

# Why do farm accidents persist? Normalising danger on the farm within the farm family

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## Abstract

In most of the western world, farming is the most dangerous occupation. It has the highest rate of accidents and fatalities of any industry. Farming remains largely a family business and the majority of accidents happen to family members. Why do safety campaigns have such limited success and why do farm families bring this terrible grief on themselves? This article argues that farm accidents are a persistent social pattern requiring sociological analysis. Based on qualitative data gathered for a Scottish study, it is argued that within farm families there is a socialisation and normalisation of danger. Accidents are to be expected. Two key arguments are advanced. First, danger is normalised and children are socialised to undertake risky behaviour. Furthermore, planning regulations and health and safety regulations make exemptions for agriculture that they do not for other occupations. In particular exemptions are made which allow younger children to drive farm machinery than is the norm for other children. Second, it is suggested that when women do take up farming, they consciously undertake dangerous farming activities to prove that they are 'authentic' farmers. No previous research has considered women's approach to danger, and the existing literature generally suggests women are more safety conscious. This is not supported by our findings. We argue that farm accidents and fatalities are a persistent social problem because of the normalisation of danger within the farm family. Family members socialise each other to accept danger as the norm. It then becomes part of the farming identity.

## Introduction

Farming is a dangerous occupation, and in most of the western world it is the occupation with the most fatalities every year. It is also the occupation with the highest levels of life changing injuries every year. Increasingly Health and Safety Authorities undertake new and innovative campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers of the farm and work with industry

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partners, and sometimes even schools in order to reach children (HSE UK, ,2017; HSE NI, 2018). The campaigns focus on making people on farms aware of the safety issues on the farm and aim to highlight the most vulnerable family members. Young people and older people are especially at risk of farm accidents. Partly this is linked to some of the peculiarities of farming as an occupation. Farming is the only occupation where children live and play at the worksite (Zepeda and Kim, 2006). It is normal for children to play in the farmyard and to climb onto farm equipment. Farming is also an ageing occupation in the western world. In Europe, over 31% of farmers are 65 years of age or older (Eurostat, 2016) and the pattern is similar in Australia and the USA. Again, there were never the same patterns of retirement from the occupation as for other forms of employment, and farmers tended to farm until they were no longer able. This has been seen as a structural problem for the industry, and the European Union for example has implemented various early retirement schemes and new entrant programmes with limited success. Being an ageing occupation does not only raise structural issues, it also has implications for occupational safety.

Farming is the only occupation that retains some pre-industrial social patterns. The family, the home and the business are all intertwined. In Europe, over 94% of farms rely entirely on family labour (Eurostat, 2016). It is not surprising then that the majority of farm accidents involve farm family members. It is the occupation with the highest rates of heredity, sons tend to inherit farms from their fathers. This gendered nature of agricultural inheritance is also a persistent social pattern across the western world (Author, XX; XX). While some heirs do undertake agricultural training programmes, most training happens on the job, or on the farm. The intergenerational transfer of knowledge between father and son also happens on the farm.

Any examination of national farm accidents show an erratic time series. In other words, it is not that there is a reduction in farm accidents year on year, rather it seems as if farm families are luckier some years than others. Why do safety campaigns have such limited success and why do farm families bring this terrible grief on themselves? This article argues that farm accidents are a persistent social pattern and to understand social patterns a sociological lens is needed. Based on qualitative data gathered for a Scottish study, it is argued that within farm families there is a socialisation and normalisation of danger. Accidents are to be expected. Two key arguments are advanced. First, children are socialised to undertake risky behaviour. There is also an agreed myth within farming families that their children are born understanding the dangers of the farm. Furthermore, planning regulations and health and safety regulations make exemptions for agriculture that they do not for any occupation which allows it to persist in being a dangerous occupation. In particular exemptions are made which allow younger children to drive farm machinery than is the norm for other children. Second, it is suggested that when women do take up farming, they consciously undertake dangerous farming activities to prove that they are 'authentic' farmers. No previous research has considered women's approach to danger, and the existing literature generally suggests women are more safety conscious. This is not supported by our findings.

The article is structured as follows. First comes the literature review, which has three components; it reviews previous literature on farm safety; it considers the sociology of danger and it presents some of the gender and agricultural literature which shows how difficult it is for women to enter farming. Next the methodology and the study is described.

