

## **RURAL MASCULINITY AND ANTIQUE TRACTORS: RELIVING THE MEN IN THE MACHINES\***

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### ABSTRACT

As the economic contexts of farming change, occupational supports for the maintenance of traditional rural masculinities diminish. When these past identities remain salient, identity discontinuity can occur and alternative mechanisms of support may be sought. Nostalgic remembrances may serve to reduce such discontinuity. The current inquiry explores antique tractor collecting as a means of restoring traditional rural masculinities. Data were collected through observations at antique tractor shows, interviews with collectors, and examination of the contents of collecting-related periodicals and other publications. Data reveal three unique ways in which tractor collecting allows for more full re-enactment of past masculinities. Symbolically anthropomorphizing these tractors with unique identities, in turn, allows for the symbolic reliving of work experiences by restoring and utilizing the tractors. Finally, shows recreate a supportive community for these masculinities. Implications for antique tractor collecting as a mechanism of support for traditional rural masculinities are discussed.

Research on masculinities has highlighted the connection between work and masculine identities in a variety of rural occupations, especially farming (Brandth 1995; Brandth and Haugen 2005; Saugeres 2002a, 2002b). Within this literature is the identification of traditional masculinities defined primarily in terms of work-based characteristics. Yet, as work and occupations undergo change, work-based supports for these masculinities may disappear or be replaced. To the extent these traditional masculinities remain salient for many, alternative mechanisms of support for these identities must be created and maintained. The current inquiry explores antique tractor collecting as one means of creating such supports. Utilizing a nostalgic frame of analysis, this inquiry identifies key symbolic processes in the practice of antique tractor collecting that create unique opportunities for the support and re-enactment of traditional rural masculinities.

Central to the conception of traditional rural masculinities is the value of hard physical labor. Such labor was not only strenuous, but was often required over long days for weeks at a time. Similarly, traditional rural masculinities are also associated with mutually supportive attributes that include the value placed on hard physical labor under harsh conditions, toughness, tenacity, dependability, strength, and the

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need to conquer or overcome nature and exert control over the machines that make this possible (Bartlett and Conger 2004; Brandth 1995; Campbell and Bell 2000; Liepins 2000; Little 2002; Saugeres 2002b). The ability to succeed as a farmer and a man is therefore seen as primarily dependent upon one's capacity for hard work.

Masculinities are constructed through interaction and discourse and are best understood as a set of performances and practices that reinforce certain clusters of attributes (Connell 1995). Masculinities may be constructed in relationship to women, but also in relationship to other men, through homosocial activities where men seek validation for their manhood by other men (Kimmel 1996). This is particularly true where masculinities are work-based and work is conducted within primarily homosocial groups. Rural, as well as other, masculinities vary in terms of geographic locations, time frames, and economic contexts wherein multiple masculinities simultaneously coexist (Bartlett and Conger 2004; Campbell and Bell 2000; Little 2002).

Some masculinities are considered more dominant, desirable, and authoritative than others and become hegemonic in nature (Connell 1995). Connell (2000) has suggested that these hegemonic masculinities are more valued and hold a most "honored" position within given contexts. Hegemonic masculinities become so dominant within particular settings that they are considered self-evident and come to be viewed as "natural" even to the point of being seen as genderless (Connell 1995; Hearn 1998). Such hegemonic masculinities are usually learned during adolescence, and reinforced in homosocial groups (Bird 1996; Connell 2005; Hearn 2004). Bird highlighted the importance of homosocial groups by noting that homosociality "contributes to the maintenance of hegemonic masculine norms by supporting meanings associated with identities that fit hegemonic ideals" (1996:121). Given that contexts are continually changing, so too is the hegemonic positioning of any particular masculinity.

Gender scholars also recognize the importance of performance and body reflexive practices that serve to interactively construct and reinforce work-based masculinities. Bulter (1993) viewed performance as the reiteration of a set of normative expectations that enables the formation of a subject rather than simply being performed by a subject. Connell (1995, 2000) recognized that bodies represent both agents and objects of practice where the need to define male bodies as masculine must also coincide with the body's physical characteristics. Gender is not only reflected within the bodily performance of gendered work, but the body itself chronicles past masculine achievements in scars and blemishes on the body. As such,

the body or its symbolic substitute may serve as an important basis for the reconstruction of past identities.

Masculinities are rarely based solely upon one sphere of activity, such as work. Rather, they are based upon power relations and supports for such in a variety of social spheres. Bartlett and Conger (2004) located traditional rural masculinities within an “agrarian” set of values and cultural practices that view farming as a way of life. Farming is seen primarily as a family commitment, dominated and controlled by men, that integrates concerns for work, family, and community (Bartlett 1993; Bartlett and Conger 2004; Salamon 1992).

Recent research on rural masculinities has also identified a variety of masculinities that differ from more traditional masculine identities and challenge traditional masculinities’ hegemonic position within current contexts. Predominantly identified among these newer masculinities is a more industrial/entrepreneurial rural identity in which farming is viewed as an occupation where rational economic decision making in a competitive marketplace is more highly valued than physical effort (Bartlett and Conger 2004; Brandth 1995; Little 2002; Saugeres 2002a). Thus, success as a farmer and as a man is more dependent upon rational decision making than hard physical labor. This industrial model of rural masculinity coincides closely with Connell’s view of a wider corporate hegemonic masculinity characterized by rationality “shaped to fit the needs of corporate work” (1995:165). This alignment of newer rural masculine identities with more global hegemonic masculinities shifts the focus of these identities from the dominance of rural influences in the construction of masculinities to the broader (hegemonic) masculinities as the basis for identity construction within the rural setting (Campbell and Bell 2000). Such a shift diminishes the contextual importance of geography in the construction of gender and endangers past identities as real men.

