

RURAL EMBODIMENTS OF FEMININITY: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC
APPROACH TO GENDER NARRATIVES

by

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ABSTRACT

The socialization one experiences throughout their lifetime informs their communication behaviors with others around them. Coming of age in a rural, Westernized geography instilled in me a unique sense of femininity that was constructed to complement the narratives significant to the cultural context of Rural America. This research discusses multiple dominant and marginalized forms of gender and these identities' relationships to the gendered experiences that I had growing up in rural Montana. This autoethnography is composed of narrated experiences, pre-teen assessments, and poetic descriptions of the disciplining I was confronted with throughout my childhood in my small, ranching community. I utilize feminist scholarship and interpretivist-informed paradigms to investigate my interpersonal experiences from multiple reflective perspectives to provide a rich and nuanced evaluation of the long-term impacts enforcing cultural scripts on others can beget.

Keywords: Rurality, Interpersonal Relationships, Gender, Sexuality, Autoethnography, Adolescent Development, Cultural Scripts

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
IV	Interpersonal Violence
DV	Dating Violence
FCP	Family Communication Patterns
CTSPC-CA	Parent-Conflict Tactics Scales
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
CTS	Conflict Tactics Scale

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Exploring the intersections of rural spaces, including towns, homes, and physical bodies, is crucial to producing a comprehensive understanding of how gender norms are constructed and enforced within these geographies. Investigating the impact of hegemonic modes of gender on femininity in rural settings advances scholarship on the unique socializing that women *and* men residing in rural geographies experience and perpetuate. The aim of this research is to examine the nuances of my personal and social identities informed by cultural scripts produced in the rural, American Northwest.

Chapter Two outlines the current state of gender and sexuality research within rural, developed areas of America, Europe, and Australia. Through the review of scholarship on traditional, gendered expectations and experiences, this chapter positions dominant social ideologies recorded within these Western countries in conversation with idyllic myths that continue to inform innumerable rural experiences. Additionally, this chapter explores the intersections of hegemonic modes of gender, power, and interpersonal violence experienced by rural residents to further give context to the cultural narratives dominating American media and the non-rural individual's imagination, periodically tying these hegemonic ideals back to the complex relationship between rurality and public health.

Chapter Three discusses the methodology and procedures I employ to investigate rurality, identity formation, and dominant cultural ideologies. This chapter explores the academic value of lived experiences and personal narratives, adding to the larger

academic conversation surrounding “helpful” and “just” outcomes for those implicated in the research process. Using feminist methodologies and interpretivist approaches to scholarship, I explain the qualitative principles that give power to the narrated experiences and artistic illustrations produced through autoethnographic investigations.

My autoethnographic pieces, found in Chapter Four, include narrated memories, long-form prose, and media-inspired accounts, some pivotal and some pedestrian. These autoethnographic pieces explore different stages of my emotional, physical, and social growth, tying together my perceptions of the world around me. In Chapter Five, I apply theories from existing research that emphasize agency in constructing, sustaining, and resisting the social expectations and assumptions of the dominant ideology within the rural spaces of western, developed countries. I place my own hegemonic and subversive identity narratives in conversation with rural social expectations to investigate how these forces compound to produce novel, intersecting culture scripts. Through the critical analysis of my own experiences with hegemony in rural Montana, I illuminate the nuances of being a young woman in an area that encouraged wifedom, presumed heterosexuality of me, and necessitated my community involvement. Lastly, Chapter Six discusses the implications and limitations of this scholarship to identify future avenues for fellow rural scholars to consider as we work to expand academic accounts of identity within the rural Northwest.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Idyllic Rural

A “rural” town is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture as a town and its surrounding area that has a population of 2,500 people or less (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019). Within the United States, 60 million residents, 19 percent of the population, live in rural areas. Billings, Montana, has a population of approximately 104,284 people (United States Census Bureau, 2021a). In 2020, an average of 2.04 million people rode the subway in New York each weekday, and this was in the midst of a global pandemic (Metropolitan Transportation Authority, 2020), meaning that there were still around 20 times more people using subways *daily* in the first-wave epicenter of COVID-19 than there were people living in my state’s largest city. Communication scholars must draw their attention towards this portion of our population in order to produce research on the unique positionalities rural cultures and environments cultivate.

Rural communities have a great deal of positive attributes, including supportive social bonds, lower overall crime rates compared to urban areas, and the freedom of open land (Little, 2017).

Rural life has long been associated with an uncomplicated, innocent, more genuine society in which 'traditional values' persist and lives are more real. Pastimes, friendships, family relations and even employment are seen as somehow more honest and authentic, unencumbered with the false and insincere

trappings of city life or with their associated dubious values. (Little & Austin, 1996, p. 102)

In the absence of factories and busy city streets, urban residents presume health and fitness of rural residents due to the vast, open spaces and fresh air (Little, 2015; Little, Panelli, & Kraack, 2005). Safety, harmony, and commitment to community are also associated aspects of rurality (Little et al., 2005). This conceptualization of the rural manifests from social constructs that tend to reproduce idyllic myths regarding the alleged harmony of rural geographies, neglecting or subtly concealing the troubles that rural residents may be facing. While living in rural geographies can have these numerous benefits, this lifestyle is often romanticized, producing problematic, idyllic myths that inform the urban imagination (Cooper, 2002; Little et al., 2005).

Idyllic assumptions about rural geographies and communities produce challenging atmospheres that often conceal persistent issues individuals are struggling with. The U.S. Department of Agriculture publishes reports exploring the disparities among the economic outcomes and education attainment for rural and urban populations. Rural households earn between 20 and 25 percent less income than their urban counterparts and are often situated further from educational institutions (USDA, 2021). Despite narratives of health, safety, and prosperity, poverty continues to be a major personal and social problem faced by rural populations. As of 2015, the percent of rural residents who have earned their high school diploma (87%) had more than doubled from 1960 (40%). In 2019, 21 percent of rural adults “25 and older” had earned at least a bachelor’s degree. Urban adults in this same age range are 14 percent more likely than rural adults to have college education (35%).

After earning their degree, previously rural residents may choose to reside in urban areas that can provide greater access to competitive wages and job opportunities (Little, & Austin, 1996; Logan, Walker, & Leukefeld, 2001; USDA, 2021). When graduates don't return, the education earned is not re-entering into rural spaces at the same rate as education attainment. Investigating rural populations can provide further rationale to ensure education, funding, and social services become as equally accessible to rural residents as these resources are to their urban counterparts.

The current economic state of agriculture has been said to be in a bit of a crisis, noted by Burchfield et al. (2022), equally reliably, my immediate family. The environment regularly dictates the types of agriculture¹ that one can partake in—consider seasonal or unseasonal weather, flooding, native wildlife, and diseases. With advancements in agriculture, the importance of strength and toughness has fallen second to technical expertise and the financial obligations that accompany cutting-edge machinery designed to maximize production (Little, 2003). Livestock prices can fluctuate; the financial insecurity is managed only by the owner's ability to compete in the marketplace and keep their stock safe and healthy. The unique challenges that these professions experience, especially the nature of the financial and social investments, produce novel gender experiences that warrant much more consideration in scholarship.

Culture, Media, and Identity

Culture both influences and is influenced by geography, producing this mutually constitutive relationship between topography and human expression. When investigating

¹ “ag” for short agriculture

the impacts of geography on rural identity formation, researchers often find that men and women represent two, conceptually-distinct identities. This binary ideology would imply that there are innate, knowable truths to the male and female bodies, including the desires for monogamy, heterosexuality, and procreation. However, gender identities are culturally-informed and shaped by the expectations that surround and differ among bodies, initially reckoned by the sex someone was assigned at birth (Schippers, 2007).

Accordingly, gender and sexuality research in rural spaces has moved away from essentialist approaches that identify biological make-ups as the primary reasons for gender differences, to a constructivist approach that argues that gender and bodies are discursively and materially produced *within* their societies (Little, 2002; Little & Leyshon, 2003; Little & Panelli, 2003; Schippers, 2007). Little and Panelli (2003) break down rural studies' research on gender in developed countries into four categories—work, community, environment, and sexuality. These four areas of identity co-constitute one another and serve as overarching themes throughout the following work, as well.

Modes of Gender

Gender is a taken-for-granted part of the rural identity. As both masculinities and femininities are socially constructed, expressions will vary according to the cultural settings they exist in. Characteristics that impact the lived realities of rural residents include where they are situated geographically, their history with the area, and their individual circumstances (Little, 2017). Exploring rural spaces, including homes, towns, and physical bodies, expands scholarship's understanding of how gender norms are constructed and enforced within these rural settings.

As family structures and standard work schedules shift from what they were in the 1960's, novel dominant femininities have emerged to allow women to embody masculine characteristics (e.g., assertiveness, career-driven) without penalization from the gender hierarchy (Charlebois, 2010). McRobbie (2009) identifies “global girls” as women who appropriate traits of hegemonic masculinity in pursuit of successful professional careers. While appearing overtly defiant to the traditional gender hierarchy, these women may still support the gender order in other contexts and maintain support for male hegemony. To accurately understand modes of femininity, it is essential to acknowledge these intersections and study them at the local level to determine how they operate in relation to hegemonic gender expectations and expressions (Paechter, 2018; Paechter, 2003).

Unrealistic assumptions about young people's levels of agency and autonomy persist in rural geographies. However, the rural context protects males' control and allows it to fluctuate in patterns that females' control does not (Shoveller & Johnson, 2006). It is often assumed that a man owns the farm or ranch, and marriage will allow him another set of hands that will produce multiple other hands to continue the family business once the farmer retires (Little, 2003). In Little's (2017) study, a column written for single farmers joked that men could find love by placing an ad for a house keeper. This study also produced data that indicates a social conception that women are needed to help socialize these rugged, unkempt men. Additionally, heavy farm equipment marketing campaigns are directed primarily towards men (Brandth, 1995). The narratives that are reproduced in media matter—representation is powerful.

Hegemonic characteristics of masculinity spark ideas of a strong, powerful, logical man well-suited for leadership. Femininity is then conceptualized by ideally

complementary abilities, strengths, and demeanors (Schippers, 2007). Within the rural context, characteristics of an idealized femininity would be the “ranch or farm house wife,” or a heterosexual woman whose desires in life are to raise children and support her husband on the farm (Stebbing, 1984; Little, 2003). When “masculinity” means strength, domination, and control over emotions, feminine qualities that are seemingly complementary would include being physically and psychologically delicate, humble, and soft-spoken (Budgeon, 2014). Femininity would also include qualities of meekness, submission, and accommodation. This essentialized understanding of femininity is a product of benevolent sexism (McCornack & Morrison, 2019). Hegemonic gender identities from patriarchal societies establish and enforce the hierarchical systems that legitimate the subordination of women to men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), of femininity to masculinity (Schippers, 2007). Rural scholars have begun denaturalizing these gendered assumptions and social categories to investigate the broader social value and legitimacy of upholding and reproducing them.

Hegemonic masculinity is venerated and presented through cultural narratives as the ideal way for a male body to *behave* in society. Hegemonic gender productions are contextual rather than static qualities with inherent power (Francis et al., 2016), performed through actions rather than existing as any single, apparent identity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), meaning this mode of gender is expressed through actions and opinions that endure largely without cause for investigation. Hegemonic forms of masculinity and patriarchal systems dominate gender ideologies in rural America, consequently placing women in spheres that require subservience to the males in their lives—usually domestic positions.

Narratives produced by the gender hierarchy outline the most desirable way for a feminine body to be perceived in society—the way a “good woman” should exist.

Women who embody these complementary characteristics and accept the submissive role are expressing emphasized femininity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), performing the role of the idealized woman (Schipper, 2007). A “good” woman should dress modestly (Little & Leyshon, 2003), care for a family (Little, 2003), and tolerate the financial difficulties and lack of downtime the farming occupation entails.

Hegemonic gender hierarchies allow women to engage with and share acceptable forms of femininity to legitimize their positionalities while denouncing other inferior versions of womanhood. Hegemonic femininities perpetuate sexual, racial, and class inequality by legitimating their own status as the only gender expression to aspire towards (Schipper, 2007). These positionalities can also serve the gender hierarchy by disempowering alternative femininities through social disciplining, ensuring the continued domination of those nonhegemonic masculinities and all femininities.

Trujillo’s (1991) analysis of the media representation of American baseball player Nolan Ryan reveals five hegemonic culture values that give essence to this idolized masculinity within America: physical force, patriarchal family structures, frontiersmanship, heterosexuality, and occupational success. Bravery and control are notable characteristic of rural masculinity, constructed by media portraying the Old West to professional athletes (Trujillo, 1991) to narratives of the rural within the armed forces (Woodward, 1998). A rural man must be tough mentally and physically, assertive, strong, and powerful in the face of an out-of-control nature (Little & Leyshon, 2003).

Hegemonic status is not solely based on difference and complementarity. Schipper

(2007) clarifies that the hierarchy among women in relation to class and race is extremely complex and could produce multiple configurations based on the context being evaluated.

Rural communities are spaces of hegemonic gender performances that support the patriarchal process. Leyshon (2008) identifies subject positions these larger discourses produce for the masculine, which also implicates the young women around them. A female participant told Leyshon that each Sunday after church, her step father would request that she put on a shirt that complimented her feminine attributes. They would then go to the pub so that he could show her off to the other men. In combination with the harassment the young women face when they approach the front of the pubs, they are also subjected to the male gaze, often regardless of how much they dress down (baggy t-shirts, tennis shoes). Little states that for the men, women appear to be territories that need colonization. With both these toxic traits and earlier-mentioned rural idyll, communication theories offer effective tools to investigate these polarized narratives of rural experiences.

As mentioned, scholars have found content that echoes sentiments of harmony and close-knit communities when evaluating gendered messages within the idyllic rural. As the assumed caretakers, women's roles also translate to community-related nurturing (Bock & Shortall, 2006; Little & Austin, 1996; Hughes, 1997). Women are expected to organize and uphold social institutions for both partners, such as relationships with extended family members and volunteer-run community events. Scholarship within agricultural communities has consistently identified men inhabiting these roles, while women's positions require them to nurture their families and communities in accordance with traditional values and practices (Davidoff et al., 1976; Dempsey, 1990, 1992; Little

& Panelli, 2003). This community work is maintained by women, who are seen to be allegedly honored with the task, even when aspects of that work do not *benefit* women (Little & Austin, 1996). Rather, these messages go on to further dictate how valuable women's work is without providing them with significant autonomy and decision-making power (Bock & Shortall, 2006; Little & Jones, 2000; Shortall, 2002). This conceptualization of women's work is a slippery slope, as women's subservience can then be viewed as integral to men's success.

Religion and nationalism are co-constituting ideologies in the United States, a country which was founded to establish religious freedoms and to capitalize on the "new" land, so noting the significant influence religious institutions have on social expectations provides further context to rural communities where Christianity and Catholicism play important roles in both the personal and social lives of these citizens. With conservative, patriarchal ideals still monopolizing rural spaces, hegemonic gender identities are privileged and rewarded. Conservative values include the nuclear family structure, faith, nationalism, and tradition (Mann, 2008). Rural women engage with hegemonic modes of gender and employ American ideals, including faith and nationalism, to construct their gendered identities (LaMothe, 2015). Faith in the Christian God, like most gods, places a great deal of importance on loyalty, both to one's savior and to one's monogamous, heterosexual partner. God also is said to endow individuals with their worldly possessions, success, and wealth. These beliefs dominate the narratives about how families, gender, and neighbors "ought to be" in rural geographies (Little, 2017; Little & Leyshon, 2003).

While scholars note that women are still expected to be easy-going, down-to-earth, and subservient, they are also heavily encouraged to be active participants in the community (Little, 2017; Little & Leyshon, 2003). Women in rural geographies are in the public eye regularly, serving and bringing people together to sustain the connections amongst families. Despite having very traditional gender expectations, this research demonstrates how women in rural spaces are encouraged to hold leadership roles and take on responsibilities that urban women are not.

Family life and community life are often tightly linked, and rural women are left to carry the responsibility, or sometimes burden, of maintaining a cohesive community (Little & Panelli, 2003), adding to their unpaid time spent working. While male partners yield control *over* these significant areas, women work to nurture and serve *within* the confines of men's authority (Stebbing, 1984), which can and does manifest as income and employment inequality for women (Dempsey, 1987; Little & Austin, 1996; Little & Panelli, 2003).

There is an added stress on female farmers and ranchers to manage their home as well as owning and managing a large property of land. Rural women are still expected to put career aspirations on the back burner, maintaining the primary role of child caregiver in places with limited childcare resources. This includes fostering the social and academic success of their children. With this pressure on the family business, it is very likely impacting the roles and responsibilities of women in the home and in the workforce.

Heterosexual marriage is a naturalized, fundamental goal of land owners in rural geographies and a key aspect of the American gender hierarchy. *Compulsory*

heterosexuality conflates a person's worth, morality, and purpose with their involvement in a heterosexual, monogamous relationship. In rural spaces, homosexuality is viewed as deviant and heterosexuality is largely presumed without notice (Bell, 2000; Bock & Shortall, 2006; Little, 2003). This ideology is produced by a social system to police sexuality and romantic interests (Fraser, 2018). By doing so, compulsive heterosexuality ensures its own hierarchical standing and delegitimizes violators through punishment or disenfranchisement.

Compulsory heterosexuality further positions "wife and mother" as the ultimate role of a woman. Within this context, a hegemonic woman would be the "ranch or farm house wife," or a heterosexual woman whose desires in life are to raise children and support her husband on the farm (Stebbing, 1984). This dominant narrative organizes the acceptability of a female body and a woman's sexual responsibility (i.e., motherhood). While women are socially disciplined to have children, discussions or expressions of sexuality are not welcomed outside of family-making. This suppression reflects the traditional, conservative values upheld in Western rural geography. Institutional influences such as marriage laws, media portrayals of sexuality, and unequal pay help regulate and perpetuate heteronormativity, encouraging females to be further dependent on and engage in complementary partnerships with males.

Media Influences

The American cowboy has had a long run as a cultural icon, all through the midst of progressive movements of the 1900's and throughout the early 2000's. This archetype has often been depicted as the All-American man, enshrined in both film and print (Pearson & Haney, 1999). The cowboy represents tradition, hard work, and, especially

notable, frontiersmanship. The work of a rancher, farm mechanic, or a hired hand regularly requires manual labor, decisiveness, and long, unpredictable days, positioning these traits as essential to such a person's occupational success.

Connell and Messerschmitt (2005) note that hegemonic masculinity is not statistically dominant in any given society, as hegemonic ideas of masculinity are often comprised of fantasies and desires. For example, professional male athletes are idolized by many who cannot and will likely never physically perform at the same level as these men (Connell & Messerschmitt, 2005). Yet, male athletes are highly and widely revered, dominating ideas of what men should aspire to be, even if they are not realistically feasible. This allows scripts for hegemonic masculinity to persist despite the improbability of its fulfillment (Trujillo, 1991).

The use of sporting events and athletes at the top of their fields and the height of their careers serve as rich sites of investigation into the construction of hegemonic models of masculinity. Competitive sports such as football and soccer necessitate aggressive, unrelenting domination over the other team (Trujillo, 1991). Masculine identities have been associated with performing risky behaviors, which is clearly exhibited in the sport of rodeo (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). American rodeo is alleged to be one of, if not the most, dangerous *and* patriotic sports (Pearson & Haney, 1999), conjuring up images of bravery and individualism. Fewer regulations are in play compared to other dangerous sports, and it is suggested in the rodeo community that one only need be a tough, burly, go-getter to succeed in the sport. Rodeo cowboys are regularly injured, but the severity is often downplayed to maintain the image of bravado.

This behavior in particular is hypermasculine, with pain being expected and danger being anticipated.

Country Music

Scholars and consumers alike can see paradoxes in the origin stories of country music and the current ideologies that dominate present-day country music. Despite the rich influences of African American musicians from the rural South and West, few Black artists have thrived in the genre (Malone & Laird, 2018; Meier, 2019). Notably, Charlie Pride's work made it to the top of the charts several times before audiences knew he was African American. Pride's final number-one single in 1983 would be the last time an African American person would return to the number one spot until Darius Rucker's (2008) "Don't Think I Don't Think About It." Social and political negotiations are taking place in country music, and this warrants much further discussion.

American country music partially functions to redistribute political power. Research on the politics within country music provides deeply interesting contexts for evaluating country music's lyrics and the broader genre alike. Redistributive politics include "the effort to establish that these values are the important American values; other values should be considered deviant and subject to scorn" (Meier, 2019, p. 90). Meier's six themes further illuminate the symbolic politics that inform country music: the "common man," traditional family values, patriotism, nostalgia, whiteness, and religion. Meier identifies alcohol, prison, mothers, "trucks," trains, and infidelity as the core content of country music. While subtle, these topics each are laden with their own identity politics—*does one have a substance abuse disorder? Does one have enough*

income to afford a vehicle? Is one a member of a marginalized group that has high incarceration rates? Can one afford legal services?

Country music is inspired by the simplicity and nobility of the “common man” (Malone, 1965; Meier, 2019). Narratives of goodness and purity within the genre contrast ideas of evil institutions (i.e., the government and big businesses), reflecting dominant opinions on most institutional involvement. Patriotism within country music urges people to put aside their individuality in service to the United States, a common nation. This genre is also influenced tremendously by patriotism, nationality, and nostalgia for a country that is no more, commonly mentioning idealistic notions of what it means to be a true and honorable American, which has a distinct overtone of whiteness.

While the beliefs shared in the country music genre are not homogeneous, they are dominantly conservative. Conservative individuals subscribe to notions that one can succeed despite any obstacles as long as they are determined and work hard enough, which informs conversations surrounding what one “earns” or what their labor is worth. In doing so, this patriotic idea of the “American Dream” also asks audiences to overlook issues of class, race, and gender within the past and the present, which Mann (2008) calls *dehistoricized innocence* (p. 89).

“Others” and Power

One’s identity allows them claim and access to specific memberships, including any sentiments associated with each identity (Shields, 2008), aiding individuals as they try to discern the in-group and out-group statuses of those they encounter. Berger and Calabrese’s (1975) Uncertainty Reduction Theory asserts that people’s primary objective as they interact with unfamiliar individuals is to gather information on this person,

minimizing the perceived unpredictability of the other. When the information is confirming to one's own self, such as a shared value of public land use, a mutual connection is identified, fostering feelings of liking and trust (McCornack & Morrison, 2019).

These social practices and connected values offer scholars more understanding of ingroup and outgroup relations. Brewer (1999) articulates, "The very factors that make ingroup attachment and allegiance important to individuals also provide a fertile ground for antagonism and distrust of those outside the ingroup boundaries" (p. 442). When an expectation is violated or destabilized, disciplinary measures are taken against the transgressor (e.g., verbal censure, state-sanctioned disenfranchisement including laws and policies). Sharing a specific group membership eases the tension felt as a consequence.

