Title: 'I'm not going to be able to leave': The impact of belonging to the Irish farming community on university students' life experiences and transitions to adulthood

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Publication Date: 2014-02-10

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‘I’m not going to be able to leave’: The impact of belonging to the Irish farming community on university students’ life experiences and transitions to adulthood.

by

Anne Cassidy

A thesis submitted to the School of Sociology and Politics
in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of PhD

National University of Ireland, Galway
(July, 2013).

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This is dedicated to the memory of

Nuala Burström

whose courage and warmth

still inspire

and my mother who

is the beacon light

of home.
Abstract

Despite extensive research into family farming culture little attention has been paid to young people raised in this community who do not become full-time farmers. This thesis explores the childhood experiences of university students who grew up in Irish farming families and its impact on their movement into adulthood. It concentrates on their relationship with the farm and the local, rural and farming communities this is situated within. This study focuses on the impact belonging to these institutions has had and continues to have on the lives and choices of farm youth as they build a life potentially leading away from their cultural and familial background. It examines the processes underpinning their transition to adulthood and the role of structural boundaries such as parental strategies, cultural norms and gendered frameworks in the direction of their life, their identity and affiliations. The concept of belonging is unpacked and the nuances, norms and attitudes grounding this that attach and detach this group from the farm and their communities are highlighted. Attitudes to the prospect of being given the farm are outlined as is the role played by those who will not be given the farm in the preservation of the farm into the next generation. The findings of this qualitative study are based on a series of thirty semi-structured interviews carried out with a cohort evenly divided between male and female participants aged between 18 and 33 who attend university. It was conducted by a researcher who is an insider in this community.

The research argues that how young people belong to the farm and the community and the degree to which they are pushed and pulled from it on a practical and symbolic level has a significant part to play in decisions they make about their adult lives. Findings demonstrate that the concept of belonging can be broken down into four dimensions; functional, informal, formal and social. How these develop from childhood onwards and the way they are perceived and constructed conditions individuals into particular roles and attitudes about their place on the farm and in the community. A delicate balance operates in the choices made about individuals’ futures around the needs of the farm, the family, interpretations of the meaning and import of belonging and personal wishes. The study suggests that regardless of the nature of transitions to adulthood, an upbringing in the farming community shapes
lives and acts as a profound cornerstone of identity and belonging whether this is willingly embraced or not.
Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the honesty and enthusiasm of all of my participants whose willingness to share their life story was humbling. I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Dr. Brian McGrath who indelibly shaped this work and for his wisdom and guidance over the course of the past four years.

Thanks also go to the staff of the Structured PhD in Child and Youth Research and all the staff and students of the Child and Family Research Centre for their help during this thesis.

Thanks go to Sheila Garrity and Tanja Kovacic for turning a single journey into a shared voyage and with whom I was privileged to share so many moments of confusion, confidence and breakthroughs in all three theses. The fleeting moments with Marcella have always been entertaining and encouraging as well!

To all in GKC for providing constant sources of distraction, fishing me out of rivers and making me forget the enormity of this project. In particular I thank Nikki and Sinead for keeping me on the right path, Colm for always asking and the rest of my Rusheen crew for the lifts and restorative paddles as well as Ashley, John, Sam D. Aidan, Aisling and co for all they have given me.

To the rest of my friends here and abroad, especially my Korean gang of Brian, Stu, Siobhan, Rod, Ronan, Oisin, Nancy, Conor and the always missed Graeme, I thank them for the joy of their friendship over the past ten years. I am deeply thankful to Mary, Noreen and Breege who have seen me through more crises than I care to remember and who are always there and Amanda for patiently listening and talking sense in my moments of doubt from the start to the finish.

For Torsten I do not have enough words to say how grateful and appreciative I am for always being there to support me in the highs and lows and with whom it is a privilege to share so much.

To my family-mom, Mary, Nora, William, Kate and Nuala, Martin, Tim, Paul and Searlait and their amazing little ones and my extended circle of uncles, aunts and cousins, especially Anne, I am thankful for all your support and giving me the space and time to do this work. This work stands on all of your shoulders.

Lastly, I remember my late father and thank him for his gifts of curiosity and balance. I hope he would have been proud.
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Chapter One Introduction

Section 1.1 Introduction
Life in a farming family is a deeply immersive experience with thin and fragile boundaries between work and leisure, business and emotion and the past and the present. These entanglements between the family’s home life and the domain of the farm are often physical—a child’s swing stands next to a tractor shed, a field of hay bales is a source of vital family income and a gleeful playground for its offspring. They are mental too—a family’s narrative in the past and the present is bound up in the retention of the farm—a kind of symbolic defiance of difficulties overcome, with identities engrained and enmeshed in the very soil of the land. The intensity and dualities of connections are not the sole preserve of a farmer or their successor; instead, they are deeply embedded into the childhood experiences of the entire family regardless of whether their future lies on the farm or off it. While this might be a hugely positive source of belonging, identity and security it can also bring with it pain and turmoil as a person finds themselves inextricably tied to a life and a culture they yearn to escape from. However, it is not only the farm as their homeplace that individuals are influenced by, in addition they are bounded by cultural norms and social networks that echo through the paths they take in life. These are not always visible as, for example, in the life of an actor who goes to university and embarks on a path far away from the realm of farming, but they reverberate through their lives in the decisions they make, if only in an oppositional sense and the values they admire.

The aim of this thesis is to examine the childhood experiences of a cohort of university students who grew up in farming families and who are unlikely to return to farming in a full-time capacity. This study is set against the backdrop of the Irish family farming system’s changing circumstances and the wider context of its increasing economic, political and social vulnerability. It is also positioned against a late modern\(^1\) societal environment with its emphasis on the individual path and

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\(^1\) The term late modern society derives from Giddens’ (1990) argument that this is a more suitable way to describe the present than say postmodern, which denotes a new form of society. Late modern
identities supposedly predicated on the importance of the temporary or the present moment over rootedness in the past and following traditions. This generated a number of broad questions, which helped to ground and motivate this study: What is it like to grow up in a farming family? What impact do these experiences have on actors’ movement into adulthood and their identity? In light of the shift from traditional to late modern social models does a childhood spent in the farm environment continue to have the power to shape the course of a life? What is the relationship between farm youth and the farm? Do they wish to see the farm preserved in the family or are they indifferent about the possibility of it being sold in the future?

This chapter firstly, delimits the scope of this thesis, which is followed by a discussion of the key themes and arguments contained within it. Next, it pinpoints the gaps in youth sociology and rural studies that this study looks to fill. After this the theoretical and conceptual ideas underpinning the work are mentioned. The rationale is then given for choosing this particular cohort and why the specific age group of 18-28 years old is focused on. The Research Question is then provided as is a brief description of the design of the study. The second last part of this chapter explores in some detail the historical and current context of the Irish family farming community. Finally, an outline is provided for each of the chapters in this study.

Section 1.2 The Scope of this Thesis
This thesis focuses on a research cohort of young people who have grown up on family farms\(^2\) and who now attend university. It concentrates on the impact of their childhood experiences on their movement towards adulthood, largely in terms of their belonging and arising from this the choices and structures they are bound within, the nature of their attachment to their background and so on. The aim of this work is to explore the perceptions of these young people about the influence their

\[^2\] For the purposes of this thesis family farms are defined as ‘farms which [are] operated as family based enterprises’ (Central Statistics Office, 2007, p.10).
farm upbringing has had on their lives not only in their interpretations of their childhoods but also whether their lives are grounded by this framework at present. The farm or the homeplace, as it is often referred to throughout this thesis, is a powerful and dynamic element of farm youths’ life experiences and how they create and maintain their attachments to their home and their family. This study is framed by the prism of the relationship between the individual and the farm they grew up on and to a lesser extent their embeddedness\(^3\) into the communities this is located within. In addition, it explores the degree to which they regard themselves as attached or detached from their cultural and familial background and from their homeplace.

All participants routinely assisted on the farm in some way during their childhoods either intensively through working on it or more sporadically or moderately by helping when needed. They consider their childhoods to have been significantly influenced by the interconnectedness of the farm and the family both on a symbolic and practical level. Furthermore, their lives were impacted by their rootedness within a spatially based local community and a wider rural framework and farming culture. The majority of the cohort is unlikely to return to the farm or farming in the future and regard their movement away from the homeplace as being on a permanent basis. A smaller number will probably inherit the land or succeed\(^4\) to the farm and the title of farmer, but at present none intend to return to the land in a full-time capacity. All have used the medium of university to continue a transition to adulthood, which will lead them towards professional careers. These will enable them to move back to a rural environment near or in the homeplace, somewhere similar or to continue to build their life in an urban area.

\(^3\) The term embedded is different from the meaning Giddens gives it where it refers to the process of detaching from place and time attachments and replacing them with autonomous personalised frameworks, as is discussed in Chapter Two Section 2.3.3.

\(^4\) The term succession refers to the passing on of both the farm and the title of the farmer from one generation to the next while inheritance is linked more to the idea of being given the land. Succession is explored and defined in greater detail in Chapter Three Section 3.6.4.
This thesis excludes the experiences of farm youth who did not attend university and who have, instead, remained in the home community and intend to make a full or part-time living from agriculture. It also does not include those farm youth who have neither taken up farming nor continued on with their education beyond second-level. Furthermore, it does not encompass the views of others such as parents or siblings and, therefore, concentrates only on the perceptions and beliefs of this group. Although transitions to adulthood are a core theme of this work it does not specifically focus on the details of participants’ engagement with markers such as gaining employment or building relationships. Rather the process is explored as one of the key underpinning and organising concepts of their lives at the present time. While the issue of succession is an important feature of this work the idea is not examined in relation to, for instance, the influence of birth order on strategies surrounding it or the specific dynamics of the process. Also in terms of their interactions with communities outside of the farm, influences such as peer groups, school, etc., were not taken into account because they were neither discussed enough in the interviews nor did they fit within the scope of this study.

**Section 1.3 The Thesis’ Key Themes and Arguments**
This section outlines the main arguments in this thesis around the notion of belonging. Secondly, it provides a brief introduction to the dimensions contained within this and which are the primary focus of the findings’ chapters.

**Section 1.3.1 Belonging**
The core concept underpinning this thesis is belonging and how it is experienced and understood within the farming community. This is grounded within four different dimensions: ‘functional’, ‘informal’, ‘formal’ and ‘social’, which are discussed in the second part of this section. A key cornerstone of this thesis’ findings is how the components of belonging come to be developed and differentiated between different family members according to particular roles and cultural and familial norms. Although belonging was not identified at the outset of the thesis’ process as an important axis around which a farming childhood can be understood it became
increasingly apparent as the analysis developed that this was one of the central concerns of and influences on this cohort. This thesis argues that belonging acts as an underpinning framework in the lives of this group particularly in how an individual’s attachment or detachment from the farm impacts on the direction of their transition to adulthood. Some members of the cohort are either positioned as inherently important to the long-term future of the farm as regards to succeeding their parent to the status of farmer and landowner or alternatively as an heir to the landholding. However, for the majority their relationship and sense of belonging was, from childhood, predicated on the notion that while their short-term commitment to the farm was vital in the contribution they could make to its survival, in the future they were expected to build a life elsewhere. This group are usually socialised into a position where they do not consider themselves to have the right to expect to be given even a share of the farm. This does not seem to be a source of conflict with some, indeed, feeling relief at not being expected to have future commitments to the farm. Nevertheless, despite their seeming detachment from this process this study argues that they still play a vital, if underappreciated, role in succession. Many position themselves as a safeguard willing to protect the family’s linkage to the farm through taking ownership of it in the absence of alternatives. More importantly, they have a significant role to play in succession through their implicit or explicit agreement and cooperation with the strategy adapted by the family. As this is usually based on the farming norm of giving an intact holding to as few of the family’s offspring as possible this means that they must relinquish a share of an asset that could potentially help to establish them in adulthood. Their attitudes are usually driven by the desire to see the connection between the family and the farm retained into the future.

Belonging is a dialectic act between the individual and the external structures they operate within and are bound by. The degree to which an actor belongs and the nature of this attachment is influenced not only by their own personal preferences and plans for their future but also by their family’s approach to their upbringing and their long-term relationship with the farm. In addition, this is influenced by community norms and attitudes. This research shows that much of this external influence is driven by gendered frameworks, which help to condition this cohort’s
relationship with the idea of belonging and the farm itself. Some of the group operated outside of what might be normatively expected of them, for example, when females occupied central positions in the working life of the farm or males moved into a role in the household domain. However, this is done in the knowledge that in taking on this position they were, in fact, rebelling against what was expected of them. Belonging is also structured by a temporal continuum whereby actors often view themselves and their parents and siblings as more than just a discrete unit and actively include other generations both past and future in how they frame the farm. This rootedness in an intergenerational continuum is a strong feature of their connection to the farm and a core motivation behind their wish to see the farm preserved within the family into the future. Through their relationship with the farm and because of their parents’ attitudes to it they see themselves as belonging to a lineage that began before them and will continue on whether they remain on the farm or not.

The concept of belonging can be considered to be both an organising and processual force in the lives of participants. It is organising in that the extent of an individual’s expectations around their links to the future of the farm impacts on the transition they make to adulthood. For instance, if they are conceptualised as a non-successor then they are pushed towards education and a life away from the farm and so in some ways imagine themselves as increasingly detached from it as they grow up. It is also processual in that it is not linked to a singular happening or event but rather is based on a series of intertwined decisions, actions and so on, involving parents and the individual, which are in turn grounded by gendered frameworks and spectrums, cultural norms, etc. This thesis demonstrates that belonging to the farm and the communities associated with it, is such a deeply inherent part of the identity and worldview of these actors that regardless of whether this is visible to or recognised by others and despite their own attitudes they have no choice but to belong. Even where some might wish to detach from this part of their identity because of a difficult childhood relationship with the farm or the implications it has for their future through being marked out as the successor, they acknowledge that growing up on a farm and the experiences associated with this will continue to influence them as they move towards and through adulthood.
Section 1.3.2 The Dimensions of Belonging

However, while belonging is the core concept underpinning this work the analysis and findings suggest that this idea can be unpacked into four different dimensions of ‘functional’, ‘informal’, ‘formal’ and ‘social’. These are extensively analysed within the findings’ chapters of this thesis and so are only briefly described here. The functional dimension centres on the working relationships the cohort develop with the farm and especially how farm youth are framed as ‘workers’ or ‘helpers’ who must contribute to the farm in a manner fitting this position. These are usually gendered and are partially intertwined with the cultivation of formal attachments to the farm in the future. Its informal counterpart explores the proprietorial attachments individuals develop towards the farm in terms of their emotional connections to it and how they frame the farm and the links their family have with it. These ties continue to have deep meaning for individuals even after they move away from the farm and are a source of powerful sentiments and feelings of, for example, pride, obligation, rootedness and responsibility. They are not differentiated along gender lines like functional or formal attachments are, and they play a vital role in the creation and maintenance of actors’ ties to the farm, which help to shape these other two attachments. The formal dimension is linked to succession and the process and act of taking ownership of the land in the future. While the succession strategy continues to be heavily gendered attachments to the idea of preserving the farm runs deep in both female and male participants. This is associated with a heavily encultured socialisation process about the paramount importance of keeping the farm in the family, so much so that individual paths are sometimes sacrificed in order to continue this affiliation. This is created through, for instance, the use of cautionary tales, i.e. family stories which generate attachments to or detachments from the farm depending on parental wishes. The last form, social, is slightly different in that while the other three dimensions concentrate on the links actors have to their homeplace this is concerned with their relationship with the wider local, rural and farming communities they are embedded within. Although this does not necessarily impact on their interaction with the farm the extent to which an individual feels immersed in the community can influence their intention to return to live there in the future or their ease in engaging with local social networks. It can also be a reflection of the on-farm roles actors have been given and the public performance of farming or their meaningful interactions with neighbours. It is these four dimensions, which this
thesis argues that belonging in the farming community is constructed upon. While these are linked together the findings’ chapters explores these as relatively discrete units that can shape different aspects of an individual’s experiences and engagement with their background, for example, in terms of work, emotions, ownership and social connectedness.

Section 1.4 The Gap in the Literature
The primary motivation for focusing exclusively on this cohort is that very little, if any, research has been carried out about the experiences of individuals who grew up on a farm but who have left it either on a temporary or permanent basis. This represents quite a significant gap in the literature on farm youth and rural studies in general. Although individuals in similar circumstances to this cohort have undoubtedly been included in previous studies particularly around succession, gender and the division of labour, it is likely that this took place when they still lived on the farm. However, scant attention is usually paid to this group once they move away from the homeplace. Most of the extant literature, for instance, that discusses the concept of succession does so through the lens of the incumbent farmer-successor relationship or differentials between marital partners in accessing power and resources. In relation to this concept, this study seeks to explore new territory in looking at the affiliation between both non-successors and the farm as well as the connection between those who will succeed but are unlikely to become full-time farmers, at least for the immediate future, and this same institution.

In terms of engaging with youth sociology it looks to examine an under-conceptualised element of the structure-agency debate in empirically concentrating on the dynamic between actors and their background and how this fits in with the individualisation debate. Usually the focus appears to be on the capacity of individuals to make particular choices as part of their biography construction without paying much heed to the influence of the institutions they are bound within. By contrast this study examines the interplay between boundaries, norms and influences imposed by cultural institutions such as the family, the farm and the wider
frameworks these are contained within and the personal preferences of the individual. Another gap in the literature exists specifically around the concept of belonging. While it has received extensive coverage, for example, in the field of cultural geography and to some extent in rural sociology, it is rarely unpacked in these fields or more generally with respect to its impact on individualisation. Instead, it seems to be viewed as an all-encompassing idea without regard to how it can be composed or constructed in different ways in a community such as the farming one. Rather than viewing it as a spectrum connected to different forms of attachment, influences, etc., it is usually located within a categorising framework with belonging to a community on one side and not belonging on the other. Furthermore, there is space in the broader theoretical literature for an exploration of the connection between belonging and transitions to adulthood. This particularly references the nature and depth of the attachment an individual feels to their background and how this helps to shape decisions about their path towards adulthood and the manner in which they are bounded within distinct frameworks. This study does not look in-depth at literature around key markers such as gaining employment but, instead, examines the broader path an individual is placed on such as attending university or taking over the farm.

Section 1.5 The Theoretical/Conceptual Framework
The literature grounding this thesis is divided into two loosely interlinked sections and draws on two separate bodies of work. The first of these is the wider field of youth sociology. This is concerned mainly with providing the theoretical basis for this thesis. It focuses on some of the principal contributions to the structure-agency debate around individualisation (Beck), the impact of reflexive biographies (Giddens) and habitus (Bourdieu). This debate is of crucial important to the construction of this thesis’ arguments. It is the relationship and interface between the individual and the structures they are located in, in their childhoods and youth that influences how their sense of belonging is developed and in particular the emergence of its various dimensions. While much of this study resonates with Bourdieu’s ideas about the importance of habitus a decision was taken to incorporate this into the study without making it the primary theoretical grounding for it. This is because it is
Beck and Giddens’ work, which was regarded as having interesting and fruitful gaps and inadequacies. It also concentrates on some of the key debates in the area of transitions to adulthood and Bauman’s ideas on identity as this connects with the temporal and intergenerational aspects of their identity and belonging.

The second area of literature in this study comes from the canon of rural studies. It mainly draws on rural sociology but also includes material from cultural geography, anthropology, migration studies and history and comes from a variety of Irish and international sources. This provides the basis for many of the subthemes developed in the findings’ chapters about, for example, the dimensions of belonging, the role of gender, cultural norms in the farming community and place attachment. The literature, which has been produced around the idea of belonging is also contained within this and serves to highlight its usual absence from research as a subject worthy of being unpacked. It should be pointed out that the youth sociology material grounds the more abstract considerations in this thesis around the nature of belonging, identity, and individualised life paths. Material from rural studies can largely be regarded as providing conceptual support for the more visible ways this is manifested in terms of succession plans, active relationships with the farm, place attachments and so on.

Section 1.6 Rationale for the Thesis
This section examines the reasons why this cohort was selected for the study. Secondly, it discusses the motivation behind the decision to focus on participants in the emerging adulthood category.

Section 1.6.1 Choosing the Cohort
The question could firstly, be posed as to why farm youths’ experiences are worthy of study in their own right outside of the general rural populace. There is sufficient evidence to justify an investigation into this section of the populace as a distinctive cohort in their own right. For instance, Elder and Conger’s book entitled *Children of*
the Land: Adversity and Success in Rural America (2000) based on data gathered in a longitudinal study of rural Iowa shows that relationships between families who lived and worked on farms were highly interdependent and that children associated more with their parents than their non-farm counterparts did. This finding was backed up by a Health Behaviour in School Aged Children Survey carried out in Ireland, which found that Irish farm youth spent more time with their family and less time with their peers or in off-farm social situations than those in non-farm rural or urban families (McGrath and Nic Gabhainn, 2007).

As already stated little research has been carried out with this group of farm youth previously. The argument could perhaps be advanced that the cultural norms of the farming community, which place great importance on, for example, securing a successor and producing a supply of ‘workers’ able to assist in its essential activities and take on the holding in the future renders an exploration of this type of individual unimportant. After all if they have detached from the farm through their movement towards professional careers and/or urban living then how relevant can their voices be? What do they have to say that is important for this area of study? The contra-argument to this is that firstly, given the impartible succession strategy used in the Irish family farming system they represent the majority of actors reared in this environment, historically and contemporaneously, and as such are a topic worthy of exploration if only out of academic curiosity. However, beyond this narrow concern they can, for example, shed light on the nature of belonging in this community and the development of relationships that are detached or attached depending on the needs of the farm and the family both in the immediate and distant future. Thirdly, it is also an important group to focus on since their vital role in the succession process has been sorely under-researched. In light of the decreasing number of young people entering this profession, a trend which has not yet resulted in an increased sale of land, the aims of this study gain greater credibility. It can also help to provide a more detailed picture of the motivations and processes hidden behind decisions to migrate from rural to urban areas. As Halfacree and Rivera (2012) argue out-

5 In 2010 the percentage of land, which came on the market represented .2% of the total agricultural acreage (Savills, 2011). At present only 6% of farmers are under 35 years of age (Cadogan, 2012). This suggests a disjuncture between declining rates of entry into farming and a rise in the sale of land.
migration is usually less studied than inner migration because of the difficulty caused by the scattering of people. This was an opportunity to gather data about a geographically disparate but relatively homogenous cultural grouping. This point about the disparate nature of out-migration also justifies why participants from a university setting were chosen. If any farm youth who have left the farm were selected for this study it would have been more difficult to gain access to a coherent sample.

Section 1.6.2 The Rationale for the Emerging Adulthood Category

The particular age category focused on in this study is the emerging adulthood phase roughly lasting between 18 and 28 years old. One significant early theme of youth and transition studies was the idea that stages are passed through on the way to becoming an adult or, in other words, a fully fledged, legitimate member of society (Skelton, 2002). This is a somewhat unsatisfactory idea as it fails to incorporate the importance of the present and of being and, instead, portrays individuals as little more than becomings. A solution to this problem is the idea of emerging adulthood, a term used by Arnett (2000, 2004) to describe a period of intense uncertainty and change that has evolved between adolescence and adulthood. Arnett argues that the emerging adulthood phase usually lasts from the late teens up until the mid to late twenties and that this stage of development is both theoretically and empirically distinct from the adolescent phase that precedes it and the young adult period that follows it. Although there is no distinct age at which emerging adults move into young adulthood, Arnett states that by the late 20s most actors are likely to have begun to meet socially defined expectations of what it means to have reached this status. In between these two stages, emerging adults as a group are statistically most likely to be living fluid, changeable lives that are gradually evolving away from a world heavily shaped and controlled by adult figures such as parents or teachers towards one of their own creation and volition (Arnett, 2000). Choosing a cohort fitting this age profile potentially provided a source of rich data since the participants were at a juncture in their transition to adulthood between adolescence and

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6 This concept originates from the field of developmental psychology. It is used as part of the organising of the study and is not explored as an idea in terms of its psychological underpinnings.
adulthood. Furthermore, if Arnett’s claims are right the participants’ were at a time of their lives when they were questioning and shaping the direction of their lives.

Section 1.7 The Research Question
Mainly because of the insider status of the researcher, an aspect of the study that is extensively analysed in Chapter Four, the research question was deliberately constructed in as broad a manner as possible. For this same reason no specific aims or objectives are included in the design of the study. The depth of the researcher’s lived knowledge of growing up in a farming family raised a concern that the development of a very particular research framework at an early stage of the study would possibly have been grounded in subjective opinions and ideas. Similarly, the lack of academic research directly relevant to this cohort further increased the likelihood that any structures imposed through the creation of targeted aims and objectives would emanate from this same personal source.

Bearing these issues in mind the research question developed for this study was:

- What are the experiences of growing up in a farming family among farm youth attending university?

Section 1.8 The Design of the Study
This thesis is qualitative in nature. It is framed within the narrative inquiry approach and develops an in-depth examination of the experiences, views and attitudes of this cohort. Its findings are based on data collected from a series of thirty semi-structured interviews carried out with a cohort aged between 18 and 33 years old. All participants had grown up on farms and at the time of the interviews were either undergraduate or postgraduate students at a university in the West of Ireland, the National University of Ireland, Galway. As already stated the researcher also grew up in the Irish farming community and the considerable implications of this insider status for how this study was conducted are described in detail in Chapter Four. The data was analysed using a thematic approach underscored by a commitment to explore the participants’ narratives within the wider backdrop of patterns, which

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7 This institution is referred to as NUI, Galway throughout this thesis.
emerge across the cohort. As far as possible the findings of this research represent the voice and views of the participants and as such extensive use is made of quotes and stories from their narratives throughout the findings’ chapters.

Section 1.9 The Context of the Study
This section provides an extended background to the family farming culture in Ireland. While this is not an overt component of the findings’ chapters it helps to contextualise the relationship between the family and the farm both in the past and the present. This illustrates the rationale framing decisions made in this culture around the familial and farming strategies, which are adopted and the norms it is bounded within. It firstly, concentrates on locating this culture in an historical context from pre-Famine\(^8\) times to the late twentieth century. Secondly, it describes the present environment it operates within paying particular regard to the policies, which have been developed by the EU and by the Irish government and the changes that are likely to occur in the near future. It is important to explore this because this provides a setting for the current state of farming in Ireland. It should be noted that while there is a vast amount of literature available in both of these areas this section is not an exhaustive study of this material but rather a summary of the main historical and socio-economic influences on family farming.

Section 1.9.1 The Historical Context
The first half of this section locates the Irish family farming system in its historical context. Firstly, the period leading up to the Famine is examined and following this it discusses the state of post-Famine rural Ireland. After this it outlines the patriarchal family model that underpinned this culture and the socialisation of children. Next, it describes the changes that took place in the family farming culture over the course of the twentieth century and the role and impact of migration and education. Lastly, it highlights changing attitudes to farming and succession during this same time frame.

\(^8\) The Irish Famine of 1845-1852 wreaked huge damage on the Irish population and forever altered its collective psyche. Out of a population of around eight million more than two million people died from starvation and disease or were forced to emigrate.
Section 1.9.1.1 The Pre-Famine Era

In any study of modern Irish farming families the historical context grounding this culture needs to be explored as without this it would be difficult to understand contemporary norms such as the stubbornness with which land can be held onto even in unfavourable circumstances. This fervent wish to see the farm retained partially has its origins in the tumultuous events of the nineteenth century.

In pre-Famine rural Ireland there were significant divisions amongst the rural population especially between those with land and without and those who were financially solvent and those who scrabbled for survival day by day. While most of the population in this period were dependent on some form of agriculture for their survival, the majority were landless labourers or cottiers in the employ of larger farmers who in turn rented their land from Anglo-Irish or English landlords (Hoppen, 1999). It cannot be taken as inviolably true that the landlord class despite their popular portrayal were the only group to have a potentially exploitative relationship with inhabitants of the countryside. In the dogged struggle for survival all societal factions from larger farmers downwards manipulated those below them in the socio-economic scale (Ó Tuathaigh, 1972). A crucial weapon in this fight for prosperity was access to an adequate acreage of land, for without it a man could not expect to provide even the most basic means of survival for his family. For those who had tenuous access to land, options were extremely limited as this group lived in constant threat of poverty due to underemployment and lack of resources (Hoppen, 1999). Furthermore, there was a visceral fear around loss of status amongst farmers, especially those who rented enough land to survive but who were not sufficiently comfortable to expect to overcome unexpected calamities such as poor harvest yields. They dreaded being dragged down to the level of those labourers and cottiers who lived such a miserable and scabrous existence around them (ibid).

In spite of the fact that most of rural Ireland lived in poverty there was a small

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9 This group worked for larger farmers in return for a cottage and a small piece of land they could cultivate. Cottiers and landless labourers made up nearly 70% of the population in 1841. By contrast farmers with holdings of twenty acres or more accounted for only 20% of the population (Hoppen, 1999).
minority of larger scale farmers, located mainly in south Ulster and Leinster, who led relatively comfortable lifestyles with ample resources to educate and support most of their children’s future entry into the professions or the clergy. This access to financial resources facilitated a shift towards the use of impartible inheritance\textsuperscript{10}, which came to have such a hugely significant impact on the structure and fate of the farm family into the twentieth century and beyond (Ó Tuathaigh, 1972). In spite of its growing usage, in much of Ireland before the Famine the system of partible\textsuperscript{11} inheritance was more common. For many peasants there was little possibility of passing on an entire intact holding to one heir. Instead, the governing aim was to ensure the survival of all of the family’s offspring. In order to achieve this, the older generation were forced to subdivide their landholdings between as many of their offspring as needed access to land (Ó Tuathaigh, 1972). This contributed to a situation where on the eve of the Famine many previously viable holdings were reduced to little more than a ragged patchwork of over-used plots where potatoes were the only crop produced (Ó Gráda, 1993).

\textbf{Section 1.9.1.2 Post-Famine Rural Ireland}

The Famine had a deep psychological impact on Irish society especially on more vulnerable smaller farmers and encouraged a shift towards impartible inheritance in subsequent decades as this group sought to distance themselves from the landless hordes. While food had been produced during the Famine, mainly it must be said for commercial export, one of the key morbidity factors was, therefore, not the complete collapse of the food supply but rather an inability to purchase it when the potato crop failed. Those who had been reduced to relying on this tuber for their survival in the period leading up to the Famine and who did not have sufficient acreage to support themselves by other means suffered disproportionately from the effects of this calamity (Hoppen, 1999). Although the lack of resources had the severest impact on the lowest classes of labourers and cottiers-the class who suffered the most from death and emigration-it did impact on those who had smaller farms of under fifteen

\textsuperscript{10} In the practice of impartible inheritance the head of the household, who is usually male and who holds title to the land selects one of his children to inherit the entire holding. As a normative it is a son who is chosen as the successor.

\textsuperscript{11} This system allows for the division of the estate equally between more than one heir.
acres. Relatively large-scale farmers were the only section of the broader rural populace, apart from landlords, who emerged reasonably unscathed from the devastations of the Famine. As a result, one means for smaller farmers to safeguard their position was to seek to emulate the way of life and the protection enjoyed by larger farmers by passing on a complete landholding to the next generation. In addition, the equation of land with survival undoubtedly caused even the lowliest of farmers to become determined to strengthen their own grasp on their holding (Hoppen, 1999). More than ever before, land was imbued with an almost magical, talismanic ability to protect against misfortune and the vagaries of life. For a people who had witnessed grinding poverty and the spectre of starvation, the prospect of long-term stable possession of their farm, which could protect against catastrophes was intoxicating (Connell, 1958). Security of tenure came to attain a position of almost mythical importance, something that did not always live up to the reality of a few acres of land on the side of a mountain or bog but, which still retained a real and absolute potency.

The political climate also moved towards protecting the rights of tenants’ to the long-term possession of their holding, which encouraged tenant farmers to re-examine how they managed the future of their farm and family. The resolve to hold onto their land for as long as and as much as possible was facilitated by the various Land Acts that began to be enacted in the 1870s (Connell, 1958). Over time, these Acts gave tenants a measure of security and enshrined in law, rights that had hitherto largely relied on the whim of individual landlords not to mention increasing their power in the local community at the expense of this group and the labouring classes. These rights included fixity of tenure and rent, eventually culminating in an entitlement to purchase their holding at a reduced price (Hoppen, 1999). Prior to the Famine most peasants possessed little and lacked the agency or resources to improve their condition and were also vulnerable to sudden eviction. However, they now found the heady concept of land ownership within their grasp, something which in keeping with the practices of their counterparts on larger farms could only be preserved through the practice of impartible inheritance (Connell, 1958). In the last third of the nineteenth century the protection provided by land legislation allowed even the lowliest of tenant farmers, to imagine themselves at the head of a
landholding empire continuing over generations and acting as an enduring testament to the family’s stubborn obduracy (Connell, 1958). Through this the family could continue to be associated with a landholding over an extended number of generations. This opened up the possibility of creating a family dynasty regardless of the size of the farm (Arensberg and Kimball, 2001). This can be interpreted as a reaction to the fragile hold, which much of the rural populace had had on their land in the past. This security was of momentous significance to a people who had long been vulnerable to obliteration from their local social and cultural landscape through death, eviction or forced emigration (Connell, 1958). As the values and cultural traditions of the prosperous farming class began to assume an imperious hegemonic status within rural Ireland this also held true at the individual family level. The use of such customs as impartible inheritance, which strongly favoured one son and to a lesser extent one daughter through the arrangement of a marriage with a farmer of a similar status, were pursued, defended and protected even by those who did not stand to benefit by taking formal ownership of the farm.

Section 1.9.1.3 A Patriarchal Family Model
By the beginning of the twentieth century the prevailing ideology in the farming community centred around land ownership, patriarchal control and the performance of agriculture as a male preserve and masculine ritual (Ní Laoire, 2005). It was accepted that certain men were bred to be farmers and that it was right and natural that they would be the head of the household. This monologic ethos precluded female control of resources and presented men as the dominant head of the household and women as their inferior helpmates, whose purpose was to support their husbands, sons and brothers (Peters et al., 2000 cited in Ni Laoire, 2005). The power and authority of the individual farmer was inextricably linked to the wider culture in which they lived. The father as title holder to the land was the head of the household and could exert considerable authority over his family. They decided what work was to be carried out and the timing of it. In addition, they bought and sold livestock and controlled access to resources such as money and important social networks (Arensberg and Kimball, 2001). Through their interaction with financial and market institutions and carrying out the most significant public transactions, the
father acted as an intermediary between the family and wider society and represented its outward face and prestige. Although women’s visibility and a certain amount of their power was not externally very apparent they had power inside the confines of the house and the farm. This was because the domestic domain they controlled was a world that existed outside the parameters of male control. While fathers’ controlled and regulated the family’s access to the outside world and to the primary means of production, his authority was not absolute or untrammelled. He had little input into the domestic routine of children or housework and it was here that a woman could wield her influence.

Fathers were often distant, authoritarian figures who demanded and commanded complete respect and obedience from their children and were rarely the object of filial affection (Hannan and Katsiaounai, 1977). This separation was necessary in order to ensure that they remained secure in their position as head of the household and its supreme arbiter. By contrast mothers were perceived as warm and nurturing and had an intimate connection with their children. Through the long years of their children's apprenticeship and subordination, mothers acted as a qualifying, mediating figure who did much to ensure the persistence of family balance and harmony. Mothers interceded in disputes involving their husband and children and softened the harshness of the father's demeanour. This equilibrium was crucial, as without it; a family could become divided, allowing the alarming prospect of individual concerns and aspirations to emerge. This scenario had to be avoided at all costs as the erosion of the overriding group mentality would undermine not only the family's chances of continuity but also indirectly rural society’s vitality, prosperity and traditions (Hannan and Katsiaounai, 1977). As they grew into their apprenticeship role sons typically continued to have an affectionate and nurturing relationship with their mothers even after they moved outwards from the feminine sphere of their early childhood towards the masculine world of agriculture and the community. Likewise, whilst there could be fondness between father and daughter, theirs was often a distant relationship as they had little meaningful contact with each other (Messenger, 1969).
Section 1.9.1.4 The Socialisation of Children
Traditionally within each family in the farming community there was a strict
socialisation and delineation of gender and social identities. One important element
of farming families’ interactions and the farming way of life was the construction of
male and female identities and the expectations that children attached to these roles
from an early age. The production and reproduction of, for example, gender and
familial duty was a vital component of the socialisation of both girls and boys
towards accepting their position vis-à-vis the possibility of being given the family’s
land (Hannan and Katsiaounai, 1977). This extended to their role within the family,
in the productive sphere of the farm and also domestically. As custom moved away
from partible to impartible inheritance this became even more crucial. This latter
practice was a source of potential conflict so children needed to be raised with the
understanding that what they were entitled to receive or how their future would pan
out could be radically different from their siblings-even those of the same gender.
Each child was schooled from an early age into a specific personal and work domain.
The skills and outlook they were imbued with in their childhoods prepared them for
their future position in society, one for succession and marriage, others for education
and migration and so on (ibid). These defined roles were portrayed as natural to the
sexes because both had particular characteristics of paternal authority or maternal
care that meant or implied they were suited to that position. Any attempt to move
beyond designated positions into a sphere considered ‘unmanly’ or ‘unwomanly’
was met with ridicule and disdain not only from the family but the local community
(Arensberg and Kimball, 2001).

Section 1.9.1.5 Changes to Irish Farming Family Culture in the Twentieth
Century
By the early 1930s, rural Irish society was on the cusp of a huge change. The culture
which had evolved after the Famine was beginning to be threatened by the forces and
appeal of modern society. Migration, which had become a vital feature of the
farming family’s survival strategy had a significant impact on its aspirations and
values as it came to be exposed to a broader set of influences. Furthermore, the place
and role of women was transformed by their involvement in education and by their
mothers’ desire for them to have a different life than they had (McNabb, 1964). By
the 1950s and 60s, there was also a frenetic pessimism around the future of farming. In many areas it was beginning to lose its way financially, especially in regions where incomes were low. In addition, as farm offspring exerted more control over their destiny, as a result of their growing involvement in education, farming began to lose its power in comparison to the opportunities offered by urban employment. By the mid-twentieth century the primacy of pre-modern farming culture with its emphasis on patriarchal authority and the single-minded determination to protect the holding by both the younger and older generation had begun to collapse under the weight of migration and the glittering promise of modern living (Brody, 1973). Features of life such as succession, which had appeared so steadfast and immutable, began to be challenged in ways that could not have been anticipated a generation earlier.

From the 1930s onwards, the coercive, persuasive element of finding a successor for the farm gained greater importance firstly, along the Western seaboard and latterly, rural Ireland as a whole. The gloom attached to rural living expanded with the general decrease in agricultural viability so that even the more prosperous Eastern, Southern and Midlands regions faced a progressively more unequal battle to retain the next generation on the land in the latter half of the twentieth century. Vestiges of traditional farming culture such as labour exchange between households and the tradition of arranged marriages were being eroded in the face of modernisation, migration and the decrease in marital prospects (Curtin and Varley, 1984). This change had a dramatic effect on attitudes towards farming life and resulted in significant changes in the balance of family relationships. The prospect of succession began to seem less like a blessing and more like an onerous fate that would befall those who were not capable of building a life elsewhere. In comparison to the allure of urban living, agrarian society with its strict injunctions and rigid codes of behaviour seemed increasingly oppressive to its young inhabitants. By the 1950s the residual tenacity, which so strongly linked the farming family to the land had begun to be replaced by the pull factor of modern culture (Brody, 1973).
Section 1.9.1.6 The Role and Impact of Migration

Migration has long played an important role in rural Ireland. Between 1850 and 1914 four million people left Ireland and in doing so greatly altered the Irish landscape. Those who moved away were not entirely motivated by economic considerations as demonstrated by the fact that those who left had a shorter life expectancy than those who stayed. Instead, those who had not been given the farm were often driven by a desire to establish themselves elsewhere (Kennedy, 1975 cited in Strassmann and Clarke, 1998). Without land and in light of the fact that the prospect of becoming a landless labourer was something to be avoided at all costs, migration was often the only possible means of reaching full adult status for many farmers’ children. This was because the opportunity to marry was often predicated on taking ownership of the farm and without assuming either of these statuses it was almost impossible to gain recognition as an adult in this community (Hoppen, 1999). Migration helped to smooth out the seemingly conflicting nature of Irish family farming life. This refers to the adoption of a succession strategy, in families with large numbers of children, based on impartible inheritance, which could only aid the progression to adulthood of a limited number of these offspring (Ó Gráda, 1993). The ideal scenario for any farming family, as described by Arensberg and Kimball (2001) in their anthropological study of rural Ireland Family and Community, was that non-succeeding children would leave the local area and enter into a profession, the civil service or religious life. The key to this successful transition to adulthood was education. From the earliest days of the Irish state the farming classes recognised that this strategy was a means of ensuring not only the basic survival of their offspring but also their prosperity.

The role of mothers became even more important during this phase. While fathers had always been seen as providers for their family, it was a mother’s duty to prepare their family for the future. As the primary caregiver in the home with whom children had the most frequent and affective contact, mothers were responsible not only for the physical wellbeing of the family's offspring but crucially the inculcation of a set of values and norms that complied with the demands of the farming family and their status in the community (Messenger, 1969). This role was vital for the prolonged success and preservation of the farm and the continuation of an often harsh and
austere way of life that by the 1940s held little of the beckoning promise of the USA or England. Many holdings especially in the west of Ireland were of dubious quality and viability and required careful planning and strategising in order to find a willing heir. A farmer’s life, which in poorer areas had always been somewhat bleak and impecunious, and now faced competition from wider societal forces such as the employment and entertainment opportunities in towns and cities in Ireland and abroad, was proving to be increasingly unappealing by the mid-twentieth century. This internal unattractiveness was reinforced by the fact that rural Ireland had built closer ties to potentially transformative external forces in Irish urban areas and abroad, hence, making individuals more aware of the possibilities available elsewhere.

As farming became less secure, mothers used their influence to encourage their children to build a future away from the rural farming community (McNabb, 1964). This was especially true of daughters whose mothers wished for an easier life for them. Women were increasingly dissatisfied with their role on the farm and by the isolation and hard work it usually entailed. As a result, they often discouraged their daughters from marrying farmers and, instead, persuaded them to seek a partner and a way of life that was not so limiting (O’Hara, 1998). This ambition was helped by the access girls had to education, which presented them with a range of options other than simply becoming a farmer’s wife (McNabb, 1964). Thus, migration away from the countryside was a means of escaping the patriarchal model that suffused rural inter-personal relationships (Kennedy, 1975 cited in Strassmann and Clarke, 1998). In any event, it was easier for girls to leave than boys because sons were raised with greater parental expectations that they would do their duty by their parents and their ancestors who had worked hard to preserve the family’s connection with the holding (Schep-Hughes, 1979). Therefore, the drive towards education was not so pronounced among those who were identified as successors to the holding. Indeed, many farmers were opposed to educating their succeeding offspring as there was a real fear that these sons would not return to the farm once they had participated in this process. Moreover, it was seen as potentially ruinous, as not only would it challenge the authority of the older generation, but it would also plant new modern ideas into their heads that would cost money (McNabb, 1964). Even agricultural
education was a threat as it undermined the father’s position as the oracle of farming wisdom and craft. In the modern era, the choice of successor appeared to partially shift away from the notion of who was most suitable to be a farmer towards the idea of it being the child who was least capable of doing well academically. Those who showed scholastic ability were not encouraged to remain on the farm but rather were pushed to break their emotional ties to the farm and to see their future as lying with education and the pursuit of a middle class lifestyle (McNabb, 1964).

Section 1.9.1.7 Changing Attitudes to Farming and Succession
From this period onwards, it was also no longer the case that farmers automatically had a choice of potential successors. In fact, with the growing emphasis on education, the question would have to be posed as to whether parents themselves saw succession as a benefit to their children or as a hindrance. As off-farm prospects improved and the farming outlook became more negative, parents began to ask themselves whether they should encourage their children to follow them into farming (McNabb, 1964). However, not every parent wished to see their way of life come to an end but they had fewer inducements available to entice their offspring to stay. Many parents had to watch as their children left the farm with no intention of returning. In the end, they often had to rely on an appeal to their last born son’s sense of duty and responsibility to secure a continued presence on the farm (Brody, 1973). This was linked to a change in attitude among the younger generation who no longer aspired to farming with the same fervency as they had in earlier days. The balance of power between parents and their children shifted even further away from the older generation and the traditional ways, towards youth, modernity and greater freedom. With the decrease in agricultural viability fathers began to lose their patriarchal authority. They could no longer rely on the promise of land or the status attached to this to maintain their position of respect and influence. Farming culture and the families who were such an integral part of it were in an especially vulnerable position in the west of Ireland where farms were small and had little scope for modernisation. In Inishkillane, a study of a West of Ireland community, Brody wrote of encountering families where fathers were the target of their children’s sniggering ridicule and all they represented was dismissed as archaically irrelevant by their
offspring (Brody, 1973). While it is difficult to know whether this accurately represents general parent-child relationships at the time or whether they were specifically related to his site of study, it does seem to indicate that the awesome patriarchal figure, which fathers had once been was somewhat diluted in the changing societal environment of the time.

Section 1.9.2 The Current Policy and Institutional Context of the Irish Family Farming System
It is important to examine in brief the policy and institutional context underpinning the Irish family farming culture. It provides the backdrop against which young people make decisions around whether or not there is a viable future for them in the farming sector and whether parents encourage or discourage the creation of formal attachments to the farm and the type of belonging emerging from this. The first part explores the current context family farms operate within including the European Union (EU\textsuperscript{12}) policy environment. Then, it discusses the movement towards multifunctional forms of agriculture followed by an outline of some future predictions that have been made for this industry. Finally, it touches on the Irish policy environment within which farming operates.

Section 1.9.2.1 The Current Context
Statistically the outlook for Irish family farming is gloomy. Since 1991 the number of family farms in Ireland has decreased by 18% (The Irish Times, 2013). Furthermore, the number of young farmers is perilously low and in 2012 the average age was 54 while in 2000 it was 51 (Murphy, 2012). In addition, as a small island with a limited population, Ireland has always relied on access to overseas markets for its agricultural produce. As a result, it is highly sensitive to the vagaries of the international political, social and economic climate. After it gained its independence in the 1920s, the Irish state was relatively free to create its own policies and up until the 1960s farming was at the heart of its major strategies. However, since Ireland’s entry into the EU, it has become increasingly locked into an institutionalised political

\textsuperscript{12} Although the EU only took on this name in 1993 having being previously called the European Economic Community (the ECC), in order to avoid confusion it will be referred to here as the EU.
and trade framework that allows it little room for independent manoeuvring. It is highly vulnerable to the workings of pan-European frameworks such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and global trade concerns in the shape of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Although the WTO has a significant impact on the fate of farming families in terms of changes to market conditions, external competition, etc., it is beyond the scope of this study to explore this influence.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was formulated as one of the core platforms of the EU. Its main objectives were to promote a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, to increase productivity and to encourage the modernisation of agriculture (Meester, 2010). The broad strategy pursued was based on price supports and intervention, which kept prices above a minimum level, thus, on paper at least guaranteeing a reasonable standard of living for European farmers. However, over the years serious issues emerged around the CAP policy that threatened its viability and impacted on farmers who came under its sway. How the system was set up whereby farmers were encouraged to produce as much as possible meant that demand not only overtook supply but also that its budget share increased exponentially and the natural environment began to suffer. In 1992 under what became known as the MacSharry reforms part of the price support policy was replaced by income support so that farmers were guaranteed a certain level of subvention regardless of their level of production. The aim of this was to reduce prices for agricultural goods, which had not only distorted the market but also meant that production was not always carried out efficiently or rationally but, instead, was with the aim of qualifying for available grants (Silvis and Lappere, 2010). From that point on, farming incomes began to be gradually ‘decoupled’ from productive outputs. Furthermore, the percentage of the EU budget devoted to CAP measures has decreased dramatically in the past thirty years. For example, in 2013 it is estimated that it will fall below 40% of the budget from a high of 85% in 1970, which potentially reduces farm incomes. Furthermore, within this same time frame CAP policies have been reconfigured so that an increasing percentage of its budget is devoted to regional and cohesion\textsuperscript{13} strategies at the expense of income supports for

\textsuperscript{13} Cohesion strategies are concerned with reducing the disparity between regions within the European
agriculture (Bos, 2010). This demonstrates that there has been a shift from specific sectoral assistance for agriculture to spatially based regional supports. This is aimed at promoting growth across an entire region that is lagging behind the European average and to reduce dependence on an already struggling farming industry. However, this will influence the future viability of some types of farming, as the sector becomes less central to economic considerations and particularly increases the vulnerability of smaller operations.

Section 1.9.2.2 Multifunctionality

There has been a major change in the discourse that underpins CAP and other EU policies concerning agriculture and the wider rural sphere. It has moved from a focus on productivity to multifunctionality with further evolutions likely to occur as social and political changes arise. This is due to changing societal preoccupations around the requirement to protect the environment and concerns over the non-private, public goods that are created by the farming community. It is also driven by CAP reforms, which were propelled, as mentioned in the last paragraph, by a need to reduce emphasis on production. Within this changing dialogue, farming officially moved from focusing solely on productivity to include matters such as environmental public goods, the provision of amenities for an increasingly urbanised, middle class population and a safe, transparent food supply based on quality rather than quantity. This implies that farming has to reconfigure itself within a wider social mosaic where it no longer acts as a core driver of the economy as even within rural regions, statistics around demographics and employment show that it is in decline (Potter and Thomson, 2010).

Union, i.e. between poorer and more affluent regions.

