effective gender communication within agriculture. Current lack of training or education of interpersonal communication in the workplace may be impacting the demographics of women in agriculture, thus reifying women's status as the non-dominant group.

Theoretical implications of this study will benefit literature concerning muted group theory and the narrative paradigm. There is currently a lack of agricultural-related literature concerning these two theories. Investigating the impact of gender on

communication in agriculture provides an opportunity to test these theories within a new lens. The theories fit well with this study because gender roles in the agricultural industry are traditional and have not been studied or explored with these specific theories.

### **Definitions**

Several terms that will be seen further in this study require definition. These terms include emplotment, patriarchy, dominant group, social norms, bilingual communication, and feminism. It is also imperative to delimit which agricultural occupations will be explored in the current study. Emplotment is a part of the narrative paradigm (Fischer, 1984). The focus of this term explains how people assemble memories of events within our storytelling. Within this study, emplotment refers to how the women choose to share their stories and what they can and cannot recall. When an individual perceives as a narrative or story, rather than a substance or thing, the vivid experience and the recollection of that experience makes up emplotment (Polkinghorne, 1988). Emplotment can relate to the upbringing of an individual since it may impact what they feel is appropriate to bring up within their storytelling.

Secondly, patriarchy, within the current study, refers to males having a governing presence within the agricultural industry. Patriarchy typically revolves around men being the head of a family or household; however, patriarchy can also be present in society or workplaces (Collins, 2001). The reason for this is in the past men have been the more “dominant” gender due to making a larger amount of money and setting rules and standards for society. Patriarchy also plays a role in agriculture because historically male figures have been the heads of the households. Typically, this terms will be related to the

used of the term “dominant group.” Nash (2009) described the term best by stating the following:

patriarchy, traditionally defined, refers to a system of social relations in which there is gender inequality between socially defined men and women. This system of inequitable social relations embeds in the political, social, cultural, and economic institutions of a society. (p.103)

This means that men employed within agriculture are a part of the group that is ‘dominant’ or ‘patriarchal.’ Therefore, they have long set the tone of communication styles; whereas, women have had to match those communication styles.

Typically, the term “social norms” in this study refers to expectations society and history have set for women and their capabilities. Social norms include conformity or compliance with fundamental themes to achieve goals, build and maintain relationships, and manage self-concept (Cialdini, 1998). Many women within the agricultural industry, when taking on more significant roles in the workplace, may face social norm issues due to being the non-dominant gender.

Feminism will also enter the discussion. “Feminism is a social, political ideology with a broad purpose of advancing the status of women” (Collins, 2001, p.5). Feminism can be boiled down to belief in the equality of the sexes and supporting women’s rights. This view is important to the current study because women have to use bilingual language to communicate effectively with their male counterparts (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999). Just like how some people are bilingual in speaking the English language as well as the Spanish language, women have to become bilingual into communication styles for men and women (Kramarae, 1981).

Finally, the agricultural occupations explored in the current study are limited to include agronomists, agricultural saleswomen, agricultural education teachers, and soil scientists. Within the literature review, however, agricultural occupations are discussed more broadly as a result of the scope of careers covered in the literature, however, for preciseness, the scope of the present research includes only women in agronomy and animal science fields.

The current chapter has set forth the problem of women as a potentially-muted group within agricultural careers. The following chapter will review extant literature about the history of women in agriculture and the two theoretical lenses for the study. Chapter three details the interview methodology undertaken for the study, while chapter four and five, respectively, report and discuss results.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RESEARCH

Within this literature review, the history of women within agriculture, the examination of how women have been excluded from that industry, and the description of how women can share their experiences through story-telling are discussed. Additionally, I will provide background of the narrative theory revealed through previous studies that scholars within the communication field have discovered by participant storytelling. Next, the exploration of scholarship surrounding muted-group theory will be explained. Finally, within the muted-group section, silenced culture and the social norms that drive the silencing of women within the agricultural workplace is discussed.

### **History of Women's Communication and Gender Biases**

Philosopher Soren Kierkegaard stated, "silence is not only a woman's greatest wisdom, but also her highest beauty" (Jamieson, 1995, p. 80). This quotation expresses that women are viewed as more-so a passive rather than active participant in communication. However, modern feminist scholarship asserts that gender is socially constructed. To this end, Margaret Anderson (2015) stated:

Gender is not just an attribute of individuals; instead, gender is systematically structured in social institutions. Gender is created, not just within families or interpersonal relationships, but also within the structure of all major social institutions, including schools, religion, the economy, and the state. These institutions shape and mold the experiences of us all. (p. 30)

In addition to understanding that gender is affected and developed by social influence, we also know that these social constructs affect our communication. Within any living or working environment, humans create communication standards for various social

constructs, including that of gender. Views of gender are influenced by biology, psychology, and cultural criticism (DeFrancisco et al., 2013). Biological theories that base gender on sex, hormones, and brain structures, with genitalia prescribing one's sex affect agricultural ideologies. Saugeres (2002) stated:

Because women are supposed to be physically weaker than men, they are seen to only be able to do agricultural work which does not require physical strength. As a result, some agricultural tasks are represented as being masculine and others as feminine. (p. 645)

As Saugeres points out, when viewed through a lens of biological theory, gender can directly affect agricultural ideologies. So while in this view, women are deterred by their physical abilities. Psychological theories suggest that gender is determined by early childhood experiences offered by one's primary caregiver, an argument that more-so aligns with Anderson's. The concept of psychological theories can be illuminated further by Antonio Gramsci's thoughts on hegemonic ruling (Zompetti, 1997). Hegemony is created through the control of ideas when people are encouraged to see an ideology as more of a common-sense fact versus an idea (i.e., men being the head of the household or women needing to stay in the house) (Zompetti, 1997).

Finally, critical and cultural theories emphasize how culture creates and maintains gender roles (De Francisco et al., 2013). Cultural ideology includes the values, beliefs, and understandings known to members of society that guide their behavior around social norms of their culture (De Francisco et al., 2013). Not only do humans create cultural ideology for gender, but perhaps gender biases in agriculture are maintained through the same ideology.

**Gender Biases.** Gender bias is based on socially-created gender roles—social expectations of a binary gender relevant to a person’s sex (Ryle, 2012). Small forms of sexism happen when institutional expectations clash with a person’s gender implementation (DeFransisco et al., 2013). Men and women alike can feel excluded by gender roles. For example, males are extremely underrepresented in both registered nurse work (10%) and elementary and middle school teaching (21.5%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). These occupations are considered caring professions and, therefore, do not fit the stereotypical gender expectation of male sex roles (Palczewski et al., 2013). Sex roles are present for both men and women. When roles of a certain gender are not the norm in a given career field (e.g., male farmers, female nurses), gender biases may occur. For example, the synopsis of the (Saugeres, 2002) article “She’s not really a woman, she’s half man: Gendered discourses of embodiment in a French farming community” stated:

Even when women show that they can run farms by themselves and do work which is usually defined as masculine, they are either represented as only being able to do so because they have male help, or because their bodies and attributes do not conform to culturally constructed heterosexual norms of femininity (p. 641).

Essentially, the quote says that though women prove themselves fit to be agriculturalists, they are still accused of having masculine help with their tasks; contrarily, if a woman does prove she can complete tasks on her own, she is accused of not being feminine. Saugeres (2002) explained that single women who can run a farming operation physically by themselves tend to be seen as unattractive sexually to men due to acting in a masculine fashion while still not being able to farm as well as men. Therefore, even though women

receive education in agriculture and prove themselves in the field, if they do their jobs well, they might be seen as masculine rather than just an agrarian-inspired feminine female. Not only do women experience gender biases within the agricultural field, but gender roles of farming can also interfere with their success as well. According to dominant discourses, women lack the understanding of farming, connection to land, machinery, and physical strength via biology to be competent farmers (Saugeres, 2002). When dominant discourses include ideas that women have lacked abilities, gender biases present themselves.

Gender biases often happen outside of the agricultural field, as well. Scholars McDonald (2013) and Pruitt (2017) studied participants of the non-dominant gender in gender-dominated fields of nursing and funeral directing, respectively. When studying males in the nursing field, McDonald (2013) found that many men try to hide feminine traits of their job. For example, a male nurse may refer to himself as clerical or administrative to avoid using the word secretary as one might view that as more feminine (Lupton, 2000). Male nurses may avoid using the term of secretary because they associate masculinity with less communicative tasks. Many male nursing students who interviewed for Lupton's study associated with masculine behavior traits such as avoiding discussions of feelings, valuing assertiveness, choosing logical reasoning over emotional reasoning, and proficiency in technical and mathematical skills (McDonald, 2013). However, when asked to define feminine norms, the male participants pinpointed the characteristics of expressing emotion, showing compassion, and listening skills to build relationships. The male participants realized that these were necessary traits to be



successful within their field and reported that they acted upon those traits when necessary (McDonald, 2013).

Pruitt (2017) conducted a study in which she gained narratives of women who entered the male-dominated field of funeral directing. Within her study, the main themes she identified included gender essentialism, experiencing sexism, confronting sexism, and doing masculine tasks. Gender essentialism is defined by Liben (2015) who stated the following:

In conceptualization, males and females are assumed to have different essences that, although largely invisible, are reflected in many predispositions and behaviors. These essences are given at the individual level by a range of genetic and hormonal processes and at the species level by evolution. They are viewed as part of the natural order, likely to be presumed to operate across contexts and across the lifespan, and often presumed to be immutable, at least in the absence of herculean and unnatural efforts to change them. (p.410)

England (2010) asserted that gender essentialism outlines culture, co-occurring with notions of gender equality. Essentially, even though women are now allowed to enter all occupations, cultural and social support do not necessarily back the women's decision.

An example of gender essentialism given by Pruitt (2017) is when women are in authority positions such as a school superintendent. Even in the authoritative position, she may have authority issues because students do not see her as authoritative. Other examples of sexism include instances of pay inequality, lack of consideration for jobs, and being devalued as a woman (Pruitt, 2017). An example of sexism given in Pruitt's article is when women were not hired for funeral directing jobs because the funeral home

felt that they would not be strong enough to lift corpses due to their small stature as a woman. When women confront sexism in Pruitt's (2017) article, they verbally challenged sexism and attempted to taper characteristically masculine ideals for tasks. Women in this study called out funeral homes who would not hire them due to their stature by stating that it was illegal not to hire them based on their gender.

Finally, when women perform masculine tasks, gender is being "undone" by disrupting the link between the female herself and femininity (Butler, 2004). Women in Pruitt's (2017) study did masculine tasks by retrieving corpses from homes, speaking with families at the time of their loss, and organizing funerals despite allegations that they could not perform these duties.

Pointing out when sexism was happening was a common occurrence for many female participants within this study. For example, Vera is a native Spanish speaker and was licensed to direct funerals and embalm clients. When applying for a job at a Spanish-speaking funeral home in the neighborhood where she grew up, she was repeatedly told that they would not hire her due to safety concerns related to her being a woman. Vera rebutted by stating "don't you know you're breaking the law? You cannot tell me you are not going to hire me because I am a woman. I know the neighborhood" (Pruitt, 2017, p.147). Even though Vera had every capability to execute her job duties well, she was judged by her stature and feminine traits.

Sexism can happen for female funeral directors via co-workers or bosses, however, this same form of sexism can also frequently come from consumers, as well. A participant named Rachel shared with Pruitt that conflicts can happen at any time of the funeral process, whether that be the beginning stages of embalming or transporting the

body to the cemetery. In these moments of stress and sexism, Rachel shared that she battles her frustration with humor. A statement from Rachel within the Pruitt (2017) interview shows her attempts towards humor in awkward situations:

People will say ‘You don’t look like a funeral director.’ And I will say ‘Well, what does a funeral director look like?’ And then there are times where I’m getting in a hearse, and a man will stop me and say, ‘Are you going to drive the hearse?’ and I want to say ‘How do you think we’re going to get there?’ But I don’t. I just say ‘Yes, I am.’ It takes some getting used to. (p. 147)

Although Rachel displayed a sense of humor when others question her about her working capabilities, her dialogue contributed to Pruitt’s (2017) themes of experiencing sexism and confronting sexism. Another participant in the study was a woman named Amber who was new to the funeral directing industry. Amber was unaware of the gender-gap in the funeral directing industry because while she was in school most of her cohort was female. When describing her first job, she explained that she was “pigeonholed” by her manager. Instead of being given hands-on tasks that she was trained to do, she was asked to do more secretarial work such as answering phones and finalizing paperwork for families. When asked to describe the beginning stages of her work, Rachel stated:

At first, especially with my internship, a lot of the guys were like, ‘Step back, and we’ll let the men do this,’ and I would look at them and be like, ‘Bullshit. I am a lot stronger than what you think I am. I’m not this dainty little woman. (Pruitt, 2017, p. 148)

Amber was forced to call out her co-workers on sexism to learn more hands-on tasks within her field. Perhaps Amber and other women within the funeral directing field feel that confrontation is their only option to gain respect or open eyes to their ability to do a

great job at their craft. Just like the female funeral directors, women within the agricultural industry may feel the need to call out sexism in hopes to change gender norms that have historically been present within the industry.