Finally the findings are presented demonstrating the processes by which danger is normalised within farming families, and the dangerous behaviours women undertake to prove that they are real farmers. It is concluded that planning regulations and farm safety rules are part of the process that normalises danger on farms. Going forward, safety campaigns need to consider socialisation within farm families and focus on how farm family members normalise danger.

## Literature review

### *Farm safety*

There is research on farm safety, but surprisingly little given its significance as a social problem. Farming is recognised as the most dangerous occupation (Lizer and Petrea, 2007; Lovelock, 2012; Dimich-Ward, et al, 2004; Zepeda and Kim, 2006). The implications for older farmers are considered. Farmers work long hours and it is hard physical labour. It is also, as we know a dangerous occupation, with heavy machinery, chemicals and large animals. Research suggests that farmers do not alter their work patterns as they age, or consider that they are less able (Lizer and Petrea, 2007). Research also recognises that while occupational health in agriculture is a significant public health issue in all industrialised agricultural nations, a means of addressing this persistent pattern has not emerged (Lovelock, 2012). Previous work has particularly focused on the risks for children (Zepeda and Kim, 2006; Nilsson, 2016; Author XX). The farmyard is central to the farm. It is the functional space where family labour meets with farm production. The farmyard is also recreational, and many farm children grow up playing in farmyards. The farm and the family are tightly intertwined (Author XX). Parents are aware of the dangers of the farm yard. One mother interviewed by Zepeda and Kim said that 'I always pray every day that they make it to 18 years of age' (2006: 116). No other occupation poses this level of risk to children. Research suggests that sometimes children and young people grow up in the environment and are blind to the risks of the farm and sometimes unsafe practices are passed on from parents to children (Nilsson, 2016). Some previous research has considered gendered aspects of farm accidents. Doing dangerous work is seen as central to farming. Farmers are strong and tough and it is thus part of the farming and masculine identity to undertake farming risks (Lovelock, 2012). Farm men are stoic in the face of adversity. Lovelock argues that an acceptance of injury and disease are embedded in the culture of agriculture and argues that farming should be compared to boxing and ballet dancers, as occupations that must have endurance and experience pain and injury to achieve excellent (2012: 579). This is an interesting argument, although occupational success for agriculture is not technically reliant on pain and injury. Quite a bit of previous work suggests that women are more safety conscious than men, although the empirical basis for these claims are slight. Lovelock suggests men are often on 'automatic pilot' or in the zone and do not think about danger or actively undertake dangerous work because to be safe is seen as feminine behaviour (2012: 577). She suggests that women are more safety conscious, but she only interviewed men. Lizer and Petrea (2007) argue that women's risk taking depends on whether they grew up on farms, with people reared on farms more inured to farm risks, while Zepeda and Kim (2006) argue women are more aware of the risks posed to children by the farmyard, although there was little evidence of how this knowledge is used to prevent accidents. Dimich-Ward et al (2007) argue that while more men than women are injured on

farms, this is related to the work they undertake. They suggest that as women increasing participate in all aspects of agricultural production, there is a need to collect, interpret and disseminate information on agricultural injury that is relevant for both sexes (2007: 55). The research presented in this article also shows this to be the case.

### *Sociology of danger*

Danger and fear are often seen as subjects of psychological studies rather than sociological ones. Simpson (1996) powerfully argues the processes by which danger is socially constructed. There are acceptable fears of danger and unacceptable ones. It is unacceptable to be afraid of flying or afraid of dogs and there are classes and courses available to people with these fears to socialise them out of being afraid. It is argued that danger is first socially constructed, then there is a collective agreement of what is dangerous, and then we are socialised into acceptance of this danger. Of course objective danger exists, and in the case of this article, we can demonstrate that farming is a dangerous occupation. However, the objective environment provides inconsistent and ambiguous clues about danger which means we must interpret how dangerous we consider a situation to be (Simpson, 1996). What is considered safe or dangerous varies across time and space. Thirty years ago it was perfectly acceptable to drive cars without seat belts, and it was more acceptable to drink alcohol and drive. This has changed over time. Similarly Irish or English women would not eat cheese made with unpasteurised milk when pregnant, or eat soft eggs, but French women do not observe these same fears. It is through socialisation and communication that we share our fears (Simpson, 1996: 555). The family is the most important social agent of socialisation. It represents the centre of children's lives, and it is here that children learn cultural knowledge, attitudes, tastes and prejudices (Macdonis and Plummer, 2011: Bourdieu, 1984). Our family is where we learn our way of knowing. We will argue that farm families socially construct, collectively agree and then socialise each other into what is acceptable farm danger and farm risk.