14 This is a blend of non-commodity and commodity outputs from agriculture. This acknowledges the fact that certain outputs, which benefit the public, for example, environmental protection have no easily attached economic value and should, thus, be recognised as such and where suitable be subsidised by the State (Potter and Thomson, 2010).

15 Public goods are goods that are non-excludable and non-reducible so that the use of a resource by one actor does not reduce its availability to others and neither can that actor’s right to access it be denied.
Section 1.9.2.3 Probable Future Pathways
More recently the sector-based approach to rural policy has shifted towards an emphasis on broader development through investing in national transport networks, the provision of technology such as broadband as well as supporting the establishment of alternative enterprises including artisan food production or tourism. This would seem to suggest that in the future, farming will occupy an even more peripheral role in structural and cohesion policies. Larger farms, especially in the dairy sector, will continue to move away from the family farm model through, for example, the consolidation of holdings and the introduction of greater technological innovations, towards a more ‘business’ oriented, intensive model. These will be expected to link into the free market system, with minimal reliance on subsidies and a greater integration into global pricing frameworks (Collier, 2004). Medium-sized enterprises will continue to rely on EU subventions that will need to be supplemented by off-farm employment by one or both partners. It is believed that this group will be less concerned with production targets and more with a custodial role focusing on landscape management and an adherence to traditional ‘rural’ heritage values. Smaller farmers will most likely be funneled out of farming and into the world of commuting to urban areas for employment. This will lead to an increase in the phenomenon of ‘rurbanisation’ where rural areas become more like urban ones in terms of activities and modes of employment that centre on commuting to sites outside of agriculture and rural areas (Collier, 2004). What is most notable about these trends is the fact that farmers are vulnerable on a greater scale than ever before to wider social pressures that follow global trends and interests, which allow them little scope for manoeuvre (Teagasc, 2008). This undoubtedly impacts on the future of those participants who are likely to succeed to the farm as it can either constrain or enable their choices and prospects in the field of agriculture and shape earlier decisions taken by parents around encouraging children to stay on the land or look elsewhere.

Section 1.9.2.4 The Irish Policy Environment
The capacity to develop policy within the Irish context is limited by its membership of the EU and the reliance of the agricultural sector on EU subventions, as channelled through the CAP programme (Collier, 2004). This position is exacerbated
by political structures that have been imposed at a pan-European level, which circumscribe its actions. Nevertheless, within the Irish institutional context it is obvious that there is a clear drive towards the rationalisation of agricultural operations with a shift away from the constitutional position\textsuperscript{16} of maintaining as many farming families on the land as possible. Within the Teagasc\textsuperscript{17} strategic policy document \textit{Towards 2030 Foresight Report} there is a focus on the importance of scientific knowledge and the need for innovation amongst farmers. As part of this there are strong linkages made between involvement in formal higher education and the ability to develop farming enterprises (Teagasc, 2008). This is underpinned by a gradual movement away from a focus on local knowledge and an individual apprenticeship to the land through working with the older generation. Moreover, this report argues that in the future direct support from the EU will increasingly be reduced in favour of general rural development. This means that agricultural producers will come under more pressure due to their exposure to market forces as their income support is reduced. Arising from this are a number of challenges especially for small-scale farmers who will struggle to engage with this new landscape due to, for instance, unviable holdings and poor infrastructure (ibid).

Teagasc (2008) predicts that the divisions within the Irish farming community between large-scale, financially viable farms and smaller enterprises, which have less involvement with the open-market economy, will grow. For the latter a type of farming where the focus is no longer on productivity and its attached validating forms of what it is to be a ‘good’ farmer (Burton, 2004) such as producing the highest yields or obtaining the best price for their stock, would need to be reconsidered. Instead, the emphasis would have to be on the custodial role already mentioned or on performing a specific social function in maintaining the physical appearance of the landscape or protecting natural or cultural heritage. On the other hand, it is envisaged that larger farmers would only provide modest agri-environmental benefits and alternately, would become more intensive and focused

\textsuperscript{16} The Irish constitution states “that there may be established on the land in economic security as many families as in the circumstances shall be practicable” (Bunreacht na hÉireann article 45.2.v).

\textsuperscript{17} Teagasc is the agricultural and food development authority in the Republic of Ireland. It has a broad mandate ranging from research and development programmes to the delivery of education and advisory services for farmers.
on capitalising on their comparative advantage in, for example, dairying through their access to relatively low-cost pasturage in comparison to other countries (Teagasc, 2008).

For young people, including some of this cohort, who must weigh up possible entry into the field of farming as a career, the changing requirements and expectations around each sector are likely to have a major bearing on their decision. For those who have access to resources in the form of land, capital and knowledge it is possible that given the world’s growing population and the potential impact of climate change on food production elsewhere that certain farmers will be in a position to take advantage of this situation. However, those young people who stand to inherit a smaller portion of land not falling into a category that can compete within the market system, such as beef cattle producers will possibly face stagnating incomes. Additionally, they will need to build their identity around the role of guardian of the environment or the provider of amenities desired by the public such as leisure facilities (Teagasc, 2008). This could be quite a dramatic change from the farming processes they grew up with and the skills and attributes, which were traditionally esteemed in this community.

The paradox with this change towards the market economy is that while its aim is to secure the future existence of the farming community, this goal cannot be reached without sacrificing the involvement of large sections of the population dwelling in this community. This group must join the ranks of commuters and ‘rurbanites’ who live and work in rural areas but not necessarily in agriculture. This aim was expressed within the document *Food Harvest 2020*, (2012, p.18), which was produced by a cross-section of the Irish agri-food industry. This states that:

The restructuring process that has characterised Irish agriculture in recent years needs to be accelerated. Market realities dictate that a strongly commercial perspective is pivotal to improving viability and ensuring sufficient returns and long-term growth.
Given that this restructuring typically involves the consolidation of holdings and the moving of small farmers into alternative forms of employment, it would seem that the underlying paradigm of agricultural policy is based on the steady erosion of the traditional precepts of family farming culture in favour of a more business orientated, ‘rational’ model. While this might prove successful in retaining certain groups of young people within the industry, it could also increase the pressure on others to leave it behind and create a new life for themselves outside of this sphere. The rising emphasis on productivity for some kinds of farming is contained within the same policy arena as the growing debate over the kind of food that society desires and the importance placed on goods such as clean air and an environment rich in biodiversity. In light of this, it remains to be seen what sort of compromises will be made between these two sets of values, which in many ways are in opposition to one another. It might result in a set of differentiated values whereby certain classes of farmers are given one set of targets and are supported in an appropriate manner whereas others will be expected to fulfil an alternative function in society. Either eventuality will have profound implications for societal attitudes towards farming and endeavours to attract young entrants such as this cohort into the farming industry.

Section 1.10 Outline of the Thesis Chapters

Chapter Two-Theoretical Literature
This chapter provides the main theoretical grounding for this research. It firstly, explores the area of transitions to adulthood and the increasing fragmentation of this experience. Secondly, it discusses the structure-agency debate with particular reference to Beck’s work on individualisation, Gidden’s notion of the reflexive self and Bourdieu’s theory of habitus. Lastly, it examines Bauman’s conceptualisation of identity in present day society.

Chapter Three-Rural Literature
Chapter Three grounds this research within the field of rural studies beginning with literature that has been produced on belonging. It then explores the idea of place
attachment and its relevance to this cohort. It next makes mention of how memories are framed within the sociological canon. After this it moves on to examine material directly related to the dimensions of belonging starting with functional, moving on to formal and finishing up with social. The informal aspect of belonging is rarely studied on its own so it is only possible to make brief mention of this in the context of the other three forms rather than putting it into a distinct section in this chapter.

Chapter Four-Methodology
This chapter outlines and describes the methods used in this study. It explores its philosophical underpinnings, the narrative inquiry strategy and, then, gives a detailed description of the study’s design. The next area centres on the use of critical reflection as a device to ensure adherence to rigorous academic standards. It also focuses on the analytical strategy used as well as framing the findings and detailing how ethical standards were maintained. Where relevant the implications, benefits and challenges of the researcher’s insider status are discussed throughout the chapter.

Chapter Five-The ‘Functional’ Dimension of Belonging
In this chapter the concept of the functional dimension of belonging is focused on. Firstly, it explores its principal characteristics and, next, examines the ‘helper’ and ‘worker’ relationships and their implications. After this it discusses the relationship between gender, the creation of these roles on the farm and participants’ attitudes to them. Following this the reasons put forward by the cohort for taking an active role in the working life of the farm are looked at. Subsequently, it details the positioning of the cohort within the family and the impact of the labels, which were assigned to them around their engagement with the farm and their transition to adulthood. Lastly, it briefly outlines the value placed on work and help within the family and the status associated with these roles.

Chapter Six-The ‘Informal’ Dimension of Belonging
The informal relationship the cohort has with the farm in terms of their continued proprietorial attitude and their deep emotional connections to it are analysed here. It explores some of its key features as well as how the farm is conceptualised by this group in emotional or business-like terms or a combination of both. The significance of personal, familial and historical memories to the development and maintenance of
this relationship between the individual and the farm is then looked at. Finally, it examines the role of the temporal continuum the family and the farm are framed within and the intergenerational context this is situated in as well as the role of legacy in how young people view the farm.

**Chapter Seven-The ‘Formal’ Dimension of Belonging**

This chapter focuses on formal ownership of the farm and the relationship successors and non-successors develop with it. One of the key themes of this chapter is the gender framework participants are positioned in with regards to the norm of preserving the farm in the family. The first part of the chapter looks at the role gender frameworks play in how attitudes towards succession are constructed and in the transition to adulthood of those who are likely to be given the farm and those who will not. Secondly, the motivations behind the desire to see the connection between the family and the farm preserved into the future are discussed. After this attention turns to the differentiated expectations attached to taking formal ownership of the farm, i.e. whether it will be actively run or viewed as a landholding to be kept within the family. Then, views about the idea of the ‘farmer’ in the family being bequeathed the farm are explored and lastly, perceptions about parental attitudes towards succession are considered.

**Chapter Eight-The ‘Social’ Dimension of Belonging**

In this chapter the social attachments the group build with the local, rural and farming communities they grow up in and the degree to which they feel embedded or disembedded from these networks and ties are examined. In the first section the concept of community as it is understood by the participants is highlighted and defined. Secondly, the principal characteristics of embeddedness are outlined, followed by an exploration of some of the key influences on the participants’ level of engagement with this aspect of their lives. Next, it looks at the contradictory relationship actors have with their background, particularly with their local community. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the role of ‘othering’ in their ongoing association and connection with the idea of their membership of their cultural background.
Chapter Nine-Discussion
This chapter concentrates on providing an overview of the main arguments contained within this thesis and their relationship with the conceptual frameworks discussed in Chapters Two and Three. Firstly, it summarises the main points of the research, which is followed by a discussion of the four dimensions of belonging. After this broader points are made about the overarching concept of belonging and how this relates to the transitions to adulthood debate. Subsequently, it focuses on the relationship between the findings in this thesis and the fields of rural studies and youth sociology.

Chapter 10-Conclusion
This chapter concentrates on giving a general summary and conclusion to this thesis. It begins with a recap of the aim and scope of the study and after this the gaps in the literature are discussed once more. Then, it looks to provide an answer to the Research Question that underpinned this thesis. Subsequently, how the arguments of this study are established and developed over the course of this work is outlined. Some limitations of the study are then highlighted and recommendations made for future avenues of research. Finally, concluding remarks are made about the relationship between the findings and the theoretical and conceptual framework it is located in and the nature of belonging in the farming community.

Section 1.11 Conclusion
This chapter concentrated on introducing and providing an overview for this study and the context it is situated inside of. Many of the sections and themes contained within it are elaborated on in far greater detail throughout this study as an argument is built around the research question. The first part of this construction involves the development of a theoretical and conceptual framework, which is partially laid out in the next chapter.
Chapter Two Theoretical Literature

Section 2.1 Introduction
It is no longer sufficient to refer to adolescents and adults as if there is a discrete division between these two groups and that when a certain age is reached a line is crossed whereby all the socially acknowledged trappings of adulthood are attained. In the late modern era, boundaries have become more fluid and ‘facts’ once taken to be universally true have become blurred and suffused with uncertainty. In late modern industrialised societies, the developmental trajectory has been stretched to include categories of actors who are not quite adults and not quite teenagers. It is useful to speak of an intervening phase—that of ‘emerging adulthood’, which Arnett (2000; 2004) suggests as a way of describing a life stage grounded in experimentations with identities, careers and relationships. The existence of this phase is demonstrated by the fact that with the extension of education and the lack of paid employment opportunities, it has become difficult to ascertain with any degree of precision when adulthood is attained.

In present day society, young people can no longer and are no longer expected to move into adulthood with the same predictability as preceding generations. In transition studies, markers such as school-to-work and the movement from parental home to independent dwelling were always seen as vital indicators of adulthood. However, depending on individual circumstances, an increasingly non-linear process allows, for example, for a potentially endless series of switches between education and employment (Ahier and Moore, 1999). It should be noted that simply because there is no clear path to adulthood that markers have not disappeared. Instead, they have assumed an elastic, friable quality, which defy neat explanations or elaborations. For instance, the education system is now engaged with regardless of biological age and social independence is distanced from financial dependence (Bynner, 2005). A vital element of this process is the ability to access resources and build a future within the constraints or freedoms that one is permitted. This brings up the dilemma of structure and agency and the extent to which the actor is shaped by the former and freed by the latter. The way this cohort develop their overall sense of
belonging and attachment to their background can be framed within this debate as it is the interaction between the two that governs its creation.

This chapter largely focuses on providing a general review of literature relevant to this topic rather than concentrating on farming or rural youth. This is out of a wish to locate this cohort within the wider field of youth studies and link them into larger frameworks and theoretical debates than might be possible in rural sociology. The first part of this chapter concentrates on transitions to adulthood, what they look like and how they have changed. This is important because they were a grounding concern and framework for the participants’ lives in the period the research was carried out. It then discusses the concept of 'emerging adulthood' as it has been developed by Arnett (2000; 2004). The second section looks at three major contributors to the debate around structure and agency, specifically Beck (individualisation), Giddens (the reflexive self) and Bourdieu (habitus). These are significant because they are part of the conceptual and theoretical backdrop framing the experiences of young people within the influential parameters of the farm, the family and the community as well as their own individual outlook. This is a crucial notion to consider in how farm youth engage with the idea of their belonging. It finishes with an exploration of Bauman’s identity theory. Like the structure-agency debate this is crucial for the interpretation of the data in this research as it provides theoretical positions, which the cohort can be compared within and against.

Section 2.2 Transitions to Adulthood
This section firstly, examines some of the characteristics of the transition to adulthood and secondly, the way this has begun to fragment in late modern society.

Section 2.2.1 Key Transitions to Adulthood
Although this thesis does not focus specifically on how the transition to adulthood is made it is important to consider some of the key literature around this area. This partially grounds the findings and provides some detail on the life phase of the
participants and the frameworks this age group engage with. It is also significant because this research seeks to highlight the importance of an individual’s childhood experiences and background on the kind of transitions to adulthood they consider making and the choices and paths, which are actually available to them. In addition, this is important because at the time of the research the participants were, through their attendance at university increasingly immersed in this process.

The growth in theoretical and empirical material around young people’s transitions to adulthood can in large part be connected to the social emergence of the adolescent during the twentieth century. Prior to this there was little attention paid to specific age categories as it appeared there were few differences between the cultural tastes and values of young people and other sections of society. Preferences and attitudes were more likely to be linked to class origins than any particular age division. However, during the twentieth century, clear generational differences appeared and a distinctive youth culture emerged. For much of the twentieth century these distinctions were largely superficial with many connected to consumption patterns and lifestyles rather than facets of life such as work or marriage. Recently, these differences have become more profound with significant changes occurring in how lives are organised in key areas such as the family and work compared to earlier generations. In turn this has prompted more in-depth research and attention (Ahier and Moore, 1999). Within this trend age categories have expanded beyond that of adults and teenagers, to include other groups that do not fit with these characterisations such as in the case of this research, emerging adults.

Much of the literature around young people’s transitions to adulthood centres on the movement between certain key life phases, namely, school-to-work, housing changes and domestic transitions (Skelton, 2002). During the early modern period, as Western societies moved from a predominantly rural, agricultural base to an urban, industrial model, the strong structural frameworks associated with traditionally organised societies continued to exert an influence on relatively concrete and linear paths that led to adulthood. For males these transitions were regarded as following a clearly defined sequential pattern from education to employment, from parental
home to a separate dwelling and a stable relationship with a wife and children. On the other hand, females were expected to leave employment after marriage and take care of domestic matters and childrearing duties. There was considerable social pressure to make these linked progressions, which were used as indicators of having reached adult status (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). In the post-Second World War period in particular, young people in the UK were encouraged to reach these standards through support from the State in terms of welfare provision, such as free education and social welfare benefits, for example, housing (ibid).

Section 2.2.2 The Fragmentation of Transitions
As society became more fragmented and social pillars such as welfare state provisions were diluted by neoliberal government policies, the linearities in the three core transition markers began to diminish and be replaced by a plethora of often contradictory signs and pathways. As a result, many of the mechanisms young people had used to navigate their way towards an adult identity such as access to independent housing were replaced by disjointed and truncated avenues that militated against the possibility of achieving this goal (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). This has been exacerbated by two linked trends, which have materialised across the Western world—that of limited employment opportunities for young people and the expansion of education beyond the compulsory period of participation (France, 2007). An ironic outcome of a concomitant shift towards greater opportunities in education and the rising diversity in employment is that this has largely been made possible because of an increased emphasis on standardisation in other areas. For instance, young people are expected to prolong their education beyond the compulsory phase. Whereas participation in further education and training was previously only available to a select group, now it is seen as the way forward for all classes in society, regardless of academic ability or interest (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). These factors have had a significant impact on the sequencing of transitions to adulthood as well as the likelihood of doing so successfully. In ways it seems that the independence young people gained from older generations and the distinctive position they occupied in society has been eroded by dependency on access to parental resources and their vulnerability to social changes. Moreover, the transition
to marriage is typically delayed until after education has been completed and stable employment has been obtained, so there is a knock-on effect on the timing and occurrence of such events. For women too, the normative path to adulthood has no doubt been affected by the feminist\textsuperscript{18} movement of the mid-twentieth century, which campaigned for greater freedom for women to move beyond the kitchen and into the classroom and the boardroom.

The lack of uniformity and the twisting paths to adulthood as identified in the theoretical material are reflected in empirical evidence. Studies have shown that this age group have an ambivalent and highly subjective view of the passage to adulthood. In one Dutch inquiry (Plug et al., 2003) the majority of people aged between 24-28 years old viewed themselves as being both adult and youth. They were found to have complex life goals simultaneously combining individual aspirations and socially defined transitional events such as finding employment. Canadian research shows that while movement between education and employment are no longer as unidirectional or as defined as they once were, they are still part of young people’s life plans and, therefore, are important to the process of becoming an adult (Thiessen and Looker, 1999 cited in Molgat, 2007). However, Arnett (2000; 2004) argues that notions of what it means to be an adult are only nominally linked to arriving at particular junctures in life such as gaining long-term employment. In his work Arnett notes that socially defined transitions have little relevance to young people—what is important is a complex mix of existential, individualistic criteria. Throughout his research conducted with a number of American participants he found that the principal benchmarks for adulthood centre on making independent decisions, accepting responsibility for oneself and achieving financial autonomy. Furthermore, Arnett claims that young people are undecided about their own status and, instead, willingly embrace the idea that while in some ways they are adults in others they are not (Arnett, 2000; 2004). These findings are supported by a Swedish study (Westberg, 2004), which shows that actors aged between 19-25 years old are more likely to choose individual progress over transitional markers as indicators of their stage in the developmental process. This was attributed to the fact that these are not

\textsuperscript{18} In this thesis the term feminism should be taken to mean the demand and push for equality of opportunity and independence for women (Winkler, 2010).
permanent milestones but rather can be adjusted according to the individual’s circumstances and preferences.

When young people reached the age of maturity in the early modern period, they were expected to make a linear transition to adult patterns of employment and relationships, but now these switches are usually postponed until later in life (Arnett, 2000). It is this elongation of the move towards adult status that gave rise to the intervening period of emerging adulthood. During this phase, individuals are free to experiment with their identities and explore a reflexive idea of the life they would like to create for themselves. It is a time of relative independence from both the parental control of their earlier lives and the responsibilities that become more pervasive as they move into the adult phase of life (Arnett, 2000). This process of questioning the life world they have been raised in usually begins during adolescence, but it intensifies during the emerging adulthood stage where it can act as a strong guiding influence. It should not be interpreted as either a time of ‘being’ or ‘becoming’ but rather a combination of both, when forays into, for example, education or employment, are simultaneously important to the present act of living whilst also shaping future courses of action (ibid). This idea of becoming frames transitions as being open to constant change in terms of how an individual sees themselves (Worth, 2009).

However, like other labels such as teenager, emerging adulthood is not a universal phenomenon but, instead, is culturally specific and socially constructed according to the normative standards and needs of society. In a study of 186 non-Western cultures (Schlegel and Barry, 1991 cited in Arnett, 2000) it was found that whereas adolescence was almost universally present in these societies, emerging adulthood was only in twenty per cent of them. At present it more commonly features in industrialised countries than elsewhere. Similarly, within developed countries it is more likely to be associated with the middle rather than working classes (Arnett, 2000). This is perhaps linked to the fact that middle class children are more likely to be provided with the formal and informal support needed to extend their involvement in education than those from lower socio-economic backgrounds are (Shucksmith,
2004). However, participation in education should not be automatically interpreted as the sole catalyst for reconfiguring identities. As Arnett notes this is a period during which emerging adults, regardless of whether they are engaged with the education system, often question long held beliefs instilled during childhood. These 'truths' can be challenged and reinterpreted by actors according to their own experiences and reflections (Arnett, 2000). Finally, it should also be noted that although it can appear to be distinct from other parts of the developmental spectrum, it lacks internal homogeneity and should perhaps be interpreted more as a general quest for a broad range of experiences and meaning than one all-encompassing collective endeavour.

Much of the literature around transitions to adulthood rests on the notion of increasingly fluid definitions and paths towards this status with key markers attained in non-linear and personalised fashions. This process appears in some ways to be almost within the sole remit of the individual since it is linked to reflexive choices they make around education, employment, etc., and the timing of them. However, this is a contentious idea because it fails to take into account such factors as cultural norms and role allocations. With this in mind, the next important theme turned to is the structure-agency debate and the degree to which individuals control and shape the transition process in light of external influences.

**Section 2.3 The Structure-Agency Debate**

One crucial question that arises from the debates around transitions to adulthood is the extent to which actors are able to influence their own lives and the power that social forces have to affect them. The following sections examine three of the main theoretical frameworks that have been applied to questions around the impact of agency and structure on the lives built by actors-Beck’s concept of individualisation, Gidden’s reflexive self and Bourdieu’s theory of habitus. These are of particular relevance to the conceptual framework of this thesis in providing theoretical grounding for the examination of the interplay between the research cohort and the cultural, familial and social frameworks they have grown up in. This first section
explores Beck’s theory of individualisation, research which has taken place around this and some of the relevant critiques, which have been developed about this topic. It also looks at the work of Anthony Giddens in relation to the potential demise of traditional society and the growth of the reflexive self. Both of these ideas are significant to this thesis in the way in which young people from the farming community continue to experience at least some of the vestiges of traditional societies and position themselves as part of an overall group rather than as a single discrete unit.

Section 2.3.1 Individualisation
Individualisation is an important concept to consider in this study because of the attention it focuses on the level of input young people have in the decisions they make about their path towards adulthood and the unique narrative shape of their life (Roberts, 2009). This theory attempts to bridge the gap between structure and agency, to uncover the kinds of influences they have on each other and to show how a sense of the importance and efficacy of personal action can create outcomes for individual actors (Rudd, 1997). Within traditional society, the individual actor was a relatively insignificant unit-decisions were made at a collective level and to wander from accepted norms handed down by community elders and leaders was considered foolish and deviant (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). However, as historical patterns of behaviour and lifestyles began to be undermined by industry’s voracious demands for a flexible, mobile work force, new styles of living were needed. In order to survive in the modern era, the individual actor needed to place themselves at the centre of their world and conduct their lives based on this premise. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that ties to spatially based communities and stubborn adherence to a particular way of living create a danger of being dismissed as irrelevant or old-fashioned. This suggests that the duty to oneself and to carefully crafting one’s own life, with society as an almost extraneous backdrop, has gradually taken precedence over acting from an awareness of being located in a wider social configuration, where the individual is a minor figure in a larger framework.
The concept of individualisation is linked to the ‘Do It Yourself (DIY) biography’ whereby an individual constructs their own life based on a series of transient choices with often unknown consequences (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). The DIY conceptualisation of life paths centres not just on choices around careers, for example, but also includes links with groups and other individuals, which must be methodically contrived as part of the ongoing process of engineering an ‘acceptable’ life. This is strongly linked to the fragmentation of social institutions based on the family, distinct social classes and so on. Thus, the individualisation process can be viewed as a product of societal trends rather than lying within the power of the person (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2009). It raises questions around whether or not the subjective expectations of these actors who actively attempt to create their own identity and life path are compatible with the objective conditions in which they live. Actors are ostensibly encouraged by society in the belief that it is possible to be whoever they want to be, irrespective of their social background, their access to resources or their gender (Beck, 1992). However, there is a risk that if concepts such as equality of opportunity are accepted into the public lexicon that these then assume a sophistic quality, i.e. while they might appear to be valid in reality they are fallacious. This obscures the continued underlying actuality that actors in the emerging adulthood category, however much choice they are superficially seen to possess, are still highly defined by their social background, the access to resources this brings with it as well as normative cultural expectations.

One significant outcome of this move towards individualisation is that the choices actors make in, for instance, education or employment become crucially important because it is only in actively choosing the right option that one can hope to reach individual goals. The use of the word ‘choice’ is rather ironic in these circumstances. It implies that not only does the actor have the freedom to pursue any avenue they wish but that they can also choose not to choose. This ignores the fact that society increasingly defines the selection of personal, individualised paths from within an almost endless array of negotiable options as a universal necessity. Therefore, while individuals might appear to have been granted an increased amount of freedom by virtue of the myriad of opportunities available to them they are bound to a framework, which virtually insists that they make these choices. These decisions are
subtly compulsory since if the actor opts not to play the game at all, they invite social and personal opprobrium (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). In effect, if a decision is made not to engage in the process then they are liable to be marginalised. The dilemma around the perpetual need to choose and to be seen to actively involve oneself in the life project is succinctly captured by Bauman (1999, p.134):

> Whether we like it or not we are doomed to choose, to go on choosing and to justify our choices and to be painfully aware that choosing and being pressed to prove ourselves right is our fate.

If in present day society, the individual actor can claim, however objectively true this might be to have forged their own path in life, then the rewards attached to this position can be said to be theirs alone. Unfortunately, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) point out, this also means the risks are theirs as well, and if they do not achieve what they set out to do or, indeed, if compromises in any facet of the reflexive life project must be made then the actor is personally responsible for this failure. Furthermore, individualisation is not uniformly accessible to each actor. For example, there are rural-urban differences, which potentially influence the resources available, which govern the kind of choices open to an individual. Despite these potential constraints, this view of life as the personal responsibility of the individual often fails to take into account structural problems that might hamper prospects of reaching these goals (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

This move towards the individualisation of society has singular consequences for the youth of today. There is a sense of structured incompleteness in the transition to adulthood since the individual’s eventual destination is like a mirage-constantly swimming in and out of focus and changing location and shape. This is underpinned by the fact that habitual elements of life are increasingly obscured by a haze of questioning and retailoring of the taken for granted into something new and unfamiliar. As part of this, relationships with family and community are assimilated into the reflexive process so that they are no longer grounded in an automatic sense of obligation but rather a selective and perhaps not as proximal set of ties. In pre-
industrialised society the survival of the family depended upon the maintenance of a critical resource such as the farm. Consequently, the family was indivisible from and relied upon a coherent economic and social strategy based on mutual ties of duty to the farm. However, as society has moved towards an industrial base this conceptualisation has been replaced by a family structure whereby its continued endurance is not predicated on economic or social interdependence but a sentimental kind of attachment (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

As society has appeared to move away from a collectiveness based on families, communities and classes and towards making the individual the most crucial unit in society, civic awareness around the limitations and chances provided by membership of these aforementioned groupings has waned. Many of the advantages and disadvantages associated with, for example, class background or gender were supposedly neutralised by the introduction of equal educational opportunities, which appeared to guarantee that with sufficient hard work each actor would be able to achieve their own goals (Beck, 1992). However, evidence from rural sociology indicating that, for instance, the status of farmer is still a male preserve (Silvasti, 2003) implies that structural constraints still exert a great influence on how actors make the transition to adulthood. Furthermore, individualisation does not suggest that social background is no longer of any import since families with appropriate types of capital continue to help establish their offspring on a life path. This support should be viewed as assisting them in making their own unique transition to adulthood (Roberts, 2009).

Neither does Beck propose that structural inequalities have ended but rather that the clear causal links, for instance, between poverty and class membership have been overshadowed by the perception of individual cause and effects. This would seem to suggest a widening disparity between the objective conditions emerging adults and other categories live in, and their subjective view of the world and their ability to find their place in it (Beck, 1992). This paradox is highlighted in research carried out with young women in the Netherlands and the UK by Chisholm and Du Bois-Reymond (1993). They noted significant discrepancies between what young women
think they can achieve in their lives and the reality they are actually confronted with. Initially, many believed that they would be able to combine ‘traditional’ choices such as marrying and having children with highly skilled employment. In spite of this conviction, as time went by the challenges they faced in terms of poor childcare facilities, inflexible work practices and an unequal division of household chores meant their aspirations had to be narrowed to more practical strategies such as working part-time or finding less demanding employment (Chisholm and Du Bois-Reymond, 1993). This study illustrates the risks in equating young people’s subjective views about their ability to achieve and create a DIY biography with the objective reality of the situation they must deal with. Perhaps instead as Shucksmith (2004) argues it would be better to consider individualisation as asymmetrical and dependent on place, class and gender, for example. This replaces the universality of Beck’s conceptualisation with a more nuanced typology, which can take into account the varying circumstances of individuals.

**Section 2.3.2 Critique of Beck’s Approach to Individualisation**

While Beck’s work has had a significant influence on sociological thinking it is not without issue or debate. His individualisation thesis was the subject of some criticism in Furlong and Cartmel’s (1997) *Young People and social change: Individualization and risk in late modern society*. They argue that Beck overestimates the ability of the individual to reflexively construct their own identities. This is based on the claim that a defining characteristic of this theory is the idea that in the late modern period there has been a weakening of collective social ties and influences. Furlong and Cartmel maintain that this is something of an exaggeration and it is merely subjective beliefs around their importance, which have been distorted. They attribute this to the profusion of lifestyles and forms of attachments that have sprung up in society, which in turn give the illusion of choice. In reality, it is the lived experiences that actors negotiate in their daily and past lives that shape their life chances (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997).
The views expressed by Furlong and Cartmel are given greater credence by the fact that little empirical evidence has been presented to support the individualisation thesis. However, one possible explanation for this is that the collection of supporting data is quite challenging in light of a lack of awareness among young people of the challenges created by their gender or class membership. This makes it difficult to objectively analyse the impact of these influences on their lives (Rudd, 1997). Further to criticism of Beck’s work, Lehman (2004) in his research on school-to-work transitions in Canada and Germany collected clear evidence to support the idea that structural reproduction continues to take place on a widespread scale. He suggests that Beck believes there are weak links between social origin and post-school decisions. This does not lead to greater choices but, instead, the need to actively make decisions around social relationships and education or employment. This causes the theoretical danger of overemphasising the importance of agency at the expense of structural influences. However, these criticisms are challenged by Woodman (2009) who argues that Beck rarely mentions the concept of ‘choice biography’ but rather uses the term ‘DIY biography’ to describe how lives are constructed. There is a significant discrepancy between these terms as the former implies the criticisms are justified as it has connotations of unfettered liberties, while the latter gives rise to the idea that one must personally create a life in the space that follows from the dislocation between past and present societal models. This misinterpretation is attributed by Woodman to the desire of writers such as Evans (2007) to use Beck’s concepts as a convenient contrast to their own standpoint and as a means of categorically stating what they are not (Woodman, 2009).

Section 2.3.3 Giddens: The Reflexive Self and the demise of Traditional Society
This section explores Giddens’ idea of reflexive biographies as bringing another dimension to the structure-agency framework. It also touches on the debate around the demise of traditional society in light of the pressure emanating from its late

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19 Evans (2007) in research carried out in the UK and Germany developed the concept of ‘bounded agency’, as a middle ground between structure and agency. It emphasises the socially situated position of the individual and how their actions are under the influence of but not completely determined by externalities such as social structures. This also includes internal motivations and frameworks that can motivate decisions and choices.
modern counterpart. This is important because farming culture could be perceived as still connected into the former as shown, for instance, in its emphasis on retaining particular patterns of succession.

Giddens argues that in traditional societies it was the life cycle and the continuity of generations, which was of paramount importance. It was the collective responsibility of each generation to act as an agent of renewal for a way of life. It is only as modern society evolved that this intergenerational transfer of knowledge and duties began to be submerged by the need to produce individual biographies. In addition, kinship ties were the primary mechanism by which an actor conducted their lives—it was through this that their role in the family and the community was decided and the parameters of their possible experiences and expectations in life were delineated (Giddens, 1991). In traditional society there was a heavy dependence on the transmission of knowledge and practices from one generation to the next. Tradition was not just about the present but also about preserving this for what was to come. Therefore, many of the rituals and practices connected to maintaining the continuity between the past and the present were equally concerned with safeguarding these same social structures into the future. This does not preclude changes in how traditional knowledge or practices were diffused or clothed; instead what was sought was the preservation of the notion of perpetuity (Giddens, 1994). Thus, there was a temporal continuum threading its way through society incorporating the past, present and future through, for example, the use of symbols and the meanings derived from these (Giddens, 1990). This was linked to the construction of norms, which stress an almost moral imperative to do what ‘should’ be done. A kind of ontological security is represented here as actors are somewhat cosseted from the uncertainties and risks associated with the creation of life paths and the possibility of existential crises is also guarded against.

In the post-traditional, individualised society, Giddens claims that intergenerational transfers of practices and meanings have lost much of their relevance and authority.

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20 Giddens regards modern society to be a form of society originating in Europe around the seventeenth century, which eventually spread around the world (Giddens, 1990).
Now the ontological self, previously securely anchored in the certainty of family and social networks, has shifted to a reflexive self. This reflexive self relies on emotional autonomy, which reconstructs a past that, despite efforts to the contrary, cannot be erased from our consciousness and which comes to be used in the present. The actor is constantly faced with the challenge of reacting to situations whose ultimate resolution lies outside of their control. Regardless of their attempts to limit their exposure to the anxieties and danger inherent in modern society these individuals are exposed to ever greater levels of risk. Irrespective of the presence of so many imponderables and unknowns, the reflexive actor must continually negotiate the risk society they live in and dwell in a world where the consequences of particular decisions must be carefully parsed and contemplated (Giddens 1991; 1994). This requires an active engagement with identity and a constant need for actors to develop new skills and ways of thinking in order to protect themselves from the machinations of the society they live in. At the heart of this reflexive identity lies the process of breaking attachments to place and time—a process referred to as disembedding and replacing it with one that must be autonomously created and patched together from a variety of ideas and influences, i.e. re-embedding. As a result of this practice, nothing about an individual’s identity can be taken for granted or assumed but, instead, it must be actively engaged with and deliberated upon (Giddens, 1991). Giddens (1991, p. 28) argues that this has serious consequences for social actors:

Living in ‘risk society’ means living with a calculative attitude to the open possibilities of action, positive or negative, with which, as individuals and globally, we are confronted in a continuous way in our contemporary social existence.

Due to the multitude of possibilities available in post-traditional societies, actors have no option but to constantly make considered judgements about their everyday lives. Furthermore, Giddens contends that habitual practices are not rooted in the past since the use of tradition as causal explanations for why something should be done in a particular way no longer holds great sway. Instead, they must be supported by arguments based on knowledge coming from other sources such as science (Giddens, 1990; Elliott and Lemert, 2009b). In reflexive modernisation the key driving force is the widening disjuncture between structure and agency. Actors are
freed from collectively based institutions such as the family or class and consequently organise their own life stories. However, although this might be possible on an abstract theoretical level, this is not feasible for the majority of young people who are constrained by the inequitable distribution of resources and by their social disenfranchisement (Lash, 1994). Giddens also warns of the limitations possibly placed on choices by virtue of previous personal experiences and through decisions made at a macro-level far beyond the individual realm, which influence access to resources and capital (Giddens, 1994).

One major criticism that could be levelled at this theory is that it largely ignores how individuals continue to act on the basis of, for instance, old habits, parental admonitions, memories and habitus, a concept explored in the next section. Furthermore, it appears to be quite culturally and class specific and fails to take into account groups where the kind of late modern consciousness needed to underpin these reflexive projects is not encouraged, thereby reducing the likelihood of this process becoming a feature of daily life. In any case, when one moves away from focusing on the agent and their interaction with social structures towards including culture there is a concurrent shift away from a preoccupation with whether individuals are limited or freed. Culture is still bound up with the continuation of traditions, ritualistic behaviour, etc., regardless of the supposed move towards a post-traditional form of social living. This goes against the idea that late modern actors make decisions based on rational thought rather than falling back in a non-reflexive way on what is customary or expected (Městrovíc, 1998). It also overlooks the fact that traditions can be continued not out of an unreflexive force of habit but rather because they remain the appropriate reaction to the conditions the group are faced with at the present time (Cohen, 1982), instead of being almost begrudgingly carried forward, if at all, as Giddens would seem to intimate.

Section 2.4 Bourdieu’s Theoretical Contribution
Bourdieu’s theory of habitus contrasts with Beck’s and Gidden’s framing of structure and agency as it suggests that the experiences of individuals can play a
major role in how they build their life. He would appear to advocate a compromise between the two whereby outside structures influence the individual but are mediated by their reactions and habitus. This would seem to counteract Beck’s and Giddens’ arguments that it is the agent who exerts more control than the structures they are bounded within.

Section 2.4.1 Bourdieu’s Theory of Habitus
The theory of interlocking habitus, fields and capital is an important grounding concept within this research since it is a means of exploring and framing the relationship between an individual and their childhood experiences in a farming family. Particularly, it gives space for belonging, whether it is to the homeplace, the family or the community, to be considered as an ongoing influence on the lives of individuals as they build their lives away from the farm. The theory of habitus is discussed as well as two of its principle components, i.e. the concepts of fields and capital. It also briefly explores some of the main critiques of this theory.

Bourdieu’s theory of habitus is designed to show that individual actors have the capacity to direct their own lives in tandem with the institutions and structures they encounter. He argues that it is through the everyday negotiated interface with competing interests that actors display the agentic ability to shape their own lives (Bourdieu, 1977). That is not to say Bourdieu discounts other influences or that he views individuals as operating without reference to their experiences or other actors, for to do so would be to completely ignore the complex storied weave of each individual’s life. To a certain extent this theory counteracts Bauman’s (1995) stark vision of episodic lives unmoored from both the past and the future, as discussed in Section 2.5. The concept of habitus was designed as a means of bridging the divide between social structure and agency, or in other words, the gap between subjectivity and objectivity. It suggests that contrary to Bauman’s position, individuals always act within a frame of reference entrenched in the past. Therefore, how an individual responds to the actions of others is not born out of that particular moment but rather
is imbued with previous experiential connections between those individuals (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Although habitus acts at a level below active consciousness it is not a natural or biological construct. It is composed of cultural values and rules that are durable and applicable across a range of fields. While these allow the actor to respond to a given situation from within an array of potential strategies, they are still contained within a defined spectrum that is governed by cultural expectations and attitudes, which govern possible responses (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Habitus here is regarded as operating at the stratum of practice—at the boundary where an individual’s cultural framework coincides with a particular problem or choice to be made. This has the effect of combining agency, through the active decision that is made, and structure, by virtue of the cultural framework that has been internalised previously. The objects of these practices are socially constructed through a dialectic of ‘structured and structuring dispositions’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 p. 121) rather than imposed by an external force. Bourdieu’s habitus is founded on the idea that the human mind operates within set limits that are ‘socially bounded, socially structured’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 126). These are underpinned by an individual’s upbringing and how they are shaped during this period of time. Bottomley (1992, cited in Marshall and Foster, 2002) claims that habitus represents a sense of history, which in turn reflects an individual’s sense of place attachment in their mirroring of language and a manner of acting and being in the world.

Section 2.4.2 Fields
A crucial component of this theory is the concept of fields, which are the socio-historical relationships that exist between different positions based on access to power. It is in these fields that power is wielded over the distribution of various goods and resources. These in turn provoke and sculpt rejoinders in the form of habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Thus, both the context and content of responses to a given situation are grounded in prior experiences and social interactions that condition actors to expect a particular outcome. Bourdieu suggests
that similar to habitus, fields operate at an unconscious and yet constructed level. It is comparable to a game where all the participants compete for particular outcomes, within a set of rules that are unspoken but understood and, yet, which might seem incomprehensible to those who are not involved. Unlike a game however, when actors engage with an environment compatible with their habitus they do not realise they are part of a carefully constructed field but rather perceive this as a naturally occurring, external phenomenon they encounter (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Fields are a contested idea with different parties absorbed in preserving or reshaping them depending on their position and their aspirations, and how a particular type of capital is apportioned. Hence, habitus and fields combine in a kind of circularity, whereby participation in fields shapes habitus, which then go on to reproduce and shape the field (ibid). Two caveats can be attached to this argument around fields and habitus. Firstly, this is not a static set of predispositions; they are continually shaped and influenced by, for example, the values and predicted outcomes actors meet in each field and situation they operate in. Secondly, the relationship, which exists between habitus and field does not completely determine the reaction of the individual, but merely demonstrates that the path taken cannot be understood without reference to them. Furthermore, possible choices are limited to those, which are founded on an internally rational sense of order (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Section 2.4.3 Capital
Capital is a vital underpinning element of the relationship between fields and habitus. It is through acquiring forms of capital such as financial or cultural that an individual’s position within the social system is largely determined. This is because access to capital delimits the boundaries shaping our habitus, thus demarcating potential life paths. Capital is not based solely on material assets but also symbolic forms such as authority positions and status within a community or group. It is not a rigidly defining resource but, instead, acts as a determinant to a greater or lesser extent depending on the context or field it operates in (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This results in a hierarchy of legitimacies with certain cultural expressions and types of employment, for instance, deemed socially acceptable and worthy of respect and admiration. Others are frowned upon or dismissed as relics of a bygone
era or of undesirable modes of living. This has possibly occurred with regard to the farming community as its way of life comes under greater pressure from outside forces. As a result, the relative importance of forms of capital such as ‘symbolic’ hinges upon notions of ‘taste’, which although they are rarely perceived as socially constructed, in reality depend upon the ability of particular groups or classes to have society’s goals and needs fall into line with their own. These tastes then develop into the embodiment of what it is to be socially acceptable, whilst at the same time due to constraints imposed by habitus, they become almost impossible to realistically attain for those who do not share this legitimising capital (Bourdieu, 1984). This means that agents adjust their expectations of their possible outcomes through the practical limitations they encounter and the social world they belong to, which gives rise to particular suppositions. This helps to reproduce existing societal stratifications and structures that shape the lives of young people, however much it is claimed that the social ties binding actors have been diluted. Within this conceptualisation of taste individuals foresee the ‘social meaning and value of the chosen practice or thing’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 467), which directs them towards a sense of their place in an overarching social scheme.

Section 2.4.4 Critique of Bourdieu
One potential criticism Bourdieu’s work could be open to is that instead of building a middle ground between agency and structure his work is overly deterministic and focused on the power of habitus to influence actors’ lives. Crucially, he appears to neglect the generative role of agency that produces unintended consequences, which can break the circular linkages between the past and the present and go on to create new fields and change habituses. While Bourdieu acknowledges that habitus is not of a closed design, at the same time, he argues that the original experiences, which help to shape it exert a profound influence on later ones so that substantive change is unlikely to occur (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2002). Crossley (2001) contends that Bourdieu ignores the countless rationally calculated choices individuals continually make. The act of choosing should not be relegated as Bourdieu would seem to intimate to an exceptional occurrence but rather should be viewed as a regular event that, in fact, is rooted in one’s habitus. Bourdieu’s riposte to this criticism is that it
does produce the possibility of action and that especially in times of great social upheaval or change when there are clear divisions between, for example, social background and employment ‘split habituses’ arise. These occur where there is conflict between a person’s experiences and the new set of circumstances they are confronted with and which can change underlying beliefs and expectations (Bourdieu, 2004 cited in Woodman, n.d.).

Section 2.5 Identity
The last section in this chapter is focused on the notion of identity as it is conceptualised by Zygmunt Bauman who is a leading contributor to the theoretical debate around the shift away from traditional societal frameworks.

Section 2.5.1 Bauman and Modern Identity
For young people the question of identity and how it develops represents a significant element of the move towards adulthood. The available literature on identity is vast and outside the scope of this research but it is of some concern to this thesis and should be examined briefly particularly with reference to Bauman’s contribution. This concept is important as it is helps to ground the findings around the social dimension of belonging in how young people consider the impact of the wider communities they have grown up in.

As society evolved from a traditional schema to its modern counterpart one challenge actors encountered was how to construct and maintain a stable identity. In traditional societies identities were formed within strict parameters based on ritualistic and practical knowledge handed down from previous generations. During this pre-modern phase there was an emphasis on social continuity and meaningful inter-generational relationships. Identity formation was not usually a source of anxiety as young people were brought up in a particular ontological framework, which they rarely moved away from even after they reached adulthood. Bauman (1995) believes that as society progressed from its agrarian origins towards
industrialisation and the corresponding disembeddedness of individuals from their families and communities, identity became a matter for personal reflection and a site of action.

Bauman (1995) claims that identity formation becomes significant when actors are unsure of their place in the world and how others will react to any attempts to reposition themselves in a particular social milieu. As society moves further away from the durability of traditional structures it shifts towards the late modern preoccupation with ensuring that identities are ‘liquid’, flexible and malleable enough to be rearranged repeatedly until the actor is satisfied with the result. Bauman (1995) supports his assertion by stating that: ‘Identity is an oblique assertion of the inadequacy or incompleteness of “what is”’ (p.82). This leads to an unfortunate irony; as identity moves away from being a solid and definable noun towards an active verb, a final end result becomes an ever more unattainable aspiration (Bauman, 1995). This is because there is no satisfactory terminus, which allows an individual to feel they have finally reached their chosen destination. Using this logic, identities have become little more than fragmentary holograms and are vulnerable to the whims and vagaries of the individual and the society they live in (ibid). This identity dilemma has the potential to impact greatly on young people from farming backgrounds as they grapple with changes in their community and their social position, not to mention the marginalising process many undergo during their upbringing on the farm, which can serve to detach their future pathways from it.

In the early modern period there was a relatively linear movement between adolescence and adulthood; individuals knew at an early age what their future would look like. As social structures have become more fragmented the loss of continuity and the growing ambiguity means it is no longer possible to arrive at this same certainty. Instead, one must become wary of behaving in such a way as to create long-term commitments (Bauman, 1995). This implies that both the past and the future have to be disconnected from each other with neither being allowed to influence the present situation because this would result in the grim possibility of becoming obsolete. This Bauman (1995, p. 89) argues results in:
‘(the abolishment of) time in any other form but a collection or an arbitrary sequence of present moments; to flatten the flow of time into a continuous present’.

This dilemma poses obvious problems for the farming community, which continues to require the kind of undertakings and long-term assurances that are perhaps receding in the wider societal context amid its emphasis on fragmented and multilinear transitions.

Section 2.5.2 Critique of Bauman’s Position

The idea that identity formation is the product of an active personal process must be treated with some wariness. The creation of an identity could be linked to personal narratives, i.e. the stories that help to make sense of oneself and of the world. It is based on a referential, contextual framework allowing order to be found and rooting individuals in an ambiguous world. Actors rarely see their identity as being in the state of flux that Bauman’s framework would seem to suggest but rather perceive it as a secure entity in a fluctuating context. This enables individuals to retain a deep sense of self and prevents psychic breakdown (Hekman, 1999 cited in Leyshon, 2002). This viewpoint calls into question Bauman’s notion of a proactive identity formation and, instead, shows it to be a more stable, interactive process. Secondly, it is debateable whether Bauman’s temporal disconnections can occur in anything other than a theoretical setting, since it seems unlikely that actors could reach a rational sense of emotional or sentimental detachment permitting them to disengage with the past or the future. Actors are products of their upbringing and of historical and familial events that occurred long before their birth and as such they cannot fully uncouple themselves from the context in which they live.

Furthermore, one needs to be careful about assuming that the traditional societies that formed a counterpoint to Bauman’s and Giddens’ modern structures were static in nature. Agrarian societies did not necessarily expect their identity to be exactly reproduced by the next generation. Those who managed to survive and prosper in difficult conditions were able to do so because of their ability to adapt to the
circumstances they were faced with and could gain new descriptions and statuses, of migrant, priest or teacher. Instead of using the term traditional to describe societies and social structures they are founded on, it would perhaps be more judicious to employ the term ‘customary’. Tradition has an inflexible quality that seems to denote fixed practices and preclude changes. Although custom dominates and limits the potential range of actions available to an actor, and permeates both Bourdieu’s fields and habitus, nevertheless, it allows scope for changes to systems in response to new situations. Unlike tradition this must be open to variation because it is, in fact, born out of innovation itself (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). While the problems with the use of the word tradition are recognised and understood because it was a phrase used by participants in their interviews, this term rather than custom is employed throughout this thesis.