### **History of Women in Agriculture and Gender Perception**

Women have been an essential part of agriculture for many years, but their hard work is often overlooked (Shortall, 1992; Zimmerman & Olaf, 2010). Frequently, men in agriculture are labeled by their relation to their work, connection to the land, and masculine traits. However, women have many times been connected to the farm by their marital status, their farming children, and their role as a homemaker or mother (Sachs, 1996). Typically, women marry into farming families and assert themselves in the role of a farm wife (Bock, 2006). With this position, these women generally do not participate in directly farm-related tasks that correspond to resource production. Farm wives are typically not paid and do not gain acknowledgment for their work. Instead of taking recognition for themselves, this glory typically is gained by the patriarch of the farming family (Brandth, 2002a).

Due to these women's hard work without recognition, one may think they may feel upset. Although conducted some time ago, research has shown that many women in farming situations do not believe they experience exploitation through the lack of recognition (Brandth 2002b). When farm women do push back from these notions of oppression, they do not adhere to feminist concepts because the women feel they are playing a significant role on the family farm through their tasks (Sachs, 1996). Surprisingly, in a more recent study, Riley (2009) interviewed more than 200 farm women from a range of 64 farms to offer perspective on the women's roles and found

that many women were happy to be a part of the advancement of their operations behind the scenes. More so, many women spoke proudly of doing fewer outdoor tasks and focusing on household duties to create an atmosphere where their families can work in one place (home). Allen and Sachs (2007) proposed that a reason there has not been a feminist push within farm women's actions in the past is that feminist traits contradict agrarian (agriculture) ideology which partly idealizes farm living while emboldening women's subordination. However, in all of these cases, the women interviewed were farm wives. Scant research has explored these same perceptions among women in more career-oriented, professional roles in the agricultural industry. These studies have also regarded these women's reported contentment with their roles, as opposed to their perceptions of their communication within those roles. For this reason, the current study will examine the communication-related perceptions of women with college degrees in agriculturally-related majors (e.g., agricultural communication, agronomy, agricultural educators, seed saleswomen).

The history of these women in agriculture relates to this study by analyzing the current social norms in place. Agrarian ideology has valued the patriarchal hierarchy for quite some time. The following section will analyze the current and past patriarchal statures within the industry to further understanding of how to conduct the study and understand the limitations of the research.

### **Women's Exclusion from Agriculture Roles**

With the recent incline of technology within agriculture, the increase of agricultural technology can reinforce patriarchal ideologies and, therefore, exclude women from farming (Saugeres, 2002). Bryand and Pini (2006) argued, "Women's

exclusion from farming has critical implications for women's position in the public sphere of agriculture. Women are disadvantaged not only because they live in remote rural areas, but because they are responsible only for domestic reproduction of the household" (Little, 2009, p. 316). Because women have been expected to stay in the house, there is a likely chance that many of their daughters will be raised to act similarly.

Exclusion in agriculture starts at an early age. Sons are more likely than daughters to be taught how to operate tractors and other heavy equipment (Sanderson, Dukeshire & Rangel, 2010). Farm injuries happen often, and because women are less likely to be taught to operate a tractor, they are usually less knowledgeable than their husbands to teach their children how to be safe (Anderson & Lundqvist, 2014). In a collection of data concerning farming couples, Stoneman and Jinnah (2017) found that both parents shared the care of the children; however, a third of the women they interviewed felt that they were the primary caretaker for the children. In the same study, data showed that an overwhelming number of fathers were solely responsible for planting and harvesting of crops, maintaining farm machinery and supervising the youth (mostly little boys) doing tractor work (Stoneman & Jinnah, 2017). Only 63 or 50% of the farm wives they interviewed had operated a tractor in the past year, and, of those women who had attended college, a vast majority studied education, accounting, and health, whereas 68% of the husbands or fathers studied agricultural degrees (2017).

Further, Heggem (2014) reviewed transcripts of interviews with 45 farmers, both men, and women, and found that, without being asked, 20 farmers revealed that they believed that there is a distinctive difference between men and women and that gender may influence their ability to become farmers. Male and female farmers shared that they

avoided using gender to determine which of their children would be the successors. Also, they did try to avoid favoring their sons over their daughters; however, they reported feeling there was nothing they could do as parents about the fact that boys were better suited for farming than girls (Heggem, 2014). This exclusion might keep young women from wanting to stay on the farm or coming back after their post-secondary schooling. Beach, Luzzadder-Beach, and Lohse (2013) interviewed 15 farmers about future generations taking over their farms. When asked about their daughters, 11 of the 15 farmers mentioned that their daughters had left the farm. Some had gone to large cities, some to towns nearby, and others to entirely different states. This study highlighted that many young women who are born into agriculture did not feel it necessary to stay.

By stressing the exclusion of women within the agriculture industry, I can better understand current issues faced by the women that fill these business roles. Women are filling agriculture roles rapidly and need a voice to overcome the current communication challenges in place. Furthermore, the difference between communication styles contributed to the exclusion of women within the agricultural industry.

### **A Rise of Women Within Agriculture**

Women recently have had an immense rise in taking on agricultural business type roles versus just being farm wives (McIntosh & Simmons, 2008). One organization in particular that assists and supports women in agriculture is Annie's Project (Altman, 2010). Annie's project was established in 2002 through grant funding obtained by Outreach and Assistance for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers (OASDFR), an initiative by the United States Department of Agriculture. The mission of Annie's Project is to "empower farm women to be better business partners through networks and

by managing and organizing critical information” (Eggers, 2007). There are 25 states that are currently enrolled in Annie’s project with more than 4,800 farm women active. The average age of the female members is 46.7 years with an average of 18 years of farm experience (Altman, 2010). This organization hosts a variety of agricultural women from a variety of relationship backgrounds as 76 percent are married, 17 percent are single, and seven percent are widowed or divorced (Altman, 2010). Organizations such as Annie’s project offer support for the increasing numbers of women in agriculture and encourage them to be active businesswomen in the agricultural markets.

Women in all forces of agriculture are on the up rise, one area notably being agronomy, which studies plant life and appropriate nutrition for cropland (Litke, McGahan, Donald, Breeden, & Gentry, 2015). When studying Australian women in agriculture over recent improvements of technology within the industry, Hay and Pearce (2014) found that women gained pleasure and significance from being active in production agriculture practices even though recent technology had increased their workloads. Women stated that they spend their days outside; in the evenings, the women are inside. However, when asked, the only part of new technology in agriculture the women did not like is that they were forced to be inside to use it. They felt that instead of being inside with technology, they would rather be outside participating in active duties within agriculture (Hay & Pearce, 2014). Through data collection, findings unveiled that women use technology within agriculture three times more than men. Women also perceive themselves as essential assets to the family business. Furthermore, data was collected presenting that women viewed learning as valuable while taking on agricultural



production evolution such as modern livestock management processes as well as decision making management (Hay & Pearce, 2014).

Sometimes, unfortunately, women are brought into labor positions within agriculture for the wrong reasons. Because some employers feel that they can compensate women with less money for work, women are also hired on with less stability in mind by the employer. Women's work is kept invisible and is seen as easily replaceable by other women seeking work within agriculture fields (Fredericks, 2010). In this study, highlighting how women are on the rise within the industry is crucial to illustrate why a change in agrarian communication norms may be needed. Now that I have covered past exclusion of women in agriculture and how the women are shattering glass ceilings and taking on business roles, I am going to explain the narrative paradigm and muted group theory and how they relate to this study.

### **Narrative Theory**

The clarification of the narrative paradigm is essential as there are differences between gender and power. Often, when people feel they have been wronged or want to share about their own personal experiences, they rely on narrative (Kent, 2015). Storytelling can be traced back thousands of years. Ancient Greek and Roman philosophers used oral traditions to carry on cultural knowledge, superstition, religion, knowledge and cosmological beliefs passed down through stories, speeches, and anecdotes (Kent, 2015). The concept of narrative can categorize into two main ideas. First, the narrative paradigm is based on the assumption that humans are story-telling beings. Secondly, Fisher argued (1984) that humans are actors on a stage of life which, in turn, makes the narrative a natural and normal human function. Burke (1966), in his

theory of dramatism, also described humans as actors and the world as a stage on which their actions have meanings that can influence actions of other people (Burke, 1966). He called these actions, which include the use of language, symbolic action. Conceptualizing language as symbolic action, Burke (1966) further asserted that humans are “symbol making, symbol using, and symbol misusing animals” (p. 2). Essentially, humans create the main plots of their life by verbalizing their own experiences to others.

Additionally, Fisher (1984) stated that humans as storytellers is a generic form of symbolism. The stories hold symbols that are created and communicated overall to give meaning and order to human experience. Additionally, these stories are used to persuade others and establish ways of living in a community where the stories sanction and constitute a way of life (Fisher, 1984).

The narrative paradigm does not demand a given form of society. Rather, the narrative paradigm is an ever-present part of mindfulness because humans have cultivated into it. The narrative impulse is part of the human’s very being through attaining narrativity in the natural process of socialization (Krashen, 1982). Whether narrative delivery is oral or written, it becomes a part of human nature that crosses time and culture. To expand, White (1980) continued by saying that there is far from one code of communication that spans across many humans, instead, there is a culture associated with big experiences which creates meaning behind people’s narratives. Essentially, narrative permits us to comprehend the actions of others “because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives regarding narratives” (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 197). Furthermore, narrativity demands that humans distinguish the meaning of any single event only in sequential and spatial relationships to other events.

The main characteristic of a narrative is that it creates understanding only by connecting parts, somewhat unstable, to a composed configuration or social network by the reasoning that narrativity defines itself by temporality, spatiality, and emplotment. (Somers, 1994).

Emplotment and re-emplotment are points of reason between recalling events and deriving the purpose of a story one is telling. Changes in detail or commentary within a narrative are not just accompaniments but offer the storyteller the possibility of reflection on their position within their narrative (Davies & Harré, 1990). In considering what a storyteller chooses to characterize about her experiences while bearing in mind the language variations across multiple depictions of that experience, Chafe (1998) states that retellings are “unique windows on the mind” (p. 284). Through these unique windows, humans’ experiences as storytellers, the “tint” on the glass may be different colors due to upbringing and environment. McVee (2005) discusses the importance of discourse by quoting Polkinghorne in his 1998 book *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. McVee states, “stories of narrative self-identity must be embedded in and constructed out of a person’s particular cultural environment—that is, the specific vocabulary and grammar of its language, its ‘stock of working historical conventions,’ and the pattern of its belief and value systems” (p. 144). Additionally, Bamberg (1991) stated, “events are not only given form due to their relationship to the theme or plot but at the same time due to the language that is spoken and the discourse that is generated” (p. 157). Essentially, discourse refers not only to choices of grammar and vocabulary, but working conventions, beliefs, values, and attitudes are also taken into consideration when evaluating the backbone of the narrative discourse (Bamberg, 1991).

Probability and fidelity of the narrative paradigm can be justified when taking into consideration that all human communication can be both situational and historical due to stories competing against each other constituted in good reason accompanied by rationality (Fisher, 1984). The narrative paradigm challenges the notions that human communication, if considered rhetorical, must be an argumentative form due to considering the discourse involved within clearly identifying both inference or implication. Additionally, the norms for evaluating rhetorical communication must be rational standards taken essentially from informal or formal logic (Fisher, 1984).

Although social action may become conceptualized through the construction, enactment, and appropriation of the narrative paradigm, social actors are not able to manufacture their stories by their own will. In actuality, a small number of representations of stories are available to story-tellers. The kinds of narratives that individuals use solely revolve around the distribution of power within their environment (Somers, 1994). Essentially, this is why people use narratives as practical reasoning to make sense of their circumstances. Through this reasoning, it has become vital that humans uncover the cause of practical reasoning rather than assume or take the normative narrative of practical reasoning for granted (Somers, 1994).

Women in the workplace, especially within agriculture can be demeaned as the lesser gender and through social constructions that over-look their hard work are generally seen to have less power (Shortall, 1992; Zimmerman & Olaf, 2010). In daily discourse, experiences are often incoherently characterized, especially for those who feel controlled by a greater, outside power. For this reason, gender studies have fervently argued for the significance of making new public narratives and symbolic illustrations

that do not continue the long convention of exclusion (Somers, 1994). The original widespread narrative permits men to normalize themselves and their own experiences in these every man stories. These stories not only characterize maleness but metanarratives of classical social theory. By arguing that women cannot access the same normatively valued forms of symbolic representation—especially stories of solidarity and autonomy among women—Violi (1992) notes the difficulties for women in assembling social identities. These figurative silences then cause women to remain in a “man’s world” concerning narrative. Representation, narrative, and subjectivity form part of Violi’s (1992) argument, as well, as Violi argues that unless female subjectivity is evident through narrative, it will continue to become sealed within individual experience. Selecting narratives to express multiple subjectivities is a deliberate way increasing the presence of objectivity which embeds itself in master narratives (Somers, 1994).

Participants in this study shared their personal stories via interviews. I observed not only what the participants shared in their interviews, but how they chose to share their story. Humans cannot always find the right words or proper way to share what they feel; therefore, additional questions were asked when participants felt they were not expressing their narratives in a way they liked. Now that women within agriculture sharing their narrative has been discussed, I am going to dive in deeper to the current feminist movement and muted group theory.

