The *Farm Journal's* Discourse of Farm Women's Femininity

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SUMMARY *During the 1950s, U.S. farm women's normative roles and self-identities changed from that of hard working, petty-commodity-producing "housekeepers" to that of unproductive, consuming "homemakers." This article analyzes the way the Farm Journal constructed and promoted new roles for farm women at a time when farm families were negotiating the radical disruptions of farm and rural community after World War II—constructions that contributed to a hegemonic consensus that systematically excluded and rendered invisible large portions of farm women's daily lives.*

A number of studies have documented how farm women's normative roles and self-identities changed significantly in the 1950s from the role of "housekeeper" to that of "homemaker" (Adams 1993, 1994; Fink 1986; Jellison 1993). The reconfiguration of farm women's normative roles was part of a larger process of nationally promoted "modernization," carried out through a variety of economic, political, and cultural institutions, with varying degrees of participation by and with the consent of the women and men affected. One of the most striking things, looking back from the vantage of the 21st century, is the near absence of opposition to the profound changes that occurred in farming and rural communities. Farm operations and families underwent what appears to have been sustained crisis, yet little organized resistance developed. I am particularly struck by the narrow range of alternative thinking by farmers and other rural residents.[1]

It is as if the universe of possibility narrowed, and people were propelled at breakneck speed through a landscape they could not recognize as humanly created or capable of being other than it was. As one man I interviewed about the period said, "After you saw it, you knew you'd seen it coming" (interview with author, March 17, 1984).

This article examines the part played by the *Farm Journal* in this process of making the world appear "normal." I examine the way it constructed and promoted new roles for farm women at a time when farm families were negotiating the radical disruptions of farm and rural community life in the decade following the end of World War II. I particularly look at the ways advertisers and columnists played on themes that were widely current but not necessarily mutually compatible—themes based on patriarchal and urban "Progressive" agrarianisms, urban femininity (the "feminine mystique"), and conservative nationalism—in order to promote their products and policies. They were themes that created a rhetorical consensus that systematically excluded and rendered invisible large portions

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of farm women's daily lives. I argue that the *Farm Journal*, as a leading farm magazine, contributed to a public view of farm women and rural life that precluded significant alternatives to the processes of "modernization" which, in the post–World War II period, were fundamentally transforming rural life.

Post-War Restructuring of Farm Life

The post–World War II period, generally glossed as "the fifties," was a crucial period in reconfiguring farm life, including gender relations and identities.[2] Between the end of World War II in 1945 and the 1960 Census of Agriculture, U.S. farming underwent a widely noted and well-documented "transition"—from production heavily reliant on human and animal labor to production that relied on industrial, electrical, chemical, and biological technologies. As a consequence (in the absence of countervailing government policies) the number of farms fell precipitously, the number of farm workers fell even more dramatically, and, concomitantly, the rural farm population plummeted. A body of statistics exposes the scale of these changes in a definitive, if somewhat mind-numbing, manner: the number of male agricultural laborers declined by 17 percent between 1920 and 1940; in the next two decades it dropped by 53 percent (Cochrane 1979:332). This drop in labor requirements was accomplished by vastly increased labor productivity: Output per worker increased 38 percent between 1940 and 1950, and by a whopping 68 percent the following decade (and an even greater 86 percent between 1960 and 1970, after which the rate of increase fell sharply) (Cochrane 1979:340). This sharp increase in productivity stimulated a comparable drop in the number of U.S. farms and of the rural population. The number of farms fell from 5,967,000 in 1945 to 3,963,000 in 1960, a decrease of 34 percent, while the rural farm population fell from 24,420,000 in 1945 to 15,635,000 in 1960, or by 36 percent. Farming had long since ceased to be the occupation of a majority of Americans, but this period signaled the almost total eclipse of a large block of American life. Between 1945 and 1960, the proportion of farmers in the total population fell from 17.5 to 8.7 percent (Fite 1981:101).

During this same 15-year period, farm family income also declined both absolutely and in relation to income of nonfarm families. In relative terms, in 1945 the family income of farmers was 58.1 percent of the family income of nonfarmers. This figure decreased to a low of 47.7 percent in 1956, though it rebounded somewhat in 1960 to 53.8 percent. This reflected a nearly flat per capita disposable income by farm families between 1945 and 1956, even when all sources of income were included (Fite 1981:101). Total farm income fell precipitously. The Committee for Economic Development (CED) reported "the *net income of farm operators from farming* declined by 34 percent from the peak in 1948 through 1956, falling from $17,695,000,000 to $11,000,000,000" (1957:13–14). It continued, "However, because there are fewer farmers now, and because of a rise in income from non-farm sources, the decline in *income per capita of the farm population* (includes non-farm income) from 1948 through 1956 was only 6 percent (from $958 to $902)" (1957:13–14).