2.6 Conclusion
In the past number of decades there has been a dramatic change in how and when adulthood is considered to have been reached in Western society. Where once there was a relatively smooth path from child to young person to adult, now it is clouded, and these descriptive terms have lost much of their practical meaning. The strong continuities between generations have been replaced by an emphasis on what is current and modern. The irony is that this anxiety with being of the moment, barely disguises the fact that it is the future that actors are really concerned with. If one does not make the right choices now then there is a risk of being cast aside and doomed to oblivion. It is this conundrum around personally shaping a life, which surfaces more strongly in society than ever before and appears to serve as the driving force behind many of the decisions taken by young people today. The lives and experiences of this research cohort are played out against this societal backdrop and these concepts of change and continuity, choice, etc., which the findings are partially grounded by. Their membership of the farming community, relies on the preservation of certain cultural norms and, yet, also requires its young people to engage with wider social influences and forces. Therefore, the parameters outlined here are of crucial importance to the interpretation of the data in this thesis.
However, the decisions which must be made do not take place in a vacuum but, instead, are firmly embedded in a wide variety of factors that can influence how, when and if they are conceived. As a reaction to this, the debate around structure and agency has become one of the major sociological themes in recent decades. The second part of this chapter focused on some of the theoretical approaches that informed this debate. Beck and Giddens speak of a shift towards individualised, reflexive life biographies for emerging adults. Their discontinuity between generations could perhaps be interpreted as operating at a superficial level of, for instance, types of careers available in the late industrial era and the use of technology that magnifies the apparent disconnect between these age groups. Bourdieu can by contrast be seen to argue for deeper seated continuums operating at an unconscious level, which are incessantly reproduced. This implies that even in an age within the Irish context with supposedly equal access to education and political participation to name but two categories, factors such as social class and gender still largely dictate the direction of actors’ lives. When these arguments are taken in conjunction, it seems that perhaps a middle ground should be occupied that balances structure and agency and credits young people with the ability to shape their own lives within the boundaries imposed upon them by family and society. One must bear in mind as well the impact of changes in social structure from traditional to late modern and how identity becomes more liquid in this period. However, this is not a definite and all embracing idea and it remains to be seen whether in fact the adjustments that have been forecast are borne out in the findings of this research. This structure-agency debate underscores the lives of the young people involved in this study as the external forces they are influenced by such as their parents and the communities they have grown up in contend with their own personal preferences. The resultant sense of belonging and the kinds of engagements and conflicts, which this is predicated on helps to shape the path towards adulthood, which they follow. This concept of belonging is developed in more detail in the next chapter as is the material grounding many of the subthemes in the findings’ chapters.
Chapter Three Rural Literature

Section 3.1 Introduction
Life in the farming community has always been mediated by a precarious and constant battle against inclement weather, poor harvests and disease any one of which could on its own or in combination cause instant ruin. Perhaps as a means of counteracting this sense of individual vulnerability, a profound respect and awareness of both the past and the future was traditionally incorporated into its temporal logic. Underpinning this was a strongly patriarchal, gendered division of social and labour roles that relied on the production of a suitable male heir to manage the farm. This protected the family’s future by ensuring the connection with the farm continued and simultaneously protected their past by maintaining the tie between their lineage and the holding. In order to guarantee the continuation of this pattern of succession this structure relied heavily on other family members such as women and children performing certain roles as well. However, as society has begun to modernise and farming has become more economically and culturally marginalised, this social system has started to come under serious pressure. This is reflected in the declining numbers of both male and female offspring who are willing to enter into this occupation and the challenges faced in trying to adapt to new conditions.

Much of the popular perception around farming childhoods is based on the notion of an idyllic, carefree existence that serves as a counterpoint to life in urban areas. However, this is contradicted by an education system that encourages young people to equate success with spatial mobility, flexibility and moving away from rural areas. Within this framework, the disconnect young people from rural backgrounds face between their world and what is portrayed as desirable in both the popular and academic mindset, of an individualised migratory youth, is often overlooked (Looker and Naylor, 2009). In reality how young people feel about their life to date is crucial to their future life paths. The push-pull factors that emerge around gender, differentiated attachments, etc. will have a major bearing on whether or not actors choose to stay in their community or migrate elsewhere (Glendinning et al., 2003). It is this dilemma that the cohort must deal with as they move towards adulthood.
especially because of their intense engagement with the education process.

As is argued throughout this thesis the concept of belonging is crucial to understanding and interpreting the experiences of this research cohort. This is a complex idea involving not just the actions of the individual but also the structures imposed by the environment in which they live. The notion of belonging can be unpacked and separated into four distinct dimensions, ‘functional attachments’-centring on labour input into the farm; ‘informal attachments’-emotional and proprietorial relationships with the farm; ‘formal belonging’-specifically revolving around the inculcation of attitudes towards succession and lastly, the idea of ‘social belonging’-connections to the wider community. These ground the relationship a young person develops with the farm they grew up on and the communities this is located within. The concept of place attachment has particular resonance for the nature and quality of participants’ links to both the homeplace and the local area they were brought up in as it can be used to understand how deeply an individual feels they continue to belong to these frameworks and, for example, whether they wish to return to live there in the future. A significant canon of literature has been produced, which specifically relates to the functional and formal dimensions as well as broader material on, for instance, rural migration and differentiated social attachments that can be related to farm youth. However, little work appears to have been carried out that is directly applicable to the notion of informal attachments as being anything other than a secondary concern within a larger piece of work. The emotional connections or the proprietorial attitude actors feel towards the homeplace appears to have been neglected except where it specifically relates to succession strategies in the family.

The chapter begins by discussing the concept of belonging and some of the factors linked to this such as choice, place attachment and memory. These play a significant role in how belonging is created and imagined by the individual. Then, it looks at the rural idyll framework as it is construed in academic literature. This is important because it often acts as a comparative concept against which the lives of rural youth are constructed against. The rest of the chapter focuses on three of the four
dimensions of belonging that serve to underpin the findings of this thesis, i.e. functional, formal and social and where possible links to informal attachments are noted. The functional section examines the relationships, which are generated in relation to the working life of the farm and the role of gender in this. The formal segment largely concentrates on the concept of succession and how, for example, the norms grounding this dynamic. Finally, the social belonging section particularly explores the influence of migration and education on young people’s connections and attitudes towards their background.

Section 3.2 ‘Belonging’

Section 3.2.1 Belonging in the Literature
The concept of belonging has received scattered attention in the sociological canon with much of the writing on the subject appearing to be based on the migrant experience rather than attempting to understand individuals’ lives in the context of their birth community. With regard to young people the impact of belonging on resilience levels for members of disadvantaged urban communities is another academic priority. Most pertinently for this research different forms and dimensions of belonging are rarely unpacked and examined but, instead, it is presented as an undifferentiated whole to be used as a vehicle for looking at other concepts without demanding exploration itself. The exception to this is gender, which is used, for example, as a means of investigating contrasting senses of belonging in rural communities by Dahlström (1996). Furthermore, in rural sociology remaining on the farm appears to be considered the principal qualification of belonging with little or no attention paid to those who grew up in this environment but who have subsequently moved away. Much of what has been written on this subject comes from the field of cultural geography and looks to document the experiences of rural youth in terms of their attachment to place. It should be noted

21 For example, Marshall and Foster, 2002; Savage et al., 2005; Ní Laoire, 2007; Halfacree and Rivera, 2012; Rishbet and Powell, 2013.
22 For instance, Corcoran, 2012; Pinkerton and Dolan, 2007.
that this does not usually focus on farming youth as a distinctive cohort. This research is often connected to their attachments to outside sites such as popular meeting spots rather than their own home as a site of importance for them. However, although there are significant gaps in the literature especially as it relates to this research cohort and the thesis findings, what has been developed about the idea of belonging is focused on in the first section of this chapter.

Belonging is rarely broken down into individual dimensions and, instead, seems to be almost taken for granted in the research with a focus on it as a continuum related to one single overarching idea rather than being made up of different components. On one end is a feeling of security in one’s membership of a group and as its obverse a sense of being distanced with various shades in between. In the literature belonging is seen as principally centred on an awareness of being part of something—either a collective such as a community or a place (Felski, 1999, cited in Trell et al., 2012). It is also about the sensation of being at home and familiar with somewhere and is strongly connected to relationships with the family and the community (Inglis, 2009). This is in turn linked into the actions and reactions of others since it is not enough to simply declare oneself a member of a group; one must also be considered to be such by others (Rubenstein and Parmalee, 1992). Thus, belonging is neither the individual’s sole responsibility nor at their discretion but rather is enacted within a dialectic process involving other actors in how the idea is shaped and transmogrified over time (Kraus, 2006). If this is the case then how others perceive an individual and, therefore, label them as being either part of something or not is of great importance to the idea of belonging. Belonging should be viewed not as a matter only for the individual concerned but as a process resting in part on the actions and attitudes of others in how it can be built, agreed to, disregarded, ascribed to and so on. It is also as Cohen (1982 p.6) argues generated by almost any means available such as:

the use of language, the shared knowledge of genealogy or ecology, joking, the solidarity of sect, the aesthetics of subsistence skills.

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23 See Jones and Jamieson, 2007; Shucksmith, 2004; Bjarnson and Thorlindsson, 2006; Trell et al., 2012.
Section 3.2.2 ‘Elective Belonging’
As part of the late modern social structure, belonging has begun to be identified within sociological literature as a matter of the individual having the capacity to choose where is most appropriate for them to claim they identify with. Being aligned with a specific place can become an important marker for how an individual seeks to present themselves to the world because it carries the potential to associate oneself with the attributes imputed to it (Cuba and Hummon, 1993). So, for instance, in declaring oneself an urbanite, one can possibly link into notions of modernity and sophistication. A note of caution needs to be sounded about overemphasising the importance of any one place in the life of individuals since identity is created across different levels and sites involving different actors rather than a single location (Marcus, 1992). There is a dialectic between an individual and their identification with a place as cultural and social aspects of the latter influence the actor and the experiences and characteristics of the person in turn impact on it (ibid). However, due to the eroding of the link between personal networks and spatially based communities, signifying oneself as being of a particular community is increasingly based on preferences and life choices (Beck, 1992). This would seem to suggest that deep ties or obligatory membership of a community caused by enculturation during one’s upbringing are weakened in light of actors having the option to choose where one belongs to rather than it being a given part of one’s identity.

Within an increasingly globalised world, individuals do not construct their sense of belonging vis-à-vis a spatially based community but, instead, as part of a reflexive process, which is closely linked to their own particular life path (Savage et al., 2005; Kraus, 2006). This can largely be attributed to the growing disconnect between place, time and space so that belonging as a concept is increasingly imagined outside of these boundaries. It has been replaced with a form perceived as grounded in a circular interplay between being mobile and being at home. In the literature an exception is made when belonging is connected to land since living on a farm implies involvement in a life mode where different aspects are entwined such as aesthetic and capital producing resources. In addition, the closely integrated links between the world of agriculture, the farm and free time influence the creation of this belonging (Urry, 2000). In this conceptual model the idea of a static sense of
belonging where one is part of a community or has a fixed place attachment without much choice has been apparently replaced by the concept of reflexive belonging. As part of this globalising trend, attachments to types of communities revolving around the local are perceived to be faced with the threat of being lost or greatly diluted (Beck, 1992).

It has also been contended that in choosing to claim belonging to a place or community a statement is made about the kind of image one wants to portray or the values and lifestyle aspired to and appropriated as part of this process. Savage et al. (2005) argue for the idea of ‘elective belonging’ whereby individuals have a fluid relationship with what they define as home, grounded within their own life story. In this way their choice of residence is a reflection of their own self-idealisation, with their sense of place acting as a kind of marker for their symbolic identity within the world. In this framework the idea of community membership moves away from a fixed, historically situated, concept to one which is based on dynamic choices. The idea of attaching to a particular place based on birth or upbringing is no longer of the same importance as in earlier times (ibid). It is this ‘elective belonging’ that Savage et al. (2005) believe is the central axis of current forms of place attachment. Within this conceptualisation of belonging, the idea of fixed local belonging is reinterpreted in favour of individuals choosing new personalised relationships with communities. Nevertheless, these are likely to continue to resonate with some part of their biographical background. However, this does shift the balance towards the global since according to Jørgensen (2010) the individual usually has little interest in becoming part of a fixed community in their self-chosen location. Instead, one of this place’s main attractions is its ability to permit easy connections with other areas while living there (Jørgensen, 2010). As well as this, since mobility is of such crucial importance to late modern society, attachments to a particular place are not overly accommodated. This is because in order to fit into this socially approved form of living, anchorages must be transient rather than permanent (Bauman, 1992). In saying this while this idea might be applicable to certain sections of society, it presupposes access to, for instance, financial resources, employment and other forms of capital such as social, which appear to be necessary preconditions for ‘elective belonging’ to emerge. This calls into question whether this is relevant to all but an
elite group with suitable resources to engage with society in such a manner. Furthermore, the emphasis on mobility among current theorists could be part of what Felski (1999, p.23) argues is an anti-home ideology running through the framework of modernity:

It [the vocabulary of modernity] celebrates mobility, movement, exile, boundary crossing. It speaks enthusiastically about movement out into the world, but is silent about the return home. [...] The longing for home, the desire to attach oneself to a familiar space is seen by most theorists of modernity as a regressive desire.

Section 3.2.3 Belonging as ‘Othering’
An important component of belonging is the way in which it is used as a signifier of inclusion and exclusion. Within Irish culture place is used to classify individuals into different categories and to identify common bonds or differences with a stranger (Inglis, 2009). In fact, Inglis (2009) contends that in the Irish context being definitively linked to a community can become a method of labelling and identifying someone as much as their surname can. Thus, by marking oneself out as attached to and from a particular place, actors essentially make a statement about themselves and the kind of attributes they can be presumed by others to have. Through identifying oneself as belonging to a particular culture, community or family an individual is distinguished as being somehow different to others. It is a form of ‘othering’ from groups seen as representing an alien idea to what they are part of. In doing so stereotypes are produced that permit categorisations to be made of another community against which the differences and similarities with one’s own group are accordingly exaggerated or minimised (Jenkins, 2008). While these commonalities, which are constructed in order to maintain group affiliations might be imagined they have a real impact in how they can allow for or dismiss the possibility of someone being recognised as belonging to a group (Cohen, 1982). This community membership is based on symbolic ideas that act as a vehicle for demonstrating attachments to a group so that even where phenomena generate disparate meanings for individuals they still provide a shared veneer of identity all can assume (ibid).
Creating identities depends on relatively discrete notions of inclusion and exclusion whereby conceptions of who one is, is defined by what one is not. When an identity is positioned as originating from a particular community, such as a local spatial one or its farming counterpart then the dissimilarities are reduced in comparison to possible distinctions made with the external ‘other’ (Paulgaard, 2002). This is connected to the fact that it is at the perimeters of where two cultures meet, for instance, when the urban and the rural are compared or interface with each other that actors become more cogent of their own culture. Through the construction of these boundaries and how these are delimited individuals become aware of ways they can include and exclude others from membership of a group (Cohen, 1982).

Section 3.3 Place Attachment
Although place attachment was mentioned in the previous section in relation to elective belonging it is important to discuss this idea on its own since it forms one of the core precepts of this thesis. Firstly, place attachments for farming youths are examined and, then, the impact of education on how these are constructed is outlined.

Section 3.3.1 The Concept of Place Attachment
Place attachment is of crucial importance within this study both in terms of the specific site of the participants’ home on the farm, which was the location for much of their childhood experiences as well as the wider community they grew up in. Place itself can be defined as ‘a discrete if ‘elastic’ area in which settings for the constitution of social relations are located and with which people can identify’ (Agnew, 1993, p.263). In using this definition the concept of place can be linked to both the individual’s sense of self as well as their membership of a group (Corcoran, 2002). A number of elements are identified in the literature as important to the development of place attachments. Firstly, the environments both constructed and natural are instrumental since these come to be etched into how individuals perceive a place (Riley, 2002 cited in Corcoran, 2002). Secondly, the existence of social networks at a local level is vital in terms of, for example, the relationships which are
developed there (Simonsen, 1997 cited in Corcoran, 2002). Thirdly, the culture of a place helps to create attachments as an actor’s rootedness is partially predicated on being within a location where familiar ideas are held up as norms to be adhered to. As a result an individual’s reaction to a place and their consequent attachment to it are dependent in some ways on the memories triggered by being there (Childress, 1996 cited in Corcoran, 2002).

Section 3.3.2 Place Attachment for Farming Youth
The meaning connected to place is frequently seen as a neutral concept—a blank canvas upon which all actors can equally impose themselves. In reality, social status and perceptions around one’s attachment to a place has a large bearing on the extent to which an individual identifies with a location. Place and spatial identities cannot be construed in an intersubjective way but rather rely on a multifaceted network of relationships between the individual, their family and public or private spaces (Dahlström, 1996). This concomitant social standing is in turn heavily dependent on the level of power the individual has and their role in a given system. In the case of daughters’ positions it appears their place attachment is constructed in an impermanent way and rests on an awareness that they will probably have to migrate in order to complete their transition to adulthood. As part of the dynamic of young people’s upbringing in the farming community, daughters are often differentially socialised to male siblings who are raised with the possibility of inheriting the land (Bjørkhaug and Wiborg, 2010). Since much of the dominant social strategy depends upon patrilineal inheritance girls can be regarded as having a more fragile spatial identity than their male counterparts. The latter are more likely to be encouraged to build stable local identities by their parents. This can play a major role in girls’ decision to leave the community and build a life elsewhere.

The meaning individuals attach to where they grow up is an important part of how identities are formed, irrespective of whether their life path seems to take them far away from the lifestyle they were part of growing up. This birth culture can be used in an oppositional sense to create a biography that is urban based or professionally
driven (Wiborg, 2004). Farmers’ daughters are often inspired to do this by their mothers who encourage them not to follow in their footsteps but rather to gain employment off the farm in offices or professions. Given that this would more than likely require moving to urban areas this can also, regardless of whether this is intentional or not, be interpreted as pushing them away from their home community (Gidarakou, 1999). The formation of identities is an incessant process of engagement between the individual and society and cannot be seen as something that is entirely based on personal subjectivity or standards. As societal ideals and aspirations shift, so are certain elements of place based identities accordingly validated or repudiated. Thus, for example, the symbolic value of farming can ebb or flow depending on the social status that has been afforded it, which in turn can shape its members’ attachments.

Place attachment should be seen as a social construction so that while it may be based on a fixed point in the physical landscape, specifically in the case of this research the farm and associated communities, it is assigned meaning by the individuals who inhabit it (Corcoran, 2002; Wiborg, 2004; Mahon, 2007; Haukanes, 2013). These are not tangible divisions since boundaries are themselves imagined impositions so that the line between having an affiliation to one location and not another is dynamically created. This form of place attachment is in opposition to late modern ideas focused solely on the individual and their capacity to craft their own chosen path towards adulthood. However, in terms of schooling and lifestyle opportunities places such as the rural still continue to act as a significant medium for how these are felt and embodied in the lives of actors (Wiborg, 2004). It should be pointed out too, that simply because an individual has moved away from a particular place that meaning does not cease to be attached to it. Instead, in this action a new interpretation can be created about it or indeed an existing one strengthened.

Place attachment is not a uniform concept but, instead, is strongly tied to an individual’s own social position within a location. This social status is in turn infused with differential access to power grounded in gender, age, etc. (Dahlström, 1996). The implication is that this is not personally created but rather is underscored
by interactions between the individual and wider social networks and norms as well as cultural and economic processes that impact on how differentiated meaning of place and connections are created (ibid). If localised attachments to place are viewed through this organic lens then it moves away from a static idea in opposition to modern, globalised lifestyles. Instead, it becomes a more fluid, less bounded idea that remains a useful way of looking at the processes helping to shape an individual’s life (Dahlström, 1996). However, this would seem to go against a core tenet of Savage et al.’s (2005) research since the need for recognition by others of the right to belong seems to have been overlooked in this work. A further rejoinder to this idea of ‘liquid’ communities replacing local attachments is how research shows that it remains a significant force even where individuals appear to follow the globalised path of mobility (Appadurai, 1996). Indeed, one means of negating the power of globalisation is that of deepening ties to the local, which is represented as something different and unique (Inglis, 2008) than what is available in the homogenous offerings of the wider society.

**Section 3.3.3 The Relationship between Education and Place Attachment**

This leads to the question of the relationship between place and education and the impact this has on how young people from, for instance, farming backgrounds view their attachments and construct their sense of belonging. Although education is not a specific concern of the research its influence in terms of the stage of life the participants are at, and its role in their transition to adulthood means it cannot be ignored. Dahlström (1996) points out that in the case of Norway the rural way of life is almost completely ignored by the education system. In this process young people are presented with an aspirational lifestyle bearing scant comparison to the life world they grow up in. Furthermore, much of what is taught lacks any practical applicability for those who wish to work in primary industries such as farming. Corbett (2000) in *Learning to Leave: the Irony of Schooling in a Coastal Community*, a study carried out in a rural community dependent on another primary industry (fishing) in Nova Scotia, Canada, contends that many teachers who work in rural schools are inclined to discourage a sense of local place attachment among their students in favour of broadening their horizons and fulfilling their potential in larger
urban settlements. Those who dropped out of school or who chose not to continue on with their education at post-secondary level were seen as failures doomed to a life of struggle in the faltering local community (Corbett, 2000). In the local rural education framework Corbett found that those who left to continue their studies elsewhere, most of whom were female and from wealthier families, were deemed to have succeeded more than those who stayed. This view is grounded in developmental theory, which argues that in order for young people to flourish they must move away from the safe world of their childhood and realise their potential through personal self-discovery elsewhere. This leads to the conclusion that those who choose to remain in their home community are viewed by the scientific community as less mature and developed than those who opt to leave (Donaldson, 1986). Although this might fray the fabric of one’s belonging this attitude towards the importance of education has practical merit since it has become essential for securing well-paid employment. By contrast those with few qualifications often have little option but to stay behind and find low-paid locally based employment (Stockdale, 2002; Shucksmith, 2004; Cleary et al., 2012).

Section 3.4 The Role of Memory
A tranche of literature exists on the notion of memory and its use in the transmission of culture but little seems to have been written about it with regard to rural sociology. However, as it emerged as a concept pertinent to the findings particularly around the development of informal attachments it is necessary to briefly mention some aspects of this subject.

Place attachments are often shaped by and through a collection of common memories and customs. Thus, the idea of place attachment as it relates to belonging can be seen as bound up in layers of meaning that are in part a merger of these two elements (Corcoran, 2002). It is also relevant to the idea that over time these connections can change as the relationship between an actor and where they grew up is imbued with new interpretations. This is because memory is a fluid concept in which understandings of recalled events are constructed and distilled within a
framework of the individual’s present needs (Jedlowski, 2001). Two different types of memory are identified within the sociological literature. The first of these is concerned with individual memories, which are internal and unique in the meaning ascribed to them by that actor. At the same time they are external in how their recollection is located within a complex relational framework (ibid). The second type is the collective form. This collective memory is essential for the passing on of a culture and its norms, traditions and artifacts from one generation to the next. These types of memories have a particular function in a group since they allow a common identity to be preserved and handed down thereby maintaining its continuity (Connerton, 1989 cited in Jedlowski, 2001).

However, while this collective memory is linked to the perseverance of a group and as such draws much of its energy from within this dynamic, it is the individual who actively sustains this through the act of remembrance (Halbwachs, 1992). There are many individuals and events that could be remembered and drawn upon in the passing on of norms, customs, etc., but this is a selective process based on their relevance to a particular set of values. This idea of collective memory is applicable to different kinds of groups (ibid), but it is at the level of the individual family, which this research is primarily concerned with. At the same time these are undoubtedly penetrated by memories from a wider social level so that recollections of events within a particular family can be expected to be filtered through a lens infused with norms of to some extent the rural but especially the farming community. This collective memory is historical in nature and has elements of continuity from the past and tinges of the present in how it is understood. If it was only the present that was considered to be important then continuity, which is its primary aim, would not be achieved. It should be noted also, that Giddens (1994) contends that tradition is closely linked to memory and in fact describes it as ‘an organizing medium’ (p.64) for it. This would seem to suggest that in any community such as the farming one-where the preservation of traditional patterns of behaviour is essential for its persistence into the next generation-the notion of memory could be of great importance.
Section 3.5 The Impact of the Rural Idyll Framework

This section examines the idea of the rural idyll and how it is portrayed in the literature. It is important to explore how this is imagined as this can influence the experiences and attitudes of young people who grow up there. However, the notion of a single reducible concept of the ‘rural’ is virtually impossible to arrive at since there are many possible interpretations of the idea depending on an individual’s point of view, status and sense of belonging. Therefore, what is focused on here is the notion of a dominating framework based on the rural idyll paradigm (Pratt, 1996). It should be noted that as regards to the context of this research cohort the literature does not appear to readily distinguish between different groups within the rural, seeming to settle instead on an all-encompassing notion and as such the specific and relatively unique experiences of farming youth are rarely touched upon.

Much of the discussion around rural living is shadowed by the concept of the countryside as an idyllic place to escape the pressures of modern life with its endless array of choices and challenges. This image of the countryside can represent an ideal that is pure, innocent and connected with older, timeless values. However, it can also be portrayed as a moribund culture lagging behind municipalities in terms of social and economic opportunities (Matthews and Taylor, 2000; Looker and Naylor, 2009). These representations raise certain issues for rural society. Firstly, it fails to take into account the heterogeneity of life there with its wide variety of individual tastes and ideas that might not fit easily into a particular stereotype. Instead, it legitimates one definitive ‘rural’ and equally one ‘urban’ that helps to reproduce social stratifications and can lead to an inequitable allocation of, for example, economic resources (Pratt, 1996). Equally, one imagines that this could cause issues for those who do not squeeze within these boundaries in terms of what is deemed to be appropriate behaviour for where they live. There is a danger with these delineations that some of the characteristics viewed as present in one place are then assumed to be absent elsewhere. These associated values are not neutral as one is often portrayed as superior to the other, which in turn shapes how social life is constructed there and the interests that a young person ‘ought’ to have in one particular place. This has consequences for how both spaces, and one can conjecture its inhabitants, are presented within the popular and academic imagination (Halfacree, 1993). As part of
this framework there are certain constructs developed in terms of supposed comportment and preferences so that the rural idyll can become a governing edifice in how childhood experiences and life there are presented (Jones, 1997). This argument is bolstered by a study carried out in rural Czech Republic, which found that how young people imagine their lives there often resonates strongly with the rural idyll construct in representing them as peaceful, quiet and so on (Haukanes, 2013).

Secondly, this framework ignores the unique challenges that those who grow up in rural areas face. As Jones (2007) points out there is often a nostalgic wistfulness about rural life amongst those who dwell, for example, in urban areas, which can hide dark realities about a childhood spent there. This upbringing supposedly represents all that modern life is not but, in fact, this image potentially dilutes the stark actuality of the isolation and loneliness many who live there feel (Jones, 2007). The prevailing view is shown in attitudes towards social difficulties, for instance, where poverty and material deprivation are often postulated as an urban concern when in fact it is more likely to be a rural problem24. It is often a silent and underestimated predicament, which is compounded by a sense of shame precluding the accessing of welfare supports or of being publicly seen to suffer. The situation is further clouded by the belief that these challenges are negated by the compensatory aspects of rural living, such as greater levels of social support (Cloke, 1997; Commins, 2004). In the Irish scenario, the high regard property ownership is held in and the perception of it as providing a sturdy safety net means that the battle for financial survival in farming families is often a secretive struggle hidden behind the status of owning land (Commins, 2004). In addition, research carried out in rural Ireland on the impact and prevalence of suicide concluded that the norm of close social ties, which were regarded as important features of life there have also begun to diminish, further increasing the potential pressure and isolation felt by its inhabitants (Cleary et al., 2012).

24 Statistics show that in 2011 the percentage of the population in rural Ireland at risk of poverty was 17.8% compared to an urban figure of 11.8% (Central Statistics Office, 2013).
This construction of what rural means has real consequences for how young people experience their life in the countryside so that, for example, a lack of financial or other resources can be weighed against the supposed beneficial aspects of life there. Research carried out in Scotland by Jones and Jamieson (1997) reveals that many young people were deeply conflicted about their lives and whether they should stay or leave their community. These decisions were often based on push-pull factors that were not so strong for urban youths who often had local access to many of the things their rural counterparts yearned for such as third level education. This played a role in actors’ deliberations over staying or leaving the area they grew up in. Another Scottish study showed that in reflecting upon the quality of life in rural areas young people factored in both positive and negative elements, such as inclusivity against surveillance (Glendinning et al., 2003). Similarly, research conducted in Norway by Rye (2006) with a group of rural youth found a plurality of attitudes towards the countryside amongst this cohort. Some valued the strong social ties there while others saw them as claustrophobic; likewise, some bemoaned the lack of amenities and others prized the tranquillity it offered. At the same time, Looker and Naylor (2009) argue that little research has, in fact, been carried out on the experiences of rural young people in terms of these factors, which can strongly influence the transition to adulthood. Research by Shucksmith (2004) demonstrates that while individualised choices can be a feature of life in rural areas they are often predicated on, for example, access to family resources, employment and educational opportunities. These asymmetrical chances, which possibly contradict the supposed benefits of rural living, can impact greatly on the kind of transitions young people make and their relationship with where they grew up.

Section 3.6 The Dimensions of Belonging
As stated previously, little attention has been paid in the literature to different dimensions of belonging. The following sections concentrate on research primarily from rural sociology that has been carried out in relation to three of the four types of attachment that formed the basis of the findings’ chapters in this study. These are the ‘functional’, ‘formal’ and ‘social’ conceptualisations. While the ‘informal’ attachment connected to emotions, temporalities, etc., is an equally important
component of this study it has rarely been focused on and, instead, is mentioned
almost in passing as a thread running through other work. As a result there was not
enough specific material related to it to form a distinct section in this chapter.
However, it does cross over the other three dimensions and where pertinent is
incorporated into the relevant areas.

Section 3.6.1 Functional Attachments
The first form explored is that of the functional attachment to the farm and
concentrates on how labour is managed and divided in this community along gender
lines. It also looks at the relationship between the family’s offspring and the farm.

Section 3.6.1.1 Cultural Scripts and the Division of Labour
The idea of ‘cultural scripts’ has been used in social psychology for a number of
years, but was not employed in rural sociology prior to Silvasti’s (2003) application
of the concept to the Finnish farm community (Vanclay and Enticott, 2011). It is a
useful notion both for describing and explaining the basic organising norms of
farming communities. The concept of the script, which is derived from Goffman’s
dramaturgical theory,25 concentrates on the idea that there are certain common
stories, lines of thought, etc., actors are socialised into operating within (Vanclay and
Enticott, 2011). A significant amount of everyday behaviours are spontaneously
enacted in the face of unexpected events where an individual must develop
immediate responses to an event. At the same time, throughout the course of a life
conditioning takes place, which frames and bounds these actions-in other words an
individual is taught what are the appropriate ways to react to an event (Goffman,
1959 cited in Vanclay and Enticott, 2011). In this way then the fundamental

25 This theory argues that roles are performed in everyday life by individuals according to scripts,
which are acted out. These are interactive in that they are connected to how others act and react.
These must fit in with appropriate cultural and moral norms bounded within a given set of actions that
can be expected to be enacted in a situation. These are not, however, a list of strict rules that must be
adhered to but rather provide a number of scripts that are drawn on when required. These
performances are part of culturally located and understood customs and rituals. This does not mean
that actors are without agency, but it is recognised that certain conventions are attached to these roles.
These help to govern behaviours even where an individual applies their own interpretation of them.
The metaphor underpinning this theory is a stage where life unfurls through a series of events that
must be performed within and reacted to (Goffman, 1961 cited in Lock and Strong, 2010).
governing principles of a society are, by and large, followed by individual members because they come to be seen as the natural way of being and acting in that group. A number of different kinds of scripts can be identified such as habitual sets of actions in a given situation and arguments that are produced in response to a stimulus like the need for an heir to the farm (ibid). These scripts are crucial to the development of identity and belonging not only for individual actors but also for groups. This is because scripts can be relied upon as a way of ensuring that one talks and acts in a manner befitting the norms of that culture. Another element of this is that scripts act as a means of delimiting the views and attitudes of individuals and of creating the set of choices available to them as they move through life (Vanclay and Enticott, 2011).

Within farming culture three particular scripts have been identified by Silvasti (2003) as a constant underpinning way of organising its way of life. These are the gendered division of labour, the perpetuation of the farm into the next generation and the preservation of the productivist model of agriculture (Silvasti, 2003). It is the first two which are of most relevance to this thesis and these are focused on here and in Section 3.6.2, which deals with succession. While these scripts were identified in the Finnish farming community, the common patterns across agriculture in Western Europe, for instance, in terms of the model of succession means they are largely applicable to the Irish situation as well. The gendering of labour is of great importance since it acts as the basis of succession with one son often being socialised into taking a farming role, while other siblings, especially sisters, are encouraged to pursue their education instead (Silvasti, 2001 cited in Silvasti, 2003). Silvasti (2003) argues that parents are vitally important to the continued reproduction of these scripts into the next generation because they shape how their offspring think about their relationship with their background and the community they grow up in. These also consciously or unconsciously signal to their children the meaning and degree of importance they should attach to the farm and its preservation. In this way the scripts that have been developed for the survival of family farming, and which continue to be important, become a way of ensuring that its members act in a culturally befitting manner. This would seem to serve a double purpose of not only protecting the values of this community but probably too the social status of the family since its members are encouraged to act in an appropriate and culturally aware fashion.
Section 3.6.1.2 The Gendered Division of Farming Labour

The gendered division of labour farming is typically portrayed as a bastion of male strength and dominance. As a result, many of the activities the recognised farmer has control over have been privileged and described as ‘real’ farming whereas other tasks typically carried out by women or children are seen as ancillary and unskilled. This cultural norm, which has long dominated the farming and rural landscape is based on a monopolising ability to carry out manual labour and to own and master the physical environment. It is through the circular relationship between the ideology of a particular farming system and the power wielded in this that social and family structures are constantly produced and reproduced (Mitchell, 2002; Wallace et al., 1994). Thus, the meaning a family’s offspring attaches to their surroundings depends upon the ideological framework they grew up in and their allocated role within it.

This has implications for both genders and practically speaking often means that where the farm is publicly and privately constituted through the male farmer, women and young people occupy a secondary position on and off the farm (Connell, 2000 cited in Ní Laoire, 2005). These powerful masculinities are maintained over a number of generations through connecting particular symbolic representations such as ‘landowner’ with high status social positions both within the domestic and work sphere of the farm. An essential feature of this is that farmers believe they are born to be farmers and that the skills they possess are inherently bred into them by virtue of and in relation to the farm (ibid). This construct of the ‘farmer’ is part of the socialisation process within families from an early age with much of this individual’s sense of who they are tied into the farm and its association with an intergenerational continuum (Price and Evans, 2009). The results of a study carried out by Dessein and Nevein (2007) in Belgium with a group of farmers shows that the importance of belonging to a farm was not restricted to their own person but, in addition, was linked to an intergenerational lineage continuing from the past to the present. This also encompassed the passing on of the farm itself and knowledge to the next generation.

Deeply connected to how work is constituted is the specific farm the family lives on. The physical landscape of any place, in this instance, the familial landholding can be interpreted as having particular philosophical implications for each actor, which
influences how they act and how they expect others to (Cosgrove, 1984 cited in Saugeres, 2002). This is in line with the idea that this is not extrinsic to the lives of the actors who inhabit it but rather is an intrinsic part of their story. It is a dwelling place connected to an enduring, temporally entrenched narrative to which each individual has a reactive relationship (Ingold, 1993). Saugeres (2002) in a study carried out in rural France on the relationship between gender and landscape indicates how the control men exert in agriculture has been legitimised by the notion that they have an inherently deep affinity with and knowledge of the land they farm. The male participants in Saugeres’ analysis were keen to emphasise the point that farmers rely on an emotional and passionate connection with the land only found in those who had been born into this way of life. This is intimately tied to the skills they alone are seen to possess since their work produces a unique capability to understand and coax out its full potential. This implies that the hierarchy of status and power is a natural phenomenon and to tamper with this is to somehow interfere with what is fundamentally ‘right’. Consequently, land attains a position of importance beyond its status as a form of financial capital—it also becomes the medium by which a male farmer can locate himself in relation to the farm and also within the local social hierarchy. Just as importantly, he is positioned within the annals and ranks of his own family in terms of both his ancestors and his descendants, conferring a certain kind of immortality on him. Therefore, a ‘good’ farmer is partially defined by the ability to preserve or improve his holding for the use and benefit of the next generation (Burton, 2004). In turn, this depends on their ability to carry out the necessary work on the farm and having the skill and knowledge to do so.

Women, on the other hand, through their social positioning as helpmates and carers who are tied to the domestic world of childrearing and housework are not considered to have a similar relationship with the surrounding physical landscape (Saugeres, 2002). The female respondents in this study typically defined the farm in relation to their husband and his activities and normally presented themselves as ‘farmers’ wives’. Even those women who ran their own farms often seemed to do so because of the lack of a suitable male rather than out of personal choice. This spatial and psychological distancing of the female from the farm is no doubt further augmented.
by the fact that in most cases it is the woman who has moved on to the farm from elsewhere. This helps to cement the female family member’s position as the quasi-outsider who cannot define herself through a connection to the land in the way that her male counterparts can. It should be noted though that while women might be distanced from a farm they move onto, according to a Dutch study, those who grow up on one do not lose their emotional connection to their original homeplace and, instead, continue to see it as their true home even after they move away (de Haan, 1994). In addition to Saugeres’ work in France, other research carried out, for example, in Norway by Brandth (1995) shows that these concepts of masculine and feminine identity are not abstract notions but have a real impact on the lives that men and women lead. This acts as an influence on the socialisation of children into specifically gendered expectations and frameworks. Brandth focuses on the use of farm equipment, most notably the tractor, to highlight the gendered nature of agricultural practices. Through dominating its usage men have continued to assume the title of ‘farmer’ to the exclusion of others. This is despite the decreasing need for manual labour in the day-to-day operation of the farm, which could potentially have called into question their right to this title. Their monopolising of agricultural machinery has allowed male farmers to control the allocation and division of tasks on the farm and to persist in presenting farming as an overwhelmingly masculine occupation (Brandth, 1995). The debate around the use of tractors draws attention to the way the dominant masculinity has changed its form whilst still retaining overall control in terms of gender. Prior to the mechanisation of agriculture, ‘real’ farming was portrayed as tough, dirty and unsuitable for and beyond the scope of women. This was in spite of the fact that women often played a significant role in the logistical organisation of the farm and regularly performed farm-based tasks. With the move towards the use of machinery, this was replaced with a more business orientated, technically competent skill set that, nevertheless, remains within the realm of male farmers’ control (ibid). Thus, men continue to be viewed as possessing the natural capacity to succeed in farming while women are relegated to an administrative role in the enterprise.

Despite the continual changes that take place in how agriculture is practiced, it can be seen from this discussion around the management of specialised knowledge about
the subject and equipment that one of the main ways power is conserved along
gendered lines is through the command of information related to work on the farm.
A Foucauldian approach to the overarching agricultural framework would argue that
farming knowledge is subjective and is a contested space that permits an individual
or group to dominate others. Its possession confers a certain kind of authority on the
holder to make decisions and control the actions of those who do not have the same
access to it. Like landscape and ideology, power and knowledge are mutually
constituted and cannot function independently of the other (Foucault, 1980 cited in
Punch et al., 2007). Thus, the field of agriculture needs to be treated less as a product
and more as a process facilitating changing responses while allowing for overall
control to be maintained (Foucault, 1982 cited in Liepins, 1998). In this way, the
division of labour whereby one gender is taught the work of the farm to a greater
extent than the other has implications for how the power generated through
possessing this knowledge is continually reproduced down through the generations
(Leckie, 1996).

Section 3.6.1.3 A Flexible Approach to the Division of Labour?
However, we need to be careful of assuming there is a black and white division
between roles in the farming family at the current time. As Bryant (1999) points out,
in order to persist there is a need for a middle ground, which recognises that it is
almost impossible to survive if farming is viewed merely as a way of life and not as
a business requiring a pragmatic approach. Yet at the same time the core normative
values of this culture demand the preservation of a somewhat non-commercial
outlook. This compromise has at its heart the maintenance of the family farm while
creating space for non-traditional gender roles such as off-farm employment
strategies particularly for women. This has led to more women moving away from
the label of ‘farmer’s wife’ towards a more visibly important role because of their
off-farm employment. Indeed, in light of harsh economic conditions this extra source
of income has become vital for the continued survival of many family farms.
Nevertheless, the on-farm relationship dynamic between the genders has remained in
place despite the substantial changes to the socio-economic climate in recent
decades. Kelly and Shortall’s (2002) work in Northern Ireland with farming women
shows that the importance of women’s income-generating strategies for the continued existence of the farm is not fully appreciated and has not led to a significant reorganisation of gendered divisions of labour in terms of, for instance, childcare or household chores.

While strong patterns do emerge around the creation and maintenance of functional attachments to the farm other caveats need to be considered against this somewhat rigid approach. Firstly, farming identities have not been statically transmitted through the generations, instead, they should be looked on as contingent and spatially located and as an attempt to respond and adapt to prevailing social conditions while holding onto overall precepts. This can be seen from the case of Norway where the definition of what constitutes a farmer and what does not has been more open to debate since 1974 when the law changed to allow the firstborn regardless of gender to legally inherit the holding. This potentially calls into question the tenets the dominant patriarchal discourse in agriculture is based on and shows that in some situations farming is no longer considered to be an automatic birthright based on gender but rather a choice to be made by the individual (Villa, 1999). This decision was undoubtedly influenced by the backdrop of increasing awareness of gender equality, for instance, and the desire to maximise the chances of successfully passing on the farm from one generation to the next. This demonstrates how specific changes are brought about in an effort to preserve the overall culture (Bjørkhaug and Wiborg, 2010). At the same time, it must be acknowledged that while research shows females are more likely to take on tasks that would be typically considered to be male this is not usually met with an accompanying flexibility in male role allocation (Wallace et al., 1994). Nevertheless, there appears to be a tendency in the academic literature to overemphasise stark and discrete contrasts between the genders. Much of the writing that has appeared in the past twenty years around this subject has drawn heavily on feminist epistemologies. This sometimes fails to take into account the reality actors are confronted with and the choices they must make given the circumstances they find themselves in. Additionally, this tends to ignore the real power that women can exert even where they do not own capital resources.

See for example, O’Hara, 1998; Shortall, 1999; Kelly and Shortall, 2002; Price, 2010.
through, for instance, their control of the domestic sphere and how cultural norms are passed on or overlooked by them. There is an impression sometimes given of women as voiceless and overpowered when in fact it is often thanks to their ingenuity and flexibility that the family survives.

**Section 3.6.1.4 The Functional Relationship between Young People and the Farm**

If there was a need to place women at the centre of the debate around contributions to farming family life there is an even greater need to do so for young people who grow up in this culture. Apart from exploring, for example, the use of work to socialise male offspring into the role of successor, little specific research has been carried out on the impact of this experience on farming offspring in terms of informal relationships or emotional connections. This focus on functional connections is understandable given the importance attached to maintaining the family farm in the face of economic difficulties and how the lack of an affordable, non-family labour force and the desire for a successor means that children are often required to work (Elder and Conger, 2000). However, it does potentially overlook crucial elements of this working role and the relationship dynamics this is bound within. The lack of research on female offspring is also particularly pronounced in the literature documenting this subject. In one paper on the relationship between fathering practices and time spent on the farm by children and succession, the terms ‘children’ or ‘sons’ is used throughout but almost no reference is made to daughters (Brandth and Overrein, 2013). Although this might be a reflection of the aims of the study it, nevertheless, implicitly collapses the idea of children and sons into one category with no need to overtly look at female perspectives.

One study which did look to pay attention to young people was carried out by Riley (2009) who conducted ethnographic research around labour on a number of farms in England. He found that children are a vital element of the family’s workforce especially at peak times such as during the harvest. Furthermore, the presence or absence of potential heirs is a catalyst for either focusing on the development of the farm or for a slow winding down of operations. In addition, although the respondents
were conscious of the need to honour the past, they were intent on following their own path, for example, through introducing new techniques. In this context intergenerational relationships take on a more fluid and multi-linear nature than might otherwise be assumed. The family system is no longer based on a unidirectional transference of knowledge and resources but rather a two-way process with the potential to shape both the adult and the child (Riley, 2009). These findings demonstrate that children do exert agency and can influence the family’s direction both in the short and long-term, however young or powerless they appear to be from the outside, in the degree to which and the way they are involved in the working life of the farm.

Interestingly, Riley’s work also highlights the early socialisation of children into gendered roles. He notes how boys’ participation is seen as a means of starting on the path to manhood and as a rite of passage whereas girls are more likely to view their work as merely ‘giving a hand’ (Riley, 2009). These conclusions are further supported by Wallace et al. (1994) who show there is a clear division of labour on family farms in the UK, which is rarely queried even where questions are asked of patriarchal forms of authority. They also found that parents are reliant on their children for labour so that in these situations their power is often dependent on moral capital and the nurturing of a close affiliation between their children’s identity and the farm (Wallace et al., 1994). This consubstantial identity ensures that even where a farm does not seem to be viable there is at least a chance of an heir remaining on. These ties between the family and the farm and the blurring of divisions between their business and personal life means that even where children are highly unlikely to take over the farm they are still willing to help out (Wallace et al., 1994). As part of the process of identity formation within the farming community, the farm and the family become symbolically intertwined with one another. Therefore, the family is constructed as indivisible from the landholding in how they publicly present themselves to the community and in the meanings produced and shared there (Gray, 1998).

Research shows that fathers can have a stronger impact on those children who choose to stay on the farm whereas mothers can exert more influence on those who
opt to build their lives elsewhere (Elder and Conger, 2000). The former is likely to be true because in order for a member of the family to become a farmer they must serve a quasi-apprenticeship requiring a significant time commitment. The period that children spend working on the farm can have another impact as the more time an actor spends on it the more likely they are to want to take over the running of this enterprise in the future (ibid). This links with Corbett's (2000) findings that the more an individual participates in the education system, which is itself a significant reason for non-involvement in farm work, the greater their chances of seeing their future as lying away from their parents’ occupational choice. One could argue here that the focus on work on the farm is too narrow in its scope since it fails to take into account other ways that young people can develop a functional role within their families, which is also seen as useful. While in some ways because they fall outside the typical framework of the farm as a site of study these alternate ways to perform roles remain largely invisible in the literature, but they are still legitimate if slightly culturally marginalised pathways. In this way the pursuit of a high level of education can become an important goal for children and for their parents. This is true in the Irish farming family context where especially on larger holdings education has become an important element in strategies for survival and a means of guaranteeing the progression of young people from this background who have not been identified as the ‘farmer’ (O’Hara, 1998). While this might not directly relate to the day-to-day activities of the farm the role is functionally important because securing professional employment helps to maintain the family’s status in the community as well as removing potential obstacles to the smooth transfer of the farm from one generation to the next (ibid).

Section 3.6.2 The Formal Dimension of Belonging
The next concept to be examined is succession27 in the farming community and how attachments around this are created and manifested. This underpins the formal

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27 There is a difference between the concept of inheritance and succession with the former principally concerned with the passing on of resources, namely, the landholding, buildings, etc., while the latter is also linked to the transfer of the social meaning of farming with its concomitant obligations and rights such as the need to protect the land, which is held in trust rather than owned exclusively by the successor. In addition, it confers the title of farmer on an individual, which has implications for their standing in the local and farming community (Bjørkhaug and Wiborg, 2010). For the purposes of this
attachments explored in the research findings. This is of obvious importance to the exploration of the issue of belonging since it is partially the basis of present and future connections to the farm and the community. While both formal attachments and succession are grounded in similar dynamics they are not interchangeable terms as the former includes broader processes and a wider pool of actors than is usually the case in studies of the latter. The issue of the passing on of the farm from one generation to the next has received much attention in rural sociology. However, it should be noted that this body of work largely concentrates on the relationship between the farmer and any potential successors or in the case of feminist approaches the position of female members of this community. One of the most significant gaps in this body of work is the attitude and stance of those who for reasons such as family succession strategies, lack of personal interest and so on will not inherit the land. Furthermore, the emotional connections as contained within the informal dimension of belonging that can underpin succession strategies appears to be overlooked in favour of a focus on work-based socialisation. This type of cohort has not been studied in any depth in relation to this issue. While the informal dimension of belonging as conceptualised in this thesis is not directly applicable to the material discussed in this section, some of its characteristics are prominent, for instance, in the decision-making process around retaining or letting go of the farm. This section concentrates on different aspects of succession such as its continued importance, the impact of gender, the declining number of young entrants to the field of agriculture and some reasons as to why a particular model of succession still persists in spite of the pressure it comes under in late modern society.

Section 3.6.2.1 Succession Norms
One of the most vital concerns in farming is ensuring that the land is passed on from one generation to the next. In fact, Silvasti (2003) in her work on cultural scripts in farming identifies this as the most significant of all norms for this community. Typically, even where females have the same legal rights as males to inherit the land the holding is almost exclusively passed on to sons (ibid). Usually, it is only if there study the term succession is taken to encompass both of these elements since little research seems to have been carried out specifically on those who inherit without succeeding.
are no sons available or if for some reason they are not in a position to take it over that daughters will be considered as successors. This model of succession is closely linked to the way farm labour is organised and roles allocated on the farm during childhood with, as explained previously in Section 3.6.1.2, particular attention given to socialising sons into deeper involvement with the farm in the belief that this will produce a natural successor (Silvasti, 2003). This is because in succeeding to the farm the individual takes on more than just the ownership of the farm but also the values attached to this status (Daugstad, 2010 cited in Bjørkhaug and Wiborg, 2010).