Power is institutionalized through the language people use and the behaviors they enact. To identify cultural influences on identity, scholars look to the dominant ideologies of the area. Social messages and cues provided by others help signal to individuals what the most socially-validated presentations of *self* are. These locally-agreed upon divisions result in distinguishable language used to discuss identifiable groups (i.e., gendered pronouns, adjectives, and abilities), serving as organizing features of social relations (Messerschmidt, 2019; Shields, 2008). These power relations result in a dominate group or class, shaping a corresponding hierarchy within the social structure. Consequently, the hierarchies and social stratifications of those power structures continue to produce and reproduce assumptions about the value of specific identities and larger social groups.

When one's identity matches the dominant expectations within a society, they receive greater approval and social reward. Access and control beget positions of

influence. This may be in service to maintaining the status quo of gender norms, hierarchical ethnicity narratives, and other often subtle but well-established power imbalances. These cultural assumptions largely remain unquestioned, often to the benefit of individuals in positions of power and authority and detriment of those who are not. Redistributive politics include “the effort to establish that these values are the important American values; other values should be considered deviant and subject to scorn” (Meier, 2019, p. 90). One establishes and maintains powerful identities asserting their dominance and will, often at the expense or oppression of “others.” The social “norms” produced can provide additional contexts in which those power relations operate in, as these socially-informed relationships naturalize and reinforce one another (Collins, 2000; Shields, 2008).

Interpersonal Violence

There is a dissonance between the idyllic rural narratives and data on crime and violence. The impacts of domestic and interpersonal violence have lasting and often rippling effects on the individual and the community. Unfortunately, some of the same aspects that make rural areas safer for some also present a danger to individuals experiencing violence. Interpersonal violence (IV), which includes dating violence (DV), domestic violence, and family violence, can be defined as “behaviours that are coercive and controlling and include physical abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, sexual abuse, financial deprivation and social and cultural isolation” (Campo & Tayton, 2015, p. 1). Idyllic narratives foster a dichotomy between rural and urban spaces, the latter being portrayed as morally unsound and prone to crime and disharmony with the aforementioned existing distinctly separate, both geographically and conceptually, from

its allegedly corrupt counterparts. This leaves little space for rural voices that have contrasting, even traumatic, experiences to share, qualifying this as a significant issue of public health.

Hegemonic masculinity fosters unsafe environments. While not requiring violence to be dominant, nor are they inherently negative, the traits associated with masculinity can be supported through physical and psychological force (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, hegemonic masculinity can act to legitimize interpersonal and state-sanctioned violence due to the social acceptability of physical force and the perks of patriarchal roles (i.e., authoritarian influence, presumed competency, access and control of communal resources). The geographical isolation compounds with this dominance provides ample opportunities for predatory and sexist behaviors to persist. Data shows that rural males enact more violence than their male urban or urban-influenced counterparts (Logan, Walker, & Leukefeld, 2001), indicating a significant influence of geography on gendered expressions.

Coercive control, surveillance, and entrapment are primarily psychological, making them less apparent forms of abuse (Little, 2017). The long-term effects of physical and psychological abuse on victims can manifest into homelessness, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Smith et al., 2018; Vézina et al., 2015). Substance use is more likely to turn into substance abuse for rural citizens, putting them at an additional risk for violence involvement and suicidal ideations (Vézina et al., 2015). When these factors compound, the likelihood of IV being fatal to both victims and perpetrators increases in areas with the highest numbers of rural citizens such as Alaska, Montana,

Idaho, and Wyoming, which all are in the top five states with the highest rates of suicide mortality (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020).

The idyllic narratives of rural towns have been shown to silence women experiencing interpersonal violence (Little, 2017). Domestic violence occurs at higher rates in rural geographies than it does in urban areas (Little, 2017; Logan et al., 2001; Owen & Carrington, 2014), prompting exploration into the compounding features of rurality that contribute to the increased rates of violence these populations face *and* perpetrate. Small towns, as previously mentioned, have fewer employment opportunities (Logan et al., 2001), increasing the chances that a victim is financially reliant upon their partner (Owen & Carrington, 2014). This is further complicated when families' income is reliant upon the success of their farm or ranch.

Rural communities' identities are largely centered around their social cohesion and support of others. An individual coming forward to report abuse is a direct threat to members of this group's character and perceived integrity, for they did not notice that a fellow member was experiencing violence despite priding themselves on aiding their neighbors when in need. Idyllic assumptions then make the presence of violence seem almost unimaginable in such tight-knit and supportive communities, and reporting abuses of any kind is consistently responded with doubt and disbelief. Fears such as being seen as an unfit mother, not being believed, and further violence have been recorded, though these are not exclusively rural women's issues, as all community members suffer when violence against another is permitted in their lives (Little, Panelli, & Kraack, 2005).

Problems of access in rural spaces limit the options that victims have to navigate or escape their circumstances. Gendered power relations impact the responses to violence

and the forms of violence perpetuated. As previously mentioned, male domination in rural settings manifests in significant economic ways, creating inequality in income and employment (Dempsey, 1987; Little & Austin, 1996; Little & Panelli, 2003). Victims might choose not to report based on the lack of resources to support them (Campo and Tayton, 2015), and legal services are fewer in number, making the services more expensive and less accessible to victims (Owen & Carrington, 2014). Anonymity is drastically lower in rural spaces, as those providing emergency response or supportive services are likely to know both the survivor and their abuser, perhaps on a personal level (George & Harris, 2014; Owen & Carrington, 2014). Small towns are notorious for gossip, and for victims, this rumor mill can produce dangerous environments where their abusers can easily access information about them, such as their location and future plans (Campo & Tayton, 2015). Safety for both victims and those trying to serve them remains a large concern in areas that have high rates of gun ownership (George & Harris, 2014). In dire situations, emergency services may have to travel over 20 miles to respond to calls, essentially reducing the effectiveness of the resource for any rural resident. By addressing the local and the intimate, research can study the nuances of violence evident by where it occurs and endures, specifically in rural spaces.

This violence can have significant, adverse effects on the health of all individuals directly involved. Among the most concerning findings is the increased likelihood of revictimization. Once an individual has experienced interpersonal violence, they are significantly more likely to experience violence in the future than those who have not (Vézina et al., 2015). For perpetrators, conviction and jailing can result in detrimental mental health outcomes (depression, sensory deprivation, sense of isolation, exacerbating

existing conditions) with additional physical consequences (higher rates of drug usage, mixing illicit substances, peer violence) (Logan, Walker, Cole, et al., 2003; Schnittker & John, 2007).

Family Communication

Children's relationships into adulthood are influenced by their relationship to their early caregivers. Social modeling theories and family communication patterns (FCP), a theoretical model, help scholars understand the roles that family of origin play in a child's communication development. Social learning theory (SLT) assumes that children learn through observation and imitate behavior that is rewarded by others (Bandura & Walters, 1977). According to SLT, parents' modeling of comfort and guidance teach their children how to treat those around them. Adults who witnessed confirmation in their parents' relationships as children are more likely to use this positive relational maintenance strategy with their own partners (Young & Schrodt, 2016). With heavy importance placed on childrearing and the family in rural settings, family communication scholarship should help inform conversations about the nuanced experiences of rural children with specific attention paid to the impacts of detrimental communication.

Freedom of communication in families can shape the ways that children interact with their partners later in adulthood. Family communication patterns (FCP) proposes families have stable and consistent methods of communication among themselves (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; 2004). Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) distinguish between two dimensions: conformity orientation and conversation orientation. They define conformity orientation as "the degree to which families create a climate that stresses homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs" (p. 85). The conversation orientation is

“the degree to which families create a climate where all family members are encouraged to participate freely in interactions about a wide array of topics” (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 85).

Each family has a high or a low orientation of each, creating four possible patterns: laissez-faire, pluralistic, protective, and consensual. Laissez-faire families are low in both orientations and do not openly communicate often nor do they tackle more than a few topics. Families with a pluralistic communication pattern have a high conversation orientation with a low conformity orientation. This communication alignment is inclusive of all members, and these families are open to diverse, sometimes difficult, conversations. The protective pattern is distinguished by its low conversation and high conformity orientations. Obedience to parents in these families is a high priority with few unconstrained interactions. Lastly, consensual-patterned families are high in both orientations, which maintains “a tension between pressure to agree and to preserve the existing hierarchy within the family, on the one hand, and an interest in open communication and in exploring new ideas, on the other” (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2004, p. 185).

Unkind or unsafe communication from parents can also manifest in significant ways for young and adult children. SLT also proposes that children whose caregivers parent in threatening, forceful, or inconsistent ways have a higher risk of adopting aggressive behaviors; this relationship has emerged in numerous studies (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Goodnight et al., 2017; Lavoie et al., 2002). Harsh parenting includes verbally insulting, quarreling with, or hitting the child as punishment (Lavoie et al., 2002). A child will very likely learn these tactics as behaviors to be used in future events

involving conflict, impacting how they would negotiate struggles with peers and partners. Even when children are not directly involved in the conflict, witnessing interparental conflict is enough to produce negative outcomes for children. Issues such as a lower sense of well-being (Vanderwater & Lansford, 1998), negative view of conflict (El-Sheikh, 1997), and social maladjustment (Kinsfogel & Grych, 2004) can result.

Furthermore, Andrews et al. (2000) identified family aversive communication as a positive predictor of couple aversive behavior and decreased couple satisfaction for both dating men and married women—even decades after adolescence. Carroll (1977) found that violent tendencies were more likely to be passed down to children from their same-sex parent(s), indicating that individuals who experienced violence in their childhood are at risk of using violent communication and behaviors in their own families. This also points to gender as a revealing variable to investigate how family communication impacts relational development in adult children.

Vézina et al. (2015) studied the effects of family violence, high-risk adolescent behaviors, and childhood behavioral problems on girls' dating victimization. Data was collected from the subjects during adolescence and again in early adulthood with the Parent-Conflict Tactics Scales (CTSPC-CA; Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, 1998) and a revised version of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus et al., 1996). The CTS or a revised version (Straus & Douglas, 2017; Straus et al., 1996) was utilized in numerous studies in this review (Andrews et al., 2000; Babin & Palazzolo, 2012; Kinsfogel & Grych, 2004; Palazzolo, Roberto, & Babin, 2010; Vézina, et al., 2015), helping to support the validity of the measure as well as the studies that used it. The results showed that high-risk behaviors (i.e., risky sexual behaviors, substance use,

delinquency) increased the probability that girls would experience revictimization of psychological dating violence. Girls of this study who experienced family violence and had behavioral problems as children were at a greater risk of DV involvement than the subjects who did not. Vézina et al.'s definition of victimization included the experience of psychological, physical, or sexual violence. This is interesting, as over half of the scholars working on this study also collected data for Lavoie et al. (2002), which did not investigate "sexual" violence as a factor for both the likelihood to experience and the perpetuation of violence, despite their overlapping nature of the various forms of abuse.

Using FCP, Young & Schrodtt (2016) found that when parents openly explore their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors with their family, "young adults are more likely to communicate acceptance to their romantic partner and to challenge their partner to grow as an individual" (p. 468). Their results also suggest that children of protective parents (i.e., high in conformity, low conversation) might communicate opposition to their future partners more than those of laissez-faire families (i.e., low in conversation and conformity). This engagement might produce conflict, which could result in negative emotions or, conversely, may facilitate discussion to establish mutually-beneficial relational expectations. This supports the idea that not all conflict is negative, but without guidance, children might not understand the value of this type of communication.

Fathers' conformity orientation was not a significant predictor of any IPV, unlike mothers', which predicted five variations of IPV for their daughters (i.e., physical perpetration, sexual perpetration, sexual victimization, physical victimization, and psychological perpetration) and one for their sons (psychological perpetration) (Babin & Palazzolo, 2012). Mother's conformity orientation significantly predicted psychological

perpetration for both sons and daughters, possibly indicating a mother's preference or greater aptitude for psychological disciplining communication tactics. These findings may reflect traditional parenting roles that place mothers as the primary caregivers. As the dominant caretaker in a traditional, heterosexual relationship, mothers may have stronger bonds and more time with the children than the fathers do, thus giving mothers more opportunities to communicate with and socialize their children. Babin and Palazzolo's method allowed them to evaluate the unique perspectives male and female children had on their male or female parent's communication pattern.

Babin and Palazzolo's (2012) findings indicate how gender-influenced communication patterns are perceived by children. Specifically, this study suggests that mothers' communication strategies have greater impacts on their children than fathers' do. Babin and Palazzolo (2012) used FCP to study how parents' communication patterns impacted their children's future intimate partner violence (IPV) involvement. Parent's conformity orientation predicted physical perpetration, physical victimization, sexual perpetration, and psychological perpetration in their daughters, significantly for the latter two. Psychological was the *only* type of perpetration predicted for their sons; however, not to a statistically-significant amount. Additionally, Babin and Palazzolo's (2012) work provides evidence that mothers have more power in socializing their daughters than they do their sons, which support the findings of other studies (Palazzolo, Roberto, & Babin, 2010).

As mentioned, harsh parenting can involve verbal, physical, and argumentative forms of discipline. Lavoie et al. (2002) collected data through questionnaires from 717 adolescent boys for 8 years, producing a longitudinal study on the effects of

dysfunctional parenting (i.e., laxness of monitoring, interparental conflict that the child witnesses, and harsh parenting practices) on their children's future dating violence involvement. Specifically, the results found that harsh parenting experienced from ages 10 to 12 predicted dating violence. Lavoie et al. also found the connection between harsh physical parenting in 12- to 14-year-old boys predicted future social issues more than when used on boys 10 to 12 years old. Puberty is an incredibly sensitive time for boys, and harsh parenting of teenage boys can result in antisocial interactions for a rural boy.

Antisocial behavior contributes to the enactment of dating violence (Andrews et al., 2000; Goodnight et al., 2017; Lavoie et al., 2002). In addition to harsh parenting practices, Lavoie et al. (2002) found a direct relationship between antisocial behavior (i.e., substance abuse and delinquency) when boys were 15 and violent dating relationship involvement at ages 16 and 17. Andrews et al. (2000) identified a male partner's antisocial behavior as a significant predictor of physical aggression in a dating woman's relationship. Goodnight et al. (2017) noted that antisocial behavior is a trait of psychopathic individuals, who are also known for callousness and superficial charm. Their study found a prospective relationship between psychopathy and IPV, though the researchers note more research needs to be conducted on the association between the two. Notably, antisocial behavior in partners has been reported less in married couples than in dating couples (Andrews et al., 2000), indicating relationships with at least one antisocial partner may dissolve more often than they result in long-term commitment, such as marriage. Communicating to children how to recognize both safe and unsafe behaviors in others is an important task for caregivers and academics alike, especially in rural spaces where the diversity of adults children experience is often very limited.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Interpretivism

Researchers and the literature they produce abide by shared moral and functional standards according to their respective philosophical traditions (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). The epistemological and ontological assumptions of interpretivism suggest that societies and their corresponding populations should not be examined as objectively-observable units, much like scientists have studied the natural world around us (e.g., the cycles of Earth's moon or the migration habits of monarch butterflies). This paradigm highlights that we can only comprehend our realities through a perspective that is completely unique to us (rather than an outside, unbiased, all-knowing human being).

Interpretivism identifies any *universal* "Truth" and its implications to the social sciences as a fairly unnecessary additions to academia. There is no essential reality (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). An all-encompassing Truth necessitates the neglect of diverse experiences of the same society in the creation of it. Objectivism relies on the idea that scholars are capable of identifying, studying, and presenting information without external influences or partiality, essentially denying their own humanity. By indicating a universal, social Truth, scholars risk failing to address the role and value of perspective in the research they record. This potential absence of personhood and agency are factors that aided in the development of interpretive, qualitative, critical methods. When scholars reject objectivism, they create space for considering there can be no universal narrative satisfactory to even the smallest of cultures.

This paradigm asserts that the social world and the co-constructed rules that govern it can be identified in the personal accounts that researchers and their participants offer. Interpretivist scholarship honors diversity by focusing on the ways the participant narrates their experiences and creates a shared understanding of their accounts for the researcher and the readers. Scholars seek to record the person—to see the ways an individual makes sense of their environment, relationships, and their own self-concept. Personal accounts are seen to constitute the richest data—these accounts are often deeply vulnerable, full of cultural context. Interpretivism addresses those subjective, emotional aspects of social experiences and the values that drive choice and govern interpretation to produce deeply empathetic research.

Note that one cannot be expected to know and use tools they have never had access to nor seen utilized, meaning the researcher's identity and knowledge base will impact the way they can present their work to others. Another key feature of interpretivism is the intentionality to consider the researcher's own understanding of the world. Facts and truths produced in a scholar's articles are all bound to the paradigms and vocabulary of those scientists (Kuhn, 1996). The lenses that individuals use to navigate their environment depends entirely on what spaces they have been able to inhabit in society.

This applies to scholars and their participants alike, which prompts researchers to explore the impact of their own positionality and interests on their interpretations of their data. This is to say, scholars need to reflect on the presence of nuances beyond their research and their knowledge, and it is their responsibility to the academic community and the subjects they study to address these aspects in their research. This shift validates

the academic value of lived experiences and personal narratives and encourages helpful and just outcomes for all of those implicated in the research.

Feminist Methodologies

Feminist scholarship also informs this research, compounding with interpretivist notions to examine the broader conceptualization of “the rural” as well as provide accounts of lived experiences of the residents in these areas. Scholars seek to understand where our systems of meaning stem from and what work they do for us and on others. To investigate this relationship between power and discourse, Feminist scholarship attends to each subject’s unique, individual possession of power (Donovan, 2000; Eadie, 2009; English, 2010). Rather than developing a wide lens to view the domination from an elite or hegemonic class, the focus on subject positionality acknowledges over-arching, social hierarchies without sacrificing subtle nuances of those (often) co-constituted characteristics. Feminist scholars look small-scale at how individual positionalities and the power they offer a person interact to produce these imbalances in privileges among those oppressing and oppressed identities. Feminist theories explore and detail power relations that influence the ways individuals understand and formulate their own identities, especially in relation to womxn’s experiences (Donovan, 2000; English, 2010). By investigating the subject positions that women embody in the contexts of their interpersonal relationships and social settings, feminist scholars work to provide attentive, nuanced accounts of how identity is negotiated.

Feminist scholarship has produced literature and theories that emphasize agency in constructing, sustaining, and resisting the social expectations and assumptions of the dominant ideology within the rural spaces of Western, developed countries. Subjects are

participants in the development of their identities (Bock & Shortall, 2006). By identifying and investigating assumptions and untouched renderings of social life, feminist communication scholars direct attention to the subtle power relations that dictate expectations, access, and authority within and among our interpersonal relationships. This makes dominant ideologies, oppression, and means of resistance rich sources of information about what a culture values (Craig, 2007; Craig & Muller, 2007; Jansen, 2007). This intentionality to differentiate between the subject and the context results in powerful understandings of human experiences.

Without acknowledging significant characteristics of subject and researcher positionality, scholars may inadvertently publish “unhelpful” findings that may produce adverse consequences for the participants and the populations they may be representing. Feminism also renders that any universal Truths and accompanying social and academic implications as fairly *suspicious* additions to academia. When scholars choose methods that conflate “impersonal” with “objective” while not addressing their own positionality, they often present their information as if it is free of significant outside influence beyond those named in their limitations (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2016). Additionally, researchers might produce scholarship without thoroughly addressing the presence or the impact of such ideals on their own understanding of their identity and their relationship to their research. As a consequence, scholars risk neglecting the rich, cultural experiences that have informed and led them to conduct those studies.

Research should be mutually beneficial for the community of study; those being investigated deserve to receive sufficient compensation for the deeply personal and meaningful stories they reveal to investigators who may have previously been strangers

to them (Naples, 2003). Feminist research addresses the problem of representation by elevating the voices of others, specifically those whose identity has been silenced and alienated from political, economic, and cultural power (Kirsch, 1999; Naples, 2003). Kirsch (1999) calls for this community involvement, recognizing that the responsibility falls on the researcher to ensure that those previously gatekept channels of communication are open for participants to narrate and register their lived experiences in and, often *for*, the academic sphere.

Feminist research foregrounds the epistemological assumptions that guide it, addressing the researcher's own professional, political, and personal power and positionalities in order to establish transparency and maintain accountability to participants. Ethical standards of feminist scholarship, much like interpretivism, assert that researchers need to be very intentional when considering their own role, power, and epistemological stance, as well as how these factors influence the results, the *knowledge*, that a study work yields (Kirsch, 1999; Naples, 2003). Questions such as, "*What reason did you choose this method? What traumas are informing this research? Are the people of this community going to find this research?*" These questions prompt researchers to investigate their own motives and desires for their work, as well as consider the larger impacts the narratives they produce may have on the subjects of study.

Feminist research requires reflexivity, often through analytic, discursive reflections with those implicated, the investigator themselves, and within the literature they produce. To accomplish this, social scholars collect and compile those data-rich accounts of cultural phenomena using methods such as interviews, open-ended questions, and ethnographic inquiries. Control over the research is shared among a researcher and

their co-investigators (participants), establishing a significant power exchange between those previously known as researcher and subject, scholar and layperson, simultaneously working against coercive scholarship that exploits its subjects. These conversations help to interrupt the passive acceptance of hegemonic narratives that dominate representation by constructing conditions that encourage and necessitate the researcher acknowledges the role of power within academics.

Qualitative Research

When scholarship assembles knowledge from diverse perspectives, they are acknowledging that there may be countless different experiences of an interaction, which also recognizes that any one rendering of an experience is only partial and therefore imperfect—sans objective Truth, if you will. “Qualitative research treats humans as patterned but not fully predictable beings whose thought practices are internally closed off from others” (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2016, p. 27; also see Peters, 1999). Critiques of traditional research methods posit that these means can inadvertently exclude or systematically overlook narratives (Ellis et al., 2011; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Qualitative scholars investigate perspectives, descriptions, and sensitive relationships, recording multiple accounts of events that are often unavailable to the researcher as an outside party (Ellis et al., 2011; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011), drawing attention to the social constructions produced from meaning-making moments that inform and influence our every-day lives (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

Qualitative research explores the complexities of individual experiences through methods such as interviews, ethnography, and textual analysis, which yield richly descriptive accounts of larger social phenomena. These methods are used to investigate

dialogue and dialect among group members and non-members, the use of space in private and public places, cultural works of fiction and nonfiction, and significant artifacts such as clothing or monuments. Ethnography, for example, is often aimed at helping the insiders and outsiders explain and experience a culture - in more commonly understood ways (Ellis et al., 2011, Maso, 2001). That is, with concerns of identity, the researcher may not be a member of the community that they would like to work with, making the aforementioned methods invaluable to social-scientific investigations.

These aforementioned paradigms and their correlating methodologies give scholars practical theoretical framework to produce vibrant, participant-centered additions to the social sciences. By doing so, social scientists engage their participants or subjects in more considerate and empathetic ways to enhance the collective outcomes and minimize the disadvantages of participating in such studies.