Increased labor productivity was enabled by vastly increased applications of technologies produced off the farm. According to Cochrane's index of farm inputs (1967 = 100), total purchased inputs increased from 62 in 1945 to 86 in 1960: mechanical power and machinery increased from 58 to 98; agricultural chemicals from 20 to 49; and feed, seed, and livestock purchases from 54 to 84. Reciprocally, nonpurchased inputs fell from 161 to 119 and farm labor fell from 271 to 145 during the same 15 years (1979:130–131).[3]

Those gross statistics and indices point in only the most general way to the profound social transformation that occurred in that period.[4] They only hint at the manner the institutions through which people organized their lives were radically restructured. These changes went under the rubric of "modernization," a theory of social change that identified a number of value-laden sociological "pattern variables" (Parsons 1950) with technological "progress," in a theory of unilineal evolutionary progression that had deep roots in the nineteenth century (Danbom 1979; Elbert 1988). This theory of modernization portrayed agriculture as lagging and backward and as a drag on the forward march of civilization. Concretely, this could be expressed in terms of dangers to national unity and democracy posed by wide variances in social patterns among different groups (e.g., Bertrand and Associates 1958:8–89) and, in a time when Keynesian economic theories dominated, in terms of the weak buying power of farming populations (CED 1945:5–6). In this outlook, social scientists perceived "rural culture" as a relatively static "folk culture" and contrasted it with "highly dynamic urban-industrial civilization" (Landis 1948:3–4).[5]

Women are strikingly absent from most sociological and policy-oriented writings on rural life during this period, except insofar as they appear in statistics regarding fertility, sex ratios, and migration (e.g., Bertrand and Associates 1958). These statistics regarding gender appear descriptively, with little analysis.[6] Women were more visible in the agricultural press, although the nature of their visibility changed significantly during the post–World War II period, moving more closely in line with dominant national discourses that counterposed "work" and "home" and that defined "work" as masculine, concerned with production, and "home" as feminine, concerned with consumption.

Similarly, distinctions between Americans as members of ethnic or racial groups, or as having different interests because of tenure or scale of operation, were virtually invisible in farm-oriented media. In almost all *Farm Journal* articles and advertisements, the normative farm family was relatively prosperous, white, nuclear, male headed, and church going. Men appear as primarily concerned with increasingly specialized production agriculture and women with homemaking centered on raising moral, productive children, although husbands and wives were frequently shown as cooperating in some farm enterprises, such as poultry or direct sales, and in creating a positive family life. The communities in which they lived were only featured glancingly, and variations in community structure were never noted.

The national discourses that prevailed in academic and policy-making circles rendered invisible large portions of rural life and the changes it was undergoing. They provided no intellectual tools with which to critique the direction of change and to formulate oppositional strategies. While they purported to be "value-free" and "scientific," they in fact played an enormously repressive role in constructing what French ethnographer Pierre Bourdieu calls the "universe of the undiscussed" (1977:168–169), rendering vast areas of experience private, outside the realm of public discussion and critical thinking.[7]

Theoretical Premises

A considerable historiography has analyzed the nature of the changes that occurred in rural American life, broadly sketched above. What is less clear is *why* those changes occurred as they did. Viewed in a comparative light, we know that—while the trends seen in the United States also occurred in comparable political economies in Europe and Japan—farming and rural life, including gender roles, underwent a far more radical transformation in the United States. Yet to

those who lived through that transformation, the changes generally appeared inevitable. Most people fully accepted the legitimacy of the processes that occurred and, whether or not they were personally gratified by the transformations, they envisioned no possible alternatives.

If an existing order is perceived to be "legitimate," it will not be challenged by those who live their lives within its norms. Social analysts have discerned a range of events that cause what some term "legitimation crises." These events call into question core aspects of the existing order. However, despite the fact that agriculture and rural communities were "objectively" in crisis during the post–World War II decades, and that this crisis extended into the intimacy of farm households, no group stepped forward to propose a significant alternative. This presents both a theoretical and interpretive problem for understanding **[QA1]** people's actions in history. (1977:168) provides some conceptual tools to aid our understanding. He describes the universe of the undiscussed and undisputed, what he terms "doxic relations." Doxic relations, he argues, are "the absolute form of recognition of legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness, since it is unaware of the very question of legitimacy, which arises from competition for legitimacy, and hence from conflict between groups claiming to possess it." This is the aspect of culture that is "second nature," that is, the ways that we behave and think that appear wholly "natural," self-evident, and necessary, despite their cultural specificity.

This then, is the main problem motivating this paper: how did this misrecognition of the arbitrariness of social policies come about? How did a particular perspective, so weakly linked to people's experiences, come to represent them, both to themselves (with greater and lesser degrees of acceptance) and to policymakers and the nation at large?

The experience that the dominant course of history was "inevitable"—that a beneficent (if occasionally painful) "progress" and "modernization" corresponded seamlessly with the changes people experienced in their daily lives—appears "over-determined" in the sense proposed by Louis Althusser (1962). That is, no single factor consolidated the hegemony and power of this ruling theory of social change; rather, multiple determinants, corresponding to multiple interests and historical trajectories, conjoined to install its authority, to render it popular "common sense" (Gramsci 1971), largely unassailable either by direct experience or rational argumentation.

The most important of these determinants, I suggest, were preexisting gender and age relations; preexisting relations through which production was effected, including kin, wage, and in the South and Southwest, race relations; and the post–World War II social movement that promoted nationalistic anticommunism, highly marked gender roles (the "feminine mystique"), and mass consumerism. The various mass media welded these disparate and often conflicting elements into a discourse that, while never unchallenged, maintained its hegemony until the mass movements of the 1960s.