### **Muted Group Theory**

Muted group theory (Kramarae, 1981) manifested through studying how men and women communicate differently. Feminist scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s argued that men have a public domain and women have a private domain. This means that

masculine communication style occurs in public places, such as the workplace; however, feminine communication styles are accepted more privately due to their nurturing nature. This difference is due to the varying power between genders. Though some criticized this assertion as overly simplified (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999), others agreed that “dominant modes of expression in any society have been generated by the dominant structure within it” (Ardener, 1975). Muted group theory is further clarified by Kramarae (1981) stating:

The language of a particular culture does not serve all its speakers equally, for not all speakers were part of its formulation. Women (and other members of other subordinate groups) are not as free or as able as men are to say what they wish, when and where they wish, because the words and the norms for their use have been formulated by the dominant group, men. (p.1)

Because men have been the dominant gender in society and thus have a governing communication presence, women become muted. Essentially, scholars have argued that, because men have historically maintained power, the world has communicated within this power structure (Kramarae, 1981). Furthermore, they argue, if women wanted to be understood, they would have to suppress their own forms of communication and convert their expressions to fit the dominant form, being ‘muted’ in the process. Overall, in a situation where gender is present, and men have a dominating communication presence, women tend to be muted (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999).

Ardeners, (1978) who created muted group theory, stated that accepting a woman’s experience when expressed through feminine communicative patterns is rare. The current language system lacks space for women’s interests and concerns. Thus,

muted group theory asserts that women are unable to symbolize their experiences in the language. As a result, women choose from two courses: either internalizing male reality leading to alienation, or they are unable to speak at all (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999). Within a feminist culture, silence becomes useless because it symbolizes powerlessness and passiveness. Muted-group theory implies inadequacy of women's language. Theorists label female language as handicapped, inferior, or inarticulate (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999).

Silence and 'muteness' do not simply refer to "inability or reluctance to create utterances in conversational exchange" but also represent "failure to produce a separate, socially significant discourse" (Gal, 1994, p. 408). Therefore, 'muteness' does not just mean silence, but rather a social silence for those who belong to a social group with less power. Because social construction can build discourse, those with more power can set guidelines for normal communication practices. Kramarae (1981) discussed numerous hypotheses that are implied by a muted group. She stated that although women may have difficulty matching their communication to fit the dominant (male) form of expression, their male counterparts have trouble understanding what members of the other gender are expressing within their language.

Consequently, in both verbal and non-verbal situations, females take on the responsibility of integrating the feminine communication style to change the current norms of the dominant public mode of expression. Also, females need to state dissatisfaction with the dominant public mode of communication. When refusing to conform to social organizations set by dominant public modes of expression, Kramarae (1981) indicated that females can change what is socially dominant. Additionally, Turner

(1992) argued that not all speakers were equal contributors to creating social norms of language. Thus, those who created social norms are reaping more benefits from the norms.

Three basic tenets regarding how dominant and subordinate groups communicate exist. First, men and women observe the world through different lenses due to a separation of labor created by society. Second, men's form of communication is consistently seen more often, which in turn makes women's modes of expression unacceptable. Finally, women must adopt the dominant mode of expression to participate in society and express themselves. Despite women's movements, there is still evidence of muted group theory in society (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999). Women must become bilingual in both women's and men's language to become successful (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999).

Muted group theory, as conceptualized by Turner (1992), essentially argues that not all speakers become equally served while using a language because not all speakers using the language had taken part in creating that language. Specifically, while trying to highlight communication practices grown in the agriculture community, Ardener (1975) asserted that those who are in high-status groups of a culture largely determine the communication system that becomes used within that culture. Furthermore, those that are considered lesser or subordinate in that culture become perceived as inarticulate to the communication system that has been put in place because the language they must use is rooted in perceptions of the dominant group. Furthermore, Turner (1992) affirmed that men in society have molded the use of language; therefore, language is well suited for



their experiences and communication needs. Primarily, women must go through a translation process when trying to communicate with men.

In this study, I used muted group theory to highlight how the women within the agriculture industry have been silenced or ‘muted’ out of using their communication styles when adapting to a masculine communication style in their workplace. I looked for traits of muteness while conducting one-on-one interviews in which the women shared their personal narratives with me concerning their experiences.

In this literature review, I have discussed the background of women within agriculture and the exclusion of women within the industry. Additionally, I have covered how narrative theory can open the door to stories that share the experiences of these women. Furthermore, I have examined muted-group theory and how scholars within the communication discipline have found that those of non-dominant groups can become silenced for not fitting the gender or social norm related to dominance. This study will further the communication discipline’s understanding of communication issues targeted for the growing population of women entering the agriculture field. Women in agricultural careers experience exclusion and dissatisfaction regarding their capabilities from the day they are born (Heggem, 2014). This study will shed light on current daily communication issues faced by the women within the agricultural industry and provides insight regarding how to alter social norms bestowed on them from the dominant group.

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: Are there commonalities in the narratives of workplace communication experiences described by women in agriculture?

RQ2: Do women in the agricultural field describe their communication in ways that might show evidence they are a muted group?

To answer these research questions, I conducted interviews and analyzed my findings. In the next chapter, I will discuss my methods of research.

### CHAPTER III: METHOD

The method section will cover my procedure, sample, sample selection, and my instrumentation and interview questions. I will share my semi-structured interview guide and discuss how I used descriptive content analysis and inductive thematic analysis to review my interview transcripts. Additionally, I will address both the benefits and limitations of my design of the study.

#### **Research Design**

This study was qualitative. I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with women of agriculture. These interviews ranged from 20-45 minutes in length and included open-ended questions. An in-depth interview was the best design option for my study because the method opened the door for women to discuss their personal experiences and elaborate on details that I may not have gathered from a survey. “Naturalistic, in-depth interviews are used to understand social phenomena by developing intimate familiarity and detailed, dense acquaintanceship with interviewees” (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2000 p. 273). Therefore, to gain comfort and respect for participants, as well as get many details of the concept of communication within agriculture, I conducted in-depth qualitative interviews.

Interviews were conducted over the phone because in-person interviews conducted at the women’s workplace might not get accurate information due to possible eavesdropping and lack of security for the information presented. Controlling for environmental influences means deciphering which controlled environment (home, office, laboratory) would be the least likely to skew results that are gathered from

participants (Frey et al., 2000). I called the participants after their working hours when they were at home.

### **Sample**

The sample for this study was strictly women in agriculture. I conducted interviews with 12 participants over the age of 18. The participants had five or more years of experience in the agronomy and animal science professions, had retained a four-year degree in their respective fields, and had been in their current job for at least two years. Recruiting female participants that had been in the agronomy and animal science professions for at least five years assumed that they had adequate experiences as well as experience in agrarian communication styles. Researchers Lindlof and Taylor (2002) share that there is no definite answer corresponding to what an appropriate sample size is but urge the researcher to have a sample size relevant to the population that they are drawing from. I contacted 20-25 women within the agronomy and animal science occupations in hopes that at least half of the women respond to have a substantial sample size. Then, after contacting the women, I opened the opportunity for network sampling. Network sampling is when respondents are asked to refer the researcher to other potential respondents to build the sample size (Frey et al., 2000). Practically, concerning resources of time and money, a sample of 12 participants is an adequate size.

Participants included female agronomists, animal science nutrition professionals, and extension agents. Gathering a sample of women from the varied fields of agronomy, animal science, and extension ensured that the themes that present themselves would come from women within the broader agricultural industry rather than just one sub-field, thus, creating both external and population validity. External validity is created when a

sample is internally valid or has non-random characteristics that all participants share so that researchers can make general claims with their findings (Frey et al., 2000).

Population validity is created when the sample must be representative of its population (Frey et al., 2000). Therefore, through gathering a sample of participants that range in field expertise, I created more validity for my study.

### **Sampling Method**

My participants were drawn based on non-random purposive network sampling. Nonrandom purposive sampling is when researchers select participants non-randomly based on a specific characteristic all participants share (Frey et al., 2000). In this study, the similar characteristics within the sample are having an occupation within agronomy, animal science, or extension, having a four-year degree pertaining to their occupation, and being a female. After contacting South Dakota State University's agriculture department to refer me to potential participants and being turned away due to confidentiality rights, I reached out to my past academic advisor who works in the agricultural department to reach out to some of her own personal contacts that fit the criteria.

The participants were individually interviewed and audio-recorded. I followed a semi-structured interview guide which was a set of basic questions that are incorporated into the interview schedule. I was free to ask follow-up questions to try and gain specifics or more complete answers (Frey et al., 2000). Having a semi-structured interview showed to be a beneficial tool for gaining narratives of the women. After the interview, created transcripts of the interviews and analyzed to data through directive content analysis and thematic analysis.

## **Instrumentation**

The instrumentation that I used in this study consisted of my interview questions. I arranged the questions within a funnel format. The definition of funnel formats is as follows: “Funnel formats, in which broad, open questions are used to introduce the questionnaire or interview, followed by narrower, closed questions that seek more specific findings” (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000, p. 101). Beginning the interview with broader questions will allow the women a chance to not only warm up to me but engage in reflection on their careers in agriculture. While conducting interviews, I looked for any questions that may need clarity and editing. The interview guide appears in the appendix.

## **Analysis**

To analyze the findings of this study, I used directive content analysis and thematic analysis. Directive content analysis is when researchers use existing or prior research to identify key concepts or variables as coding concepts (Potter & Levine-Donnerstien, 1999). For example, I used Pruitt (2017) to guide how I analyze my data and look for common themes she found in her study entitled “Redoing gender: How women in the funeral industry use essentialism for equality.” The main themes Pruitt found were gender essentialism, experiencing sexism, confronting sexism and doing masculine tasks. Gender essentialism is explained by Liben (2015) as she stated the following:

In conceptualization, males and females are assumed to have different essences that, although largely invisible, are reflected in many predispositions and behaviors. These essences are given at the individual level by a range of genetic and hormonal processes and at the species level by evolution. They are viewed as part of the natural order, likely to be presumed to operate across contexts and

across the lifespan, and often presumed to be immutable, at least in the absence of herculean and unnatural efforts to change them. (p. 410)

Essentially, gender essentialism is when gender roles shape culture and individual choices. Though women are now allowed to enter all fields of work, cultural norms often prohibit them from being welcomed. Experiencing sexism occurs when pay inequality, unequal consideration for jobs, or actions devaluing a woman presently occur (Pruitt, 2017). Confronting sexism occurs when women verbally call out acts of sexism such as stereotypes or exclusion (Pruitt, 2017). Finally, doing masculine tasks is when women perform traditionally masculine jobs in which they “undo” gender by proving that both men and women can complete the tasks (Butler, 2004). However, in my particular study, I analyzed if women felt the need to communicate in masculine forms as all of the participants’ jobs revolved around communicating with male-coworkers and producers. Therefore, the current study instead analyzed the interviews for both women performing masculine tasks and using masculine communication styles. Women performing masculine tasks or using masculine communication styles may be attempting to adapt to the agricultural industry’s norms. Butler (2004) explained by stating “Norms may or may not be explicit, and when they operate as the normalizing principle in social practice, they usually remain implicit, difficult to read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce” (p. 41).

The thematic analysis portion will follow Owen’s (1984) method of thematic analysis. Owen’s method evaluates data through reoccurrence, repetition, and forcefulness to determine themes in data. Repetition occurs when “at least two parts of a report have the same thread of meaning, even though different wording indicated such a

meaning” (Owen, 1984, p. 275). Repetition is also defined as the “explicit, repeated use of the same wording” (Owen, 1984, p. 275). Saturation of themes is noticeable when no new themes occur.

### **Limitations**

Limitations that came with this study included the following: not all women in agriculture feel the need to change their communication style at work, but perhaps those who were inclined to volunteer for this study may have felt a need to share their story because they have already existing feelings of exclusion. Thus, potentially creating a self-selection bias. Self-selection bias is a problem that may occur when comparisons are made between groups of people that have been formed from self-selection (Frey et al., 2000). Secondly, the interviews conducted were with women from the upper Midwest and women from other areas of the United States may not face similar communication norm issues. Finally, women potentially may have shared more personal information behind an anonymous survey due to the Hawthorne effect. The Hawthorne effect links study results to how aware participants are of the researcher’s intent of research. This effect could influence their behavior and skew their answers to align more with what they perceive the researcher wants them to say for their study (Frey et al., 2000).



## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

After completing the semi-structured interviews with each interview participant, I transcribed the material to prepare for analysis. I first conducted a directed content analysis focused on using existing or prior research that identified key concepts or variables and used these as categories for coding (Potter & Levine-Donnerstien, 1999). In this case, these categories were drawn from the Pruitt (2017) study of women in the funeral directing profession. I will be using Pruitt's four themes (gender essentialism, experiencing sexism, confronting sexism, and masculine versus feminine communication styles) as lenses while reporting the interview results. To draw sub-themes with each category, I analyzed the remaining interview text from the transcriptions via thematic analysis using Owen's (1984) method which focuses on recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Table 1 shows each participant by name, gender, age, race, and the number of years they have been in their occupation. All interviewees' names have been changed for confidentiality. In the remainder of this chapter, results are reported within each research question, with sub-themes discussed, therein.

Table 1

### *Research Participant's Demographics*

Participant	Age	Race	Occupation	Years
Courtney	34	Caucasian	Office Supervisor	4
Beth	28	Caucasian	Agriculture Faculty	3
Brittany	27	Caucasian	Livestock Feed	5
Debra	43	Caucasian	Extension Agent	17
Chelsea	29	Caucasian	Extension Agent	7
Ashley	27	Caucasian	Extension Agent	4
Sharon	58	Caucasian	Extension Agent	35
Lucy	30	Caucasian	Livestock Feed	6
Carmen	27	Caucasian	Seed Consultant	5
Amber	29	Caucasian	Livestock Feed	5.5
Megan	28	Caucasian	Livestock Insurance	2.5
Jessica	27	Caucasian	Livestock Feed	3

Table one shows the demographics of interview participants. All 12 interviewees were Caucasian women from the upper-Midwest. The women's ages ranged from 27 to 58 with the average age being 32 years old. The years of experience in the agricultural field ranged from two-and-a-half years up to 35 years. The average number of years the participants had been working in the agricultural field was eight years.