Autoethnography

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) use geographic framework to analyze hegemonic masculinities at three different levels: local, regional, and global. Rural studies of gender often focus on the local and regional levels, which include families, communities, and social structures (i.e., work places, churches, and volunteer groups) and culture, politics, and nationalism, respectively. The local, regional, and global properties coincide to impact gender constructions at all levels, but centering investigations on these two levels focuses the cultural influences that guide gender identities and performances.

After a great deal of reflecting and speaking through my goals with classmates and professors, I have chosen autoethnography as a method to draw attention to the novel ways that disciplining, racism, sexism, ableism, and classism function to construct gender

identities in the rural Northwest. Jones, Adams, & Ellis (2016) pose four noteworthy features that differentiate between autoethnography and other personal work: “(1) *purposefully commenting on/critiquing of culture and cultural practices*, (2) *making contributions to existing research*, (3) *embracing vulnerability with purpose*, and (4) *creating a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response*” (p. 22, emphasis in original). Autoethnographers utilize their most inter- and intra-personal experiences to expand on their cultures, exposing the ways the self “is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations” (Ellis, 2004, p. 27).

Autoethnographers produce, critique, and evaluate social theories. By reclaiming stories from one’s memories, researchers compose renditions of their epiphanies through poetry, journal analyses, and visual representations to investigate their membership of a social system significant to their identity (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2013).

Autoethnography helps us answer questions like, “How do we negotiate the lingering effects of trauma/family memories/friendship failures with the relationships we still maintain and the memories we still replay?”

Communication has effects, and those effects linger, sometimes to the point of altering the trajectory of someone’s well-being. Whether that be a singular catalytic event or hundreds of lowly-spoken words, the richness of insider information on an event can provide significant understanding to otherwise under-studied or overlooked aspects that contribute to and constitute widely-accepted social narratives (Ellis et al., 2011). This opportunity is enabled and, optimally, empowered by that person’s cultural identity.

When they narrate their own experiences, scholars can explore the institutions that intentionally underrepresent, suppress, or refuse individuals’ stories and rights to them.

As Toyosaki and Pensoneau-Conway (2013) explain, “Our ‘doing’ of autoethnography helps us, autoethnographers, come to know (epistemology), evaluate (axiology), become (ontology), and do (praxeology) our selfhood—our sense of being—in the world” (p. 560). Emotionally-rich narratives produced through autoethnography work to fill the gap that is absent from traditional research literature (Adams, Ellis, & Holman Jones, 2017; Ellis et al., 2011; Kirsch, 1999). Autoethnography is “an interrogative method [used] to explore the intersubjective nature of our self-constructions” (Toyosaki & Pensoneau-Conway, 2013, p. 557).

To write of an experience and then further investigate the culturally-influenced nuances of the situation is to write autoethnographically. Behar (1998) encourages autoethnographers to focus on the social and cultural influences on their own experiences while drafting in order to fully address the nooks and crannies of their identity.

Ethnographic methods are often utilized to help the insiders and outsiders explain and experience a culture - in more commonly understood ways (Ellis et al., 2011; Maso, 2001). This is displayed in the atmosphere that the writer describes for their readers – what picture they paint, what tone they set, which parts they punctuate. Facets of one's culture are made familiar for both insiders and outsiders through the exploration of personal experiences. Eyewitness accounts, second-person viewpoints, and third-party perspectives allow readers to observe the event from alternative perspectives; these range from very intimate places to far away—the bird’s-eye-view (Ellis et al., 2011).

While artful, autoethnographic works engage significant facets of traditional, procedural research. Autoethnography gains validity from the methodical and theoretical tool and previous research and corresponding literature to engage with (see personal

interview in Ellis et al., 2011, p. 276). Abstract analysis is accompanied by significant literature and research data to compare and question the views and values autoethnography lays bare. Through the use of scholarly references and in-text citations, the reflexive scholarship marks autoethnography as scholarly recognizable (Jones et al., 2013). Holman Jones et al. (2016) says that autoethnography creates space for the following components of *spirit* inside the academic sphere, additionally offering five educational purposes of autoethnography—“(1) *disrupting norms of research practice and representation*; (2) *working from insider knowledge*; (3) *maneuvering through pain, confusion, anger, and uncertainty and making life better*; (4) *breaking silence/(re) claiming voice* and “*writing to right*” (Bolen, 2012); and (5) *making work accessible.*” (p. 32, emphasis in original)

Autoethnography’s format provides individuals outside of the academic sphere with more accessible means to engage with research that has been done on their identity, without them. Autoethnographers explicitly call for audience interaction, creating a space for constructive, and perhaps equally vulnerable, feedback and disclosures. By focusing their intentions on producing written accounts of their own culturally-indicative experiences, autoethnographers ask for and engage in an expectation of care- and responsibility-centered research for all researchers and all participants (Bockner, 2013). This academic climate works to elicit and account for diverse perspectives from positionalities that may also be interested producing comprehensive delineations for and with their respective communities. By putting one’s work in conversation with other scholarship and inviting interaction, scholars embrace that vulnerability to advance

existing research by fostering a genuine and intentional relationship with assembling knowledge.

Autoethnographic standards for academic literature strive for just, narrated truths, advocating for representation in scholarship and emphasizing the importance of the ethical logistics of writing the “other.” As previously explored, a researcher’s emotionality and subjectivity are very likely going to influence the research methods and results. Autoethnography takes a proactive approach to addressing a study’s limitations; the researcher engages in transparent and reflective dialogue with the hypothetical reader rather than posing as a “master” narrative on the subject (Ellis et al., 2011). When scholars unarm significant moments (Behar, 1998), researchers engage in a vulnerability usually left to participants. Scholars acknowledge their faults and their flaws as social *and* academic beings in their literature, creating space to public critique of the practices one upholds and admits to.

Moved by hindsight and autoethnographic methods, I investigate the formation and evolution of my own co-constitutive relationships of gender, sexuality, and identities. I hope to highlight the values of the rural, northwestern woman in farming and ranching communities and how they shape the lives of families. I know my experiences may radically differ from those of women who are five years older and likely will not mirror those who are five years younger. My work as an autoethnographer is to identify the circumstances that my stories resulted from to advance scholars’ understanding of rural gender identities and performances. Using hindsight to deconstruct my experiences, I now use autoethnography to relive and explore the messages of femininity, sexuality, and gender roles in rural America.

CHAPTER FOUR: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Being Rural is...

growing up in the house your grandparents bought, in the same house your that father did.

finding tiny, old toys in the nooks and crannies of your room, likely your aunt's. never moving houses as a child.

sitting on top of the old, red harvester that broke down and found its final resting place here amongst this collection of junked cars, fenceposts, and equipment we refer to as a pasture.

cherishing these moments of solitude that I stole away for myself.

I was not very tall when I created this space for myself. The hard, cool steel never let me forget to bring the jean blanket Mom always has in the back of her car. In early April, I hear birds and sheep. I see momma cows with their babies. If I lay flat and do not move too close to the left edge, I may remain hidden from those who had not thought to look up on the back of a decaying combine with a caragana (Caragana arborescens) bush growing out of the header².

having a junk yard with this much variety.

My grandparents used to burn their garbage in the back of some sort of trailer. I would dig through it. I saw old beer bottles, pill bottles, pop³ cans.

noting each yellow skeleton of a Vermeer baler that your grandfather littered out across the pasture, because this was his backyard before it was yours.

I was so irritated when they hauled the decaying, broken-down bus over to the other place. Mom realized that my friends and I would play in my grandparents' old bus and told me that we could not go in it anymore, due to the other creatures and diseases that might be inhabiting it. It had been one of my favorite hideouts. I spent hundreds of hours in the junkyard, finding keys and old bottles and fragments of metal that sparked my imagination.

seeing the diesel pickup your dad drove your entire childhood sitting in two pieces in the junk yard and feeling sadness for him.

I remember the morning he carried me into the pickup before the sun or I had woken up, wrapped in a blanket he had brought from the living room. He asked me the night before if I wanted to go with him to Billings or stay home with Grandma and Grandpa. I thought hard about it, ultimately deciding to join him. He shut the door and went back in for just one more thing. I woke up before he got back, gazing around, checking the green glow of the radio, hoping my eyes might adjust and provide me with the time. He walked out of the door, striding towards the pickup with his eyes to the ground, mind preoccupied.

² Header: rotating blade cage that mows and collects grains or crops

³ Soda, obviously.

setting up a secret hiding spot for yourself inside of a pig feeder.
 harboring adamant feelings about how stinky and gross pigs are.

Grandpa had raised pigs at one point and then gave it up at another, thus solidifying the family narrative surrounding pigs.

hearing those stories from a man who has pulled rotting lambs out of an ewe that had aborted them days ago.

Dad's "Kermit" car that reminds you of the story where your uncle wrecked a car after coming back from Eunice one night.

Dad, all while having a broken collarbone, took the fall for his brother, because my uncle was too young to be driving legally.

having two entirely separate wood stacks that no one has ever explained.

Why do we need two, guys?

needing to clarify which "barn" you are asking about, because there is the shop, the lambing sheds, the cow barn, the feed shed, the old shop, and the net⁴ shed.

We use the word "shed" a lot for people who are referring big, tin buildings.

knowing that each barn contains a variety of items that is not reflected in their names.
 putting a slab of cement in your front yard to cover up your well.

having two sink faucets, one with well water and one with minerals, and still choosing to drink the well water.

knowing the cows' drinking schedules to plan the best time to take a shower.

One must wander into the unfinished basement that my grandparents started so that you can turn the valve to shut off the water in the yard if you need to do a load of laundry or run the dishwasher.

needing to grate and regravell the dirt road to the house every so often.

We had to fill in the potholes, because cars and pickups and tractors and semis splashing to and from the highway create quite a few potholes.

having your father put the pickup in gear and tell very young you to just "turn off the key" when you get to the gate.

I am upset that grandpa did not teach me to drive at four years old like he did my brother, but he did love to teach us how to drive, so I definitely got my own time in. It took a while for my mom to forgive my grandpa for letting my brother drive solo before he could start kindergarten.

living five minutes away from your grandparents' double-wide trailer home⁵.

seeing your grandpa pull up at the house and walk in with the papers from the previous week in a plastic sack.

Mom and Dad did not buy the paper. We just got them after my grandparents had finished reading them. The crossword puzzles and Sudoku pages would either have my grandmother's writing on them, or they would be cut out altogether. The classified sections had circles around the garage sales that they were interested in last week.

spending more time with your grandparents than with your parents most summers, even the parent who operates a business from home.

⁴ Net wrap

⁵ And it was a *home*.

When we went to Grandma and Grandpa's, we got to watch cable TV. Grandpa and Grandma got it to watch more shows, but they mainly stuck to the same two or three channels that my brother and I got over at our house from the antenna. They watched the 5:00 pm and 6:00 pm programs, usually the news, Jeopardy, and the Wheel of Fortune. They were married more than sixty years before he passed away.

getting picked up from the bus at the highway by your grandparents after school so that you would not just be sitting at home alone.

I hated loud noises. As the daughter of a skilled mechanic, I would regularly hear the rattling of the air wrench taking bent or broken teeth off of the neighbor's rake. Vehicles flowed up and down our driveway, dropping off their malfunctioning equipment that my dad or grandpa would fix that afternoon, or as soon as they could. There was always something to be done.

walking home from the bus on the other days after school, because no vehicle was there.

Sometimes, in the winter, Dad would be off feeding. There was an awful blizzard one afternoon, so my brother tucked me into the haystack and went to get the four-wheeler to take us both to the house quickly. I was, and have been since, so grateful for that.

never wearing a helmet.

Not to ski, not to ride a four-wheeler, not to move cattle up to their summer pasture on TJ, my mom's high school 4-H horse.

keeping work gloves in the car at all times.

worrying about angus cattle as you drive home at night.

not trying new restaurants because Applebee's⁶ exists.

never letting go of anything in case you need to use it to expand the corral.

skillfully using old bones of equipment to build a functioning corral to work anything between the size of a lamb to a bull.

Not all of the gates are 100 percent lamb-proof, but is anything?

feeding cows in the morning so that you can have Christmas lunch on time.

not taking trips too far from home for too long because something is going to go wrong on the ranch while you are gone.

hating small dogs.

They cannot assist around the ranch. I guess.

thinking you don't need sunscreen, because you already burnt and have a "base tan."
walking into the living room to see your mom reading her bible and daily devotional every morning.

wearing shoes outside only when you accept that they will likely get muddy.

My sister-in-law shared that she tells her family to only bring items that they would not mind getting poop on.

washing any boot off under a free-standing facet outside and scraping the bottoms on the shoe grate before setting foot in the front porch.

You really should do it before you step on the cement, because then the muddy footsteps will dry into dirt steps that would need scrubbing to remove. As a kid, I

⁶ Written pre-"Fancy Like"

used to hose off the sidewalk, my arena, where I rode my bike every summer, around and around and around.

hearing a gun go off when you least expect it because your dad or brother wanted to shoot at the birds (magpie or pigeon, both the enemy).

I was awful at killing things. It just was not for me after my run as a gopher trapper. My brother and I would find their holes out back, plant the steaks in the ground, and set the rusty traps. We would ride out on the four-wheeler, check our traps, and bring back the ones we got to the lambing barns and green shop, wherever my momma cats had taken their kittens at that point in the summer.

warring with the magpies over the cat food each winter when the cats are bedded down in a barn, unable to defend their supplemental dry food and scraps from the house.

The food scraps go to the cats or guard dogs, as my mom's main man these days is a good boy named Dunkin who is very bad at guarding the sheep but really incredible at guarding my mom and the shady spots in the yard. I spent many-a-nights making sure the dogs did not come up onto the porch, because they chased my cats for sport. I used to hate some dogs.

wearing my pink foam Nike slippers out to the dam with my dog to take go on an adventure and stepping directly into a cowpie.

I washed it off in the dam, even though it is silted down. We all wished that it was not such a puddle of livestock waste and bugs. I always wanted to swim or fish in it. My dad likes to ice fish. We usually go with Willy and Steve, some of Dad's old friends. He periodically comments that he has not heard from them in a while. One year, we went to an ice fishing competition. I took a fish we had kept and released the eggs into the dam, hoping I would be able to fish. I thought I was going to get into so much trouble if it worked, but I was also hoping I was the only one who would notice, being the one who spent the most leisure time there. I imagine there are some important logistics one should know about spawning conditions, but I was not old enough to have considered that at the time.

playing outside all day every day that you could once your parents decided you were old enough to correctly calculate whether or not something could kill you.

Throughout years of my adventures, I have traced the fence around the dam a hundred times over. My cousin and I had to pull a lamb out of it one afternoon, because my dog had chased her into it. Hook kept running from side to side, bank to bank. The lamb swam across the dam and back, twice. I did not even know lambs could do that until that day. We named her Michelle Phelps.

having a windbreak behind your house to play in, to mow, and to bury your pets in. understanding the difference between "horse people" and "four-wheeler" people.

My brother got a four-wheeler for Christmas one year. I think Mom technically did, as well, but I do not know if it was really for her.

getting to ride the horse your mom raises as she rides her horse out of her sister's mare. keeping secrets for your brother about the various ways he wrecked the three-wheeler.

I was involved in one of these legendary crashes. We were gaining speed, going too fast for kids⁷ to be going. I wrapped my arms tightly around him as the three-wheeler approached the gravel pile. The bike launched into the air, but just as

⁷ Who were unsupervised without helmets, but mostly just because we were children.

quickly returned to the ground. We had not hit squarely, and the bike tipped, and we toppled. Pain shot from my ankle, a throb spreading to my foot and leg. Once I realized where we were, what had happened, and where my brother landed, I hopped over to him to make sure he was okay, but he seemed better off than I felt. We tipped the bike over, hopped on, and drove to the house. We talked it over, and we were not going to tell Mom or Dad, because then he would get grounded from the three-wheeler, and I would just be in trouble, which was the end of the world at that age. Mom came in, saw me on the couch, covered up and not feeling stellar, and the jig was up. I remember him crying at the bathroom sink, taking in my scratched-up tummy as Mom looked me and my injuries over. He felt so badly, but I was only banged up, not broken. Mom checked me for a concussion, and I seemed fine. However, it did take me a while before I could ride on the back of a bike again. It is one of my favorite things that we did together.

trailing your grandpa's cattle up to their summer pastures with their calves, and trailing them down every fall to be shipped.

My mom and sister-in-law recently picked up a horse for my unborn niece. spending four weekend days on the back of a horse, rain or shine, stopping midday to eat the salads and cookies your mom and aunts made.

My grandpa has seen four generations of his family move the herd he and my grandma started across the land and back over the last 50 years.

learning about lamb parts at the kitchen table at nine years old.

I started showing lambs when I was nine. I was scared to do it the first year I was old enough, because I was so scared to lose control of the lamb during a fair show. Every year, my dad and I would pick me out some lambs. Often, we went to near-by neighbor's ranch to check out his fair lamb selection, and sometimes we would go closer to my grandpa's ranch. He would ask me which ones I wanted, and he would strongly urge me to participate. I watched and read about and tried to get the technique right to pick great market lambs, but honestly, I could not tell for the longest time. He would eventually just wait until I made my decision, everyone getting a bit more uncomfortable as frustrations increased.

naming two lambs every year to raise and train and walk and give treats to.

selling them both for market, as one will make you money for college and the other could have picked up a disease at the county fair, and it should not come home to the flock.

learning how to read sign language while operating heavy machinery that only your father knows the direct translation for.

crying because you are so cold by the end of the day that your family is shearing sheep and then promptly having your father yell at you.

I remember my mom snapping at my dad for snapping at me. Little lessons on standing up for myself, I suppose.

riding 20 minutes into town with your mom on the days she worked to drop her off at daycare while your brother rides around all day with your mechanic and rancher dad. then starting kindergarten in the opposite direction with a class of six, because that is where your brother was.

We were better friends when he was not too old to appreciate a younger sister's affections. After he became a teenager, we stopped hanging out. Only one of us was hitting a growth spurt, and the other became defenseless.

hearing your mother ask your father so many times to rototill the garden.

having so much space for a garden but being too busy keeping animals and children alive to tend to one.

having the cows tramp through any garden that gets planted, if the rabbits did not consume everything first.

making bottles⁸ for bum⁹ calves in the basement mud room.

thinking that you will get in trouble for letting the four-year-old you are babysitting pee in the yard if anyone drove up.

When you can hear a vehicle coming before they get to the house, it really is not a risky procedure to pee whenever nature calls. I have absolutely peed in the lambing barns when I did not want to stop playing and go all the way up to the house.

letting a 13-year-old girl babysit when she has zero experience.

Thanks for taking a chance on me, Shelly.

getting dropped off the school bus at somebody else's house to take piano lessons or to learn to knit with your 4-H leader.

taking hunter's safety as soon as you can to spend more time with your friends.

taking hunter's safety from a man who had been shot in a hunting accident and was just never the same afterwards.

not having internet access for the first ten years of your life.

I grew up when everyone understood the floppy drive but was also just learning how to use the CD-ROM. Myspace would become my future in the following years.

coming home after a day full of school, a sports practice, and unpredictable social relationships to head down to the shed to help feed and water the ewes during lambing season.

turning the key in the tractor or pickup so that the radio plays while you work.

Having a radio meant we always had something to fill the silence between my father and I as he figured out our (his) project's next steps. I would take orders, "Grab this," or, "Take this over there." I had somewhat helpful, little hands, and wide-open ears.

not remember hearing your father sing along to anything but the song "In Color" by Jamey Johnson for your entire life.

thinking that singing along to the radio with your dad in the car is too embarrassing for you.

I had been singing and jumping on the trampoline one warm, cloudy afternoon, when my father hollered from the fuel tanks, something in a question format, that

⁸ Of milk replacer and water

⁹ Motherless; by the mother with no milk, by the mother dying, or by the lamb or calf being a twin and not getting enough milk from mom

let me know that he was hearing me. I was mortified, and quit playing shortly after.

operating heavy machinery before you have a driver's license.

driving the tractor on a county highway at 35 to 50 miles per hour to get to your grandparent's house.

running a Ford tractor that has no radio and sometimes has no doors to rake.

knowing how to drive a tractor but not a manual vehicle.

This one may just be me. Mom tried to teach me in Dad's old, green and white Ford, and it went okay, though I definitely started having nightmares about being in the body of a moving vehicle without the means to steer or stop it after that.

getting the gates for your father as he feeds the ewes in the lambing lots.

learning how to quickly cut the net wrap off of a bale before your dad lowers the hay into the feeder, making sure no critters crawl into the feeder.

always caring around a knife in case you need it, because you will.

The knives that are scattered throughout the barns and vehicles and overall pockets all have the family business name on.

helping your father put tin on the roof because your mom is afraid of heights.

spending hours every summer picking up net and blue tubs from left-over lick tubs from the winter because your dad feeds without slowing down.

coming upon wire from old fences that he left in fields when you're walking or swathing.

pounding fence posts and fastening t-post clips on a breezy, summer afternoon.

spending your older summers in heavy machinery to make money for college and help the family with haying¹⁰.

spending young summers on a slowly decaying porch, surrounded by cats and kittens.

I am honestly perplexed how they thought we could just transition me into an active role on the ranch and not have a really big problem.

knowing the best adrenaline high is hearing the sounds of new kittens somewhere in the barn.

walking your cat out to the grain bins so that she can go *extreme* mousing, scoring one every five to ten seconds until the surviving mice had found refuge.

not batting an eye at the massacre because it meant that your cat was "doing her job," even if it just meant that she was well-fed to you.

losing at least ten kittens every summer to disease, dogs, and vehicles.

finding kitten after kitten near death and bringing them into the house, saving the ones that just needed warming up and comforting the ones who were on their way out.

coming into the house to your parents after wandering for hours, calling for your favorite kitten Orangey.

I got back to the house, interrupting my parents' conversation to ask if they had seen him. I was pretty sure they would have already told me by this point if they had. The question was asked as I walked through the kitchen on my way to the back door to see if he was back on the porch yet, but Mom had something to tell me.

feeling the weight of "when?" lingering over every animal you see.

¹⁰ Haying:

rushing excitedly into the house from practice after your mom took Buddy to the vet after she stopped eating or drinking last night.

I asked how Buddy was, and she only got out, "Not very good..." before I kneeled down and saw her laying still in her crate. She had become incurably ill, as the cats around the ranch seemed to every so often. My mom hugged me, and we cried as we talked about how wonderful of a kitty Buddy had been and how good of care God would take of her. This became our ritual.

calling your mom at work because you think you can see your 4-H kitten dead in the front yard but are too scared to go look.

My mom told me to go check and that she would wait on the phone. When I came back, my worst fears had been confirmed, big and small hearts breaking.

having your mom come home and tell you that the man who had hit your cat on the highway had stopped at her work to tell us how sorry he was and how quick she died and how little she suffered.

not ever knowing if that was a story your mom told you for comfort or an interaction she really had.

panicking at the sounds of foxes' not-so-distant yips and cries.

lying awake at night, prepared to rush to the porch if hissing and yowls erupted.

sobbing hysterically in the lambing barn, calling for the kitten you have been raising.