In addition, many regulatory bodies take lax approaches to agriculture which tacitly reinforce the idea that farmers are free to make judgements about safety and danger that would not be allowed for other occupations (Author XX). Agriculture-related land use changes have been largely exempted from planning. Where planning regulations exist, they relate to new activities, and previous buildings are not subject to planning legislation. It is of significance that there are many more concessions for farming than for any other occupation (Author XX). The allowances made for agriculture are interesting. Farming is one of the few family occupations that persists, and it is the occupation with the highest rate of heredity – in general, sons take over their fathers' farms. It means farming retains some pre-industrial features, and the planning regulation seems to accommodate this expectation that farmers have a right to do what they wish on their private agricultural land. It is similar to the exceptions made for agricultural practices with regard to health and safety on farms (Author, XX). While young people cannot drive cars until they are seventeen years old, exceptions are made for farm children who are allowed to drive heavy machinery at thirteen and fourteen years of age. In some respects these exemptions further the normalisation of danger on farms. The farming expectation that they should retain their independent identity to act on their private property is clear for example in the UK National Farmers Union (NFU) recent response to the Rural Planning Review. They argue that it is necessary for the size of buildings which can be built on farms without planning permission to be raised as farm machinery has increased in size. In concluding, the NFU say they are 'frequently asked why

local planning authorities are so negative towards and don't understand farming....this lack of integration and understanding is often seen as a barrier by our members and the NFU...will encourage the consideration of farming priorities and do not deter them because of, for example, restrictive landscape designations and sustainable transport policies' (2016:18). The Farmers' Union displays the expectation that farmers should have autonomy over their actions on their own farms. It is part of the farming identity of autonomous, self-employed and self-sufficient workers. The interesting point is that planning regulations, along with health and safety regulations, make considerable exceptions for farming. They facilitate this idea that farmers socially construct their view of what is danger and acceptable behaviour. This is not the case for other businesses. The farmyard, a work place, is very lightly regulated.

### *Gender and farming occupational closure*

Previously elite social groups were able to operate means of professional market closure and retain occupational control of work (Evetts, 2003). Often occupational closure meant the exclusion of women. While this is no longer acceptable, inequalities persist in the labour market with feminised occupations often being less well paid, and the persistence of 'glass ceilings' which mean that women are less well represented in senior management, and consequently, paid less (Maume, 1999). Professions share common experiences, understanding and expertise, and ethnographic studies show how in work places shared professional identities are developed and maintained (Evetts, 2003: 400). The legal profession is often held up as the best example of an occupational group in a relatively privileged position still about to construct the profession from within. However, it could easily be argued that farming is a classic example of an occupational closure that continues to exclude women and regulates the industry within male spheres of activity. Farming space continues to be used to signify and maintain distinctive gender identities. A considerable amount of work has focused on how the farm shapes the farm family, gender roles, and the identity of family members. All of these are bound up together. It is only possible to touch on some of that literature here, and it is done so for illustrative purposes. The farmer is typically understood to be male. It defines his role identity, his group identity, and his gender identity. The patrilineal line of inheritance also means that it is deeply embedded in culture and traditional practices that agriculture is male (Author, XX). The outdoors are coded as masculine, while indoor activities are coded as feminine (Pini, 2004; Brandth and Haugen, 2010; 2014; Little, 2014; Little and Panelli, 2003; Campbell and Bell, 2000; Campbell et al, 2006). In the outdoors, men undertake hard, physical, and sometimes dangerous work such as handling heavy machinery, being foresters and dealing with chemicals. The tractor for example, is argued to have become a symbol of male power and spatial domination by men of the outdoors. Men have appropriated agricultural technology to underline their identity as farmers (Brandth and Haugen, 1998; Pini 2005; Saugeres, 2002). Specific activities such as hunting and mining are seen as outdoor male activities (Campbell and Bell, 2000). Women who breach this male space and work with heavy machinery often seek other ways to reconfirm their feminine identity (Brandth 1994). Women's indoor work is predominantly seen as domestic or as socially reproductive work. It is seen as sustaining the household (Whatmore, 1991; Trauger et al, 2010) This significantly contributes to the invisibility of components of women's farm work such as management of accounts, and decision making, because the indoor nature of

this work means it is not seen as authentic farm work and thus reduces women's identity as farm workers (Sachs, 1983; Alston, 1995, Bock and Shortall, 2006).