### **Description of Workplace Communication**

Research question one asked if there are commonalities in the narratives of workplace communication experiences described by women in agriculture. Results will be reported following themes found in Pruitt's (2017) study, which were adapted for use as categories for content analysis. Pruitt's themes included gender essentialism, experiencing sexism, confronting sexism, and masculine versus feminine communication styles.

**Gender essentialism.** When asking the women about their communication style in the interviews, gender essentialism showed through responses regarding women's own perceptions of their roles as well as their perceptions regarding the roles their male colleagues expected them to play. In the interview process, eight out of the 12 women shared distinct instances of gender essentialism when discussing their workplace communication. In this category, I will be reporting findings that include expectations of women's gentleness/compassion, and expectations of women's detail orientation.

*Expectations of women's gentleness and compassion.* Of the eight women whose interviews demonstrated experiences with gender essentialism, two interviewees shared that they felt men expected them to communicate more gently due to their gender. Beth shared:

I think I'm a little bit softer with my male coworkers versus my female coworkers which may be a little weird, but I just found that when I was ever a little assertive and talk to men in the way that men talk to each other, they got a little uncomfortable. They would say things like, "Why are you being mean" or "I didn't realize you felt so strongly about that." I think they expect women to be a little more compassionate.

Like Beth, Lucy also enjoys bringing her compassion and eye for detail to her job, however, she occasionally feels that her skills are underused.

***Expectations of women's nurturing.*** Although perceptions regarding the women's compassion help producers make decisions, this can also cost them more hours on the job. Lucy stated:

I think that one thing that us women bring to the table is a little more compassion and a little more empathy in my field. We want to help producers make sure they're doing the best thing possible for their operation.

Two of the 12 women shared how producers use their time together as therapy sessions. Beth shared, "We would show up, and the guys would tell us about tough situations going on in their life even though we're not therapists and we didn't really need to know that information." Other than being just therapists, seven of the 12 participants shared how they have to be careful about showing how willing they are to help because customers will take advantage of them, unlike their male coworkers. Ashley shared, "Being willing to go the extra mile sets us apart but it can sometimes get us in trouble too. I've had, you know, maybe a little bit more added to my plate because I'm too willing to help." Courtney echoed this assertion by sharing the following:

There are times when producers don't understand when I say, 'I can't do that.'

'No' is a hard word for them. Or they will try to come at it a different way to see if they will get a different answer.

These perceptions regarding women's willingness to help can be linked to stereotypes regarding maternal attributes. Producers often tap into historical maternal attributes.

Three of the 12 interviewees said that employers and producers expect less out of them because they have kids, or regularly ask about their kids because they assume that the subject is what the women want to talk about. Chelsea shared:

I have a coworker that works full-time and has six kids, and sometimes we have discussed that there are sometimes that there is a little different set-up for her than others, and she doesn't like it because, "oh, you're a woman and you have six kids, we shouldn't expect that much from you." [sic.]

Their maternal characteristics also bled into their work with agriculture where every woman I interviewed that works in feed sales (six) shared that care for the animals on the farm is placed on the women. Brittany shared that although farm couples make decisions together, the main focus on the animals is attained by the women by stating, "They're kind of her babies."

Even though gender stigmas were present in the interviewees' lives, three of the 12 women openly stated that they felt there are just some jobs only men can do in agriculture. Debra elaborated on this claim by stating "There are physical challenges, not only that, but mentally and emotionally. It's a huge risk to be in agriculture, I think women have adapted to it but there are also some things we just can't do." Lucy echoed Debra's thought and stated:

I am one of those that think women are fully capable to do whatever we set our mind to, but I also realize that you know, there are some jobs a man should just do and maybe not a woman.

*Expectations of detail orientation.* While some interviewees perceive that women's personalities are different than men's, other interviewees reported feeling stereotyped in ways based on their gender that hindered their opportunities in the workplace. Four out of the 12 women directly commented on how they felt women were better suited for agricultural sales tasks because women are more detailed and can read people better and have more compassion. Two of the 12 women interviewed shared that men in their workplace assumed that they were more organized because of their gender. Lucy stated:

I think as a whole we always just feel like we are seen as 'the secretary,' ya know? Somebody walks in-she must be the secretary. She must be the assistant. I think for women in agriculture who are in a male position face this. We do need those positions, but it could just as easily be a male in that situation.

Lucy was not alone in feeling like she was made a secretary. Carmen felt that her bosses were not giving her hard-enough work. At company meetings, they would make her take notes because she was the only female in the meeting. Carmen stated:

I just feel like some of the things he [her boss] says or some of the things he asks me to do versus my teammates makes me feel like we're back in the old times where women should just be in the kitchen. Just because you are a girl does not mean you are organized.

**Experiencing sexism.** Sexism can come in many forms; when solely addressing women's communication style while at work, interview participants highlighted a few main forms of sexism they experience while communicating with male coworkers and producers. Experiencing sexism showed in women's interviews when discussing new placement in a job. Eight out of the 12 women described feelings affected by sexism within their workplace communication. In this category, I will be reporting the findings of men's alleged perceptions of women's lack of knowledge in agriculture, and women's sexism experiences with the baby boomer generation.

***Perceptions of lack of knowledge.*** Two of the 12 women exclusively said that they felt male coworkers expected them to know nothing about agriculture when beginning their job. For example, Amber shared, "When I worked at a feedlot, it took me two weeks for my male coworkers to actually realize I could saddle my own horse." Debra elaborated on this automatic male assumption by adding:

When I first started, I was intimidated by them. They did have a 'good ol' boys' club that they didn't invite me to, which I took that pretty hard. Could I communicate? Yes, but it's hard when you don't know what is always going on.

***Sexism with baby boomers.*** Interviewees shared that a "good ol' boys club" may still be in practice as eight out of the 12 women expressed that they face gender issues primarily with baby-boomer-age producers and coworkers versus younger men. Courtney stated:

Anyone older, especially men, are not always going to trust your opinion, but the hardest one I had was when I worked in a hog confinement. There was definitely

gender discrimination there because we had two females and eight guys. We really didn't have an opinion.

Jessica echoed Courtney's narrative about communication with older men in the agricultural industry by stating the following:

The only time I run into difficulties with men is if they were, I'm generalizing, but the 50+ age block. They get really gruff and really shy, so they don't like to talk to you and don't really care for you to tell them details about things, especially if its face to face, they have a little more trouble.

Megan also felt that as the millennial generation gets older, communication in the agricultural field will look much different. She shared her experiences of older generations' gender differences by stating the following:

I will say one thing with the generational gap, just even when we go west river to ranches to work with people in their 50s and 60s, the women flock together and the men flock together. The women's conversation almost never revolves around the cattle; it's what they were doing within the four walls of their house and how they were getting things ready for the men that day at the branding. I can tell there is a generation gap because I would still be just as comfortable talking to the Cowboys as I am with their wives. You know, I want to talk about what's happening at home and what's going on outside.

**Confronting sexism.** When interviewees spoke about confronting sexism, the most common response was that women had created a unified front in agriculture through women's groups and conferences. Six of the 12 women explained that workplace communication has slowly changed to accommodate the growing number of women in

the industry. In this category, I will be highlighting specific details of how the agricultural industry has become more accommodating to women.

*Women's unified efforts.* Even though women reported that sexism had been a part of their experience, they also reported that the increasing numbers of women in agriculture have been positive. Five of the 12 women actively spoke about how women have been in unified efforts to change the masculine tone of the industry. Chelsea declared, "Even those that are working behind desks or anywhere within the industry, I think there has been a more unified effort to get the word out that we're not going anywhere, and we might know things, too." One example of women's unified effort making changes has symbolically been shown at conferences. Beth shared that when she went to a conference recently, a mothers' nursing room was provided for attendees: "I went to an agribusiness conference in Sioux Falls and my son was fairly young. So, they set up a nursing room for me which isn't something I think they really had to do in the past."

Another specific example of the agricultural industry changing to accommodate women at a conference was given by Brittany who stated,

"There's getting to be more women around and I think it was about two or three years ago they had enough women. They always would have different apparel that we would get. About two or three years ago they started having women's size selections and more variety of selections for women than they did men."

### **Women Doing Masculine Tasks and Using Masculine Communication Styles.**

With the presence of gender essentialism, sexism and women's efforts to confront sexism, many of the women reported that they felt they needed to make masculine



adjustments to their communication to fit in at their workplace. Ten out of the 12 women interviewed shared that they changed their communication style to gain respect from male co-workers or producers. Three of the 10 felt they did it only at the beginning of their careers and seven out of the 10 felt that they altered their communication daily. Carmen experienced the need to change her communication very early in her work, she stated:

I would say for me that it was easy to be walked all over when I was trying to be the feminine communicator just because I was a girl and so they took it to ask okay she's weak, she's still new, she doesn't get it. Let's just be critical and an a-hole to her and see if we can get something out of it. That's just where I changed my tone right away and that's just when I get straight to the point and have the masculine style of communication.

Specific examples of using perceived masculine communication styles to be more effective within the workplace were given by Courtney, Jessica, Brittany, and Megan. Courtney works for a county Farm Services of Agency (FSA) office. Recently there has been a program called Trump's Tariff Program where, after harvest is complete, there are a variety of commodities for which producers are eligible for payment from the government based on the number of bushels of crop they sell. The government pays them for their commodities in two payments. As producers are waiting for their second payment, Courtney often has to practice masculine communication styles. She shared:

I have to continue to be firm with producers that the second payment has not been issued yet and that I do not know when it will. It's hard to tell them 'I don't

know,' but I'd rather be blunt with them than give them a random answer that might later put me on thin ice.

Megan often sells bull semen to producers so that they improve cattle herd genetics. When selling the semen, she often finds herself needing to take on masculine communication styles to make a sale. Megan stated:

I will say that the tone that I take is more of the masculine approach because I'm trying to draw them in. It's the "one-liners" (jokes) sometimes that gets a guy to listen to you seriously instead of giving him a sales pitch right away.

Brittany and Jessica shared specific examples of how women are easier to work with often due to their male clients' use of masculine communication. Jessica shared how female clients communicate more clearly than male clients:

When trying to set up orders with customers, I have to dig for more details with men. They are going to tell me the product they need, and that's it, which forces me to ask for details such as where it needs to go, the time they need it, etc. If I'm talking to a woman, she's going to tell me the exact product, where it needs to go, and when she needs it by. Women always call prepared.

Other than female customers' use of detail orientation, Brittany also spoke specifically on how female clients are easier to work with by stating the following:

I really do think that we (Brittany and female customers) try to relate to each other a lot more. I think it's more effective and builds trust a lot easier between women than it does between men. I'm not quite as assertive with the women as I would be if it was just a male customer. I think there's things that I do for a few customers' wives that a male coworker probably wouldn't do for them.

### **Describing evidence of a muted group**

Research question two asked whether women in agricultural careers described their communication and interactions in ways that might show evidence they are a muted group. Themes found in Pruitt's (2017) study (gender essentialism, experiencing sexism, confronting sexism and using masculine communication styles) were again adapted for use as categories for content analysis.

**Gender essentialism.** Interviewees reported that they were a minority gender in the agricultural field. Gender essentialism was evidenced through women's upbringing and their need to prove themselves as female agriculturalists to their male co-workers. All 12 participants shared narratives regarding gender essentialism. In this category, I will report the findings regarding women's upbringing grooming them for the agricultural field, and their need to prove themselves to male co-workers and producers.

***Groomed to be masculine.*** Multiple interviewees reported that they had grown up on farms and they felt that the experience groomed their communication style. These women reported that, from the time the women were born, they were immersed in the masculine communication styles of agriculture when helping their family on the farm. Additionally, many women felt that they picked up on "tomboy"-like tendencies due to their upbringing in agriculture or by having brothers. Ten of the 12 women interviewed shared that they felt they are more naturally masculine because they grew up in agriculture or had brothers growing up. Chelsea, who took over her family farm at a young age, clearly outlined how she felt she was groomed to have a masculine communication style when she stated the following:

I spent a lot of time with my dad growing up, and that's probably part of the reason I already talk that way. I definitely don't consciously get up in front of a crowd and ask about their feelings. Just the communication style itself, I think it just happens. You really want to talk like they talk, and you want to make sure they take you seriously.

Chelsea further elaborated on her masculine communication style tendencies learned in agriculture when speaking about day-to-day life:

I'm not a soft human. I'm not a huge feminist movement person—like outwardly, I haven't done a lot with that type of thing. My personal opinion is that if you can handle yourself in your own situations, you should be able to stick up for what's right.

Courtney echoed by saying, "I don't know if I treat people differently because I'm not a coddler like that. I don't have time and way too many producers to do that." Chelsea and Courtney are just two examples of the ten women who shared that due to their upbringing in agriculture, they are not naturally submissive. Although some women felt they are naturally stern speakers, they still reported feeling that their gender provided them a need to prove themselves.