Over the last 60 years, economic success in farming has increasingly depended upon expanding the scale of operations. This trend is reflected in the dramatic increase in average farm size and resultant decline in smaller-scale, family farming as an occupational choice over this period (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1967, 2003). Extensive literature examining this shift in agriculture locates traditional rural masculinities and their hegemonic positioning within contexts reflective of smaller-scale farming operations and industrial/entrepreneurial masculinities with larger-scale operations (Bartlett 1993; Bartlett and Conger 2004; Ni Laoire 2004; Saugeres 2002a). Connell (1995) has noted that when conditions that support the hegemonic positioning of certain masculinities change, positions of power erode and particular

forms of masculinity may disappear altogether. Shifts in economic contexts within both logging (Brandth and Haugen 2005) and farming (Ni Laoire 2004) have diminished support for traditional rural masculinities associated with this work. As Brandth and Haugen (2005) have noted, when farming no longer serves as a viable occupational choice, men seek alternative means of maintaining past forms of masculine identities. Thus, the loss of opportunities to successfully enact traditional rural masculinities results in identity discontinuity for many.

For men, identity discontinuity may occur when there is a loss of work-based opportunities for the continued enactment of masculine identities. Davis (1979) has suggested that nostalgia often emerges as a means to reduce this discontinuity. He described nostalgia as “a positively toned evocation of a lived past in the context of some negative feeling toward present or impending circumstance” (1979:18). These memories are usually in individuals’ adolescent past (Davis 1979; Schuman and Scott 1989). Nostalgia diminishes discontinuity by connecting former identities to current ones within our own biographies. However, Davis further argued that it is not simply the individualized nostalgic memories that provide continuity and comfort, but the sharing of those memories with others who have similar remembrances. This sharing of similar biographical memories creates opportunities for the creation of collective memories, the shared recognition of older collective identities, and the potential for their social re-enactment (Gongaware 2003).

Boym (2001) proposed two modes of using nostalgia to reconnect with the past. She recognized one mode as reflective nostalgia that is more about individual and cultural memory centered on lost values, frequently associated with nationalist revivals and experiences that remain poorly defined. Alternatively, restorative nostalgia refers to efforts to totally rebuild and restore imagined communities, memory gaps, and imagined identities contained therein. Restorative nostalgia seeks a return to the original stasis, where remembrances of past values and ideals warrant application in the present. Given that identities are continually created and recreated, restorative nostalgia therefore better connects components of identity over time and enables location of past identities alongside current ones (Batcho 1998; Hogan and Pursell 2008; Wilson 2005).

Material objects may serve as nostalgic triggers that connect us with past identities especially as they relate marginalized workers to their work life (Milligan 1998; Strangleman 1999, 2007). Unfortunately, most explorations into the role of material objects in the nostalgic process focus primarily on historic objects associated with the deceased (Bonsu and DeBerry-Spence 2008; Unruh 1983), or objects associated with former identities after passing through significant rites of

passage or the felt coming of age (Silver 1996; Wilson 2005). In these cases, material objects primarily serve as reminders of former identities and triggers for more reflective forms of nostalgia. The importance of restorative nostalgia as a basis for reducing identity discontinuity however, requires more comprehensive re-enactment of the former identity in the present. The current inquiry explores the use of unique material objects, antique tractors, as mechanisms to achieve a more restorative nostalgia and better integrate former identities into current ones.

### GENDER, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE COLLECTION OF ANTIQUE TRACTORS

Within farming, the tractor represents a technological artifact or tool essential for the exertion of control over nature (Brandth 1995; Liepins 2000; Saugeres 2002a, 2002b). Therefore, interaction between men and tractors constructs and reinforces gendered meanings for both the men and the machines (Brandth 1995; Mellström 2002; Wajcman 1991). Brandth (1995:127) found in her study of tractor advertisements, “the men farmers give the tractor gender, and the tractor makes farmers into real men.” Saugeres (2002b) suggested that sons of farmers are seen as “naturally” attracted to agricultural machinery, and the tractor in particular, early in life.

Tractor operation is often a basis for the demarcation of gender lines on the farm (Brandth 1995; Saugeres 2002b). Even at times when women may be required to operate tractors on the farm, efforts are made to ensure that this activity does not threaten traditional gendered relations and the dominant position of masculinities symbolized by the tractor (Brandth 1994; Pini 2005). The possession of technological knowledge, however, serves a more significant gender boundary. Such knowledge is seen as men’s inclination and domain, not women’s. Women may be allowed to operate tractors since they do not challenge or threaten masculine dominance of technological knowledge necessary to maintain the machine (Brandth 1994; Saugeres 2002b). Thus, tractors become the most significant piece of masculinized technology and a symbol of rural masculine identity.

