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RECONSTRUCTING VIOLENT RURAL MASCULINITIES: RESPONDING TO FRACTURES IN THE RURAL GENDER ORDER IN AUSTRALIA

ABSTRACT Men's violence against women is higher in rural communities compared to urban areas and many writers have identified the increased vulnerability of women in rural areas when addressing men's violence. This article will explore the implications of the emerging scholarship on rural masculinities for understanding how rurality invokes different modes of masculinity associated with men's violence in the context of rural restructuring. While the socio-cultural aspects of rural areas generate stronger enforcement of gender roles that perpetuate gender inequality, rural restructuring challenges dominant forms of masculinity, and this has contradictory consequences for reconstructing masculinities. Consequently, while many rural men are endeavouring to preserve traditional masculinity in the face of the rural crisis, other men are exploring alternative masculinities that are incompatible with men's violence against women.

KEYWORDS RURAL MASCULINITIES, RURAL GENDER RELATIONS, RURAL RESTRUCTURING, MEN'S VIOLENCE

The incidence and prevalence of men's violence against women in rural communities have become an issue provoking considerable debate in recent years (Hastings & Maclean, 2002; Hogg & Carrington, 2003; Neame & Heenan, 2004; Wendt, 2009). While men's violence against women in indigenous communities has been well reported (Hastings & Maclean; Neame & Heenan; Keel, 2004), White men's violence against White women in rural communities has until recently remained largely hidden. This may be related in part to Carrington and Scott's (2008) observation that there is an urban bias in research into men's violence against women, as most of the focus is on men in cities. Furthermore, there is little research on the differences in the perpetrators of men's violence in rural communities compared with men who commit violence against women in urban settings (Wendt).

Although some writers raise questions about whether violent crime more generally is higher in rural areas (Neame & Heenan, 2004; Wendt, 2009), there seems to be persuasive evidence that men's violence against women is a more significant problem in rural communities. Leviore (2003) demonstrates that there are higher

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levels of sexual violence in rural communities and Carrington (2006) cites extensive research that demonstrates that violence against women is higher in some rural communities in Australia compared to urban areas. Hogg and Carrington (2006) found that 45 out of the top 50 localities for sexual assault in New South Wales were located in rural areas of the state. Also, of 50 domestic violence “hot spots” in New South Wales, 39 were located in rural and regional localities (Carrington & Scott, 2008).

A national Australian study of men’s violence against women found that women were more vulnerable to violence in rural communities compared to urban areas (Women’s Services Network, 2000). Studies in the United States also reveal that rates of sexual assault in rural counties were considerably higher than in cities, even though rural counties have lower reporting rates (Ruback & Menard, 2001).

Hogg and Carrington (2006) believe that men’s violence against women is more likely to be unreported in rural contexts in Australia. Low reporting rates of men’s violence against women may be due to a range of informal controls operating in rural communities, which include a more conservative social climate, a greater number of acquaintances, and a deeper mistrust of external interventions (Ruback & Menard, 2001; Wendt, 2009). Greater geographical isolation and more limited access to police and support services in rural communities are also likely to impact on reporting levels (Hogg & Carrington, 2006). Also, as perpetrators and the police are likely to share the same friendship networks, this may impact on women’s willingness to disclose the violence (Neame & Heenan, 2004).

People tend to assume that violence is higher in cities because of the belief in idealised images of rural communities (Hogg & Carrington, 2003). The “rural idyll,” as some refer to it (Bell, 1997; Wendt, 2009) is the notion of describing rural lifestyles as positive, friendly, safe and cosy (Struthers, 1994) where people live happier and simpler lives (DeKeseredy et al., 2007).

The rural idyll is a myth for many people in rural communities. Rural culture is likely to generate negative effects on some forms of difference. Those in rural communities who are marginalised by gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality are all too conscious of the myths surrounding egalitarianism in rural life (Kraack & Kenway, 2002). Furthermore, the romantic image of the idyllic rural community has been shattered by awareness of the increased vulnerability of women to men’s violence in rural contexts.

IMPLICATIONS OF SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS OF RURAL AREAS FOR GENDER RELATIONS

Weisheit, Wells and Falcone (1995) identify a number of socio-cultural aspects of rural areas that may have implications for gender relations: greater social and political conservatism; stronger enforcement of gender rules and traditional roles in the family; a strong belief in the privacy of family matters; a mythology of mateship among men and reinforced patterns of female subordination; distrust of “outsiders” and a suspicion of policy solutions “imported” from the city; less anonymity and privacy; greater levels of surveillance, particularly of women and girls and strong social controls operating through informal and intimate processes and mechanisms. These social influences are seen as differentiating rural culture from an urban culture.