The concept of a "social movement" to characterize the ethos of the postwar period must be used with caution: the social phenomenon I point to did not involve the mass public mobilizations ordinarily associated with social movements. However, it was a mass shift in popular sensibility that, although largely organized by elite interests, arose from "the grassroots." For this reason I refer to it as a "social movement."[8]

The various mass media welded these disparate and often conflicting elements into a discourse that, while never unchallenged, maintained its hegemony until the mass movements of the 1960s. I suggest that during periods of extremely rapid change and mobility people grant greater power to authoritative

representations of reality than they do when networks of informal and localized communication can make adequate sense of the world. If those representations draw on tropes that the audience finds familiar and positive, and if the direction of change seems largely beneficial, those who pose radical alternatives to the direction of change will have little purchase on the popular imagination. In the case of farmers, no radical alternative emerged in the twentieth century to challenge "business farming." The last of the battles between "agrarians" and "business farmers" occurred during the New Deal, and then only in a muffled and confused manner.[9] The evidence I assemble in this article does not allow me to argue that a direct causal relationship exists between the *Farm Journal*'s more-or-less self-conscious efforts to set public agendas, frame the public discourse, and influence farmers' behavior, and the actual practices of farm families and farm women. The historiography of the period does, however, indicate that farm women did indeed shift their identities and their actions in the directions articulated by the *Farm Journal* and most other mass media of that period.

The *Farm Journal*'s Changing Representation of Women

When I began this project, I expected to see a gradual development of new norms through the post–World War II period, and as I excerpted the *Farm Journal* (approx. 250–300 pages per year, beginning with 1946 through 1958), the articles did present something of a "filmstrip"—like those flip booklets children make to create animated images. Women became more shapely and fashion conscious; farm homes were remodeled and fitted with all the most up-to-date modern furniture and equipment; teenagers developed lives centered around consolidated schools, autos, and TV, requiring profound rethinking of parenting roles; farming encountered economic crisis, became more specialized; and farm organizations proliferated.[10] However, closer examination of the magazine's contents indicated that the immediate postwar period was crucial in determining the shape of the period we now know as "the fifties." During this brief period various fundamentally different options appeared on the table; by the early fifties the table had been substantially cleared of options. It is this period I focus on here. The data come from detailed analysis of selected articles and advertisements, largely concerning women, in the *Farm Journal* for the years 1945, 1947, and 1948, and from a tabulation of articles about women for 1952 and 1956 (both election years), as well as a general survey undertaken while excerpting the magazine.[11]

As soon as I began excerpting articles for the 1940s, I saw that the "feminine mystique" was only one trope among many, in a highly charged and energetic discourse on gender roles and the role of the citizen. In this article I focus particularly on how the *Farm Journal* represented women as political actors, as people to be mobilized for the consolidation of "free enterprise," and as income-earners. Along the way I begin an examination of the fundamentally different tropes through which masculinity and femininity were constructed, tropes that predated the period being studied, and that served as part of the "common sense" through which new roles became defined.

Women as Political Actors

As I studied the articles I excerpted from the *Farm Journal* I was surprised to find, in the issues immediately following World War II, many articles promoting women's participation in politics. Ruth Sayre, vice president of the Associated Women of the American Farm Bureau Federation and for 10 years Iowa state chair (*Farm Journal*, January 1947:55), and Gertrude Dieken, a *Farm Journal*

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editor (www.las.iastate.edu/kiosk/1500.shtml), were two of the most prominent promoters of women's involvement in world affairs.

The period just preceding and following the end of World War II were particularly crucial in establishing the new world order. As the Big Three negotiated the terms of their alliance against the Axis powers, other forces met to plan the future. These were often highly visible planning exercises (e.g., see A&P advertisement, CED 1945, 1956, 1957, and 1962) and they worked to enlist popular support for their vision. As the end of the war became visible in 1945, the Allies began building international institutions with which to govern world affairs, forming the United Nations and, at Bretton Woods, establishing the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Despite considerable divisions and confusions, powerful actors mobilized virtually all sectors of American society toward the task of consolidating U.S. hegemony and rebuilding Europe. In the process, a wide variety of international organizations was created or enlisted. Among these were an international organization, the Associated Country Women of the World of which Ruth Sayre was president in 1947, and the U.S. Extension Service. The core of this mobilization was in opposition to totalitarianism—during the war the totalitarianism of the fascists; after World War II, the totalitarianism of Communist Russia.

In one particularly striking issue, January 1947, two powerful spokespeople outlined the program for the postwar period: Ruth Sayre, the vice president of the Associated Women of the American Farm Bureau Federation, and W. I. Myers, Dean of Agriculture, Cornell University. Myers (*Farm Journal,* January 1947:35–36) sounded a clarion call for anticommunist internationalism: "We are now in the midst of one of the greatest ideological conflicts in recorded human history—whether government exists for the individual, or the individual for the government," he wrote "Europe's greatest fear concerning the United States is that we will become discouraged and pull out. If we do, there is nothing in sight to prevent the sweep of Communism to the English Channel" and also its takeover of China, India, and the Middle East. He finished his article,

> Whether we like it or not, we are the hope and the model of Europe, and most of the rest of the world. We have a responsibility to other nations, as well as to ourselves, to make democracy work more effectively here at home, and to develop a positive philosophy that will appeal to freedom-loving men everywhere, as they make their choice between our way of life and Communism. [1947:35–36]

Twenty pages later, in the women's section, Ruth Sayre exhorted farm women to develop their role of homemaker, rather than the technical skills of housekeeping. Women, she argued, have a crucial stabilizing task in the work of reconversion, and of facing the difficult period ahead. She played all the tropes already well honed by urban promoters of women's "separate sphere."[12] Women, according to this gendered division of social labor, are primarily responsible for morality in general, and particularly the moral character of their children and their families. In keeping with this theory of femininity, Sayre wrote (all quotes from January 1947:55):

> No matter how many housekeeping duties modern society may take out of a home, the main function of a homemaker still remains—to maintain the family; to train the character, habits, attitudes of children; to transmit culture from the past to the present generation; to teach living a good life.