Collecting represents a form of material consumption where identities are constructed in more idealized ways unrestricted by occupational demands (Hochschild 1989). Belk, Tanner, and Wallendorf (1997) recognized not only a gendered basis for what objects are collected, but also the use of collections to construct gender identity and the gendered societal functions served by collecting. As such, antique tractor collecting represents a strategy for maintaining symbolic representations of former rural masculine identities in the present. Men reared

within farming contexts as children learned to value the hegemonic masculinities they were exposed to and, for some, these masculinities remain highly salient as adults. The relationships between antique tractors and the men who collect them provide insights into one means of maintaining traditional rural masculinities as valued identities, and reducing identity discontinuity. In particular, this analysis focuses upon interrelated processes employed by antique tractor collectors to reconstruct former identities located in no longer accessible occupational environments. These processes involve the recreation of past identities as specific living actors embedded within these tractors, the creation of opportunities for the re-enactment of past work experiences, interactions and the identities developed therein, and the creation of collector communities that allow for a social reconstruction and sharing of former identities.

#### METHODS AND CONTEXT

Utilizing a grounded theoretical approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967), I began attending antique tractor shows to understand what these tractors mean to collectors. My initial research strategy took the form of an observational ethnography wherein my unstructured observations were unobtrusive while occupying the role of complete observer (Gold 1958; McCall 1984).

I began observing regional, annual tractor shows. Most of these shows have been organized at the county level, although one show with a forty-two year history, advertises itself as the “World’s Largest Gas Engine and Tractor Show,” and recruits participants both nationally and internationally. I attended this show and another one operating at the county level annually over a ten-year period. In all, observations were conducted at forty-seven antique tractor shows at fourteen different locations within a three-state region over this ten-year period. These shows were concentrated in northeastern Indiana, although I also observed shows in northwestern Ohio and southeastern Michigan. Shows lasted one to five days, and ranged in size from those displaying less than fifty tractors to the largest show displayed 800 tractors.

I would typically spend at least an afternoon observing each show as most activity occurs during this time of the day. Given that shows are usually organized at the county level and most of the participants reside nearby, collectors typically show up only intermittently during their spare time or when they are participating in an organized activity. Standardized note-taking detailing the setting occurred at the shows, while interactions were recorded upon leaving the show. I also became

a nonparticipating member in select sponsoring organizations that allowed me to monitor their meeting minutes.

To supplement my unobtrusive study of collectors, I began exploring media sources similar to those grounding other work dealing with gendered rural identities and changes therein (Brandth 1995; Liepins 2000; Little and Panelli 2007). I examined four print-based periodicals related to antique tractor collecting: *Antique Power Magazine*, *Gas Engine Magazine*, *Belt Pulley Magazine*, and *Steam Traction Magazine*. I examined six to ten volumes of these publications that coincided with the ten years of show observations. In total, 264 issues were surveyed to not only supplement my understandings of the collector culture and practices, but also to identify articles that tied the tractor to specific male family members or previous owners. In all, I identified 162 articles and examined them for descriptions of the relationships between these identified men, a specific tractor, and their meanings embodied in the machines by collectors.

I also scrutinized nineteen “trade” books. While some of these were thematically dedicated to a particular brand of tractor, such as John Deere, most dealt more broadly with history and collecting of antique tractors. Analysis of this compendium of observational data was aimed at identifying dominant themes and developing a more focused, interactive research effort.

After approximately seven years of observations, the second stage of my research took the form of an informant ethnography wherein I conducted twenty-two in-depth, structured interviews of which twenty-one were with collectors. Nineteen of the interviews were conducted face-to-face and three collectors were interviewed by phone. Sixteen of these participants were recruited using contact information gleaned from the signage attached to show tractors indicating personal identification of the tractor with someone other than the current owner. Two collectors were identified through their occupation as antique tractor mechanics. One collector was identified through a story in a local newspaper. Besides these nineteen collectors, I also interviewed three individuals involved with antique-tractor publications (two of the three were collectors as well). Two of these were editors of periodicals examined earlier and one produced an audio tape of tractor sounds marketed at tractor shows and in related publications.

The interviews ranged in length from thirty minutes to two hours, with most lasting approximately ninety minutes, and primarily occurred at the homes of the collectors. Frequently, additional time was spent viewing the interviewee’s own collection where informal interactions provided additional data recorded upon leaving the site. To the extent that collectors displayed a general reluctance to

openly discuss issues of masculinity, efforts were made to ensure the validity of the researcher's developing understandings through a process of analytic validation (Douglas 1976; Emerson and Pollner 1988). In this process, after each interview was formally completed, I asked the subjects to comment on how well my understandings resonated with theirs. This validation process developed as central themes emerged from prior observations and earlier interviews.

All but two interviewees were men, ranging in age from eighteen to mid-seventies, but most were in their fifties and sixties. All interviewees were Caucasian, as were all observed participants in the shows. This racial homogeneity reflects the racial distribution in farming in this region both historically and today (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1967, 2003). Four interviewees had less than a high school education, thirteen had a high school degree, and five had degrees in higher education ranging from an associate degree to a doctorate.

Nineteen collectors interviewed grew up on farms between the '40s and the '60s. Of the remaining three, two (eighteen and nineteen years old) still live and work on a farm and began their collections with a tractor given to each of them by their grandfather, who guided them through the restoration process. Among the older interview subjects, four began their careers as farmers, although one left this occupation in 1968 and the other three in the early '80s at the time of a significant debt crisis in farming (Dudley 2000). All four reported leaving farming because it no longer represented an economically viable occupation for them. At the time of the interviews, respondents were equally divided among blue collar (e.g., mechanic, electrician, livestock breeder) and white collar (e.g., professor, accountant, periodical editor, purchasing agent) occupations, although seven were now retired.