Research in rural communities has for some time identified the prevalence of patriarchal belief systems, conservative social norms, and stereotypical gender roles in shaping family life. In 1992, Ken Dempsey undertook an extensive study of gender inequality in an agricultural community in Victoria, Australia. Published as *A Man's Town: Inequality Between Women and Men in Rural Australia*, Dempsey identified "Smalltown" (the name given to the Victorian town) as a patriarchal system. This was reflected in men's superior power and the economic dependence of women that results, and the ideology of gender that defines men and their activities as superior and women and their activities as inferior. Men's dominance was reflected in the following: men's control of local decision making bodies; the segregated men's service clubs; men's control of the churches; the dominance of male sport; the role of pub drinking in gender segregation; the segregation of friendships and informal interaction; the domestic division of labour; the subordination of women in paid employment; and the traditional gender attitudes of men and women (Dempsey, 1992).

Fourteen years later Hogg and Carrington (2006) discovered the same dimensions of patriarchal control in the public and civic spheres of the rural communities that they studied. Such aspects of the public sphere and civic culture in rural communities appear to be more patriarchal than corresponding sites in cities (Hogg & Carrington). Thus it can be argued that rural communities are more likely to have conservative dominant ideologies in relation to gender and diversity issues.

Much of the literature acknowledges differences in the experiences of women who are subjected to men's violence in rural communities (Alston, 1997; Hogg & Carrington, 2003; Neame & Heenan, 2004). If family life is more privatised and kept secret, there is less possibility of encouraging women to speak out against the violence and to encourage men to address it through counselling and education. It has also been recognised that some aspects of rural culture inhibit women experiencing violence from seeking assistance. Wendt (2009) has identified the barriers that prevent women from escaping from violent men. These include financial factors, isolation, and limited access to services, information, and police assistance. Also, increased commitment to traditional gender roles means that there is a greater level of acceptance of men's dominance (Alston, 1997; Neame & Heenan, 2004). All of the issues that women face in cities are thus exacerbated in rural communities.

The difficulty of getting men's violence against women raised as an issue to be addressed in rural communities has been well noted (Hastings & Maclean, 2002). Alston (1995) identifies that women, as well as men, in rural communities are more likely to hold traditional views about gender roles. If women support the ideology of male dominance, they will be more willing to accommodate to unequal gender arrangements. Such women are less likely to respond positively to feminist arguments about men's privilege and power.

Many commentators have identified the particular challenges of enacting a feminist approach to practice in rural contexts (Alston, 1997; Hastings & Maclean, 2002; La Nauz & Rutherford, 1997; Neame & Heenan, 2004). In fact, there is some evidence to suggest that anti-violence campaigns are less likely to be successful in rural communities, and that it is more difficult to regulate the levels of men's violence against women (Hogg & Carrington, 2006).

While attention has been given to what rurality means for women's vulnerability and capacity to speak out against men's violence, less attention has been given to how these ideologies influence the construction of masculinity in rural communities and how they might impact on men's violence against women. Although there have been a few studies of men's violence against women in rural communities in Australia (Alston, 1997; Carrington & Scott, 2008; Hastings & Maclean, 2002; Jamieson & Wendt, 2008; Wendt, 2009), there has been little interrogation of how particular expressions of rural masculinity impact on and shape men's propensity for violence. What is it about rurality that increases men's propensity towards violence?

RURAL MEN AND MASCULINITIES

Masculinity studies as a field of academic scholarship emerged in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, this scholarship entered a new stage in which variations among men were seen as central to understanding men's lives. Thus we cannot speak of masculinity as a singular term, but rather should explore masculinities in the plural (Pease, 2000). Men are as socially diverse as women and this diversity entails differences between men in relation to class, ethnicity, age, sexuality, bodily facility, religion, world views, parental/marital status, occupation, and propensity for violence.

Historically, masculinity studies have been city-centric or "metro normative," as Kenway et al. (2006) put it. It is only in recent years that a literature on the relationship between rurality and the construction of masculinity has emerged. In recognition of the diversity between men, masculinity scholars have started to articulate differences between rural and urban masculinities through understanding the specific influences of rural and urban communities upon particular groups of men (Bye, 2003; Campbell & Bell, 2000; Campbell et al., 2006; Johnson, 2001; Kenway et al.). Thus just as we need to understand men in relation to class, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and able-bodiedness, we also need to see how men are situated in relation to the urban-rural continuum (Kramvig & Stien, 2003). We may thus posit that there is a connection between rural practices and activities, and the social construction of masculinities in rural communities (Little & Jones, 2000).