Maggie's mother Boise disappeared earlier that summer. She typically greeted me whenever I came down to feed and hang out with her, but not this morning. I finally spotted her, just blinking at me on the wall. The memory of my brother coming into the house, telling me through tears that Kanga the jogging kitten had died had been flashing through my mind. He had found the guard dogs attacking her. She had just passed by the time my small legs carried me down there. Kanga was one of two lost that morning.

having a really tough time with grief.

Five Influential Songs to Describe My Youth (see Appendix B for song lyrics)

“This One’s for the Girls” by Martina McBride

“Homewecker” by Gretchen Wilson

“Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue” by Toby Keith

“Back When” by Tim McGraw

“A Different World” by Bucky Covington

Honorable mentions (see Appendix B for abridged song lyrics) include:

“Mr. Mom” by Lonestar

“Red Dirt Road” by Alan Jackson

“Drive (For Daddy Gene)” by Alan Jackson

“How Do You Like Me Now?” by Toby Keith

“I’m Still a Guy” by Brad Paisley

Being from a small town is...

listening to the same radio station on the “highway bus” every morning.

Our local radio covered everything—the news, local sports, and even the birthdays. My parents called in couple times; it is very wholesome. The other buses picked up the kids who lived down much longer dirt roads than I.

having two elementary grades taught by the same teacher.

Small schools did not have the resources (a salary or space) to give all classes their own classroom.

your class size growing because a hired hand moved his family into town.

getting a ride home from your first-grade teacher because she lives right up the hill from you.

answering the door for customers and directing them to the correct barn.

Sometimes, a friend or a classmate would join their dad on his errands. As we got older, they started having us do those errands for them.

knowing not to ride the “highway bus” when Larry drove.

feeling bad for having to call home when he was driving because your dad will have to stop working or send a grandparent to come get you.

knowing you’ll get in trouble for ruining the joke your teacher is playing on your friend.

My friend ate a pencil lead and was seconds from crying because she was so scared and embarrassed. I tried to shake my head as slightly as possible when she looked at me pleadingly to for clarification.

getting to take a “ski day” every March when the whole school loads into two busses with

chaperones to travel two and a half miles to the ski slopes.

I sometimes had to level up beyond my ability because I knew we would not be back for another 365-ish days. Additionally, I wanted to have a friend to ride the ski lift with, but there were years where my closest friends stayed in town to go roller skating and bowling instead.

waking up at six every morning and listening to discern which step your mom was on in one of her morning routines.

The drawer opening and closing, the clatter of a plastic pick on the marble counter, and the sound of the cord prongs being plugged into the socket on the

wall that separated us meant that she is only on the blow-drying step. I often felt that I needed to beat my brother to the shower if I was going to have enough time to get ready. It was not really that difficult, since the stairs creaked so loudly.

figuring out beauty customs the hard way.

I shaved some eyebrow hairs from below the arch with a new, plastic razor for the closest cut, and accidentally nicked myself. I pretended a cat did it, but I was still humiliated when my parents told me a few days later that I should not shave my eyebrows. I switched to the painful method of plucking the hairs instead.

boys your age begin cupping your chest and butt when you are walking down the hallway or as you leave your third-grade classroom.

being flattered by the other people in your life telling you that you are wise for your age because that means you are at your peak performance of “good child.”

hearing the phrase, “If you don’t stop crying, I’ll really give you something to cry about.”

My friends and I were talking about how our parents disciplined us when they were angry with us. I was confused and internally alarmed when one of my classmates said that her mother would slap her across the face if she talked back.

learning to be funny, because your dad responded better to you when you were funny.

listening to a significant amount of Jeff Foxworthy during your childhood.

your brother and father buying CDs of taped redneck-pandering comedy.

hearing a Ron White bit dozens of times about him holding up a thong and teasing his wife before she tells him that it is his daughter’s.

thinking that it would be mortifying to have my dad find my underwear rather than

weird that a middle-aged man is talking about his daughter’s undergarments to millions of his audience members, specifically men his age.

realizing that this section’s entire format is exactly how Jeff Foxworthy sets up his

“You might be a redneck if” material.

Sigh.

hearing your mom and aunt talking while watching “Modern Family,” and hearing your aunt say, “I wish they wouldn’t have it on TV.”

bringing your kids to the basketball game and setting them free in the school.

playing truth or dare when you and your friends lie to your parents at the high school basketball games about where you will be.

My cohort started playing sexually explicit Truth or Dare in the first grade. My parents were usually more aware of where I was than were other parents.

having your second-grade teacher chastise you without naming you in front of the classroom the following Monday.

My friend and I sold paper air planes to other kids at the basketball game under the bleachers for however much money they gave us—anywhere from two cents to a dollar. Our small business never restarted.

playing basketball from the ages of 6 to 18 years old.

Nearly all year long, we carpooled with friends and coaches to and from basketball games on weekends and during the summers.

going to Church School on Wednesday at the White Church¹¹ or the Brown Church¹².

My friends and I went to the White Church right after school on designated Wednesdays. Church School had the best snacks, typically cookies and juice from the parents with cookie duty that week.

telling people that you “went to a Lutheran church” when asked if you were religious. noting that your religious experiences involved being raised to believe that those who attend church are not any better than those who did not.

learning to properly spell Lutheran at twenty-four after saying it “Looth-wren” for your entire life.

getting a key to the front doors as a symbol of acceptance into the church in eighth grade.

Our church underwent major construction, and they changed the locks before I graduated high school without making us any more keys.

your first church school teacher missing two and some fingers above the second knuckle after the header of his combine started up while he was working on it. hearing him say, “Is that Randi with and i i i i i?” from across a room every time he sees you.

being called “Randi with an ‘i’” from the time.

It was nice to have a male who did not yell at me to redirect my energy. Paul always tried hard to make me feel noticed and appreciated. He is a local farmer and rancher. He loved to spend his time teaching kindergarteners about Jesus Christ. There was a day where I was supposed to be singing next to my peers, and I was marching around them, miming out actions to the lyrics, jazzing up the whole event. Then I realized that no one was enjoying it; they were actively ignoring me. No adult asked me to stop, but I did. Dancing to the song made it more fun. “Why doesn’t anybody else want to do this?”

hearing years after you graduate, your mother is still getting put on “cookie” duty.

Monopoly

The day before Christmas break is one of the best days of the school year for Randi. Each year, the elementary classes do a “Secret Santa” Christmas exchange in their classrooms—kindergarten, first and second, third and fourth, and fifth and sixth. They would spend the rest of their day moving from room to room, joining in games with their friends that the teachers had left out for the students. The jr. high and high school students did a White Elephant gift exchange, and then held a volleyball

¹¹ Lutheran

¹² Catholic

tournament with teams created by their teachers. Each year, teachers were all on their own team, leaving students unattended during their games.

Will and Michael were in the third and fourth grade room and they asked Kasey to play Monopoly. Randi was there as well, and the absent invite indicated to her that it was preferred that she not be there. Kasey and Randi were best friends, so maybe she still wanted her to stay to hang out.

Around five minutes in, Kasey landed on the Jail space. Will, the banker, and Michael agreed that meant she was “in jail” and needed to pay to get out. No, Randi thought. That was not right. “That’s not the rule.” Kasey glanced quickly up at her, emotions concealed if there were any, and the boys ignored her. She grabbed the rules out of the box and began reading. They were moving on; Kasey had paid the fine. Then Randi spotted the rule, and she read it out loud so that everyone could know, so *Kasey* could know, that she was being cheated. “If you are not ‘sent’ to Jail but in the ordinary course of play land on that space, you are ‘Just Visiting,’ you incur no penalty, and you move ahead in the usual manner on your next turn.”

“Shut up!” Will said, looking up at her with loathing. Or was it disgust? She lingered there behind them, tongue bitten, watching as they continued to play, and then she took her leave, wandering out of the room as tears welled in her eyes, trying to understand how he could be so upset with her for wanting the game to be played fairly. Kasey said nothing, and they would not talk about this moment in the future. As she wandered down the hallway alone as the sounds of a volleyball match and laughing bounced off of the concrete walls, she coached herself on how to stay quiet around them for the rest of the day. She only had the afternoon to make things right with them. Maybe they would not think that she always needed to be right if she was silent.

Basketball

We are in overtime, and the crowd is buzzing in response to the close competition of junior-high basketball. I wear a jersey that was worn first by the high school teams before they were replaced and retired to Jr. High.

“Get up there!!!” bellows from my father’s mouth. My body tenses as I tilt my head towards the stands to lock eyes with my father. I emit the most forceful glare my prepubescent face has ever made, and turn back to the game, forcing my brain and body to perform defense until the game finally ends. I do not remember if we won or not. I can say with absolute certainty, it does not matter.

I walk from the locker room to find my parents, free the momentary rage that drove my optical decisions earlier that evening. I was still annoyed, but sports parents do these things, ya know? They are there, ready, and they escort me out of the building with intention, past everyone still remaining in the gymnasium. We load into the car and leave the parking lot.

My parents remained silent for some moments, nothing but tension hanging in the radio-free air. I do not remember who said it (probably my dad?), but I heard crystal-clearly from the front seat: “If you ever look at us like that again, we will come down onto the court and pull you out of the game.”

My body is on fire, and actually, everything is on fire. I had disappointed them. I had grown out of spanking, so while little was verbalized about what my future could be if I made the wrong choice, the message of, “You better regret this, and know you’ll definitely regret that,” was conveyed crystal-clear.

My heavy tears rolled down my sticky, flushed face as my nails dug into my palms the rest of the ride home. I did not move a muscle for the rest of the ride, no movement in my winter jacket, trying with all my might to convince them I was asleep. I stew

silently, alone, sweat still heavy on my skin. I'm going straight to bed when I get home, back into myself.

Being a rural teenager...

showing others that you care about your outward appearance.

Other people would talk about their parents not letting them wear sweats to school. Their parents wanted to ensure that they were not perceived as “slobs.” As I aged, class differences became more salient, though I could not yet understand the significance.

buying a white shirt and a black pair of pants to always have on hand, as both 4-H and FFA¹³ required them for “official dress.”

You could also buy a belt that was “blingy” so that you would stand out in showmanship or judging events.

ordering your very own blue, corduroy jacket with your FFA chapter’s name on the back.

trying to explain to people, including my own nieces, what 4-H is without missing significant aspects.

*One of my closest friends told me that she thought the four H’s were referencing horses. However, the pledge is as follows:
I pledge my head to clearer thinking,
My heart to greater loyalty,
My hands to larger service,
and my health to better living,
for my club, my community, my country, and my world.*

leaving at 7:30 in the morning to drive 22 miles to school in your hand-me-down Ford F-150 that your brother had taken to college.

My friend and I carpooled as often as possible, because we lived along the same highway.

teaming up with your classmates to finish assignments so none of you had to do the entire assignment as homework.

not learning to fully use a microscope until your first college seminar with a very unforgiving male instructor.

considering “That’s 70’s Show” a realistic example of how young adults can and should act.

feeling like you have to earn the respect of those around you instead of deserving it from anyone.

knowing that people should feel obligated to hire the local contractors, despite the quality of their work being notoriously inconsistent.

I have dry-walled rooms with my father that were absolutely not square.

only having three sports to choose from, and knowing basketball is the most important.

Is using a van to travel forty-five minutes to basketball practice on bad roads every season

My school was a Class C school, which essentially means that the school eventually had too few students out for athletics to have a team on our own. Schools all over co-oped just to have a team at all, and one can only imagine the politics that went into and spurred from those decisions.

¹³ Formerly known as Future Farmers of America.

being excited to have your dating pool open up significantly when you are seeing a second school so often.

being disqualified from a local scholarship because you are going to the liberal arts college instead of the agricultural school.

hosting an exchange student to bulk up the sports teams and guilting them for a while if they didn't play basketball.

I have sat in class, listening to teachers that doubled as host parents looking through the profiles of eligible exchange students, saying things like, "We are getting one that has sports as an interest." Soccer players were acceptable, as they would at least be used to running the length of a court of a football field.

getting bullied by adults if you choose not to play.

not breaking training rules¹⁴ because you wouldn't get to go on trips with the team like the rest of your friends.

Most host parents let their exchange students go to parties and drink. I, however, was not allowed to go to parties. Nevertheless, the school did not allow me to attend one trip, because I lied for a friend who had a boy sneak into our hotel room through a window at a school function. I was unconscious for most of the company the boy kept, which I was told was "messy." That friend teased me in front of our friends for being there, snoring loudly, while they were together.

organizing the games, teams, and bonfires for the homecoming pep rallies.

I adored homecoming week. Everyone made posters for the gymnasium, we decorated the football field, and the volleyball players each wore a football player's jersey for the day. The high school teams had banners made by the local sign shop, too. One year, we all dressed up like attorneys and took a team picture we later labeled "Laying Down the Law." The school keeps them hung up around the lunch room, which was the school's first basketball court before the expansion.

never experiencing a cohesive team, because co-oped schools, athletes and their parents alike, often communicate that their town is the better of the two anyway.

sometimes having your clothing interrogated by people you are supposed to rely on.

I once sat and listened to a boy ask my teammate, "Short-shorts?" in a confused and seemingly affronted tone to inquire why I might be wearing shorts to basketball practice that landed far below my fingertips but still more than two inches above my knee.

a giant send-off with goodies as you and your team set off to compete in the district, divisional, and, if all goes well, state tournaments.

The weekly basketball games served as a community function before the end of the season began. Community members drove from miles around to convene at the tournaments to show support for athletics. To hype us up, the parents of the players would compile snacks, gum, and fun items like nail polish into personalized gift bags. Our names and numbers covered the windows of the bus in the school colors.

knowing everyone in the home section at the weekend games.

¹⁴ Specifically, not participating in under-age drinking.

playing as shouts flood in from the bleachers. being allowed to yell at other people's children, unless you and their parents didn't get along.

After all, it takes a village.

Periods and the Concept of "Liking It"

Before proceeding, please see Appendix A. You must.

Pink panty liner wrappers, folded smaller than a standard chess board square. Haphazardly mummied in a tissue, stuck into an empty toilet paper roll. I learned to conceal my period, tuck it far into the trash and cover it with the other garbage.

Sneaking tampons to my room in a towel while my family was distracted by the television. I would take the wrappers off of my tampons and pads in the towel closet with the vent turned on to absorb every possible crinkle. Sometimes, I would even pre-rip the ends of the wrapper, because no one could know of my secret.

My mom talked to me once about some changes that my body would be going through in the near future. To give me the best understanding of the amazing feat my body was about to perform, she gave me a pamphlet published in the early 70's titled "Growing Up and Liking It." We flipped through the pages together as I asked simple questions, choosing to forgo the inquiry of the sanitary belt in the picture. I had never seen one in our bathroom, or anyone's for that matter, but I could not tell *Mom* that. Right before my mom left my room, she told me that we would have another talk sometime about how babies are made. I started to feel intense dread each time I was alone with my mom, fearing she would launch into a serious conversation about sexual reproduction. She could mortify me at any given time.

Horrified by the books I found in my mother's cabinet, I was on edge every single time we were alone together from that day on. A feeling of relief would wash over me once we reached our destination, whether it be just to town or all the way to Billings for

our bi-monthly grocery hauls. You know the ones—the kind that you need two shopping carts for.

Books for Christian mothers would float between their cabinet and my mother’s nightstand. If she was reading one of them, my mother would tuck the book into the covers whenever I entered her room to say goodnight.

And for the record, this conversation never happened. I never learned how human children are created.

...But if I did,

Maybe I would have learned about the birds and the bees from the cats and the cows, like the aristocratic Mrs. Bridgerton explained to Daphne using hounds and puppies in the Regency-era Netflix drama “Bridgertons” set in 1813 London.

Maybe I would have learned that sex is unfit for children to know of from the television my family would watch in the evening, after dinner was done, when my dad would change the channel if my mom did not ask him to first.

Maybe I would have learned about child abduction from television, news media, and my friends with “cooler” older siblings. And then, maybe, I would also have learned about one or two of the reasons one would abduct a child from those passive sources presuming an adult audience.

Maybe I would have learned about rape at five years old from my cousins Derek and Sarah, who told us using imagery of ropes, trees, and “sex.”

Maybe I would have nightmares that I never told my parents about, because how can you ask about something you are obviously not supposed to know about?

Maybe I would hear about the games of “Truth or Dare” played during high school basketball games, perhaps joining once and humping (facing each other and bumping fronts once) with a boy three years younger than I.

Maybe I would find an adult magazine or three from the 70’s out in a shop one day as I rummage around for interesting junk to craft with.

Maybe, in eighth grade, the year I was going through confirmation¹⁵, two girls in my high school would race to be the first girl in their class to have sex.

¹⁵A Christian sacrament

Maybe the “winner” would “lose” her “virginity” in my teacher’s basement as their son and his friend watched from the closet, unbeknownst to her, only to be slut-shamed and bullied out of the school within the following week.

After that, maybe the school would provide us with some form of sex education that might equate to three pages of limited biology in a health textbook from the nineties that was previously stored above the music room with the rest of the textbooks from years past.

Maybe.

Or perhaps, the first “conversation” of substance I would have with an adult about sex would be in the Fergus High School’s auditorium from a woman named Pam Stenzel as I sat in a crowd with hundreds of teenagers from the other surrounding small schools.

Having found her entire presentation recorded and posted on YouTube, I am able to watch a very similar lecture to the one I received in the first half-way through high school. Here is a bit of the first few minutes:

“No one has ever had more than one partner and not paid... You had a good choice. That was before you had sex. Now all the choices you have are going to carry lifelong consequences. No easy way out of a pregnancy you didn’t plan... That drug, that hormone, that pill, that shot that this girl is taking has just made her ten times more likely to contract a disease than if she were not taking this drug. This girl could end up sterile or dead. Thanks Mom. Glad you cared.”
(Poulin, 2007)¹⁶

The, “Thanks Mom. Glad you cared.” hangs in the air, lingering as we hear the message: mothers have a responsibility to never give their children access to

¹⁶For more, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0ezYNWIDB0&t=24s&ab_channel=SarahPoulin

contraceptives, and the pill is for girls who would prefer to die instead of remain faithful to themselves, to their morality.

After her initial lecture, adults helped sort students into groups of boys and girls half-way through. I am not sure why they do that, as the room erupted the moment we all reunited, buzzing with students swapping the narrative Pam and her team thought each gender needed to hear.

Pam offered an afterschool lecture that was free from the limitations of public schools. My mother attended. She told me afterwards that she really enjoyed it. I can suspect why, but personally, I could not relate.

Being a young, rural female is...

tie-dying your no-longer white Nike socks.

At one point in the summer, I had crossed my legs and landed my left ankle in bum lamb poop while starting the day in the lambing barn with my kittens and my 4-H lambs.

wearing a cut off t-shirt and shorts to go wash your lambs in the shed built of cement, tin, and hoses before their respective market classes.

I would wear cut-offs often, because it seemed like the “cool girl” thing to do.

then having your mom tell you that you need to set an example to other young girls.

She brought this up because my sports bra was showing quite a bit, which echoed her previous encouragements to only wear clothing that communicates to people that you respect your body.

getting a class key instead of a ring.

Rings felt too feminine for all of us. Besides, girls my age did not wear jewelry aside from earrings and necklaces, aside from a promise ring their boyfriend might have given them.

hearing rumors that your teacher shoved their child up against the wall in the hallway when they were reminding them how important their grades were.

I wound up in the hallway a few times, crying from something they said after I made them angry. But I hated getting in trouble, so I cried whenever someone yelled at me.

being both perplexed and jealous that the other kids are showing up to play practice drunk.

performing a play every spring to fund the seniors’ class trip.

going somewhere that the drinking age is 18 when you graduate so that most of the class can finally party together legally.

graduating with six other students, four that you started kindergarten with, all that you’ve known since you were six.

Two were your cousins and one was the son of a man that my mom went to school with.

knowing that sex with any person, including yourself, will change the way other girls think about and treat you, more than it would change the boys’ behavior.

having boys ask you intimate questions over text and then not be able to publicly acknowledge you at the basketball games their school is playing against yours.

praying that your parents let you spend the night at a friend’s because the town kids are having a party, and you want to go.

driving nearly 100 miles away from where you told your parents you’d be, just so that you could drink Mike’s Hard that somebody’s older brother bought them.

almost getting an MIP as you drive away from a party to pick someone else up at the same time as a cop car drives by.

hearing boys laugh about a girl being “a bleeder” after she had sex for the first time.

mentally reflecting that a girl and her boyfriend last better last, because she has already had sex with him and wouldn’t find that kind of relationship again.

distancing yourself from a girl for having sex with a boy but talking to him like usual, just thinking he just a little gross, depending who he had slept with.

What could I say, what could I do, and what could I have that would elevate me in the social hierarchy? Getting a boyfriend with an equal or greater social standing would certainly help.

drinking something called a “Pink Panty Dropper” from a big Gatorade jug that you did not see being made.

making yourself cry over an imaginary scenario you concocted to tell your parents because you drove an hour away to party with a boy who does not treat you well at all and were fifteen minutes late for your curfew, only to not have to tell them you hit a family of raccoons.

Is this too oddly specific?

Diary Entries

A shimmering purple cover with a cheap, silver lock.

A white Persian cat, sitting atop a couch, surrounded by jewels and perfume.

Lisa Frank and her crew were, and always have been, a bunch of baddies.

After deliberating about what to get with my birthday gift card from Grandpa and Grandma, I took the risk of buying something “girly.”

On October 10th, 2007, my favorites included:

The color periwinkle, French toast with powdered sugar, the movie “Over the Hedge”

“The Sweet Life of Zach and Cody,” language arts, boys.

My favorite band was Rascal Flatts, favorite song Sara Evans’ “Backseat of a Greyhound bus”

I am astounded by these pieces of myself I immortalized at 11 years old.

A sticky note lives in the front, documenting a childhood crush’s likes and dislikes.

Likes include sports times, Ozzy Osbourne, and the colors red and black.

Dislikes: lime green, cherries, and tomatoes.

I measured time in generations of kittens born that summer.

In 2009, it was Maggie, Chris, Joseph, and Chloe.

A boy gave me butterflies, even though “he wasn’t the best driver, but he tried really hard.”

Another boy poured Mountain Dew down the back of my shirt.

I fondly wrote him into my journal for years to come.

“What else would an 11- to 18-year-old write about, especially one who’s from the middle of nowhere?”

Everyone had, like, ten choices for viable friendships.

It was chatter-worthy news when anyone went to town together.

The word “slutty” makes so many appearances.

I did not like overt sexuality.

This kid worried about boys and what the other girls thought of her.

Everyone was asking about any “boyfriend” I might have away at college. Then, my two high school best friends started dating their (near) future husbands. I started worrying about becoming a spinster.

These thoughts began at around 20 years old.

Another damaging relationship was in the books for me. I remember feeling sad and wishing I could be like the person I was in High School. My memory colored her as some type of aspiration “girl-boss.”

However, I drop the “r” word once in 2011. I called a girl my crush was dating a bitch in the same breath I note that her mother recently died. Standing firm for what I believed in has begun to read a lot more like intolerant ignorance.