***Women needing to prove themselves.*** All 12 interviewees explained that they had to verify their abilities in their past or current occupation. When speaking about proving themselves, the women shared that they most often had to validate themselves when starting their career or when meeting a producer who is a new customer to their company. Lucy stated, "I felt like I needed to prove myself because I was a female in my mid-20s in a male-dominated field where there hadn't been any other female employees before or

nutrition consultants before me.” The interviewees spoke about their observations that male coworkers’ testing their limits waned once they “proved themselves.” For example, Carmen stated:

I feel like they (male co-workers) try to challenge me sometimes when they think I don’t know what’s going on, but once you kind of get through that hurdle, it’s like “okay all is well, they’re going to treat me the same now.”

Courtney, Ashley and Lucy shared some specific examples about moments in women’s careers where they felt they needed to prove themselves. Courtney stated, “When I worked at a hog confinement I had to prove myself and show that I knew what I was doing because there were two females and eight guys. We had to work to just have an opinion.” Ashley also spoke about proving herself when starting a new position:

I was a female taking over a position of an older male that was really valued in the agricultural community. I had to prove myself when answering questions. Even when I didn’t know the answers to things I had to say, ‘I’m not sure about that, but let me do a little research and get back to you.’ That way, even if I didn’t know the answer right away, they knew they could at least count on me to get a correct answer.

Lucy spoke about how women can prove themselves via knowledge of technology:

“Businesses are realizing any new technology is a huge thing and if women are in a position to bring that technology to them they’re much more receptive to that idea.”

Women needing to prove themselves was not the only common theme. Women also discussed forms of sexism they have experienced.

**Experiencing sexism.** The interviewees' stories of sexism when asked about their experiences as a minority gender revolved around sexist jokes and attempts to make business sales. Seven out of the 12 interviewees shared specifically about occurrences with sexism while speaking on their experiences as women in agriculture. In this category, I will be reporting some of the women's experiences with sexist jokes and the customers' preference for male employees.

***Sexist jokes.*** Other than the interviewees feeling like they have to prove themselves in their occupation to their coworkers and clients, some women also face sexist jokes in the workplace. Four women reported encountering sexist jokes at work often. Lucy shared:

I was raised to be able to do everything on the ranch that the boys could do and so with that, you know, I also hear all of the terrible jokes and all of the random banter. I think it caught my male counterparts a little off guard that I would take things as light-heartedly as I did, I guess.

Beth also hears many jokes at work. She stated, "The guys, they make so many dirty jokes—at least the operations guys and stuff. Especially while they were all out in the shop on rainy days where they could talk about anything they wanted."

***Male preference.*** Although all 12 participants felt that communication within the agricultural industry would change with the next generation, many participants felt they had the most difficulty with older generations when it came to sexism. Seven out of the 12 interviewees actively spoke about how men often only trust other men's opinions when it comes to agricultural business. Debra reflected on her early years as an Extension agent:

I had a gentleman call my office and said, “I would like to talk to the county agent” and I said, “you’re talking to her.” He said again, “no, I want to talk to the county agent,” and I repeated, “you’re talking to her.” That was my first ever experience where I felt like ‘wow, he definitely felt that this was a male role.

Debra experienced male preference when she started her position; however, Megan experiences this social norm every time she attends a bull sale with her husband. Megan and her husband are both representatives for a genetic sire service business, so when they attend a bull sale together, their goal is to approach producers and make sales for high-quality genetics via bull semen. Megan explained her common occurrences of sexism at the bull sales by sharing the following:

We both are the ones out there trying to make these semen sales to people, and it is incredible how I can say something to a producer, another male producer, and unless my husband says it, it doesn’t sink in. So, there’s times and conversations where I know what I am saying is being heard and listened to, or if I need my husband to say it because this customer needs to hear it from a man.

Not only did some interviewees report men responding to other men when making sales, one woman reported that a man would not sell to her because she is a woman. As stated previously, Chelsea took over her family’s farm at an early age due to her father passing away. Once taking on the farm’s duties, Chelsea noticed that the operation needed a new lawnmower. Chelsea shared her story:

I remember specifically I bought a lawnmower and a loader in the same year.

When I went to buy the lawnmower, I brought a friend of mine’s dad because he was a lawnmower repair person. I just thought he would be a good person to bring

with. The salesman wouldn't talk to me. He would only talk to this guy, so I said forget it! Then I went somewhere else and bought one at a totally different place because I wasn't going to put up with it.

**Confronting sexism.** When women were asked if the agricultural industry was changing to adapt to women, they offered a variety of examples as to how sexism has been confronted. Nine out of the 12 women interviewed shared about how they believe sexism is actively confronted by women in agriculture through banding together. In this category, I will be reporting women's experiences of confronting sexist jokes, and their experiences of forcing the agricultural industry to self-assess gender norms.

**Confronting sexist jokes.** When confronted with sexist jokes, some interviewees spoke about how they call out male-coworkers. Four of the nine women who shared about confronting sexism said that they actively confront sexist jokes when they hear them. When Beth shared about calling out her male-coworkers, she described their reactions by stating, "It's like they are thinking 'weird— I don't know how to handle this.' Kind of like 'oh she doesn't want to joke about boobs, because she has boobs.'" In another example, Beth gave her experience at a recent agricultural conference:

The guy would try to make wife jokes and nobody would laugh. Because people were either in good solid relationships or he was making a joke about people in the room because there were wives in the room, ya know?

**Women banding together.** Five of the nine women who spoke about confronting sexism specifically highlighted how women in the agricultural industry had banded together to change the current gender norms. Chelsea shared about recent multitudes of women in agriculture conferences and stated, "I think there has been a more unified effort



to get the word out that we're not going anywhere, and we might know things, too."

Brittany also believed women had created a unified front through conferences; however, she made a point to acknowledge past women's work so women today are able to be successful. Brittany stated:

It's pretty opinion based, but I really think it's just a lot of farm and ranch women that have come before us. I mean they're used to tough living. Men know that we can handle it because they've watched their moms and wives and kids be around the farm and work really hard and are able to do everything.

Brittany also shared that in light of women banding together, her male customers have begun to ask her opinion and thoughts on feminist ideals exemplified through their responses to events such as such as the Bret Kavanaugh court case, the women's march, and the electing of South Dakota's first female governor, Kristi Noem.

#### **Women Doing Masculine Tasks and Using Masculine Communication Styles.**

When describing evidence of being a minority gender, women's masculine tasks revolved around their decision to be in agriculture, and their need to be assertive when speaking with male co-workers and producers. Ten out of the 12 women interviewed shared about why they are working in the agricultural industry and the day-to-day communication tactics they use. In this category, I will report on what influenced the women's decision to be in agriculture, and their need to use assertiveness at work.

*Decisions made from birth.* Many of the interviewee's decisions to work in the agricultural industry were second-nature to them. 10 out of the 12 women reported growing up in agriculture and that their childhood inspired their professional career. Amber shared her personal story by stating the following:

I'm the fourth generation to grow up on our ranch, so there was really no question as to that I was going to be in agriculture. It was more my parents telling me to go to college before I could come back.

Courtney echoed Amber's response and said, "Well I grew up on a farm and ranch raising purebred Charolais cattle and row crop. I kind of didn't think of any other industry."

Although these women are proud of their roots as agriculturalists and felt that they gained their strong communication styles from their childhood, some women shared that women's assertiveness in the workplace is necessary. Women making decisions from birth to stay within the agricultural industry could fit in both a category of confronting sexism as well as using masculine communication. This concept could fit in dual categories as women are both confronting social norms in agriculture by working in business agriculture versus being a homemaker, yet also having to conform their communication styles to fit in to their new roles.

*Necessity of assertiveness.* Four of the 10 interviewees that shared about their masculine tasks while working in the agricultural industry shared that they felt a need to be assertive toward male co-workers and producers to be taken seriously. When being asked why she thinks women might change their communication style at work, Carmen stated:

Honestly, I think it's more of a fitting in thing. I mean, it's tough because I don't want to talk like that all the time, but sometimes it's like they don't hear you if you talk in a 'normal human voice' as I like to refer to it. I mean, if you're just the

quiet little one in the room nobody ever hears you, but as soon as you're kind of vocal and blunt they're like 'oh yeah, what did you say?'

Megan explained that she uses her communication assertiveness to relate with her male coworkers more, she stated, "I think we're trying to put ourselves on the same level. I don't know if it's just in our own brains to change our approach when speaking to someone of a different gender, but we do."

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study disclosed themes surrounding the description of how women communicate within the agricultural industry and signs that women are a muted group within the agricultural industry. To analyze these themes, I began analyzing the transcriptions of the semi-structured interviews via directed content analysis where I looked for themes that reflected Pruitt's (2017) article surrounding re-doing gender in the funeral industry. Directed content analysis is when researchers use existing or prior research to identify key concepts or variables as coding concepts (Potter & Levine-Donnerstien, 1999). Pruitt's four themes were gender essentialism, experiencing sexism, confronting sexism, and doing masculine tasks. However, because this study examined women's communication styles, I analyzed women communicating in masculine forms. After reaching saturation in directed content analysis, I then used thematic analysis to enable the sharing of sub-themes. By interviewing these participants, answers were provided to the previously posed research questions:

RQ1: Are there commonalities in the narratives of workplace communication experiences described by women in agriculture?

RQ2: Do women in the agricultural field describe their communication in ways that might show evidence that they are a muted group?

With a growing number of women entering the business side of the agricultural industry versus being just farm wives (McIntosh & Simmons, 2008), states such as South Dakota have experienced a large economic benefit (USDA, 2012). However, even though women entering the industry shows economic benefits, women still experience sexism (Saugeres, 2002). Even though women proved that they could operate in agricultural

efficiently, they are seen either only being able to do hard work because they have had male help, or because their attributes do not conform to culturally constructed femininity (Saugres, 2002).

The first question of the research study asked if there are commonalities in the narratives of workplace communication experiences described by women in agriculture. According to the results of this study, many women felt that they alter their communication style due to their male counterparts' perceived expectations. By conducting in-depth interviews, I was able to obtain women's description of how they experience the world in terms of their agricultural workplaces. These descriptions align with Krashen's (1982) discussion of narrativity as a natural process of socialization and acceptance as women often described their communication in the workplace through telling stories about difficulties at the beginning of their career, then learning and adapting to masculine ideals and communication styles in order to communicate more effectively. Additionally, Fischer's (1984) description of emplotment and re-employment provided a vital lens for this study. By interviewing women in agricultural careers, this study offered women a re-employment opportunity to recall the events of their workplace communication and reflect on purposes of their stories. The communication themes found in the narratives of these women are bolstered by Chafe's (1998) claim that storytelling is a unique window of the mind. Women's narratives in this study are illuminated by Chafe's (1998) claim because women were required to reflect on their own personal observation of their experiences when entering their occupations—i.e. how they felt when they first experienced work-place gender essentialism. When analyzing data for this research question through the lens of gender essentialism, I found that women felt that

their male counterparts often had expectations of women's gentleness and compassion, nurturing characteristics, and detail orientation, and therefore resulted in women feeling as if they must balance both employing traditional feminine characteristics and harnessing masculine communication styles.

Concerning expectations of women's gentleness and compassion, eight of the 12 women interviewed felt that men expected them to communicate more gently in the workplace due to their gender. Some of the participants shared specific feelings, including Beth who shared "I just found that when I was ever a little assertive and talk[ed] to men in the way that men talk to each other, they got a little uncomfortable." This assertion of gender expectations supports Anderson's (2015) claim that gender is not just an attribute of individuals, rather a reflection of systematically structured social institutions. Feminine communication style reportedly "fosters connections, supports closeness in relationships and the workplace and creates mutual understanding" (Ye & Palomares, 2013, p.112). Examples of what scholars have deemed feminine communication are offered by Wood and Fixmer-Oriaz (2015), who stated, "to achieve symmetry, (feminine) communicators often match experiences to indicate "You're not alone in how you feel." Typical ways to communicate equality would include, "I've felt just like that" or "I totally know what you mean" (p. 112). The feminine communication style is purported to offer support, understanding, and the overall attempt to understand and relate.

Men's perceived expectations of women having nurturing characteristics was also a discovery shown in the data. These expectations reflect Ryle's (2012) definition that gender biases are created based on sex roles and social expectations, and DeFrancisco's

(2013) claim that small forms of sexism happen when institutional expectations clash with personal gender implementation. Within the theme of expectations of women's nurturing, findings arose of women being used as therapists by male clients, men having difficulty hearing the word "no" in a business setting, frequent questions of women's personal life on the job, and women's feelings that some tasks in agriculture only men can do.

Two of the eight women that shared narrative reflecting gender essentialism felt that producers often use their business exchanges as therapy sessions. One of the participants, Beth, stated: "The guys would tell us about tough situations going on in their life even though we're not therapists and we really didn't need to know that information." Additionally, seven of the eight women that told stories of gender essentialism stated that they must be careful about how much they are willing to show male clients and co-workers to avoid extra work in their already busy lives. These examples of gender essentialism in the workplace support the claim of Pruitt (2017) as she states that "In funeral directing, the same essentialist notions of women as naturally caring, and nurturing seem to undermine masculinity by assigning incredible importance to the feminine" (p. 27).

To continue on with findings concerning men's perceived expectations of women's nurturing characteristics, three of the eight interviewees who shared about gender essentialism occurring in their life stated that clients and co-workers often expect less productivity from them due to having children or assume that home-life is all women want to discuss when conducting business. Chelsea shared that she has a coworker with six children. Chelsea's coworker discussed with her that she feels management often

makes special allowances for her without her asking because she has children. Data regarding men's perception of women's maternal attributes needing to be catered for in the workplace reflects the theory that culture creates, emphasizes, and maintains gender roles (Palcewski et al., 2013).