According to this prescriptive femininity, civil society depends on "the homemaker's" competence in her role, since the family is the foundation of all of

society's institutions. Sayre continued:

> My greatest concern for the future lies in building a world in which families can live together in peace. I think it is the major concern of women everywhere. Here again we come back to the home for answers. Women are the most important builders of public opinion. In the family they instill attitudes of prejudice, intolerance, and selfishness—or gentleness, nobility, and faith. . . .
>
> The time is here and now for every mother in every farm home to work on attitudes of reasonableness, generosity, and tolerance, for better understanding of the families of the world. It is so clear to us now that the welfare and the peace and freedom of families all around the world is closely tied to that of our own families.

Sayre's vision of homemaking also extended women's ennobling activities directly into the larger community:

> We cannot build a wall about our own family. The community touches us in many ways. It is women's part to do in the community the kind of things they do for their own homes. Keep it clean, orderly and healthy. See that it has education and is well governed; be the guardian of its ideals. Our grandmothers may not have needed to do this. In our world we *must* do this community housekeeping.

Employing the rhetoric of urban reformers, Sayre extended women's appropriate domestic activities to community leadership:

> It is our responsibility to furnish dynamic leadership for community activities that contribute to the well-being of the home. By that I mean leaders for Sunday School and church, 4-H Club leaders, Home Demonstration Club leaders, leaders in P.T.A., farm organizations, school affairs and health programs. We must do more than just serve refreshments at school board meetings—women must serve on the school board and other policy boards. I believe we must do these things for the sake of our own home.

Dieken, the *Farm Journal* editor, was more forthright about the need for women to become informed and involved in civic affairs, including international ones. In an article headed, "How Much Do You Know about the World You Live In?" (*Farm Journal*, September 1948:111–112), she wrote,

> There was a time, and not too long ago, when home demonstration work for farm women meant, to some of us, making neater bound buttonholes or baking lighter cakes.
>
> We're still learning how to make and how to do, and that's good. But we've been lifting our eyes to things infinitely more important, too. Today, farm women in some states are making an organized and intelligent study of what is going on in the world. We have grown to feel that being informed in a broader way is part of homemaking.
>
> I've just been looking into the things farm women are doing in this whole new world-study field. It's encouraging. You seem enthusiastic about this kind of study. Why not? It *affects* us.
>
> What we and other nations do together will determine whether our sons will go to war again, or into a peace-time army ready-and-waiting. What nations buy, or don't buy, will change prices for eggs, wheat, hogs, cotton.
>
> And I think, too, that women find a lot of satisfaction in being well informed, and in taking an intelligent part in any conversation. We feel better about ourselves if we're able citizens. Besides, we want our relations with other nations to be Christian.

The language used to mobilize men and women is strikingly different: in articles aimed primarily at men (although not so marked, men being the putative universal), communism, military strategy, and a rhetoric inflamed by the clash

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of war and conflict predominate. In articles directed to women, tropes associated with peace, order, harmony, and helpfulness predominate. Both speak to the profound misery left in Europe after the war (notably, Japan is hardly mentioned), but men are expected to be moved by the threat of communism breeding in such misery, while women are expected to be moved by compassion and the desire to bind up wounds of war. This division of sentiment was stated explicitly in an article by Frances Payne Bolton, Congresswoman from Ohio. She wrote (*Farm Journal*, July 1948:63), in an article exhorting women to become politically involved,

> For instance, I am chairman of a sub-committee of the Committee on Foreign Affairs *particularly because I am a woman* [emphasis in original]. This committee deals with national and international movements like Communism and Fascism—very explosive subjects. I was told when I was appointed: "Men are inclined to feel that war is the only solution for international differences—you women are not of this mind—so we are asking you to take this Committee."
>
> Because our woman's responsibility in the Eternal Economy is to give life and to protect it, we can no longer draw back. Let us, as women, play our part. (See also *Farm Journal,* April 1948:143, May 1948:87–89)

By 1952 this thrust had virtually disappeared; women created a better world through the quality of their children and, in a far reduced way, by involvement in community affairs.[13] International linkages had been established between the U.S. Cooperative Extension Service and countries in Europe and what we now term the "Third World" that were on the "front line" of possible communist expansion, such as India and the Middle East.[14] However, these exchanges had become, at least rhetorically, largely routinized. They appear as demonstrations of our "know-how" and success in achieving prosperity, and only secondarily as part of a crusade to contain communism.[15] The anticommunist crusade had successfully purged "Reds" from virtually all farm organizations and, although nationally the Red Scare was in full swing in 1952, it appears largely in advertisements by such corporations as Electric Light and Power and Republic Steel, and in a consistent editorial line against "socialism," construed as government controls and "big government."[16]

Women and Free Enterprise

Many corporations also sought to mobilize popular sentiment for "free enterprise" and against socialism.[17] While most of the advertisements in these campaigns, such as those by Republic Steel or Electric Light and Power, were rhetorically and visually aimed at men, the New York Stock Exchange and National Association of Manufacturers included women in its audience, and General Mills, "Home of Betty Crocker Services," explicitly aimed its ads at women. Their 1948 ad is particularly striking for its attempt to align women's sentiments with corporate interests. In it, a widow rebuts her working class son's class-conscious critique of stock profits. The advertisement subtly ties his revised understanding with middle-class achievement through education. It deserves a lengthy quote.