As part of an upbringing that concentrates on handing on carefully gendered and prescribed roles there is also an implication that through doing this a young person is taught the meanings and performances associated with these. Thus, the import attached to the farm and the dynamics around this become a vital element of the succession process as it involves an interaction between parent and child as well as other considerations such as local and social attachments (Bjørkhaug and Wiborg, 2010). It also acts as a mark of achievement in farming particularly for older generations of farmers who view their ability to maintain their family’s temporal continuity and bond with the land through passing the holding on to the next generation as a major accomplishment (Brandth and Overrein, 2013). This no doubt can be connected to the feelings of duty and obligation they themselves were socialised into growing up when succession was inculcated as a moral imperative. This Norwegian study (Brandth and Overrein, 2013) demonstrates that in the younger generations of farmers the urge for succession appears to be less important, with choice for their children viewed as more vital (ibid). This was partially linked in the research to perceptions around the lack of a viable future for farming. However, one could speculate as well as to whether this is as much a function of their stage in life as a reflection of wider social changes. As they get older and the issue becomes more personally pressing this concern might grow in magnitude for them.

Section 3.6.2.2 The Decline in Irish Succession Rates
In recent decades the number of young men entering the Irish farming profession has dropped dramatically. There are a number of factors in this decline that are worth examining in brief. Traditional farming identities were based on the notion of strong
male breadwinners, a gendered division of labour and clear delineations of the future pathways of the family’s offspring. Ní Laoire (2005) argues that although the broad contours of this model remain in place, the social and economic challenges faced by the farming community has led to significant changes in this model. Responses to these issues include a move towards pluriactivity on the part of either or both partners and the expansion and intensification of farm activities. Furthermore, Ireland’s economy has moved from a rural, agriculture base to one dependent on urban based employment, while simultaneously there has been a drop in farm incomes to below the national wage. This altered dynamic contributes to the challenges the farming community faces in attracting new entrants (Ní Laoire, 2002).

There has also been a change in the position of farming within the national and international societal framework. Part of the explanation for the change in farming status lies in the move from EU policies promoting productivist, intensive agriculture to a post-productivist model where farmers are more akin to custodians of a way of life and an unspoilt countryside (Burton, 2004), as outlined in Chapter One Section 1.9.2.4. They often struggle to survive in an increasingly precarious environment where their concerns can no longer be equated with the goals of the wider society they belong to. They are often framed in a negative way in the public mindset as they can be portrayed as a relic of the past and dependent upon EU grants for survival. This has caused problems for how farmers create their identity and for the prevailing model of masculinity. Largely because of these changes they no longer have the same defining role as the bulwark of rural society they once had and must, instead, reinvent themselves as, for example, ideologically connected to environmental concerns or more overtly commercial endeavours (ibid). The societal shifts outlined here have an undoubted impact on attitudes towards becoming a farmer since it can distance young people from the idea of regarding farming as a viable way of life.

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28 The average Irish farm income in 2012 stood at €21,500 (Healy, 2012). The average annual earnings for the same period were €35,905 (Ó Fátharta, 2012).
According to the literature, another reason for the decline in the number of young people who stay on the farm is the perceived transformation of attitudes around the farm’s promise of perpetuity. In previous generations there was an element of sacrifice amongst farmers, an almost ritualistic performance of self-denial and hardship, which acted as proof of their philosophical commitment to this way of life. Now the potential pool of farmers is more likely to take into account lifestyle choices, such as the need for free time as well as income levels in considering whether to take on the landholding or not (Bjørkhaug and Wiborg, 2010). In a Norwegian study Villa (1999) found clear distinctions between three generations of respondents, which highlights the change in attitudes in agriculture. Amongst the oldest subjects, there was a deep dedication that precluded attachment to any other way of life and placed huge importance on historical continuity. In the so-called middle generation, farming was associated with personal choice and with returning to do one’s duty after time spent elsewhere. Of the youngest cohort who opted to take over the farm, most were aware of the historical implications but were likely to analyse the situation in light of their own personal biography and whether the holding was financially solvent. Many of these had, in fact, been actively discouraged from taking over the farm by their parents. There was a kind of double-edged dynamic at work here since although the need for rational choices about their future was emphasised, there was still an emotional subtext concerning the desire to maintain an intact, functioning farm into the next generation (Villa, 1999).

Due to the patriarchal nature of many rural societies, women are encouraged if not compelled to build a life elsewhere, while young men are likely to be conditioned to see the world in more spatially constrained terms. However, as Ní Laoire (2001) points out this leads to a near stigmatisation of actors who succeed to the farm. This is because they lack the social and physical mobility seen as so vital in late modern society. Further compounding this is relatively poor educational qualifications, especially in comparison to their female and one could surmise their non-succeeding male siblings. Sons who are likely to succeed are often discouraged from pursuing an education as there is a strong linkage between this and being perceived as feminine whereas masculinity is associated with ‘real’ work and hard, physical labour. Thus, many young men are faced with the dilemma that even if they would like to move
elsewhere they lack the qualifications and skills to do so. However, the decision to stay on should not be automatically seen as a reflection of their powerlessness but, instead, could be a conscious attempt to avoid marginalisation in other settings. It is in rural communities where the flexible skills they often possess are most readily utilised and their personal interests have an easy outlet (Magnussen, 1997 cited in Bye, 2009). Despite this, the choice of staying or migrating is often a source of tension for potential successors to the farm who are caught between a desire to fulfil their family duty and retain their place within a familiar masculinity and the fact that this is an industry coming under increasing internal and external pressure (Ní Laoire, 2005).

Section 3.6.2.3 Keeping the Farm
The reasons young people choose to take over the farm are a complex combination of personal, social and economic factors. There is insufficient space in this review to intensively explore this topic, nevertheless, some of the main factors outlined in the literature need to be detailed especially since reference is made to the role of informal relationships with the farm in this process. Three motives advanced in one Scandinavian study for agreeing to take on the farm are the appeal of agricultural work, a wish to live in that particular location and a yearning for the holding to be kept in the family (Andgard et al., 2009 cited in Bjørkhaug and Wiborg, 2010). Much of the attachment to the idea of retaining the farm in the family is derived from a sense of obligation to previous generations and a wish to honour the commitment and sacrifices associated with this. This also links back to the concept of place attachment, discussed in Section 3.3, whereby the longer the family’s history has been enmeshed with that of the farm the more likely they are to feel this sense of commitment and duty to preserve it (Vedeld et al., 2003 cited in Bjørkhaug and Wiborg, 2010). It has also been found that this kind of belonging and the powerful sentiments bound up in the farm prevent the sale of the property even where it appears to be unviable to keep it on (Flemsæter, 2009 cited in Bjørkhaug and Wiborg, 2010). Since the family identity is so closely entangled with the farm, the prospect of losing the land represents more than simply a denial of access to an economically important resource but also the means of expressing who they are and
their affiliation to a broader and older ideal (Ní Laoire, 2005). In acknowledging the emotional power of this concept, and irrespective of the sense of individual obligation to the idea of succession, this has been shown to be weaker than it was in previous generations. The notion of choice as a fundamental right of the individual is posited as being of growing potency in the literature (Villa, 1999; Brandth and Overrein, 2013). This should not be taken to mean that the handing on of the farm will soon cease or that family farming will be obliterated from the social landscape but rather that it will be modified and adapted to meet the changing needs of modern society (Silvasti, 2003).

Section 3.6.3 The Social Dimension of Belonging
The final dimension of belonging looked at is the idea of social attachments and embeddedness. This has a direct connection to belonging in how the depth of an individual’s attachment to a community helps to shape their decisions about, for example, where to live in the future. There is a significant body of work on the phenomenon of migration in rural areas but this usually does not relate back to the notion of belonging per se or specifically to the farming cohort. This section looks at the impact of gender on social attachments, migration and the role of education in this process.

Section 3.6.3.1 Gender and Social Attachments
It is not only in terms of meaningful involvement on the farm or succession that young women can face challenges. They are also marginalised from the possibility of participating in the public social performance of what it means to be rural and/or from a farming background. A study conducted by Dahlström (1996) in northern Norway shows that typically male activities such as hunting or fishing are highly valued. They are an important means of demonstrating loyalty to a rural lifestyle and membership of the dominant ontology of this community. By contrast there are few comparable activities for young women offering similar pathways for gaining social acceptance. The ‘maleness’ of rurality is also highlighted in an examination of drinking patterns in rural New Zealand, which shows that the almost exclusive
performance of alcohol consumption in public is an important expression of male power and supremacy (Campbell, 2000). These processes can often result in young women feeling oppressed or unfulfilled as either their specific needs are not catered for or their entry into these male activities is frowned upon or dismissed as unsuitable. This can lead to a sense of dissatisfaction for young women around what their future life as members of this community would look like and inculcate a desire to leave and create a life where it is possible to participate more fully in the community. Although this idea is not explored in these studies, this sense of being disenfranchised could be extended to young men who do not share these dominant interests or who do not want to enter a strongly male occupation such as farming and through this potentially share this sense of exclusion and of being othered.

Section 3.6.3.2 Migration in Rural Society
Rural society has always been inextricably linked to migration. Therefore, it is an important idea to consider in this research because of how it underpins the life path of the participants. It has long acted as a safety valve for those who are dissatisfied with the possibilities on offer in a place and when necessary as a means of populating urban areas. It needs to be understood as a complex process heavily connected to identity formation, place attachment and subjective opinions. The decision to move from one area to another or from a rural to an urban setting or vice versa reflects a decision connected to cultural, economic and social considerations and is an important part of one’s biographical trajectory (Ni Laoire, 2000). It can be more fully comprehended if it is viewed as the intersecting point between factors such as family or cultural background and decisions around educational goals or future employment (ibid). It should be noted that in line with, for instance, Savage et al.’s (2005) argument, discussed in Section 3.2.2, as rural young people become more conscious of the possibility of mobility in all its forms and link into a globalised culture, identity formation is perhaps no longer so rooted in the specific geographic location of their upbringing. Instead, it is based on choosing from a multiplicity of options including urban or transnational ones. As part of this it is claimed that young people are becoming less deeply encultured by their upbringing
in rural areas and can more easily choose to identify with other cultures through, for example, the internet (Thiessen et al., 2010).

Various studies carried out in Canada (Corbett, 2000), Greece (Gidarakou, 1999) and Iceland (Bjarnson and Thorlindsson, 2006) point to the fact that girls are far more likely to either migrate or express a desire to do so than boys. Gidarakou’s work in Greece reveals that girls are often socialised into thinking of their futures as lying away from the farm and are instilled with negative feelings towards building their lives in their local community. Those few who did wish to stay spoke of the challenge of creating a meaningful adulthood in view of patriarchal farming practices that militated against the possibility of earning a stable income or developing a status beyond that of assistant (Gidarakou, 1999). This negativity towards farm life was further compounded by the fact that most mothers in this study wanted their daughters to obtain off-farm employment where they could earn an independent income (ibid). This preference was undoubtedly intensified by the general movement of women away from the home and into the public and economic spotlight during the twentieth century.

Section 3.6.3.3 The Role of Education in Creating Social Attachments
A key influence on migration is the level of education attained by an individual. Indeed, the rise in education qualifications in Western countries among rural inhabitants and the consequential vistas opened up has had singular affects on society. As Ní Laoire (2000) notes there is a serious disjuncture between the employment opportunities available in rural areas and the highly educated workforce it produces. It has been recognised for a long time that rural women are more likely to continue with education than their male counterparts, which in turn increases the probability of their migration from the countryside. Although it is not the only reason and may, in fact, be a mere catalyst for their relocation the lack of suitable jobs for those who have attended third-level education decreases the possibility of these women returning to the countryside. This is likely to have an impact on their social attachments to a community since through participating in
education they are inevitably preparing themselves for a move away from where they grow up. In the Irish context, from an early stage of the twentieth century the farming community recognised that the strategy of encouraging differentiated educational paths could ensure not only the basic survival of their offspring but also their prosperity. The provision of educational opportunities came not just from a sense of duty but also pride that their children could do well in life, thus, reinforcing the family’s social status (Arensberg and Kimball, 2001). By the 1960s the education farmers’ daughters received, especially in more prosperous families, was equal to that of children in urban settings. This acknowledged their need to establish themselves away from the local community and was also a means of compensating them for the fact that they would not be given the land (McNabb, 1964). This trend has continued to the present day with above average completion of the Leaving Certificate by both males and females from farm backgrounds.29

In his Nova Scotian study, mentioned previously in Section 3.3.3, Corbett (2000) notes that the push for education was met by a certain level of resistance from the local community. Many participants were resentful of their lifestyle and culture being downgraded in comparison to other areas. Furthermore, the idea of ‘success’ in a rural community such as this is revealed as having multiple definitions. The fact that many of those who do choose to continue their education find that because of a lack of suitable jobs, they are effectively no longer employable in their local community begs the question as to whether they have succeeded or failed. For those who view staying on as the ultimate goal, dropping out of school and, for instance, taking up employment in the fishing industry, could be seen as a positive decision that rejects the alternative lifestyle so heavily promoted by the education system. Corbett found that far from becoming objects of envy and respect, in some cases those who opted to enter professional employment were regarded as less capable and less masculine than those who stayed. This was because of the perception that they were not as physically strong or able to turn their hand to a variety of tasks as those who had remained and worked there for a number of years (Corbett, 2000). Corbett’s

29 The Leaving Certificate is a state exam students take at the end of their second-level education. 94.8% of farmers’ daughters completed the Leaving Certificate in 2007 while the average figure across all classes was 89.7%. The difference was lower for farmers’ sons—their average stood at 83.8% and the general figure was 82% (Byrne et al., 2009).
work shows the dichotomy, which can exist between definitions of success and the challenges that those who wish to stay and continue in the footsteps of previous generations face and, equally, the problems it creates for those who are socialised into a life away from the farm. The lifestyle choice of remaining in the home community is somewhat anathema to the modern focus on flexibility and the pursuit of a series of short rather than long-term goals. There is conflict, therefore, for rural young people when they think about the future and making the transition to adulthood between the desire to stay in their community and the world they are familiar with—even if prospects there appear to be gloomy—and migrating for education or employment purposes. The latter path can bring issues such as isolation from their cultural upbringing for young people as they make their way towards adulthood. This is rarely a straightforward, zero sum choice, and can be heavily influenced by parental biographies. For instance, young people’s decisions about leaving to pursue an education can be strongly impacted by their parents’ qualifications and employment choices (Shucksmith, 2004). Therefore, decisions around migration should be regarded as reflecting complex internal and external processes linked to push-pull factors emanating from their sense of belonging to the community of their upbringing and their home.

Section 3.7 Conclusion

Despite the many changes that have taken place in the farming community in recent decades in moving towards pluriactivity and the expansion or contraction of agricultural activities, certain core tenets still tend to dominate. Thus, for example, farming continues to be closely aligned with the performance of a particular type of masculinity even where women and children have a labour input and act as a catalyst for the development of the farming enterprise. What is different than before is that the prospect of succeeding to the holding is no longer as likely to be seen as an honour but rather as a duty to be taken on or avoided by out-migration or gaining an education. Many of those who do stay on in their home community lose status as a result of the high social value placed on mobility and transient experiences. Nevertheless, men who leave face difficulties, as their masculinity is according to the literature often linked to their performance of being a specifically ‘rural’ male. On
the other hand, for farmers’ daughters the transition to adulthood appears in ways to be more straightforward. They are differentially socialised to their brothers and develop a sense of self that is less tied to the farm and their home community than their male counterparts. Instead, from an early age, through an emphasis on education and spatial mobility, many are moulded into the prototypical late modern youth. As a result of this, they experience higher migration rates and withdrawal from rural localities than young men.

It must also be remembered that the decisions young people make around migration, education and employment are conditioned by the prevailing framework of their lives. It can define someone as being a failure or a success; a social insider or outsider, which in turn influences their sense of belonging and the kind of future they imagine for themselves. This is as true for farm youth as it is for any group in Irish society and must be borne in mind when we consider how attachments to farming as a culture and a way of life are shaped from an early age. Belonging was focused on in the initial part of this chapter and within this it was demonstrated that it is rarely unpacked into different dimensions. It did, however, highlight the importance of different concepts, which are of significance to the findings, namely, place attachments, memories and othering as well as providing some general grounding for the notion of belonging. This chapter specifically explored literature relevant to three of the four dimensions of belonging, i.e. ‘functional’, ‘formal’ and ‘social’ and where possible touched upon material around ‘informal’ attachments. Much of the literature produced in rural sociology revolves around the working relationships young people develop with the farm they grew up on and the nature of succession. Both of these aspects are crucial to the preservation of the farm into the next generation and have the potential to exert an influence on the transitions to adulthood and life paths of members of this community. Although there is a good deal of research available about social belonging this does not disaggregate cohorts from farms but rather considers them within a broader conceptualisation of the rural. In all of the material, which has been produced in this academic field little direct attention seems to have been distinctly paid to the informal proprietorial relationships individuals develop with their homeplace and their community. In fact, this carries great potential for shedding further light on the other dimensions, which have been
outlined here and is also worthy of exploration by itself. However, before these findings are outlined, the methods used in this study need to be examined and this is focused on in the next chapter.
Chapter Four Methodology

Section 4.1 Introduction
This chapter outlines and analyses the methodological strategy used in this thesis. The first section looks at the epistemological foundations of the study. Secondly, it describes the narrative inquiry framework, the reasons it was chosen and the possible issues associated with its use. It then explores the positioning of the researcher and the challenges and benefits connected to this status. Next, the design of the study is discussed including the data collection method, the recruitment and sampling strategy, the participants’ profile and the analysis process. The role of reflection in the research study is also examined and the findings are then looked at. The chapter finishes with a brief explanation of the ethical guidelines the work is framed within.

Section 4.2 Social Constructionism
This first section concentrates on the philosophical groundings of the research. This thesis is underpinned by a social constructionist epistemology. It is not the intention here to delve deeply into the canon of literature relevant to this topic since it is vast in its scope and breadth but rather to reflect on its consequences for the design and implementation of this study. Advocates of social constructionism argue that there is no singular objective reality, which can be uncovered by a researcher. Instead, meanings are constructed by each individual in a relational sense with the context they are located in. This implies that actors experiencing the same event can develop very different interpretations and understandings of this phenomenon depending on the kind of engagement they have with it (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, the idea of an objective truth and reality is replaced with multiple constructions. These differentiated meanings reflect too, the influence of interpersonal relationships embedded in the framework they are found in (Neimeyer, 1993 cited in Quinn Patton, 2002). The objects, in the case of this research, the farm and the communities associated with it, framing this reality are substantive. Thus, each individual constructs their meanings in an on-going interpretive relationship with various facets of their life. These contexts need to be taken into consideration throughout the entire research process since they are an active constituent of actors’ experiences (Crotty,
1998). Through this the personal predispositions of each individual are taken into account, but at the same time the significant influence of the socially constructed reality they are positioned within can be acknowledged (Lock and Strong, 2010).

As this research was grounded in a social constructionist perspective an interpretative, qualitative approach was adopted. This strategy allows a broad understanding to be developed of the individual’s experiences in light of the contexts they interact with (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Following on from this standpoint no objective understanding of the participants’ life on the farm was sought. Instead, the focus was on the participants’ subjective understanding and interpretation of growing up on a farm. Thus, while attention was paid to ensure the findings were reliable, the numerous unique realities and truths this group of participants constructed about their lives needed to be included in the research framework. It also concentrated on exploring the actions of this group within the context of their cultural upbringing in the farming community and the meanings they attach to this (Creswell, 2007). Undoubtedly problems with generalisability are created by this approach, especially in how the researcher must contend with the often competing realities emerging across a cohort (ibid). Dealing with this issue was challenging, but manageable through the development of a set of findings, which incorporated the views of both the majority and the minority within the group.

Section 4.3 The Narrative Inquiry Framework
This section examines the narrative inquiry framework, the rationale behind its use and the potential challenges it created for the study.

Section 4.3.1 Narrative inquiry
Within the qualitative framework narrative inquiry was chosen as the overall methodological approach. This is predicated on the importance of story within everyday life and on how its construction and use become a way for individuals to make sense of events and actions that happen to them and around them. They are
constantly produced as a means of organising experiences and usually involve a
temporal element where events are chronologically linked with a beginning, middle
and end (Moen, 2006; Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007; Creswell, 2007). Since
individual actors do not exist in a vacuum unaffected by cultural, social and
historical contexts the prism of their experiences, as conveyed through their
narratives, is fundamental to understanding meanings bestowed by actors on events.
This is because it allows both the personal (wishes, hopes and attitudes) and the
social (cultural and historical) to be included in any attempt to take account of their
views (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). There is a dialogue between the self and the
world so that the individual is constantly interpreting their life through this
relationship. Since it is impossible to explore an individual’s experiences without
considering the background and circumstances helping to shape their lives, their
context becomes an important part of the research (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000;
Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). Thus, the stories that individuals tell about their lives
cannot be viewed as being isolated from social and cultural currents but, instead, are
located and acted out amid these surroundings (Bruner, 1984 cited in Moen, 2006).
They serve as a mechanism for researchers to enter participants’ worlds and through
this, their experience of it can be interpreted in relation to these influences
(Clandinin and Connelly, 2006 cited in Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007). They are also
an important element in establishing identities both for individuals and for groups
since: ‘Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who
they are (and who they are not)’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006 p. 201 cited in Riessman, 2008
p.8). These stories become a scaffolding framework through which the participants
interpret their past in the present moment of the interview (Clandinin and Rosiek,
2007). Therefore, narrative research becomes a way of framing and recognising how
individual actors speak of their life and imbue the context they are immersed in with
meaning (Moen, 2006).

Another crucial aspect of the study of narratives is the concept of temporality.
Usually, the chronology of the individual’s story is stressed and to a certain extent
this was important to the research in how, for instance, participants’ relationships
with the working life of the farm changed as they got older. However, in the analysis
phase the need to emphasise the role of intergenerational continuums in the
participants’ construction of their reality became increasingly apparent. As a result, the concept of chronology took on a more elastic quality and mien than is commonly allowed for in narrative methodologies. It rested on the conceptualisation of events by participants in relation to past and future generations rather than bracketing them solely within their own individual life span. This is because it is not usually feasible within the farming community to view a life as a discrete unit as it disregards the influence of temporalities and its location within intergenerational contexts.  

Neither can the importance of place to narrative research be overlooked according to Clandinin and Rosiek (2007). In essence the narrative approach creates a ‘three-dimensional inquiry space’ allowing a triad of context-place-temporality to drive research strategies (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p.50). However, its use is not without problems, as is discussed next.

Section 4.3.2 Challenges in the Use of Narrative Strategies
A central concern of narrative inquiry is to give space to the participant to voice their story. This was integral to this research process, especially in how the data was collected and written up. However, two notes of caution need to be addressed here. Firstly, it should be recognised that in considering the views of an individual, both the researcher and the reader need to accept that this is overlaid with echoes of cultural norms, other actors and historical events (Wertsch, 1991 cited in Moen, 2006). In the context of this research this allowed for an acknowledgement of other influences on the life experiences of the individual, such as family members or cultural scripts. One of the challenges for this research was, in fact, to construct an account that respected and kept at its core the participants’ narratives and the sense they made of their childhoods while taking into consideration the historical and culturally located influences of their family and community.

The second source of tension relevant to this research is the potential distance between the experience itself, what actually happened and how it is recounted. Narratives have been described as fictions produced about how a life was really

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30 This concept is explored in detail in Chapter 6 Section 5.1 and Chapter 7 Section 7.3.
experienced (Denzin, 1989 cited in Moen, 2006). These fictions are characterised as ‘truthful narratives’ linking what was thought to have happened to how they are portrayed (Moen, 2006 p.7). Bruner (1984 cited in Moen, 2006) also claims there are differences between firstly, what occurred, i.e. the lived life, secondly, how this is understood in the context of the individual’s own reality and thirdly, how it is recounted. The construction of these narrations is influenced by, for example, who the listeners are and the social circumstances in which the story is told. An additional aspect of this is the retelling that happens when the different parties to the research work together to develop a mutually comprehensible narrative (Goodson, 1992 cited in Moen, 2006). In this way, through engaging with the research process the researcher becomes a co-producer of the story. There are implications here for the kind of data generated in seeming to place great significance on the relationship between the researcher and the participant, a theme returned to later in this chapter in Section 4.5.4.3. It was not possible within the methods used in this study to overcome this problem fully, which is a limitation of this study’s design. In saying this all attempts were made to develop an analysis framework, which harmonised these four levels through the interview style, the reflection process and so on. In any case as already stated, in social constructionism the uncovering of an objective reality is not sought but rather it is the individual’s own interpretation of events, which is of particular importance. Nevertheless, it is not just the participant who needs to be considered; the influence of the researcher must be included in this discussion as well. This is focused on in the following section.

Section 4.4 Insider Research
This part of the chapter explores the concept of insider research and the challenges and benefits associated with this. In order to properly contextualise this position a brief mention also needs to be made of the researcher’s biographical relationship to the farming community.
Section 4.4.1 The Concept of Insider Research

While in terms of the research cohort I view myself as an insider\textsuperscript{31} this status is potentially problematic. In claiming this there is a risk of presupposing the presence of concrete identity positions bounding individuals (Merton, 1972 cited in Hodkinson, 2005). This goes against the late modern idea of fluid identities with different aspects capable of coming to the fore depending on the context (Hodkinson, 2005). Furthermore, one wonders if it is possible for any researcher to remain truly outside a community given the interactions, which take place between them and the participants. Even were a community to be a completely unknown, detached quantity at the outset of the process, one would imagine that at the very least by the conclusion of the research a subjective response of some kind would have been triggered. If this were to happen, the term outsider would no longer be truly applicable as this implies a relatively impermeable distance exists between the researcher and the subject when in reality it is likely to have been bridged. Despite these reservations and in noting it is not an absolute concept, the term insider can be used where enough similar experiences are shared between participants and the researcher (Davies, 1999 cited in Hodkinson, 2005). In addition, it can be present where there is a deliberate agreement, based on a perception of common characteristics, to implicitly or explicitly agree to this idea of shared community membership (Hodkinson, 2005). Thus, through the participants’ decisions to take part in this research-in itself an act of claiming belonging-there was recognition of a distinctive farming context, which they and I belonged to. However, I was conscious throughout the process of my academic training and identity and the epistemological and sociological awareness, etc. this engendered. This ultimately served to underpin the research and counterbalance the influence of my own personal background.

\textsuperscript{31}For the purposes of this study insider is defined as being a member of the farming community. As I attend the same university as the participants I am a double insider but because the study was about their experiences on the farm rather than in university this was not really a factor. However, it did provide indirect insights into their transition to adulthood and had practical benefits in helping to gain access to participants.
Section 4.4.2 Disadvantages of Insider Status
There are challenges in carrying out research as an insider in a community. According to Brannick and Coghlan (2007) it is often frowned upon and accused of being too subjective. They also argue that critics perceive this type of researcher to be incapable of conforming to standards of academic rigour. Hence, research executed by a community member that gathers contextually driven data informed by a lived perspective would perhaps stand accused of not being reliable enough. The concerns of those who question the merits of insider research are understandable, especially if the argument that primary identities are the least malleable and fluid of all forms is taken into account. This makes the overcoming of potential biases or loyalties to one’s birth culture problematic (Jenkins, 2008). Similarly, a researcher might not want or be able to confront potential taboo subjects in the field. As a result, they could inadvertently or on purpose, steer away from presenting an unpleasant interpretation of experiences (Alvesson, 2003) out of a kind of fealty or protectiveness. However, it is possible to minimise this problem through critical reflection, as discussed towards the end of this chapter in Section 4.7.

Section 4.4.3 Advantages to Insider Status
While these problems need to be recognised and dealt with, the benefits in pursuing research from this position cannot be ignored. It brings with it deep resources in terms of understanding and sensitivity, which are best utilised through acknowledging and incorporating the insider position of the researcher into the work. Rather than approaching the study purely under the cloak of academia, this lived knowledge can be used to enhance and enrich comprehension of the research problem. It becomes an almost self-ethnographic interpretation of the narrative inquiry framework that is different but no less valid than other formats (Alvesson, 2003).

32 Jenkins states in his book Social Identity that identities are formed through an internal-external dialectic between an individual and the social forces they encounter and the resistance/negotiations/compromises this produces. In this theory, early identities are the most heavily influenced by the actions and opinions of familiar authority figures such as parents. This is because the individual does not have the capacity or the resources to resist and, thus, has less room to oppose this identity formation process. As a result, it is more deeply engrained than other forms (Jenkins, 2008).

33 This strategy focuses on the documentation and analysis of social contexts that a researcher is part of and deeply familiar with, but they themselves do not form a central component of the analysis or findings. By contrast autoethnography involves a personalised interpretation of events or experiences where the researcher is at the heart of the story (Alvesson, 2003).
Insider status can also combat some of the difficulties associated with interviews, for instance, where participants seek to (re)present an idealised version of social reality not actually commensurate with their own experiences. Where a researcher has this personal insight into a cultural setting the risk of this happening can be reduced through the use of probing questions (Alvesson, 2003). The veracity of the accounts given was not challenged in the interviews but occasionally where attempts were made to present an idealised truth, reassurances were given against the need to do this. This is illustrated in the following interview extract where the participant’s reluctance to express his opinions was overcome through the researcher identifying his struggle to go against the version of life contained within the rural idyll framework.

Interviewer: Sounds like you kind of still have a dilemma around it [the farm] and what to do with it.

Brendan: Hmmm a little bit-kind of suppose a little bit yeah. It's always there, it's a love-hate kind of thing I guess. Like I absolutely love it, love the land, love the place, but I couldn't see myself living there. It's [a] rural Ireland thing as well, I really couldn't see myself living back there with its...if this wasn't being recorded I'd say what it really was but-

Interviewer: Please say what you want because it is anonymous.

Brendan: Boring shithole that's what it is.

Interviewer: I want you to say whatever you want. I don't have a right and a wrong answer. Don't feed me something that you think I want, some sort of idyllic picture of life at home.

\[34\] Here we had been discussing his probable inheritance of the farm, his dilemma over what to do with the land in the future and whether he would have to move back home.
Brendan: No, no not at all…It's a beautiful boring shithole, but it's a boring shithole.

Interviewer: Where you're from you think or rural Ireland in general?

Brendan: Rural Ireland in general, depending on your position…In terms of what you're doing or who you're with like it's [potentially fine], but if you're [a] young, single guy or girl I think with any ambition it's a fucking [...] it's a nursing home, like it's a retirement home like I see it as anyway. Nothing else there unless you're raising a young family or something or [...] you're retiring or something…kick back and enjoy it. [...] Trying to go places I think [...] it doesn't help as such.

**Section 4.4.4 The Researcher’s Position**
It is not sufficient to merely examine insider status in general terms and accordingly mention also needs to be made of the researcher’s biography as well. Qualitative research often calls for an element of geographical and psychological otherness from participants. This detachment purportedly allows for a certain level of objectivity to be maintained even as the distance between the researcher and the participants is both spatially and mentally reduced through, for example, developing relationships and collecting data (Alvesson, 2003). An image of a dispassionate researcher who is solely concerned with analysing a set of discrete and impartial facts and truths is conjured up here. However, in reality this detachment is unachievable since as Creswell (2007) notes the researcher’s own context impacts on how they interpret the data. With this point in mind reference should be made here to my own background.
I come from a mixed farm\(^{35}\) in the Irish Midlands. I helped extensively during my childhood with everything from feeding sheep in winter to picking potatoes in autumn and painting gates in summer. My grandfather bought my homeplace in the 1920s and growing up my siblings and I were steeped in anecdotes of his life and work. His story and particularly his purchase of the farm acted as a foundational narrative for the family, with his sturdy sheds still enduring to this day as silent testimonies to his handiwork and determination. My father built on his efforts through carefully nurturing the landscape and livestock, and so the farm came to be etched into his identity and he stood proud in his achievements. In our intrinsic awareness of the symbiotic relationship between the farmer (our father) and the land (our homeplace), the indivisibility of our family name and the farm was impressed on us—as if in losing the land a kind of amulet would be taken away from us. Yet while my family is deeply rooted in this place, for my sisters and me there was always a vague distancing from the farm and the surrounding community. Perhaps it came from being viewed as ‘blow-ins’ as unlike almost all of the other prominent farming families in the area we were not part of the intricate kinship of relations that define and underpin many of the local social networks. However, a more likely reason was probably that from an early age my sisters and I knew, just as my only brother did that the farm would be his one day. While he was expected to continue on the family legacy in taking the farm over, our lives lay away from it no matter our love of home or agriculture. By contrast to our slight detachment, my brother easily moved onto the land and into the community in a way that publicly and symbolically proclaimed the strength and nature of his belonging. He was my father’s son with all this entailed and obligated, while my sisters and I were his daughters with all the consequences this had for our life paths.

My mother too was born on a farm as were all of my grandparents. Through all these linkages and the depth of our connections, farming culture framed how my family represents itself to the world. This had intense meaning for how my childhood was experienced and the creation of my primary identity. Growing up I saw much of the joys of farming—a quiet beauty and fragility in the birth of a new calf, the shared

\(^{35}\) This is a farm where both livestock and tillage are produced.
satisfaction of a hard day of labour and the relief of a harvest safely gathered while the sun shone. However, I saw too its heartbreaking consequences—relatives killed in tragic farm accidents, neighbours with bodies gnarled and twisted from a lifetime of unceasing work, rifts over inheritances that tore families apart to be never quite forgotten even if they seemed to be forgiven, and reluctant sons coaxed into a life they did not quite believe in. Both these dark and light sides and the endless talk and tales heard a hundred times around the kitchen table whispered through my experiences and attitudes. These were imprinted so strongly that they continue to permeate my view of the world so although I have lived away from my homeplace for more than a decade, it still shades who I am within this research process and without.

Section 4.5 The Research Study Design
This section describes and outlines the design of the study and how it was implemented. It looks at the recruitment of the participants including the sampling methods, the research site and the process used to gather the cohort. Next, it provides a profile of the research participants followed by a discussion of the data collection method.

Section 4.5.1 Recruitment of Participants

Section 4.5.1.1 Criteria for Inclusion
One of the criteria for inclusion in this study was to have grown up in a farming family. It was not specified as to, for example, what kind of farm they should come from, the extent of their involvement in its working life or whether the farm was to be a primary or secondary source of income. This inclusiveness was driven by a concern that in the absence of guiding academic research about this group, these stipulations, whether in the wording of the call for participants or in a researcher driven selection process, would originate in my personal assumptions about what constitutes an ‘authentic’ farm childhood. This acted as a check on my own subjectivity since the participants had to decide whether they fit within the
parameters of the study. Consequently, no details biographical or otherwise were requested prior to the interview. The other main inclusionary criterion was for participants to be aged between 18 and 28. This bracket approximately corresponds with Arnett’s (2000; 2004) category of emerging adults outlined in Chapter One Section 1.6.2 and Chapter Two Section 2.2. An exception was made for one participant aged 33 who through his request to participate, self-identified as belonging to this cohort. In any case as an undergraduate he could still be considered a member of what is a loosely defined categorisation. A further proviso was for participants to be university students, principally because this was a discrete group within which patterns could be more easily developed than if it was any emerging adult from a farming background.

Ideally, it was hoped there would be a range of participants from around the country, across farm types, academic disciplines and ages in order to reduce the chance of anomalies in the findings due to, for instance, an over-representation of individuals from particular geographic areas. In addition, having a varied cohort expanded the breadth of the narratives and experiences gathered. Only on gender grounds were participants actively selected by the researcher on the basis of personal characteristics. Towards the end of the recruitment phase when the targeted number of participants was close to being reached, female respondents were favoured over male counterparts. This was not driven by preconceptions about the role gender would play in farm experiences but by a wish to have a more balanced study.

Section 4.5.1.2 Sampling and Site of Research
The participants were recruited using the purposive sampling method. This is often used in the interview method of data collection as it allows the researcher to select a sample relevant to the research question (Bryman, 2004). It also permits specific criteria for inclusion to be developed, which is important since these influence the participants’ inputs (Marshall, 1996). For practical reasons NUI, Galway was chosen as the site for the research. As the researcher is based there it was relatively easy to recruit participants, to be flexible in arranging interviews-an important factor given
the group’s busy schedules and to find locations where they could be carried out. However, due to the unknown nature of this process in terms of the numbers and kinds of candidates who might come forward other third level institutions in different parts of the country would have been recruited from if necessary. There were two possible scenarios, which could have led to this happening. Firstly, NUI, Galway is one of the proximal universities to the Border, Midlands, West region\textsuperscript{36}, and in this area the percentage of holdings where farming is a subsidiary occupation\textsuperscript{37} is higher than in the South and East of the country. As a result, the potential population in this site could have been skewed towards a group where farming was perceived to be of relatively minor importance to the family. This might have reduced the number of recruits for the research. Secondly, the university’s location in the West of Ireland could have unintentionally bounded the findings to this particular geographic area. Consequently, if there was an insufficient spatial spread in the sample, recruitment would have taken place in other sites.

![Regional Map of Ireland](image)

(The Irish Regions Office, n.d.).

\textsuperscript{36} The geographic regions are based on definitions in the Local Government Acts of 1991 and 2001.

\textsuperscript{37}If the time spent in gainful non-farming activity exceeds what is spent on farm work then the latter is regarded as a subsidiary occupation. Gainful non-farming activity includes paid farm work on other farms and all other non-farming activities from which an income is obtained, whether undertaken on or off the farm. The figure stands at 21.9\% in the Border, Midlands, West region compared to 16.1\% in the South and East (Central Statistics Office, 2008).
Section 4.5.1.3 The Number of Participants
Thirty individuals—fifteen females and fifteen males—took part in this study. The ideal cohort number for this study was between twenty and thirty actors. This was flexible since it was unknown at the outset when saturation would be reached. Saturation is generally seen as the underpinning rationale in deciding on the number of participants to be accommodated in any research cohort (Mason, 2010). In order to have enough accounts available to develop high quality findings no less than twenty were to be included and no more than thirty because at this point saturation would be close. The saturation point of this study was based on two separate but interlinking elements. Firstly, the limits of the interviewer needed to be considered, with the large volume of data to be managed and the time consuming nature of the analysis process, having to be factored into this decision. Secondly, it revolved around a figure beyond which nothing of fresh theoretical significance was likely to appear. While there was always potential for new details to emerge, especially in terms of biographical details or the peculiarities of familial succession strategies, it eventually would have been harmful to the research to continue on since too much unnecessary data would have been generated (Strauss and Corbin, 1990 cited in Mason, 2010). Furthermore, while the intention was to highlight the experiences of the individual participant as much as possible in the data analysis and findings, this aim might have been undermined by having too many respondents. It should be pointed out that although narrative inquiry usually relies on intensively analysing and reporting on a small number of cases (Creswell, 2007) it was decided to disregard this, in order to increase the scope of the experiences and views collected.

Section 4.5.1.4 The Recruitment Process
The study was advertised by means of an email, reprinted in the next section, which was sent out, with the permission of the University Registrar, through NUI, Galway’s computer services at the beginning of October 2011. As all students have access to a university email account this allowed the widest possible audience to be reached. It was timed to coincide with a relative lull period in the academic calendar between the settling-in period at the start of the semester and its conclusion when

38 One pilot interview was carried out to test the topic guide and the style of interviewing used. This was not included in the analysis or the findings.
exam and assignment pressures are at their greatest. Interested parties were asked to reply by email to indicate a wish to take part. They were contacted within twenty four hours and a participant information sheet\(^{39}\) was sent out. This was accompanied by a request that if upon reading it they still wanted to take part they should reply and a suitable time for an interview would be arranged. All the interviews were conducted in October 2011. In order to prevent participants from dropping out because of dwindling interest or rising academic workloads it was necessary to carry them out over a short time period. The interviews took place in a borrowed office on NUI Galway’s main campus. Careful consideration was made as to the choice of venue since it can impact on the power differential in the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee and how the latter relates to and engages with the process (Elwood and Martin, 2010). As the cohort all attended this university their familiarity with the campus environment and their status as students within it, negated as much as possible the effect of the location on the interview’s dynamics.

**Section 4.5.1.5 The Impact of the Recruitment Letter**

The recruitment letter possibly influenced the findings of the research. As such it is reproduced here almost in its entirety and its implications are then discussed.

I am a PhD student here in NUI Galway looking at the impact of growing up in an Irish farming family and the influence it has on young people’s identities, choices and decisions. If you are a male or female student aged 18-28 attending NUI Galway who grew up on a farm, your experiences and knowledge are very important.

Having grown up in a farming family I know that Irish farming families are under huge financial and social pressure and that young people face difficult decisions about where their future lies. By taking part in this research and agreeing to participate in a short interview you will have the chance to add your voice to

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\(^{39}\) Please see Appendix A.
the debate around what, if any, role farming culture continues to play in modern Irish society.

While the email calling for participants was successful in attracting the desired number of participants it probably had an influence on the kind of individuals who responded. In order to encourage individuals to come forward the email needed to make mention of my insider status. Although members of the farming community are incorporated into Irish society, there is also a wariness and ‘othering’ in being part of a way of life perceived as not fully understood or appreciated by outsiders. In making it clear from the outset that I too, was from a farm I hoped that the defensiveness this can lead to would be overcome and participants would be more willing to volunteer. Since requests of this nature are regularly sent through the university email system it also had to appeal on an emotive level. It needed to stand out and attract individuals who felt strongly enough about their experiences of growing up on a farm to come forward. This potentially influenced the type of individuals who chose to respond in terms of their level of interest or passion, etc. By contrast other individuals who technically fit the criteria, but who felt the farm had had little impact on their lives or who were not attracted to the subject might have shied away from it. In not capturing these alternative views the research findings are no doubt narrower in their perspective than they otherwise might have been. However, if a more neutral email had been sent out the response rate could have been negatively affected, forcing me to look elsewhere with attendant complications for gaining access to participants and delays in the research process.

Section 4.5.2 The Participants’ Profile
Some of the cohort’s main socio-demographic features are summarised in Table One on page 115\(^40\). The thirty participants were aged between eighteen and thirty-three. Ten respondents were teenagers and twenty were over the age of twenty. Twenty one were undergraduates (referred to in the following table as third level) and nine were

\(^{40}\) For more detailed biographies please see Appendix B.
postgraduates\textsuperscript{41}. Birth orders ranged from oldest to youngest and twenty eight had at least one sibling. Nine came from dairy farms, eight from mixed livestock ones\textsuperscript{42}, nine from cattle farms and four from other types. Sixteen participants described themselves as ‘helpers’ on the farm and fourteen as ‘workers’. Seventeen do not see foresee any possibility of succeeding to the farm, ten possibly will, two probably and one definitely will inherit the farm. All participants’ names are pseudonyms assigned by the researcher during the transcription phase.

\textsuperscript{41}The postgraduate category includes both Masters and PhD students.

\textsuperscript{42}This involved combinations of cattle, sheep and horses.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Academic Level</th>
<th>Birth Order</th>
<th>Number of Siblings</th>
<th>Farm Type</th>
<th>Role on Farm</th>
<th>Inheritance Status</th>
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<td>Aisling</td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>2 sisters 0 brothers</td>
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<td>4 1</td>
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<td>worker</td>
<td>Possible</td>
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<td>mixed livestock</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
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<td>worker</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1 2</td>
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<td>Probable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>18/19</td>
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<td>Sheep</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>4 4</td>
<td>Dairy</td>
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<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conor</td>
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<td>3rd of 4</td>
<td>2 2</td>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>helper</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>27</td>
<td>post/grad</td>
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<td>2 0</td>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>worker</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
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<td>helper</td>
<td>Possible</td>
</tr>
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<td>mixed livestock</td>
<td>worker</td>
<td>Possible</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>worker</td>
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<td>&gt;20</td>
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<td>worker</td>
<td>Possible</td>
</tr>
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<td>worker</td>
<td>Possible</td>
</tr>
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<td>cattle</td>
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<td>Possible</td>
</tr>
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<td>worker</td>
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</tr>
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<td>cattle</td>
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<td>4th of 4</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td>dairy/cattle</td>
<td>helper</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>3 1</td>
<td>dairy</td>
<td>helper</td>
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</tr>
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</table>
Section 4.5.3 Research Timeline

Start of PhD: September 2009.
Recruitment of Participants: October 2011\textsuperscript{43}.
Data collection: October 2011.
Transcribing of interviews: January 2012-March 2012.
Findings write-up: November 2012-March 2013.

Section 4.5.4 The Data Collection Process
This section outlines the process used to collect the data and the advantages and disadvantages associated with this. The second part of the section examines the relationship between the researcher and the participants, its impact and the benefits and challenges connected to this.

Section 4.5.4.1 The Data Collection Method
Interviews were chosen as the means of collecting data, as this was the best method of gathering information to support an in-depth exploration of the research question. A loose semi-structured approach linked to a topic guide that moved beyond a strict question-answer format was used. The research interview was framed as a co-production between the participant and the interviewer with meaning derived from the interaction between the speaker and the listener (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 1982). Moreover, as these interviews were based on a social constructionist epistemology where a multitude of possible interpretations exist in any given situation (Gubrium and Koro-Ljunberg, 2005) it was vital to have a two-way dialogue between the researcher and the participant. Through this, possible misinterpretations of the participants’ narratives by the researcher during the analysis phase were minimised, as is explained in the next paragraph. In addition, the use of

\textsuperscript{43} The email calling for participants was sent out on October 4\textsuperscript{th}, 2011 and recruitment was ongoing throughout the month.
this approach facilitated and encouraged the telling of their story. The creation of a loose guide to underpin the interviews was beneficial because, as Quinn Paxton (2002) notes, it allows for the maximum usage of the limited time available to collect data. This was especially pertinent here because many of the participants arranged their interview to coincide with breaks in their lecture schedules and, therefore, were only free to take part within short specific intervals.

It was decided not to use an interview style, which emphasised the monological production of a narrative by the participants. Too much potential existed within this for the researcher’s assumptions to act as an arbiter of meaning in the analysis process (Larson, 1997). If the participants had been encouraged to narrate their story with nominal input from the researcher, problems could have arisen farther on in the study. If clarification was not sought for confusing or ambiguous aspects of the story during the interview, then it would have been all too easy in the analysis phase to make an interpretive judgement based on my personal understanding of farming culture. To reduce this possibility, a process, which intended to arrive at an understood production of meaning but not a joint one, was utilised. This was not about reaching a common definition of a phenomenon but rather a clear understanding of the interviewees’ opinions. In this way, my subjective influence on the study was reduced. Furthermore, in asking for a participant to simply speak of their life on the farm without guidance, complex, troubling stories would have been less likely to be told because of the: ‘scar tissue [which] knots this narrative and refuses to let the story unwind’ (Benstock, 1988 p.26). However, this approach still recognises that it is the researcher who controls the interpretation of the data; an idea explored in more detail in the Section 4.8.2. Despite the benefits associated with this type of interview there are also difficulties, which are described and discussed next.

Section 4.5.4.2 Challenges in the Use of Interviews
Two particular challenges exist when using this type of interview. Firstly, there is the issue of power differentials. This is germane because, while the cohort is not socially marginalised in the sense of being deprived of access to education or family support
as a result of their positioning in the farming community, they are often invisible and unvoiced in matters relating to farming. As a result, awareness and sensitivity were needed around whether they felt legitimately empowered to discuss the topics raised in the interview. Additionally, in the semi-structured approach the interviewer still has the power to shift and guide the interview whilst simultaneously claiming to give maximum space to the participant’s voice. Despite the promise to facilitate the dominance of the interviewee’s perspective there is often an unequal power balance between the two parties to an interview with the idea of a shared space becoming something of a chimera (Briggs 1986; 2003 cited in Gubrium and Koro-Ljunberg, 2005). This issue was controlled for by framing the interview as being between two ‘experts’ on the subject of growing up in the farming community. The participants were made aware of the importance and validity of their contribution through the speech, body language, etc. of the interviewer. In order to further improve the balance of the interviews, the dynamic of ‘researcher-participant’ was moved away from towards that of ‘farmer’s child-farmer’s child’. This was achieved through the kind of language used throughout the interview, which focused on colloquial speech commonly used in the farming community rather than academic terminology. Another way the respondents can exert power is through their own agency—in refusing to answer a question or in framing a response in their own terms they assert their own rights (Mishler, 1986). To help with this the participants were assured that they could refuse any question they were uncomfortable with.

The second issue with these kinds of interviews is that they are one-off events, within a particular contextual moment, which are then employed to create interpretations about experiences occurring outside of and before they took place (Wengraf, 2001). This fails to take into account the influence of a participant’s context at that moment on their attitudes towards relationships, attachments and so on. A brief example taken from the research illustrates this point. One participant had walked out of church services a couple of months prior to the interview in protest at comments made by the priest. This was a partial catalyst for what, by the time of the interview, had become an increasingly bitter estrangement from some family members and the local community. The incident undoubtedly coloured the views aired in the interview, as it was returned to unprompted more than once by the
participant in an impassioned and despairing manner. This led me to wonder whether if the interview had taken place six months before or six months after the incident occurred would the responses given have been different. Would the individual have been in a more forgiving or a harsher mood? Unfortunately, these answers could not be provided within the boundaries of the research design, which was a limitation of the research design. There are no definitive solutions to help overcome this issue, but the relatively large sample helped to avoid overly relying on one actor as the source of a behavioural pattern. Care was also taken in the development of the research question and the analysis to emphasise the centrality of the participants’ subjective perceptions rather than an objective understanding of the material, which helped to reduce the tensions associated with this. Regardless of the interview style used the dynamic between the two parties to the interview is crucial to its success and it is to this that attention now turns. The section also looks at the advantages and disadvantages of insider status with regard to the interview process.