In recent years, geographers have started to explore the relationship between space and gender (Berg & Longhurst, 2003; Little, 2002; Longhurst, 2000; Horschelmann & van Hoven, 2004). The premise of the research agenda into rural masculinities is that spatial structures impact on gendered subjectivities. Thus different spatial forms construct different expressions of masculinity (Kenway et al., 2006). This means that masculinity is not only historically and culturally constructed but also spatially produced.

Hogg and Carrington (2006) argue that rural masculinities are constructed out of rigid divisions of labour and forms of hegemonic masculinity that are premised on subordinating women. They argue also that rural men are more likely to be heterosexist and homophobic than urban men. In their view, the existence of these issues leads to a greater level of tolerance of men's violence against women in rural communities. Empirical work carried out by Wendt (2009) demonstrates that rural men who are violent to women are less likely to see their behaviour as problemat-

ical and are more likely to regard it as a legitimate expression of their masculinity.

There is a sense in which a rural man is a “real man” (Sach, 2006), someone who manifests a particular form of masculinity as exhibited in notions of the pioneer or the logger (Campbell & Bell, 2000). Thus it can be said that rural men are closer to the hegemonic model of masculinity than urban men. If rural men are “real men,” then urban men are perceived as being more feminine and soft (Hogg & Carrington, 2006). Bell (1997), for example, talks about the role played by the country and nature in restoring city men who may be stressed and made soft by urban life. The natural wilderness is thus seen to promote a particular form of masculinity (Little & Jones, 2000).

Rural men, more so than urban men, are expected to be self-reliant and stoic in the faces of challenges and hardships (Wendt, 2009). The representation of the farmer struggling against significant odds is a common idealisation of rural masculinity. Leipins (2000) demonstrates how agriculture-based masculinities are constructed through notions of strength and battle. These particular forms of masculinity are seen to epitomize the masculine qualities of physical strength, male friendship, moral strength, courage, and survival skills (Connell, 2006; Hogg & Carrington, 2006). These masculine traits are the foundations of the particularly Australian notion of mateship, which seems to be stronger in rural communities (Coorey, 1990).

Johnson (2001), in his doctoral thesis, documented how young men in rural Australia live out various expressions of masculinities involving alcohol, cars, interactions with women, and sporting prowess. Alcohol consumption among men is considerable higher in rural areas, compared to large cities (Carrington, 2007, cited in Wendt, 2009). So pub culture has a particular place in constructing masculinities in rural communities (Campbell & Bell, 2000). The ownership of guns by men in rural communities also appears to be a significant dimension of the construction of what it means to be man in many rural areas. It is not just the fact that gun ownership by men is higher in rural communities. It is the passion with which gun ownership is defended as a human rights issue (Hogg & Carrington, 2006; Wendt).

Some critics have raised the question about whether rural masculinity can be separated analytically from urban masculinity (Brandth & Haugen, 2005). Campbell and Bell (2000) address this issue by exploring what they call “the masculine in the rural” and “the rural in the masculine.” By the masculine in the rural, they mean the diversity of ways in which masculinity is constructed within rural spaces. By rural in the masculine, they refer to the processes by which rurality produces forms of masculinity. Notwithstanding the problems associated with constructing polarised notions of rural and urban men, it is important to acknowledge that there are differences between men in terms of their location in different geographical spaces.

ACKNOWLEDGING THE DIVERSITY OF MASCULINITIES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

In exploring the socio-cultural aspects of rural areas and the implications for gender relations, we must thus be careful not to homogenise rural communities and overlook the diversity of class, ethnicity, and sexuality divisions likely to be found within them (Hastings & Maclean, 2002). Most commentators agree that rural life is much more diverse than is commonly believed. There is no one notion of “the

rural." Campbell et al. (2006, p. 15) propose that we should talk of there being "multiple rurals," as distinct from one "real rural."

Wendt (2009) has raised questions about whether there is a homogeneous patriarchal culture in rural communities that is unique to them. In line with the notion of masculinities in the plural, there is not one monolithic form of rural masculinity but rather a plurality of rural masculinities (Campbell & Bell, 2000). We thus need to understand how the rural context shapes the way in which various forms of masculinity are enacted. While there are hegemonic forms of rural masculinity that are exalted, there are also contesting masculinities in rural areas that do not fit the image of the ideal rural man (Hogg & Carrington, 2006).

As Neame and Heenan (2004) point out, rural communities are not wholly conservative, any more than urban areas are uniformly progressive, on gender issues. So while it is important to highlight differences in rural and urban landscapes, we must not present rural life as homogeneous. Just as there are conservative people in cities, there are also progressive people in rural communities. They suggest that while the sexual double standard is more common in rural communities, it is not the only form of gendered subjectivity.