These earlier rural experiences and the masculinities formed from them must also be contextualized geographically. The three-state region where antique tractor shows were observed also represents the same area where most of the collectors had their earliest farming experiences. Farms in this region were typically smaller than average, ranging between 43.6 percent and 61.3 percent of the national average acreage per farm in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1967).

These men and their earlier experiences also need to be contextualized within an economic frame. Given that the ability to adopt new technology is dependent on economic conditions, these small farms were often economically marginal with little capital available to continually purchase and upgrade to new equipment (Rasmussen 1962). Furthermore, they had little capital available to pay others to make necessary repairs on the older equipment. Therefore, farmers in these contexts not only had

to be able to repair the tractors themselves, but also had to keep these machines operational for comparatively longer periods.

### PAST IDENTITIES, DISCONTINUITY, AND A SPECIAL ANTIQUE TRACTOR

Traditional masculinities associated with the occupation of farming are unique in that these identities are constructed and enacted primarily within a family setting where the position of breadwinner and model for traditional masculinities was typically occupied by a male relative, usually either a father or grandfather. Collectors often associate special tractors with specific familial men and the traditional rural masculinity they represented. As noted in one article, "It was chosen for most of the important farm work, so if I was driving it, it meant I was doing something important" (Ertel 2000: 3). As Dan, a diesel mechanic, stated: "I remember getting on (the tractor), looking around, and thinking, I'm in charge here. It was big time, it was like bein' twenty-one. I wasn't in Dad's foot tracks anymore. Before, everything was play, this was real. I was able to accomplish something on my own through machinery." The operation of these tractors, usually experienced in early adolescence, is seen as symbolic of entry into manhood.

Unfortunately, the ability to maintain these traditional work-based identities through adulthood was not an economic option for most. Indeed, the Census of Agriculture found that those indicating "farm operator" as their occupation declined by an average of 68.4 percent in Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio between 1940 and 2002 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1967, 2003). As a result, most of the collectors were forced to seek occupations other than farming, often outside rural settings.

Most collectors linked this loss of occupational opportunities with a shift in masculine attributes associated with successful farming. As Dan observed: "Hard work was really the key to success then. It wasn't your shrewdness, it wasn't your mathematical skills, or your ability to peddle this or that, it was the man, the machine, you worked hard, you produced. But now, I think everything is flipped upside-down." Paul, producer of the audio tape and the only subject to mention masculinity specifically, stated: "There is so much that goes into agribusiness now that just isn't necessarily masculine, it's just thinking analytically." These understandings reflect the increasing dominance of the industrial/entrepreneurial model of rural masculinities over more traditional forms.

Antique-tractor collecting serves as a mechanism to maintain traditional identities. In a search for a particular familial tractor, an article underscored this point by noting, "The tractor represents a very tangible tie to his dad's generation

of farming and will become a precious family treasure to pass along” (Mays 2003: 14). For many collectors, the most prized and often the first tractor in the collection, was either the exact same or the identical model tractor to the one they first learned to drive on the farm. When asked if they see a particular familial male reflected in the tractor, collectors consistently acknowledged this embodiment. In responding to this question, Larry, an antique tractor mechanic stated, “Yep, I would say definitely. I perceive that myself with my dad. I figure when my dad passes, I will keep one of his tractors because I can see him operating it, fixing it.” Ed, a sixty-six year old, truck driver reflected a similar focus: “I have pretty fond memories of my granddad driving them old tractors.... My father-in-law, I have memories of him using it, in fact, from the time I was first married, I used the tractor because I helped him. I get attached to things like that. I’m like my dad.” This embodiment of revered fathers and grandfathers within these tractors is also exhibited at shows through the signage on the tractors outlining the family heritage. Tractor shows also typically hold parades where announcers not only identify the type of tractor and its owner, but also the family history of the tractor.

Consistent with previous descriptions of farming and traditional rural masculinities within an agrarian cultural context, collectors see their early agricultural experiences as family struggles to succeed as a group. When additional labor was needed, farming required the direct involvement of all available family members. This is often when younger children first learned to operate the familial tractor. In this light, tractors become an essential component of this family struggle, often cast as symbolic family members. Periodical articles support this connection with titles such as: “Part Tractor, Part Family” or “Chad Becker’s WD: Like Part of the Family.” The identification of certain antique tractors with older specific familial males solidifies the symbolism of the tractor as simply another family member. As an article in a trade book read: “Dad is now in a nursing home, but as long as I have that old John Deere, there will always be a part of him working on the farm” (Singer 1997: 79). Clearly, these older men, their masculine identities, and the past contexts in which they existed remain highly valued and honored by these collectors. When Jeb was asked why men collect tractors, he responded, “I think a lot of it’s nostalgia,...maybe it has to do with the threat, the diminishing of farms, attempt to recreate it, keep it alive.”

#### CREATING LIVING ACTORS

To more fully reproduce former identities, material objects need to become full participants capable of actively recreating interaction and performances. Central to

the process of gender construction involving any technology is the ability to make machines as human-like as possible. Antique tractor collectors frequently imbue their tractors with life through their collectors' vocabulary. For example, restorations are often referred to as bringing the machine "back to life" and experienced as almost a rebirthing process.