Further gender segregated space is evident in the provision of agricultural training. Most agricultural training is structured in a vocational way for those that will enter the occupation, so in many ways it is not surprising that most agricultural programmes have a majority of male students. However, the socially constructed identities of women as home makers and farmers' wives, means that they do not obtain a knowledge transfer appropriate to their farming roles. Women farmers are underserved in agricultural education and technical assistance (Trauger et al 2008; Author XX, 1996; Alston, 1998; Liepins and Schick, 1998). Women often view training groups and programmes as being for men and feel unwelcome and conspicuous in this space. Agriculture extension workers do not always see women as 'authentic' farmers, because they do not occupy outdoor space and hence do not invite them to training initiatives or address programmes to their work (Barbercheck et al, 2009; Trauger et al, 2010; Teather, 1994). Here we see women's self-verification of not being the farmer being institutionally reinforced by agricultural extension workers. It is remarkable that this gender divided space persists. It is problematic, because increasingly off-farm employment to support the farm is decided between the couple, and educational levels and life cycle issues determine who will work on the farm and who will work off the farm (El-Osta et al, 2008; Benjamin and Kimhi 2006). Seeing men as the authentic farmer means the relevant person on the farm may not receive appropriate training. The literature on women's role in agriculture is characterised by themes of continuity and change. On the one hand, the hegemonic discourse of the masculine prevails in farming despite changing gender roles (Brandth and Haugen, 2016). At the same time, change occurs. In the study which will be described in the next section, it is clear that women are taking a more central role in farming. When they do so, they often seem to take risks to 'prove' their farming identity, to prove that they can undertake the same dangerous and physically arduous work of men. This will make them 'authentic' farmers.

## Summary

We argue in this article that farm accidents persist because farm families normalise danger through socialisation in the farm family, and we argue women take risks to prove that they are authentic farmers. We reviewed three sets of literature relevant to our key question. First, we examined the existing literature, which demonstrates the particular risks on farms to older farmers and children. It also presumes women are more safety conscious than men. Next we looked at the social construction of danger, how it is socially constructed, collectively agreed, and then socialised. We examined too the light touch regulation that applies to farming around planning and farm safety, which tacitly suggests farmers have the right to agree as a collective and without intervention what it is safe to do on the farm. Finally we looked at some of the literature that shows how farming displays many components of occupational closure to women. Women who farm have to prove their farming identity and their authenticity.

## The research

In 2016 the Scottish Government commissioned research on "Women and Farming in the Agricultural Sector". The overall purpose of this research was to establish a baseline position on women in farming and the agricultural sector in order to inform policies to enhance the

role of women in these sectors. Very little previous research on women in farming and agriculture existed. The specific aim of this research project was to investigate the role of women in farming and the agriculture sector in Scotland under five headings specified by the Scottish Government: daily life, aspirations, career paths, leadership and comparative analysis with women in other family businesses. During the research, inheritance, training and farm safety also emerged as important issues. In particular, although the research brief did not ask for the study to consider farm safety, it came up repeatedly. It was agreed early in the research process to include a number of questions about farm safety.

The research questions were explored through interviews and focus group discussions with women and men involved in farming, crofting and the agricultural sector across Scotland. Specifically, the interviews and focus groups included women who are new entrants to farming, as well as those who are involved in agricultural industry leadership, estates and large-scale farms, crofting, and farm diversification. Women who are new entrants were of interest to the Scottish Government. It seems that a higher percentage of women are farming in Scotland than in the rest of Northern Europe, with almost 30% being women. This seems to be linked to the land tenure system whereby the availability of rental land means women do not have to inherit to farm, and the Scottish crofts, or very small holdings, means it is financially possible to purchase land.

Although the specification did not ask the researchers to interview men, it was requested to include a sample of men involved in farming, crofting and the agricultural sector as interviewees and focus group participants. Men and women's focus groups were conducted separately. Interviews and focus groups were also arranged with women who work in non-farming family businesses, in order to provide a comparison to farming businesses. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

The research was comprised of literature review, 10 focus groups, 34 interviews and two on-line surveys: in total, over 1300 women and 17 men from across Scotland participated. The research was undertaken from June 2016 to March 2017 all over Scotland. The quantitative and qualitative data were analysed thematically along the lines identified in the tender, and under the additional headings identified by the research team. The qualitative and quantitative components ran side by side because of the specified time constraints set by the Scottish Government. This chapter only uses the qualitative research. Full details on the methodology can be found at (Author XX).