Due to the fact that women are often associated with maternal characteristics and gentleness, three of the eight participants who discussed experiencing gender essentialism felt that there are some roles that only men can do within agriculture. Debra was one of the participants that felt even though women can do whatever they put their mind to, there are some jobs only men should do. Debra was a participant from a baby-boomer age group. She felt that the types of roles men should take on versus women is anything that involved physical labor such as lifting bags of seed or working with large cattle. Debra felt that if women did all jobs within agriculture they may be susceptible to being injured as she felt women are physically weaker than men. These expectations of women's nurturing characteristics reflect Saugres's (2002) claim which stated:

Because women are supposed to be physically weaker than men, they are seen to only be able to do agricultural work which does not require physical strength. As a result, some agricultural tasks are represented as being masculine and others as feminine. (p. 645)

Finally, within the first research question under the lens of gender essentialism, data showed a re-occurring theme of men's expectations of women's strong detail orientation. Two of the four women interviewed felt they are expected to have organizational skills in the workplace due to their gender. Lucy shared that customers often assume her to be the secretary when entering her place of work. Carmen often gets



elected to the position of taking notes at every company meeting as she is the only female in her place of work. Due to women being assigned small tasks in their workplace, they could perceive their value in the workplace as less than their male co-workers. This idea supports the claim of Fredericks (2010) in that some employers feel that they can compensate women with less money for work and less stability. Fredericks states that women's work is kept invisible and is often seen as replaceable with other women.

The second lens used while examining how women communicate in the agricultural industry is experiencing sexism. The two data themes that appeared in this category was experiencing sexism with the baby boomer generation and perceptions regarding women's lack of knowledge about agriculture. Eight out of the 12 participants felt that they face gender issues primarily with the baby boomer generation. Jessica shared that if she has any gender-related issues in the workplace it typically is issued by a baby-boomer customer. She stated "I'm generalizing but the 50+ age block gets really gruff and really shy. They don't care to talk to you or have you share details about things." Megan reported noticing generational gaps when going on ranch visits during a calf branding. She notices that within that generation, men typically are outside branding and speaking about agriculture and women are typically inside preparing a meal for the men. Examples of participants' experience with generational sexism support Stoneman & Jinnah's (2017) findings where they interviewed 126 farming couples, and only 50% of the women (32 out of 63) shared that they operated a tractor in the past year due to their husbands primarily driving large machinery on their farm. Additionally, women interviewed that did attend college mostly went to school for accounting, teaching, and health degrees whereas their husbands went to college for agricultural degrees (Stoneman

& Jinnah, 2017). This finding supports the fact that many women entering the agricultural industry in business roles has been recent. This, in turn, may have created gendered communication issues within the workplace.

Two of the eight women that offered their own personal narratives of experiencing sexism felt that their male clients and coworkers perceived that they had a lack of knowledge about agriculture due to their gender. Debra reflected on her experiences when she first started her job and shared that there was a definite “good ol’ boys club” where they discussed agricultural topics, she felt as if she was never good enough to join the “club” until she proved her knowledge in agriculture. Amber reflected her experience at a feedlot where she had to spend two weeks trying to convince her male-coworkers that she knew how to saddle her own horse. Expectations of women’s lack of knowledge reflect Ryle’s (2012) claim that gender biases are based on socially-created expectations of binary gender and DeFrancisco et al.’s (2013) assertion that small forms of sexism happen when institutional expectations clash with a person’s gender implementation (i.e.—women entering the traditionally masculine agricultural field).

The third lens used to examine how women communicate within agriculture is confronting sexism. Six of the 12 women who participated in the study actively spoke about how workplace communication has increasingly accommodated women, and five of those six women felt this accommodation was due to women’s unified efforts. One interviewee, Chelsea, stated that she felt that all women in the agricultural industry, even ones who sit behind a desk, have put forth a unified effort to get the word out that women are knowledgeable and in the agricultural industry to stay. These unified efforts for change are reflected through an initiative created by the United States Department of

Agriculture in 2002 called Annie's Project (Altman, 2010). Annie's Project is to "empower farm women to be better business partners through networks and by managing and organizing critical information" (Eggers, 2007). Organizations such as Annie's Project that unify women in agriculture solidifies Burke's (1966) description of the human narrative by stating that humans are actors and the world as a stage on which our actions have meanings that can influence actions of other people. When women take charge of their farming operations and how they communicate, other women in agriculture may be influenced by their confidence and band together, like with Annie's Project.

The fourth and final lens used while examining how women communicate in the agricultural industry is women doing masculine tasks and using masculine communication styles. Women sharing their own personal narrative is significant because it authorizes them to comprehend the actions of others, as well as their own actions and experiences, in a workplace where the communication style is not native to their own (MacIntyre, 1981). Out of all 12 participants, 10 women shared that they have changed their communication style to be more masculine to gain respect from male clients and co-workers. Wood and Fixmer-Oriaz (2015) clarified masculine communication by stating that masculine speakers possess a tendency to assert ideas and authority while maintaining independence and control of their thoughts. Masculine communication, therefore, has been the label applied to communication that aims to build dominance through problem-solving, social dominance, and establishing status and control (Wood & Fixmer-Oriaz, 2015). To provide an example of what scholars have deemed masculine communication styles, Wood and Fixmer-Oriaz (2015) stated "One way to exhibit knowledge and control is to give advice. For example, a person might say, "The way you should handle that

is....,” or “Don’t let your boss get to you” (p.114). Masculine communication, therefore, has been the label applied to communication that aims to build dominance through problem-solving, social dominance, and establishing status and control (Wood & Fixmer-Oriaz, 2015).

On the contrary, feminine communication styles welcome connections and encourage closeness in relationships to induce mutual understanding. Wood and Fixmer-Oriaz (2015), who stated that feminine communication style often hosts the goal to relate to other communicators by using phrasing such as: “You’re not alone in how you feel.” (p. 112). Understanding, support, and relatability are deemed the overall purpose of feminine communication styles. Feminine communication style reportedly “fosters connections, supports closeness in relationships and the workplace and creates mutual understanding” (Ye & Palomares, 2013, p.112).

Out of the 10 women who reported using masculine communication styles, three stated they only changed their communication at the beginning of their careers, where seven of the participants felt they change their communication daily. For example, one interviewee, Carmen, stated that she needs to change her communication style at work daily to avoid being “walked all over” like she had when she spoke in more of a feminine communication style at the beginning of her career. Additionally, Courtney stated that she often has to use a masculine tone for male clients to take her seriously when she tells them no. Megan frequently uses masculine communication tactics to gain initial interest from male customers when trying to make bull semen sales. “It’s the ‘one-liners’ (jokes) sometimes that gets a guy to listen to you seriously.” As Carmen and Courtney attempted to be successful at work, and Megan tried to grow her business via using masculine communication, Kanter’s (1997) claim that women must ‘do’ masculinity to succeed in

male-dominated fields is reinforced. Furthermore, Brittany and Jessica both shared how women are often easier to work with due to male clients using masculine communication styles. For example, Jessica shared she often has to dig for more details with male customers when they are buying feed from her. “They are going to tell me the product they need and that’s it, which forces me to ask for details such as where it needs to go, the time they need it, etc.” In this instance, Brittany and Jessica were forced to use feminine communication in a dominant-masculine communication field as Wood and Fixmer-Oriaz (2015) stated that feminine communication style’s main purpose is to understand and relate.

The second research question in this study asked if women in the agricultural field described their communication in ways that might show evidence that they are a muted group. Results of this study showed that there are many occasions when women felt as if they are part of a muted group and had to adjust their actions and communication style to better “fit” into the agricultural world. When analyzing the data for this research question under the lens of gender essentialism, I found themes of women being groomed to be masculine, and women feeling forced to prove themselves on the job. Several interviewees reported that they often strategically chose masculine communication styles to enable them to do so.

Participants often stated that they were groomed to adopt a masculine nature as 10 out of the 12 interviewees shared that they felt they are more masculine naturally because they grew up in agriculture or had brothers growing up. The need for girls to be groomed to be masculine can be explained by Kramarae (1981) who states that those who have more power (i.e., men in agriculture) have the opportunity to set guidelines of what

normal communication practices are. Chelsea, for example, expanded on her “tomboy” tendencies by sharing that she spent a large portion of her childhood working with her dad which may be the reason she uses masculine communication styles at times. “I definitely don’t consciously get up in front of a crowd and ask about their feelings. Just the communication style itself, I think it just happens. You really want to talk like that, so they take you seriously.” Leckie (1996) stated that often unlike farm boys, farm girls are expected to not only help their mothers with household chores unlike their brothers but also help men with family farming, therefore she is expected to gain knowledge and mannerisms from both parents. Additionally, Courtney shared that she naturally is not a coddler due to her upbringing. Leckie (1997) declared that when she conducted a study on women’s upbringing on farms, participants recalled both positive and negative experiences in learning on the farm via their father’s instruction. Some women were the only children, so they were their father’s only source of labor, so in turn, adopted a lot of their fathers’ knowledge. Gannon-Leary (1999) stated that it is essential for women in subordinate groups to adapt to social norms of the dominant group for their success, they highlighted that women have two choices: either internalizing male reality leading to alienation or are perceivably discouraged to speak.

The second theme found when analyzing data for the second research question under the lens of gender essentialism was women feeling a need to prove themselves on the job. All 12 interviewees shared that they felt they had to prove their abilities to their male coworkers and clients before they were accepted. When the women shared about proving their abilities, they felt that they most often had to prove themselves at the beginning of a new job or when meeting a new client. The underlying reason women may

need to prove themselves when beginning a job is not only explained by Sanderson, Dukeshire & Rangel (2010) where they state that sons are more likely than daughters to be taught how to operate tractors and other heavy equipment, but also by Leckie (1997) who claimed that since women are not directly taught factors of production, they are often been discouraged from learning any further about agricultural occupations, except the small amount they need to know to provide labor. Lucy, Carmen, and Ashley gave specific examples of how women felt they needed to prove themselves. Lucy shared that when she began her career, she felt she had to prove herself because she was a female in her mid-20s in a male-dominated field where there had not been any other female livestock nutrition consultants before her. Secondly, Carmen's male co-workers and clients try to challenge her at times when they think she doesn't know what is "going on." But she stated once she got through their hurdles, they began to treat her the same as other men she worked with. Lastly, Ashley offered a specific example when she described taking over a job in Extension that was previously filled by a well-respected male. "I had to prove myself when answering questions. Even when I didn't know the answers to things I had to say, 'I'm not sure about that, but let me do a little research and get back to you.'" Examples given by Lucy, Carmen and Ashley solidified Leckie's (1996) claim that farming is concerned with issues of patrimony, property inherited from one's father or ancestor (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), because land is valuable, a source of power, and both knowledge base and land bases of agricultural production have been passed primarily to other males. For this reason, historically, women in agriculture have been at a disadvantage, not only in terms of the farmland that was passed on to them, but because of the resultant missed opportunities to gain farming knowledge and experience.

The second lens examined when analyzing the second research question--whether women felt they were part of a muted group--was experiencing sexism. When asked if they had any experiences with sexism, interviewees' responses highlighted sexist jokes and the clients' preference for male employees. Seven out of the 12 participants reported experiencing sexism in the workplace. Four of the seven women who reported experiencing sexism said that they encounter sexist jokes in the workplace. The freely-used sexist jokes women experience from men reflects Kramarae's (1981) claim that women are not as free as men to say what they wish, and where they wish because social norms for their use were formulated by the dominant group, men. Beth shared that she often heard sexist jokes from men who worked in operations: "The guys, they make so many dirty jokes. Especially while they were all out in the shop on rainy days." On the contrary, Lucy stated she had to get used to sexist jokes and her co-workers were surprised that she responded positively:

"I was raised to be able to everything on the ranch that the boys could do...I heard all of the terrible jokes and random banter...I think I caught my male counterparts off guard that I took things as light-heartedly as I did."

Non-verbal praise for not confronting sexist jokes reflected Gal's (1994) conclusion that 'muteness' does not just mean silence, but rather a social silence for those that are part of the socially-lesser group.

A second theme found when using experiencing sexism as a lens to identify signs of a muted group was clients' preference for male salesmen versus female salesmen. All though all 12 participants felt that communication in agriculture would change with the coming generations, seven of the 12 participants reported how male clients often only



trust other men's opinions when business deals occur in agricultural business. Debra, Megan, and Chelsea gave specific examples of experiencing sexism in the agricultural industry. Debra shared an experience from her early years as an Extension Agent where a man called her office and asked for the county Extension Agent. After telling the gentlemen she was the agent, he then asked two more times for the county agent. Eventually, the man believed that Debra, was in fact, the county Extension Agent; however, this was Debra's first instance where she realized a male was preferred in her role. Despite many women entering the agricultural industry, Saugeres (2002) explained that patriarchal working styles still persist in the industry. She made the claim that male business agriculturalists still use rapport to connect with other male customers to assert dominance and sustain relationships.

Megan touched on present-day male preference when she explained every-day occurrences when her husband and herself attend bull-sales to sell semen. Megan stated, "We both are the ones out there trying to make these semen sales and it is incredible how I can say something to a male producer, and unless my husband says it, it doesn't sink in." Megan's experience with customers preferring her husband's advice resonates with Wood and Fixmer-Oriaz's (2015) explanation that masculine communication revolves around establishing status and control. They continue by stating that masculine speakers are reported with tendencies to maintain control and independence of their thoughts and actions through the assertion of ideas and authority. Not only did women report of having difficult times selling items to men such as livestock feed and crop seed, one woman reported a trying experience where a man would not sell to her.