Section 4.5.4.3 The Researcher-Participant Relationship
While it was made clear in the email calling for participants that I was a member of the farming community it was not explicitly alluded to again prior to the interviews. This helped to avoid it becoming such a feature of the interview that it would impact on its neutrality. If this were to happen participants might have felt unable to express themselves honestly without incurring either the pleasure or displeasure of the interviewer (Quinn Patton, 2002). However, by the way individuals engaged with the interview and me in general it was obvious that most framed me dually as a researcher and an insider. This was demonstrated in how, for example, participants assured me that for the sake of the research I could ask any questions I wanted and, yet, at the same time referred to and appealed to my lived awareness of their experiences in the (re)construction of their childhoods during the interviews. The effect of this underlying positioning was that the interviews became research ‘conversations’ rather than operating within a stark interviewer-interviewee dichotomy. Through this, an interactive account could be taken of joint understandings, contexts, shared knowledge, etc. (Mishler, 1986) instead of it being a stiff, formalised interaction.
Section 4.5.4.4 Benefits of Insider Status to the Researcher-Participant Relationship

The establishment of rapport is one of the most crucial influences on the data collection process since it impacts on the extent to which the participant is willing to divulge personal stories and details. Obtaining a signature on an informed consent sheet can gain access to a specific amount of an individual’s time, but the interview’s success depends in large part upon an unspoken contract based on a tacitly understood array of gestures, language and so on. Building a strong rapport can be the difference between a meaningful as opposed to a sterile and bland interaction (Josselson, 2007). One of the factors in creating an early rapport in these interviews was a shared vocabulary. While insignificant in some ways in that the words and phrases are often of little import to an overall conversation, they are powerful identification markers indicating membership of a community. Given the relatively discrete categories of insider/outsider that emerged in the interviews this common background was, in retrospect, quite influential in building the trust and openness ideally found in interviews. The position I was regarded as occupying acted as a filter in the way actors spoke of their experiences growing up in this community and how empathetically received they expected to be. One example of this shared meaning generated through language occurred prior to one of the interviews. As a matter of courtesy, before each interview participants were offered a cup of tea or coffee and on one occasion when it was turned down I jokingly said “oh did you just stand up from the table?” This was met with an affirmative and knowing laugh. The exchange had no obvious bearing on the interview, but what it did signify was a mutual recognition of an experience common in this community. This was heavy

44 This concept is discussed in detail in Chapter 8 Section 8.6.
45 In the farming community, this is an excuse used as a means of refusing or delaying the acceptance of the hospitality usually offered when visiting a house. When I was growing up mealtimes were arranged around the rhythms of the working life of the farm, so dinner could be eaten at 12 o’clock or 4 o’clock or any time in between. Callers to the house who arrived during a meal or, indeed, at any other time, would automatically be invited to share the food or have a cup of tea. It was quite an insistent invitation and even though the person could be hungry, it was implicitly understood by them that it was impolite to accept with undue alacrity. The phrase ‘I just stood up from the table’-implying they had recently eaten was often used as a protest against the possibility of taking up the offer. This was despite the fact that some guests notoriously and comically timed their visit on the speculative hunch that it would coincide with dinner. Others were genuinely embarrassment at having arrived at an awkward time. Either way, notwithstanding the strong likelihood that they might indeed have just finished eating dinner, this comment was never treated as anything more than a feeble attempt at politeness. This protesting exchange usually preceded a hearty, if slightly sheepish, enjoyment of whatever was prepared by my mother. In the knowing exchange before the interview the phrase ‘I just stood up from the table’, acted as a symbolic device showing an understanding of particular processes and the nuances of social norms and rituals in Irish family farming culture.
with implications for the development of rapport and signalling a sensitive audience for the impending interview. The importance of this brief interchange dawned a couple of days later when I visited a friend’s house, and in refusing the proffered tea I, unthinkingly, used this phrase. This was met with a blank stare and was obviously something my friend who is from a rural but non-farming background had not encountered previously. These two instances highlighted the role language can play in interactions and the presence of a symbolic, coded way of speaking in the farming community.

One positive influence of my insider status is the access it allows to ethnographic detail borne out of membership of a community or culture that cannot be gleaned from a review of literature, academic or otherwise. However, this position does not grant a monopoly on knowledge or a panoptical view of the farming world. Neither does it mean that outsiders would be unqualified or unable to carry out research with this group but, instead, that the approaches used would, out of necessity, be different. While I had to devise strategies to distance myself from my background, for someone who did not grow up in a farming family it would be the opposite case. Furthermore, there is an implicit awareness arising out of belonging to this community of cultural norms that could affect the interviewer-interviewee relationship. An example of this is the topic of the size of a family’s landholding. Although I felt comfortable pursuing almost any avenue within the domain of the research, one question I deliberately avoided asking was about how much land their family owned. This query is a significant, if generally unspoken taboo, in the Irish farming community. This is demonstrated by the fact that, despite freely sharing the details of their life and the farm, in their description of the farm only a small number of participants volunteered this information. While this knowledge could have led to interesting insights into, for instance, succession patterns, the potential benefits would not have sufficiently compensated for the negative consequences on the interview dynamic. Academic research did not provide this insight; instead it came from knowing the ‘rules’ of polite conversation in farming culture. While it was unlikely anyone would have been offended to the point of terminating the interview, it is probable that if I asked this question there would have been a subtle shift in the atmosphere of the interview. I would have othered myself through this because it would have denoted a
lack of understanding of appropriate ways to be and to behave. This could have led to a metaphorical hunching of the participants’ shoulders and a regression into stock answers given to satisfy an obligation to the interviewer rather than a deep engagement with the process.

My status had another influence on the research in that technical or colloquial references to farming terms made by the participants could be grasped without having to seek further explanation. As already noted in Section 4.5.4.1, every effort was made to clarify issues of substantive importance to the story through the use of follow-up questions. However, where farming terminology was used insider status proved to be an advantage in two ways. Firstly, it enabled the interviews to flow more smoothly because participants did not have to be interrupted in case something of vital importance was missed. Secondly, it lessened the possible misinterpretations of their words during the analysis phase. My knowledge of the symbolic shorthand used by the participants to represent larger ideas is shown in the following instance. In talking about her routine and role on the farm Maura had this to say:

So you went to school during the week, came home, out of your uniform, into the yard clothes, onto the yard carrying-doing the two bucket challenge that kind of thing.

I immediately understood what she meant and could recognise the broader implications of this statement and her determination to show how she had worked hard on the farm from a young age. I could see that in mentioning this she wanted to illustrate the active identifications she chose to make with her background and her wish to appear to belong to the working life of the farm without explicitly stating it.

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46 In winter, livestock are usually housed indoors and need to be fed and watered very diligently. This phrase *the two bucket challenge* refers to having to carry feed and water to livestock in buckets. These are quite heavy especially for a child. While in ways carrying one is easier, bringing two is more efficient. More importantly it creates a kind of equilibrium, so although it is more strenuous it increases the likelihood of arriving at a destination with the contents of the buckets intact. As Maura points out this is quite a challenge for a young child since they are heavy and a strain on neck and arm muscles.
Section 4.5.4.5 Issues Associated with Insider Status
While there are benefits to this position this type of relationship also creates challenges for the research process. The most significant disadvantage is that an outsider could probably have unpacked meanings in the interviews in a different way as they would not operate so readily from a taken for granted position. Furthermore, while we shared the same background this did not automatically guarantee shared interpretations. Although overall patterns of behaviour emerged, each narrative revealed its own complexities, which shaped individual relationships and experiences within farming culture. Therefore, outsiders would have perhaps approached the process in a more open-minded manner and used methods to uncover ideas and explore themes with respondents in a way that no matter how balanced and reflective I attempted to be, was a state impossible for me to reach. This is because I could not fully erase my own background and knowledge from how I approached my academic work. While it is likely that some themes were not pursued because of my status, the richness of data gathered in the interviews compensated for this. In addition, two defences against this were critical self-reflection and an inherent curiosity that led to probing questions even in areas I was familiar with. Before the reflection process is discussed brief mention must first be made about how the interviews were carried out and their transcription.

Section 4.5.5 The Interview Process
A basic topic guide covering four different areas relevant to the research question was used. These were on socialisation-general involvement with the farm and how roles were shaped; transitions to adulthood-attitudes towards succession and participation in education; identity-influences on its formation and comparisons with non-farm childhoods and place attachment-connections to their birth community and farming culture. While the research question was relatively broad in scope the interviews needed to have a starting point of some kind, hence the use of these broad topics. However, there was scope for the interview to move in different directions depending on the interviewees’ interest in discussing a particular narrative strand or their direct experience of phenomena. They could also discuss other elements of their story they felt were important, but which I had not introduced. The interviews lasted between forty five minutes and one hour and forty five minutes and averaged
approximately one hour in length. They were all carried out according to the ethical guidelines described in Section 4.10. Before they began participants were given two consent forms\textsuperscript{47} to sign; they kept one copy and the other was retained by the researcher. With the permission of the interviewees, all the interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. The data was stored in accordance with NUI, Galway’s data protection guidelines.

Section 4.6 Transcription of the Interviews

The interviews of about 6,000 to 9,000 words each were transcribed by the researcher. The participants were given pseudonyms during the transcription phase, which were then used for the rest of the research process. The aim was to be as faithful as possible to the content of the interviews, so pauses and very obvious changes in tone of voice or laughter, for instance, were noted. Since a form of thematic analysis was used, more attention was paid to what was said rather than how it was said so pauses, etc. were not focused on to a significant degree. Nevertheless, exaggerated tones of voice or laughter were highlighted since these contexts influenced how the participants’ words should be interpreted. Language was taken into consideration since the subtleties of experiences emerge not in a distant, objectified format but rather in how these stories are engaged with in all their richness and complexity (Moen, 2006). In addition, every effort was made to ensure that the quotes taken from the transcripts were as reliable and true to the words and intentions of the participants as possible. However, they were altered slightly to make them easier to read, so conversational fillers such as \textit{like} and \textit{you know} and repetition of phrases, which were not essential to the point being made were removed from the quotes included in the findings’ chapters.

Section 4.7 The Reflection Process

Since the process of reflection was an ongoing and vital element of the study it is necessary to explore this in detail. In order for this to be successful the researcher must step outside of himself/herself to critically meditate on what is taking place and

\textsuperscript{47} Please see Appendix C.
their role in it (Riach, 2009). It involves thinking through ‘personal, political, intellectual and theoretical autobiographies of ourselves as researchers throughout all stages of the research’ (Doucet, 2008, p.3). This was particularly important as a device for exploring the impact of my own narrative and unconsciously held beliefs and attitudes on the research (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Through acknowledging and understanding these influences, the reliability of the research was improved and the effect of my insider status on the analysis and findings was minimised. While appreciating the still dominant position of the researcher, this ensured that the participants’ views were extensively represented throughout the study. This reflection was ongoing throughout the entire research process and was recorded in the form of written memos and journals. These writings were not overtly included in the findings’ chapters, but they helped to frame the overall approach and the kinds of insights generated in the analysis.

Below is an extract from one of my reflective journals. It was written relatively early on in the process—eighteen months before the data was collected. During this period, I had started to question what membership of the farming community actually implied. Additionally, I was simultaneously querying and unpacking the influence of my upbringing and parents on how I see the world. Aside from removing some sections for brevity’s sake, I have left the entry intact. As a result, the writing is less polished in some places than it could otherwise have been, but I chose not to edit it because to do so would have brought a risk of reinterpreting early but no less valid views.

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I had a conversation with mom about the notion of community—that someone who was from a town would perhaps find it difficult to fully understand what life in the country was really like and the nuances which were part of this community. Part of this might be the idea that there are subtle unwritten rules that do not need to be explained or even should not be explained because they should just be taken for granted. A person has to abide by these rules if they want to be full, active and welcomed members of the community. Nothing is explicitly said, you
won’t have people coming out and saying we don’t want you around or we won’t help you if you don’t abide by these hidden prescriptions for life in a rural community. But when talking to my mother I got a strong sense that for her being a good neighbour was vital for your relationship within the area. A major part of being a good neighbour is that you do favours to help and help them out in an emergency. This help is freely given because of the expectation that in the future this assistance might be needed in return. I don’t think that when someone turns up with an extra tractor or whatever that they are consciously thinking that this is great because it means that I will have the right to help in the future. […] But just because it is not explicitly stated does not mean that these rules, however subtly they are drawn up are not still applicable. It is perhaps only when the rules are not followed when help is withheld or is given begrudgingly that explicit statements are made and previous help is tallied and calculated. Sometimes these bonds of friendship and expectation are not even connected to the specific generation or individuals in question. When we were growing up we were always told about good deeds that had been carried out by dad or by our grandparents. […] From this emerged a feeling that there was a duty of care and responsibility to those who were in a less fortunate position. […] Perhaps for farmers like my father there was a certain sense of a duty of care to the parish and a recognition that a position such as farmer brought with it certain social obligations. In this way and through the stories we were told and the messages they contained we were socialised into thinking what a good member of the farming and by extension the local community was.

The reflection process continued throughout the data collection phase and beyond with the participants’ words often acting as a catalyst for flashes of insight into the influence of my own childhood and culture. Thus, while the interviews were one-off
events, the participants had an ongoing influence not only in the words they spoke but also through the circular relationship that developed between their narratives and I, in the kind of reflective thinking they provoked. It was often in these encounters that deep understanding was gained into my relationship with this background and more abstractly into the research question. One such revealing moment can be seen in this extract from Bridget’s interview:

Bridget: I suppose the only issue I had was she is perceived as very manly... When you'd see her passing in the tractor mam used always be [saying] “oh my God…did you see Mary-Anne driving the tractor? Oh my God how do her parents allow her?” You know she's perceived as very manly and she has three brothers who have no interest in the farm.

Interviewer: Will she get the farm though that will be the interesting thing?

Bridget: That will be very interesting to see. She's married now to a man from the north. She has kids and things, so we will just have to wait and see. I don't think she will.

Interviewer: I wouldn't hold out too much hope for her.

Bridget: No, I don't think she will either.

During the transcription of this interview, this passage struck me as significant because it highlighted the culturally defined and located nature of our reactions to the idea of a woman succeeding to the farm. Despite knowing she was the de facto farmer in her family, and while neither of us were opposed to the idea of her succeeding to the farm, we were both sceptical as to whether it would actually happen. This was an important moment because it led to reflections on how views are constructed around succession patterns. Emanating from this were subthemes about the gendered frameworks individuals move in and out of depending on the

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[48] She was referring here to a woman in her locality who had worked all her life on the farm and the kind of masculine identity she had had to take on in order to fit into the farming community.
context. This demonstrates how this reflective process became a vehicle to uncover my own story and the underlying voices influencing the participants’ narratives as explored in depth in the analysis phase.

Section 4.8 The Data Analysis Process
The following section looks at the thematic method used to analysis the data, the benefits and challenges associated with this as well as detailing the steps carried out in this process.

Section 4.8.1 Thematic Analysis
Thematic analysis was chosen as the means of analysing and interpreting the findings in the research. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe this as ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data’ (p.79). For the purposes of this study, themes are understood at a basic level as illustrating and classifying events and at a higher one as interpreting different elements of events, experiences and stories (Boyatzis, 1998). They are also linked to the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and become the means by which this is explored to its fullest extent. Thematic analysis is not connected to one particular methodology but can be used within a number of different approaches and strategies (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This flexibility was one of the main reasons why it was chosen as it provided a space for a range of concepts relating to language, underlying frameworks and narratives to be examined. Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) emphasis on a three-dimensional temporal, context and space narrative axis was also kept in mind throughout. Through framing the work in this way, space was created for themes to emerge rather than relying too heavily on a priori theoretical assumptions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A comprehensive literature review was carried out from which theoretical concepts such as agency and individualisation were identified and used to ground the ideas developed in the data analysis. There was strong cognisance of the multiplicity of voices represented in the participants’ ones (Moen, 2006) so this had to be factored into the process. In addition, the large

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49 This is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven Section 7.2.
volume of data gathered influenced the decision to apply a thematic lens since it was the most practicable way of managing it. Some of the depth and subtlety of the individual account was inevitably lost in comparison to if the narrative style with its intensity of focus on a smaller number of participants was used. This was compensated for, however, by the broader underlying patterns uncovered, within which the participants’ stories could then be situated.

Section 4.8.2 Issues in the Use of Thematic Analysis
While thematic analysis was the best approach to use in this study there are challenges associated with it too. As with any method it was a messy affair with much self doubt and agonising over what to leave in and what to take out as well as being an extremely time consuming process. However, two quandaries arose in relation to this specific piece of research. As Riessman (2008) points out, one potential issue for this type of analysis is that although the emergence of commonalities facilitates the construction of themes it must rest on the assumption that collective meanings can exist across a research cohort. This was a somewhat problematic leap to make in light of the epistemological basis of this research, with its emphasis on the multiplicity of ‘truths’ seeming, on some level, to deny the very possibility of these collective meanings. Creating loose thematic definitions helped mitigate this concern as space was provided for the recognition of differences between the participants. For example, one theme used in the first round of analysis was the broad notion of relationships with the farm, which allowed the unique contours of the participants’ story to be described and highlighted. Furthermore, the case could be made that there were enough similarities of language and experiential details in the stories to suggest the presence of a number of shared meanings in farming culture, such as the definition of the ‘farmer’.

Another issue to be addressed is the role of the researcher. One possible problem is falsely interpreting data through misconstruing themes and developing patterns and clumsily and haphazardly fitting them together in order to adapt to desired findings (Gilovitch, 1991 cited in Miles and Huberman, 1994). The situation is further
complicated if one disputes the idea of themes ‘emerging’ from the data, as if they are organic constructs suggested purely by the participants’ thoughts rather than emanating from the selection, nurturing, development and interpretation of ideas and themes by the researcher. In other words, while researchers claim to give voice to participants these are, in fact, channelled and framed through and by them rather than presented in a raw state unadulterated by their interventions (Taylor and Ussher, 2001; Ely et al., 1997 cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006). In addition, as Miles and Huberman (1994) argue there is a lack of standard principles guiding how qualitative research should be carried out, which creates problems for how to deal with the Gordian knot of analysis. As a result, it is largely up to the researcher to decide how to proceed with all the room for errors this opens up. Having discussed the advantages and disadvantages of thematic analysis, attention is now turned to the actual steps taken in the process.

Section 4.8.3 The Analysis Process
It was decided not to use a software package to aid in the analysis of the data. The particular method and style of analysis used did not appear to lend itself easily to a strict coding process. This was driven by a fear that the data would become fragmented and decontextualised, instead of being interpreted within an overall narrative. Another reason it was not utilised was that the structure of the data was not suited to such a system. Although a topic guide was used to ground the interviews there were no discrete boundaries between interview segments or set points when new concepts were introduced into the discussion. Therefore, it would have been difficult to develop bounded codes in this study. Since the analysis phase was an iterative process, relying on a software package could have made it more mechanical and reduced the data to a greater extent than was desired. Nevertheless, these points had to be weighed against a software package’s capacity to track and manage data. Other possible benefits included the creation of models, etc. that might have acted as a particular means of triangulating the data or increasing, at least in appearance, the validity of the findings. Despite having undergone extensive training in the use of one such package called NVivo, for the reasons outlined above, a decision was taken not to make use of this. In any case, regardless of whether a software package is
incorporated into the process or not, it is the researcher’s ability to carry out high quality analysis that is crucial, not the tools made available through a programme (Clare, 2012).

With this in mind, the analysis was carried out as comprehensively and reflectively as possible and in observance of best academic practices. While my insider status was important in adding depth of understanding to the analysis it was grounded at all times in the participants’ words and views. The decision was taken not to use a line-by-line coding scheme but rather to concentrate on broader themes. As Mishler (1986) argues the line-by-line method risks removing the context surrounding stories and comments within which they should be located and understood. In order to develop an analysis that included the whole research cohort, comparative patterns needed to be developed both on a descriptive and latent level. A thematic approach, which examined the wider picture outside of tightly bracketed codes, was, therefore, required. The analysis began during the transcription phase when a series of analytical memos were written about concepts and themes figuring prominently in the data. These memos revolved around direct quotes from the interviews, which served to prompt ideas and thoughts. This phase was in keeping with the idea that writing should not be left to the end but, instead, becomes a foundational and intrinsic element of the analytic process allowing nascent themes to be constructed (Saldaña, 2009). In addition, these memos were an entry point into the daunting task of analysing and interpreting the research.

The second phase of analysis was largely based on what Boyatzis (1998) describes as a ‘manifest’ level (p.4), i.e. what was overtly talked about in the interviews. Each transcript was rewritten as a descriptive account using thematic headings such as the relationship with the farm and attitudes towards inheritance. They were between 4-8,000 words each, depending on the length of the interview. The stories stayed in the voice of the participants where possible through retaining their idiolectic phrases. The centrality of their position to the analysis was emphasised through presenting it in the third person e.g. wording it as Bridget believes; Seamus feels. This captured their stories, and in doing this, the various narrative strands and sequences in the
interviews also began to be drawn together. Additionally, the data was made more manageable for the next stage of analysis, since it was shaped into a readily accessible format for the further development of themes. Furthermore, this gave me an opportunity to deeply familiarise myself with the data before I started the next stage—one of the key elements of any successful analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). From these accounts, short biographical sketches\(^{50}\) were written for each participant summarising the key details of their background, family and education.

It became apparent after this phase that the dominant feature of the participants’ accounts of growing up in the farming community was the theme of belonging and its different dimensions; how each was experienced; what impact it had and so on. In phase three, maps were created around these four concepts—‘social’, ‘formal’, ‘informal’ and ‘functional’, based on the themes that had come through from the analytic memos, the manifest phase and the reflective writing process. Subsequently, in phase four the data could be interrogated at the latent level according to these dimensions. At this stage abstract concepts and patterns were focused on and the views of each participant were brought together under the thematic headings generated in the previous phase. Through this a picture of trends and experiences, etc. began to be developed and explored in the context of the whole research cohort. This stage concentrated on developing ‘latent’ themes into wider interpretations about underlying ideas and suppositions across the group (Boyatzis, 1998). These centred too, on the voices that come from, for instance, cultural norms and family memories, which are of such importance in the narrative approach (Clandinin and Connelly, 2007). The last phase, i.e. how the analysis appeared in the final write up of the thesis is discussed in Section 4.9 where the findings are touched upon.

\(^{50}\) As already mentioned these can be found in Appendix B.
Summary of the Data Analysis

Thematic analytical approach was used, concentrating on the participants’ narratives.

Phase One: Analytic Memos written during the transcription phase.

Phase Two: ‘Manifest Level’→ Thematic Analysis of what was overtly discussed in the interviews. Open-ended and not focused on particular concepts at this stage.

Descriptive accounts produced of between 4-8,000 words each. Centred on stories and themes emerging directly from their narratives.

Phase Three: Belonging emerged as the core concept. Maps were developed around the four dimensions of ‘functional’, ‘informal’, ‘formal’ and ‘social’.

Phase Four: ‘Latent Level’→ Thematic Analysis of underpinning abstract concepts and wider patterns across the group. Interpretations of trends and experiences in the context of the entire cohort.

Phase Five: Findings→ Iterative process between manifest and latent levels. Allowed for triangulation between the different levels and the inclusion of participants’ voices and stories and more abstract themes.

In order to demonstrate how the analysis was carried out an example is provided here of a concept’s development and expansion over different phases. This theme focused on how young people are socialised into appreciating the importance of the farm to the family and the interdependence of these two structures. The first extract is an abridged analytical memo written during the transcription of James’ interview. These were his words on the subject of the family’s intertwining with the farm:

> Remembrance cards\textsuperscript{51} [...] they would have been on show. [...] Or, you would have been aware of these people [his ancestors] [...] for say the Catholic ritual. You would have been made aware of them, but at the same time, they are your history as

\textsuperscript{51} James is referring to memorial cards used to remember the dead. These are small cards, which include the person’s name, their photo and perhaps a passage from the Bible or a poem and are usually given to close family and friends. They are rarely discarded so they are often kept around the house long after the individual has passed away.
well you know, the history of the farm as well so they become inextricably linked.

I wrote the following in the accompanying memo, which has been lightly edited:

This is a powerful image—his childhood was shadowed by these portraits on the wall and by memorial cards. There is a sense here of ancestral worship—of linking into the past very strongly and of wanting to preserve this sense of tradition. It is like they are continuing to watch over and somehow to influence the actions of the current generation. […] Were these pictures and cards a means of socialising the children of the family into remaining loyal to the values, morals and outlook of the next generation? In a way they weren't allowed to forget about the past—they served as constant reminders of who they came from and the sacrifices that had been made to get the family to where it is now. He does not see the family name as being necessarily important to preserve with the land but rather that the family legacy is maintained into the future and through this the family's forebears are honoured. This is a heavy load to carry and I wonder does it in some way serve as a means of curbing recalcitrant behaviour? Where does this inclusion of the past fit in with the concepts of mobility and shunning the past that are encouraged in postmodern society? Do these attitudes belong more to what could be termed a traditional society, in the sense that Giddens, for example, would mean? These values seem to be somewhat out of step with modern society. Are they encouraged within the farming community in order to preserve the family into the future? Where would this fit in with the transition to adulthood that sees people being somewhat autonomous in their decisions and in how they move into adulthood?

The ideas in this memo were built on during the manifest phase and later incorporated into the latent level. It became a cornerstone of a theme about the importance of the connection between the family and the farm and how this was used in this cultural context to build the informal dimension of belonging through, for
example, emphasising the importance of legacy. This is an extract from the analysis and again it should be noted that it is only edited for grammar errors and typographical mistakes:

For James remembering the dead through remembrance cards was inextricably linked to keeping the farm going. These would have been on show [in the house] or at the very least James would have been aware of them. He says these are his history and the history of the farm as well so they would be completely linked. This highlights how the family and the farm are so closely linked. Part of the general reluctance to sell the farm must come from the impact this would have on the fabric of the family and on the family narrative. There is great importance placed on the foundational story so that it becomes another cautionary tale\textsuperscript{52} with wisdom, provisos or norms to live by and draw from. [...]This speaks to identity as a family and individual concept-one without the other makes less sense and each gives and takes meaning from the other. This idea of the memorial cards is a powerful image. They became more than just names on a family tree but real people. For him the history of the farm and knowing about it has had a profound impact on his relationship with the farm—even though he has said that it is his father he would feel duty bound to and not his grandfather the hold the farm has over him stretches back a lot further than this.

This concept of legacy was included in the final version of the findings and is explored in detail in Chapter 6 Section 6.5.2. The next section makes brief mention of how the findings were presented in the thesis as well as explaining how they were arrived at.

**Section 4.9 Findings**
The final write up of the findings was framed by the knowledge that they are tentative (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007) and that no generalisation was possible to

\textsuperscript{52} These are explained in detail in Chapter Five Section 5.3.2.
individuals outside this research cohort. The actual number of participants sharing particular viewpoints was not included in the write up. Since there was no set list of questions in the interviews, it would have been impossible to compile these kinds of figures, as not all participants were asked for their views on a topic. In any case, as the study design emphasised qualitative interpretations, this would have been a somewhat false striving for positivist reliability. In addition, if the number of participants who shared a view was seen as representing a high form of validity then the nuances and importance of individual experiences could be lost (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2007). In their place, phrases such as some of, many of, etc. were used to describe the frequency with which particular opinions were expressed amongst the cohort. While all participants were included in the findings’ chapters, some narratives were drawn on more than others. This was usually because they discussed a topic in great detail or because their words had strong resonances with and relevance to a specific theme. It should also be noted that there are no strict delineations between participants according to, for example, ‘helper’/‘worker’ positions or successor/non-successor status. Instead, a loose approach was taken that allowed appropriate categorisations or distinctions to be made according to the nature of the theme.

The final phase of the analysis, which is presented in Chapters Five to Eight involved combining and synthesising the manifest and latent stages of analysis into the four different dimensions of belonging and developing interpretive patterns about these across the research cohort. In tandem with a focus on wider themes this created space for the individual stories and experiences to be brought back to the fore. In this way, attention was concentrated on the views of the cohort whilst also allowing broader underlying meanings to be discussed. The findings included the experiences of as many interviewees as possible through quotes and stories, which elaborated on and intertwined with the more abstract patterns and themes that were explored. This also sought to accommodate the views of those who did not fit within the majority views or patterns on a given subject. This was important because it allowed their voice to be heard and also revealed a good deal about the wider group. In recognising and understanding what was uncommon, the dominant views could be unpacked further. It also helped to triangulate the data since this iterative movement
between the two levels of analysis ensured a close orientation between the individual stories and the wider themes. This also helped to guard firstly, against misinterpreting the data and secondly, the impact of the researcher’s own views, as there was as close a match as possible made between these conceptualisations and what the participants had actually said.

**Section 4.10 Ethical Considerations in this Study**
The final area to be outlined and discussed is the ethical principles and procedures grounding this study. In order to be granted permission to carry out research with human subjects in NUI, Galway, approval needed to be obtained from the university’s Research Ethics Committee. An extensive document covering all aspects of the study from its design to above all protecting the rights of the participants was given to this committee. Consent was granted in full in May 2011 for the research to be carried out. All care was taken in this study to adhere to the four main ethical principles around deception, informed consent, confidentiality and avoiding harm (Bryman, 2004). Firstly, in order to avoid misleading interviewees the purpose of the research was outlined in the participant information sheet and was verbally summarised again prior to the interview. Secondly, the participants were informed of their rights, for example, to withdraw at any time and each signed an informed consent form. Maintaining the confidentiality of the participants was of great importance, so pseudonyms were created for the participants and any individuals they mentioned in the interviews. Potential markers of identity such as the specific place they came from or illnesses in the family were also disguised.

The issue of harm had to be carefully considered as well. During the interviews, this meant handling delicate issues in a sensitive manner and framing questions in a way that enabled individuals to decide how much detail they wanted to give. While this probably meant that certain narrative themes were not explored fully, the participants’ welfare took precedence over the collection of data, so they were not induced to reveal more than they wished to. In the aftermath of the interviews,

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33 The confirmation letter is contained in Appendix D.
participants also need to be protected from potential sources of harm. One possible cause in this research would have been members’ checks in the form of returning individualised analysis to participants to examine and verify. This is often deployed within the narrative inquiry framework to strengthen the validity of findings (Josselson, 2007). It can also shift the power balance towards the participants since it gives them greater control of how their narrative is presented (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 cited in Miles and Huberman, 1994; Josselson, 2007). However, it was not appropriate in this study. If individualised analysis was returned to the participants there was a danger of unintended consequences around the issue of succession in particular. In the interviews, participants gave the impression that this was not a significant issue or dilemma for them. Nonetheless, anecdotally and historically, this has proven to be a painful problem in many farming families with the contents of wills often causing significant heartache and tension. Against this argument as Josselson (2007) points out, participants have their own means of resolving issues of harm and the importance of the interview in this regard should not be exaggerated. Nevertheless, if interpretations had been made available to individuals about succession practices this could have lead to an unmasking of the social processes underpinning this dynamic, potentially leading to unanticipated and unforeseeable problems in future negotiations on this subject in their family. Furthermore, there was no intent to position the research within the participatory action approach, so this kind of awakening about the constructed nature of roles, gender, etc. was knowingly avoided where possible.

**Section 4.11 Conclusion**

This chapter looked at the methods used to carry out this research. It explored the impact of social constructionism on the data that was gathered and how this was interpreted. It then discussed the narrative framework, why this was chosen and the challenges, which were associated with its use. The position of the researcher and the impact this had on the research process was examined as was its influence on the relationship with participants. The design of the study was described including the recruitment process, the criteria for inclusion and the sample size. It moved on to explore the use of interviews as the data collection method and the issues that need
to be thought through such as power differentials. The chapter then focused on the analysis framework and the rigorous stages this involved, which helped to ensure reliable findings were arrived at. It looked at the reflective process—a crucially significant device within this study. Lastly the ethical standards adhered to, which were of preeminent importance within the entire design and successful implementation of the study were described. In the next chapter the findings contained within this study begin to be explored, starting with the functional dimension of belonging.
Chapter Five The ‘Functional’ Dimension of Belonging

Section 5.1 Introduction
The functional dimension of belonging focuses on the participants’ role in the working life of the farm. It is important to explore this aspect because of the centrality of the farm to the family and its dynamics. This is because not only did all members of the cohort speak of some level of involvement with activities on the farm but also due to the intertwined relationship between the family and the farm on a cultural and symbolic level. From the data two groups emerged that can be separated loosely into ‘workers’ and ‘helpers’. ‘Workers’ tend to be involved on an intensive basis with the farm, while helpers are perceived as participating less and acting like an emergency labour pool. How the individual categorises themselves in this regard has a significant impact on their attitude towards their functional attachment to the farm. However, while belonging is based on an individual’s own experiences it is also linked to other actors’ views about where they stand on this spectrum. Following Evans (2007) conceptualisation of bounded agency mentioned in Chapter Two Section 2.3.2, belonging can also be viewed as similarly bounded. Actors can be made to feel as though they belong and have a kind of functional role to fulfil in keeping the farm going through their labour input and in holding to this help to maintain a particular family dynamic. There are limits to this, which are imposed by others and by their own preferences. It is not being implied here that there are wholly discrete boundaries between ‘workers’ and ‘helpers’ or that the family operates along purely pragmatic or strategic lines. Instead, it is argued that amongst the fluidities, nuances and happenstances of the everyday, clear patterns develop, which impact on how the functional element of belonging is framed by and for the individual.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first one examines the nature of the functional dimension of belonging and the two divisions within this of work and help. The second section explores the impact of gender on this attachment and the influences which underpin this. Next the chapter discusses the reasons put forward by the participants for their involvement with the working life of the farm. Lastly,
attention is turned towards positioning in the family, more specifically, the labels and roles assigned to individuals, and the value placed on work and help in the family.

**Section 5.2 The Functional Dimension of Belonging**
This section focuses on its principal characteristics and explores the role of the ‘helper’ and the ‘worker’ in farming families. This is important as it grounds the remainder of this chapter.

**Section 5.2.1 Main Characteristics**
This functional concept is worthy of examination because of the role the farm plays in the construction of childhood through the expectations surrounding involvement with the active life of the farm. In the family farming system it is common practice for children and young people to actively contribute to the farm in some way. This assistance has two levels of meaning and importance. Firstly, it enables children to be socialised into this culture and its values, norms, etc. and secondly, it provides a vital source of labour. It is almost impossible to disembed the family from the farm since it is such a core feature of its overall identity. Therefore, for this research cohort there was a symbiotic relationship between the farm and the family with a blurring of the lines between work and play; the home and the farm; parent and boss and the past and the present. In most cases, their lifestyle and day-to-day rhythms revolved around the demands of the working operations of the farm. Farming was omnipresent for these participants in their childhoods and acted as a foundation of a way of life, identity and business for them and their families. This is shown in Lorraine’s comments:

> I would have been [stressed] around the lambing season and the hay season. […] from whenever I started to know that like the hay season was going on-about five or six or seven. […]We'd be coming in to watch the weather forecast and then it was like the

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54 Thirty per cent of the labour input on farms is contributed by family members other than the main farmer (Central Statistics Office, 2008).
farming weather thing\textsuperscript{55} Sundays so we'd [...] have to get that like before we'd have the dinner.

However, while all the participants were involved in some way with the farm, distinctions can be made between two broad categories; that of the ‘worker’ and ‘helper’. Help is defined here as linked to tasks, which are considered to be unskilled, take place on a sporadic basis or in an emergency situation and are not regarded as essential to the running of the farm. These are connected to what is traditionally seen as an appropriate feminine role on the farm. Examples include feeding young animals and providing an extra pair of hands during peak seasonal periods such as harvesting or lambing. ‘Helpers’ are typically more integrated into the domain of the household with many providing assistance to their mothers through completing chores within this space. Nevertheless, there is usually an implicit understanding that the needs of the farm take precedence over other activities including household tasks. Work, on the other hand, is perceived as routine, skilled and physical and is predicated on an expectation of regular commitment, often after school and at weekends as well as during school holidays. It is linked to what is traditionally perceived as a culturally normative masculine role at the level of the family and in the wider farming culture. This depends upon a relatively high degree of instruction, in comparison, to what ‘helpers’ receive about the technical aspects of farming. In order to be able to complete these kinds of tasks local knowledge of the farm, for example, the peculiarities of the soil in each field and the social nuances underpinning the farming community, is required.

No impenetrable barrier lay between these two statuses, with both groups taking on tasks from the other category on occasion. In some cases these divisions were also temporally fluid with changes occurring over the years, either because of the preferences of the individual or due to changing family circumstances. For instance, Julia worked on the farm milking cows until she grew tired of her father’s overbearing behaviour and by offering to take care of her younger siblings was able

\textsuperscript{55} There is an extended farming weather forecast broadcast on Sunday mornings on one of the main Irish television channels.
to shift into a ‘helper’ role within the household. Katie worked until her brother was old enough to take over this position and then began to gradually assume a ‘helper’ role instead, especially when her educational commitments became more intense and demanding. In many instances the relative levels of engagement of both of these groups with the farm is linked to perception rather than reality. Although ‘workers’ were believed to be more involved with the farm, ‘helpers’ often spent lengthy periods of time on it too and performed tasks that while smaller could still be essential to the running of the farm.

With few exceptions those who played a minor part in the everyday routine of the farm did not express serious remorse or regret over their detachment from this aspect of belonging. A small number of participants who had pangs were pensive about the reduction in time spent with the family but not because they had missed out on farm activities. For those who worked on the farm there was a mixture of emotions from hatred to love to all in between. Hatred because of the impositions placed on them during childhood or resentment at being forced into a role they had no real love for and which held the terrifying prospect of a future trammelled by the farmyard and the field. James made this clear when he said:

 [...] from an early age I never wanted anything to do with it
 [...] as a child I despised it, hated it.

Love was present too because it gave a connection to their family, particularly their fathers, and a distinct role of prestige and status within the familial hierarchy. In between was a shrugged kind of acceptance-this was what happened in farming families and there was no point disputing or arguing with this fact of life. This was true even where as pointed out by Jennifer there were protests about the inconvenience of participating at a specific moment:

There was plenty of times when I've been in my pyjamas watching TV and dad's like ‘oh will you help me move the cows?’ and I'm kind of like ‘oh really?’ but like I kind of go out and do it because I know that he can't do it [on his own].
Section 5.2.2 The ‘Helper’ Role

There was a clear distinction made throughout the interviews between working and helping on the farm in, for example, the description of roles taken on. Belonging to either of these categories has an impact on how the functional relationship with the farm is constructed by both the young person concerned and other actors around them. In this cohort the division is heavily gendered with the majority of female participants identifying themselves as ‘helpers’. By contrast only a small number of male participants saw themselves as falling into this group. The term helping has connotations of a superficial level of engagement suggesting a temporary status— as if the individual could easily walk away from the task should they so choose. In reality, while their activities were often mundane and not visibly central to or regarded as crucial to the farm, this assistance was still regularly drawn upon in emergencies or to speed up a task and ensure it ran more smoothly. This construction of helping as less obligatory than work also neglects the fact that there was usually little personal agency as to whether they were involved or not. If they were asked to do something they were usually required to comply regardless of their own preferences or views on the subject.

The locating of an individual by themselves and others in the category of ‘helper’ had a significant impact on their functional connection with the farm. As the role was typically seen as transient and relatively unimportant, it was not imagined as leading to a long-term working relationship with the farm. Despite its characterisation this attachment should not, however, be seen as shallow because they still expressed a deep and enduring belonging through their eagerness or willingness to assist on the farm. For many this practice extended into adulthood since as several noted they still help outside on the farm when they return home from university to visit. Nevertheless, this status seems to form a barrier preventing these individuals from viewing the farm as a possible choice of employment. This has repercussions for an actor’s lifestyle, sense of belonging and spatial and emotional attachments. In part, help is framed in this way because it is not conceived of as having the same time commitment as work. Yet what is overlooked here is that while it might not have been as regular a punctuation of their life as it was for others it was still a significant feature of their childhoods, youth and even in some cases
adulthood. The distinctions between ‘worker’ and ‘helper’ were tacitly understood and underpinned by an awareness of the nature of one’s role on the farm. This was highlighted in Bridget’s interview:

> It wasn’t a regular basis [helping out] but you knew you did have a role on the farm I felt growing up. So the girls knew that if the cows broke the fence or if the boys weren't around that we were there to help out and you know just to get the jobs done.

For those who fall into the ‘helper’ category there was a clear differentiation drawn in their own minds between the intensity and usefulness of their participation in the life of the farm compared to parents or siblings who worked. They often had a vaguely dismissive attitude about the value of their own contribution to the farm and discounted it as either being like play, or as at a remove from real day-to-day life. In addition, where participants regarded themselves as ‘helpers’ they tended to make light of the role they actually played on the farm. This can be seen in Florence’s narrative where she spoke in a disparaging manner about her contribution and, yet, then made reference to regularly yeaning ewes when she was growing up. She also referred to an incident from when she was around ten years old when her father became angry with her for not coming out to the farm early in the morning to do her chores. This would imply that he too saw the value and necessity of her input into the farm irrespective of how she chose to portray it in the interview.

In chronicling their functional role on the farm, female ‘helpers’ often alluded to it as play. This did not appear to be a sentiment shared by males who either worked or helped. While this section of the cohort occasionally talked about the recreational opportunities available on the farm they did not posit their involvement in farm-based tasks as play. By contrast to their description of their involvement on the farm, girls saw tasks in the house as more like work, possibly because they had a routine quality that was restrictive. Katie noted this in her interview:

> Yeaning is the term used to describe a sheep giving birth. When they have difficulty doing so human intervention is required. Given how elsewhere in her interview she described her father as a large man with powerful hands, her small, delicate ones would have been a valuable resource since they could fit where his would not.
We [she and her siblings] felt it was easier to do the work outside than go in and sweep the floor. If mum asked us to sweep the floor everyone would be like ‘‘nah we're not doing it’’ and then dad goes ‘‘will you come down and help me dig out the sheds?’’ -‘‘Yeah ok’’. [...] It was just this thing where we were outside, we thought it was easier. We thought that you could escape a bit outside [...] outside seemed more fun especially when it's not raining.

Similarly, Florence described the work she did in the house with a slightly tortured air but activities on the farm were portrayed as lighter and more carefree. In this situation helping on the farm was seen as play rather than as a serious responsibility-something they could perhaps withdraw from with less guilt than those who were regarded as ‘workers’. As they were sometimes not viewed as vital to the running of the farm, parents appeared to have been happy to let these offspring gradually withdraw from a role outside in the farmyard or on the land. Instead, pursuing a successful education became their priority, which was recognised as important by both the individual and their parents. Aisling spoke of reaching secondary school and largely disengaging from the farm and with the acquiescence of her parents turning her attention to her education. On the other hand, male members of the cohort were more likely to be bedevilled with obligation even as their education progressed and were probably not allowed to pull away by their parents.

This awareness of gendered positions is illustrated by a female participant who saw herself as a ‘worker’. Maura took great pains to point out how in her family it was the girls who remained involved as, for example, when she commented:

So you went to school during the week, came home, out of your uniform, into the yard clothes, onto the yard carrying-doing the two bucket challenge that kind of thing.

It was the boys who pulled away and moved into a ‘helper’ position as they grew older. She was conscious that in doing this her family was unusual. Although she was proud of the role she and her sisters played on the farm and had no difficulty with, for instance, being seen to publicly perform a masculine role such as carrying
out manual labour\textsuperscript{57}, she laughingly stated that this must have shown what ‘tomboys’ they were. Her use of the term ‘tomboy’ here suggests that even in this situation, where the girls have the ‘worker’ role, farming is still viewed through a masculine prism, which highlights the dominance of the hegemonic masculine, construction of farming. It should be pointed out that for Maura there was no contradiction between being placed on the masculine end of the spectrum and her femininity since she did not feel this working role precluded her from dressing up on a Saturday night to socialise.

Section 5.2.3 The ‘Worker’ Role
The status of ‘worker’ leads to the development of a different kind of functional relationship with the farm as the individual shifts into a more central position in the present and possibly the future tense. This should not be taken to mean that ‘helpers’ are less capable of fitting into this bracket but rather that they are not expected to be engaged to the same extent and so, in turn, are not included as much. In some cases this working status is an investment in the future by both parents and young people since it is connected to formal belonging, as is discussed throughout Chapter Seven, and in others it is a reflection of the immediate needs of the farm. Working implies a relatively fixed status akin to having a job that brings with it a set of ongoing responsibilities and a defined and definite role in the dynamics of the farm. This is linked to a perception of functional embeddedness in the farm on a practical as well as symbolic level. It is practical in the sense that these actors are viewed as a reliable and regular source of labour and symbolic as it is connected to the public and social performance of farming and eventual recognition of being a farmer by others in this class. George noted the two sides to this ‘worker’ role:

The local community would've seen me out helping my dad, and then as I got older they would've seen you know my dad leaving work for me and me going out doing the work on the farm myself, if it was even you know driving the jeep that we had down to you know the other farm and putting out nuts [food for cattle]. Like I'm sure people did see me and they did

\textsuperscript{57} The discomfort female participants can feel about publicly performing this kind of role is discussed in Chapter Eight Section 8.4.1.1.
There was a strong sense of ownership and inclusion here, whether they had willingly agreed to participate or not, in the activities of the farm. This was often in marked contrast to other siblings who were either not asked to contribute in the same way or did not display the same interest in it as the ‘worker’ did and, thus, did not actively seek this kind of interaction. That does not mean the presence of ‘workers’ in the family precluded the involvement of other siblings in the active life of the farm. Typically, they occupied the ‘helper’ role instead, and as stated previously, contributed during emergencies, for instance. Usually, those who worked were expected to spend substantial amounts of time labouring on the farm; some in the evenings after school and all at weekends and during school holidays. This intense and differentiated participation is shown in the following quote from Brendan who described himself as a worker who will probably succeed to the farm:

I remember being a very young kid […] I used to work my ass off […] before school I used to get up and feed animals… rush home in the evenings for the harvest. […] Your parents as well put a little bit of pressure on at times especially busy times of the year. They'd be like ‘you have to be home, you have to help’. […] They [his brothers] would have worked it too, now not-nowhere near as much as I would, they would have had that obligation at some point […] stacking bales, picking stones. […] The eldest brother […] he would have very little experience with it like, he would have a couple of years of summer holidays but nothing like myself and the next guy, and it's kind of even once he left school he was gone to Dublin to university and he wasn't home that much then [either]. I guess I was there most.

For some participants working on the farm was a positive experience because it gave them a sense of belonging and was a natural and intrinsic part of themselves and their experiences in the family. For others it was something that while they did not...
love it they could come to terms with it and accept it as a feature of farming family life. However, for a few this kind of functional belonging provoked powerful feelings bordering on hatred and at times fear. They detested it because they had to carry out tasks they had no interest in, in difficult weather conditions with significant pressure to get a job done correctly and generally under the demanding watch of their fathers. In addition, there was an element of fear as in James’ case because as a child he worried that if his brother did not want the farm he would be fashioned into the heir:

[...] my older brother, the one that's going to take the farm [...] when he decided he was going to be a mechanic, things were thrown up in the air. The parents were completely abhorred at the idea [...] I remember [it] was huge at the time so that was interesting because I was thinking well who the hell do they have in line for the farm-is it me or the younger fella? [his other brother].

Incidents of a distasteful nature also drove his negative attitude towards working on the farm. One of James’ strongest memories from childhood was being aghast at the stupidity of animals. He recalled trying to divide cattle in the driving rain whilst being covered in cow dung and being screamed at for something he did not want to do and, yet, was compelled to take on.

Although parents have a strong impact on the kind of functional attachments an individual develops towards the farm, personal preferences can play an important part in this as well. It should be noted that this is different to where circumstances dictate the level of engagement some offspring have with the farm, such as in the case of Brendan’s oldest brother who in attending boarding school had less time available to spend on it. This issue of taste is relevant to individuals, such as James, who was forced to work on the farm and, yet, never grew to like this aspect of his life. While there were certain tasks he enjoyed such as harvesting hay, in general he loathed the work and escaped from the farm at the earliest opportunity. Differentiated attitudes and relationships with the farm existed amongst siblings who were of the same gender and who had the same status, thus, demonstrating the
importance of individual dispositions in shaping attachments. An example of this is Harry whose father tried everything in his power to increase his connection to it such as persistently demanding he spend time on the farm. Despite his father’s endeavours, he stridently avoided becoming more immersed into it than he absolutely had to. By contrast he presents his brothers as intensely identifying with the farm and the work associated with it. Thus, blanket parental attempts to socialise offspring into a particular role on the farm, in some situations encounter and must be mediated through and by the opposing attitudes and goals of the individual. This leads to issues over choice, a concept discussed in more detail in Section 5.4.4.3 of this chapter. Therefore, socialisation is not always successful in creating a ‘worker’ or someone who has passion for the farm—even where strong attempts are made to induce this attachment. Although it is difficult to quantify on the basis of the interviews it seems fair to say that for some participants personal inclinations are stronger than the external influences brought to bear by, for example, parents.

Section 5.2.4 Summary of the Functional Dimension of Belonging

All participants had a functional relationship with the farm. Two categories: ‘helpers’ and ‘workers’.

Characteristics of help:
- feminine tasks e.g. minding young animals;
- perceived as temporary/infrequent involvement by themselves and others;
- short-term attachment;
- acts as an emergency source of labour;
- linked to play.