Rural life has taken on a renewed power of healing from city stresses with "sea change" and "tree change" migrations to the coast and the bush. Of course, this is not new in that counter-cultural communities have always established themselves in the country (Connell, 2006). When highly educated and politically progressive people move to the country, they contribute to the diversity of the populace.

Carrington and Scott (2008) also identify the rise of new rural-based social movements as a response to the current crisis. While alternative and oppositional masculinities in rural communities that are concerned with environmental issues, alternative lifestyles and gender equality may be subordinated, they nevertheless pose cracks in the hegemony of the upholders of patriarchal and traditional masculinities.

However, while a diversity of rural masculinities exist, it is the physicality of rural men's labour, as manifested in the roles of stockman, hunter, fisherman, farmer, and cowboy, etc., that represent the dominant forms (Carrington, 2007, in Wendt, 2009). Thus it can be argued that rural masculinities are less diverse than those in urban spaces.

Notwithstanding the diversity of cultures in rural communities, there is a persuasive argument that masculinist and patriarchal discourses dominate public and private life and consequently shape rural masculinities. This diversity is often marginalised and excluded in the context of dominant rural ideologies (Hastings & Maclean, 2002). This means that dominant rural ideologies which are conservative frame the ways in which men's violence against women in rural communities is understood.

RURAL RESTRUCTURING AND CHALLENGES TO RURAL MASCULINITIES

Back in 1992, Dempsey did not see any progressive change coming from within rural communities. Men's domination and exploitation of women was so pervasive across all areas of rural life—local government, the service clubs, the churches, unions, leisure activities sport, drinking at the pub, and informal interaction—that

there was little evidence of opposition. Rather, the only hope was for larger structural and cultural changes in the wider society to create spaces for change. Such changes may be occurring. Rural communities in Australia have undergone significant economic restructuring in response to globalisation leading to high levels of unemployment among men. This has come to be described as a “rural crisis” (Hogg & Carrington, 2006; Kraack & Kenway, 2002).

How have rural communities been transformed by economic restructuring? A number of writers identify a series of consequences of economic restructuring in rural communities associated with increasing globalisation. The main consequences are: high levels of youth unemployment; corporate downsizing; decline in real wages; changes in technology; decline in manufacturing jobs; decline in farming, forestry, and other traditional rural occupations; the increase of women on farms and as partners in family businesses; and the introduction of alternative forms of farming (Alston, 1995; Hogg & Carrington, 2006; Johnson, 2001; Kenway et al., 2006; Wendt, 2009).

What does this crisis mean for men and how does it impact on expressions of masculinity? The decline of the agriculture and forestry industries in rural areas will impact dramatically upon men who are associated with these industries (Brandth & Haugen, 2005). If these industries go through a process of restructuring or decline as a result of the rural crisis, we would expect that the construction of masculinities will also change. Johnson (2001) suggests that alternative forms of farming that move away from high technology challenge traditional notions of manhood. Men also experience challenges to their masculinity by women entering men’s domain on family farms as livestock managers and machinery operators and women becoming more involved in off-farm labour (Alston, 1995). This is exacerbated by changes to gun ownership legislation and drink and driving laws (Hogg & Carrington, 2006). Kimmel and Ferber (2006) identify similar changes to the rural gender order in the United States where economic restructuring has led to decline in wages, unemployment in the manufacturing sector, corporate downsizing, and changes in technology. In this context, the rural crisis has generated a crisis in masculinity, as many men rural men in America feel under siege. This has led to the rise of militias as men look for someone to blame.

These changes to rural life are transforming gender divisions in rural families and occupations (Carrington & Scott, 2008). Agricultural restructuring and challenges to traditional gender roles resulting from increased levels of male unemployment means that many men feel that their sense of manhood is under threat.

Of course unemployment among men in urban areas will undermine masculinity as well. However, there appears to be some differences in the ways in which men respond to economic crises in rural communities (Laorie, 2001). While job losses have occurred in both rural and urban contexts, there has been a more significant economic downturn in many rural communities. Many commentators have noted that men have been more affected by this economic restructuring and unemployment because they struggle to maintain traditional forms of masculinity associated with being the sole provider and head of the family (Carrington & Scott, 2008; DeKeseredy et al., 2007; Foskey & Avery, 2004; Sherman, 2005). For these men, relationships are likely to be more unstable and higher levels of family conflict are

expected because they are endeavouring to maintain expectations of a form of masculinity that eludes them.