Fantasies I had about being liked by my peers had me believing some pretty unhinged things.

Now, seven years after graduating, I feel less like high school me than I ever have before.

We do not have anything in common but a deep affinity for kittens and hearing others share their stories.

I am far from that version of myself. Perhaps this may be my greatest accomplishment to date.

Maybe it is because I will never be that powerless again. Or maybe it’s just because she was a fatphobic, little bigot.

Who is *really* to say?

Because of Tammy Wynette
(content warning: intimate partner^{x3} violence)

South of town, he took me to his favorite spot in the mountains. He said he had not taken any other girl to this spot before, and no one had ever made me feel so special.

The calls started coming each time I went to a social event. He wanted to hear what was going on around me.

Ache consumed my stomach in his presence. I just needed to relax.

Not long after his semester began, he hit his best friend and dropped out of school. His abuse of alcohol had gone unaddressed, and I did not yet know the signs.

“Don’t you love me?” to “Don’t you. Ever. Talk to me again.”

Before I realized that the mood had shifted, he wrapped his hand around my throat and against the window. He held me there without light in his eyes, observing, appraising his affect.

You mean you have never been told about the signs of intimate partner violence before?

Yellow flags are easy to spot, aren’t they? I missed the one when he contemplated breaking up with me because I had explained the experience of the PTSD, before I knew mine is valid. He didn’t like how it made him feel.

Oh, did I say yellow? “Who is that guy on your Snapchat story? Tell me the truth.”

Unprompted, he slapped my face from the backseat as my friend drove us home. I asked her to stick around until I texted her. He cracked my blinds and my computer screen in his drunken stumble towards the bed.

Receiving phone calls still sends my heart racing, even though it was through text that he said goodbye, that he was going to get his gun. He was furious I reached out to his roommates that night to go make sure that he was safe.

Most of our friends were used to seeing him black out.

After hours of trying to keep him under control and safe, he laid down in bed next to me, looked me in the eyes, and said, “Fuck you, Randi, fuck you,” and then woke up the next day like nothing had happened.

“No, please. I’m so sorry, Randi.”

“I was just drunk.”

“I love you.”

For Landen

the swivel of an ear, a twitch of their tail.

Landen understands

sage from disarray and lifetimes in the saddle

distance

our one constant

effervesce meanderings, hers.

I eat dark chocolate to laugh with you again

an easy decision

made too late

your moments here are cherished.

I see your gifts hidden in the folds of my home

reindeer scarf

snowflake mug

a home-made denim stocking

nail polish

one earring

sadness shadows your smile in my solitary recollections

I'd hate to make anyone else's a d.

what do we do with all of these traditions?

muddy memories of kid cousins

a colt, a calf, a cat, a lamb,

are we to keep all of them to ourselves?

days were warmer with you near.

this breach,

can you tell us how to tack this tear?

no, no, I know.

an absence with no answer.

and now we're here, another Christmas,

without you.

with this new routine of looking around for you in Grandpa's house...

we'll have to do this every year?

Being a “rural” in the urban who sometimes gets to visit the rural is...

contemplating if former teachers from your community would want you to share this work with them.

Have I been fair to everyone? Despite the early sexualization and loneliness of trying to figure out all the rules. I do not feel that anything “ruined” my childhood besides becoming an adult. I do, however, feel like I am ruining my childhood for all of the adults in my life that worked so hard to keep me safe.

having your former teacher message you on Facebook for your college transcripts so that he can get you the scholarship he oversees.

The current staff at my school all have deep connections to the area, whether they be former students themselves or the spouse of one. Depending on substitute teachers, it is possible that every single adult in the building would have spent nearly every non-collegiate year of their life in that town or one town over. Do you understand?

walking into the county fair with one wish, and one wish only.

I still cannot hear his name or see their faces without shrinking, flight mode activated, shame alarms blaring. Are you still the other woman if you did not consent to it? It does not really matter these days, I suppose.

roaming strategically around the midway as to not walk within earshot of them.

I averted my eyes and fix them towards my nieces, only stealing a glance around to ensure that I need not worry about those nearest to me. I think that’s why some people have kids, to have a reason to leave whenever you want to. I glanced back to see my dad chatting and laughing with them, oblivious to our complicated history.

realizing you were not the only one coerced by him.

“He took me down the hill from my house.” It was also at a party, and she had also been scared. She did not completely remember what happened.

learning about dating violence your friends were too scared to tell anyone about.

“He used to hit me.” Her dad chased him off one night with death threats after he showed up banging on her window, demanding to talk to her. I remember how that story was framed, how I thought her father overreacted even if the guy did wake them up. How she did not tell me until almost ten years later.

discovering more specifics about the community members who made you most uncomfortable.

I have recently gotten old enough to notice what a sociopath looks like in your kitchen.

getting wind that a male community member had been fired from coaching for sending sexual messages to one of the female players.

Later that year, he had new professional photos of he and his wife and child posted proudly on Facebook.

your friend from a neighboring town sharing with you that one of your class’s exchange students attempted to sexually assault her.

Back then, I had secretly hoped that boy would start to like me, to find me interesting, to make me interesting.

investigating everything you ever thought you knew.

exploring the “feminine urge”¹⁷ to be radically respected.
apologizing for messy spaces within your home.

My friend chastised me one evening because I dared feel shame that the dishes in the dishwasher were not clean when she asked me about them, needing to know if she could put here plate in at all. She replied with, “Oh... You live here??” The “unkempt house” shame flooded through my body, down my chest and arms, through my legs to my feet, and flowed the floor. How deep my fear of failing to measure up to a proper woman runs.

finally getting to talk to your parents about not getting to talk to your parents about the tough stuff.

Whenever I am home, my mom and I have such great talks. It feels bizarre that we went so many years not doing this. My mom says that it is probably because of the way she grew up. Not talking about things, that is. Not addressing distressing feelings. She tells me that having big feelings about things was not allowed. If you were upset, she says as she raises her eyebrows, eyes fixed on the table, stoic, “You’d better get over it.” I cannot imagine my grandpa, the one that always speaks in sentences that start in an instinctive, thoughtful, “Oh...,” as someone who would get riled up about such things. I can hear him responding contently, “That’s good,” to every answer I give him to every question he asks me.

exploring your familial history to ensure a familial future.

flipping through photo albums stacked high in the living room.

Vacations, family reunions, baby chicks. Kittens and cousins and birthday parties, years of fading memories my mother compiled for us.

getting to tell tales of a young girl growing up surrounded by opportunities inner-city kids could only read about.

“Gun violence” was language I did not hear until long after I had loaded my first shell.

chatting with your dad about the price of a ticket being less than the price of the registration for the green truck.

He drives to town once a year to pick up the alfalfa pellets at the local kitty litter factory that they feed the sheep during lambing season.

not asking too many questions about that last part, just knowing it has something to do with similar logistics and equipment.

inquiring about your behavior and demeanor as a child from your mother and not your father.

waiting to admit to your mom that you and your friends cheated regularly in high school until you are about done with your Master’s.

I have been trying to get my specific learning abilities evaluated and needed her to know it has been years since I was a “good” student organically.

feeling apprehensive to ask your mom about fertility because it might make her sad, and you have designed your life around never making your mother sad.

navigating discomfort when your former classmate out-of-the-blue jokes with you that your graduating valedictorian GPA was the lowest that the local paper has ever reported.

¹⁷ Pop culture reference

Well... could be true, I suppose, but that was six years ago, Alex.
 showing up as the only liberal at Grandpa's birthday parties.
 seeing *three* cousins go on to serve as State FFA Officers.

All women, I might add.

having your grandma ask you about your vehicle every single time she sees you, even though dementia has made her forget where you live now.

She also asks about a boyfriend.

picking up the landline and hearing the far away voice of a trucker that is sitting out at the end of your road.

He needed get ahold of someone who can verbally consent to let him to unlock the gate at the end of the driveway, even though it is essentially never shut due to the high volume of wide loads¹⁸.

hearing that neighbor women were shocked that your sister-in-law could back up a trailer on her own.

internally rolling your eyes when the barista asks you where you bought your Carhartt jacket at.

She wanted to find one like mine with Sherpa lining it. I told her that my sister-in-law was on the equestrian team in Bozeman, Montana, when she got it, so it was closer to 10 years old than it was to brand new. "Ooo, the story gets cooler!" she replied, and I smile, breve in hand, turning away, remember the straw¹⁹ that was left in the pockets, thinking to myself that my S-I-L and mom would appreciate the absurdity of ole' Carhartt becoming a lifestyle brand that involves zero cake pellets²⁰ or afterbirth.

getting a glimpse of your sister-in-law traveling via four-wheeler through the yard in a blizzard, chasing out cows as big, fluffy snowflakes collect across her eyebrows.

She thought to ask her doctor if she could ride the four-wheeler as usual during her pregnancy, to which the doctor seemed very surprised. The answer was yes within reason, in case you were wondering.

watching your father wander around looking for tin for his latest project as you see your mom wander to the lambing barn to feed the ewes in their jugs.

They each have their daily chores now that she is home²¹.

having two parents to learn from.

My mom taught me empathy, compassion. How to respect others when they are not around. How to ride a horse. How to speak to Jesus. My dad taught me strong will, perseverance. He taught me to drive a tractor, how to swing a bat and throw a ball, and how to speak in a British accent. He taught me how to set a trap and use humor to navigate frustration. My parents showed me how to be sincere, outstanding members of a community.

bringing those you love to see where you grew up and sharing a snapshot of your other life.

¹⁸ Trucks hauling fuel, equipment, or livestock.

¹⁹ From a straw bale

²⁰ Pellets for the animals that were brave enough to eat out of our hands

²¹ Retired, but working, as ranchers do

I have never referred to it as my “other life” before, but writing out these little clippings of my life makes me feel like an independent double agent, a rural rancher’s daughter in an urban, academic space where I get to decide what constitutes knowledge.

being able reminisce with solace and percipience.

I understand that my parents love me so much better now that my prefrontal cortex has finished developing. They understand me and support me and will do everything that they can to ensure I am healthy and safe. This kind of familial security is incredible, imperfect, and essential to the person I want to be for them, for my cousins, and for my brothers’ little families.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS

Well, well, well. Much to consider. She establishes some valid points; sexual trauma, prematurely deceased family members, death a regular part of her unconscious since she could visit and help out in the lambing barn. Does her story count?

I imagine adults with rural pasts, presents, or futures can contemplate this work and the novelties *they* never felt special for and feel their own particular concoction of emotions. It recently occurred to me that busy-to-the-point-of-stressful work environments are easy for me to function in, and I would say any kid who has worked cows has also learned how to “perform well under pressure.” These moments matter, too. I have not forgotten how fun it is to be a little kid atop a horse or a milk cow, held up by an adult, of course. Or waking up to go hunting with your dad and siblings. There are so many moments, even though small and significant and weak from time passed, with no kooky or somber stories to tell again and again. Just our memories of them. It’s incredible and exhausting.

I began this autoethnography with tales of my whimsical, complicated, confusing, and beautiful childhood. The beginning “Being Rural” reads like a dream, a wish that an only child somewhere in an apartment building would make. I understand; it was once only magic to me, too. My first and second nine years of life were spent running through fields with my dogs, establishing little forts all around the ranch, laying secret claim to my favorite remains of what were once my family’s investments. It was my first experience with colonization. No wonder I was so ready to forgive the European sins of the past.

I am a white woman who grew up in my community as an able-bodied, cisgender, straight-passing girl who had two mentally- and physically-well parents who remain committed to their marriage to this day. Both of them went to get secondary education. Both had the means, both finished their programs, both utilized their education to access employment. Both of my grandparents ranched. All of their families also cultivated agriculture. I come from a long line of people who were able to access loans, social capital, and helpful services in their communities. I have a last name that is likely said daily in Central Montana. Meaning if I were stranded somewhere, I could tell someone my name and they would know *someone* in my family, meaning I have always had ample access to *goodwill*.

The generational wealth in the forms of overall wellness, financial security, and familial stability cannot be overstated. I grew up in the same house as my father and his first family did, and every year, I spend my second Christmases at Mom's childhood home (unless an aunt hosts). There are families that pray for this connectedness, the dependability, the group effort to maintain traditions. I was able to participate in sports because my parents could afford my travel, my gear, and the time commitment. My family has never discussed the stolen nature of our land that I love so much, nor the implications of that notion. My privilege runs deep. I encourage additional reflection on these aspects unsaid in the narratives, poems, and proses throughout engagement with my research.

Organizing Features of the Rural

The Home

Religion, traditional values, and my gender informed the morality narratives I was given to uphold obedience within the home. My family's protective communication orientation (high in conformity, low in conversation) is apparent throughout the autoethnographic pieces. Fears concealed like indecent secrets, disguised in my "boundaries," naturalized for appropriate performances of self. With no appropriate avenue to explore these emotions, shame operated as a persuasive tool of discipline for the many roles I was playing, both inside and outside the home.

Power with the tradition, rural, nuclear family is rarely negotiated between parent and child. Rather, conservative ideas about how children should act within the home and public are marked by obedience and respectfulness. As a younger woman, I did not push back much on my partners during disagreements. As my understandings of healthy relationships developed, my communication within more recent relationships is marked by welcomed conflict, supporting Young & Schrod's (2016) hypothesis that protective communication within the family can lead to more direct efforts to address emotions and expectations, especially within a relationship that maintains equal individual power and mobility. This is not without exposure and education about alternative versions of healthy relationships, which also attests to the importance of investigation into healthy boundaries and habits.

Parents in the rural serve primarily as development guidance and secondarily as emotional support. In hindsight, I can easily see the efforts my parents and others made to be there for me. However, I felt that my parents did not always like me, even when I

knew they *loved* me. They fostered my self-development in primarily constructive ways like extracurriculars. They showed up for me at every athletic event that they could, which was nearly every one, but they also did not teach me how to stand up to grown-ups. I was able to engage in, grow, and be disciplined in the community, just as much as I was within the home.

Adult expectations of children function both to aid in their development as well as support the ranch or farm. Before I was old enough to help my dad regularly, I got myself home from the school bus stop, started my homework, and practiced my rented saxophone on my own. In the summer, I stuck close to the house, checking in periodically with whoever was around. I would also help prepare lunch for my dad and whomever else was helping hay. At my grandparents, I was tasked with setting the table and making the Kool-Aid. Mom called me self-sufficient, capable of responsibility for a child older than I, one of my favorite sentiments of approval from any adult.

Mothers are shown to have more of an impact on their children's development than fathers, especially in traditional settings where women are often the primary caretaker within the family. My mother addressed her children's feelings and engaged us in faith-based emotional development. She served as the primary caregiver for my physical and mental well-being, echoing observations from Little and Leyshon (2003) and LaMothe (2015) concerning the centrality of traditional motherhood functions within the rural family. Dinner was very often made by my mom and eaten at the table together, ether, even when everyone in my nuclear family was busiest. The conversations typically consisted of, "How was your day? What did you do in school?" The emphasis typically landed on what I learned and completed, rather than on how my mood was. I think my

mother was fairly perceptive to the latter, anyway, as the women in my life seemed to be. When she tucked me in at night, we would read together if it was not too late. It was then that we could talk more about how the day went for me, and every so often, say a prayer.

Gendered Expectations

Gender relations in my stories center on heterosexuality, desirability, and social expectations, but they also include nuanced versions of what counts as “work.” Much like Stebbing’s (1984) scholarship on labor within the rural, women may be doing a great deal of labor for the home and the community, but it is still within the confines of a traditional gender hierarchy. As Little (2003) notes, women’s work is central to both the rural community and the family, invaluable and unquestioned.

My mom did all of the chores one would image a traditional woman to do and so much more. My father did not have too many conventional responsibilities in the standard American Dad way, as he did not take out the trash or mow the yard, but he engineered corrals and hauled the manure piles²² out of the lambing lots. Dad repaired machinery, constructed barns and sheds, checked cows at night, and hayed. Mom tended to us, her town job, and the ranch where and when she could. Both of their roles were significantly complexified by the logistics of rearing children, raising livestock, and running small businesses. Research affirms the continued importance, if not necessity, of tradition gender roles to the success of the family farm (Davidoff et al., 1976; Dempsey, 1990, 1992; Little, 2003), even as notions of masculinity and agricultural technology alter the requirements of male farmer’s work (Brandth, 1995; Peter, Bell, & Jarnagin, 2000).

²² During lambing, ewes are placed in jugs (small pens) with their lambs until both know the other well enough to be added to a larger group. Those jugs must be cleaned out to prevent disease, and the pile of straw and sheep waste grows throughout the season.

Everyone's chores got done, regularly despite social obligations or weather interferences, attesting to the tenacity farming and ranching require, as noted by Little (2002), echoing constructions of "true" farmers (Peter et al., 2000) and ranchers. Occupational roles are a strong, organizing components throughout the autoethnographic chapter. It begins in the family, as my dad held a position at the home, which required frequent service calls, and my mom held positions in the home and off of the ranch. Without their collaborative efforts, the ranch would not function, and neither's work was considered more essential than the other's, though Dad smashed his fingers significantly more than Mom did, and she's spent more hours in the blazing heat of the home office doing bookwork.

In the rural, experiences outside of the home echo the values learned within the home. All of my brother and I's extracurriculars were a priority in our house and in our community, a kernel present throughout the autoethnography. Beyond the home was my extended family and neighbors and teachers, and sometimes, they would be all three. Public activities that symbolize connectedness within the community such as potlucks are also largely organized by the local women, and my mom was often baking for or volunteering her time at these events. The concessions were primarily run by the wives not competing in the trapshoots²³.

Within this autoethnography, women's work has been shown to be an essential piece of maintaining community in the rural. The success of fundraisers, bazaars, and tournaments resulted largely because of the efforts made by "ranch wives" and the mothers of the students and athletes. Rural communities extend beyond the town,

²³ Shooting competitions—clay pigeons, styles, and aiming.

sometimes including multiple towns, as was indicated by co-oped sports teams. Without the time-intensive work that organizing events for over 50 square miles of rural residents and families necessitates, the “close-knit” nature of these communities would significantly decline.

When new teachers would move in, they were often courted by the local, unwed men and encouraged to settle down there, thus ensuring continued resources for the school and, consequently, reinvigorating the community. Little’s (2003) case studies recorded similar sentiments of hope for women who marry local farmers, fostering unrealistic assumptions of women’s “natural,” almost effortless, capacity to liven up spaces. Perhaps this is a symbolic consequence of women’s physical capability to bring life into the world, or it could also be a result of work deemed feminine and therefore less valuable, suitable for ranch wives to busy themselves with in the absence of rural entertainment. The co-constitutive nature and intersections of identity remind us that neither can be completely true, directing scholarship to explore the nuances of positionality when investigating these socially-constructed notions of femininity in rural spaces.

Rural men are not encouraged to parent with the same, often gentle, techniques that women are, alluding to the gender confines indicative of a patriarchal society. Schippers’ (2007) exploration of binary, “complementary” gender roles and their consequent expectations informs this difference between men’s and women’s labor within the family. Emotional conversations are what mothers were for, if you were fortunate enough to have a reliable one. When women are presumed as the nurturing characters in society (Bock & Shortall, 2006; Little & Austin, 1996; Hughes, 1997),

discomfort of a child around an adult man could occur predominantly without surprise. Traditional variations of masculinity were socially rewarded and presumed as harmless and virtuous, pointing to the security one should presume of rural men regardless of age. When someone's dad would engage with me, I would quickly begin feeling uncomfortable, as adult men in the community were the last people that maturing girls were taught to socialize with. All dads think they are funny, uncomplicated to be around, but this was rarely the case for me.

Any way about it, none of the men in my young life were strong providers of emotional support. In spaces where their physical abilities were essential and emotional capacities were optional if not additionally disparaged, men's embodiment of masculinity centered on strength, leaving little space for variations of masculinity that did not (Little, 2002). In my autoethnographic reflections, I note an instant where he disciplined me to continue helping as they sheared, despite my physical needs no longer being met. In the first section, "Being *Rural*", I consider singing within earshot of my father too vulnerable. With this perceived relationship to him, I did not know quite how to chat with him. He was not the person I went to if I wanted to know about my childhood, as my mother would always say more. None of my friends had fathers who always had the answers or eloquent sentiments, either; just men who worked really hard for their families and businesses.

Community Work

Hegemonic, masculine understandings of how to display hard work informed the interactions in community spaces and rural places. The leadership I experienced in my extracurricular activities informed my beliefs about myself and of my responsibilities to

the community. Teachers and coaches placed significant pressure on both local students and our exchange students to join athletics and extracurricular activities such as the end-of-the-year play (usually written by locals) and school-organized clubs. As noted in “Being a rural *teenager*,” participation within the community was posited as a cardinal virtue for residents of all ages. This contribution to the public consequently made one’s identity accessible for praise and scrutiny, adding to the checklist of appropriate presentations of self.

The importance of athletics within my community concealed the outcomes of hegemonic masculinity’s attachment to ability. The aggression of athletic coaches was naturalized, “unfortunate but necessary” due to the few folks who could take on such a leadership role in the community. My town did not have sufficient infrastructure to serve bodies with physical disabilities, so it did not serve the community to invite a teenager to the town that could not perform these essentialized tasks.

This ridged role I played served as a catalyst in *Basketball*. My glare threatened my parents’ identities as authoritarian-esk parents who had positive influence over their child’s emotions and behaviors, a valued parenting skill at the time. By clearly sending my message for the entire fan section to see, I had disciplined my parents, publicly presenting evidence that I did not respect them and the commitments they had made for us all to be there. They had taught me better than to do that. I understood that they were disciplining me for slacking in the game as well, a valid expectation to set for a developing child. Working hard for those around you, for your team, shows integrity. It was not hard for me to comprehend the overarching concepts. The primary lesson I learned, after all of these points, was that I needed to push my mind and body to the point

of exhaustion for these other tween-aged girls, teammates that either befriended me, ignored me, or bullied me.

Hard work and self-less dedication are tremendously important to maintaining the home, the family business, and the larger rural community. When I was reminded that there is always room for improvement, I had a tremendously difficult time conceptualizing how I could truly ever be enough. If the hard work that you put in is deemed inferior and evokes indignity rather than dreams and determination, the fuel never really comes from within. Hard work became a shame response.

Public and private disciplining work to reaffirm conformity. I know exactly where I learned a powerful glare of disapproval is how you could immediately tell someone to knock it off. The narratives that our relatives provided us are complex and constitutive of our foundational understanding of the world we exist in (Ellis et al., 2011). My uncle found out about my outburst, and he got quite the kick out of teasing me about it. My stomach would clench with confusion, contempt, humiliation. Just a joke, but another reminder served.

Gender, Sexuality, and Violence

Traditional modes and means of gender and sexuality are present in my rural community, and they have produced incredible, honorable relationships amongst community members—people who care deeply for their neighbors and their children’s futures. These relationships foster the feelings of connectedness and support, and they are also the narratives that make the rural a much more dangerous place for some more than others. Despite strong religious influences and greater public disapproval, overtly sexual experiences were not difficult to encounter as a young woman. Both my own innocence

as well as the innocence of my male peers was posited as a female's responsibility. This work aids to destabilize assumptions of identity and bodily performance in rural geographies, specifically within the American Northwest.