Chelsea took over her family's farm at a young age when her father passed away. She explained that she needed to buy a lawnmower for her farm. Chelsea's friend had a father who specialized in doing mechanical work on lawnmowers, so Chelsea brought him with her to purchase one. She shared, "The salesman wouldn't even talk to me, he would only talk to my friend's dad. So, I said forget it...I bought one at a totally different place because I didn't want to put up with it." The salesmen not trusting Chelsea's knowledge to buy a lawnmower reflects experiences of female funeral directors in Pruitt's (2017) study. Many female funeral directors experienced sexism when making retrievals of deceased clients from their homes, they would often get questions addressing how they would carry a body out due to females perceived lack of strength.

The third lens used to analyze if women are a muted group in agriculture was confronting sexism. Nine of the 12 participants reported actively confronting sexism through confronting sexism jokes, and women banding together via organizations and conferences. Four of nine women shared that they actively confront sexist jokes when they hear them. Beth commented on men's surprise when she confronted their jokes. Beth stated, "It's like they are thinking, 'weird I don't know how to handle this.' Kind of like, 'oh, she doesn't want to joke about boobs, because she has boobs.'" An additional example Beth gave concerning women confronting sexist jokes took place at an agricultural conference where the speaker expressed a wife-related joke and no one in the audience laughed because many of the audience members were wives. The speaker at Beth's conference may have felt it was 'ok' to make wife-related jokes because traditionally, men in agriculture are labeled by their relation to work and connection to

land, whereas women have been identified to the farm by their marital status, their children, and their work as a homemaker (Sachs, 1996).

Five of the nine women described how women band together in the agricultural industry to induce social change. Kramarae (1981) stated that females could change what is socially dominant when they refuse to conform to social organizations set by dominant modes of expression. Chelsea and Brittany offered specific examples during their interviews, mainly highlighting recent women in agriculture-related conferences. Chelsea stated, "I think there has been a more unified effort to get the word out that we're not going anywhere, and we might know things, too." As previously mentioned, Annie's Project, which is an initiative funded through the United States Department of Agriculture, offers proof that women's united efforts have helped change social norms of sexism within the agricultural industry. Annie's Project was established in 2002 through grant funding to empower farm women to be better business partners (Eggers, 2007). Brittany also felt that women's unified efforts are supportive towards an opportunity for social change in the agricultural industry; however, she made a point to acknowledge women that have come before her as well. She stated, "I really think it's just a lot of farm and ranch women that have come before us...Men know that we can handle it because they've watched their moms, wives, and kids do it." Brittany's perception of females in agriculture that came before her reflects Shortall's (1992) and Zimmerman & Olaf's (2010) claims that women have been an essential part of agriculture for decades even though their hard work is often overlooked.

The final lens I used to analyze data for research question two was women doing masculine tasks and using masculine communication styles. Ten out of the 12

participants shared that they often use a masculine communication styles—sometimes habitually, other times strategically. These women report that their communication styles are often habitually masculine due to their farm-based upbringing and attraction to the agricultural industry. They further report that choosing masculine communication styles is often necessary to appear assertive and, hence, to garner respect from their male coworkers and clients. These 10 participants reported growing up in agriculture and claimed that the decision to work in the industry was second-nature to them. Amber, specifically, shared that she grew up on a fourth-generation ranch and there was no question whether the ranch would be her future. She simply got a degree because her parents asked her to go to school. Courtney also felt there was no other avenue to chase her passions as she grew up raising Charolais cattle and row crops. Amber and Courtney's felt need to stay in agriculture could reflect their family structure as Leckie (1996) states, "what girls learn about farming itself depends on a combination of factors, ranging from family structure, socio-economic circumstances, personal interest, and participation opportunities" (p. 310).

Although many of the women reported pursuing occupations in agriculture as second nature, four of the 10 interviewees felt that they must use masculine communication to be effectively assertive in the workplace for male co-workers and clients to take them seriously. When asked why the women felt they needed to be assertive, Carmen reported that the communication style was necessary to fit in. Additionally, she felt that even though she didn't want to speak using masculine communication styles all the time, it was necessary to ensure her male counterparts would hear her when she speaks. She stated, "As soon as you're kind of vocal and blunt,

they're like, 'oh, yeah, what did you say?'" Even though not all women necessarily want to speak in a masculine tone, scholars assert that our world—dominated by masculine communication styles---often forces women into speaking in this manner (Kramarae, 1981). Women deciding to be in agriculture from the time they are born could fit in dual categories. Confronting sexism and using masculine communication styles may both be a fit for this concept due to women taking on business roles in agriculture, yet also having to alter their communication styles to stay relevant in the workplace.

Amber and Courtney's experience using masculine communication with customers strengthened Wall & Gannon-Leary's (1999) claim that women must become bilingual in both feminine and masculine communication styles in order to be successful. Women in agriculture needing to be bilingual and use masculine communication styles within the workplace solidifies the suggestion that they are a muted group. Women must alter their perceived preference of feminine communication style in order to gain respect and trust with customers. When women do not alter their communication style, they may be subject to a lack of success in the workplace which, in turn, may affect their pay.

### **Implications**

Practical implications of this study can benefit women in agriculture. This study has displayed current communication issues, stigmas, and underlying causes of the use of masculine communication styles in the agricultural industry. Information garnered from this study may aid women entering professional careers in agriculture by offering a clear perspective of what current issues women face during daily communication.

Additionally, as many female agriculturalist organizations are growing, this study may offer solid content for a workshop revolving around workplace communication and how

to combat social norms in a unified effort. Finally, the research found in this study may offer human resources representatives' material to incorporate into yearly workplace training or for incoming employees. This training could benefit both men and women as the material can inform the employees of historical communication issues in the workplace. This information may serve employers as employee satisfaction and retention may increase for entry level positions, as well as aid understanding for both men and women in managerial positions.

Theoretical implications of this study may benefit literature surrounding muted group theory and the narrative paradigm. When researching for literature surrounding agriculture through the lens of muted group theory and the narrative paradigm, there was a lack of materials offered. Perhaps through this study, scholars may notice an academic research gap when it comes to the people of rural America as the narrative paradigm, and muted group theory are evolving in this era of technology and computer-mediated communication. Additionally, rural sociology researchers may benefit from participants' narratives and discover a new avenue to pursue a study.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

In order to strengthen the findings and implications for this study, interviewees were within a limited range of age, ethnicity, and region. Future research could explore a broader variety of women's experiences. The qualitative nature of the methods made a large sample unfeasible, however, future small-scale studies could sample from other ages, ethnicities, and regions of the country. Accessing participants from a different part of the country may have yielded different responses to interview questions. For example, women in agriculture in New Mexico or Arizona may communicate differently women

from the upper Midwest. Additionally, recruiting women for a large-scale study that has a variety of ages, ethnicities, and regions of the country may induce different findings in a similar study. Using a larger sample of women perhaps in a quantitative research survey may offer opportunity to ask more questions or have more specific research questions answered. Despite women's agreement to participate in the interviews and being assured of confidentiality, an additional limitation may have arisen due to the non-anonymity of the interview process. Within interviews, women may have felt nervous to share information that they may have disclosed behind an anonymous survey. Furthermore, this study was only conducted with women in communication-related occupations in agriculture. Future studies may investigate the communication styles of women who are strictly farmers or ranchers for their occupation. Additionally, a future study may benefit from testing women for the imposter phenomenon prior to conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews to gauge women's confidence in order to set up a fitting interview protocol with prospective participants.

Due to this study hosting a small sample size, an inability to generalize presents itself. Therefore, this study is purely a descriptive study which describes experiences of 12 women from the upper-Midwest. In the future, if women from multiple regions across the United States were either polled or interviewed, a more general understanding may be concluded of the experience of communicating as a woman in agriculture.

## **Conclusion**

This study sought to understand how women in agriculture describe their workplace communication and if they felt they are part of a muted group. Participants revealed their experiences with gender essentialism, experiencing sexism, confronting sexism, performing masculine tasks and communicating using masculine styles. Growing up in agriculture and working in agriculture has been influential in how participants communicate with male coworkers and clients. Future research can focus on a more diverse sample and understand further barriers and solutions that may be impactful for women in agriculture. Through this research, human resources representatives and agricultural employers can be better equipped to provide important training on workplace communication in the field of agriculture.



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**APPENDICIES**

## Appendix A

## CONSENT FORM

Participant Consent Form  
 Participation in a Research Project  
 South Dakota State University  
 Brookings, SD 57007

Department of Communication Studies

Project Director Shala Larson Phone No. (605) 265-0532

E-mail shala.larson@sdstate.edu Date 11/20/2018

***Please read the following information:***

1. This an invitation for you to participate in a research project under the direction of the Communications Studies Department at South Dakota State University.
2. The project is entitled "Undoing Gender: An Analysis of How Women Communicate Within Agriculture".
3. The purpose of the project is to 1. Investigate the narrative of women who work within the agricultural industry. 2. Investigate their perception of communication when working with their male co-workers.
4. Your participation in this interview will imply your consent. If you consent to participate, you will be involved in an audio-recorded, semi-structured interview, which will take about 45 minutes of your time.
5. Participation in this project is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. If you have any questions, you may contact the project director at the number listed above.
6. There are no known risks to your participation in the study.
7. There are no known direct benefits of this study.
8. There no compensation for your participation in this study.
9. Your responses are strictly confidential. When the data and analysis are presented, you will not be linked to the data by your name, title or any other identifying item. The audio-

recording will be stored securely in a password-protected file, and will be destroyed at the end of the thesis term, by April 1, 2019.

10. As a research participant, I have read the above and have had any questions answered.

I will receive a copy of this information sheet to keep.

If you have any questions regarding this study you may contact the Project Director. If

you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, you can contact the SDSU

Research Compliance Coordinator at (605) 688-6975 or [SDSU.IRB@sdstate.edu](mailto:SDSU.IRB@sdstate.edu).

As a research participant, I have read the above, have had any questions answered, and agree to participate in the research project. I will receive a copy of this form for my information.

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Project Director's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me about your decision to work in the agricultural field.
2. Tell me about your experience as a woman in agriculture.
3. The number of women in agriculture has been increasing. How do you feel the industry has adapted to this change?
4. Do you feel valued in your position as a woman in agriculture?
  - 4a. If not, is there a specific experience that made you feel this way?
  - 4b. Do you feel you comfortable communicating with male co-workers?
5. How do men and women communicate with each other within your workplace?
6. Do you ever feel you need to change your communication styles to match your male co-workers or clients?
  - 6a. If so, how would you say you change your communication styles?
  - 6b. If so, why do you think you change your communication style while at work?
7. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your experiences as a female in the agricultural industry?

## Appendix C

## TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW

Interviewer: “Before we begin (Interviewee) can I just have some quick verbal consent you know if you’re okay with me recording you for the interview and then just happy to interview and stuff like that.”

Interviewee: “Yes you’re fine to record, and I’m happy to interview.”

Interviewer: “Alright perfect. Well, we will go ahead and get started. My first question’s pretty broad; it’s just tell me a little bit about your decision to work in the agricultural field.”

Interviewee: “Well I kind of grew up. I grew up in Michigan so farming was what my dad and I did on the side and grew up showing livestock so I didn’t really have a quote on quote calling when I went to school so I went to college for ag business ag economics and just started doing classes and realized that wasn’t really what I was interested in and decided on having some stuff for agronomy and then just kind of liked where it was headed, and I fell into the career I guess always kind of knew that I liked working with ag and didn’t really know what I wanted to do long term until it fell in my lap.”

Interviewer: “So are you an agronomist right now?”

Interviewee: “Yeah I work for (blank) as a seed rep so not quite an agronomist, but I guess I get to dabble in it now and then.

Interviewer: “Alright perfect yeah absolutely so my second question here is tell me about your experience as a woman in agriculture.”

Interviewee: “I would say it’s been up and down as an intern in the industry what six or seven years ago now starting out it was a little rough there was definitely some farmers

that weren't interested in me on the farm which I kind of understood and it was still kind of a new concept back then. Now days I feel like it's more easy and not too many challenges I don't know other than I feel like they try to stop me they try to challenge me sometimes when they think that I don't know what's going on but once you kind of get through that hurdle it's like okay all is well they're going to treat me the same but in general I would say it's not any different than my coworkers, but I guess I don't let it affect me either at the same time if that's not something they want to deal with I just call somebody else."

Interviewer: "Yeah would you say you just kind of build rapport with those producers over time and that's why they're not really challenging you any more or."

Interviewee: "That and I feel its age and obviously as an intern you're temporary you're younger that's obviously a little bit more of a challenge to overcome versus somebody whose there short-term and then yeah long term I mean they're used to seeing me they're hearing from me quite often."

Interviewer: "Yeah absolutely I would totally agree with that, so my next question is obviously you know that the number of women in agriculture has been increasing how do you feel the industry has adapted to that change."

Interviewee: "This one stumped me so I think it's just the norm of an adjustment I mean I think all careers are changing who you're seeing and so I feel like it's just inevitable that change happens, and so it's slowly changing and they just slowly adapt as an industry to see that and I also think that as women we are becoming not scared for management roles which has obviously opened the doors for incoming women to say okay if they can get all the way there we can start here type thing"

Interviewer: “Yeah absolutely I totally agree with you on that. Do you feel valued in your position as a woman in agriculture?”