Characteristics of work:
- masculine;
- perceived as essential/valuable by themselves and others;
- possible long-term attachment;
- symbolic and practical links to formal dimension of belonging.
Section 5.3 The Impact of Gender on the Functional Dimension of Belonging

The focus of the next section of this chapter is the influence of gender on the functional dimension of belonging. This is of vital importance because of its vital role in farming culture and how it shapes the kind of attachments young people form with this dimension of their life. Firstly, it explores gendered norms followed by an explanation of cautionary tales and their role in the socialisation of farm youth. Then, it discusses different influences on gendered views as well as outlining cases where there were no distinctions made on this basis. It next discusses situations where there are flexible attitudes to this and lastly, attitudes to female ‘workers’.

Section 5.3.1 Gendered Norms of Behaviour

Gender and the frameworks surrounding it are one of the most significant influences on the creation of functional belonging. Gender frameworks here refer to the ones specifically contained in the family farming culture. Within this community strong norms have developed around gender appropriate roles and behaviours. As was discussed in Chapter Three Section 3.6.1.2, certain activities are seen as suitable for males, such as driving tractors and dangerous or manual work, while proper female roles revolve around nurturing tasks, for example, taking care of young animals. While community norms have a strong impact on attitudes towards masculinity and femininity, these are interpreted by the individual and their family within the context of their relationship with the homeplace. There is a spectrum along which individuals and their families operate in how the functional dimension of belonging is developed. Participants were aware of either fitting into their allotted gendered role or defying the diktats associated with their supposed position on this continuum. They were also cognisant of definitions of masculinity and femininity operating specifically within their own family sphere. This was spoken about by Conor:

I suppose you know when you grow up on [a] farm there's always that kind of masculinity involved, like dad would never get up and wash a cup do you know that kind of way.

Clear distinctions existed within certain families based on these kinds of gendered roles whereby boys were expected to go outside and work, whilst girls did household
chores and took on a ‘helper’ position on the farm. Where there was a readily identifiable male ‘worker’, girls almost never took on a similar functional role as them on the farm. There was a set of perceptions created around this position so that girls who helped were assumed to be relatively removed from the day to day life of the farm in a way ‘workers’ were not allowed to be. Repeatedly in the interviews male participants described their sisters in tones, which suggested they saw them as being detached from this aspect of the farm and family life. However, this reserve is not necessarily linked to their emotional connection to the farm (as is explored throughout Chapter Six). Some female participants, for instance, Bridget presented this marginalising as a choice they actively made but others appeared to be detached by actors such as their parents. As a result, while they might have had a love for the land and an interest in farming, it never became a viable option for their future transition to adulthood. By contrast in most families there was an expectation that boys should take a dynamic role on the farm. Even where they might be as disinterested as their female siblings, it was still assumed by, for example, their parents that they would play this part. This was the case for James who spoke of his sister being permitted to disengage from the farm as she got older and, yet, while he hated most farm work, he still had to continue on in this position. This gendered aspect of functional belonging did not cause resentment amongst participants, regardless of whether they liked working or not. This was Ben’s attitude:

She's [his sister] the youngest, she's a girl, she gets away with not doing a lot but, do you know, who cares really? She's happy with it, we're happy with it yeah, so no it's ok we got a good thing going,

and James’ as shown in his analysis of his sister’s position:

Sinead certainly was always very much her own person [...] I suppose even just followed her own way because there was no way she was ever going to take the farm or had any interest in it.

However, two male participants, Conor and Harry, rejected this status of ‘worker’ and instead took on what they perceive to be a girl’s role in their family. They shifted into the ‘helper’ position, which enabled them to escape the gendered
requirement of working outside on the farm. Both Conor and Harry were aware of
the masculine expectations they were supposed to be framed within but in spite of
this, constructed a quasi-feminine role focusing more on household work as a core
feature of their functional belonging than farm labour. This stance is demonstrated in
Harry’s comment:

I mean I’m kind of, I’m not going to say... yeah I’m sort of the
girl if you know what I mean like.

This allowed them to assert their own agency, whilst at the same time still fulfilling a
role within the family and through this minimising conflict with their parents.
Although these two actors were relatively content with this situation, it had not
necessarily been a straightforward decision or process. While Harry was satisfied
with this role because, for example, he could lighten his mother’s workload in the
house, it also seemed to be underpinned by a fractious relationship with his father
and a desire to ‘other’ himself from the world of the farm. Similarly, Conor was
relieved not to be burdened by too much work on the farm but, nevertheless, he was
somewhat uncomfortable with the role he has taken on. For example, when he is at
home he resents having to cook dinner for his brother who works on the farm. He
felt it was natural for his mother to perform this role since it is her ‘maternal’ instinct
to do so but was aggrieved at having to do this himself, and in this juxtaposition
revealed a slight unease with the stance he had adopted.

Quite contradictory ideas and frameworks permeated the interviews around the issue
of gender. On the one hand, those participants from families where the work was
divided along relatively traditional lines viewed these constructs as normal but still
expressed strong views on the subject of gender equality in other spheres. Many
female participants appeared to be particularly indignant at the presumption that they
ought to carry out household chores or ‘serve’ their fathers or brothers. For example,
Susan distanced herself from her mother in their respective attitudes to the division
of labour within the household; her mother performs a traditional role, but Susan saw
no reason why the workload in this space could not be shared equally with the men
of the family. However, despite expressing feminist views about the construction of
gender roles in this domain, in relation to farming she firmly and unthinkingly...
placed her family into gender appropriate roles. This was highlighted in her description of her mother taking care of newborn calves while simultaneously positioning her brothers as the ‘farmers’ in the family. Correspondingly, male participants tried to present themselves as adhering to modern frameworks around gender equality but at times struggled with this concept. This was shown by for the most part, speaking of trying to avoid housework and identifying, albeit in an almost apologetic manner, certain roles as being innate to girls and boys. George demonstrated this slight confusion in his comments about views on women’s work in this community:

> It's kind of silent work [girls’ work] that doesn't get seen but between one neighbour and the next they probably expect that the girls in the neighbouring house do it…and that's what I'd say my view of what them people think as, as my view of what the farmers in the community and the other people in the community would have thought. That's not personally what my view of [it is]. If I had daughters I think I'd probably would still have my sons coming out on the farm slightly more than my daughters. I suppose just that's the DNA that I have now whatever is born and bred into me, but I don't think that it would mean that you know my son'd be doing anything less than my daughters'd be doing inside.

**Section 5.3.2 Cautionary Tales**

Cautionary tales are stories that help to shape actors’ identities through providing a set of boundaries around the expectations available to them. These cautionary tales are almost like family fairy tales, in the manner of *Cinderella* or *Rapunzel* that are retold within the family and carry subtle messages about the dire outcome of particular actions. They appear to be constructed by mothers more so than by fathers. They usually involve something negative happening either to the teller or another individual such as a neighbour or parent. If a particular path is pursued and actors entertain inappropriate hopes around succession or a desire to step outside the normative, established life path and movement into adulthood, these are the probable
consequences. They serve as both admonitions and catalysts for how actors set their goals and align their paths, past, present and future, within certain frameworks and construct their own personal identity. In addition, they delimit the boundaries of their relationship with both the specific farm they come from and their place within the farming culture in terms of, for example, what is an acceptable level of participation in both the public and private performance of farming work. This also holds true for promoting or restricting ambitions with regard to succeeding to the family’s landholding or the need to engage with education in order to avoid being trapped on the farm in the future. While participants can use these stories in a similar way to their parents they also employ another kind in their narratives. These are self-constructed by participants either during the course of the interview or were simply recollected in this space. Within these types of tales their father, mother or another protagonist can be presented by the interviewee as the main character to whom less than pleasant events have occurred. They can help individuals to understand more about themselves and their actions as they can justify their past actions, their present choices and their future direction. Further details are provided about the nature of these tales in the next section and in Chapter Seven Section 7.2.3.

Section 5.3.3 Influences on Gendered Views
Although as has been pointed out previously there is a culturally created gender spectrum influencing how this is acted out at an individual level, many of the participants’ views seem to emanate from distinctive parental standpoints as well. It is within the home and on the farm that ideas around appropriate behaviour for males and females are constructed and internalised and space is given for these to be played out. This is apparent from interviews with girls who worked on the farm who noted that this was with the encouragement of their parents. In fact, none of the female participants spoke of having contravened their parents’ wishes in taking on a ‘worker’ role. Perhaps of all the participants, Bridget had the strongest views on the impact of parents on the creation of gendered farm roles. She mentioned the disapproving comments her mother always makes about a woman in the area who works on a farm and about how inappropriate and manly this is. Bridget also narrated a cautionary tale about her own efforts to break the gender barrier as a child.
She relayed a story of how when she was twelve she tried to drive a tractor and trailer with a load of turf into a shed. Her mother saw this and laughed at the preposterousness of her attempts to do this kind of a job. From time to time her mother still regales the neighbours with this story, thus continuously reinforcing her strictly discrete view of gender roles. Although Bridget claimed some agency in shaping her role, through arguing that if she had wanted to go outside and work on the farm she could have, in reality this would not have been easy. In light of her mother’s persistent references to the unseemliness and masculinity of girls performing a male role on the farm it would have been difficult to reposition herself on this spectrum.

However, the association between gender and work roles is also augmented by other actors such as siblings and the wider community. Many male participants in particular spoke from a kind of expectation that their sisters would not be as intensely involved with the farm as they were because of their gender. This is shown in Myles’ interview when he mentioned that since his little sister will soon be twelve she, like other girls, will lose interest in farming. It seems likely that if she does pull away she will not really be pulled back to it. One wonders if it was a boy would they be allowed to move away from this functional role of the ‘worker’ so freely? Since this gender pattern is expected, this type of behaviour is probably subtly encouraged or at least facilitated within the family. These views around ‘workers’ and ‘helpers’ are reinforced by members of the community as well who also operate from within the same cultural norms. This comes through, for example, in the kind of conversations males and females are party to in social gatherings. The latter are not included in farming talk, which is a source of endless heated debate and conversation when farmers congregate together. Their apparent lack of interest and their perceived indifference about participating in these interactions, which are a crucial source of information and a way of demonstrating membership of this group, are in a circular relationship with each other. This is shown in Bridget’s interview when she comments:

Culturally I suppose girls don't take on a farming role, it's not something girls really talk about you know. What happens on
the land or what happened at the mart\textsuperscript{58} so you wouldn't expect people to even talk about that stuff to you because you kind of wouldn't have any interest.

\textbf{Section 5.3.4 No Gender Distinctions in the Creation of Functional Attachments}

However, in a small number of families there was no differentiation along gendered lines in how functional attachments were created. While the participants were still conscious of masculine and feminine roles these could be subverted and ignored in some situations. Those girls who worked on the farm, whether they did so willingly or not, were heavily involved and were eager to position themselves in this role. Maura was anxious to emphasise this lack of differentiation in her family:

[There was] no differentiation [between boys and girls] none whatsoever like I know how to do all these boy things because of the fact that there was never a differentiation made in our house, you were who you were. […] If the tractor was being fixed, if someone needed to get involved there, it didn't matter who you were as long as you were able to do the job. […] It was just the job that had to be done like.

Usually, this happened if there was no son in the family or as was the case for Maura because her parents did not push for their sons to be involved. As Maura’s parents had bought the farm and, consequently, had no deep personal attachment to the holding they intended to sell it to fund their retirement. As a result, they did not encourage the gender divide of labour as they did not look to pass the farm on to their sons. It should be noted that this gender indifference was generally absent from the male participants’ interviews. While it is impossible to tell if it is a true reflection of the family’s arrangement none of the male ‘workers’ with female siblings spoke of their sisters as being as seriously involved with the farm as they were. Where they did indicate some sisterly interest in it, either through their love for the land or fathers buying horses because of their daughters’ affection for them, they continued to distance them from a ‘worker’ role.

\textsuperscript{58} This is where live cattle and sheep are usually sold.
Section 5.3.5 Flexible Attitudes to Gender

Although deep gender norms exist in farming, they are not blindly followed or adhered to but rather can be adapted to suit an individual family’s circumstances and strategies. Where no sons were available or when parents did not push for a male successor, the ‘worker’ role was opened up to girls. This does not mean parents were unaware of the guiding norm, but rather that they were either willing to defy it or had no choice in the matter. For instance, Audrey’s father lamented the absence of sons who would properly care for the farm but was amenable to his daughters taking on an active role. Expediency can, therefore, dictate whether gendered roles are either accepted or rejected by parents, which was the case for Audrey’s father who either had to seek his daughters’ assistance or work alone. It shows too how the practical realities of life on the farm mean that community norms can be resisted—while they might appear to have a dominant hold on the construction of functional attachments to the farm; in reality, they can be subverted or used as a rationale to justify the creation of certain patterns of behaviour. The flexibility with which gender norms are used is shown in Shauna’s story. When she was younger, she had a role as a ‘helper’ and was actively discouraged from working on the farm by her parents through, for example, their refusal to let her learn to drive a tractor. These were her comments on the subject:

My uncle…he’d be slagging ‘‘oh we need somebody to help us draw the bales. Shauna come out here, and we’ll show you how to drive a tractor’’, and daddy’d be kind of sniggering and laughing under his breath…I remember saying it to him ‘‘sure here I’ll drive a tractor, can’t be that much to it’’. [her father replied] ‘‘You will not—you'll not drive a tractor—you're not getting up on that tractor no way!’’

However, her older sister worked side by side with her brothers on the farm when she was younger. The main difference between the two constructs appears to have been that more labour was needed when her sister was growing up because the farm was more intensively run and her two brothers were too young to take on all the work. By the time Shauna reached a similar age, her brothers were older and the number of cattle stocked on the farm had been reduced. This shift highlights how cultural norms can be used to defend the development of a family member’s role and how their sense of functional belonging is imagined and defended. In Shauna’s case
her ‘helper’ status was rationalised and accepted because of gender concerns but at other times when the demands of the farm were greater they were overlooked. This emphasises how attitudes towards gender can be based on the pragmatic needs of the family and, more importantly, the farm at a given moment rather than a deeply held set of beliefs underscored by community tenets.

**Section 5.3.6 Attitudes to Female Workers**
For the girls who took on a working role on the farm there appeared to be few problems with the kind of self-image or identity this imbued them with. Unlike Bridget, with her vague disgust for those girls who broke gender barriers, they often welcomed this involvement and spoke of preferring to work outside more than inside the house. While as already stated, they were aware of the gender conventions grounding farming, they had little difficulty breaking away from them. However, this deviation was not only based on their own preferences but also parental wishes. Those female participants who did take on this role did so usually at their parents’ insistence and in particular it seems at their fathers’ encouragement (although it is likely their mothers’ acquiescence would also have been needed). They did not enforce cultural norms around masculine and feminine behaviours but, instead, looked to these actors to fulfil the ‘worker’ role on the farm. Jennifer discusses this in her interview:

> Dad doesn't really see a boy/girl line I don't think at all. Like he's always kind of taken me out on the farm rather than my older brother cos he knew that [he] wasn't interested, where I was, and like that's all that mattered to him was whether they actually wanted to go out and work on the farm with him.

This gender blindness shows families have the capacity to rebel against perceived cultural norms and that cultural prohibitions in this area are not so strong as to lead to automatic conformity. Instead, they seem to come into force when they serve a particular family narrative or strategy around succession such as when parents are anxious to secure the farm into the next generation.
It should not be assumed that where no gendered distinction is in place for jobs outside the house that it is the same for household chores too. While fathers sometimes encouraged their daughters to try things outside on the farm that might be considered masculine such as driving tractors, this did not mean they saw the lines as equally blurred inside the house. This was true for Audrey who spoke about how her father encouraged her and her sisters to go out on the farm, but when it came to household tasks he reverted into a patriarchal role in viewing household chores like preparing food as women’s work. This again shows how different constructions of gender can be developed according to individual needs and strategies. These tenets can also be contextual and utilitarian so that outside on the farm where Audrey’s father needed the girls to work it was disregarded. Yet in a different space such as in the household sphere, gender became an important consideration for him. Gender divisions are, therefore, linked to different spaces or spheres of activity and are circumstantial in depending on the sex of the family’s offspring as well. It is noticeable that in some families sons are expected, despite their protests, to contribute to the housework even where their fathers might not necessarily do so, thus, adding further complexity to the use of gender in this community.
Section 5.3.7 Summary of the Influence of Gender on the Functional Dimension of Belonging

Gender norms exist on a community level but are adapted to suit family and individual needs.
Individuals are aware of the spectrum they operate in even when going against expectations.
Parents and community help to regulate behaviour along gender lines.
Presence or absence of sons strongly dictates the creation of functional attachments for girls.
Male ‘workers’ available:
- Girls:
  - ‘helpers’;
  - marginalised from a long-term relationship with the farm;
  - allowed to pull away.
- Boys:
  - ‘workers’;
  - integrated into farm;
  - Less likely to be allowed to pull away.
Male ‘workers’ unavailable or no parental push for succession:
  - fewer gendered distinctions;
  - girls take on ‘worker’ role.
Interpretations of gender norms at a family level:
  - expedient;
  - circumstantial.
Contradictory attitude to gender from male and females:
  - attitude changes depending on if it is the domain of the house or the farm.
Cautionary tales are used by parents to steer their children onto particular paths.
Participants use them in this way and also to justify their own actions.
Section 5.4 Reasons for Assisting on the Farm
Having examined the impact of gender on the creation of functional attachments to the farm, attention is now turned to the reasons put forward by the participants for taking on the role they found themselves positioned within. This is crucial because it shows the interplay between personal wishes and other factors most notably the relationship they have with their parents. It firstly, explores two reasons put forward by both groups for their involvement and then examines the motivations for ‘helpers’ and lastly, the factors influencing ‘workers’ decisions.

Section 5.4.1 Reason for Helping/Working
The two factors motivating both sections of the cohort’s participation in the working life of the farm are the time it gives them with their fathers and a sense of duty to their parents.

Section 5.4.1.1 Spending Time with Fathers
One of the main arguments put forward for assisting on the farm by both ‘workers’ and ‘helpers’ was that it provided an opportunity to spend time with their families and more specifically their fathers. Although they enjoyed feeling useful on the farm some participants questioned the value of their input and, instead, attributed both the request and the agreement to help to a desire to spend time together. This was the case, for example, for Rita whose contribution to her father’s renovation of the farm amounted to little more than writing her name in wet cement when the work was finished. Nevertheless, her involvement became a ritual appreciated by her and her father. This was true for ‘workers’ as well who saw being outside on the farm as a way to maintain a relationship with their fathers. Jennifer pointed out its importance in her comments:

I'm quite happy to go out [on the farm] cos I'm really close with my dad […] I don't know you always feel like after I've done like a full day's work on the farm and I've been working really closely with dad-when the two of us have been working together-not me in one field and him in the other I always feel
really close to him. I feel like it was a really good day and
hanging out with him and stuff and that we've got closer you
know that feeling you get from working with your parents so I
like that.

While male participants were more likely to attribute practical meaning to their work
they did hint at having a similar motivation. Donal, for instance, spoke of how he
still likes going out on the farm when he returns home because it allows his father
and him to spend time in each other’s company.

There is a strong thread of empathy running through many stories that concern
fathers, whereas the same narratives tend to describe mothers in slightly colder and
more distant terms. This is shown in how fathers are portrayed as more relaxed about
the kinds of futures their children create, seemingly wanting nothing more than their
children’s happiness. By contrast mothers are perceived to be insistently demanding
in wanting them to have more from their life than they or their husbands had. The
desire to spend time outside with their fathers can be linked to how relationships
with parents are characterised. The connection to fathers could be considered as
emotional and effective while with mothers it is practical and affective. These
differing relationships are manifested in how participants often actively chose to go
outside and help, in order to spend time with their fathers on the farm rather than
stay inside in the house and assist their mothers. Similarly, where participants
obliquely referred to difficulties between their parents over money or unemployment
fathers were viewed sympathetically and empathetically while mothers were often
adjudged to be at fault.

This desire to be outside was reciprocated by fathers as well who looked for their
assistance on the farm as it enabled them to spend time with their children. This is
connected to the fact that farmers usually work long hours and sometimes have little
opportunity to engage with their offspring on other occasions. In addition, they
perhaps enjoy having company since farming can often be a solitary somewhat
lonely activity. Their wish for their children’s time, apart from the practical need is
partially demonstrated by the fact that participants spoke of their fathers buying
horses because they knew their daughters were interested in them. The farm, therefore, can serve as a medium framing the relationship between the parent and child. While children in farming families have a function on the farm it could also be said that the farm has a function in the life of the family. This is because it provides a mechanism through which significant contact takes place between its members, thus, facilitating the strengthening and enhancement of relationships. Maura saw this as one of the main benefits of her engagement with the farm:

[…] you'd be out on a Saturday or a Sunday and you'd be in the farm and Mum would come down with the flask of tea and ham sandwiches and that kind of thing and I think for me that's why I liked it because it made us a family unit.

Section 5.4.1.2 Personal Feelings of Duty to Parents
Assisting on the farm was internally driven by a duty and debt of gratitude to their parents this group felt beholden to repay. It is interesting to note here that for all but one of the participants in either category this debt was not viewed as reciprocal. Participation on the farm in their childhoods and as adults was not presented as entitling either ‘workers’ or ‘helpers’ to a share in the income of the farm. Instead, they seemed grateful for any contribution, financial or otherwise, they received from their parents. Part of this inner urge too came from the perception of being strongly rooted within the family—the farm was vital to the well being of the family unit both in monetary and spiritual terms. Thus, it would be selfish to refuse to take part in the work. One of the participants, Myles, spoke about it in these terms:

It'd be kind of stupid of me [not to work on the farm] cos like the money that we make from it, like it goes to pay for us-to help me […] it's to benefit the whole family in a way so like it's kind of […]you know very kind of traitorous kind of a little bit of a] betrayal. It's kind of like mean you know that sort of way wouldn’t even think of that like.

Others such as George rationalised their working relationship with the farm as based on an inherent loyalty to the family, as manifested in the guise of their father, over other considerations such as spending time with friends. Off-farm life was not...
completely sacrificed, but there was an understanding that at certain times the duty to the farm outweighed other personal considerations such as socialising.

Only one respondent, Harry, explicitly referred to farming as being their father’s responsibility rather than viewing it as a collective family focused task to which there was a quasi-moral obligation to take part in. Despite pressure from his father; Harry did not feel obligated to work outside and, instead, allied himself with his mother in terms of both his sympathy for her and his contribution to her household space. He regarded farming as his father’s job, instead of as a family enterprise he ought to contribute to. Although in the interview he shimmied between framing himself as a dutiful, willing son and a resentful, obstinate one the overall impression he gave was of the latter. He was also unusual in not responding to his father’s arguments that he should participate out of appreciation for being financially supported through university. He believed his father should feel a sense of responsibility towards him because he is his son and thus conferring a right of access to familial assistance. He had a different attitude towards parental obligations than, for instance, James who, in spite of his dislike for farming, remained grateful to his parents. In not regarding his relationship with the farm as functionally reciprocal, i.e. depending on it to the point of needing to give something back, Harry would perhaps find it easier to distance himself from it and this part of his identity. It should be noted that this could also be linked to a troubled relationship with his father, which he hinted at throughout his narrative.

Section 5.4.2 Reasons for Helping
The two main reasons put forward for helping on the farm were that this was the role actors preferred and also that their parents pushed for them to take this on.

Section 5.4.2.1 A Preferred Role
Based on the content of the interviews some reasons for being involved appear to be more pertinent to ‘helpers’ than ‘workers’. One of the motivations put forward for
helping is that it allowed actors to create a role for themselves within the family, which minimised their engagement with the farm. While the individual still performed a part in the family, largely within the inside space of the house, they could avoid becoming embroiled in heated disputes over not working out on the farm. Additionally, they gained some measure of personal control over their relationship with the inside (house) and outside (farm) dimensions of their environment. Although tasks on the farm took precedence over household chores, through helping inside they at least deflected the appearance of being idle, which would have inevitably led to a job being ‘found’ for them on the farm. It also meant that they still felt they were contributing to the overall well-being of the family; in itself an important source of pride and confidence. The ‘helper’ role was claimed by Julia who deliberately stopped going out to work on the farm, and, instead, took over much of the management of the household and the care of her younger siblings. This also holds true for Harry and Conor who as previously mentioned took on a ‘helper’ role in the family in response to attempts to force them to work on the farm.

Section 5.4.2.2 Parental Preferences
For two male participants, Thomas and Brian, their status as ‘helpers’ was based on parental decisions about the nature of their children’s engagement with the farm. When they were growing up they distanced themselves from the working life of the farm, but this had its origins in how their parents framed their role from childhood onwards. In Brian’s case the farm was peripheral to the family’s life and was managed by his father almost as a hobby. There was also no urgent desire to push him into the role of potential heir, a point explored in Chapter Seven. Instead, education became a central focus with farming as a very secondary and minor concern. Thus, when other farmers’ sons were outside working on the farm in their spare time, he was inside studying. Similarly, Thomas was nudged away from a working role on the farm from a young age through not being asked to participate in the same way as his older brother, the successor to the farm was. In the kind of functional relationship they developed with the farm as it was imagined by their parents, both actors were always aware their futures lay away from the farm and structured their own position and life strategies accordingly. While these factors are
relatively specific to ‘helpers’ others emerged from the data as important for ‘workers’, which are discussed next.

**Section 5.4.3 Reasons for Working on the Farm (Willingly)**

Working on the farm willingly was generally driven by two factors firstly, a sense of responsibility and obligation and secondly, their parents’ attitudes to the functional dimension of belonging.

**Section 5.4.3.1 Responsibility and Obligation**

One strong motivation for taking part in the working life of the farm stems from the concept of having responsibilities and obligations to do so. This was not necessarily equally felt amongst all family members since in some cases there was one ‘worker’ who went outside, while others retreated into a life of education and household work often accompanied by a helping role on the farm. In some families a likely ‘worker’ and potential future farmer was identified at an early age, either through birth position or possessing a natural aptitude. They usually developed a corresponding sense of duty to the farm. From these differences a set of expectations emerged, which contributed significantly to how individuals were socialised and the differentiation of functional belonging in the family. Some participants explicitly identified themselves as ‘farmers’ and viewed their engagement with the farm as arising from a genuine love of and responsibility towards it. They appreciated the depth of their connection to it—of being part of something bigger and older than themselves, which anchored them to the farm and to a wider farming identity and culture. This was not accompanied by the futile resignation or resentment some participants felt towards their role but rather a sense of pride and accomplishment at being so important to the farm. This attitude was a significant feature of George’s interview as shown in these comments:

> I was always looking for the responsibility to do the next difficult job up always you know like even in terms of driving tractors or you know looking after the sheep or whatever I was always kind of there edging away to do something a bit more
you know. [...] Out on the farm, I was never really shying away from work I was always kinda interested in it.

Section 5.4.3.2 Parents as a Motivating Factor
This urgent sense of responsibility was partially externally motivated in that they knew their parents expected this of them so it was difficult to refuse to comply. Fathers and mothers assumed that children would participate since it was traditional, and usually had been a feature of the early life of one if not both, parents. This demand was highlighted by Brendan, who spoke of mainly being self-motivated to work but, then, at especially busy periods of the year his mother, at the urging of his father, would emphasise the necessity of contributing. He, like others in his situation, rarely rejected the request, despite the lack of dire repercussions or punishment associated with this. Rather than leading to severe castigation it would, in fact, have been more likely to elicit disappointment as opposed to an angry reaction from his father. Given the revere in which Brendan held his father he would have been anxious to avoid this response, thus, increasing the likelihood of his agreeing to do the work. This normative duty was internalised from a young age, so as these ‘farmers’ grew up, apart from the odd mutinous comment about having to get up early on a Sunday there appeared to be little conflict over this role.

Section 5.4.4 Reasons for Working on the Farm (Unwillingly)
Those who unwillingly worked on the farm did so primarily because they had no other siblings to take on the role or because they had no choice but to do so.

Section 5.4.4.1 Absence of Alternative Siblings
However, not all work on the farm was willingly or gladly carried out but rather was accompanied by despair and resentment. The difference with those who hated it but managed as Harry did to dilute their involvement through shifting into a ‘helper’ role, was that alternative siblings were available. For Joan who worked hard on the farm in her childhood and continues to do so now, the motivation to perform an
active role on the holding came from a foreboding sense of duty rather than love. This need to work was internalised from a young age so much so that it became unthinkable for her to refuse as her parents demanded it of her and she expected it of herself. She did not express any affection for farming in her interview and, indeed, spoke of how it manipulated the dynamic between her and her parents. She presented their relationship as employer-worker not parent-child and was something she felt suffocated and oppressed by. Yet although she has moved away to university and is unlikely to take over the farm, duty still prevents her from detaching from this role as the ‘worker’ as she is still heavily involved at weekends and during her holidays. This is further compounded by her gratitude at being supported financially while she attends university, making it even more difficult to pull away from this position. While her enduring involvement is shadowed by a profound dislike of working on the farm it has an intense hold on her:

Yeah like I would [want to avoid it] but at the same time, see I always kind of had this sort of very inbuilt idea that it was my duty, so I almost felt so myself, and he [her father] didn't have to say so [for her to go outside] maybe because like for so long I kind of took and internalised that idea that it's my job to-like it's your duty to help your parents you know. Like children have an obligation to help their parents.

Section 5.4.4.2 ‘No choice’
For some individuals a prime factor in their involvement with the farm as ‘workers’ is that they had no choice but to do so. Parents were acknowledged by these participants as having a strong compelling influence on the creation of their functional attachments to the farm. This is true even for those who loved working on the farm and were eager to embrace this status. For example, Myles, who still lives at home and regularly works on the farm, was asked in the interview about how his father would react if he said he did not want to go outside. He responded by saying he would laugh and make him do it anyway. This did not seem to annoy or disconcert Myles since he enjoyed it. However, for other participants who did not like it and who felt they were coerced into working, there was some latent rage and
resentment underscoring their interviews, even where as adults they have reframed this period of their life in a more positive light as discussed in Chapter Six Section 6.4.1. In these cases attempts were made to exert agency through refusing to obey until asked repeatedly, or as discussed earlier challenging masculine and feminine roles by becoming a ‘helper’. Ultimately, however, for this group there was little choice but to take an active part in the life of the farm. For some this created a degree of pragmatism about this type of functional belonging. Andrew talked about his reluctant role on the farm and trying to escape tasks but went on to say:

Well if I don't do it who's going to do it? [...] It needs to be done for them few days at least....and it's just helping out for a few days. [It] isn't too bad you know like. It's not like I'm committing my life to doing it, it's just a few days so [...] it would be kind of stupid if I laid back and just refused to do it.

As participants move towards adulthood there are usually corresponding alterations in parental expectations about their engagement with the farm. Their attitude shifts from coerciveness to negotiated requests. Furthermore, despite their own nascent steps on a career path leading away from the farm, many participants spoke of being more willing to take part in farm work on visits home than when they lived there. This seems to stem in large part from feeling that they now have a choice rather than are forced to work on the farm against their will. Conor, for example, did all he could to avoid the farm when he was younger but now is more disposed to the idea of making what he sees as a meaningful contribution to the farm through working with machinery. As he has greater freedom to choose he is more accepting of this role than when he was younger. This is also likely to be because he has built a life of his own away from the farm, which gives him the confidence to know he will not be permanently drawn into the farming world. Thus, as he becomes more secure in his own life choices, he has slightly moved away from helping towards this ‘worker’ category, albeit in a temporally bounded capacity. The grounding of the functional dimension of belonging in persistent coercion appears to be a significant part of the problem participants have with their role. For actors such as Conor, rather than looking to eschew all involvement or have their sense of belonging marked by their
role on the farm they prefer to contribute in a way, which accommodates their own personal preferences.

Section 5.4.5 Summary of Reasons for Assisting on the Farm

Reasons for assisting on the farm:
‘Helpers’/’Workers’:
- opportunity to spend time with fathers:
  - more empathetic relationship with fathers;
  - more practical relationship with mothers.
- Obligation to parents.
Reasons for helping on the farm:
  - build a role minimising interaction with the farm.
Male ‘helpers’:
  - position dictated by parents’ attitudes to succession;
  - presence of incumbent successor;
  - personal dislike of the farm.
Reasons for working on the farm:
Willing participants:
  - identified as the farmer in the family;
  - interested in farming;
  - externally motivated by parental assumptions/demands.
Unwilling participants:
  - duty;
  - lack of alternative supply of labour;
  - gratitude;
  - no choice.
Section 5.5 Positioning in the family
The final section of this chapter looks at how individuals are functionally positioned in the family in terms of three different factors; the labels they are given, the roles they take on and the relative value of the contribution they make. While this moves away slightly from the focus of the rest of the chapter in looking at, for example, education it is important to do this because of the way this impacts on and interacts with relationships with the farm and with their standing in the family.

Section 5.5.1 The Use of Labels to Create Positions in the Family
Labels such as the ‘farmer’, the academic and the brat were used by both ‘workers’ and ‘helpers’ to understand the positions they had on the farm and how these were established. They were often self-ascribed as a means of explaining a relationship and way of being and belonging within the family. Labels were also part of a process of internalising parents’ expectations surrounding their place in the framework of the family. Thus, for example, if an actor was perceived as the ‘farmer’ by their family they are likely to act in a manner befitting this position. In addition, they seem to be used to rationalise the nature of their belonging within the family and of partially answering the question of where they fit within its dynamics. These labels become a means too of justifying childhood actions, which retrospectively speaking as adults they were not particularly proud of. In a few instances when participants looked back on their childhood experiences and felt they did not contribute much to the farm, they tried to explain their behaviour and incorporate it into their ontological view of themselves through the labels they applied. Hence, Conor who spoke with distaste about working in the cold and wet during his childhood and refused on occasion to help his father with milking the cows, excused this during the interview as being because he was the ‘spoiled brat’ of the family. This label, thus, explicated his actions because this was what was appropriate for the position he had in his family. Similarly, much of Joan’s sense of duty came from and was accounted for by the ‘worker’ label she assumed from a young age. As the rebel in the family her sister could refuse to work on the farm; however, Joan could not because she wanted to distance herself from this identity positioning. Instead, she took on the title of the ‘worker’ with all this meant for her functional role and responsibilities.
These labels could be very important too, in how actors tried to conform to or pull away from them and through this their identity was partially shaped. Even when Florence did not want to carry out a task or enjoy doing it, she felt compelled to take it on because this was her position, making it seem impossible to decline her requests:

I wasn't a rebellious kid really, so if I was told to do it [a job] I would assume that there was some sort of reason behind it.

Although she admitted to having felt like slave labour at times when she was growing up she could not refuse her mother’s requests to do a job because of this label she carried. Equally, Brian argued he was not a farmer’s son in the true and full meaning of this phrase since he did not work on the land as others with this tag did. As part of the label he had been assigned he occupied a ‘helper’ role with the attendant connotations this had for his relationship with the farm. By contrast George was deeply aware of his position as a farmer’s son and his father’s assistant on the farm and did all he could to live up to the standards expected of this label through working outside as often as possible. In doing so he felt a profound sense of responsibility and loyalty. However, for those who were less content with the label they had, this could lead to a profound urge to pull away as they moved towards adulthood with Seamus, for example, appearing to be extremely anxious to avoid taking on the label of the farmer in his family, albeit with little success as is explored in detail in Chapter Seven.

Section 5.5.2 Education as a Role

While the main focus of this study is on relationships with the farm some mention needs to be made of education as it was one of the main features of the cohort’s role within the family. This is because for many ‘helpers’, education was regarded as an acceptable substitute for spending significant amounts of time on the farm. For the overwhelming majority of this group it was apparent from a young age that educational attainment was to be their route towards adulthood. Education was usually identified as something they had an aptitude for throughout their childhood and became a primary vehicle for their functional belonging within the family. Their contributions to the farm—however regular and necessary they might have been in
reality were perceived as a secondary consideration both by them and other actors, such as their parents. Education, therefore, was a means of performing a role in the family running in parallel and conjunction with their involvement with the farm. While their siblings might be identified as the ‘farmer’ they were often perceived as the academic child who would attend university and in doing so fulfil, in particular, their mothers’ hopes for their future. These expectations became an innate part of how they structured and organised their views of their transition to adulthood since they in turn rarely envisaged not attending university. Instead of having a working role on the farm they were to apply themselves in school and, then, move on to third-level education. Such were the views of many parents about this that the only choice they were left with was what course they would do in university. This highlights how bounded the futures of young people from the farming community can be. Although at first glance individual agency appears to be the main catalyst for the pursuit of a particular transition to adulthood, it can, in fact, be predicated on the underlying assumptions of, for example, their parents. This is based in large part on the type of functional role they were encouraged towards and aligned with within their family. Thomas talked in his interview about the life his parents pushed him towards:

I suppose the expectation built as I grew up really with me you know that I'd go on to get a good job and then that they [his parents] had those expectations for me. My parents wanted me to do well academically, they were happy for me to do what I wanted you know within reason, once that involved going to university.

In practical terms it meant that when ‘workers’ were outside on the farm this group of ‘helpers’ were often inside studying at their own inclination and at the behest of their parents. This further distanced the former from the possibility of completely detaching from the farm and the latter from taking it over in the future.

In some ways being the academic child and having the opportunity to go on to university had a dual motivation underlying it. While achieving success was personally important for these actors, they wanted to fulfil the dreams their parents had for them as well. This was the case for Audrey who never contemplated any possible path other than university but, nevertheless, in doing this could also
compensate her parents for her sisters’ relative lack of achievement in this regard. For some participants the decision to pursue their education was also driven by an unfulfilled parental ambition. Susan told a cautionary tale of her mother’s disrupted education caused by her own mother falling sick. Through this she seemed to imply being motivated to pursue her education not only so she could be independent but also to accomplish this for and on her mother’s behalf. This assigned role could also be reinterpreted and reshaped by the individual themselves according to their own preferences. Although they fulfilled the quasi-destiny or function ascribed to them within the family framework they also made their own decisions, albeit bounded ones, about their transition to adulthood. This is shown in Audrey’s stubborn decision to choose a course she was interested in rather than an agriculturally orientated one as her parents would have liked.

Some participants spoke of brothers who have become farmers and for whom there had been a clear emphasis throughout their youth on being outside on the farm rather than pursuing an education. Work became their primary role with consequential impacts for the choices available to them as they moved towards their future pathways. However, within this research cohort those who were ‘workers’; including individuals who continue to label themselves as farmers despite their attendance at university, believed a strong emphasis had been placed on their education throughout their upbringing. They took on a dual role within the family incorporating work on the farm and education. Parents encouraged this group to study, but it was a greater balancing act than was the case for ‘helpers’ as they had to assimilate both homework and time-consuming duties on the farm into their lives. This was mentioned by one participant Joseph who remains heavily enmeshed in the farm’s operations:

> Oh I would [be involved] yeah. Sometimes you have to-some days now say now if there was to be testing\(^{59}\) done on the cattle […] I kind of can skip that day of college just to help out and kind of to round them up and kind of help the vet as well.

\(^{59}\) It is compulsory to have cattle tested for certain diseases such as Tuberculosis before they can be sold.
Although this was undoubtedly challenging, this emphasis on both facets gave space for different possible paths to be followed as the young person could blend farming and a professional career if they so wished to in the future. Alternatively, in a few cases the individual was expected to play a significant part in the working life of the farm as they grew up, but their parents did not encourage them to see this as a long-term life strategy. Their parents seemed to hope that by engaging with education, farming could recede into the background and other lifestyles and careers would take precedence.

This dual path was especially vitally on very small landholdings, which face bleak financial and social futures. Equally, it was important where parents clearly preferred for their children to have easier, more predictable lives than they had had, off the farm. There appears to be no real sense of contradiction in parents creating functional attachments revolving around a potential induction into the role and label of the ‘farmer’, whilst simultaneously pushing their children away from it. This is highlighted in Myles’ narrative when he spoke at length about the demands his father made of him to work on the farm and, yet, when Myles asked if he would ever become a farmer his father gave a snort of derision. He also constantly emphasises his son’s need to gain a good education and does not countenance any other path for him. Largely as a result of this socialisation, Myles has a fierce and passionate pride in his membership of the farming community but does not foresee the possibility of actively running the farm in the future.

**Section 5.5.3 The Status/Value Placed on Work and Help**

Although not a subject alluded to a great deal in the interviews it seems clear there was a different value placed on work over help among the participants and their families, with the former accorded more importance than the latter. This positioning can be linked in part to traditional cultural norms about what constitutes ‘real’ work, with the definition centred on hard physical labour in demanding conditions over household chores or academia. Help is valued and noticed in and of itself within the family but is seen as, for example, less tiring or crucial than farm work is. These
attitudes are passed down through the family to the young people themselves as when Bridget stated that in her view the effort involved in doing a PhD does not constitute work in comparison to labouring on a farm. This attitude is also visible in the ‘worker’ category as exemplified by George. For him the value placed on his input had a positive impact on his position in the family. It gave him not only a kind of pride in the praise and gratitude it garnered from his parents but also as he somewhat sheepishly conceded an elevated status within the family. While he was conscious of the part his sisters played through working in the house and helping on the farm, he admitted to viewing himself as having a higher standing because he was doing more to contribute to the family’s income. He acknowledged too that this granted him preferential treatment, such as having sandwiches made for him after coming in from the farm. This attitude is shown in his comments:

There was do you know a position [...] the only way I can say is it's a role, there was a role that was there to be filled. I went out and I filled it do you know every Saturday or whatever, and my mam'd recognise [that] because she would have grown up in a farming background [...] The men going out doing the work and then do you know we'll have the cup of tea ready for them in the evening times, so you always felt appreciated, so it probably did give status yeah [...] I had my own identity within the family, that I knew what I had to do.

It is interesting to note the perceptions of the spatially segregated nature of work—unless it is outside on the farm it is not seen as a vital contribution and even then it would need to fall under the label of work rather than help before it would be fully appreciated. Despite the closely integrated relationship between the house and the land, housework is perceived as distinct and separate to tasks on the farm. Neither is it seen as having the same difficulty or capacity to be tiring with Harry pointing out that in his family one job outside was considered far more important and strenuous than numerous ones inside.

Those female participants who fit into the category of helper did not, for the most part, give the impression of being upset by the difference in the status of their contributions. However, it was keenly felt by Conor and Harry who had taken on the
‘helper’ role. While Harry seems to have had an anguished relationship with his father from childhood, tensions were exacerbated by their conflict over his input into the family’s farm. He saw himself as making a real and vital contribution to the family not only in the tasks he carried out in the house but also in his educational achievements. Nevertheless, he felt his father and brothers had a contemptuous attitude towards his role. He noted in his interview that his father insisted on him coming outside to assist him regardless of whether he was busy doing chores in the house. This highlights the importance given to one form of assistance over the other. No matter what he did, apart from working on the farm, he was convinced he would not win the complete respect of his father or siblings as their idea of masculinity is bound up in the performance of particular tasks. While his father and his mother are proud of his attendance at university, at the same time it appears for the former that this can never be equated with ‘real’ men’s work. The construction of masculinity within his family causes a great deal of frustration and stifled longing for Harry—he wishes he could be closer to the male members of his family and yet in many ways he is at an unbreachable distance from them.
Section 5.5.4 Summary of Positioning in the Family

Labels:
- Used to rationalise functional attachments to the farm;
- Part of the process of internalising parental expectations;
- Help to justify childhood behaviours;
They can be conformed to or pulled away from.

Education as an alternative role:
‘Helpers’:
- alternative to work;
- goal was to pursue third-level education;
- vital for transition to adulthood pathways;
- linked to early label as an academically inclined child.
This had a dual motivation:
  - personal ambitions/capacities;
  - could realise unfulfilled parental ambitions.

‘Workers’:
- Dual role of work and school;
- in the future could possibly combine both.
Or, parents looked for short-term labour solution but did not want long-term commitments to the farm.

The status and value placed on work/help:
- Help is less valued and visible;
- Work can grant a higher status to ‘workers’.
- Symbiotic relationship between the farm and the house but distinctions made between the relative values of both.
- Both categories usually accept the differentiated status of their contribution.

Section 5.6 Conclusion
This chapter explored functional belonging and the ways it was shaped by the individual and by other actors such as parents. This involvement can be divided
between work and help with the former accorded more weight and probably linked more firmly to future attachments and long-term roles on the farm. By contrast help constitutes an informal casual task that does not demand a long term commitment from either side. The chapter looked at gender and how expectations connected to this can be either conformed to or rebelled against within the family. Gender norms in many families become an important means of framing the role young people have on the farm with regard to beliefs about what are considered to be appropriate behaviours and roles for both male and female family members. However, in other situations these did not form the basis of the family’s working relationships with the farm but, instead, strategies, which suited the needs of that moment were developed such as the inclusion of girls in the working life of the farm where no sons were available. This seemed to be connected to parental wishes more than what the young people themselves sought, as despite general tensions about the issue of work when they were growing up few clashes were recounted in the interviews on the issue of gender.

For most participants there was a clear awareness of the kinds of roles and labels assigned to them in the functional dimension of belonging. It is not being argued here that they do not possess agency but rather that it is bounded by, for example, their own aptitudes, gender, parental strategies and aspirations as well as grounded in overarching cultural norms. While some participants could accept the authoritative role their parents had in their lives and others chafed against this, their views rarely had much impact on their functional role on the farm as they grew up. It is also apparent that the functional aspect of belonging is about perceptions as much as reality. While work is lauded as of great significance to the farm and is based on enduring attention to routine tasks, these same aspects, which might be present in the attitudes and practices of ‘helpers’ are downplayed and replaced by notions of it being casual, sporadic and underpinned by a detached relationship with the farm. The roles and labels assigned to individuals are of great importance to how this dynamic develops as young people seem to fall into assumed categories, which then serve to justify and bolster the kind of functional attachments they develop with the family’s holding. While these kinds of attachments are strongly differentiated
according to gender norms its informal equivalent is not, an idea explored as part of the next chapter.
Chapter Six The ‘Informal’ Dimension of Belonging

Section 6.1 Introduction
This chapter explores the informal dimension of belonging in relation to the participants’ connection with the farm they grew up on. This is predicated on a continuing proprietorial attitude to the farm regardless of whether they will eventually come to own the land, incorporate it into their future life plans or move away from it permanently. This informal attachment is largely founded on emotional connectivity and positioning within a temporal continuum linking the family to the farm in an intergenerational context. Participants do not concern themselves with locating themselves within wider historical traditions as they apply to farming culture or rural Ireland but rather the specific parameters and circumstances of their lives and their familial narratives. Despite moving away to university most participants continue to feel enmeshed in the life of their homeplace, of which the farm is a profoundly important and foundational component. Their sense of belonging to this place is continuing even as they move towards their own adult lives. In addition, on a more intense level there is an inherent connection with, for example, the farm acting as a repository for different types of memories. These help to preserve or enhance the bond an individual feels with the farm as they make their transition to adulthood through deepening feelings of obligation and prompting childhood recollections. Much of their relationship rests on conceiving of the farm in emotional instead of in business terms. While its income generating potential is not overlooked it is viewed primarily as the basis for their family’s identity and valued for the informal attachments it holds. As is explored in Chapter Seven, the informal attachments an individual feels towards the farm ground attitudes to and relationships with the formal dimension of belonging.

This chapter firstly, examines some of the principal ideas underpinning informal belonging and how this develops among participants. Then, it looks at attitudes to the farm across the cohort specifically how the attachment to the farm is framed by this group in business or emotional terms or as a combination of both. It also highlights the continuing proprietorial connection between many of this group and
the homeplace. Next, it explores the impact of memories-personal, parental and historical on the relationships participants construct with regard to the informal aspect of their belonging. Lastly, it moves on to explore the role of the temporal continuum and the location of actors within traditional frameworks bounded by the legacy of their family on the farm.

Section 6.2 The Informal Dimension of Belonging
The first section of the chapter looks at the main features of the informal dimension of belonging such as the dual persona taken on by participants, the relative impact of parents and the emotional attachments it leads to. It is necessary to explore this topic as it contains some key points about the nature of belonging in the farming community.

Section 6.2.1 Features of Informal Attachments
Informal belonging refers to the attachments an actor feels to the specific farm they grew up on, largely outside of broader cultural and community frameworks. The issue of rootedness in social norms and wider community attachments is dealt with in Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight respectively. The informal dimension of belonging is about the respondents’ perceived relationship to the farm as their homeplace outside of legal or community markers of ownership. It is related to persisting, if challenging, loyalties to both a physical and emotional space and an embeddedness in a philosophical framework that continues to serve as an influence and an anchor for this group of emerging adults as they take steps towards adulthood. This deep-seated attachment is not always immediately apparent or visible as almost all of them, through their choice of potential careers, appear to have decided to pull away from this background. Theirs is almost a dual persona since some like Conor and Thomas spoke of not being identified as a farmer’s son by their university classmates and all are seemingly at ease in an academic environment. Yet in other contexts where farming culture is more relevant, this element of their identity comes more to the fore. Conor noted shifting between the farming side of his
identity and his non-farm one and how both were important and appropriate reference points within certain situations:

You know when you grow up like in a farm [...] you have like certain values and stuff like that I think that you hold [...] the jobs you do and stuff [...] they are like in a certain context but [...] let's say if I'm in, you know, a Psychology lecture something like that and I know what's going on in [a] Psychology lecture but, yet, I don't come out of the lecture go to my friends who are doing you know French and English and start talking about like [Psychology]. It's for a certain context [...] and like even people as late as yesterday probably would-I remember saying something about like being from a farm and they were like ‘what you're from a farm?’ and I was like ‘yeah’ like ‘God you never would have guessed!’ and I was like ‘yeah I was’...I'm not one bit ashamed of growing up on a farm not in any way at all, [...] but it's not like I'm the one going out doing anything like every day do you know [on the farm]. It's like I have that aspect in my life and had it and still do but it's not there every day or anything like that.