Under a photo of a woman, sitting on her porch shelling peas, and a youth, standing at the bottom step with his back to the reader (see front cover illustration), the headline reads:

> **"Mother, you're an old plutocrat!"**
>
> Why, Peter Blake! Wherever did you get such an idea? You know very well I have to scramble to make ends meet.

> Well, some of the fellows were saying that all stockholders are plutocrats. You *are* a stockholder, aren't you?
>
> Yes, Peter. When your father died he left us a few shares of General Mills stock. The dividend checks the company has been sending us are helping put you through school.
>
> But aren't we different from most stockholders? Aren't most of them millionaires with big fat cigars?
>
> Nonsense! I met quite a few at the General Mills informal stockholders' meeting recently. There are more women than men, and most of them don't own any more stock than we do.
>
> How many are there altogether?
>
> I learned at the meeting that there are about 12,000, living in every one of the 48 states. Many hospitals, churches, schools and insurance companies also have invested in General Mills. And I understand that's true of most big American companies—they're owned directly, not by a few "plutocrats," but by millions of little stockholders.
>
> But doesn't the company pay more money to the stockholders than to the employees?
>
> By no means. The employees get several times as much as the stockholders. For example, I read in the last General Mills annual report that 37 1/2 million dollars was paid to the 12,000 employees, compared with 6 million to us 12,000 stockholders.
>
> Say . . . maybe I ought to see about getting a job with General Mills—after I get my diploma. (*Farm Journal,* May 1948:47)

In 1948, widespread labor agitation and on-campus radicalism by a relatively well-organized Left was creating a groundswell for political programs that opposed most corporate interests and sought to maintain or expand state responsibility for social services. In this advertisement, General Mills uses the widow to argue that widespread stockholding means that its profits are widely disseminated among American citizens, and that workers are not exploited. When "Mother" tells her son that their father left them some shares, and that a majority of people at the stockholder's meeting were women, General Mills positioned itself as more able than the state to fulfill a man's parental and husbandly responsibilities. The advertisement stresses that many "caring" institutions like hospitals and churches invest in the firm as well. Without explicitly extolling the virtues of free enterprise or opposing socialism (or what later came to be termed the "welfare state"), General Mills tells a story that strongly argues its case.

The articles aimed at women in the women's section, "The Farmer's Wife," did not deal with such issues, although the *Farm Journal* itself strongly and persistently advocated small government and free markets in its editorials and policy analysis. The ideology of competitive individualism central to a free enterprise system fit uneasily with other prescriptions for women's normative roles. Women were expected to submerge their individuality to the needs of the family and community and to produce children who had similar proclivities. Dieken, for example, in her history of home demonstration work (*Farm Journal,* February 1952:112–114, 164–165), played the chords of the urban agrarians who idealized rural virtue:

> The farm home *especially* has something to give to tomorrow's world. It produces people of high courage, who have faith in tomorrow. They meet the changes of Nature and seasons, start young and work hard, *know how to share toil as a family instead of going it alone.* They believe in God because He is all around them. They can win, or *they can sacrifice for the group*—it's all part of farm life. [emphasis added]

Women are not represented as competitive, autonomous individuals. Rather, the theme of self-sacrifice, virtually absent in articles aimed at men (or the general audience), frequently appears in those aimed at women. For example, in a 1947

series of articles on careers for farm girls, nursing is characterized as "Christianity with Its Sleeves Rolled Up" (*Farm Journal*, May 1947:90–91). Women, when featured, are largely represented through their personal characteristics; they are pert, sweet, chipper, shy, slender, quiet, sweet, gentle, modest, sensible, and so forth. No matter what particular achievement has merited a feature story, the writer almost invariably extols their housekeeping (homemaking) and successful children and family life. In contrast, men whose accomplishments are featured are generally portrayed through the specificities of their work, with virtually no references to their personal attributes. They appear as individuals whose products enter the larger society, while women's affective attributes identify them with home, family, and community.

[QA2]

Despite this highly polarized, dichotomized views of masculinity and femininity, some features provide glimpses of widely shared ways of constructing personal identities that differ from these norms. The *Farm Journal* occasionally wrote of "cooperative individualism" (e.g., June 1948:10), and in a story on successful community organizing in western North Carolina, featuring only men (October 1956:38–39, 174–175), the president of one community observed,

> Human nature's a funny thing. . . . We won't do a better job of farming just to earn more money. But we'll do it to improve our church, or because our neighbor is beating our corn yield, or because our community is trying to win a prize, or because our wives want a new kitchen. [October 1956:174]

As presented in this article, the men formed community-building solidarities through creating competitive relations with other communities and with neighbors, and through providing for family. The men shared their wives' commitment to wider social responsibilities, but with different motivations: men's pride appears based in displays of competence and material accomplishment, while women were characterized (in other articles) as deriving pride from achieving harmony and beauty.