## Findings

### *Normalisation of danger*

Farm accidents are presented as a norm. While we asked specifically about farm accidents, it was interesting that often interviewees mentioned farm accidents as part of a story about something else. There was an acceptance of farm accidents and a use of humour to underline that it is normal and to be expected. When we asked about farm accidents in one of the men's focus groups, one participant replied, laughing and to laughter;

What counts as an accident - hospitalised?

Another man in the same focus group said

Health and safety you know how it is with farms and even although it's probably improved... (From) a health and safety point of view it's just a disastrous industry.

It is interesting that while there was agreement that it is normal for farmers to take risks in the interest

The men recognise that their occupation is dangerous and they recognise that due regard is not given to health and safety. Often men discussed how farmers have to weigh up the cost of danger with the costs to the family business of not undertaking the dangerous activity. In the quote below, this man from the farm focus group knows that he is undertaking a dangerous action but presents it as a normalised decision; this is what farmers will do:

Also where the person carrying out the job is the person responsible for the bottom line...if you employ a man to work a baler and there's a big black cloud coming over the hill and he's not going to get the park of hay baled and the baler chokes if it's the workman he will say well to hell with that, I'm not going to lose my leg in the baler. The farmer will say well I've got to get on I'll just give it a shove with my foot and hope that it clears because I don't want my hay to get spoiled. And I mean that...in a way that's the difference and I suspect you will find quite a lot of the accidents come from people who take a chance either because they are frightened of the cost of not taking the chance, or because they are the person who weighs up the risk and says -

It is interesting that while there was agreement for farmers to take conscious risks in the interest of the farm business, men also felt that sometimes men take unconscious risks. This is similar to what Lovelock (2012) described as farmers being on 'automatic pilot': Two men made the following comments:

Well I don't think they weigh up the risk they're just completely in the zone and its... let's get this done.

It's not the big thing you've got your mind on it's the wee thing that catches you out when you're thinking about something else.

Men present the normalisation of danger in two ways. It is normal to make undertake risky and dangerous actions when not to do so will cost the farm business. This is what farmers do. However they also believe that sometimes farmers are 'in the zone' and not thinking about danger or they are thinking about something else.

The normalisation of the danger of farming was also evident in the way that serious farm accidents were talked about but they were not actually the point of the story. In the quote below one woman from the women in agriculture focus groups was discussing how she needed to multi-task and undertake activities at very short notice. This is how she told her story:

My husband had a bad accident last year and that's when...when things like that happen suddenly you're kind of...he fractured his skull and stuff and he wasn't really fit and...the harvest wasn't in, the cows were calving, there was grain piled up everywhere. There was beasts needing taken in, it was just...and he wasn't fit to

organise things so he just handed me his phone and went right you've just got to think...so suddenly the things that you didn't have to make decisions about, it's like you're phoning people saying...and we were supposed to be TB testing, you name it!

This woman's account of how women need to multi-task and be available as need arises, includes an account of her husband having a bad accident. He fractured his skull and was unable to work. This in and of itself was not the issue of note. This demonstrates the normalisation of accidents. The same is true of another woman in the same focus group who was recounting how unusual it was for her mother and herself as a young girl to go to marts over twenty years ago:

No! No! They still...well...I'm probably slightly different to the others, my dad was injured in an accident when I was nine so I'd been helping mum since then and I was just thinking about what you were saying just about how you were...the suggestion that you should just feed the calves, or just do the accounts whereas mum she had to do...she had to take over doing everything. But she always had helped him but she did find you know when she was coming to the mart when I was with her there was just us, you know there wasn't a man with her and at that point, back then...a while ago! So back then it was a bit of a strange...this woman and her nine year old daughter

The purpose of this woman's story was to explain how she comes to be farming with her mother. She is an only child and has farms with her mother, who has been farming for nearly twenty five years. It is about the unusual event of a woman going to a mart with her young daughter. The part of the account that is not commented on is that her father obviously had an accident which left him unable to farm any longer. This is not itself worthy of note, again demonstrating the normalised acceptance of farm accidents, even when they are severe.

Another woman mentioned that her husband had just had another injury:

That's his third life threatening injury since we got married.