When I read through accounts given or recounted in Little's (2000; 2003; 2017) and her colleagues' (Little & Leyshon, 2003, Little & Panelli, 2003) work, I started to understand myself as part of a larger narrative. Phillips' (2000) work regarding the age of consent as a variable dependent on geography and demographics sparked realizations. I did not conceptualize what consent was until I went to college, especially not in terms of a larger conversation about social-sexual politics in the rural. Despite the strong narratives of faith in our community and extracurricular activities, young girls like myself still experienced significant victimization at the hands of the young and adult males around us.

Restraint, morality, and compulsory heterosexually co-constructed social and sexual expectations in my rural spaces. Purity, faith-based femininity, and my nearly constant confrontation with male desire informed my notions of what kind of woman I seemingly needed to be in order to be treated well. I was not explicitly taught that certain behaviors from others should be unacceptable, due to the context in which one might encounter them in. Yet, influential adults, older peers, and the media I consumed within my community still educated me to what a "good" woman can and should be able to tolerate, affirming the femininity within and importance of symbolic meanings surrounding womanhood in the rural noted by Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), Little (2003), Little and Leyshon (2003).

Faith and hegemonic gender expectations informed the personal boundaries I was willing and expected to tolerate from peers. Within my communities, divorce was never discussed positively, but neither was rushing into marriage too early. To be a “good woman,” you are able to be the kind of woman men want, and you are able to continue to make them happy. The employment of mothering behaviors, such as guiding your male partner’s development of emotional regulation, was seen as a requirement. Little’s (2003) work notes that women, rural or urban, are deemed liable for their own feelings of disenchantment after formulating false (unrealistic) expectations for rural, unmarried farmers. Disappointment would be inevitable, and thus, I failed to set basic, age-appropriate expectations for my peers and partners.

Auditoriums operated as gathering places for students and community members alike, during the spring music festivals, holiday performances, and sexual health opinions from Pam Stenzel²⁴. Notably, Pam participated in former President George Bush’s “Faith-Based and Community Initiatives” meeting in May of 2001 (ENLIGHTEN, 2021), and she also served as a pro-life advocate. Pam’s speech structure and method assigned discernable, ethical values to individuals who identified as pure virgins, free from any and all intimate touch. Heterosexuality was naturalized by the complete erasure of queer people, and sexist ideas and alleged outcomes play strong roles in Pam’s narration of life before and after sex. Though only a child at the time, these ideals corroborated the narratives that I learned acceptable ways of being a partner, a peer, and a woman that affirmed the conservative structure of rural family and community (LaMothe, 2015; Little, 2017; Little & Leyshon, 2003; Stebbing, 1984).

²⁴ Well, have you watched any of those videos of her I included yet?

Patriarchal ideologies shape Pam's understanding of teenage relationships, complimenting hegemonic scripts already present within my rural communities. For example, the absence of the father's responsibility in a young girl's acquisition of birth control supports the narrative that fathers should be patriarchal and wise, and if either parent is going to make the corrupt choice of giving their daughter access to birth control, it could never be the father. This places the virtue of young girls on the other women in their lives, additional labor and social expectations for women to navigate and for men to evaluate (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Little, 2003; Stebbing, 1984).

I know that my parents sometimes felt very powerless, unsure how to best help me or how to help others in the situations I detailed in my heavier stories like *Periods*, *Being a rural teenager*, *Diary Entries*, and *Being a young, rural female*. In other areas of my life, the consequences, fears, and humiliation that I kept separate, were brought on by my own discretion, decisions that I knew my parents would not be impressed with me for. If sharing my choices and corollaries meant being in trouble or lectured by those whose respect I sought the most, I would not be doing it. As a consequence of this internalization, my primary source of knowledge and guidance needed to come from my peers, older children, and the media.

Relationships that affirm female subservience to masculine needs and desires encourage tolerance and adherence to painful discipling. This subservience is, while observable in the greater American gender hierarchy (Schippers, 2007), especially present in rural, traditional spaces (Little, 2017). The social aspects of school involved my friends dating our classmates, and the pairings were, predictably, always one boy and

one girl²⁵. My experiences with “Truth or Dare” and my peers’ engagement varied greatly, depending on the supervision, and I was aware of a game that resulted in far more contact than I had seen. The stories I was not around for were shared around school, and these dating experiences and their chronicles consumed my consciousness²⁶.

Despite competing faith-based scripts from within the home, throughout the community, and within churches, pressures for overt heterosexuality exist for rural women, producing symbolic and social importance for femininity to be both reliable and desirable. Overt sexuality was not something I experienced in the home, nor was viewed as appropriate for me in the public, and I was determined not be the first one to introduce the topic. There was also no way I could verbalize something so degrading to my parents who changed (one of our two or three) channels whenever intimate scenes flooded the television. It was incredibly confusing to feel shame and excitement about a boy acknowledging me in such a demoralizing way. How could I be the person, the woman, that Pam spoke of if I had been being groped by my schoolmates since third grade? This culture of secrecy, distrust for authority figures, and bodily shame fostered environments where sexual exploitations escalated instead, creating these subcultures for harmful behavior.

Young females in the rural operate within patriarchal and commonly misogynistic ideas of intimate relationships. Being a rural kid is all fun and games until your male peers start spanking and grabbing everyone’s bodies. I never told any adults, because the other girls laughed about it, and they were getting attention. At the time, the boys I wrote

²⁵ Not cousins though. That only happened once to my knowledge, and they broke up nearly immediately after being told as much.

²⁶ As much as they can for the girl that nobody wanted to “go out with.” Ka-chow.

so much about in my journal did not show me ample kindness or consideration. The response I developed as consequence is indicative of emphasized femininity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), or a gender-appropriate reaction that might best-suit the males abasing us. Little (2002) encourages investigations of physical characteristics and public and private activities in order to further inform how rurality and gender relationships are negotiated with and through the body.

Throughout the autoethnographic pieces, I refer to specific instances where my clothing did not meet social expectations of rural femininity, including my cut-off shirts and visible sports bras. Another example of my violations resulted from “short-shorts.” Even in the absence of any significant relationship to me, a male peer sexualized my body in order to reaffirm acceptable ways to wear shorts in the sport that I had been playing longer than he. My age, skill level, and status on the team still did not shield me from patriarchal discipline, which attests to the power my males peers had over me regardless of my own commitments to our shared community. Female control over our surroundings and relationships could not fluctuate in the same ways that our male peers’ did (Shoveller & Johnson, 2006).

Communities known for their security and strong social support produce unsafe atmospheres for victims to come forward. Due to the interconnected nature of families and businesses, my relationship to adults was not one of vulnerability. When a substitute teacher saw a classmate shove me up against the wall in P.E., she did not tell the principal. She asked me if I was okay, but I had left crying, and everyone else kept playing dodgeball. My teacher and my classmates’ family frequent the same spaces all year round. She and mine do not, informing how I could expect adults within the

community to support me if (when) I am victimized by a son of significant local residents.

Drinking cultures and unrecognized substance abuse compound with antisocial behaviors, recognized by rural and DV scholars alike (Campo & Tayton, 2015; Lavoie et al., 2002; Vézina et al., 2015). This social awareness and subsequent community permission for young adults to engage in underage binge drinking and attend parties produces events that are unmonitored, geographically isolated, and centered on exploring interpersonal relationships, often involving overtly sexualized games.

While the absence of consistent supervision served my busy family and I exceptionally well, this is a feature typically assigned to dysfunctional parenting. Lavoie et al.'s (2002) work with adolescent boys found that harsh parenting (which includes spanking), laxness of monitoring, and witnessing interparental conflict positively predicts dating involvement and antisocial behavior at age 15. While Lavoie et al.'s study centered on adolescent boys rather than rural girls, I was socialized in the home and school with a few of both. In heterosexual-coded spaces where the risk of DV enactment for boys increases, DV involvement will also increase for girls. (And it does.)

Hegemonic behaviors are tolerated, reaffirmed, and rewarded in both the home and by the public. Toxic confines of hegemonic gender expectations negate the “masculinity”, and therefore validity, of men’s emotions when expressed through feminine means such as tears or words. Masculinity is marked by strength, heterosexuality, and not sayin’ much when you are sad. As a teenager, my romantic partners each had family histories of socially-permissible forms of parental control, often centering on athletic performances, which went on to result in public praise for

achievements earned as a consequence. My dad never punched holes in walls, but I figured it was fine if my first serious partner had, as I had learned before the age of six that violent expressions of affect were permissible from men.

This absence of softness and compassion is both indicative of the age groups I narrate and the patriarchal structures within even the smallest and seemingly simplest social systems of adolescence (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Feminist theories draw scholars' gaze towards these moments where males are given the benefit of the doubt for their explosive expressions of masculinity, grace far beyond what those they harmed received from them (Atkinson & Calafell, 2009). In *Monopoly*, Will had hurt my feelings, aggressively and loudly telling me to stop speaking, to stop following the rules, even when it was for the benefit of our mutual friend.

At some point, he learned that being right, even at someone else's expense, was an excuse to lash out and inflict shame on another person. Domination and success, two defining characteristics of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Schippers, 2007; Trujillo, 1991), were prioritized over social relations with both of us girls. As a consequence, I understood very early on that it would be my personal responsibility to tolerate and manage the emotions of those around me. The characters in the story had not grown out of this use of chastening, a means of redistributing or reiterating power, before we graduated, myself included, which impacted the extent to which I was able to negotiate power throughout my time in my rural community.

The hegemonic expressions of masculinity are, as Messerschmidt (2019) reminds us, are contingent on dominance. Hegemonic gender expressions seek to reaffirm themselves, resorting interpersonal violence if challenged. Little (2017) and

Owen and Carrington (2014) assert that conservative expectations of gender and “strong” communities obscure or render violence invisible in rural spaces, contributing to the experience of such brutality within rural communities. Naples’ (2003) feminist scholarship notes the permeability and evolution of social positions for insiders and outsiders. However, as I reflect on the power relations and position of status, “permeable” does not resonate. Permeability feels like the trap of hierarchy, hegemony, of patriarchy—the flaunting and palpability of status with allusions to accessibility, viable means which are instead subtly and securely guarded.

The hegemonic gender disciplining I did onto others as I worked to embody a rural, emphasized femineity should be considered as one reads stories where I write openly about the choices of others and the pain their actions caused me. During the writing of these narratives, I remembered moments that I served as the discipliner, hegemonic femininity out-weighting friendship. I recalled a conversation that resulted in a close friend crying alone a few seats up after I engaged in a heated debate with her in front of our female peers about what counted as “more”—making out, spending the night with someone, hand jobs, blowjobs, etc., etc. The goal, and outcome, was to avoid being the girl who went the “farthest.” As I navigated my internalized misogyny, I attached hegemonic understandings to intimacy, putting down an incredibly close friend in the process. I did the patriarchy’s bidding, as I had many times before and will continue to inadvertently do in the years to come. My desire to be viewed as an ideal women placed relational expectations to the side. I am a product of a hierarchical gender system and must continue to explore every marked experience (Schippers, 2007).

The Social and the Media

Consider the content adults and affiliations within the rural gave me access to. When attending FFA conferences, advisors would gather us all into an auditorium for each seminar. Keynote speakers or organized tours were those of major agribusinesses like John Deere and Monsanto. These companies centered mechanics, customers, and engineers that design haying equipment in advertisements and company promotions. I even got to see that guy who wrote the “love languages” book speak.

Agriculture was marketed as a booming industry in those spaces, though adults around me and the radio kept me up-to-date on the regional issues impacting agriculture. They seemed very small-scale, localized, contained at the time. Class was in session every time we ate lunch at Grandpa and Grandma’s during haying season. We would have sandwiches or spaghetti and carrots from the garden or pickled beets and listen to the radio. Grandma had a very green thumb, and my job would be to retrieve Grandpa, mid-project, from in the shop. Most every aunt and uncle and grandparent in my family held similar, fairly traditional roles within their respective homes, modeling effective family structures and “normalcy” (Davidoff et al., 1976; Dempsey, 1990, 1992; Little & Panelli, 2003).

I grew up on media and a community that valued the sanctity of heterosexual marriage. Religion was very present in my life, and I spent a lot of time learning about Adam and Eve, about Noah and his ark. We had three TV channels at any given point in my childhood. The implications of never imagining homosexuality as a natural, standard occurrence are seen in my journal, where I sporadically dictate every crush (m), frenemy (f/m), and general life annoyance of that point in time, attesting to how engrained

compulsive heterosexuality was in my developing mind (Bell, 2000; Bock & Shortall, 2006; Little, 2003). Commitment to the nuclear family remains a core value in my community, just as Mann's (2008) research on country music revealed about the genre I spent my formative years consuming.

What could I say, what could I do, and what could I have that would enhance my appeal to the male gaze? I was striving for an idealized, hegemonic femininity. All of the "girls like you" country songs served as a resource for a socially-anxious child to gather notes about what desirable friends and females should say, do, and be. "Homewrecker" is laden with hegemonic notions of gender, sexuality, and rural identity. Can I still sing every word? Yeah, I can. Do I think that Gretchen might have very low self-esteem throughout the song and consequently hate women? Yeah, I do. This is one of the many songs that notes religion but justifies a temporary and acceptable disregard for their faith and God in the name of apparently unstable heterosexual monogamy. At the time, she taught me that I just might need to fight for my man's commitment if there is a more promiscuous option in his vicinity. You know, because men are children (Little, 2003), and women are candy.

In Mr. Mom, the vocalist sings of the difficulties he has being a stay-at-home-dad after he lost his job, which prompted his wife to go back to work until he finds another job. He is very bad at or overwhelmed with the work, accidentally putting a diaper in a Maytag dryer and learning for the first time that the crayons need to be put one drawer higher. Out of fairness to music and performance, it is a lovely ode to mothers, but he ends it with this appreciative acceptance of inferiority, as though his wife is just somehow super-human. This praise of women's work while also feigning

obtuseness reiterates women's essential role in the family without then providing any additional support to them (Bock & Shortall, 2006; Little, 2003; Little & Austin, 1996; Shortall, 2002). Similar levels of role separation are explored in Brad's "I'm Still a Guy" with more commentary on the stability and straightforwardness of masculinity. In comparison to "heterosexual" activities, Little (2002) theorizes that homosexuality is identifiable by a person's bodily activities while heterosexual individuals are recognizable by their social identities—congested pores, unkempt cuticles, in-tact testicles and all. Paisley's song highlights how male homosexuality is marked by popular feminine activities that nurture internal and external wellness—facials, Botox, waxes, and manicures. Botox implies cosmetic alternations, which are for old women needing to look younger, not for men, because men age *well*. This track also infantilizes homosexuality with nursery-esk music in the background.

The presence of faith and its subtle conflation with nationalism inform morality and nostalgia for a nation of the past, paralleling consistent themes found by Meier's (2019) within country music. Sentiments of nostalgia saturate some of my favorite mid-2000's country songs, "Back When" by Tim McGraw and "A Different World" by Bucky Covington. The first is upbeat, catchy, fun. However, McGraw does essentially reminisce on the absence of African American vernacular in main-stream media. The latter song centers on the "common American man," the goodness and pureness of life decades ago with anti-regulation undertones. Bucky takes a pro-hitting-children-with-a-belt stance, as well. Times were simpler and also permitted more physical disciplining. The song also notes the active presence of the pledge of allegiance and daily morning prayer in his early education.

When race is rendered invisible to country music, it becomes easy to ignore the racial disparities within the country music industry. Whiteness is naturalized and then goes largely unquestioned in country music. As mentioned earlier, Kane Brown and Jimmie Allen are currently the two of the most (and only) successful African American country artists in 2021. However, country music's history was heavily and meaningfully shaped by people of color. Country music is Black history. You mean to tell me that in a country where there are around 77.8 million (23.3 percent) people of color and 250.5 million (76.3 percent) Caucasian people (Census Bureau, 2021b), a genre that was largely created by and for folks of color is organically and benevolently *this* white (see Malone & Laird, 2018)? We simply cannot be that oblivious.

Despite an unawareness of or an unwillingness to acknowledge sociopolitical messaging present in the lyrics, American country music has been and remains a genre that navigates and comments on social and political issues. Music provides scholarship and individuals with a point of reference to investigate subtle messages and ideologies that shape day-to-day relationships and the greater culturally-recognized narratives (Mann, 2008). Messner et al. (2007) states that, "music is a universal medium for conveying messages and meanings to listeners." Country music continues to inform social relations, especially for folks in rural spaces who utilize local radio to stay informed.

Nationalism and nostalgia can effectively function to suppress or conceal counter-hegemonic experiences. For example, Woody Guthrie's (1940) "This Land is Your Land" has been covered by artists across genres and has consequently rose to status as an iconic American hymn:

This land is your land. This land is my land
From California to the New York island;
From the red wood forest to the Gulf Stream waters
This land was made for you and me.

However, covers of the song rarely include the succeeding verses, which identify unemployment, hunger, and poverty, as written in verse 6:

In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,
By the relief office I seen my people;
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking
Is this land made for you and me?

I performed renditions of this song for my school music concerts on more than one occasion, but our versions never included this last verse. The themes of deprivation and helplessness are equally accurate American experiences, but those narratives remained absent from my primary education, illuminating the dehistoricized innocence of both this song and my rural education.

CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS

Parameters for identity expression throughout all geographies are formulated within and according to symbolic public institutions. Within the rural, religious affiliations operate as organizing features of community membership. Christianity and Catholicism within my hometown allotted folks presumed morality and “goodness” and, additionally, informed expectations of obedience. Not attending either church can and often is viewed as a violation of the expectations for community involvement and integration, detracting from any actual morality and goodness such a person might still behold.

Scripture informs the public and private spheres, creating space for public decorum that denounces individualism, homosexuality, disobedience, and nonnuclear constructions of family. Women, within many religious traditions, are portrayed as salvific figures, integral to not only the success of men but key to men’s spiritual health, as well. The moral implications of heterosexuality in religion troubles one’s obligations to their church community, their family, and nullifies a specific aspect of their autonomy—rights to consent (to homosexual contact). God assumed Mary’s consent, for all of humanity, which detracts from the very real importance of consent within a culture that honors her role (see implications of abuse in Babin & Palazzolo, 2012; Little, 2017; Logan et al., 2001; Owen & Carrington, 2014; Vézina et al., 2015, Smith et al., 2018). Religion combined with the traditional understandings of family naturalizes heterosexuality, procreation, and patriarchal family structures in rural geographies.

As displayed in the autoethnographic pieces such as *Basketball*, *Being a rural teenager*, and *Being from a small town*, engagement in one's community reinforces residents' conceptualization of the tight-knit nature of their town, regardless of the interpersonal tensions that also exist. Participation in the community is socially-mandated in addition to its functional necessity. Spaces of assemblage such as gymnasiums and auditoriums function as stages for appropriate expressions of identity. The ramifications for not contributing to the community in accordance with these expectations can include overt and covert social disciplining, exclusion, and even financial losses. If I had elected to attend the state school which has the strongest agricultural associations instead of the state school known for its liberal art merits, I would have been eligible for a local community scholarship. When exchange students opt out of participation in athletics, teachers, coaches, and community members alike work to persuade them to reconsider, evoking guilt or shame from them if they still choose not to. When the "united, supportive nature" of the community relies on what a family or an individual wants to or is able to contribute to the group, coercion becomes an incredibly effective tool of conformity.

The bodily performance of productivity is salient in rural spaces. Rural narratives of health and well-being are discursively constructed as though these characteristics can be seen on and from the physical body, foregrounding ability and expressions of gender and sexuality in the lives of residents. This assumption devalues and conceals psychological experiences of health, which coincides with the role denial plays in hegemonic masculinity in agricultural communities, as noted by Peter et al. (2000). Paisley's track dissing men who pay for conceptually cosmetic services also supports this

denouncement of upkeep, albeit physical, for legitimately masculine bodies, as marked by (straight) pride in the song.

Physical ability is utilized and highly-valued in athletics and manual labor. Note the advancements in technology and the machinery needed to succeed in agriculture. In the moments where I reflect on the vocations of the males in my life, the strength and technical education their jobs require provides context to masculine agricultural endeavors. Manual labor positions are incredibly taxing, time-consuming, and essential, creating mentally and physically straining obligations to an employer and informs the nature of support expected from one's community. Rural women also inhabited labor-intensive spaces, though "ranch wives" as some are fondly (others begrudgingly) called, are more likely than their husbands to access supplemental, less-laborious employment off the farm or ranch (Jobes, 1997). Perhaps the influence of a culture that penalizes men for physical and emotional weakness and empathic, gentle communication is linked to the high rates and the violent nature of male suicides in rural states. More scholarship is needed to understand the intersections of mental health, geography, culture, and hegemonic gender preconditions.

Productivity and its implications within the family, on the farm or ranch, and in the community also operate as a culturally-understood measurement of social capital. Contributions made to the community display reliability and resourcefulness, power and influence, commitment and hope. Physical availability to the community is presumed of men and regulated for women. While women's work sustains the community, their sexual identities and gender performances must remain non-threatening while operating within the strict confines of compulsory heterosexuality. Religious organizations necessitate

servitude to a god, affirming productivity and limiting the individual's perceived need for rest. These forces compound in rural spaces to assign morality and "usefulness" to bodily abilities. Consent is vitiated when the community necessitates the presence and utilization of your body to operate "successfully."

The consistent and stable communication patterns that parents use within their family have long-lasting impacts on their children's future romantic relationships. (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; 2004). Furthermore, communication choices can go on to negatively impact these adult children's partners when unsafe or harmful communication is used during childhood. Additionally, the communication patterns within families can affect the community. My autoethnographic works illuminate the toxic environment that in part resulted from this inattention. These experiences warrant further investigation to help inform "best practices" for family communication as well as appropriate forms of communication for other adults in the child's life.

The contradiction between alleged peace, safety, and harmony in rural communities operates to conceal experiences of violence, rendering community-threatening information invisible. Communities that regulate, investigate, and necessitate sexuality and gender in strict, morally-implicating ways foster rape culture by presuming consent of men and allowing them to assume consent ever. This hegemonic understanding of masculinity in the community reduces autonomy and shame-free consent experiences for these two genders in unique ways.

Scholarship should reflect the different markets and communities and contexts that make up rural identities. The distinction between the two is not often noted within rural scholarship, despite the different topography and technology needed for various

crops and livestock (Pearson & Haney, 1999). The literature I encountered made plenty of references towards farmers, loggers, and agriculture as an extensive industry, but few studies are intentional to consider nuanced experiences that might be found in each occupation. While not crucial to understanding the essential points of those studies, scholars and rural individuals might otherwise find we are not researching and detailing the same identities despite our shared use of language.