Tropes did exist that portray men as identified with home and community, in addition to the tropes of utilitarian individualism (see, on individualism, Bellah et. al. 1985). Nonetheless, the portrayal of women as particularly aligned with the family, expressed in the affective, moral, and aesthetic qualities of home and children, and of men as particularly concerned with the arena of competitive politics and economics, expressed in objective accomplishments, is congruent with larger societal identifications of men with the universal and generalizing, and women with the particular and specific.[18]

The ideology of free enterprise also fit uneasily with farmers' experiences of economic difficulties and with obvious, if unspoken, divisions of class and wealth within agriculture. For example, editor Dieken wrote an article titled "The Farm Woman Wins Her Place" (*Farm Journal*, February 1952:112–114). In it she contrasted the hard life of a homesteader on the Nebraska prairie in the 1860s with modern farm life: carpeted stairs, exhaust fan, electric stove, refrigerator, and washer-dryer, a plane in the hangar, two cars, television, and so forth. The 1950 census of population and of agriculture indicated the actual conditions: in Illinois, one of the wealthiest farm states, 13 percent of farms still did not have electricity, 51 percent lacked running water, and 65 percent lacked indoor toilets. In other states the proportion of farms with modern conveniences was much lower: For example, in Kentucky 73 percent of farms lacked running water and 91 percent lacked flush toilets.[19] Airplanes are not enumerated, but it is hardly imaginable that any but a tiny sliver of the most wealthy farmers could have aspired to owning an airplane.

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It is likely that much of the differential in living standards stems directly from land tenure. Although the census of housing data does not permit correlation with land tenure status, qualitative research suggests that owner-operators were more likely to install electricity and indoor plumbing than were landlords. Whether or not a farm woman had such modern conveniences probably depended on her class and income status, because landlords were often slow to provide electricity and indoor plumbing to the houses of their tenants and laborers.

Dieken's article (*Farm Journal,* February 1952) reveals the class bias of the *Farm Journal,* which is constantly apparent, although never explicitly so. This bias undergirded the magazine's editorial position for a flat income tax in 1947 and against two other proposals that would have benefited lower-income people the most (*Farm Journal,* March 1947:37). It is also reflected in its late and infrequent attention to rural poverty (*Farm Journal,* February 1955:26; also March 1955:35, 165), land tenure, migrant workers (*Farm Journal,* June 1957:42, 84), and other similar issues. Their intended audience was the people they define as "farmers," who were predominantly relatively prosperous owner-operators.

Women as Income Earners

Both the *Farm Journal* and its advertisers recognized farm women as productive workers, congruent with agrarian ideology (see, e.g., Periam 1883:36) and **[QA3]** with farm women's lives. During the war women were more strongly identified with work than at any other time, even being featured in the masculine roles of driving a tractor and savoring the process of bringing plants to maturity.[20] Throughout the decade, General Mills ads for poultry feed show women as poultry producers, but articles display a more complex discourse: In the 1946 and 1948 volumes I examined, farm women were featured for some enterprises they had developed, generally flower breeding, sewing specialties, or other similarly gender-appropriate enterprise, while in 1952 one article featured a woman who operated the farm for a year when her husband got a town job.[21] Articles portraying women as operators of farm-based businesses declined throughout the 1950s. Articles in all volumes examined featured family partnerships in enterprises that usually involved direct retailing of farm produce.[22] However, in 1956 I noted for the first time a family presented as a partnership in which the woman was primarily responsible for the children, house, and garden, but "when Bud whistles, she'll drop her work to get a part for the cultivator, or drive the tractor during the rush season" (*Farm Journal,* April 1956:199–201). Women's normative role in farm work was shifting from partner in production to "go-fer," subordinate to her husband's needs. Farm women were entering the off-farm labor force: The 1950 census enumerated 15 percent of farm women working off the farm; a decade later that rose to nearly 23 percent. Once again, businesses recognized this phenomenon: Bell Telephone took out large display advertisements recruiting women to work as telephone operators throughout the period. The *Farm Journal*'s editorial line changed only during the recession of 1955 and 1956, when they published articles featuring women seeking off-farm work.[23]

"Polly," who provided advice to teenage girls, had a series in 1947 on careers for farm girls. While these were gender specific and generally included the jobs' applicability to finding a husband and homemaking, some successful career women were generally featured. No comparable articles appear in the 1952 or 1956 volumes, in which articles instead focused on diet, fashion, dating, and other "girlish" topics.

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Conclusion

Gender roles, then, appear in the pages of the *Farm Journal* as contested to a greater or lesser extent: exhortations to political action and community involvement and leadership, prominent in the period immediately following the war, quickly disappear. Women less and less frequently become objects of advertisers' ideological statements, again reflecting their decreasing importance—or at least the perception of their importance—in public debates. At the same time, women are consistently represented as income-earners and as homemakers, roles that generally appear mutually exclusive in national discourses and, to some extent, in explicit normative statements in the *Farm Journal.* Women remain occasionally featured for their unique commercial enterprises, while advertisements, particularly for poultry feeds, remain strongly geared toward women through at least 1956. By 1956, however, "the feminine mystique" seems to have been firmly established, with only occasional rents in this new fabric of femininity. Earning income, particularly through on-farm production, had moved from an accepted dimension of wife's work to a "sideline," providing money for luxuries and extras, although in 1956 women still appeared as partners in direct-marketing enterprises.[24]

Only an occasional letter to the editor reveals the persistence of the earlier division of responsibilities, in which the wife earned the income to support the household while men's income supported the farm. In one letter, a woman asked for ideas for earning money to finance a system of running water (*Farm Journal,* April 1956:172–173). Another article, "Mom's chickens, do they pay?" points to the shift in poultry production from being an important, income-earning part of women's domestic work to mass produced, male-controlled operations (see Fink 1986). The article assumes a "conventional wisdom" that the home poultry business drains resources from the farm operation. The article argues that, in fact, these operations can add value to women's time and farm resources (*Farm Journal*, August 1956:88–89). Women therefore, in practice and to a limited extent in representation, continued to be income-earners, but this role appears as a pale shadow of its former self. Only the farm crisis of the mid-1950s briefly reversed this trend, but rather than developing home-based income options, the *Farm Journal* promoted off-farm waged work. Despite their persistence in earning income, the readers of the *Farm Journal* appear to have generally accepted the magazine's normative exhortations. Perhaps the women readers agreed that the new technologies "emancipated" women and significantly lightened their physical exertion.[25]