The sound of the tractor running is important in this regard. For most, hearing the tractor run, serves to bring it to life. Literally every collector interviewed claimed to be able to identify at least their own tractors' make and model just by the sound. These sounds are not experienced simply as mechanical sounds, but as voice, a sign of the actual life force embodied within the tractor. As noted in an article from a trade book, "When it (tractor) started working really hard and the RPMs (revolutions of the engine per minute) slowed, the sound was like a heartbeat" (Hess 1997: 3). As Paul, who produced the recordings of tractor sounds, noted, "On a human scale, it may be easier to relate to something running slow like that [antique tractors], and certainly the old two cylinders, lugging as if the last one [cylinder firing] was going to die and now a multi-cylinder, high-speed running tractor, you don't get that relationship." This embodiment of life force is thus based only in the technology of older tractors, as newer tractors with significantly different technological characteristics are not so imbued.

In almost every case, the owners of these antique tractors are responsible for doing the work of mechanical restoration and maintenance themselves. As such, they need to be competent mechanics with intimate knowledge of their particular tractors. Further, they diagnose (and interact with) these tractors through sensual perceptions rather than more calculative mechanistic approaches. As Paul noted about tractors, "The old ones you're hearing more, smelling more, you are feeling more, all that sort of thing. I think you are more involved....The older ones you had to crank up, you are bringing them to life yourself." These sensory-based interactions further enhance the embodiment of a living presence within these tractors.

Occasionally these machines are given an active voice as seen in the line from the poem cited in one examined periodical; "Charlie's tractor is who I am, I'll work for you the best I can" (Biers 2004: 14). Most tractor shows have at least one tractor displayed with a sign that gives it similar voice.

Brandth and Haugen (2005) noted that loggers value the marked/scarred body reflecting hard work thereby making the male body a valued symbol of rural masculinity. In this light, the embodiment of these machines with anthropomorphic characteristics is further enhanced when the masculinity-male body association is

symbolically transferred to the tractor. These collectors demonstrate much purposeful consideration for the appearance of the tractor. Unlike car collectors, where every attempt is made to return cars to their original appearance, tractor shows are replete with mechanically sound tractors whose bodies remain untouched by repair or restoration. As noted in an article in *Antique Power Magazine*, “Its (tractor) once-shiny coat of Persian Orange has faded to a dull glow, but the tractor’s heart still beats as strong as ever” (Roggenbuck 2005: 40). This type of display is purposeful and carries symbolic significance for the masculinity embodied therein. For many, they see these tractors as having earned their “scars” through hard work and therefore these tractors earned their equivalent masculine honors.

As these tractors become anthropomorphized, their ability to recreate work-based interactions is enhanced. Further, to the extent that they symbolically embody specific familial males, they create opportunities to reconstruct biographical, work-based experiences, interactions, and identities.

#### ANTIQUÉ TRACTORS, WORK, AND THE RE-ENACTMENT OF PAST IDENTITIES

The association of hard work with former masculinities, and their embeddedness in these antique tractors is reflected in an article about grandpa’s tractor.

“Unfortunately, Grandpa is no longer with us. I always think of him when you get on the tractor seat and start it up....It is a daily reminder of him to see the tractor sitting there, waiting to go to work and do what it was designed to do....If this tractor could talk, I think it would tell quite a story of a lot of hard work and hard times, but a lot of good times as well” (Christ 2002: 28).

Tractors embodied with these traditional identities are therefore not just seen as instruments of hard work, but symbolically as hard workers themselves. This improves the opportunities for the nostalgic recreation of these past identities through re-enactment of similar, farm-based, formerly lived, work experiences involving such physical labor.

Within traditional rural masculinities, the value of hard physical labor and dependability are closely linked as dependability was also necessary to accomplish needed tasks within a limited period. While the primary form of work on the farm was related to the actual performance of farming tasks, the accomplishment of these tasks was dependent on the ability of the men and their machines to be dependable

workers. This meant that work was also focused upon men's ability to maintain the tractor in working order. As Paul suggested, "If you were a farmer, you were straining at your maximum output. You worked hard physically, you worked the equipment hard and long and you wanted it to last. There's independence there too, to be able to fix things yourself."

Farmers' ability to diagnose and repair tractors was another important source of these past identities. Often collectors' work begins with the restoration of the tractor to working order. Typically restoration requires not only technical expertise, but also dirty, strenuous, physical labor to remove, repair, and replace large, heavy parts of the machine. The ability to restore these tractors to operating condition is essential for maximizing their interactive capabilities through the re-enactment of work and the identities rooted therein. No collector would ever consider displaying a tractor at a show that was not mechanically operational. In this sense, the mechanical restoration of these tractors serves not only as an individualized nostalgic opportunity to recreate personal identities symbolically embedded within the technology, but also as a basis for work-based interaction with these embodied identities. Restoration also provides opportunities for the creation of more social identities with involvement of others in this process.