Some previous research suggests that farmers learn from near misses and become more cautious (Lovelock, 2012; Zepeda and Kim, 2006). We did not find the same evidence of this, as evident in the quote above. It is likely that near misses do make people more cautious in the short term. Of course the terrifying reality for farming is that the opposite of a near miss is a fatality.

### *Socialisation of danger as the norm*

Throughout the research there were many examples of how danger is socialised within the family. There were examples of parents allowing their children to undertake dangerous and risky behaviour, thus socialising them into accepting this behaviour as normal. In the quote below, a man recounts how his fourteen year old daughter misunderstood his instructions and nearly drove a loader onto the road. He has three daughters, no sons, and he

anticipates that this daughter will take over the farm from him. He told this story amidst much laughter:

She started driving the loader so she's getting on fine - She's fourteen. So we were taking the bulls out to the cows yesterday so we just made a pen um...so we took the gate down with the loader, now this one park is a really mossy park, wet areas, dry areas, you have to watch where you're going. So...we built the pen and then I told her um...just get out the road, which is just go to the side of the field a bit. Well...the next thing I see her, she took off across the middle of the park because she thought I said to go to the road! Of course this is my daughter who should ken about Buchan Doric<sup>3</sup> and everything. Lost in translation a wee bit so...of course the poor crater she'd...she was nearly in tears!

It is illegal for his daughter to drive a loader at fourteen years of age. It would also have been illegal for her to be on the road. However his daughter is being socialised into the normality of risk taking on a farm. She undertakes illegal activity, probably unaware that it is illegal. Her father found her misunderstanding amusing and her upset is the subject of humour, demonstrating that upset is an inappropriate response.

In the focus group with new entrant women farmers, many of whom had small children, the socialisation of acceptable danger was also evident. This is despite the fact that almost all children killed on farms are farm family children. Women also had this view that farm children have an innate sense of danger and understand how to be safe on farms. One new entrant woman farmer said the following:

...I just think farming children seem to have as I say just this...this common sense about them in the workplace ...there's not many other children...like my son (three years old) wouldn't think about going out and running in front of a tractor or anything like that. Whereas he could have friends that come in that do silly things ...

There is an assumption that farm children have a greater understanding of danger. Other research also found this to be the case (Nilsson, 2016; Zepeda and Kim, 2006). Parents assume their children have the maturity to assess dangerous situations. Interestingly, the young woman interviewed above, went on later in the interview to show how she is also socialising her son into the normalisation of farm danger:

...Robert, he helps his grandpa, grandpa's best friend! Robert would be on the farm 24/7 if he got the option. I've got a playground here! Yeah exactly! I get to drive tractors here! He couldn't understand why at the Highland Show<sup>4</sup> he couldn't get on the tractor to drive it! Because it's locked son! You can't get on! You can't get on it! Health and safety son!

This young woman is aware that her son cannot get on a tractor at the Royal Highland Show because of health and safety regulations. It is illegal to have a child of three years old on a tractor. Once again the regulations around farm safety are treated as a joke. It is treated as

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<sup>3</sup> Buchan Doric refers to the Scottish dialect. 'Get out the road' means to get out of my way, while his daughter understood her father to be instructing her to go and drive on the road.

<sup>4</sup> A large Scottish agricultural show.

a joke because her son is allowed to get on a tractor with his grandfather on the farm. Children as young as three are socialised into the normality of risk taking.

### *Risk taking, gender and occupational closure*

The literature reviewed suggested that women are more safety conscious than men. In our research, the findings were contradictory. On the one hand, men and women also stated that they believed women were more safety conscious, but on the other, examples of unsafe behaviours were shared. One man in a focus group told us:

I fell through two roofs but I was very lucky. But that's again...when I told my wife she said you stupid bugger! You know...and various other words but don't be so bloody stupid again. And that's the kind of thing that she would never...she is far more safety conscious than I am. Miles!

While he asserts that his wife is more safety conscious, we have no way of knowing if this is true or not, it could simply be a repetition of a common misconception. It could also be an expression of occupational closure; it is one means of demonstrating that women are not 'authentic' farmers because they do not take risks. It would be interesting to know more about the two roofs through which the farmer fell. If this was a building which he adapted or renovated for agricultural use, no planning regulations will have applied to the work carried out.

Another man in the same focus group also stated that he thought women were more safety conscious. He gave the example of his wife which was interesting, because while telling us she was more safety conscious, he also explained that she has a permanent injury from a farm accident.