As women's role in production decreased, their role as purveyors of domestic morality and harmony, and as the ones responsible for negotiating the radical changes occurring in family life, increased.[26] Letters from farm women occasionally indicate that they did not swallow wholesale their normative role of maintaining harmony and peace within families. Responding to an article that advised young married women to "grow up" in order to create family harmony, a letter writer argued sharply that many men needed to grow up as well, and called the writer to task for placing all responsibility on the woman's shoulders.[27] Nonetheless, this prescription appears to have fit relatively easily with earlier constructions of maternal and wifely roles.

Discourses sometimes appear to contradict one another. In some instances they are made to appear harmonious, as when a professional woman is presented as a fine homemaker whose family comes first.[28] In most other instances (except for women's letters that occasionally rupture the papering over of contradictions) they simply appear—and disappear—without comment. Unlike the

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great struggles against communism, or between oleo and butter, or over various farm policies, women's roles appear, except in rare and unique instances, as natural and uncontested.

The discourses embodied in the *Farm Journal,* therefore, have to be read as much for what they do not say as by what they do say. The rapid erasure of early postwar calls for women's public political participation is telling, for these calls (which sound almost feminist against the deafening silence of the 1950s) ceased virtually without comment. It was as if the domestic ethos, within which the writers so carefully cloaked their civic and political participation, took on a life of its own and smothered their activism in its maternal folds. Women's domestic role had become, in Bourdieu's term, *doxic,* its legitimacy absolutely installed through the thorough misrecognition of its arbitrariness.

The numerous explicit prescriptive statements and shifts in numbers and topics of articles and advertisements reveal normative expectations, but they also mask the reality of farm women's daily lives. These lives, visible only in the occasional disruptive letter, in oral histories, and in historical texts that lie outside of the journal, are in many ways rendered more distinctive by their virtual absence in the magazine's pages. Their subaltern, potentially subversive character appears in exactly the degree to which their reality is suppressed and denied. This subversive potential, however, became effectively deflected by the hegemonic consensus, of which the *Farm Journal* contributed only one small part. This consensus constructed women as privatized "homemakers" rather than historical actors and, through the discourse of anticommunism and American nationalism, rendered all alternative speech and action dangerous.

Notes

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1. Although the post–World War II period has not been well studied by rural historians, a considerable primary literature exists about the period, including oral histories and contemporary documents from sources one would expect to be sensitive to alternative voices, such as local newspapers, publications by farm organizations, and so forth. While some farm organizations did protest specific farm policies, even militantly, they did not challenge any fundamental assumptions about the direction of change (see Talbot and Hadwiger 1968).

2. Just as "the sixties" runs well into the 1970s, "the fifties" began shortly after the end of World War II and, depending on the indicators one uses, persisted into the early 1960s.

3. Cochrane cites *Changes in Farm Production and Efficiency,* 1977; *Statistical Bulletin,*** 612, 1978:56–57, for these index figures.

4. Cochrane begins this period with 1933, the start of the New Deal. In terms of the creation of new governing institutions, his periodization has merit; however, these institutions were not firmly consolidated, and the technologies they promoted (central electricity and synthetic chemicals) were not widely adopted until after World War II. The same is true of marketing systems: supermarkets were created in the 1920s, but domestic markets remained relatively uncentralized until after the War (Zimmerman 1955; but see Morgan 1979).

5. Interestingly, those concerned specifically with agricultural policy (in contrast to rural life) tended to focus on different attributes, rooted in older debates between what

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Talbot and Hadwiger (1968:22–25) characterize as "Jeffersonian" versus "Hamiltonian" values.

6. Paul Burstein and Marie Bricher (1997), in their study of Congressional policy-making on women, work, and family between 1945 and 1990, note that what shifted was the definition of problems. Problem definition, they argue (along with other political scientists), determines actual policy debate and, I would add, intellectual work in general.

7. William Chafe (1991), among others, analyzes the sharp discontinuity between the massive structural shifts in women's economic roles and the intensified "traditional" norms and ideologies regarding women's proper sphere in the post–World War II period.

8. Susan Hartmann, for example, stresses the importance of what she refers to as "the Red Scare" in contributing to "the entrenchment of the prevailing social order" (1982:11). See also May 1988 and Ogden 1986: ch. 6 for an overview of the effects of the Cold War on American families. On gender roles in the period, see Coontz 1992, Friedan 1963, Gatlin 1978, Hartmann 1982, Harrison 1988, Kaledin 1984, May 1988, Meyerowitz 1994, Moscowitz 1996, and Tuchman et al. 1978. Susan Ware, in her study of the largely urban and suburban, white, well-educated, middle-class League of Women Voters, selects a somewhat different set of determinants than I do. She writes, "A constellation of factors came together to reinforce women's domestic roles in new, and powerful, ways: the maturation of a consumer economy, an expanding middle class, the growth of suburbia, the baby boom, and the new intellectual currents in psychology and social sciences" (Ware 1990: 289). The different factors we discern, I suggest, derive from the differences in the groups we are studying. Patricia Bradley (1995), in her study of women's magazine editor Margaret Cousins, argues that Cousins's personal conservative ideology merged with what she terms a "cultural paradigm." On rural consumerism, see two recent historical studies by Blanke 2000 and Ownby 1999.