Often these tractors are restored by multiple generations of familial males as a family project, working together as a tribute to an older male family member. Restorations frequently involve two to four generations. Often the restoration process provides an opportunity for the transference of past identities associated with an older generation of the tractor's primary operator, through the current generation, to the next generation of younger family members who aid in the restoration, but have limited or no personal knowledge of the identity embedded within the tractor. Such activities create a means of further displaying traditional rural masculine characteristics through developing understandings of the older technology in the tractor. As noted in one periodical article, "All the hard work and countless hours that goes [*sic*] into restoring a tractor is [*sic*] made easier when family memories can be associated with the tractor" (Elmore 2003: 8). Both old and young speak about restoration as a means of passing on knowledge and understandings, especially those associated with work and masculinity. Restoration of these antique tractors literally allows for a simultaneous restoration of past identities.

The value of dependability as an essential component of hard work is symbolically embedded within the very technology of these antique tractors. "You could work them hard one day and come back the next day to easily start them

again and begin the next day's toil," according to Ed. In comparison to newer tractors, collectors see the antiques as "overengineered" in that they were designed and constructed to last a very long time. Indeed, many antique tractors are still in use despite being fifty to seventy-five years old. Few collectors believe that current tractors will still be around and functional for such a time. As Harry, an antique tractor mechanic pointed out, "they're made cheaper now (newer tractors) and are easier to break." Understandings of the masculinity embedded in the older technology become available, especially to younger generations, through the restoration process.

Antique tractor collecting also reflects the positioning of traditional masculinities through the dominance of homosocial groups. One female subject, a farmer's daughter, became involved in collecting through acquiring her father's tractor, which she learned to drive at age eleven. Nonetheless, she does not lay claim to any technological expertise. While she reported her presence during the restoration process, she acknowledged that her husband's expertise and skills directed the restoration. Women were rarely involved as active collectors and were even less likely to be involved in the restoration/ maintenance process.

Once these antique tractors are restored to operating condition, they become available co-workers able to reconstruct interactions that reinforce specific attributes of these past identities. It is a widely accepted view that one needs to regularly work these antique tractors hard to keep them running properly. This implies that continuing hard work is essential for the maintenance of the identity embedded within the tractor.

Many collectors now live in small rural settings with three to fifteen acres of tillable land called "farmettes" by one periodical. While this small size does not allow for any economically viable farming activity, it does allow for the working of these antique tractors to maintain these settings. Often, collectors operate "hobby" farms that allow for the recreation of older farming activities such as growing a large garden, producing specialty crops, maintaining an orchard, or raising livestock. The restored tractors are worked to plow snow, mow, pull stumps, haul, and till gardens. These farmettes further locate the re-enactment of traditional masculinities within a rural setting, although the term itself suggests a diminution or feminization of traditional masculinities enacted in these settings.

Where land is available, antique tractor shows will hold plowing demonstrations where collectors can "work" their machines. Some shows sponsor antique tractor pulls. Even when land is unavailable, every show has a rather constant stream of tractors threshing grain, operating saw or shingle mills, or

operating a Baker fan (a large paddled wheel just spinning in the air). Paul, producer of the commercial recording of antique farm tractor sounds, echoed this concern for work by purposely integrating recordings of tractors working at various farm operations or being “under load.” Clearly the desire to see and hear these machines work is integral to these men’s former identity and the masculinity embedded within these machines. The ability to reenact work-based identities by working with these antique tractors at shows, usually with other men, allows for the shared recreation of past identities.

Given that these past identities were learned within a rather individualistic experience, mostly constructed within one’s unique family setting, these past identities remain personal in nature. Essential for more comprehensive identity continuity is the creation of a shared social identity recognized and shared by others that allows for both the creation of collective memories and collective identities.

#### TRACTOR SHOWS, COMMUNITY, AND THE CREATION OF SHARED IDENTITIES

Antique tractor shows provide a context for the public exhibition of tractors working. Essential to this work is the involvement of numerous other men, usually other collectors, working together. Work demonstrations always require at least two to three men (women were never observed participating in these activities) to set up and operate, thereby providing opportunities for the homosocial creation and reinforcement of past social identities. Although a particular collector may identify their own tractor with the masculinity of a specific familial male, the sharing of work allows for a sharing of traditional masculine identities through interactions between the men and the tractors. In discussing the masculine values displayed at shows, Dan stated, “They learn that success is from hard work. If it’s a family tractor, they learn this guy’s always working, it’s the most important thing, you will be a better person....working with this equipment as a tool, you can become successful no matter who you are. If you didn’t succeed at farming it was because either you didn’t use the tools you have or you didn’t try hard enough.” In this light, tractors become interactive participants in their own shows. Sharing biographical experiences with others becomes a means to develop collective memories and allow one to integrate former personal identities with past social identities in the present. In response to why men participate in shows, Chuck responded, “They are recreating a time when they actually did work out in the hot sun, it was miserable. When they look back on it, that was when I was a man. I was really working hard. You knew exactly what was expected of you.” Shows therefore reinforce the value

of hard work as a basis for successful farming and a core attribute of successful manhood.

Given that nostalgic remembrances often attempt to recall an age of “homefulness” and “genuine” social relations from the past (Turner 1987) and reinforce their value in the present, shows become a basis for reconstructing these experiences. In questioning why one of the periodicals reviewed publishes obituaries of collectors, Lin, a female editor noted in her interview “It goes back to the origins of the threshermen. These threshermen were a real collective. It has its roots in this intensely committed community.” Show activities reflect efforts to reenact traditional agrarian values, practices, and cultures regarding family and community that serve as supports for traditional rural masculinities.