Actors can switch to a vocabulary and assume a way of thinking about the world appropriate to the farming context even where this might be at odds with the social environment they have moved towards in their life away the farm. Thus, for example, in the interviews participants fluently spoke and thought about farming from an insider position rather than from a distance precipitated by attendance at university. This informal connection might not appear to resemble that of their parents or siblings who take on the role of farmer and, yet, this does not preclude a meaningful awareness of the farm and an attachment to it. This is not always willingly acquiesced to since some participants would prefer to minimise their relationship with this background. Through this they would be able to make different choices about their life, which they believe would come from their own interests and preferences rather than being constrained by their background and upbringing. Nevertheless, despite any struggles against it, it continues to colour their movement into adulthood as this informal attachment helps to root actors to the farm they grew up on and the cultural community this is located within.
The extent of an individual’s functional belonging to the farm is not necessarily reflected in their informal connection to it as some participants who worked were relatively indifferent to it while, by contrast, those who helped could feel an intense affinity to it. Therefore, neither a ‘helper’s’ marginalisation from the working of the life of the farm nor a ‘worker’s’ centrality to its routine activities acts as a definitive precursor for informal attachments. It should be noted that, although as pointed out in Chapter Five, these labour roles are heavily gendered this informal dimension does not follow a similar pattern. Views about different elements of this are equally likely to be shared by male and female participants. Both categories were comparably affected by what happened on the farm and/or attuned to its emotional rhythms and nuances. What appears to be a significant consideration outside of their working relationship with it is the awareness of being part of a collective of the family and the farm. Accompanying this is a consciousness of the importance of the farm to the family unit’s well-being. This was shown in Lorraine’s comments, an individual who presented herself as quite detached from the farm and, yet, from a young age she had a keen knowledge of the farm’s activities and especially its centrality to her family’s life:

It's a big deal like if it starts raining then and the hay rots like you're screwed like...and that's a field gone so like I would have been like [aware] yeah I obviously just wanted everything to [go] well like so when it [the hay harvest] was done then we were all happy.

Likewise, James mentioned the impact the farm had on the mood within the family:

It's [the farm] doing well. I can see even the temperament of my father it's just much more relaxed whereas I remember […] when it was struggling that you just-you didn't go near dad you know you didn't. It was, that was very much the way of it, you did not-if you were out milking the cows you did it right…but eh yeah it certainly did I think take the toll. It did take a toll on both my parents while it was difficult, I can see a huge difference now every now and then when I go home and it's fantastic as well.
In some ways this emotional attachment is less influenced by other actors than forms such as functional or formal are, in so far as it does not rest, for example, on parental exhortations and strategies about the division of labour or connect to cultural obligations about succession. Indeed, in some cases such as Maura’s the depth of her emotional connection to the farm is in stark contrast to the relatively tepid relationship her parents have with it. She has a deep affection for the farm she grew up on and found the process of pulling away from it in order to concentrate on her burgeoning academic career very painful. By contrast her parents are presented as quite detached from the homeplace and significantly more concerned with the fate of the farms they grew up on than the particular holding they live on. Similarly, where parents pushed their children away from the idea of retaining the land, such as happened in Brian’s family, personal qualms remained about the concept of selling the farm. Underpinning these feelings were lingering ties to the farm that appear not to be shared by his parents. This can also work the opposite way with parents looking to promote a stronger attachment in their children and failing to do so. For instance, while Harry’s father constantly requested his presence on the farm and sought to foster his interest in it, he tried to detach from this through othering himself. He achieved this by developing oppositional tastes than those of the other men in his family, such as literature and positing his main contribution as coming within the household space.

The informal dimension of belonging is not a static concept but rather is open to the ebb and flow of identity questioning that typifies Arnett’s (2000; 2004) conceptualisation of the emerging adulthood period. In the absence of a longitudinal component to the research it is difficult to make calculated comments about, for instance, the influence of age, but it seems to exert some influence on attitudes. If the narratives of participants who resented working on the farm and looked to distance themselves from their background as they grew up, who are aged under and over twenty, are examined a significant change in perceptions emerges. This can be seen in two contrasting stories from participants. Seamus was eighteen and full of anger at the clawing, insidious influence his background has on his life and the torment this brought in the shape of damaged family relationships. Although he realised he could not completely escape emotionally, in part because of the likelihood of his
succession to the farm, he was not reconciled with the influence the farm has on his life. On the other hand, Joan, a twenty two year old, also went through periods of deep antagonism towards her childhood and her emotional entanglement in farming and spoke of a fear of being trapped in an environment she neither fitted in with nor wished to belong to. Yet, recently, she came to a measure of acceptance of this side of her identity as she realised it was impossible to erase it and that continuing to carry such a hostile attitude could only lead to further pain and family conflict. She arrived at this conclusion following a period spent studying abroad, which she argued gave her the space to come to terms with her enforced emotional linkages to farming and to become more secure in her own self through developing her chosen academic path. The latter was important because it gave her viable alternatives to the pressures associated with performing a ‘worker’ role on the farm.

While, as stated earlier, this informal attachment is not overly influenced by the actions or reactions of others, neither does this mean it is within the conscious control of the individual. Such is the depth of their socialisation and grounding in the wider culture and the specific farm and family that it seems to be very difficult, if not impossible, for them to escape its influence, whatever way they look to forge their transition to adulthood. This was true for participants such as Bridget who eagerly embraced their continued informal attachment to the farm and did not attempt to disengage from it. This was also valid for others who tried to fight against their connections to the farm. Some did this openly as manifested in, for example, Harry’s furious arguments with his father about his involvement with the farm, and others did so more furtively through choosing a university course far removed from agriculture and against parental wishes, as in Joan’s situation. Regardless of personal feelings about this attachment, as Harry noted the individual does not succeed in withdrawing entirely from their relationship with this background:

It's not a big part of me [farming life] but like I know it's where I come from and all that kind of thing and it kind of did shape me cos...I don't know [attitudes to] money and kind of working and kind of [...] I don't know qualities I suppose [...] I don't know, if my mam and dad worked at something different or whatever, I don't know if I'd be the same. I'd say it did really
you know make a big difference. [...] Like me going against it made a big deal you know what I mean, whereas if there wasn't someone there to go against I might be someone different. [...] If I didn't want to - well not rebel - but you know just didn't want to [...] do the same or whatever as everybody else.

One influence on the creation of the informal dimension of belonging is how respondents were not usually shielded from happenings on the farm. Instead, from a young age they were often included in the joyous and tender moments of, for instance, the birth of a new lamb and the heartbreaking difficulties and uncertainties of a ruined grain harvest. This integration contributed to a sense of investment in and ownership of the farm; it was not just a vague concern of their parents but also something of deep personal meaning to them. In his interview James recalled a pivotal incident from when he was ten years old that illustrates this point. Their cattle herd, whose bloodlines had been developed since his grandfather’s time had to be destroyed due to a positive test for BSE. He was deliberately taken aside and told this news and in his narrative vividly described the terrible anguish and tears it caused his father. It appears to have been an axiomatic idea for his parents to include him and his siblings in this as they made little effort to conceal the enormity of the situation from them. This was not an issue for his parents alone to deal with, through being pointedly told he was actively and consciously drawn into farm processes. Similarly, Bridget and Jane spoke knowledgably about the perilous financial environment they grew up in and the resultant sacrifices and impact this had on their families. This inclusionary approach to the farm and its influence was documented by Jane:

There's always an uncertainty and that was always the way when we were growing up cos my mam didn't work and it was just solely from the farm that we lived...We all saw the tight squeeze I suppose all growing up. Like we were all very kind of, and I suppose it reflects me still today, like I'd be very conscious of what I spend and what I waste. Food as well that was a big thing - wasting food because

60 If Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or mad cow disease, as it is known, is found in a herd, all animals must be compulsorily destroyed.
there was six of us like including my parents and then our grandparents as well.

Section 6.2.2 Summary of the Features of the Informal Dimension of Belonging

Dual persona: their farm identity/vocabulary emerges given the appropriate context even as they pull away to pursue their academic careers.

Separation between informal attachments and functional status:
- Not based on ‘worker’/’helper’ status;
- Not divided on gender lines.

Deep emotional connection to the farm and fortunes of the family and farm are perceived as tightly connected.

Ties to the farm are not always based on parents’ attitudes:
- Can be stronger or weaker than parents’ own relationship with the farm.
- Can differ from the attitudes parents seek to inculcate in their children.

But, it is not under the conscious control of participants either.

Not a static concept:
- It can be age related as resentful older participants tend to have come to terms with the relationship more than their younger counterparts.

It is strongly influenced by childhood integration into events on the farm.

Section 6.3 Attitudes to the Farm

The following part looks specifically at attitudes to the farm in terms of whether participants look it from an emotive or business point of view or in some cases a combination of both. How the farm is framed is a vital component of the informal dimension of belonging and, as is explored in Chapter Seven, its formal equivalent as it shapes the ties an individual develops with it. This section discusses how the farm is framed by the group and then moves on to look at the continued sense of ownership individuals feel towards the farm.
Section 6.3.1 The Farm as an Emotive Framework

Whether they occupied the status of ‘worker’ or ‘helper’, the vast majority of participants see the farm as representing a crucial feature of their relationship with the homeplace and, therefore, their emotional attachment and link to the family. This is because it is an integral part of how the family presents itself to the outside world and the criteria it uses in selecting the building blocks of its narrative construction. By this it is meant that they actively choose to affiliate themselves with the farm and frame their childhoods within this context more so than in terms of other possibilities such as spatial communities. In this way the two stories of the farm and the family become intertwined, so one does not make full sense without the other. The impact is seen not only in the working relationship a family has with the farm but also in its use as an important identification marker. Additionally, as many continue to play a role on the farm on visits home or because they still live there, it acts as an influence through providing a continued focal point for interactions between family members. This is true not only of situations where the farm was a primary source of familial income but also in those where it was secondary. In most but not all cases, it acted as the prism through which the family’s life was filtered even where parents had off-farm employment. In this way it becomes clear that actively incorporating the farm into the family’s identity or separating it into the concern of whichever parent is most responsible for the farm, is a choice to be embraced or rejected. Brian’s story illuminates this point since in his home environment the farm was framed as a discrete concept under the control of his father that was not crucial to his family’s story. On the other hand, Katie talked about her father owning an off-farm business, which her mother also worked in. The farm was monetarily less important to the family; yet it was the farm with its knock-on effect on their attachments and lifestyle, which her childhood and the family’s identity revolved around. This is shown through the considerable amount of time she spent outside on the holding when she was growing up and the inclusion of visits to other farms in their annual holiday plans.

Regardless of differentiations in other dimensions of belonging almost all participants seem to be in accord about viewing the farm as an essential element of their emotional ties to the homeplace. It acts as an emotional lodestone, so although
it serves to both attract and repulse the participants it can never be completely ignored. For the vast majority the farm is framed through this lens rather than in business or economic terms. It continues to be an important part of their existence even as they gradually build a life away from it, with most participants speaking of returning to the homeplace on a frequent basis. Aisling captured the general mood towards home when she said that when she thinks of home she imagines being in her grandmother’s kitchen and being asked to let out the hens and her father always coming in for breakfast at ten after milking the cows. From this can be gleaned the indivisibility of the practical life of the farm from her perceptions of the symbolic meaning of home and family. This magnetism extends to actors’ relationships with the physical space of the landholding as when James put aside his uncomfortable working relationship with the farm and, then, could appreciate its romantic, aesthetic and emotive aspects. Seamus, who despite his hatred of many aspects of the working life of the farm and its cultural framework, shared this sentiment and spoke effusively of the natural beauty of his homeplace:

"It is beautiful, like when I say what is beautiful like the nature there [...] that is why I love home. Particularly when I come home at Christmas; I mean you know last Christmas was great [...] it's just the ice and where I live it's far, like in summer, far green fields and we live on a pier, next field is horses so like I, I love it. I sit out there; I used to sit out there a lot only recently… looking at it you know I'd be at peace."

Their informal attachment to their background is facilitated by the perceived durability of the relationship between the farm and their family. This was shown in Aisling’s comments that home would not be the same if one element from the trinity of the farm, her parents and the house were removed. Her emotional connections are tied into this sense of the farm and her life there as crucial underpinnings of her identity. For her home acts as a refuge from the ‘other’ and by extension the outside adult, world; somewhere she can connect into a primary part of herself. In a transition to adulthood process, which is vulnerable to change, the homeplace allows a temporary respite from the tensions associated with their biographical construction. This attitude is also shown in Rita’s comments:
Yeah it's [the farm] a comfort more than anything […] like back to a time when life was so carefree and I think people always kind of want to feel that and sometimes when you are in places like that you actually can still feel it through the memories that you have.

**Section 6.3.2 Framing the Farm as a Business**

In only a small number of interviews was the farm considered predominantly from a business point of view either in the links made to it or the kind of language used to describe it. Two participants, Joan and Orla, spoke of the farm in a relatively unsentimental and functional manner. This seems to have been at least partially influenced by their parents since both actors viewed them as having a somewhat emotionally detached relationship with it and seemed to regard farming as a business more than a lifestyle. This probably fed into how, for example, Joan positioned her home as a workplace rather than a site imbued with intense emotional attachments:

You don't just go home to relax and just be at home, like at home there's always the possibility that you know that it's a workplace as well cos when I visit my friends’ houses and they go home, going home is like a break and for me like going home is a break too but […] I always might have to do something you know. There's always going to be a few jobs to be done, so it's never just completely like the idea of home and break or like a rest or anything.

A few participants used the word ‘asset’ to describe the farm, which becomes by implication something of monetary value capable of being bought and sold. This was said in a timorous manner and was usually contradicted by other statements made about their relationship and attitude towards it. Thus, James mentioned how fantastic it was for the family to have the farm as an ‘asset’ to fall back on but, then, refuted this by refusing to ever contemplate the sale of the land.

However, some other participants, especially those identifying themselves as ‘farmers’ likely to take on the management of the farm viewed it as a duo of the
business and the emotional. In their opinion, this is different to their fathers who position the farm as a lifestyle and an emotional choice more than they do. While the symbolic side of the farm is still of primary concern, for these younger actors, this must compete with the need to ensure the farm is financially viable. This can cause conflict particularly where the holding is small and in need of major investment, which gives Brendan a serious dilemma about what to do with the farm in the future, as is explored in more detail in Chapter Seven Section 7.3.4. This also causes a clash in other families between sons who frame the farm in a business sense and fathers who try to maintain a more sentimental lens. George said he assesses the farm in terms of its financial capacities, while his father looks at it more from a custodial stance; not necessarily in environmental terms but in the context of a continued family relationship with it. Nevertheless, George’s seemingly unsentimental attitude is tempered by the fact that he used emotive ideas to explore his relationship with the farm. He discussed the importance of the intergenerational relationship between the family and the farm and not wanting to sell the land out of respect for his father’s hard work. He also felt he would care more about protecting the farm in the way his father does if he had sole responsibility for it. Since at the time of the interview he did not have formal ownership of it, he was able to conceptualise it as a business but this would change if he succeeded to the farm. At that point he would begin to feel a burden of responsibility to previous generations and to the emotional ramifications of the farm.

Section 6.3.3 Continued Sense of Ownership
A significant element of the informal dimension of belonging is a continued sense of ownership of the farm and careful positioning as permanently connected to the farm in some way, irrespective of whether they intend to return to the farm to live. This remains the case where it has long been obvious that an individual will not formally be granted the holding. In addition, it is not predicated on or divided according to categories of ‘worker’ or ‘helper’. The participants’ proprietorial attitude was demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, it was shown through the fact that almost the entire group despite protesting their ignorance still had relatively detailed knowledge of and interest in what was happening on the farm. James, for example, professed to
be glad to have escaped this life and, yet, he knew a great deal about the plans his father and brother have for expanding the farm in the future. Secondly, it was demonstrated in the pronouns used to describe the farm and the type of agriculture practiced on it, i.e. whether it was dairy, tillage, etc. Most of the participants including individuals such as Harry, who as outlined in Chapter Five Section 5.3.1, has a complicated functional relationship with the farm, used words such as we and our to create a picture of the farm. Harry employed this language to speak about the farm:

*We* have pure Aberdeen Angus. [...] *We* have a few Charolais and a few Limousines,

as did Paula:

It's a cattle farm like *we* used to have dairy cows, but there was no money in it so now *we* just have cattle and sell them off.

This seemed to be a natural feature of their vocabulary, so even where they showed through actions driven or mirrored by their parents that they have no long-term future on the farm they continued to position themselves as an insider, if only in an informal sense. This belonging appears to operate at an intrinsic level beyond their conscious control and regardless of whether they wanted to feel this connection or not.

The prospect of the farm being taken over by a sibling did not affect actors’ perceptions about their informal attachments to the farm. Evidence for this comes from the utilisation of these personal pronouns even in situations where succession plans have already been arranged and the role of farmer taken on by a sibling. However, since this transfer has yet to take place in most of these families, attitudes to this could change in the future. Neither can it be accounted for by the length of time participants have lived away from the farm as both younger and older actors drew on similar speech patterns. This is probably related to the deep emotional and spatial connections developed throughout their farm childhoods. This ownership does not appear to be knowingly used as an identity marker but, instead, acts as a subliminal sign of attachment to the farm. Since in practical and symbolic identity

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61 These are breeds of cattle.
terms this was such an essential and influential part of their lives growing up, if they were to completely distance themselves from this informal ownership then they would erode or threaten their own emotional and psychological framework. One of the only participants who did not use personal pronouns, such as *we* or *our* was Joan. This possibly reflects the emotional detachment her family generally feels from the farm given that, as stated previously, it is imagined almost solely within its business context.

### Section 6.3.4 Summary of Attitudes to the Farm

| It is a crucial element of their relationship with the homeplace and the family. |
| For most it is viewed in emotive terms: |
| -perceptions of home are bound up in the practical life of the farm and its symbolic meaning; |
| -their deep emotional attachments are facilitated by the enduring relationship between the family and the farm. |
| -The farm acts as a refuge from their other adult life. |
| A small number framed it as a business: |
| -this is linked to parental attitudes; |
| -if the individual succeeds to the farm it needs to be financially viable; |
| -succeeding to the title of farmer will cause a shift to a custodial approach. |

Continued sense of ownership as demonstrated by their use of personal pronouns e.g. *our*.

The potential transfer of the farm to a sibling has not yet diluted this sense of ownership.

It acts as an identity marker.

It helps to protect the self as identities are partially bound up in their enduring relationship with the farm.
Section 6.4 Memories
Many of the attitudes towards the dimension of informal belonging in this cohort are built on a foundation of memories. This is also of vital significance to the development of formal belonging, as is examined in the next chapter. These memories can be loosely divided into three different kinds: personal, parental and historical. They are crucial because they help to anchor the individual to the farm and deepen the enduring connection they feel to it. They serve as a reminder of ties, which bind them to their own and their family’s past. Firstly, personal memories are examined, followed by the role of parental ones and lastly the impact of historical ones are explored.

Section 6.4.1 Personal Memories
The first sets of memories discussed are personal ones originating in the participants’ own childhoods. These are largely described in relation to either playing or working outside on the farm rather than in the house. In this way, the farm becomes a repository of memories for individuals. Even where there is a brief history of the family on the farm there is usually a personally strong emotional attachment to their homeplace linked back to these experiences. These memories appear to act as a rejoinder to the pressures they are under as they make the transition towards adulthood with its worries about employment and other expanding personal responsibilities. They symbolise the freedom and security felt as children on the farm and within the family as they can enable individuals to reconnect with a time when both of these supports featured more prominently and regularly in their lives than now. Much of what Maura, for instance, remembered from her childhood, other than occasions such as Christmas or Easter when the house became the focus for the family’s activities, was connected to the land and being outside:

Most of the memories I have of growing up are outside on the farm do you know? That's just the way it was for me, silly things like sitting on an upturned bucket and your mother comes down with a flask of tea and you know you have your lunch outside. […] Yeah nearly all the memories would have worked around the land and the farm and being outdoors more
so than anything that ever would have gone on inside the four 
walls of the house besides the obvious ones [...] where you 
would have been in the house together.

There was an element of routine here that she liked and a sense of having a fulcrum 
the family could hinge upon, bringing with it purpose, togetherness and routine that 
seems to maintain the cohesion of this unit even into adulthood.

The rural idyll framework asserted a strong hold over the personal memories shared 
in the interviews. They were presented as a recalled, shared family past located in 
 quasi-idyllic parameters. An intangible collection of snapshot memories was recalled 
throughout some of the interviews - of playing with adored pets and running in fields, 
which glossed over more bitter moments. For participants such as Rita drudgery and 
hardship were overshadowed by images of freedom and play. Despite hinting at 
facing serious difficulties in her youth in terms of a cold relationship with her mother 
and the pain this caused for her, the farm and her childhood were evoked as a happy 
period. Even an individual like James who admitted to being miserable in his role as 
a ‘worker’ also sought to emphasise the hours he spent fishing or riding horses. 
However, not all participants viewed their childhood through a bucolic lens with this 
contrasting view arising predominantly among those participants who had felt 
trapped during this phase of their lives. In this small group there were romantic 
perceptions of non-farm upbringings and the kinds of liberties they were regarded as 
allowing space for. This led to Harry, for example, wondering about the kind of 
person he would have been or the life he would have led if he had been brought up in 
non-farm surroundings. Sometimes this was because the tastes they exhibited in 
hobbies or their personal interests held little sway with the prevailing cultural values 
of rural Irish society. Joan, for instance, spoke of her love for literature struggling to 
survive in a home environment dedicated to farming and business. She also felt 
detached from her community’s leisure preferences, an idea which is discussed in 
more detail in Chapter Eight Section 8.4.3.1.

There is an air of plasticity about personal memories because of how they can be 
reframed as the actor moves into adulthood and towards their own life path, thus,
permitting the creation of new perspectives. These memories are an active part of the participants’ current views of the world as they are open to change and can be used as a means of understanding and rationalising their attachment to the farm and, in particular, their informal connection to it. This was especially true for some of the participants who had resented their childhood role as ‘workers’. Even where these situations were not very positive and memories continued to be tinged with misery and mud, individuals appeared as adults to want to revise these. They were (re)presented, for example, as beneficial learning experiences capable of driving home the importance of hard work or as a cornerstone of their pride in the indomitability of their familial and cultural background. In some ways, this seemed to be a way of making peace with their own past and allowed them to establish an informal relationship with their background and the farm that was not underpinned by bitterness. It can also be linked, as in James’ case, to gratitude for the continued financial assistance received from his parents, which comes from the farm’s earnings. The shift in James’ views was visible when he discussed his discomfort at the ‘worker’ role he had had to occupy as a child, but then tried to put a more optimistic slant on these childhood experiences. He attempted to reframe his memories and through this move from seeing the farm with child’s to adult’s eyes. Through this process he could gain a newfound understanding and appreciation of the advantages of a farm upbringing:

Looking back now I cherish it [the farm] but, then, I certainly did not… From an early age I never wanted anything to do with it […] as a child I despised it, hated it.

Another participant Andrew has also altered how he views his early experiences, which in his case was driven by nostalgia for his past. In the immediate moment of his childhood working on the farm was a source of angst, but now in his mind these memories serve a key function of bonding the family together. When he was younger he thought days spent on the bog saving turf were wasted, but when he looks back one day in particular has become a fond memory for him. While it was just an ordinary day, in the interview he fondly recalled being on the bog with his family and eating a simple lunch; something he dismissed then but now viewed as precious. This change is possibly connected to the geographically and professionally disparate lives he and his siblings have begun to build, which do not orbit around the
homeplace to the same extent as in the past. For him this common happy memory helps to unite the family into the future through creating a positive shared past or a narrative of themselves, however, distant this was from the reality of the heated arguments, tedium and cold of some farm tasks it becomes something universal they can tap into. Thus, as family members get older instead of them serving the farm as in their childhoods, its growing symbolic importance in terms of acting as a shared memory space and framework means it becomes a functionary of their relationship with each other.

Section 6.4.2 Parental Memories
The second set of memories, which emerged as important in these interviews were parental ones. A large proportion of those memories associated with parents that surfaced in these interviews came across as cautionary tales about the hardships and limited choices parents had encountered around a lack of educational opportunities and in some cases their resultant entry into farming. These were recounted as seemingly sacrosanct tales that bore the marks of frequent oral retelling or mental recollection. This is shown in how they used phrases such as ‘my father often talks about’ or ‘my mother always says’. These memories also imprint an indelible view of the family’s position within a definite cultural framework and an associated set of values and identity markers revolving around the farm on the participant. In addition, they relate to the hard work carried out on the farm especially by their fathers. Furthermore, memories framed as cautionary tales have another role in helping to construct participants’ loyalty to and long-term relationships with the future of the farm, which is discussed in Chapter Seven Section 7.3.3. These recollections were a way of adding import and understanding to the sacrifices of parents and perhaps meaning too, to the fact that the family has chosen to stay and fight in the face of financial pressures and/or unfeasibly small-sized holdings. An example of this kind of story appeared in James’ narrative where he told a tale of how his father was taken out of school at the age of twelve to run the farm when his own father became ill. Although his father is fond of the farm and of agriculture, James felt it was unfairly foisted on him, so he resented deeply his father’s childhood experiences, which in turn shaped his relationship with the farm. It pushed him towards education as a kind
of oppositional alternative and gave him a personal drive against and fear of being similarly trapped.

**Section 6.4.3 Historical Memories**

However, it was not just parental memories, which played an important part in ongoing attachments to the farm but also historical ones stretching back before their parents’ time to earlier generations. For some, this played an important role in the development of their attachment to the farm and their sense of informal belonging as it created a deeper embeddedness in the fabric of the farm. It is not being implied that all participants had an in-depth knowledge of their family past but rather that, for the most part, they knew their family’s connection to the holding did not begin with their parents. These historical memories are centred on the achievements of, for example, their grandfathers in shaping the physical landscape of the farm, notably the buildings located in the farmyard. More than one participant recalled the work of their forefathers being pointed out around the farm with buildings seemingly having a particular power to evoke strong nostalgic reactions. These were Bridget’s comments on the subject when asked whether she had been aware of the history of the farm growing up:

Oh absolutely yeah definitely “and this is where […] your grandfather used keep horses”, and we still have you know our grandfather's hay barn and things like that, even though you know it wouldn't be the best hay barn in the world. But oh very much so we knew exactly where everything was long ago and where everything is now.

Andrew also remarked on the thoughts the physical infrastructure of the farm could elicit:

When you go down there, it's kind of like wow look at this! […]This is the house your grandfather built, this is where so many generations grew up.
In addition, these memories could centre on recollecting of ancestral activities in building the farm up from very little into a prosperous holding as was the case in James’ family. He proudly recalled how his great-granduncles, from whom his grandfather inherited the farm, had gone to the USA to work as labourers in order to send money home to buy land. He felt further immersed in the connection between his family and the farm due to visual reminders in the form of memorial cards for deceased relatives, which were present in the family home. These acted as a constant reinforcement of the current generation’s positioning within an extended familial lineage. Joseph too spoke of his grandfather travelling to England to work and returning with enough money to buy the farm the family now lives on. Through these memories the family’s history and the history of the farm were presented as one so that one becomes a means of preserving the other. This contributed to a reluctance to countenance the loss of the farm from the family because of its implications for the family narrative both in relation to its past and future (see Chapter Seven Section 7.3.2 for more details).

If personal memories are somewhat open to reinterpretation, then, this cannot necessarily be said to apply to the parental and historical memories summoned in the interviews. These have a corporeal, solid quality to them, which help to root young people in their family’s past. They are also intertwined with the participants’ own biographies, so it becomes difficult to pinpoint where one generation’s story ends and the next one begins. These stories are presented in a way that seems fixed since the characters and events populating these memories become a foundational tale for the current generation of the family. This is demonstrated by most participants’ deep familiarity with how their parents became farmers and the affect this had had on their lives. For example, Shauna talked with awe about how her father took on the farm at the age of thirteen and had to raise the rest of his younger siblings. Bridget spoke of her father’s hard life in trying to raise a family in impoverished circumstances. She captured the importance of parental memories in the creation of her informal attachment in these comments:

We’re very aware you know of where the farm came from, and in time then my father purchased the field across the road and he always tells the story of […] when that field across from my
house came up for sale and he went back to the shop and he didn't have the money to buy it, but some old man back at the shop told him ‘‘oh you've no choice! You have to buy that field-you can't have someone else living opposite your house’’. So him and my mother just you know begged, stealed [sic] and borrowed to get the field.

Through calling to mind these historical and parental memories the farm is further distanced from the concept of a commodity, which can be bought and sold. The farm, thus, comes to be framed as something beyond financial measure; for what price can be placed on one’s family history and intangibles like pride and endurance?
Section 6.4.4 Summary of Memories

Personal:
- most childhood memories centre around being on the farm;
- the farm acts as a repository of these into adulthood;
- participants can reconnect with family and a sense of childhood security;
- it maintains cohesion in the family in adulthood as it acts as a common shared memory base.

The influence of the rural idyll framework:
- try to frame their childhood memories within its conceptual framework, for example, boredom is superseded by images of freedom;
- or their preferences struggle against prevailing cultural tastes.

Personal memories have plasticity as adults many try to refashion them into a more positive framework.

Parental:
- mostly framed as cautionary tales around the denial of educational opportunities;
  - explain their decision to stay on small-sized farms;
  - spur oppositional life plans, i.e. the embracement of education.

Historical:
- revolve around older generations’ work on the farm;
- reinforce informal attachments and the need to retain the land.

Both parental and historical memories are relatively corporeal and solid and feed into the farm being framed as beyond financial measure.

Section 6.5 The Importance of Temporality in the Creation of Informal Attachments

The final concepts to be explored in this chapter are temporal continuums and the traditional frameworks incorporated into these. This connects the individual to the farm in an intergenerational context and facilitates the passing on of a cultural legacy
derived from farming from one generation to the next. These notions are of great
significance since they underpin the informal attachment actors feel towards the
farm. Firstly, the role of family history is examined and attitudes towards this among
the participants are discussed. The second part of this section looks at the
transmission of traditional frameworks within the family, especially the role the
concept of legacy can play in this dynamic.

**Section 6.5.1 Temporal Continuums**

In a late modern world where social interactions and ways of constructing one’s life
path are predicated on the now and the liquid, for the vast majority of participants the
farm takes on a permanency and a promise of constancy often not found elsewhere in
terms of key transition markers, i.e. relationships, employment or housing. Their
informal attachments are tethered to a temporal continuum that in many cases locates
actors in a framework incorporating past, present and future generations. The
narrative around not only the past connection of the family to the farm but also its
maintenance into the future partially stems from this concept. This goes deep to the
very heart of many of the participants’ identities and world views. All participants
showed a strong consciousness of the intergenerational aspect of farming whether
their own situation reflected this or not. This is demonstrated by the use of the word
‘generation’ in almost all of the interviews. It is also shown in the in-depth
knowledge of the history of their family on the farm that some participants such as
Conor and James had. James, for example, had detailed knowledge of his family
continuum. Evidence to support this comes from his comments about seeing the
family name in local records dating back to the 1840s and his awareness of his
family tree. Conor also knew a good deal about the arrival of his father onto their
farm. However, for others these aspects seemed to be of little importance with only
vague outlines of dates and hazy understandings of this facet of their lives either
being passed on by their parents or remembered by them. This did not preclude
meaningful cognisance of how the farm, and as part of this the family, was
positioned along an intergenerational spectrum or temporal continuum extending
back over generations. This was highlighted by Paula:
They [her parents] haven't really talked about it [the family history] but it was just you were kind of conscious that like the Dunphys [her family] were always there…like if we all just grew up and moved off and my parents died there'd be nobody there.

There is a seamlessness to this temporal spectrum with few discrete barriers erected between the lives of the current generation and previous ones. This is shown in eighteen year old Myles’ narrative when he discussed the history of the farm and used the word *we* even in describing actions, which took place before he was born or when he was too young to be involved in the farm:

I think *we* were small enough [the size of the farm] and then *we* originally reared pigs and stuff like that-like my dad's always saying back in the seventies or eighties when he said the prices were very good and there was a lot of money in it and then they got out of it in like the late 80s.

In a way it would be difficult for actors to avoid feeling part of this history due to the time they spent on the farm and the visible prompts such as the old sheds often dotted around the farmyard so there is a natural continuity between one generation and the next. Participants often located themselves in the historical temporal framework of the farm without pausing between past and present generations. This came through in Aisling’s story when she mentioned about how busy the farm used to be in her grandfather’s time and how neighbours still recount stories from this period, thus, blurring the distinctions between then and now. Through this his story has become part of her own history and narrative. Moreover, this facilitates the embedding of a strong sense of informal belonging in her mind as it deepens her connection to the farm. The farm and a sense of belonging to it is not a solid concept solely linked to the individual in the current moment but rather is a liquid idea that shifts between the past, present and future. As a result, individuals like Aisling are bound into a sense of moral and familial obligation and rootedness. This impacts on the desire to retain ownership of the farm, an idea explored further in the next chapter.
Even where participants’ families had not been present on the farm over an extended period they were still aware of the power of the concept of generations in the farming paradigm. One of these individuals was Joan, who placed great importance on the intergenerational dimension in how other individuals created their attachments to the land. She noted the absence of an emotional connection to the land and attributed this in part to the relatively short relationship her family have had with the holding. However, this is about perceptions as much as reality since while she saw this as too brief a time for the family to develop strong bonds with it, another respondent Bridget sought to emphasise the intergenerational relationship her family had with the farm. There was a marked difference in their relationships with the farm despite the two holdings being in their family for a similar generational span. Joan’s father appears to have passed on this detached attitude as he did not try to imbue her view of the farm with sentimentality but, instead, presented it as a business while in Bridget’s family it was threaded into the familial identity. Although not an idea explored in great depth in the interviews it appears as well that the length of time a family has spent on the holding can increase the wish to see the farm retained into the future, as examined in more detail in the next chapter.

Section 6.5.2 ‘Traditional’ Frameworks
This idea of the temporal continuum also facilitates the passing on of traditional frameworks from one generation to the next. The word ‘framework’ is used here rather than values because it reflects the willingness that many families demonstrate to incorporate changing norms found in the wider society into their landscape. These norms are not static concepts of young people dutifully following parental footsteps in relation to how they construct their adult selves and the paths they take in gaining employment or choosing where to live. Instead, they are flexible options, albeit within a particular set of choices, which allow them to build a viable identity capable of competing and flourishing in society. The passing on of ‘traditional’ frameworks is, therefore, a more appropriate description of the concept because it reflects the continuation of broad ideas around, for instance, gender, inheritance and farming roles from one generation to the next. Nevertheless, a certain level of elasticity is still

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62 The farm was bought by her grandfather.
permitted in how a family develops a strategy to not only build the future of its offspring but also to safeguard where possible the farm’s survival through the socialising of a potential successor. Instances of this include the blurring of gender norms in the construction of the family’s functional attachments and the creation of dual roles to facilitate a combination of education and farming.

However, it is not only the passing on of the physical structure of the farm that underpins this temporal continuum but also the continuation of a cultural legacy. For many participants an awareness of tradition drives the legacy aspect of the informal dimension of belonging. This acts as an important feature of their emotional attachment to their cultural and familial background—included within this are preventing the sale of an original homeplace and/or keeping the surname with the land. For example, James, despite his enthusiasm about changes to the appearance of the farm and the introduction of modernised farm practices placed great importance on the concept of legacy and showed a concern for maintaining tradition and retaining something of the past. He did not want the farm to be preserved in amber but, instead, wanted to see a combination of the continuity of the family’s engagement with the farm and ensuring new policies and possible opportunities were adhered to and kept up with. Therefore, the legacy of belonging hinges on preserving the farm in its essence rather than in its concrete physical appearance or practices. His wish to see the retention of tradition was also shown in his willingness to help conserve certain customary practices in his locality, such as the communal digging of graves among a specific group of farming families. The importance of holding onto tradition also partially underpins the acceptance of clearly gendered roles and norms surrounding the formal dimension of belonging, for example. It is not only largely acknowledged and incorporated into their sense of themselves and their family but also expected to be passed down into the next generation by them as well. This legacy idea represents not just the persistence of the farm in its physical incarnation but also its social, emotional and familial representations. This was mentioned by James when he discussed his hypothetical acceptance of the farm, in the event of his brother being unable to do so, in the hope that the next generation will be more enthusiastic about the land:

It's a legacy, whereas I might not like it—whereas I might resent
it to kingdom come, hopefully you know maybe someday I might have a child who will love it, and it can be carried on whereas it's a blip in the system [his distaste at the role of farmer he could be forced to take on] you know it's a fault. It's a pothole on the road but the road goes on.

This sense of belonging to a temporal continuum was instilled in participants from a young age and persists as part of their view of the world as they move towards adulthood. Jane spoke of driving around the neighbourhood with her father when she was younger and as they did so he would proudly point out the fields they owned. She still feels an intense informal connection to the farm and derives a stubborn satisfaction from the longevity of the family on the holding. That is not to say that this belonging is always welcomed and for some participants it brings with it potentially challenging consequences in terms of their future relationship with the farm. This can be seen in Andrew’s story who, on the one hand, appreciated seeing the family’s historical continuation as visibly manifested in his grandfather’s house. On the other hand, he pulled away from this through refusing to learn more about other people who lived on his homeplace a long time ago. They left permanent reminders of their existence in the form of fireplaces clearly visible in buildings, which used to be dwelling places but are now sheds. He recoiled from this knowledge because if he were to immerse himself more deeply in this connection he would feel a greater responsibility to preserve the farm into the future. However, regardless of any conflict caused by being rooted in this temporal continuum in relation to its implications for formal attachments, many participants seemed to appreciate living in such close proximity to their family history. This was true of Donal when he said:

> Where we are is like my dad's kind of family's like the old house and...like we're kind of [...] on the original farm so yeah it would have been going back [the family connection] do you know, a fair while alright [...] the old house is still there...So it was nice…to be living there.

While this could be a source of pride and solace, for others-especially the likes of Seamus and Brendan who faced dilemmas about their future movement back to and
ownership of the farm, it was connected to a wellspring of frustrated helplessness. The farm was a bittersweet concept for these actors because the weight of history and their emotional connections to it must contend with a desire to build their own lives. Furthermore, they understood that their background would continue to exert an influence into the future irrespective of their longing to escape its clutches.

**Section 6.5.3 Summary of Temporal Continuums**

Temporal continuums:
- The farm is a promise of constancy.
- This is based on the embeddedness and intertwining of the family in the past, present and future of the farm.
- There is a strong awareness of intergenerational relationships.
- Family perceptions are important as parents can pass on a detached attitude to their children.
- Temporal continuums facilitate the passing on of traditional frameworks:
  - Allow the family’s offspring to compete in late modern society but can protect the farm into the future.

Strong adherence to the idea of legacy as a component of informal belonging. Awareness of legacy caused contradictory emotions:
- pride in the family’s endurance;
- increased sense of responsibility towards protecting the farm in the future made it more difficult to build an individual path towards adulthood.

**Section 6.6 Conclusion**

Within the interviews a strong theme developed around the informal dimension of belonging. This is about having a continued sense of proprietorial ownership and connections to the farm, which are largely unaffected by the movement towards
adulthood. Unlike functional attachments where clear patterns emerged around ‘helpers’ and ‘workers’ the concepts, which form the backdrop to this element around pronoun usage, intergenerational awareness, the importance of memories, historical embeddedness, etc. are not gendered or predicated on the division of labour. Although there is a practical aspect to their relationship with the farm the emotional connection seems to be a governing one with the capacity to engender strong feelings of love and loyalty alongside resentment and fear. A significant element of their informal relationship with the farm is how they view it not as a commodity to be bought and sold but rather as something with powerful emotive and symbolic connotations. This is in part because the farm acts as a visual and emotional depot and stimulus for the recollection not only of personal memories but those of their family both alive and deceased. It is not just historical memories of earlier generations working on the farm, which are imbued with themes of hard work and personal sacrifice, but also parents’ memories that become part of the personal story of the individual and shapes their attachment to the homeplace. It appears to be less influenced by other actors such as parents than other aspects of belonging. While they might be important drivers of, for example, loyalties to the farm, there seems to be greater capacity for fluctuations and nuances among individuals even where parents try to steer them in a particular direction. In saying this, informal belonging is outside the active control of the individual—they are tied to it on such a deep level that even where they would like to pull away completely they recognise that this is not entirely possible and, instead, must be incorporated into their lives as they move towards adulthood. It is also an important component if not the most important part of formal relationships with the farm—a dimension of belonging, which is explored in the next chapter.
Chapter Seven The ‘Formal’ Dimension of Belonging

Section 7.1 Introduction
Formal attachments to the farm are concerned with the designation of a legal successor to the farm and the title of farmer or in some cases where there is no obvious candidate to take over its active management, the heir to the landholding. It is a vital cornerstone of family farming culture for without the passing on of largely intact holdings from one generation to the next it would be virtually impossible for it to remain viable. In the vast majority of families there is a robust desire to see the farm maintained within it, even in situations where this does not seem to be a practical possibility. The norm in the Irish context is to bequeath the farm to a son or sons who are identifiably the ‘farmer’ in the family. However, this is not always a straightforward process since at times no such actor is available or interested. This necessitates a reworking of succession strategies to include sons who do not wish to be farmers or daughters. Fundamental to the continuation of this overarching norm is a need for acceptance among both successors and non-successors of their roles within this process. The former must agree to take over the farm and the latter to step aside and offer support either tacitly, through not disputing the strategy employed, or overtly through encouraging their sibling into this role. This is usually underpinned by informal connections to the farm as without, for example, the creation of deep emotional attachments to it, it could prove difficult to gain acquiescence to the approach adopted in the family.

Formal belonging can lead to significant dilemmas for some actors since the needs of the farm and the moral obligations and burdens, which are intertwined with the succession narrative, can come into conflict with their personal goals as they make their transition to adulthood. Among non-successors, attitudes to the farm’s future are not necessarily gendered or based on occupying a ‘worker’/’helper’ role during childhood. As is demonstrated in this chapter, even the most outwardly detached individual can have firmly held convictions over this issue and a fervent desire to see the land retained in the family. However, not all participants have strong feelings about the retention of the farm, but these are an exception to the general pattern.
Their attitudes can often be traced to particular familial circumstances such as their parents’ relationships with the farm or personal animosity towards farming.

The first section of this chapter looks at the relationship between gender and formal belonging. Within this it examines male and female attitudes to the gendered nature of succession, wider frameworks participants are brought up within and the cautionary tales, which are used to enforce cultural norms. The next part explores the reasons behind why most participants wish to see the farm retained in the family even where they do not want to take it over themselves. These are heavily linked to the informal attachments described in Chapter Six and include the intergenerational relationship between the family and the farm and a sense of obligation to parents. After this the concept of layers of formal belonging is discussed, which focuses on the differences emerging between individuals who will take the holding with the intention to actively farm it and those who will do so in order to preserve the family’s connection to the farm. Then, the link between the ‘farmer’ and succession is examined as is the role non-successors play in the process of handing over the farm. Lastly, a brief mention is made of parental attitudes to the issue of succession.

Section 7.2 The relationship between Gender and the Formal Dimension of Belonging

Section 7.2.1 Views on Succession
This section outlines the cultural norms around succession in the Irish farming community. Then, it discusses the views of female participants and secondly, the attitudes of male participants with regard to succession.

Section 7.2.1.1 The Succession Norm
The dominant cultural norm around formal belonging in Irish agriculture strongly favours patrilineal succession—a strategy usually accepted by both genders often regardless of an individual’s love for the farm or the extent of their active
involvement with it. Even where occasionally female participants might speak of the possibility of being given a small piece of land as a site for a house, an inherent feature of this model is that they were usually not brought up to expect equality in the form of a right to inherit a working share of the landholding. On the other hand, male respondents were aware growing up that, irrespective of their family’s idiosyncratic attitudes to this issue, a son ‘ought’ to take it over and ensure it is preserved into the next generation. Despite the fact that in some families sons had not been encouraged to think of staying on the land, in the absence of alternative siblings to assume this duty, these individuals must often struggle with the cultural expectation to take on the farm. For instance, despite Donal’s parents’ assurances that he should follow his own path he continued to feel a lingering sense of guilt over his unwillingness to go into farming. Similarly, while Brian’s parents always pushed him away from seeing the farm as part of his future, he was still aware that in not taking it on, he was rejecting a norm:

[His father’s decision to leave the farm to Brian’s sister] allowed me to go without feeling the guilt of the only son, the eldest son taking it on do you know that sort of thing.

Section 7.2.1.2 Female Attitudes to Succession
The formal dimension of belonging is rooted in the same gendered spectrum as its functional counterpart and the norm of male succession was reiterated throughout the interviews. This acceptance by most female respondents of the ‘natural’ order of sons being given the farm is linked to a mental disconnect between their upbringing on the farm and a stated wish, or even possibility of owning the farm. For example, while Susan was happy to have been immersed in the farm environment during her childhood, she is glad and proud that her brothers will eventually succeed to the farm, because she considered it to be appropriate. She further justified her lack of succession rights because of the support she received from her parents in her education; assistance, which her brothers no doubt received as well. In addition, even in circumstances where there appeared to be little chance of a financial settlement in lieu of a portion of the farm, other individuals spoke of the prospect of their brothers

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63 This discussion does not refer to the distribution of other assets such as savings as this is outside the scope of the study.
assuming ownership of it without any tone of disquiet. Bridget referred more than once to her parents’ material poverty, so it is doubtful whether they would be able to gift her a substantial sum of money in their will. Yet for her this does not lead to the conclusion that she should stand to inherit at least a portion of the farm. The casual gendered presumptions around formal ownership of the farm are shown in Shauna’s story about one branch of her extended family. Although the son has built a life quite a distance from the homeplace he will be given the land rather than his sister who is settled nearby to the farm:

The girl actually, Sabina is living [near home] and we all know that he's [the son] going to get the land cos he's the boy. [...] Alex [the son] was the farmer, but Sabina never stood foot on the farm so that's why-and cos he's a boy I just presume Alex will get the farm and Sabina will get money. Now I don't know, sure I don't know how she feels about that, but I don't think she will want it anyway.

Where it is not possible to adhere to this cultural norm, for example, in families with no sons or when daughters are more interested in farming, participants were still aware that their family was going against this tenet. Aisling, who has no brothers, spoke with a degree of wistfulness about this subject; if she had a brother he would have to deal with the tricky dilemma surrounding the farm’s future and not her. She claimed this is not because she views farming as unsuitable for women but rather that it is not natural for them to have to fret about this issue.

This default gender position serves to make it more difficult for females who want to succeed and become a farmer in their own right since where there are sons, even disinterested ones there is a real possibility that they will still be given the farm. One of Julia’s younger sisters is, in her opinion, the most likely to take over the farm because she has the most involvement with it. However, later on in the interview she altered her stance when she said that obviously if her younger brother wanted to inherit he would be first in line or at least he would be entitled to a share of the land. This is in spite of her father’s apparent satisfaction with her sister’s enthusiasm and

\[64\] It should be noted that none of the female participants including those with the label of ‘worker’ or those who expressed a desire to keep the land are likely to become farmers in the near future, if at all.
her brother’s lack of interest in farming. There was no suggestion of indignation over this potential strategy and, instead, she was quite matter-of-fact in the assumptions she made about this subject. While on the one hand, she and her father are supportive of her sister taking over the farm, on the other hand, this clashes with an automatic inclination to include her brother in these plans. This demonstrates that even in this kind of family where succession and the wider family unit are not closely aligned to culturally assigned gender roles there is an underlying foundation of traditional positioning and governing norms. Although non-traditional roles have been modelled within her family there is a presumption that male succession is the optimal or natural way of proceeding.

Not all families follow norms as dictated by an overriding cultural framework; as pointed out in the Chapter Five they tend to operate from within the resources and strategies available and suited to their own particular circumstances. In some families such as Jennifer’s, formal ownership of the farm is not overly bound by gender considerations as the concern is to secure an interested heir rather than specifically a male one. While the conversation about succession has not arisen, she felt her parents would be as willing to leave the farm to her as her brothers or to sell it. They would prefer this to one of their children having to reluctantly take over the farm. This belief was shown in these observations:

There’d be no pressure put on him [her older brother] to take over like. They-mam and dad-kind of encouraged us all to go out and do whatever we want-just go explore the world. […] I think she’d [her mother] be happy for me to take over the farm but only if it was what I wanted to do like. I think they’d rather sell it than have me working on it when I would want to be doing something else.

A similar outcome is also probable in a couple of other instances such as in Orla’s family where one of her sisters, through her higher level of engagement with and interest in the farm, has presented herself as a candidate to succeed. Likewise, where

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65 Her mother is unique across the cohort in having her own farm entirely separate from her husband’s holding and is officially a farmer in her own right with, for example, her own cattle herd.
there are no sons available parents usually seem inclined to give it to their daughters rather than to look for a nephew or other male relative.

Section 7.2.1.2 Male Attitudes towards Succession
While some male participants who are likely to succeed might rage against the responsibility they bear, an interesting point to note is their lack of resentment against siblings, especially sisters, who do not share in this obligation. Notwithstanding his avowed dislike of established cultural norms and customs and his attempts to circumvent them through, for example, not attending Catholic services, Seamus does not challenge or begrudge his sisters’ escape. Neither does it anger him that their father did not urge his daughters to return to the farm whereas Seamus has little choice but to do so. Despite his growing awareness of the socially constructed nature of practices such as succession, it seems that as he moves into adulthood he still feels he cannot resist the fate imposed on him by virtue of being a son. This was highlighted in his comments:

Oldest boy\textsuperscript{66}, the oldest boy gets the farm […] I'm not going to be able to leave no […] I'm not […] I am envious of them [his sisters]; I am very envious of them.