Interviewee: “Sometimes. Sometimes it’s a challenge, and I feel like it depends on who I’m around, so teammates and producers absolutely feel valued in what I do I bring a lot to the table for them they obviously bring me to the issues that they need help with they know my strengths and weaknesses so we kind of do that together and work through stuff I would say from a management standpoint sometimes it’s a struggle whereas they’re not sure that I am doing things correctly or they’re not sure that the way I’m going about it is something they agree with and so it’s more of a tiptoeing factor of who I’m around who I’m with is how I feel”

Interviewer: “Yeah is there a specific experience that made you feel that way?”

Interviewee: “I would say it’s just coming through different managers so when I first started in my job I would say it was really rocky I was young and was very confident with what I could bring, and so that was more of a personality clash and then as I got to my second manager it was like great everything was fine he understood what I brought to the table I didn’t ever feel like he was micromanaging me I guess if you want to call it he just trusted that I got the job done just like male employees did and the one I’m at now I feel like I’m in between the two and I just feel like some of the things he says or some of the things he asks me to do verses the teammates like well why do I have to do that they’re just as capable or I don’t want to do that because it’s challenging you know it’s little things where it kind of goes back to old times women should be in the kitchen type mindset I feel like that’s kind of you should find the medium because you’re a girl and you’re organized”



Interviewer: “Yeah I see that a lot whereas they just automatically assume the women are the more organized ones or they have the better handwriting to be a secretary which I think is funny because I run around like a chicken with my head cut off I never have my life together my handwriting looks like a four-year-olds that you know been coloring all day I have awful handwriting, so I think it’s funny that they kind of put us in that little bubble”

Interviewee: “yeah and it’s not all the time, but it’s when they do it it’s seriously to the point where I’m just frustrated because it’s so obvious you shouldn’t be doing that, but they just assume.”

Interviewer: “Yeah absolutely do you feel comfortable communicating with your male coworkers or clients?”

Interviewee: “yeah yep not a problem anymore I mean I would say so I started back up in South Dakota from Kansas now going on three years here in January and I feel like every time I get to a new territory it’s the tiptoe you know kind of introduce yourself slowly and be cautious of what you say and then like you said earlier build a rapport, and it’s second hand talking to your friends and that’s where I feel like I’m at and I have no issues yeah you still fight like brother and sister just cause every team members always have an issue at some point but I mean I feel like I could call any of them and there’s no challenge or no overwhelming things we have to get over”

Interviewer: “Good I’m glad to hear that especially you know since that’s your place of work and you’re around them every day that you can be that comfortable.”

Interviewee: “yeah absolutely.”

Interviewer: “So my next question is kind of like the meat and potatoes of my study so what I’m kind of studying is you know the difference between masculine and feminine communication so one thing that I want to clarify is that you know both men and women can speak in both ways it’s not really designated to a certain gender both genders can speak in that way so you know feminine communication is more so trying to relate to one another you’re more so of a listener you try to make connections in relationships so for an example you could be like you know I really like black angus cattle, and I would say you know I really like that too actually I grew up on a farm that raised that right so you’re trying to make a connection and build relationships and masculine communication styles is more so is that communication style is a little more gruff it more so just wants to hurry up and fix a problem just give advice a little more rough around the edges so with that being said you know how do men and women communicate with each other within your work place”

Interviewee: “I would say we’re all very masculine to an extent where within our team we’re masculine but when we go to our customer level when there are dealers selling the seed or the farmers that we work with that’s where we tend to tap into the feminine, but at the end of the day I would say we’re constantly 90% masculine and how we just have to be at the firm level cause otherwise we just get walked all over”

Interviewer: “Yeah that’s interesting has there ever been an instance where someone got walked all over because they were speaking more femininely?”

Interviewee: “I would say for me that it was easy to be walked all over when I was trying to be the feminine communicator just because I was a girl and so they took it as okay she’s weak she’s still new she doesn’t get it let’s just be critical and an a-hole to her and

see if we can get something out of it and so that's just where I just changed my tone right away and that's just when I get straight to the point and have the masculine style of communication and it does feel like that's just what they're used to as a farmer you know they're go go go you have to give me the answer I have to go to my next stop and so when they're not having that that's when they get an open mind of oh what else can we get out of them you know"

Interviewer: "Yeah absolutely and I mean you basically already answered my next question where I was gonna ask do you feel you ever need to change that communication style to match your coworkers or clients where obviously you already touched on where you have to do if you wanna gain that rapport and respect so with that being said why do you think that you know that you would have to change that communication style at work why do you feel that some women feel the need to do that"

Interviewee: "Other than just fitting in I feel it's honestly I feel it's more of a fitting in thing to be honest I mean it's tough because I don't want to talk like that all the time but sometimes it's like they don't hear you if you talk in a normal human voice as I like to refer to it as I mean if you're just the quiet little one in the room you know nobody ever hears you but as soon as you're kind of vocal and blunt and to the point they're like oh yeah what did you say okay so that how I view it as more of fitting in thing but as far as the farm gate market I have to change just depending on who I'm talking to I mean I go prepared both ways just because the guy could be worst day of his life mentality where he just needs you to get to the point and give him an answer and leave and the next guy he wants to talk about how many kids and dogs you have and where you grew up and make that connection"

Interviewer: “yeah absolutely I had one woman say that older generations tend to ask her more about her family first and younger generations don’t has that happened to you at all?”

Interviewee: “Absolutely that is a really good call out definitely.”

Interviewer: “I just I found that very interesting cause I almost wondered you know if an older generation just assumed you were a homemaker cause that’s how it was for them that maybe that’s how they felt they could make a connection with you best because you’re a woman I’m not sure.”

Interviewee: “That and I feel like it’s just a generation of caring you know the chivalrous attitude I mean I feel like they like the connection and they don’t like quote on quote masculine communication, but they just like to know you’re also a human and that you have a life other than what you do every day you could come with a bad day and they need to be able to adjust to that too”

Interviewer: “Yeah absolutely! What about female producers? So when you go out and talk to male producers you talked about how you know you might change that communication style< have you ever, you know, had an instance where you go out and your selling to a female producer.”

Interviewee: “So for me I find the female contributors more difficult than the male contributors when I go to the farm, and that is mainly because they write the checks they’re in charge of the finances and when something goes wrong, and the finances are messed up they’re pretty sassy ladies, and it’s very difficult to talk them off a cliff they’re just give me your answer what are you going to do to fix it okay get on with your day thanks for coming”

Interviewer: “Yeah so it’s almost they’re talking in a masculine tone.”

Interviewee: “Yeah I’ve had two very strong interactions with women and the first one thought that I was one of the managers of one of my co-ops, and she just went off the rails on me and I was like oh well I didn’t have a chance to introduce myself I work for the seed company that why we’re out here and then she again went off the rails, and I was just like okay”

Interviewer: “Did she think you were trying to pull wool over her eyes or why do you think she went off the rails?”

Interviewee: “Well so they had a salesman that quit but that salesperson went around and told all the customers that he was fired by my co-op, so I came out there about two weeks after to touch base and make sure that they didn’t need anything after his transition and she thought I was coming out as part of this co-op and I represent it and she said you need to quit firing all your good workers and all this and all that and I was just like I have no idea what is happening right now”

Interviewer: “Yeah I mean that’s crazy I think sometimes honestly it’s generational too you know I’ve spoken with baby boomers and sometimes I’m trying to explain something, and I can just watch their ears turn off and their not really listening to my explanation it’s just very much so stuck in their mind its interesting every generation has their different you know quirks to it the baby boomers work really hard but they’re not very great listeners, and they’re not super patient is what I’ve found and its interesting”

Interviewee: “Yeah I’m super intrigued by your study and to like know how everything comes out.”

Interviewer: “Oh yeah absolutely when I’m done I will most certainly send you what I found so my last question is super broad and you can take it as far as you want it to be you know is there anything else in general that you would like to share as your experience as a female in the ag industry you know whether that be a story that sticks out in your mind or a certain experience that you had”

Interviewee: “So I would say that in general my experience is no different than I think anybody would have in their job no matter what they do good people bad people bad communicators whatever you want to call it like the one thing that sticks out to me still to this day is so true if you’re from South Dakota you’ll understand the hutterite colonies and they just crack me up because they are so different depending on where you go but I was at a showcase site one day and they were coming through for private tours and my boss grabs me and goes okay were done for right now we need to go grab everybody sandwiches and I was like what I am not a sandwich runner long story short there was this very important hutterite colony coming to the tour and they will not listen or deal with any female because we should be in the kitchen, so we had to get in and out of there before they even saw that we were there on behalf of the seed company that I was working for at the time and it just still sticks with me because now that I am with my current company I have several of them I am always super cautious like can I go is there going to be an issue I refrain from meal times because I know it’s very important so I go midmorning or midafternoon for meetings unless I can get them offsite because this girl that I replaced she went to a noon meeting at the colony and they put her in the corner of the lunchroom and she couldn’t get her phone out obviously and she had to sit there until

everybody was done eating and so that has stuck with me all through my career like the intern at the showcase site to starting up here in South Dakota don't go over lunch hour"

Interviewer: "Gosh I didn't even think about you know the Hutterite colony aspect of it that's crazy."

Interviewee: "yeah so I don't know if you have anybody that you still have to interview that interacts with somebody like that. That's the only group that I am super cautious with as far as I know I'm a female like I do the same thing as my male coworker, but that's just something I might have to send my agronomist to instead of me but like I ask a million questions when it comes to Hutterite colonies and they stare at me like why are you asking all of these questions you never ask all these questions about another customer before it's because I'm trying to sort through how to navigate it"

Interviewer: "Yeah I mean that's wild I feel like you could do a whole study on you know Hutterite culture, in general, that's wild wow that's crazy, and you know she had to sit in a corner of the room so all the men could eat?"

Interviewee: "Yeah so I kind of learned all about it from this story so the Hutterite colonies to my understanding they so the men eat first and the women serve them and then when the men are done eating they go get the meals for the kids and they help the kids eat and while that's happening then the women hurry up and eat and so that whole time since she's not a part of the colony, so she's just sitting there in the corner during this whole hour two hour however long it takes to get done"

Interviewer: "Oh wow that's crazy yeah you're the first one that's ever brought up the Hutterite colony that is so wild oh my gosh.."

Interviewee: "I have never other than the intern up until then that was obviously my first experience with Hutterites because I was from Michigan and people here at school I would be like what are you talking about what's a Hutterite I learned really quickly what they were and how they were as far as their colonies and then to where I'm at now in my career it just more of a question and answer type of situation I have never had any of my major Hutterite colonies herd me away or frown me"

Interviewer: "That's crazy well where do you live in South Dakota now?"

Interviewee: "I live in Arora just outside of Brookings."

Interviewer: "Okay just outside of Brookings I was wondering because when you called, it was registered as a Brookings number."

Interviewee: "yes yep."

Interviewer: "Interesting oh my goodness."

Interviewee: "yep so I cover so my territory I don't quote on quote live in my territory so I cover Watertown to Clark and then south to Howard and then I zig-zag back in an angle through there, so I collect some stuff in the middle but I don't cover anything east of Volga or South of Volga that type of area"

Interviewer: "Where are the Hutterite colonies by Clark that you visited?"

Interviewee: "that was the one that my old teammate went to."

Interviewer: "Yep I've been to that colony that's crazy."

Interviewee: "yeah that's the one that she got put in the corner, and I don't know if it was Clark county or if it was silver lake, but I want to say it was silver lake."



Interviewer: “Wow that’s insane that’s really interesting information though I’m glad you told me about that is there anything else that you would like to share with you experience as”

Interviewee: “Nope thanks though I mean like I said earlier I really have had fairly positive I mean short side of some personality clashes management clashes that type of thing but I mean it’s pretty standard as far as I view the woman verse man communication I don’t try to let it bother me because some of these classes that I have to go to for work as a woman they really promote this type of stuff, and I just don’t like the rah rah like the women don’t want to be segregated they wanted to be viewed as they are professionals”

Interviewer: “Yes like not even have to do the separate rah rah thing like it’s just a normal standard.”

Interviewee: “Yeah and for the most part I feel like that in my position I don’t feel like it’s a big challenge to overcome it’s just certain things with the Hutterite groups, or I get told to take notes during the meeting.”

Interviewer: “Oh yeah that would bother me too the whole note taking thing cause again just because I am a female again I’m probably going to lose those note five minutes after the meeting and half of you aren’t going to be able to read them but they just assume because you know I’ve been in those positions too cause you know even in school when you’re in a group like for a class and it’s all boys and me they’re like okay you take the notes I mean it’s everywhere probably some other guy in the group has ten times better handwriting than me and is going to be able to organize it better you know I mean I lose my phone six times a day you know”

Interviewee: "Yeah I hear ya."

Interviewer: "That's too funny well perfect I want to thank you so much Interviewee for your time today I know you're probably busy now that it's snowing and stuff but you've given me such good information, and I'm excited to get it transcribed, and when I have everything analyzed after I interview about twelve to fourteen women I will most certainly send you the results I have"

Interviewee: "Okay great yeah let me know if you think of any other questions you want some insight on. I am happy to help."

Interviewer: "Awesome well thank you so much and you have a great evening. I really really appreciate it alright. I will talk to you soon."

Interviewee: "Yep buh bye."