This collectivist orientation also carries over as a framework for the recreation of traditional rural family and community relations at shows. Antique tractor shows are viewed fundamentally as family gatherings with many titled as “reunions” and regular organizational meetings as “suppers.” As Lois noted when discussing shows, “...shoot, these people are just like one big family, sit and visit all day long and half of the evening.” Chuck indicated that “Friendships develop by going to these shows.... It kinda sounds like a family reunion.”

The communities created by antique tractor collectors reflect a significantly more cooperative orientation to interactions reflective of older rural cultural practices rather than a competitive one often associated with newer corporate masculinities. This can be seen in cooperation, mutual trust, and support in the sharing of technical/ mechanical knowledge among collectors. Periodicals are full of letters to the editor requesting some type of technical assistance with a problem. Further, nothing can gather a group of men around a particular tractor at a show quicker than one having some type of mechanical problem. In these situations, not only is technical advice willingly offered, discussed, and debated, but also offers to help with the actual labor are frequently forthcoming. As Norm, a retired mechanic and farmer, reported, “They are just trying to help their buddy get his tractor running, that’s the way we were brought up, the whole neighborhood. If someone needed help, we would all go down and help him.” Such mutual community support and cooperation was essential for the timely completion of essential farming tasks when a specific individual was unable to do so themselves. The mere re-enactment of such cooperative practices allows for the renewal of traditional rural masculinities in the present.

Unlike antique car shows, antique tractor shows in this region do not have competition between tractors or their owners for best of show, prettiest, best

restored, most unique, or biggest. In fact, many collectors interviewed in this study openly speak against bringing such competition in, as many feel it will destroy the friendliness and camaraderie found at the shows.

Regarding this lack of competition at shows, Harry suggested, “We don’t want the competition, because it causes enemies. Everybody there (at shows) is friendly.” Dan noted that “If you go to these threshing demonstrations (at shows), you can go up to someone you never saw before and right away they will put their arm around you and say hey buddy let me show you..., the car guys don’t even want to talk to you.” These cooperative practices, consistent with traditional agrarian values, are of particular importance to these collectors as an essential element in the maintenance of community and support for shared meanings of traditional rural masculinities.

While cooperation rather than competition represents the primary interactional orientation of collectors within the collecting community, this does not mean that competition is not still present. Within the masculine realm of technological expertise, one’s status among these collectors is highly dependent upon one’s comparative abilities to restore and maintain these tractors. “Friendly” competition often occurs between these men where those most skilled in their repair abilities become the most honored among men.

Within these symbolic communities, reconstructed primarily at shows, the hegemonic positioning of traditional masculinities is reestablished. While the acceptance of women as collectors and show participants reflects the traditional recognition of women’s labor in the farming enterprise, women’s roles remain secondary and constricted in relation to men’s. While a few women may be seen at shows driving tractors in parades, women have never been observed at shows working with the tractors in any type of demonstration. Rather, the actual working of and with these tractors is seen as a men only activity and basis of male homosocial bonding. Technological discussions at shows are also the domain of men. Not only were women not observed participating in these discussions at shows, but greater recognition was given to men who experienced more difficult and time-consuming tractor restoration efforts. This homosocial setting serves to reinforce the importance of hard work, technical expertise, and tenacity that serve as core attributes to traditional rural masculinities and reestablish the hegemonic positioning of such identities.

Alternatively, most shows contain displays and activities directed specifically at women such as quilt displays, flea markets, household antique displays, craft displays, and workshops. Women-organized and operated “suppers” were also

commonplace. Many male subjects reported the desire and importance of involving women in the shows and the purposeful creation of these activities to attract women's interests.

## CONCLUSION

As changes have occurred in the economic conditions and occupational opportunities of farming, so too have traditional rural masculinities been supplanted by more industrial/entrepreneurial ones. To the extent that these traditional rural masculinities remain salient for many, alternative mechanisms of support for these identities need to be created to reduce identity discontinuity. By examining antique tractor collectors primarily within a specific geographic context, this inquiry identifies three interrelated processes collectors use to enact more restorative forms of nostalgia, thereby creating supports vital for identity maintenance and reduced discontinuity. Although rural masculine identities have evolved from the time these antique tractors were originally manufactured, continued engagement with the tractors allows for the re-enactment of past performances of idealized, traditional, hegemonic, masculine farming identities.

Most collectors are no longer occupationally linked to farming, therefore work-based identities and the work-based interactions necessary to maintain the saliency of these identities are no longer available. As grown men, collectors imbue these antique tractors with traditional masculine identities through a process of anthropomorphization. In a unique fashion, these machines are often instilled with the identity of a specific revered, familial male who epitomizes family-based, hegemonic, traditional rural masculinity to the collectors. These identities are embodied in the machines as living, working actors capable of mutually reconstructing past interactional experiences.

Essential for successful re-enactment of these former identities is the recreation of work that allows workers (men and tractors) to more fully relive these former identities. Thus, by restoring these tractors and then utilizing them to reproduce traditional forms of work, past work-based interactions are reenacted, thereby restoring these past identities and their valuation in the present.