9. See Jess Gilbert's (2000, 2001) reanalysis of the agricultural New Deal. Note that the labor movement has been studied in far greater depth. After World War II, as before, the battles over the nature of wage labor were bitterly fought, with a wide range of alternative visions propounded. The great battles of the nature of agriculture were largely fought in the late nineteenth century. By the 1920s agriculture's political representatives and most of the public discourse supported business farming (see Shulman 2003).

10. These changes have been best documented in Adams 1993, 1994; Fink 1986; Jellison 1993; and Jensen 1999.

11. I focused on articles in *The Farmer's Wife* in which women's work roles were stressed, and in general I photocopied articles and advertisements that had policy implications or in other ways were explicitly normative. I rarely copied articles that focused on production techniques or advertisements that sold agricultural products with little explicit normative content, which probably made up the majority of *Farm Journal* articles and advertisements.

12. On 19th-century gender ideologies, see Cowan 1983, Matthews 1987, Morantz 1977, Ryan 1982, Sklar 1973, Strasser 1982, and Wright 1980.

13. See Dieken (*Farm Journal,* February 1952:112–114, 164–165).

14. See Myers (*Farm Journal,* January 1947:35–36), Bolton (*Farm Journal*, July 1948:63); also series on the Middle East (*Farm Journal,* 1955; February 1956:136–137, 155–157; April 1956:186–190).

15. See, for example, Hogan (*Farm Journal,* March 1952:123, 174–175).

16. See, for example, *Farm Journal* (April 1948:33, April 1950:23, October 1950:14–15, May 1952:32), which recounts struggles within the Farmers' Union over whether the organization would "take a stand against Communism" (April 1948:33).

17. A large scholarship documents the sustained post–World War II campaign to discredit socialism as an ideology and the attempts by organizations like the National Association of Manufacturers and the Farm Bureau to roll back New Deal reforms by painting them as socialistic and antithetical to free enterprise.

18. See Ortner and Whitehead 1981:7.

19. On electricity, see Jellison 1993:154; on indoor plumbing and flush toilets, see United States Department of Commerce 1953: table 8.

20. See *Farm Journal* (February 1945:n.p., Ford-Ferguson ad; May 1945:n.p., International Harvester ad).

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21. See, for example, *Farm Journal* (November 1946:90–91, February 1946:80–82, January 1946:56–57, January 1948:80–81, March 1948:98–99, April 1948:128–130, July 1948:65, September 1948:118–119, and ads such as February 1948:104–105).

22. See, for example, *Farm Journal* (June 1948:94–95, September 1952:148–149, October 1952:102–103, December 1952:70–71, August 1956:40–41, 116–117, October 1956:44–45, 97–98, December 1956:80–82).

23. See *Farm Journal* (November 1955:123, 135), "Why some farm wives want jobs." The same issue (p. 124) had an article "Mom Got a Mink This Morning!" featuring a woman who "says that wading a lonely stream before sun–up 'makes me a better person all day.' Brings her some money, too." See also Bell Telephone System advertisements featuring farm women who work as telephone operators. The one in the April 1955 issue of the *Farm Journal* (n.p.), captioned "This chief operator has a dairy herd," is typical.

24. *Farm Journal* (May 1956:125; August 1956:40–41, 116–117; October 1956:44–45, 97–98; December 1956:80–82).

25. The theme of women's emancipation through technology often appears in stark contrast to representations of the "primitive" forms of agriculture found in Europe and much of the rest of the world (e.g., *Farm Journal*, May 1948:87–89; February 1952:164–165; March 1952:123, 132, 174–175). It is beyond the scope of this article to explore here how this trope appears to have been systematically (if not necessarily consciously) used in such a way that U.S. women would feel their removal from production was part of a progressive evolutionary development. This was congruent with the 19th–century evolutionary thinking that Turn of the Century home economics adopted. See also Adams 1993, 1994; Elbert 1988; Jellison 1993; and Jensen 1999. Note Moscowitz's 1996 observation that many women strenuously objected to the representation of homemaking as unfulfilling and dreary, berating both women's magazines that counseled unhappy housewives on how to find happiness in their appointed role and Betty Friedan who explicitly challenged the value of their role. For many farm women, release from the drudgery associated with "traditional" farm life was undoubtedly welcome, as Jellison 1993 documents.

26. Again, this deserves much greater treatment than possible here. An increasing number of articles promoted good parenting. See *Farm Journal* (May 1952:135–137; August 1952:48, 50, 104–105; June 1956:97; June 1956:98–99; September 1956:102; October 1956:122 [the latter two on the consequences of greater teenage mobility and on TV, respectively]).

27. *Farm Journal* ("Your Letters: Married—But Not Grown Up," February 1957:101–102; "Your Letters: Give Us Women a Break!" April 1957:26).

28. A biographical feature about Mrs. Sayre (*Farm Journal*, November 1948:n.p.) is representative.

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Queries to the Author

QA1: Who is this from (Morantz?) It looks like the sentence got cut somehow.
QA2: Do you want this word repeated?
QA3: 1984? Also listed from the reprint of 1884. Which is correct?
QA4: Not in text. Delete reference?