Well I've had that before, my wife actually is worse and it's my fault because I kept a cow I shouldn't have, she got the doing from the cow and so has a gammy knee and the result of that is, although she's very conscientious about looking out for calvings she's very loathe to go in the court if there's anything wrong.

He believes his actions led to his wife having her accident and it was not her responsibility.

In the quote below, a woman in the women in agriculture focus group also believes that women are more safety conscious. She believes women are 'more likely' to read the instruction manual, presumably because she supposes women are less familiar with the machinery:

I would probably hazard a guess that women are naturally more cautious and so... I mean are probably naturally more cautious and coming back to my whole the woman is likely to read the instruction manual before doing something, is probably also less likely to just kind of blunder on in forgetting to turn stuff off and she'll probably go through the proper processes of dealing with things.

However there were also examples of women taking risks. In some cases it was similar to men being 'in the zone' and unconsciously taking risks:

Normally but then if you're distracted or if you're in the middle of harvest time and you're jumping out of the tractor you might forget to put the handbrake on.

Men also described this type of risk. However what was noticeably different was that women also described occasions where they consciously took risks. As already discussed, taking risks is seen as part of the process of establishing the masculinity of the occupation, and in this way acts as a mechanism of closure. Women sometimes recounted taking risks to 'prove' that they could farm as well as men, that they are 'authentic' farmers. Consider the dialogue that occurred within this focus group with women active in agriculture;

I suppose in a way for me there's...especially with the background of my father him wanting a son and being...I love farming and it is what I want to do but there is **that little kind of devil on my shoulder that says you need to prove them wrong. You're a girl and I'm just as...**and I am very...when there's a guy on the farm and they're lifting heavy...**they say do you want a hand with that? I'm like no I can do it!**

**It's amazing what you can lift when they offer you help isn't it?** [Laughter]

**Yeah I'm the same whenever somebody offers me like do you want me to hitch that trailer up for you or whatever, or do you want me to do this for you, do you want me to do that? I'm like no I will do it!** Yeah there is almost like a point -

No but with...**within the industry and things like that yeah it's...yeah there's definitely something to prove isn't there?** # Women in agricultural industry focus group. Emphasis added.

In this dialogue, women are sharing their experiences of taking risks to prove themselves as authentic farmers. They talk about needing to prove farming men 'wrong' and also the wider farm 'industry'. Farming is the occupation that has persisted as a masculine one more than any other and continues to operate forms of occupational closure. Women seek to demonstrate their ability to lift objects typically too heavy for a woman's frame. They see the farming industry as one where they need to 'prove' they are as able. The issue is that in the process of proving themselves to the industry and displaying this prowess associated with the masculine performance of farming, they are taking risks with their own well-being and safety. This is not unconscious – one woman above talked about 'that little devil on my shoulder'. The devil on your shoulder pushes you to undertake activities that you know you should not.

In the quote below, this woman nearly suffered a fatality. However, again, she was consciously trying to prove her authenticity as a farmer:

**My big accident I nearly had last year was...and it was part of my own stubbornness and not asking for help,** I was carting the grain in and out on the combine and we were putting the winter barley into the bins and my partner was on the combine and I was loading the pits which then...and I was having to check the bins to make sure they weren't over filling and when one bin fills you need to move the shoot that comes out of the top. **You have to physically lift it up and this is overhanging a big empty sixty ton bin on your left hand side and you have to move**

**it along and put the shoot to the next bit. Open the hole and this is quite heavy and its quite an awkward...you're hanging out over a big empty bin and its very awkward because it breaks in half as well if you don't hold it properly and I got it off and I was shifting backwards and it came in half and I...and it went into the bin and I - Luckily I didn't go into the bin but I gave myself a heck of a fright...but that was a learning curve. I would never do that again # women in agricultural industry focus group**

This woman knew that she was undertaking dangerous farm activities and that her own stubbornness nearly resulted in her fatality. The work is presented as hard physical labour, and she knew that she was pushing herself to a dangerous limit. She told the group that she had learned her lesson and would never do that again. However this could easily have been a fatality, and research on farm accidents suggests that the farming community does not actually change its behaviour after near misses (Author, 2017).