Consider the occupational requirements faced by farmers and ranchers. Farmers produce crops meant for sale; their year is spent planting, irrigating, and harvesting. Ranchers raise livestock and might also engage in aspects of farming to produce and harvest feed for their animals. While farmers sell their grains and produce, ranchers may sell their adult stock, breeding males, market yearlings, and goods that the animals produce, such as wool, meat, and milk. According to government regulations, of course. Research investigating childhood and agricultural means of production may provide additional insight into the relationship between breeding livestock and ag kids' grasp of human consent.

Faith and media also play important roles within the rural. Religion within the community informs the social expectations of bodies within rural Montana, regardless of one's engagement with them. Tight-knit communities offer more common resources for residents but also primarily working inadvertently to suppress survivors of violence. Spaces of assemblage such as gymnasiums and auditoriums function as stages for appropriate expressions of identity. Patriarchal relationships structure rural home and public life, despite the significant impacts rural women have on upholding the community.

Limitations

I do not have access to being a person of color, presenting open or realized queerness, or male identities. Little discussion of masculine and male bodies and their recipient relationship to cultural and interpersonal disciplining is explored in this research, meaning more experiences are needed to support comprehensive understandings of rural gender relationships and performances. This research also lacks conclusive findings on ability's role in gender performance, which remains a central and stable component of rural conceptualizations of "hard work." More work on how queerness is negotiated in rural spaces is essential to health communication, given the historical treatment and religious implications such identities might encounter in these settings (see Jerke, 2011).

I evaluate the experiences in terms of a young rural woman rather than that of an older woman who has started a family, made a home, so my experience and my attachment to the spaces that I inhabit differ greatly from other white women who grew up rurally on farms and ranches. The experience of rural femininity from these perspectives deserves more personal narratives represented in research in order to record more understanding of the gendered experiences that inform rural social relations.

This work does not address the value control over the land and livestock means to farmers and ranchers. For example, control over the land meant that you could arrive at the family picnic faster and stay for longer. These tensions between farm and family could yield valuable interpersonal scholarship for family and cultural studies alike, additionally informing public health initiatives for rural geographies.

Research on rural folks might not be research that reaches rural folks, meaning communication scholarship needs to be intention to include the populations they discuss in future scholarship. The weight of hegemonic masculinity was experienced differently for those in my stories than it was for me, reminding us to consider the generalizability of this autoethnographic data unique in its abstract nature, meant to encourage others to share their stories.

Conclusion

This autoethnographic exploration of gender, sexuality, and community within a rural geography informs identity work of rural women. Hegemonic modes of gender that were expressed within my rural community relied on whiteness, ability, and sexuality, with labor divisions remain traditional, though much more complex when on a farm or ranch. Additionally, religious institutions and corresponding notions of morality informed my social expectations of bodies within rural Montana. Moving through prose, narratives, and hegemo-ments helps scholarship account for nuances of gender embodiments in the least-populated and much-less-accounted-for geographies.

Tight-knit communities can offer more common resources for residents, but they also can inadvertently operate in ways that suppress a survivor's safety, and I do not believe that is what small towns intend. The communities that I was a part of did not prepare or account for any young male violence, violence that was absolutely happening has been documented very well, and I find that interesting. Communication allows honesty and responsivity, vulnerability and responsibility. Identifying and utilizing tools for productive and healthy communication will serve scholars, mental health

professionals, legislatures, and neighbors alike as we work to acknowledge subversive *and* valid experiences also present within our rural geographies.

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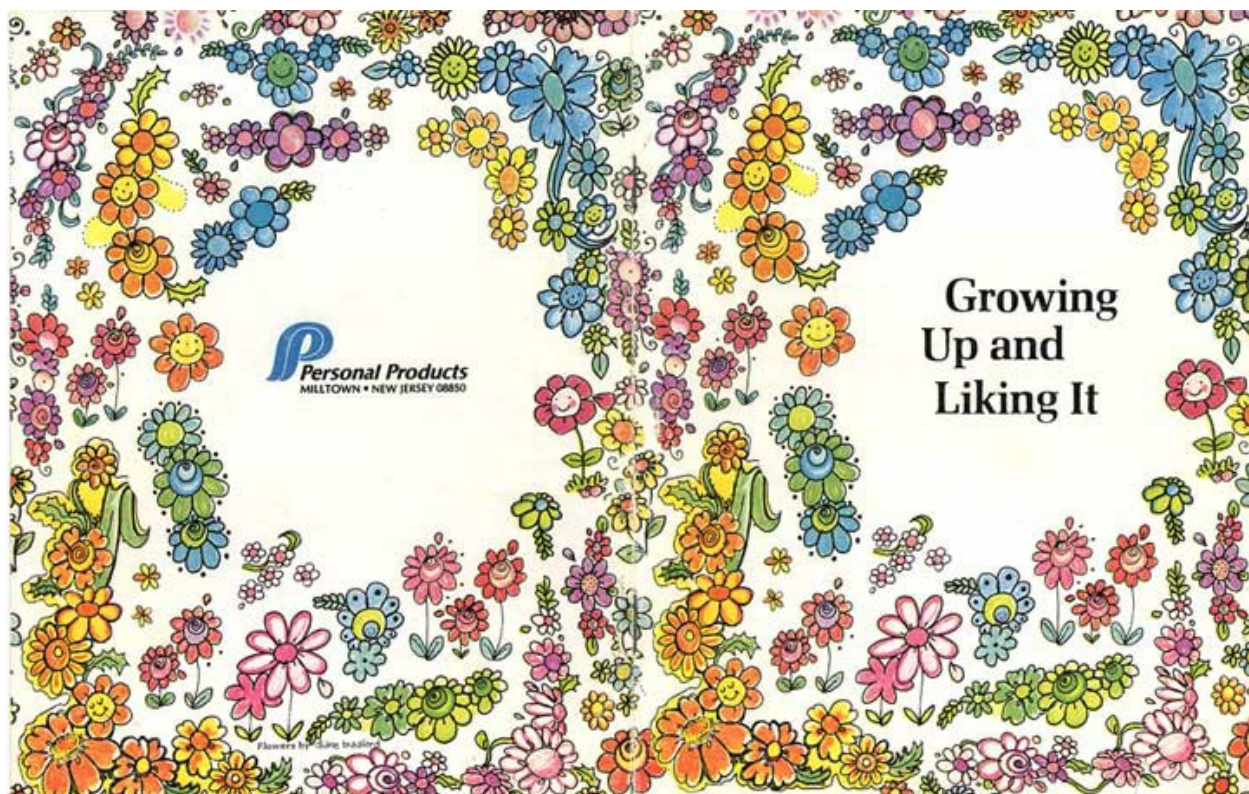
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APPENDIX A

“Growing Up and Liking It”²⁷



²⁷ Growing Up and Liking It Puberty & menstruation information for girls, 1976, Personal Products Company (Modess, Carefree, Stayfree & Teenage menstrual pads, panties and tampons), USA (Growing Up and Liking It, 1976).

GROWING UP AND LIKING IT

An Introduction

This new edition of *Growing Up and Liking It* is a story about Patty, Donna, and Ginny. The girls are good friends who keep in touch by writing. Well, actually, Ginny and Donna could talk to each other because they're from the same town. But in this story they write to Patty and she writes back, because Patty has moved away to a new town and a new school. In the beginning she's lonesome.

Each girl has a very different personality.

PATTY (whose stationery is yellow) seems to know everything. But as we said, she's really lonely and it takes her some time to make friends. Also, you'll notice she really learns a lot from her mother, older sisters and teacher. But Patty does sound like an authority when she talks.

DONNA (whose letters are in blue) is quite shy. She doesn't know very much about growing up. Donna really needs her friends *Patty and Ginny* to explain things...and to keep her spirits up.

GINNY (who writes on pink paper) seems to be a very busy, confident person. You'll notice as you read that she is a bit excitable at times.

We hope that Patty, Donna, and Ginny, and what they have to say, will help you understand that menstruation is a natural, happy part of growing up.

The Consumer Information Center



© 1976- Personal Products Company, Milltown, New Jersey 08850

Dear Ginny,

I haven't heard one word from Donna. I thought the three of us were such great friends. You can tell her for me I am very mad! I still don't like it here.

Love,

Patty



Dear Patty,

Ginny said you are mad at me. I haven't written because I am busy. Candy had six kittens. I don't know if they are girls or boys. I will write more later.

Your friend,

Donna



Dear Donna,

I am busy too! Send a picture of your kittens.

Love,

Patty



Dear Patty,

Guess what? Donna got her period! I can't believe it. She started in school. The nurse gave her a sanitary pad and two safety pins and told her to attach the pad to her underpants. But Donna started bawling like a big baby until the nurse explained things to her. I know that neither one of us would ever act so silly. But Donna didn't know what was happening. I have already sent for my Starter Kit, which is a box of sanitary supplies from the company that makes that stuff. When the time comes I will be all ready!

Luv and stuff

Ginny



Dear Pootch,

How are you? Do you like your new school? I'm dying to hear all about it. Guess what? Donna's mother just bought her a bra. I still don't need one. How about you? Write soon and tell me EVERYTHING!

Luv and stuff,

Ginny



Dear Ginny,

I miss you and Donna a lot. My new school is pretty bad. I can't stand the kids. My mother says I'll get used to things but I don't believe her. All the girls around here talk about getting their periods. They think it's really great. By the way, nobody calls me Pootch. Everybody says Patty except for the music teacher, who calls me Patricia. I think I am getting too old for a silly name like Pootch anyway. I am the same as you -- I still don't need a bra.

Love from your old best friend,

Patty

P. S. Donna hasn't written once!



Dear Patty,

Even if she is one of my best friends, Donna is getting very moody. I never know if she is going to laugh or cry. A lot of girls here talk about getting their periods too. Write soon.

Love and stuff,

Ginny



Dear Ginny,

Have you seen Donna's kittens? They sound so cute. That's really something, her getting her period. I think she got scared because no one had told her anything. My mother said when she was a kid nobody talked about menstruation. So when she started she almost dropped dead! Imagine starting to bleed and not knowing why! Mom says the reason nobody talked about it is that most people didn't even understand why it happened. Which is why she told me and my sisters all about it years ago. I wish I would hurry and start too.

Love,

Patty

P. S. I am going to write Donna to congratulate her.



Dear Donna,

Congratulations! Ginny wrote me all about it. What does it feel like to be grown up? Write soon.

Love,

Patty



Dear Patty,

I think Ginny has a big mouth! Just wait until she gets her period. I am going to blab to everybody. You asked me how it feels. Well, it isn't anything much now that I know what it's all about. I'm glad I'm growing up but there are a few things bothering me. My mother gave me some of her pads and a sanitary belt. They're not comfortable. And I don't like the idea of losing all that blood. Will I wind up very weak? I had some cramps the first two days. They were down low and across my back. If you tell Ginny this I will never speak to you again, but sometimes I get very scared about not being a kid anymore. Do you know what I mean? Answer right away.

Your friend,

Donna



Dear Donna,

I think you are lucky not to be a kid anymore. Ask your mother for a book about the facts of life. In the meantime, I will tell you some things you should know. You are hardly losing any blood at all...only three or four ounces. That's not very much, especially if you know there are at least 120 ounces in your whole body and your body keeps on making new blood. And anyway, it's not really like when you get a cut. It's much thicker. That's because menstrual flow is a combination of blood and soft tissue from the inside of your uterus. So stop worrying! Most of the girls here don't have cramps but here are some good exercises to make your cramps go away. They're from my sister Janie's booklet she got in high school. You can do them everyday and when you're menstruating (men stroo ate ing). (That's the right way to say it). Now that you've got your period, you better watch out about "odor" -- that's what my mother said.



Love,
Patty

1. Stand with your face directly toward a wall. Your feet should be about 12 to 16 inches away from the wall. Raise both your elbows to the level of your shoulders and cross your arms. Lean forward so both elbows touch the wall and feel comfortable in this position. Next tilt your pelvis forward to touch the wall. While in this position keep your heels on the floor and your knees straight. Hold for one minute and return to original position.



2. Lie on your back with knees bent, feet flat on floor and arms extended straight over head.

Swing your arms forward and at the same time push feet forward and move to sitting position.



Reach forward and try to touch toes with fingers. Return to original position.



Dear Patty,

What is a uterus? Write immediately, if not sooner! And what did you mean about "odor"?

Your friend,
Donna



Dear Donna,

Don't you know anything??? Your uterus is the place in your body where a baby grows. It's in your abdomen. That's below your stomach. I mention this because some people confuse the two. They say they have a stomach ache when they're really talking about their abdomen.

Anyway, there is this special lining of blood and tissue that builds up in the uterus so that in case you do want to have a baby it will have a soft place to grow. If you aren't having one you don't need that lining. So it flows out through your vagina. And that's menstruation.

The reason I mentioned "odor" to you is that you perspire more when you have your period. And also, menstrual flow has an odor once it leaves your body. So you should change your napkin every couple of hours. And you should have at least two belts. That way you can wash one every night. My sister Linda doesn't use a belt. She uses sanitary panties. The pad fits right in the bottom and there are loops to hold it in place. Feminine napkins come in different sizes and shapes. Experiment to see what's comfortable for you. Since I know so much, it's a shame I haven't started yet!

Love,
Patty



Dear Patty,

Thanks a lot for your letter. I used to think you were a real know-it-all but now I am glad you know so much. I feel a lot better since you explained things to me. My period lasted six days but it kind of slowed up after the first two days. Ginny says that when a woman is pregnant she doesn't get her period at all. I guess that makes sense because she would need that lining inside her uterus so that the baby has a soft place to grow. But now I am wondering-- exactly how often does your period come? How can you be sure you are normal?

Your friend,
Donna

P.S. There are four girl and two boy kittens.



Dear Donna,

My sister said that everyone has a different menstrual cycle. I am sure you haven't the faintest idea about that subject so I will explain.

When your body gets mature, thousands of tiny egg cells develop in the ovaries. You have two ovaries in case you didn't already know. Once a month one of those tiny egg cells leaves one of your ovaries. It enters the Fallopian tube (you also have two of those) which is like a direct road to your uterus. When it gets there, if there is no male sperm cell to fertilize it and make a baby, the egg breaks up and leaves your body with the lining of your uterus. Naturally you can't ever see the egg as it is so tiny you would need a microscope. Here're some pictures from a booklet my mother gave me.

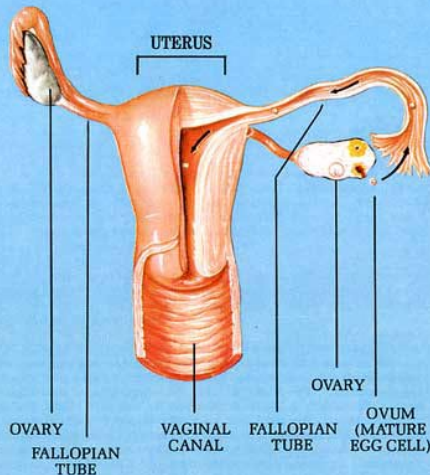
Usually, the menstrual period takes place every four weeks. But each person has a different schedule. My sister Janie is so regular she gets her period every twenty-eight days on the dot. But my sister Linda is just the opposite. Sometimes she menstruates every month and other times she doesn't. The doctor said she is just not regulated yet. I wonder if I'll ever start!

How are your kittens?

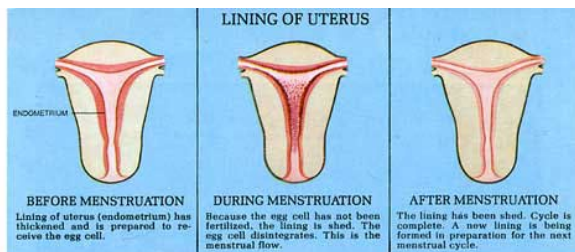
Love,
Patty

FEMININE REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS

Ovary and Fallopian tube have been extended on one side to show greater detail.



Only one mature egg cell escapes the ovary at approximately mid-point of the menstrual cycle (about half way between each period). The egg cell travels through the Fallopian tube to the uterus. If it is not fertilized, the egg is discharged from the body along with the thickened lining of the uterus (called the endometrium).



Dear Patty,

I am about ready to die! I have seven pimples on my face. Donna says I look awful. What am I going to do? I hate them! I am going to scrub my face with soap six times a day from now on. Some hair is starting to grow under my arms. I finally need a bra. How are things with you?

Luv and stuff,

Ginny

Dear Ginny,

I am sorry to hear about your pimples. We had an interesting program at our school today. It was all about menstruation. There was a film and everything. Here is some information I learned that may or may not cheer you up. If you add all the millions of girls who get their periods when they are between nine and sixteen, it turns out that twelve is an average age to begin. My mother says she was fourteen. My sister Janie was too, but Linda was thirteen. I think you're going to be next. Your pimples and your needing a bra are clues. My bra isn't even stretched yet. I am a failure!

Love,

Patty

Well, that's enough about the doctor visit. At least I'm not a complete failure after all.

Love,

Patty

P.S. We really should learn all the right names for every part of our body so we can discuss these things when we have to without being embarrassed. So I have made up a list for you and Donna. A lot of these things I learned in school.

GLOSSARY

- Cramps** ('kramps) - a common name for menstrual discomfort or pain that sometimes occurs before or during the menstrual period.
- Egg Cell** - a common name for the ovum which develops in the ovary.
- Endometrium** (en'do-me'tre-um) - Lining of the uterus.
- Fallopian Tube** (fah-lō-pe-an) - One of the pair of tubes through which the egg cell passes on its way from the ovary to the uterus. One Fallopian tube is located on the right side of the uterus. The other is on the left side.
- Hygiene** (hi'geen) - Observance of good cleanliness practices.
- Hymen** (hi'men) - Thin flexible fold of tissue partly covering the vaginal opening.
- Menopause** (men'o-pawz) - The time of a woman's life when menstruation ceases.
- Menstruation** (men-stroo-a'shun) - Periodic shedding of the lining of the uterus.
- Ovaries** (o'vah-rees) - Two small organs which produce egg cells.
- Ovulation** (o'vyu-la'shun) - Formation and discharge of a mature egg cell from the ovary.
- Ovum** (o'vum) - A female egg cell.
- Puberty** (pyu'ber-te) - The stage of maturation in which the individual becomes physiologically capable of reproduction.
- Rectum** (rek'tum) - Lower end of the large intestine.
- Urinary Bladder** (u'ri-ner-e) - Reservoir for urine.
- Uterus** (u'ter-us) - Hollow, muscular organ located in the female pelvis for holding and nourishing a baby before birth. Also called the womb.
- Vagina** (vah-ji'nah) - An elastic, funnel-shaped canal from the uterus to the outside of the body; the menstrual flow leaves the body through this passageway.

Dear Ginny,

I am writing again even though you haven't answered my last letter yet. My sister Janie didn't get her period until two weeks after she expected it. Well, she went straight to my mother and told her about it. She called the doctor and made an appointment for me too. "Just for a check-up" you know how they talk. If you want to know the truth, I worried a lot about telling him my secret. I mean, how can you just come out and say, "By the way doctor, I don't have my period yet."

But before we went to his office my mother told me to use the correct words and that I didn't have to tell him because after all, there wasn't anything wrong.

So when we got there, I said, "Doctor, I have not begun to menstruate yet."

I know my face was bright red and I was never so embarrassed in my life! But he didn't act shocked at all. He just said, "Well, that's something I hear very often from young ladies your age."

Janie feels much better, by the way. The doctor told her her period was probably late because she was so worried about that exam she had to take last month. He said this happens often.

Janie said the doctor also told her about something called vaginal discharge which is a clear fluid that sometimes happens between menstrual periods or right before a period. Janie said she was never so embarrassed but the doctor said it was good to know this was a perfectly normal thing. As long as it is white or clear in color and there isn't too much and it doesn't itch or burn there isn't any reason to worry.

Dear Patty,

Thanks for your list. I made a copy for Donna and we are both learning it like you said. Guess what? You were right! Not about being a failure but about me! I got my period last night. I wasn't even thinking about it.

And when it hit me that I was really and truly menstruating I did the craziest thing. I started to laugh. And I laughed so hard I just couldn't stop. I called my mother then, and asked her to bring me my Starter Kit. She didn't have to show me how to use anything, because I have been practicing for months!

Luv and stuff,

Ginny

Dear Ginny,

Congratulations! I always knew I'd be last. I have finally found a friend here. Her name is Jennifer. She didn't get her period yet either.

Love,

Patty

Dear Patty,

Sorry I'm late answering. We have a new boy in our class. His name is Stanley and I think he is very cute. He sits right in front of me in math. I'm really glad he doesn't sit in back of me. Because then he'd be looking at my hair! And it's so oily it's sickening. I think I'm going to get my period again. My aunt told me I should never wash my hair or take a bath when I am menstruating! Don't forget to write.

Luv and stuff,

Ginny

Dear Ginny,

I hope you are not listening to what your aunt told you. She probably doesn't understand the medical facts. It is very important to take a bath or shower every day, especially when you have your period. And you should definitely wash your hair. It may get more oily when your period is coming. Tell me more about Stanley!

Love,
Patty



Dear Patty,

Ginny likes this character named Stanley. I don't know what she sees in him. He is skinny and his voice cracks all the time.

Your friend,
Donna



Dear Patty,

Sometimes I worry about Donna. Do you know what she did? She bought flushable napkins and then wrapped each used one in newspaper and threw it in the garbage. Does that make any sense? I mean, if you buy flushable napkins then you might as well flush them. Right? If I am using a pad that isn't flushable I wrap it in toilet paper and throw it in the waste basket. Some Ladies Rooms have little bags to put pads in. Did you know that when our grandmothers were girls, there weren't many kinds of napkins and people were often embarrassed to buy them in a store. Lots of times they even wrapped the boxes in plain paper to disguise them! I'll bet Donna's mother didn't tell her how napkins have changed. She probably doesn't know. You know what my mother said? She said she is learning from me! How about that?



I'm invited to a birthday party at Stanley's house. I just can't wait! Donna is coming too.

I had to get some new bras. I finally grew out of my old ones. How about you?

Luv and stuff,
Ginny

14

Dear Ginny,

I don't blame you for not liking the party. Anyway, you'll find somebody else to like instead of Stanley.

Love,
Patty



Dear Patty,

I suppose Ginny has already written about Stanley's party. She is mad at me. But it really isn't my fault. I never even knew I liked Stanley. And he never knew he liked me either.



By the way, I investigated all the feminine supplies. You are right. Napkins come in all different shapes and sizes. Also, I discovered something called tampons. Write quick if you have any information on the subject. I am expecting my period any minute!

Your friend,
Donna

Dear Donna,

I am writing even though I think you were mean to steal Stanley away from Ginny. Naturally I know all about tampons. You wear a tampon internally, which means it goes inside the vagina. The muscles there keep it in place. The tampon expands to absorb the menstrual flow inside your body. So you don't have to worry about odor. My mother and my oldest sister use tampons. I'll try them too because that way you can go swimming. You know how I love to swim!



Since your mother doesn't use tampons herself, maybe you should ask her to write to the company that makes them. There are booklets that explain all about tampons. But no matter what you use, don't be a goon like Jennifer's cousin, who doesn't even take gym when she has her period! Janie says she feels better when she exercises.