Given that traditional rural masculinities were primarily developed from a specific biographical history rooted in a family setting, they represent a form of personal identity that limits the sharing of these identities with others. Through activities displayed at antique tractor shows, these former personal identities not only become relevant in the present, but are also shared with a wider group of "about to become friends" (Davis 1979:43). This creates opportunities for the

construction of collective memories, social re-enactment based upon these memories, and the recreation of shared social identities.

As contexts for identity formation and continuation change, so too do the bases for the enactment of past identities. The contexts in which these collectors first developed traditional rural masculine identities were unique in a variety of respects. Unlike most modern work activities, these identities were developed and experienced primarily within a family context. This family context allowed for shared inter-generational work experiences creating lived biographical opportunities for the reconstruction of these identities and their salience in the present. Second, farming represents a highly gendered occupation that creates unique opportunities for homosocial bonding. Few occupations remain as gendered today. Third, only a few current occupational identities are as closely equated with a single material object as traditional farming masculinities and the tractor; especially a material object that is affordable and small enough to become a personal possession. Last, few occupationally-based identities may be successfully claimed simply upon hard work and personal efforts. In industrialized economies, economic success and therefore successful maintenance of masculinities are seen as under sole control of the individual. Thus, antique tractors, as work-based material artifacts, appear rather unique in their ability to restore identity continuity.

Contextual changes also raise questions concerning the ability of antique tractor collecting to continue to serve the restorative nostalgic functions identified in this inquiry. As Brandth and Haugen (2005) have found, changing rural occupational contexts leads to transformative masculine identities through the lived work experiences. As time passes, so too does direct knowledge of the men embodied in these machines, the identities learned by working directly with them, and the nostalgic memories of these interactions. As this occurs, past masculinities increasingly become characterized only by the technology of the antique tractors. As traditional masculine identities embedded in these antique tractors lose their biographical contexts with younger owners, the less salient and more idealized these identities become.

As masculine identities become fixed in the technology of a particular tractor, so too do the tractor's interactional abilities. This process might function to disembody experienced masculinities from the tractor and render it only a rigid, mechanical, idealized artifact, gendered only by association with past masculinities. In this sense, over time the masculinities embedded in these antique tractors might more appropriately be defined as "antique" identities because of the very process of embedding them in the antique technology. As these artifacts become the only

source of antique identities, they become divorced from the cultural contexts that provided more full understandings of their meanings.

Additionally, this inquiry raises questions regarding the role of material objects in not only the initial construction of work-based identities, but also their reconstruction. Brandth (2005) has indicated that different rural masculine identities, such as logging or ranching, may be closely associated with different work-based tools. Therefore, do computers, which she associates with more recent rural masculinities, have the same potential for the embodiment of past masculinities in the future? Many indicate that within a few years, tractors may be operated directly by computers rather than farmers themselves. Do computers then become the material symbol of more recently developed rural masculinities, thus leaving the tractor behind altogether?

Given that this research focused upon past hegemonic understandings as maintained by those who most benefited from such power positioning, is the importance of maintaining these masculinities shared equally by others? The data presented here suggest a strongly held white, heteronormative, patriarchal world view that remains unexamined within these frames by the collectors. While the unquestioning acceptance and dominance of such views is characteristic of hegemonic gendered positions (Connell 1995; Hearn 1998), does the identity salience and felt discontinuity with current masculinities rest primarily on the power inherent in such hegemonic positions?

This inquiry also supports certain changes in conceptualizations of hegemonic masculinities, particularly those identified by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005). Regarding the geography of masculinities, these once hegemonic traditional rural masculinities are primarily local as they are constructed in face-to-face interactions of families and the immediate collecting community. Yet, they are supported by a broader regional geography reflected in the publications examined here. Therefore, understandings of hegemonic positioning need to be understood within both differing levels of geographic contexts, and the supportive interplay between these contextual levels. Similarly, these hegemonic masculinities represent idealized remembrances or fantasies that do not correspond closely to collectors' current lives, especially given the loss of their occupational and economic supports.

To the extent that these traditional rural masculinities no longer represent hegemonic positions within current social structures because of lost economic value, yet remain highly salient for most collectors, supports concerns regarding the nature of changes in masculine hegemony initially raised by Demetriou (2001). He suggested that hegemonic masculinities do not simply adapt to changing conditions,

but become hybridized blocs of historical elements capable of adapting to new histories. Although the current inquiry did not closely examine the integration of these traditional hegemonic masculinities into current forms, unquestionably certain elements have become hybridized into current hegemonic masculine conceptualizations, at least for these collectors.

This inquiry highlights the need to more fully examine the role of differing social bases of past identities and their interrelationships with nostalgic remembrances derived from various types of nostalgic triggers. Also, the ability of differently constructed nostalgic triggers to create opportunities to reenact past identities and restore them to a valued position in the present warrants closer attention. The current inquiry clearly supports the need to differentiate identities according to their initial social bases, particularly in light of what Davis (1979) recognized as a refocusing of nostalgic remembrances on material objects related to leisure activities and identities rather than those more work-based. Similarly, analysis of differing geographic, period, and economic contexts' impact on these relationships warrants examination as well.

This research has also highlighted specific mechanisms that allow for the more comprehensive re-enactment of past identities. Again, while much research has addressed issues of how nostalgic remembrances may be utilized to reduce identity discontinuity, more attention is needed focusing on the comparative manipulation, structuring, and utilization of these remembrances and their relative success in becoming restorative forms of nostalgia.

#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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