This dangerous environment for women is linked to the unconscious gender bias inherent in how the farmyard is planned. This became evident with some of the new entrant women interviewed. New entrants are understood in our report as people who did not inherit their farm, but tend to come into the sector through renting land. The new entrants interviewed were very dynamic and cutting edge. Many of the women had realised they would not inherit the farm and had trained in agriculture and taken agriculture related employment. Typically they and their partner took on a rented farm. Their partners also tended to be highly skilled, perhaps because renting a farm requires a considerable amount of capital. In most cases both worked off the farm and ploughed their resources back into the farm, and women tended to reduce their off-farm work when they had children and increase their full-time farming hours. Consider this quote from a new entrant woman below:

Because I just think well...there's not someone else about that if something happened, **it's not a very safe...environment sometimes**. So as well as like technically I could do all that, but sometimes I actually just want another pair of hands. **I think that's definitely more so when you're a female**. Like he wouldn't bat an eyelid going out himself and just doing it. Yeah I think so, yeah I think women probably think about it, definitely there's a lot of that and **I always go on to him because...if we just had the right set up we wouldn't...because there are times, situations that...I think well actually if this gating was all adjusted a little bit I could run that cow from there to there, lock it in the yoke, I don't have to carry a six foot hurdle myself and pin it up, and move dung to get it in the right place**. # New entrant woman Orkney # 11

This new entrant woman recognises that the farmyard is not a safe environment and particularly so for women. This particular woman was five foot, two inches<sup>5</sup>. She recognises that the issue is not her size or strength, but rather how the farmyard is designed. She 'goes on' at her husband about the need for them to have the 'right set up'. This was repeated

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<sup>5</sup> She told us her height during the interview.

time and again during interviews with new entrants. Women talked about the need to have the 'right kit' and gates on wheels, which eliminate the need for strength to move heavy gates. The woman above discusses the need to adjust gating to allow her to move cattle from here to there and to be able to secure the cattle without having to carry a six foot hurdle. She recognises that the problem is not that she is a woman, the problem is how the farmyard is (not) planned.

## Conclusions

Farm accidents and fatalities are a persistent social problem in the western world. Despite various safety campaigns, there is no pattern of decline year to year. In this article we argue this is because of the normalisation of danger within the farm family. The family members socialise each other to accept danger on the farm as the norm. It then becomes part of the farming identity. Laughter and ridicule are used to normalise risk taking and to counter attempts to impose regulation on family members. Women consciously undertake risky behaviour to prove that they are authentic farmers.

Farming remains a peculiar occupation in the modern world. The family live, work and play on the farm and in the farmyard. It predominantly relies on farm family labour. The tragedy then is that most farm accidents happen to family members and most farm fatalities involve members of the family farm.

Our research shows the normalisation of farm accidents. Farm families know that farms are unsafe and risks are taken, and this is seen as the norm. Sometimes interviewees recounted horrific farm accidents, but the farm accident was not the primary point of the story but rather the prelude to a different point. Accidents are normal. Then we report the ways in which the family socialises each other to take risk. There are accounts of teenagers' illegally driving equipment, and toddlers driving in tractors with grandparents. Parents use laughter and ridicule attempts to regulate their behaviour, and to counter fear of activities undertaken. Similar to previous research (Zapeda and Kim, 2005) we found evidence that parents believe their farm children to be smarter than non-farm children and more savvy in the farmyard, even when talking of children as young as three years of age. We found that while there is a narrative that women are more safety conscious, women do unconsciously take risks, but of more concern is that women reported consciously taking risks to prove their authenticity as farmers. They knowingly undertook a range of dangerous activities, with one woman recounting a near fatality.

Safety campaigns are likely to have limited success in reducing farm accidents and fatalities until the socialisation processes within the farm family which normalise farm danger are scrutinised. It may well be true that farm families are unaware of safety issues, but even if they are, this knowledge is disregarded. Farm family members are socialising each other to accept the normality of danger and accidents. Women are consciously undertaking dangerous activities to prove their farming credentials. One place to start might be to reconsider the exemptions from health and safety legislation and planning regulations that apply to farm family businesses. Why do these exemptions exist? Young children are allowed to drive heavy machinery and farmers are allowed to circumvent planning legislation when building on their farms. There is a wider institutionalised framework which allows farm families the freedom to normalise danger on the farm which is not the case for

any other industry. It is no doubt linked to the State's commitment to uphold our right to private property and the strength of the farming unions, but given that it is the most dangerous occupation it needs much more stringent rather than less regulation. The normalisation of farm danger needs to be questioned. Regulatory bodies of the State have a role to play by seriously questioning behaviour within farm families.