I have to stop now and finish my book report!

Love,
Patty

16

Dear Patty,

Did you hear that I'm invited to a birthday party at Stanley's house? I am so afraid my period will come the same day. And I would absolutely die if any of the boys knew. Tomorrow I am going to the store and get the kind of feminine supplies you mentioned. Something that will feel comfortable and fit better than my mother's stuff. I will let you know how I make out.

Your friend,
Donna



P.S. We gave away 3 of the girl kittens and both boys. My father says the last girl has to go too. He won't have two mother cats around the house.

Dear Ginny and Donna,

I am writing this letter to both of you because I have no time. Jennifer signed up for the school play. I did too. Tryouts are tomorrow afternoon. This school isn't as bad as it used to be. Donna, you shouldn't worry about getting your period at the party. You can carry your stuff with you. There are purse cases made just for that! And it is absolutely impossible for anyone to know you are menstruating. Unless of course you act stupid about the whole thing. Anyway, I will be waiting to hear all about the party. Write me everything that happens!

Love,
Patty



Dear Patty,

Stanley's party stunk! Stanley likes Donna! And she is supposed to be my best friend. Ha!!

Luv and stuff,
Ginny



15

Dear Patty,

This letter is from both of us. We are best friends again. We both HATE Stanley! He likes this stupid girl named Ellen now. Neither one of us knows what we ever saw in him! Since you have always told us EVERYTHING we have made up a list of helpful hints for you.

1. If menstrual blood gets on your pants or other clothes, wash it out right away in cold water. Don't wait or use hot water. That will leave a stain.
2. Keeping a calendar will definitely help you tell when your period is coming. Some girls can tell by the way they feel (like their skin getting oily) but we are learning that keeping a record of our periods helps us learn our own personal schedules. A calendar will also help you learn how long your periods usually last, which is a different length of time for each person (anywhere from 3 to 8 days). You can get a calendar that's up-to-date by writing to Personal Products Company. Since I have two calendars, I am giving one to you. I have marked out certain days so that you may see how it works.
3. And here is an interesting fact which you never mentioned to us. Each woman stops menstruating forever, usually when she is in her forties or fifties. That's a lot of years to get your period! We're sure glad we know so much now!

We wish you could come and visit us. Did you get a part in the school play? Write soon.

Love from your old friends,
Ginny and Donna

P.S. You will never believe this, but I've got 2 girl kittens again. One that we gave away is back. Her family moved away and couldn't take her. My father is mad. So is my mother.

Your friend,
Donna



17

PERSONAL CALENDAR (EXAMPLE)

march	april	may	june
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30

Each time you menstruate, circle the day your period begins. Mark out the remaining days of your period. You'll soon begin to see approximately how many days elapse between each period. But, remember, it often takes 2-3 years before a definite pattern is established.



Dear Donna and Ginny,

I got a part in the school play! I am going to be the Wicked Witch of the West in the Wizard of Oz. I don't think the part suits me at all! Do you??? Write soon.

Love,
Patty



Dear Patty,

We have spent two whole weeks studying magazine ads and looking at the feminine supply displays in a bunch of stores. We used to pick our stuff by the picture on the box. But now we know there is a real difference between each kind.

Most of the girls and women we saw in the stores just grabbed. We have decided it is stupid to behave that way. Menstruation happens to every girl! Even the boys are finally beginning to understand what it's all about.

From now on we are going to select our feminine supplies carefully. We are not going to be grabbers! Here are some interesting things we have discovered:

There is a special feminine napkin made for us. It is called TEEN-AGE. It is tapered at one end so it fits better without showing a bulge from behind. This napkin has deodorant protection and a pretty blue and white cover.

As far as tampons go we have found two different kinds. One comes with an applicator to help you get it in the right place. The other kind doesn't need one (like CAREFREE Tampons). You just insert it yourself. The ads say a lot about the way tampons expand, which is not the same for every kind.

We have just read over our report and all we can say is WOW! We sure have learned a lot. We're thinking of making copies to share with all our friends. Naturally, we sent the first copy to you, to show that we are getting to be real know-it-alls too!

From Donna and Ginny

P.S. I guess we're going to have 3 girl cats all together. Candy and her daughters, Snowy and Tinker. No one will take the kittens. But Mom and Dad both say they're not going through this again. No more baby kittens after this. Here's a picture.

Your friend,
Donna



Then, there are MODESS regular and super absorbency nappkins. Super nappkins are wider and have a unique safety construction for extra absorbency. They are good to use if the flow is heavy.

STAYFREE-Maxi-Pads and STAYFREE Mini-Pads are new kinds of external products that don't have tabs on the end, so they're really convenient and comfortable. They have adhesive strips which stick right to your underpants, so you don't need belts, pins or hooks.

STAYFREE Mini-pads are very small. They help you stay comfortable and feel secure when the menstrual flow is light (like the last few days). They're also good for the kind of discharge Janie's doctor talked about. And if you are going someplace special (like the birthday party) and are expecting your period, you can always wear a mini-pad just in case. STAYFREE Maxi-pads are even newer than Mini-pads. Maxi-pads are full size nappkins for the first 2 or 3 days when the flow is heavier. (Be sure to fasten STAYFREE Mini-Pads and Maxi-Pads to snugly fitting under garments).

Once you have selected the feminine napkin that is best for you, (unless you use STAYFREE pads) you will need a belt or special panties. The most important thing is not the style you choose, but how well it fits. Because if it fits properly the napkin won't twist or slip.

MODESS sanitary panties have elastic loops to hold the napkin in place, so you don't need a belt or pins. Of course, you can wash them just like your regular underwear. They come in different styles too. Most sanitary panties have a protective plastic panel built in so nothing can ever leak through and show. Then there's the all fabric kind like the MODESS SANITARY PANTY that has a moisture resistant panel where you wear the napkin.

Maybe you will want to wear a feminine belt. Belts come in different styles too. They are like little elastic waistbands with hooks to fasten to the tabs on your feminine napkin. But you better make sure you get one that really fits. And you'd better be sure to attach the long tab in the back and the short tab in the front. Don't be afraid to ask the saleslady for some help!



Dear Donna and Ginny,

You will never believe this so you better sit down. I have just been elected class President for next year! Imagine that! I wasn't even going to run, but Jennifer talked me into it. Did I tell you this is a pretty good school? You should have seen our Wizard of Oz play. It was really something! I only forgot my part twice, but I don't think anyone noticed. I still didn't get my period but I have the feeling I am going to. Maybe over the summer. I hope so! Write soon.

Love,

President Patricia
Remember me? Your
old-old Friend Pootch.



CAREFREE, MODESS, STAYFREE and TEEN-AGE

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APPENDIX B

Lyrics

**1. “This One’s for the Girls” by
Martina McBride**

“This one's for all you girls about
thirteen
High school can be so rough, can be so
mean
Hold onto, on to your innocence
Stand your ground when everyone's
giving in

This one's for the girls

This is for all you girls about twenty-five
In a little apartment, just trying to get by
Living on, on dreams and spaghetti-o's
Wondering where you life is gonna go

[CHORUS:]

This one's for the girls
Who've ever had a broken heart
Who've wished upon a shooting star
You're beautiful the way you are
This one's for the girls
Who love without holding back
Who dream with everything they have
All around the world
This one's for the girls

This is for all you girls about forty-two
Tossing pennies into the Fountain of
Youth
Every laugh, laugh line on your face
Made you who you are today

[CHORUS]

Yeah, we're all the same inside (same
inside)
From 1 to 99

[CHORUS]

Yeah, this one's for the girls”

**2. From²⁸ “Homewrecker” by
Gretchen Wilson**

“Well you're a real hot cookie with a
new hairdo
Your high heel boots and your credit
card
Long legs and a mini skirt
Yeah you know what works and you
work it hard
You smile like such a lady innocent and
sweet
You drive the men folk crazy,
But any girl can see
You're just a

[CHORUS:]

Homewrecker
I know what you're doin'
You think you're gonna ruin what I got,
But you're not
Yeah you little go getter
I'll teach you a lesson
If you get to messin' with my man
You don't stand a chance
No, you're just a homewrecker

I'm sure you waited for a long, long time
To find a man like mine
But honey you're too late
So before you go and make your move
Maybe me and you should get a few
things straight
There's two ways we can do this
I'll let you decide
You can take it somewhere else or we
can take it outside you little

[CHORUS]

²⁸ “From” indicates partial lyrics.

Now honey I'm a Christian, But if you
keep it up
I'm gonna go to kickin' your pretty little
butt
Is that clear enough yeah, you little..."

3. "Mr. Mom" by Lonestar

"Lost my job, came home mad
Got a hug and kiss and that's too bad
She said I can go to work until you find
another job
I thought I like the sound of that
Watch TV and take long naps
Go from a hard-working dad to being
Mr. Mom

[CHORUS:]

Well Pampers melt in a Maytag dryer
Crayons go up one drawer higher
Rewind Barney for the fifteenth time
Breakfast six, naps at nine
There's bubble gum in the baby's hair
Sweet potatoes in my lazy chair
Been crazy all day long and it's only
Monday
Mr. Mom

Football, soccer and ballet
Squeeze in Scouts and PTA
And there's that shopping list she left
That's seven pages long
How much smoke can one stove make
The kids won't eat my charcoal cake
It's more than any man can take
Being Mr. Mom...

...Balancin' checkbooks, juggling bills
Thought there was nothing to it
Baby, now I know how you feel
What I don't know is how you do it

Honey, you're my hero"

4. "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)" by Toby Keith

American Girls and American Guys
We'll always stand up and salute
We'll always recognize
When we see Old Glory Flying
There's a lot of men dead
So we can sleep in peace at night
When we lay down our head

My daddy served in the army
Where he lost his right eye
But he flew a flag out in our yard
'Til the day that he died
He wanted my mother, my brother, my
sister and me
To grow up and live happy
In the land of the free

Now this nation that I love
Has fallen under attack
A mighty sucker punch came flyin' in
From somewhere in the back
Soon as we could see it clearly
Through our big black eye
Man, we lit up your world
Like the 4th of July

[CHORUS:]

Hey, Uncle Sam
Put your name at the top of his list
And the Statue of Liberty
Started shakin' her fist
And the eagle will fly
And there's gonna be hell
When you hear Mother
Freedom Start ringin' her bell
And it'll feel like the whole wide world
is raining down on you
Oh, brought to you Courtesy of the Red
White and Blue

Oh, justice will be served
And the battle will rage
This big dog will fight
When you rattle his cage
And you'll be sorry that you messed with
The U.S. of A

'Cause we'll put a boot in your ass
It's the American way

[CHORUS]

Oh, oh, of the Red, White and Blue
Oh, oh, of my Red, White and Blue”

5. “Back When” by Tim McGraw

Don't you remember
The fizz in a pepper
Peanuts in a bottle
At ten, two and four
A fried bologna sandwich
With mayo and tomato
Sittin' round the table
Don't happen much anymore

We got too complicated
It's all way over-rated
I like the old and out-dated
Way of life

[CHORUS:]

Back when a hoe was a hoe
Coke was a coke
And crack's what you were doing
When you were cracking jokes
Back when a screw was a screw
The wind was all that blew
And when you said I'm down with that
Well it meant you had the flu
I miss back when
I miss back when
I miss back when

I love my records
Black, shiny vinyl
Clicks and pops
And white noise
Man they sounded fine
I had my favorite stations
The ones that played them all
Country, soul and rock-and-roll
What happened to those times?

I'm readin' Street Slang For Dummies
Cause they put pop in my country
I want more for my money
The way it was back then

[CHORUS]

Give me a flat top for strumming
I want the whole world to be humming
Just keep it coming
The way it was back then

[CHORUS]”

6. From “A Different World” by Bucky Covington

We were born to mothers who smoked
and drank
Our cribs were covered in lead based
paint
No child proof lids no seat belts in cars
Rode bikes with no helmets and still
here we are, still here we are
We got daddy's belt when we
misbehaved
Had three TV channels you got up to
change
No video games and no satellite
All we had were friends and they were
outside, playin' outside

[CHORUS:]

It was a different life
When we were boys and girls
Not just a different time
It was a different world

School always started the same every
day
The pledge of allegiance then someone
would pray
Not every kid made the team when they
tried

We got disappointed and that was all
right, we turned out all right

[CHORUS]

Bridge
No bottled water, we drank from a
garden hose
And every Sunday, all the stores were
closed

[CHORUS]

[CHORUS]

It was a different world”

7. From “Red Dirt Road” by Alan Jackson

“...It's where I drank my first beer
It's where I found Jesus
Where I wrecked my first car
I tore it all to pieces
I learned the path to heaven
Is full of sinners and believers
Learned that happiness on earth
Ain't just for high achievers
I've learned
I've come to know
There's life at both ends
Of that red dirt road...”

8. From “Drive (For Daddy Gene) by Alan Jackson

“Just an old half ton short bed ford
My Uncle bought new in 64
Daddy got it right cause the engine was
smoking
A couple of burnt valves and he had it
going
He'd let me drive her

when we haul off a load
Down a dirt strip where we'd dump trash
off of Thigpen Road

I'd sit up in the seat and stretch my feet
out to the pedals
Smiling like a hero who just received his
medal

It was just an old hand me down ford
With 3 speed on the column and a dent
in the door
A young boy two hands on the wheel
I can't replace the way it made me feel
and
I would press that clutch
And I would keep it right
He would say a little slower son
Your doing just fine
Just a dirt road with trash on each side
But I was Mario Andretti
When Daddy let me drive

I'm grown up now
3 daughters of my own
I let them drive my old jeep
Across the pasture at our home
Maybe one day they'll reach back in
their file
And pull out that old memory
And think of me and smile
And say

It was just an old worn out jeep
Rusty old floor boards
Hot on my feet
A young girl two hands on the wheel
I can't replace the way it made me feel
And he'd say
Turn it left, and steer it right
Straighten up girl now, you're doing just
fine
Just a little valley by the river where
we'd ride
But I was high on a mountain...”

9. "How Do You Like Me Now" By Toby Keith

“I was always the crazy one

I broke into the stadium
 And I wrote your number on the 50-yard
 line
 You were always the perfect one
 And the valedictorian so
 Under your number I wrote "call for a
 good time"

I only wanted to catch your attention
 But you overlooked me somehow
 Besides you had too many boyfriends to
 mention
 And I played my guitar too loud.

[CHORUS:]
 How do you like me now?
 How do you like me now,
 Now that I'm on my way?
 Do you still think I'm crazy
 Standin' here today?
 I couldn't make you love me
 But I always dreamed about living in
 your radio
 How do you like me now?

When I took off to Tennessee
 I heard that you made fun of me
 Never imagined I'd make it this far
 Then you married into money girl
 Ain't it a cruel and funny world?
 He took your dreams and tore them
 apart.

He never comes home
 And you're always alone
 And your kids hear you cryin' down the
 hall
 Alarm clock starts ringin'
 Who could that be singin'
 It's me baby, with your wake up call!

[CHORUS]

Tell me baby...
 I will preach on..."

10. From "I'm Still a Guy" by Brad Paisley

"When you see a deer you see Bambi
 And I see antlers up on the wall
 When you see a lake you think picnic
 And I see a large mouth up under that
 log
 You're probably thinking that you're
 going to change me
 In some ways well maybe you might
 Scrub me down, dress me up but no
 matter what
 I'm still a guy

When you see a priceless French
 painting
 I see a drunk, naked girl
 You think that riding a wild bull sounds
 crazy
 And I'd like to give it a whirl
 Well love makes a man do some things
 he ain't proud of
 And in a weak moment I might walk
 your sissy dog, hold your purse at the
 mall
 But remember, I'm still a guy

I'll pour out my heart
 Hold your hand in the car
 Write a love song that makes you cry
 Then turn right around knock some jerk
 to the ground
 'Cause he copped a feel as you walked
 by

I can hear you now talking to your
 friends
 Saying, "Yeah girls he's come a long
 way"
 From dragging his knuckles and carrying
 a club

And building a fire in a cave
 But when you say a backrub means only
 a backrub
 Then you swat my hand when I try

Well, what can I say at the end of the day

Honey, I'm still a guy

I'll pour out my heart

Hold your hand in the car

Write a love song that makes you cry

Then turn right around knock some jerk to the ground

'Cause he copped a feel as you walked by

These days there's dudes getting facials

Manicured, waxed and botoxed

With deep spray-on tans and creamy lotiony hands

You can't grip a tacklebox

With all of these men lining up to get neutered

It's hip now to be feminized

I don't highlight my hair

I've still got a pair

Yeah honey, I'm still a guy

Oh my eyebrows ain't plucked

There's a gun in my truck

Oh thank God, I'm still a guy"

From "American Soldier" by Toby Keith,

"And I can't call in sick on Mondays

When the weekends been too strong

I just work straight through the holidays

And sometimes all night long

You can bet that I stand ready

When the wolf growls at the door

Hey, I'm solid, hey I'm steady

Hey I'm true down to the core...

I'll bear that cross with honor

'Cause freedom don't come free"

From "Beer for My Horses" by Willie Nelson and Toby Keith

"Grandpappy told my pappy, back in my day, son

A man had to answer for the wicked that he done

Take all the rope in Texas find a tall oak tree,

Round up all them bad boys hang them high in the street

For all the people to see

[CHORUS]

That justice is the one thing you should always find

You got to saddle up your boys, you got to draw a hard line

When the gun smoke settles we'll sing a victory tune

And we'll all meet back at the local saloon

We'll raise up our glasses against evil forces singing

Whiskey for my men, beer for my horses

We got too many gangsters doing dirty deeds

Too much corruption, and crime in the streets

It's time the long arm of the law put a few more in the ground

Send 'em all to their maker and he'll settle 'em down

You can bet he'll set 'em down..."

From "Good as I Once Was" by Toby Keith,

"She said 'I've seen you in here before'

I said 'I've been here a time or two'

She said 'Hello, my name is Bobby Jo

Meet my twin sister Betty Lou

And we're both feeling kinda wild tonight

And you're the only cowboy in this place

And if you're up for a rodeo

We'll put a big Texas smile on your face'

I said 'Girls,'

[CHORUS]

I ain't as good as I once was
 I got a few years on me now
 But there was a time back in my prime
 When I could really lay it down

And if you need some love tonight
 Then I might have just enough
 I ain't as good as I once was
 But I'm as good once as I ever was

I ain't as good as I once was
 That's just the cold hard truth
 I still throw a few back, talk a little
 smack
 When I'm feelin' bullet proof
 So don't double dog dare me now
 'Cause I'd have to call your bluff..."

From "I Saw God Today" by George Strait

"Just walked down the street to the
 coffee shop
 Had to take a break
 I've been by her side for eighteen hours
 straight
 Saw a flower growing in the middle of
 the sidewalk
 Pushing up through the concrete
 Like it was planted right there for me to
 see

The flashing lights
 The honking horns
 All seem to fade away
 In the shadow of the hospital
 At 5:08
 I saw God today"

**From "Small Town Southern Man"
 by Alan Jackson**

"[CHORUS]
 And he bowed his head to Jesus
 And he stood for Uncle Sam
 And he only loved one woman
 (He) was always proud of what he had
 He said his greatest contribution

Is the ones you leave behind
 Raised on the ways and gentle kindness
 Of a small town Southern man
 (Raised on the ways and gentle
 kindness)
 (Of a small town Southern man)

Callous hands told the story
 For this small town Southern man
 He gave it all to keep it all together
 And keep his family on his land
 Like his daddy, years wore out his body
 Made it hard just to walk and stand
 You can break the back
 But you can't break the spirit
 Of a small town Southern man"

**From "Have You Forgotten?" Darryl
 Worley**

I hear people saying we don't need this
 war
 But, I say there's some things worth
 fighting for
 What about our freedom and this piece
 of ground
 We didn't get to keep 'em by backing
 down
 They say we don't realize the mess we're
 getting in
 Before you start your preaching let me
 ask you this my friend

[CHORUS:]

Have you forgotten how it felt that day?
 To see your homeland under fire
 And her people blown away
 Have you forgotten when those towers
 fell?
 We had neighbors still inside going
 through a living hell
 And you say we shouldn't worry 'bout
 Bin Laden
 Have you forgotten?

They took all the footage off my T.V.
 Said it's too disturbing for you and me

It'll just breed anger that's what the
experts say
If it was up to me I'd show it everyday
Some say this country's just out looking
for a fight
Well, after 9/11 man I'd have to say
that's right

[CHORUS]

I've been there with the soldiers
Who've gone away to war
And you can bet that they remember
Just what they're fighting for..."

**From "Good Hearted Woman"
Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson**

A long time forgotten
Are dreams that just felt by the way
And the good life he promised
Ain't what she's living today

But she never complains of
The bad times or bad things he's done,
Lord
She's just talks about the good times
They've had and all the good times to
come

She's a good hearted woman
In love with a good timin' man
She loves him in spite of his ways
That she don't understand

Through teardrops and laughter
They'll pass though his world hand in
hand
A good hearted woman
Lovin' her good timin' man

He likes the night life
The brightlights and good timin' friends
When the party's all over
She welcome him back home again

Lord knows she don't understand him

But she does the best that she can
'Cause she's a good hearted woman
She loves her good timin' man

She's a good hearted woman
In love with a good timin' man
And she loves him in spite of his wicked
ways
That she don't understand

Through teardrops and laughter
They'll pass though his world hand in
hand
A good hearted woman
Lovin' her good timin' man

She's a good hearted woman
In love with a good timin' man
She loves me in spite of my wicked
ways
That she don't understand

Through teardrops and laughter
They'll pass though we'll world hand in
hand Lord
A good hearted woman
Lovin' her good timin' man"

**From "Independence Day" by
Martina McBride**

"Well ,word gets around in a small,small
town

They said he was a dangerous man
But mama was proud and she stood her
ground

But she knew she was on the losin' end.
Some folks whispered and some folks
talked

But everybody looked the other way
And when time ran out there was no one
about
On Independence Day.

From "Just Fishin'" by Trace Adkins

“I'm lost in her there holdin' that pink
rod and reel
She's doin' almost everything but sittin'
still
Talkin' 'bout her ballet shoes and
training wheels
And her kittens
And she thinks we're just fishin'

I say, "Daddy loves you, baby" one more
time
She says, "I know, I think I've got a bite"
And all this laughin', cryin', smilin', dyin'
here inside's
What I call, livin'

[Chorus:]
And she thinks we're just fishin' on the
riverside
Throwin' back what we could fry
Drownin' worms and killin' time
Nothin' too ambitious
She ain't even thinkin' 'bout
What's really goin' on right now
But I guarantee this memory's a big'in
And she thinks we're just fishin'

She's already pretty, like her mama is
Gonna drive the boys all crazy
Give her daddy fits
And I better do this every chance I get
'Cause time is tickin'
(Yeah it is)..."

**From "I'm Still a Guy" by Brad
Paisley**

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And I see antlers up on the wall
When you see a lake you think picnic
And I see a large mouth up under that
log
You're probably thinking that you're
going to change me
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Manicured, waxed and botoxed
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lotiony hands
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neutered
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