Kenway et al. (2006) describe how men without work in rural communities exhibit various forms of loss and melancholia, which leads them to discuss what they call "melancholic masculinities." Johnson's (2001) research of farm men also reveals high levels of grief among men as they face the loss of their family farm along with the ability to meet the expectations associated with their roles as partners, fathers, and sons. The greater these men adhere to a form of masculinity associated with control and self-reliance, the greater the likelihood that they will find it difficult to address this loss and grief.

Research by DeKeseredy et al. (2007) revealed that marriages in the studied rural communities were characterised by very traditional gendered divisions of labour. However, these gendered arrangements were unsettled by the rural decline, as many women sought paid work when men were unable to provide for their families. In this context, men's self-worth was affected, and their marriages became unstable because they could no longer meet the expectations of being "head of the house."

Thus while rural masculinity commonly advantages men, it can also have negative consequences for these men. Attempts to maintain traditional masculinity in the face of the challenges to it, has implications for rural men's health (Sach, 2006). Laorie (2001) cites research that identifies high suicide rates of men in rural areas, and Campbell et al. (2006) demonstrate that rural men have higher levels of drunk driving and alcoholism. Foskey and Avery (2004) note the difficulties faced by rural men who adhere to stoicism and rugged forms of individualism in reaching out for support when their occupation is transformed by structural adjustment. Thus there is some evidence to suggest that dominant forms of masculinity are losing their legitimacy and power in rural communities.

RURAL RESTRUCTURING AND MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

What is the relationship between rural restructuring and men's violence against women? The argument of this article is that the challenges to men's traditional masculine identity in rural communities, leads some men to enact violence against women. Over 13 years ago, Alston (1997) posited the possibility that levels of violence against women would increase in response to major changes in rural life. Increased stress associated with the drought and deteriorating conditions in rural communities, combined with already existing patriarchal belief systems and the internalisation of conservative gender roles, is likely to contribute to an increase in men's violence against women (Wendt, 2009). Ferrante et al. (in Women's Services Network, 2000) identified that the more disadvantaged rural communities had six times the rate of men's violence against women, compared to the least disadvantaged communities.

Hogg and Carrington (2006) posit that higher levels of men's violence in rural areas are reflections of these different aspects of the rural crisis. Because men are often threatened by women taking non-traditional roles, violence is one way for men to reassert their control (Carrington & Scott, 2008). As a consequence of these changes, men may resort to violence against their female partners to bolster their

masculinity (Wendt, 2009). DeKeseredy et al.'s (2007) study demonstrated that unemployed men whose masculinity was founded on patriarchal belief systems compensated for their declining economic power by exercising greater control over their female partners. They found that some rural men engaged in sexual violence and rape to maintain their status in male peer groups. Research thus demonstrates that when men's masculinity is threatened, it creates insecurity and greater likelihood of violence against women. There is clearly a tension between rural men's experiences of marginalisation with high levels of stress and high rates of suicide on the one hand, and men's continued control over rural communities with increasing enactment of violence against women on the other hand (Laorie, 2001). Any strategy to address men's violence against women in rural communities must engage with this tension.

BREAKING THE NEXUS BETWEEN RURAL MASCULINITIES AND MEN'S VIOLENCE: THE POSSIBILITIES FOR CHANGE

Because it is socially constructed, rural masculinity is something that can change (Campbell et al., 2006). There are some indicators of challenges to hegemonic masculinity in rural areas. Hogg and Carrington (2006) identify emerging forms of masculinity in rural areas that are incompatible with men's violence against women. Similarly, Sach (2006) writes that rural masculinities are shifting, and that this may create possibilities for constructing alternative masculinities.

While some men attempt to shore up their traditional masculine identity in the face of prevalent socio-structural and technological changes, other men are searching for new ways to express their masculinity that do not rely upon dominance and control over women (Carrington & Scott, 2008). In their interviews with rural men, Hogg and Carrington (2006) found evidence of masculinities that were not reproducing violence against women. DeKeseredy et al. (2007) also report on unemployed rural men who do not intensify their control and domination over their wives in the face of the current crisis. Instead, they have managed to adapt their masculinity to encompass more active fathering and involved family life. Sherman (2005) also found examples of men who were able to adjust their gender ideals to the changed circumstances of their lives.

To the extent that men are able to make these changes to their gender role, they will not feel the need to exert control over women or resort to violence to compensate for their loss of power and control in their work. Men who are able to move beyond a breadwinner masculinity are able to remake themselves as engaged fathers and involved family members. Consequently, they are better able to address the anxieties associated with economic restructuring and are able to see real benefits in moving towards more gender-equal relations with women. The more men are able to adapt their masculinity to changed circumstances, the more they will find fulfilment in the context of economic restructuring. This provides some hope for the future.

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