The absence of acrimony on this subject among male participants appears to be connected to the perceptions they have of their female siblings\textsuperscript{67} as distanced and unconcerned about the fate of the farm. While sisters might be from the farm they are not of the farm in the same way as they are-sometimes against their will. In a number of cases female offspring are presented as having few opinions about the future of the farm. Given the design of the research study it was impossible to ascertain the veracity of their views on this subject. However, if the attitudes of similarly situated female participants, who are probably placed into the same category by their family, are examined it appears to be possibly unreflective of reality. While females might be marginalised from decisions about the farm because of their gender and their

\textsuperscript{66} While he implies his status as the oldest son is an important factor he then makes it clear that his other brother would not be able to manage the farm by himself because of a chronic medical condition. This would suggest that it is not about birth order but Seamus’ gender and physical capacity to do the work.

\textsuperscript{67} This attitude does not apply to mothers since more than one respondent mentioned maternal expressions of anxiety about the future of the farm.
movement away from the homeplace they usually feel a strong sense of emotional connection to their homeplace and wish to see formal ownership of the farm retained in the family. The extent of this can be seen from Paula and Bridget’s willingness to buy the farm from their brothers rather than countenance it being sold to outsiders. This intensity of feeling is, one would imagine, underestimated and in a way dismissed because of their apparent detachment from this background.

It is not only the participants who operate within gendered nuances of obligation but also their parents. They have a significant part to play in whether these responsibilities are taken on by their male offspring or not. Seamus’ father played a forceful role in the development of his commitment to the farm since he has made it abundantly clear that it is Seamus and not his daughters who must take on the farm in the event of his incapacity or death. Brian’s father was so aware of the potential quandary the farm would create for his son that he has already indicated he will leave the land to a daughter and other property to him. In his interview Brian argued that this was motivated by his father’s conviction that his son would feel more compelled to keep it on, regardless of his lack of interest in it and his gloomy attitude about the future of farming, than his daughter. Brian believed she would find it easier to sell the farm because of her lack of obligated attachment to it. Equally, through encouraging a commitment to education Donal’s mother freed him from taking on the farm as it enabled him to find a viable alternative to farming. Without this substitute, he said he would have faced an even bigger dilemma over whether he should follow in his father’s footsteps and become a farmer. His guilt over not continuing on the link between his family and the farm only began to dissipate when he found a legitimate pathway of his own as this served to justify his decisions.
Section 7.2.1.3 Summary of Views on Succession

Both genders accept patrilineal succession and are aware of cultural norms:
Females do not expect to be given the farm.
Males are aware of their cultural obligation to preserve it.

Female attitudes:
While they are not against female succession male succession is more appropriate because it is natural since e.g. brothers worked more.
Does not appear to depend on whether they will receive a financial settlement instead.
Difficult for females who want to succeed because of automatic assumptions that sons are entitled to the farm.

Male attitudes:
Can resent the obligation to take over the farm but do not direct anger at siblings who do not have the same responsibility.
Their sisters are presented as detached and distanced from decisions around the future of the farm.
Parents can have a strong role in the creation of attitudes towards formal belonging→ push their offspring towards or pull them away from this role.

Section 7.2.2 The Relationship between Gendered Frameworks and the Formal Dimension of Belonging
In addition to being influenced by the farming paradigm the participants in this study are bounded within two contrasting frameworks with the potential to influence their transition to adulthood. For female actors this is feminism with its push for independence, and for males, individualisation with its emphasis on personal choices. The expectations which accompany these positions have an impact not only on the likelihood of gaining formal ownership of the farm but also the depth of any ensuing association with it. The following section explores the relationship between
gendered frameworks and the formal dimension of belonging. It discusses views on female and male responses to succession. Then, it looks at the contrasting frameworks both genders are bound into, on and off the farm, which impact on their long-term connection to the farm and their transition to adulthood. Lastly, it outlines the role cautionary tales can play in how the cohort construct their relationship with the future of the farm and their transition to adulthood.

Section 7.2.2.1 Female participants
Most female participants spoke of parents encouraging them towards achieving both financial and personal independence through the vehicle of education. This was emphasised through parental actions, i.e. their facilitation and encouragement of their daughters’ engagement with school and speech, i.e. their frequent verbal reinforcement of the need to be autonomous. Shauna talked about this in her interview:

He [her father] has always said to me- ‘‘have your own money, never be dependent on any man for money’’,

as did Jane:

[…] my mam always harpered on about it, ‘‘you need an education; get an education’’. Go you know make something, be independent is […] my mam's motto you know, get yourself a good job that was always her thing. […] Mam'd say don't be like us […] you know not like us but […] don't be dependent on kind of one source you know. She'd always be saying go and work and like to have money.

This positioning created a mindset of it being acceptable for them to pull away from the homeplace and the farm or, as is discussed later, even where they might be given the farm to not actively operate it and, instead, lease it out. This relative detachment is true for ‘workers’ and ‘helpers’ so that even when an individual like Jennifer spoke with great affection for the farm, and would consider returning to it in the future the desperate urgency shadowing her male counterparts’ attitudes is absent.
None of the female participants appeared to identify any conflict between, on the one hand, being conditioned into believing that they were not the right individual to take over the farm and their attendant, if sometimes implicit inferiority, in the farming hierarchy, and on the other hand, being pushed and encouraged to see themselves as equal to anyone in the life they create off the farm. This emphasis on feminist ideals by both parents and young people has had a profound impact on futures, which do not appear to be affected by the roles they occupied on the farm. Thus, for example, Audrey talked with fierce determination about preserving her own independence through building a career and at the same time accepted her father’s assertion that sons would be more likely to want to take over the farm than daughters. It appears that these individuals are able to step in and out of different frameworks depending on their contextual circumstances at a given moment. In discussing their positioning within the context of the farm and the wider culture norms it is embedded in, they usually did not view themselves as being equally ‘worthy’ of formal ownership. Yet in terms of their own transition to adulthood they were able to switch to a feminist stance and speak from a perspective based firmly on parity of opportunity and achievement.

Section 7.2.2.2 Male Participants
In addition to farming norms, male participants’ movement into adulthood was grounded in the individualisation framework. They sought to and were encouraged by their parents to use education to shape a life they could be satisfied with. By contrast to the emphasis placed on independence for female respondents, in their context education was linked to giving them a greater range of choices. For instance, Myles remarked that his parents always said:

[…] get a good education and you can do what you want basically.

This ignores a paradoxical conflict between their socialisation into prevailing farming norms with the boundaries this imposes in terms of potentially owning the farm in the future and simultaneously being pushed to try to take advantage of the freedoms and mobility associated with the individualisation framework. Like their female counterparts, they were able to shift between these two elements of their identity as they reflected on their life on and off the farm without appearing to notice
any discrepancies. They spoke of a desire to travel and develop careers and, yet, were actively tied into particular functional and formal roles, which could one day contradict these aspirations.

While male participants were urged to pursue lives framed by individual choice, in a few situations especially for those who worked this was accompanied by the anticipation of a continuing relationship with the farm into the future. While choice remains a valued concept, in certain circumstances such as the absence of other heirs, bounded temporal and normative limits created within the family farming framework act to draw sons back to the farm more so than females. For instance, Seamus was pushed to go to university by his parents and wanted to build a life far removed from farming, which he detests. However, this cannot be at the expense of his commitments to his family since his father demands he return to take over the farm in the future. In theory he could refuse to comply but were he to do so little solace would be gained from this, for it would mean turning his back on his duty to the dreams of his brother and also his father’s wishes. These were some of his thoughts on the subject:

It's not what I want [...] but [my brother] wants to do it, so he needs help. It's just that I find that I'm going to be in this farm whether I like it or not, I'm going to have to be involved in farming [...] I won't be able to escape it.

This obligated succession is an appalling and even terrifying prospect for him. His story is tinged with a quasi-tragic martyrdom to a fate he cannot flee. In twenty years time when his father is no longer able to work on the farm he will have to go back to it because his brother will ask him for help. He could flee this destiny but this would entail betraying his brother. Therefore, he will not be able to refuse the farm—not because he wants to take it on or because of what society expects of him but because it is his duty to do so. He tried to be optimistic by saying he could use future savings to invest in and build up the farm or teach part-time as well but one would imagine that this might prove to be only a minor consolation. It is as if his whole future is

68 Although his brother wants to become a farmer he will be unable to do so without help. His chronic medical condition would make the physical aspects of farming very challenging. Even if his brother were to be given the farm when their father dies or becomes incapacitated, Seamus will need to step in to assist him with the work.
mapped out for him by the inevitability of his formal attachment to the farm. Rather than his own choices and decisions shaping his adulthood it is his father, his brother's wishes and cultural norms in farming, which have the power to do so. In ways it seems as if it does not matter whether he remains involved with the farm or not-he will still be trapped by its clay and ditches and by an everlasting sense of owing something to his stricken but eager brother. Even if he does not take over the farm one wonders would it be a pyrrhic victory because he would still carry his background with him- including a nagging guilt at having gone against his duty. Participants like this must grapple with the fact that in the immediate future they are free to experiment and be spatially mobile and, yet, ultimately they must return to the farm. This could also have serious implications for their ability to build personally meaningful careers in geographic regions with few employment or social opportunities.

In the participants’ opinions parents are caught in this same predicament over the kind of life path their sons should follow since for the most part they have a passionate desire to see someone take on the farm but also want their offspring to be happy and content in the choices they make. Andrew’s father is annoyed because none of his children, including Andrew, want to go into farming, but he also supports his right to make his own decisions. This shows the kind of dynamic parents and sons are bound up in, with both sides immersed in frameworks of individualisation and farming that look for two possibly very different outcomes. This creates a dilemma with no clear solutions, as one side calls for the continuation of traditional behaviours, and the other for an adult identity free from the shackles of the past. This conflict is shown by how, for instance, George’s father encouraged him to attend third-level education but, nevertheless, was a little dismayed at the direction it has led him in as his path might never bring him back to the farm. However, sometimes parents’ wishes for a different life for their offspring can be contravened by their children. Bridget’s father warned his sons away from farming and despite relying on their labour on the farm during their childhoods did all he could to facilitate their education. This included reducing the size of his dairy herd so his children could
qualify for the maintenance grant\textsuperscript{69}. Despite this and notwithstanding his entreaties against following him into farming, his sons, having initially moved away from it and engaged in education have gradually begun to return to agriculture, much to his baffled disappointment.

\textbf{Section 7.2.2.3 Summary of the Relationship between Gender Frameworks and the Formal Dimension of Belonging}

\begin{quote}
In addition to the frameworks found in the farming paradigm two different frameworks influence participants.

Female:
Feminism- emphasis on independence by themselves and their parents.
Their positioning allows them to pull away from a future obligation to the farm.
Participants do not recognise a discrepancy between their lower ranking in the farming hierarchy and being pushed towards equality off the farm.

Male:
Individualisation- emphasis on personal choice by themselves and their parents.
Can be bounded by the prospect of formally belonging to the farm in future.
Paradox between the limitations imposed by obligations to the farm and the freedoms connected with the individualisation framework.
Like female counterparts do not recognise the potential conflict in this.
Due to functional and formal obligations they are more likely to be drawn back to the farm than females in the present and the future.
Potential successors grapple with the conflict between the freedom of their immediate future and the duty to return to the farm.
Participants feel parents also face a predicament over wanting the farm to be retained and giving their sons the freedom to choose their own life path.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{69} If a family’s income is under a particular threshold students are entitled to receive a maintenance grant to support their attendance in university.
Section 7.2.3 The Role of Cautionary Tales
In some interviews, male and female participants narrated cautionary tales, which appeared to have influenced their relationship with the concept of formally belonging to the farm in the future. These were heavily gendered and were usually affected by the individualisation and feminism frameworks. Some of these have already been touched on in Chapter Six and while these were only small components of a limited number of interviews they contain important insights into the nature of individual connections to the farm and transitions to adulthood and as such are worthy of exploration.

Section 7.2.3.1 The Interrelationship between Cautionary tales and Gendered Formal Belonging
In some interviews cautionary tales were recounted by participants about their parents’ lack of education attainment, which fit in with the frameworks around individualisation and feminism for male and female respondents respectively. It is through these that parental experiences and memories, as discussed in Chapter Six Section 6.4.2, play an important role in the creation of informal and consequently formal attachments to the farm. These self-constructed cautionary tales around the denial of parental opportunities, probably increased their sons’ sense of personal or familial responsibility towards keeping the farm within the family and embedded them more deeply in a formal attachment to the land. Male participants narrated tales of how their fathers had been forced to curtail their education and take on a full-time role on the farm because of unfortunate family circumstances such as parental illness. They usually qualified these stories with statements about how their fathers still managed to build satisfying if demanding lives on the farm. For male participants such as George, James and Oisin there is a strong push-pull element to these tales with their fathers’ lack of choice in educational matters reinforcing their own need to continue with their path in academia. However, this comes into conflict with a pull back towards the farm in the future as they also seek to ensure that their fathers’ sacrifices were not in vain. As already mentioned in Chapter Six, James narrated a dismayed story about how in his view his father had been manipulated into taking on the farm at the age of twelve when his own father became ill. Despite having two older brothers his father was the one who was directed into farming and
irrespective of his satisfaction with the life he has created James is aware of the opportunities he lost out on as a result. Although this inspired James’ interest in education, at the same time, if his brother who is likely to succeed cannot do so he will take on the farm and tailor his life plans accordingly. For these actors whether they like farming, as is the case for Oisin or loathe it as James does, it can be reduced down to a reluctance to see their fathers’ life or legacy wasted. After all if they abandon the farm, what would their father’s efforts to care for the land and endure physical and emotional hardships or their pride in a good sheep flock or the draining of a field have amounted to?

These cautionary tales do not appear to serve the same function for female participants. Those who discussed their mothers’ education presented these stories as tales of stymied chances resulting in a lack of independent income and employment. For female participants such as Susan and Jane, these cautionary tales and the socialisation processes which underpinned them helped to push them away from formal attachments to the farm and reinforced their need to build their own careers. It should be noted that this did not necessarily detach them from their local community, as is explored in Chapter Eight Section 8.5.1. For instance, under the guise of a cautionary tale Jane extensively discussed her mother’s views on education. While Jane’s father left school because he hated it, her mother had no choice because the school she attended closed down and she could not afford to move to one further away. She worked in a shop until she got married, but she has repeatedly told her children that if she had continued with her education she could have become a teacher and with this had greater autonomy and earned more money. As a result, Jane seems determined to follow the path her mother could not take and which she nudged her children, particularly her daughters, towards. Through this socialisation process daughters are further pushed away from the idea of developing a long-term relationship with the farm.

In two interviews with female participants cautionary tales emerged as an influence on how gendered attitudes towards formal attachments were constructed. One respondent, Shauna, spoke of how her mother often repeats the story of a
neighbouring family where the daughter worked with her parents on the farm her whole life. However, when they died she received nothing and it was her brother who inherited everything. This tale helps to bound the expectations Shauna has about the possibility of developing a formal relationship with the farm. Through this device her mother seemed to be intimating that this would happen if she too tried to take on a farmer role and in the process imagine herself as the potential successor to the farm. This kind of tale acts as a reminder that in a family such as hers, which intends to follow patrilineal patterns there is no real chance of her taking over the farm even if she was keen to do so. Similarly, Bridget in recounting her mother’s tale about the ‘manly’ neighbour, as referred to in Chapter Five Section 5.3.2, who works on the homeplace and whose brothers have no interest in the farm but more than likely will be given it anyway, reinforces the conviction that daughters will not succeed. This tale is a warning constructed both by her mother and by Bridget about the futility of girls trying to move into a formal relationship with the farm—even where they have proven themselves to be capable of running it. In the end a woman’s efforts could amount to nothing because despite the intensity of her contribution she still might not be bequeathed the farm by her parents.
Section 7.2.3.2 Summary of the Role of Cautionary Tales

Self-constructed, cautionary tales about parents’ lack of education fit within the framework of individualisation and feminism.

- Sons speak of the denial of their father’s educational opportunities.
- These play an important role in creating informal and formal attachments to the farm and in the direction of their transition to adulthood:
  - anxious to pursue and education;
  - honour father’s sacrifices by holding onto the farm.

For daughters cautionary tales about their mothers’ lack of engagement with education are a warning to make full use out of their opportunities and, for example, to become financially independent.

Cautionary tales constructed by mothers about women not being given the farm reinforces the norm of patrilineal succession as daughters are taught not to expect this to happen.

Section 7.3 Reasons for Preserving the Farm within the Family

The chapter now moves away from an explicit focus on gender towards the reasons behind the desire to preserve the connection between the family and the farm. For the most part, the explanations advanced for keeping the farm within the family rest on a foundation of informal attachments such as temporal continuums and maintaining access to memories. It is important to look at these because they impact on how this group position themselves and family members with regard to their long-term relationship with the farm. Firstly, it looks at the impact of the intergenerational relationship a family has with the farm and secondly, it examines the influence of memories. Then, it outlines the role of the emotive framing of the farm and lastly, discusses contrasting attitudes to the importance of retaining the surname on the farm.
Section 7.3.1 Attitudes towards the Retention of the Farm
A general reluctance and aversion to the idea of selling the land permeates Irish family farming culture. This also holds true for this particular research cohort with almost all of the participants viewing the retention of the farm within the family as being of great importance. The idea of selling the land is rarely countenanced in any kind of active sense by either males or females or by ‘workers’ or ‘helpers’. This is the case even for actors, such as Seamus who, as previously mentioned, will succeed to the farm despite his hatred of it and the significant consequences this will have for his life path. Nevertheless, for the moment at least he does not see its sale as a possible way for him to escape this dreaded return to the farm. For almost all participants who fall into this category, alternatives such as leasing the land out or as in Bridget’s case buying the farm from her brother rather than see it be sold to someone else are considered preferable to letting it go out of the family. This urge to keep the land was present even where the individual had no desire to own the land, to become a farmer or even to move home again and, yet, on a fundamental personal level the idea of the farm being disposed of is abhorrent to them. It should be noted that this wish is not universal since there are a few exceptions where actors were relatively indifferent about whether the farm is kept or sold. These individuals’ stories are highlighted where appropriate in the rest of this section.

A point worth observing is the apparent lack of disputes between the family’s offspring over succession. While some successors had grave and confusing reservations about their own relationship with the concept of succession, few of those who were unlikely to be given the farm gave the impression that they resented other siblings’ future ownership of the farm. These were Susan’s thoughts about this subject:

I'd never say it's ours [the farm], as in it's mine, as in I'm entitled to a bit of this like I've no interest in that eh...I consider [it] ours as in it's my family's. I'm proud of it [...] I don't expect to get land from them I don't want it-like what would I do with it? That's the way I see it I'm happy for the lads [her brothers] to take it over, do you know, it doesn't bother me. [...] The lads did a lot more let's say when they were in secondary school
let's say than I ever did on the farm, the lads've been working
there and they've built it up [so] they're entitled to it.

A couple of caveats need to be attached to this apparent harmony. Firstly, for most
participants succession is a concern for the future rather than an immediately
pressing issue, so at the time of the interviews it was an abstract notion easily
dismissed from thought. This was due to the age profile of the families and because,
at that time, few of the farms had been officially taken over by a sibling. Changes to
either of these variables could be a catalyst for conflict in the future. Secondly,
because of the researcher’s insider status the participants might have been anxious to
avoid appearing covetous towards the farm. Whatever the private feelings and
strategies of an individual the framing of the farm as a non-commodity means it is
not appropriate to project this image. For instance, these were Brian’s thoughts on
the subject of his sister inheriting the land:

I wouldn't be needy or grabby [about the farm]...no I think it
would be just [...] that's how the die was cast [...] like I
wouldn't say ‘‘oh there's whatever it cost going to her for
nothing’’.

His attitude is discussed in more detail in relation to the reasons for keeping the
farm (Section 7.3.5), but while they might be a true reflection of his feelings they
could also be shaded by the dynamic of the interview relationship.

Section 7.3.2 The Importance of the Family’s Intergenerational Relationship
with the Farm
One of the most common reasons put forward by participants for holding onto the
farm is the intergenerational relationship their family have with it. This sentiment is
often connected to a desire to see the work their fathers put into the farm and the life
they led, symbolically and practically protected through retaining the land. It is
interesting to note that while most participants acknowledged the important role their
mothers played on the farm none appeared to view this as contributing to their desire
to see the farm kept. This could be connected to the fact that in most cases the farm
had been passed down through the paternal line. However, it is also no doubt based
on the peripheral position women occupy within the farming hierarchy with regard to
the formal ownership of the land, as illustrated in Shauna’s interview. She repeatedly linked the farm and her father together not only in terms of its everyday management but also in the development of a succession strategy. Yet towards the end of the interview it emerged that a significant proportion of the farm had originally belonged to her mother. This seemed to be a secondary consideration for Shauna as no mention was made of preserving her legacy or marking her input into the farm. Much of this intergenerational concern is also tied to narrow definitions of whose memory should be preserved. Specific named characters, such as grandfathers were acknowledged as having creating a legacy that should be honoured. As a result, even in situations like George’s, where he had not met this man he still felt a personal connection and sense of obligation to continue on his hard work. However, the idea of memory can also have broader connotations since there were also affiliations made to unnamed ancestors long gone and but vaguely remembered. This was alluded to by James in his interview:

I remember looking on records in 1849-1846 […] I remember looking into a nearby locality and seeing the [family] name as tenants. […] In a hundred years for them to have maybe what? Five acres of tenant land? For that to turn round to two hundred in a hundred years that's a pretty big accomplishment and I wouldn't like to just spit all over that.

Based on the design of the study and the data collected it is difficult to ascertain whether parents had consciously tried to use the concept of legacy as a mechanism to secure loyalty to the farm. Nevertheless, what did surface is how sentient a number of the respondents were of this context and the strong aspiration to preserve it that this led to. Although parents and especially fathers do not always overtly admit that they want the farm to be kept because of this duty to a generation before themselves the participants were often aware of their thoughts on this subject. For instance, George said his father never tried to coax him into taking on the farm through this method, but in observing his father’s quasi-reverence of previous generations he also began to view his relationship with his father in this light. Given the close relationship many have with their fathers in emotional and/or practical terms, this knowledge could undoubtedly influence an individual’s actions. Thomas pointed out
that his father was under pressure from previous, deceased, generations to make sure the farm survived into the future through securing a successor. He believed that memories of fathers and an impulse to avoid disappointing them are major influences on how farmers act. Thus, the formal dimension of belonging can be viewed as partially based on the existence of a continuous family chain of ownership. This is framed by the actions of earlier generations who are capable of exerting an influence long after they have died.

The influence of intergenerationality on the wish to hold onto the farm is not linked solely to the effort put into the farm by their ancestors but is also connected to a temporal continuum. Some participants who do not consider themselves to be the ‘farmer’, a concept examined in more detail later in this chapter, would accept the farm to protect this lineage. If they did so it would be in the hope that one of their children or a niece or nephew would be interested in farming and would take it on in the future. This is a custodial framing of the relationship with the farm with the expectation being that it would revert to a more productive status upon the arrival of a more committed and interested individual. This attitude is shown in James’ hypothetical agreement to take the farm should his brother not be in a position to continue on. He would do this in the anticipation that one of his own, as yet unborn children would want it. Through this he seeks to present himself as one component of an interconnected whole and would, therefore, be very reluctant to disrupt this continuum. This desire to preserve the family’s connection to the farm is largely detached from personal feelings towards it. Even participants, such as James, who resented their childhood ‘worker’ role did not look to sell the farm even though this would enable their own children to escape the challenges they had faced growing up. Seamus, despite his almost frantic wish to escape the farm, also talked of hoping to raise interested children before he is compelled to take ownership of it. Although this was mentioned in the context of providing him with a possible escape route from the role of the farmer this further highlights how deeply engrained the concept of continuity is in the participants’ mindset.
The importance of the intergenerational relationship between the family and the farm in relation to formal attachments is shown in absentia in Brian’s story. His father shows little desire to pass the farm onto him, and Brian believed this is strongly connected to the fact that he did not grow up on the farm. This disrupted his place in the sequential chain of obligation between the past and the future. When this is broken it seems, as in his father’s case, that the farm has less capacity to engender strong feelings towards keeping it within the family. Brian rationalised this argument as follows:

If that had been granddad, great-granddad, dad on the farm it would be hard to break away in the sense that you're breaking three generations whereas dad grew up in Dublin. [...] So in that kind of sense he's not from here now-although his father was from here-he's not really from here. [...] So to say that like he was brought in [...] and transplanted in so [for Brian] getting away or like moving away isn't, it isn't wrenching in a way like. He didn't have to tie me into it [...] Dad like-he wouldn't have the [...] the view of like first, eldest son, only son takes the farm now.

Unlike say Thomas’ father who feels tied to the farm because this has been his family’s homeplace for many generations, Brian’s father does not have the same urgent need or sense of responsibility to pass on the farm. Although Brian did feel guilt there was also a measure of relief that he does not have to take it on and that the continuum had already been ruptured as this made it easier for him to contemplate pulling away from the farm in the future. Similarly, Lorraine was sanguine about the fate of her homeplace-if, for example, her parents needed to sell it for financial reasons she would consider it to be the end of an era rather than a deeply wrenching outcome. This relaxed attitude to the ownership of the farm is perhaps because her parents had actually purchased the farm rather than it being one of their childhood homes. However, it must be said that a family’s longevity on the farm is not always an important factor in attitudes around the retention of the farm. Although Maura’s family have only been on the homeplace since her parents bought it a few decades ago she and her sisters have a strong attachment to it and are unhappy at the prospect
of it being sold regardless of it potentially providing for her mother and father in their retirement.

**Section 7.3.3 The Connection between Memories and Keeping the Farm**

Memories are an important underpinning factor in the yearning to see ownership of the farm retained within the family. As explored in Chapter 6 Section 6.4, the farm acts as a repository for memories and offers a perceptible link back to an individual’s own past and the broader familial one. If the farm were to be sold then they would relinquish access to these memories, betraying a vital part of the self and their childhoods. If it was lost then their personal ones, overwhelmingly described as carefree and happy, would to a certain degree be diminished. Likewise, more historical memories, which engender a feeling of rootedness and a greater sense of place in both its spatial and emotional meanings, would also be threatened. One respondent who spoke of the influence of both of these aspects was Aisling who linked her childhood memories and her family’s historical ones to the farm. As the probable future owner of the farm she regarded herself as the guardian of these memories, which will help to preserve her own past and the echo of the deceased. The influence of memories and the loyalty to the farm they induced was a source of serious conflict for her. She sought to reconcile being pulled away from the farm, in part because of her career aspirations and her reluctance to live in the local community, with a profound urge to hold on to the farm:

> I just have so many memories of it [the farm]-my dad-you know it's been in our family for like generations and I wouldn't like to be [...] I'd like to keep it that way. I like being able to go home too you know. The outdoors and I suppose all the memories of growing up there, and yeah like, I like it I just don't know what to do with it.

While the farm’s destiny might not have an impact on her immediate path towards adulthood it could have a strong influence on her in later years if she takes formal ownership of it. In her view this quandary hangs over and gnawingly shadows her future like a Sword of Damocles. In all of her discussion of this subject there was little talk of her biography as a discrete concept-her thoughts on the issue were
intertwined with her relationships with other actors and their memories, for example. This extends to a relationship with herself as a child in terms of holding onto memories, which are used to recreate the past in the present and evoke a glimpse of an earlier self through connecting into these.

This idea of memories is also important for non-successors such as Bridget who continue to view the farm as their home even where they have spatially moved away from it through their entry into university. By retaining ownership of the land within the family, the farm can continue to act as a memory aid capable of triggering recollections of their childhoods. Even where life paths take them away from their birth culture and birth place this part of their narrative is merely dormant rather than dissipated or diluted irrevocably and can be accessed when they return home. Bridget hinted at this idea when she said she would hate to see the farm being sold because she and her siblings would lose an important part of themselves:

I feel like if we were ever to sell something it'd, we'd be losing a part of you know our growing up and all the fields we ran in and things like that.

Section 7.3.4 The Role of Moral Obligations

The concept of moral obligation to parents and the farm emerged in several interviews as important factors in attitudes to the formal dimension of belonging. These create a significant dilemma for actors because they were driven by the importance of this moral duty to their parents. At the same time, they could simultaneously, as was the case for Brendan, long fervently to make decisions that potentially lead them away from the farm. There was an air of desperation when Brendan spoke about opting to go to university because while this detached him from the farm and gave him at least an illusion of choice he still carries an enormous sense of responsibility towards the farm and, now that his father is dead, to his mother as well. He is caught between the commitment he has to himself and to his mother and the farm. Irrespective of which path he follows he will probably continue
to be haunted by the one he chooses not to take. This conundrum was illustrated in this statement:

Do you stay or do you go kind of thing-do you make a go staying? [...] It's [the farm] always there, it's a love-hate kind of thing I guess. Like I absolutely love it, love the land, love the place, but I couldn't see myself living there...that's the dilemma [to return or not] isn't it? [...] Cos it's difficult and where I am [in] college, I made a choice to get as educated as I could if I go down that road it's only going to [...] bring me further down a different road. [...] There's always pull factors well just, just the country-the farm itself, the countryside and nature it's beautiful, I love that aspect to it. It’s your land and it's passed down through three, four generations. [...] I've seen my dad work it.

This again demonstrates the framework sons in particular can get caught in; between being pushed away from the farm and being pulled back to it regardless of the life they want to build. For instance, in addition to being mindful of his duty to the historical continuum of his family James would if necessary take on the farm out of an onus to repay a debt to his parents and to the farm. There is an element of sacrifice here-he has a potential responsibility to something bigger than himself around the farm, the land and the family; past, present and future regardless of the consequences for himself. There is personal agency shown here too, however, since if he were to take it on he would change the style of farming to suit his own employment choices or lifestyle preferences. He noted that:

as a moral obligation I would go ok I will do it you know [...] I would. I know I would-if, if anything ever happened Ciaran [his brother] or if Ciaran didn't want it I know that I could get rid of the dairy and keep beef\textsuperscript{70} [cattle] and perhaps teach at second level and somehow work out the beef as well.

\textsuperscript{70} This style of farming involves raising cattle for consumption as opposed to keeping a herd for the production of milk. This is less intense and requires less commitment on the part of the farmer. The latter usually depends on twice a day milking on a near year-round basis while the former gives more freedom. During the summer, for example, when the cattle are moved out to the fields from their winter housing they usually only need to be checked for welfare purposes.
Section 7.3.5 The Emotive Framing of the Farm
Another motivation for holding onto the farm is how the farm is framed in emotive rather than financial terms. While it is available to the owner as an income-generating asset this does not mean it is normatively regarded as theirs to do what they wish with. Furthermore, when its meaning for the family and its history are considered it becomes more difficult to (re)imagine it as a saleable asset that could, for example, fund a life elsewhere. George said if he were to succeed he would view getting the land as a gift and would never contemplate selling it as he would be reaping the benefits of other people’s hard work. In Bridget’s opinion, if her succeeding brother were ever to sell the land it would be tantamount to a betrayal of the faith placed in him that he will keep it intact. This again highlights the norm in farming culture, i.e. that a farmer does not personally own the farm but rather holds it in trust for those who had the land before him and those who will come after him. In agreeing to a formal attachment to the farm, an individual often assumes a guardian role of the farm with an attendant duty to maintain and improve it for the next generation. Even where the farm is likely to be sold such as in Brian’s case there is still an anxiety to avoid appearing avaricious. Evidence for this comes from how keen he was to separate the idea of selling the farm from possible personal financial gain. In addition, Andrew initially mused about selling his share of the holding in the future in order to make some money but, then, quickly backtracked on this idea when he began to take other factors into consideration:

[I was] thinking right sell it, make a few bob [money] [but] where there is such an attachment to it now. [....] There's so much work have [sic] gone into it over the years too that it's just a kind of shame to kind of kick it out back and be done with it.

Section 7.3.6 The Impact of the Relationship between a Family’s Surname and the Farm
In farming circles strong correlations are often drawn between the reason why male succession is favoured and how it facilitates the continued association between the family’s surname and the landholding. However, this did not appear to be a dominant concern across the group. Instead, it seemed to be as much about a
pragmatic wish to retain it within the family as needing to have a particular surname connected to it. It could be argued that this is a utilitarian reaction to, for example, the absence of a male heir, but this is not necessarily true in all cases. Rita is an only child and has known for many years that she will be bequeathed the farm. In light of the tradition of a woman taking their husband’s surname on their marriage, Rita is less likely to be able to maintain the linkage than a male relative would. Nevertheless, there appears to have been no impetus in her extended family to put a male successor in place. Her grandfather was a dominant figure in the family with a patriarchal reign that lasted well beyond his official retirement and the handover of the farm to his son (Rita’s father). She gave an impression of him as a domineering man who no doubt could have cajoled his son into leaving it to a nephew or male cousin if he had been determined to keep the surname attached to the farm. Another participant George argued that as he has gotten older the importance of keeping the family name connected to the land has diminished for him. Furthermore, if he is not in a position to take over the farm he would be amenable to his sisters’ succession. However, for other families preserving this connection is significant as was shown in Katie’s interview. She spoke of her father’s desire to pass the farm onto her brother rather than Katie or her sisters because it allows for the continuation of this tie between the family’s name and the farm.
Section 7.3.7 Summary of the Reasons for Preserving the Farm within the Family

Strong desire among the vast majority of the cohort to keep the farm in the family. It is important for both successors/non-successors and ‘workers’/’helpers’. The issue of succession does not appear to cause conflict in the participants’ families.

The reasons are connected to the informal dimension of belonging:
- the intergenerational relationship between the family and the farm;
- the importance of maintaining the temporal continuum;
- memories;
- moral obligations to parents and deceased family members;
- framing of the farm in emotive rather than financial terms.

Reasons against it being kept:
- parental attitudes;
- previous ruptures in the chain of family connections to the holding.

Not necessarily linked to maintaining the connection between a family’s surname and the farm.

Section 7.4 Layers of Formal Belonging

This section looks at layers of formal belonging in the farming community. Some participants will take the farm in the knowledge that they should actively run it as a productive farm. For others, their ownership of it will amount to a holding role in the hope that the next generation will be more interested. This is a significant concept because of the differentiated impact it can have on the future direction of the participants’ lives in how it can requires a deeper or less intense interaction with the farm. First the views of male are discussed and, then, the attitudes of female participants are outlined.
Section 7.4.1 Attitudes of Male Participants
There are nuances to the act and meaning of assuming formal ownership of the farm, which tend to lead to different types of engagement with it in the future. It is possible in ways to separate the farmer in the productive and cultural sense of the word, and the landholder who takes it so that the title to the farm is retained in the family, perhaps in the hope that the next generation will be more enthusiastic about it. Given the relatively small proportion of the cohort this relates to it is difficult to say with certainty whether this is connected to gender and/or functional status. However, it appears that for male participants who are likely to be entrusted with the farm there is a presumption that they must maintain it as a working entity. This can increase their sense of conflict around the issue of succession because it means they will probably have to make significant changes to their lifestyle such as moving home or reconfiguring their career path in order to accommodate the needs of the farm. Male ‘workers’ who are unlikely to succeed also indicated that they would actively run the farm if they were to take it over. For example, James did not consider the possibility of leasing the farm out should he be given the holding but rather, as previously mentioned in Section 7.3.2, thought about what type of farming would minimise the disruption to his life. In addition, it is probably fair to say that part of Andrew’s unease with the idea of owning any part of the farm stemmed from the knowledge that if this were to happen he would feel drawn towards working it.

For some of the participants who are likely to take ownership of the farm there seems to be no question but that they will run the farm in a productive sense because of the label they have of the ‘farmer’. George firmly identified with this characterisation and while he argued that there was little to attract people to farming because he was born into this culture he finds it difficult to move away from it. He believed that down through the generations fathers have moulded their sons into taking over the farm. As a result of this socialisation he wants to hold onto the farm and not let it become dilapidated. This was due to the onus of responsibility he had absorbed from his father, albeit one which is postponed for the foreseeable future. However, there was a clash in his interview between his claim that he would be happy if his sisters were to take over the farm and his self-positioning as the ‘farmer’. In Irish family farming culture this title automatically confers a
significantly higher possibility of succeeding, especially for male offspring. Despite the torturous dilemma Brendan faces over his future relationship with the farm, he continues to align himself with this farmer identity regardless of the inevitable and unavoidable consequences for his formal attachments. Farming is in his blood; he is almost inexorably drawn to it and yet he tries to fight against this. He appeared almost helpless against the weight of his experiences and ensnarement in farming. He noted:

[I’m] probably the one who’s probably most inclined to inherit it [...] and been around it most and worked it most. So no guarantee of that but I'd have the responsibility kind of [...] I'd have the love for it kind of thing.

This emphasis on the ‘farmer’ was apparent in other interviews as well when individuals such as Susan and Harry spoke of siblings who are likely to be given the farm because they have already assumed this position in their family.

One individual who had the opportunity to take on the role of the ‘farmer’ but who has moved away from this to the point he would contemplate selling any share of the farm he receives is Andrew. He seemed to link this rejection with an equivalent dilution in his informal attachment to his background. As he begins to build his future away from the farm he struggles to reimagine his relationship with it and the wider field of agriculture. This confusion seems to be partially driven by the uncertainty surrounding the issue of succession in his family. As none of the family’s offspring want to become farmers his father has been forced to consider dividing the farm between all of his children and letting them decide what to do with it. Andrew’s initial idea was to sell his portion straight away, which would allow him to escape the burden of obligation and responsibility associated with this bequest but is increasingly reluctant to do so. These attachments, which are always lurking at the back of his mind are a piece of himself he would, in ways, like to discard. This is because they encroach on his ability to expand his horizons and move beyond the boundaries imposed by his cultural and familial background. At the same time, he was also anxious to point out that he is happy with this part of himself and argued
that if communal\textsuperscript{71} farming practices, which in his view have disappeared, still prevailed he would consider taking it up. From a personal point of view he professed himself to be satisfied with his decision to leave farming and is confident that he will be able to retreat from it. On the other hand, when Andrew considers his position from within the framework of his family continuum, both past and present, and his upbringing a different dynamic is revealed. In the context of this milieu he must contend with guilt and regret over the possible loss of the homeplace and a realisation that this part of his identity would not be as easy to shrug off as it would initially seem or when he thinks of himself as a discrete unit. This seems to be a difficult challenge for him to deal with as highlighted by, for instance, his attempts to avoid taking on a deeper guilt by refusing to learn about the history of the people who used to live in the old buildings dotted around the farmyard. Yet like the rest of his experiences on the farm they still linger on the edge of his consciousness helping to anchor him to the homeplace and making it more difficult to sell the holding. It should be noted that he does not feel this tension emanates from trying to fit in with a particular normative framework. He dismissed the idea of being put under pressure by members of the community to take over the farm and appears to shrug off his parents’ views on this subject. He is aware that both of his parents want him to go farming, but in the case of his mother he was able to laugh off her wishes and in relation to his father he could explain away and rationalise his behaviour because his father wants him to be happy. Nevertheless, he still carries internal turmoil about the future of the farm.

Section 7.4.2 Attitudes of Female Participants
Although female participants who are likely to be given the farm also wrestle with the question of incorporating the farm into their adult lives they do not seem to visualize their future relationship with it in the same way as male respondents do. In the interviews they were more likely to speculate about plans in a way that did not involve taking on the farm in an active manner. In these situations where there is a separation between the idea of running the farm and owning it, the formal attachment

\textsuperscript{71} Up until recently he says the use of meitheal was strong in his area. This is an Irish word used to describe a cooperative approach to farming where a group of neighbours come together to help each other in turn to gather in a grain harvest or save hay. These are highly sociable and interactive affairs.
to the farm is almost a symbolic idea, albeit with very real consequences for their life. Here the concern is to retain the farm within the family rather than developing an intensive day-to-day working relationship with it. For instance, Rita would consider renting the farm out or giving part of it to relatives for sites to build houses on. In addition, Aisling tries to develop a solution to the problem of what to do with a farm she has little practical interest in but which she would hate to see idle and absolutely refuses to sell. A tentative idea she has proposed to her father is to develop a non-agricultural business that could provide an outlet for her and her sisters’ professional skills but noticeably this does not involve continuing on the farm’s dairy herd. This is possibly connected to these participants’ status as ‘helpers’ and the consequential limitation of their farming knowledge. However, other female participants who had had a ‘worker’ role still did not appear to have the same kind of deep-seated conflict over this issue as their male counterparts. It seems as if they had a greater choice as to whether to run the farm or even to agree to take ownership of it in the first place. On the other hand, as already discussed, male ‘workers’ such as Seamus and Brendan spoke in anguished tones about their duty to the farm. The difference between, for instance, Rita and Seamus is that while Rita will eventually own the farm, she will not have to assume the mantle of farmer. Thus, she can plan for her future, in some ways unhindered by the possibility that the farm will radically impinge on the shape of her adult life. However, Seamus’ formal ownership of the farm was, in his own mind, accompanied by the active title of farmer— the idea of which repulsed him but from which he felt he had little chance of escaping. Although there were only a small number of male ‘helpers’ they also appeared to share similar attitudes to the farm as females since any mention of the hypothetical possibility of receiving the holding is not accompanied by a parallel image of themselves as farmers. These were the views of one such individual, Thomas:

I'd be given the farm to mind [if his brother could not take it] until either one of my sister's little children or one of my children grew up and seemed to have an interest in farming and that. Like probably I'd just get in a farm manager […] or else just lease the farm for the entirety of that period, but no I couldn't see myself going back.
Section 7.4.3 Summary of Layers of Formal Belonging

Distinction between a farmer:
- productive relationship with the farm;
and a landholder:
- preserves it into the next generation.

Male participants:
- more likely to have a working relationship with it in the future especially those labelled as the ‘farmer’.
  - This causes conflict for those who would like to pull away but feel they cannot and are drawn back to it because of their upbringing and sense of duty.

Female participants:
- those who will own the farm in the future will probably be less likely to manage it as a productive farm and, instead, look for alternative ways options.
  - ‘workers’ on the farm do not have the same conflict as male counterparts and appear to have a greater choice about this matter.

Section 7.5 The ‘Farmer’ as the Successor
The following section explores the position of the designated farmer within the family as regards to formal belonging. It also looks at the impact their presence has on the attitudes and relationships of non-successors to the farm. This is a significant concept to consider because it can help to explain the apparent lack of conflict over this issue in this cohort as well as the roles that those who will not take ownership of the farm play within the succession process. This role is outlined in the second part of this section.
Section 7.5.1 The Natural Successor
Throughout the narratives particular individuals were clearly identifiable as the ‘farmer’ who stand out as having the most interest and passion for farming among the family’s offspring. They become the natural successor because they are regarded as the most likely to keep the farm going in the future. Although the importance of birth order was not extensively explored in the interviews little reference was made to, for example, primogeniture or ultimogeniture\(^{72}\) as being the deciding factor in the creation of this role. Instead, these individuals are often seen as suitable because they are ambitious and keen to modernise the farm and/or maintain the standards set by earlier generations. This is the case, for example, in Conor’s family where despite the absence of discussion about the topic, as is indeed true for most of these families, it is universally assumed that one particular brother will be given the farm. Conor surmised that this is because he spends the most time on it and has the drive to take on the daunting but necessary task of regenerating the farm. In other cases, such as Shauna’s the identification of the farmer is connected to simply retaining the farm within the family rather than leading to a possible expansion. While some might speak of their siblings’ business-minded approach to it, informal attachments in the form of a love for it are also viewed as important qualities in a farmer. Brendan, who self-identifies as one, links his commitment to farming as being ultimately because it is in his blood and he loves it. He depicted himself as having a special relationship with the farm, whether perceived or real that the rest of his family does not have. His inherent and unquenchable draw towards farming is demonstrated by the use of the word ‘blood’. This metaphorically penetrates to every level of his being and sense of who he is, as is shown in these comments:

\[
[...] \text{it was just in my blood and guts you know. [...] It wasn't a case of a nice part of the year or a nice part of farming. No matter what it was I just loved it, just in me blood I think. It's definitely still in my blood that's the main reason [he would be drawn towards it].}
\]

\(^{72}\) Primogeniture is a system of inheritance that gives preference to the oldest born in ultimogeniture the youngest inherits the estate.
Part of the reason why the majority of non-successors would be happy for their sibling to take over the farm is because the ‘farmer’ is often seen as having this innate attachment, as alluded to by Brendan that they do not possess. The idea of a farmer being born rather than made is an important element of farming ideology whereby a love for the land is perceived as a natural and core characteristic of these individuals. For instance, despite the negativity surrounding the future of farming James felt his brother always wanted to be one because of his ingrained passionate for it. Key cornerstones of this perception were these actors’ desire to be involved with the farm from a very early age and how this was encouraged and facilitated by others. This adds to the sense of inevitability about their formal belonging to the holding in adulthood. James recalled a childhood story about his then four year old brother’s attempts to follow his father’s tractor to the mart in his own toy one and his dismay at being prevented from doing so. He told this as a means of demonstrating his brother’s commitment to the farm from early childhood. If his brother was so enthusiastic about farming when he was small, then, in James’ opinion this shows the merit and suitability of his claim to succeed to the farm. Another participant, Donal, remembered being asked at the age of six if he wanted to become a farmer. When he said no his parents steered him towards education and he was not pressurised to take over the farm. This again highlights the connection often made between being a natural farmer and the formal dimension of belonging as his early denial was taken as a sign that his path and interests lay elsewhere. There is an element here of having to prove an intrinsic commitment to the farm and through this show their worthiness and resolve to honour and carry the work of previous generations into the future. In this way, the farm can be secured as a physical space and an ideological one where past and present representations of not only the self but the family are manifested.

This application of the ‘farmer’ label allows non-succeeding participants, male and female; ‘helpers’ and ‘workers’ to detach themselves from the debate about succession. The depth of a ‘farmer’s’ interest is supposedly such that it is legitimate for them to take over from their parents. However, it should not be assumed that this indicates these non-succeeding actors are indifferent to the farm’s future but rather that their concerns are assuaged by the presence of this individual. While Paula
spoke with some bewilderment about her brothers’ probable entry into farming she was, nevertheless, glad they might do so:

I can just imagine them [her brothers] now like [in] fifty years time as old men just living in some auld house and dirty and moving cows and talking about the mart […] as long as I don't have to do anything with it they can go off and you know [do] whatever, but I don't want to have to do it.

For some individuals, such as Conor and James, the presence of the ‘farmer’ also allowed a measure of personal reprieve from the potential burden of caring for the farm. They understand that the presence of a successor enables them to build their own life away from the farm safe in the knowledge it will be preserved into the next generation. In addition, this provided reassurances for the security of their own continued informal attachment to the farm. Through their sibling’s retention of the land they still have access to it as, for instance, their homeplace, which as previously mentioned connects them to their childhood memories and so on. Thus, non-succeeding actors’ attitudes to a succeeding sibling are largely based on a combination of two elements. Firstly, there is an appreciation of the broader family picture, as shown through the approving link they made between these individuals and their capacity to safeguard the farm. Secondly, it has personal implications in enabling them to avoid formal ownership and the impact this would have on the nature of their transition to adulthood. This sense of escape is undoubtedly of more relevance to male participants since their female counterparts, as explored in Section 7.4.2, are less likely to be expected to become farmers.

This concept of the ‘farmer’ helps to ‘other’ non-successors from the idea of formally belonging to the farm. There is an implicit corollary to the identification of siblings or other actors as having a passion or drive for it, in that they rarely talk of personally possessing these attributes. While they might love the farm they do not love farming, and while they have a drive to achieve academically this does not extend to a wish to be correspondingly successful in agriculture. For instance, Brian sees going into farming as too big a risk in comparison to what he will gain from his pursuit of a university education. He noted the passion his friends who want to become farmers have for it, which he lacks. Whether this interest is an inherent or
socialised characteristic is outside the scope of this research, but what emerged repeatedly over the course of the interviews was the ‘farmer’s’ enthusiasm overcoming issues such as low income, instability and hardship. Bridget’s brother, for example, who is highly enthusiastic about farming, quit a steady well-paid job in order to buy a farm, and Susan spoke too, of her siblings’ return to farming from nascent professional careers because of their affection for it. For others like Brian, who did not have this deep almost instinctive affiliation to farming, its benefits did not sufficiently compensate for its problems. As a result, these actors are more likely to distance themselves from the idea of taking on formal ownership of the farm when they measured their interest levels against those of the ‘farmer’.

Section 7.5.2 The Role of Non-Successors in the Succession Process

However, simply because this group are willing to acquiesce to the decisions made about succession especially where the ‘farmer’ is present does not mean that they are absent from or neutral figures in the process. Traditional patterns of succession are facilitated in part by actors such as James, Bridget or Thomas through either giving their implicit or explicit support to the strategy, which has been agreed to. This is demonstrated firstly, in their desire to have the chain of belonging stretch into the next generation even when they might chafe against their upbringing and the impact it had on them. Secondly, the harmonious continuity of the farm can only be guaranteed with the cooperation of non-succeeding offspring since they must, to a certain extent, give up on the idea of claiming an equal share of their parents’ estate. Furthermore, they can offer ongoing moral and practical support through, for example, helping on the farm or refraining from actively acting on any dissatisfaction they might feel about the distribution of their parents’ estate. From this can be seen the importance of creating a deep sense of belonging amongst all members of the family and not only the one who is the ‘farmer’. The possibility of other siblings viewing the farm as an asset to be potentially sold to benefit them is reduced through the establishment of these ties. This places emphasis on the importance of creating informal attachments and in particular shaping relationships with the farm, which position it as an essential part of the broader family narrative and not solely a revenue generating asset. This conceptualisation of belonging means
that participants such as Bridget stressed the importance of retaining the farm within
the family rather than selling it. This is highlighted in these comments:

I'd rather the land just lay fallow\textsuperscript{73} and nobody farm [it]. As
long as it's there at least you can do something with it in time.
For her this is linked to the idea that if the farm is sold then all the sacrifices that had
ensured its survival up until now would have been in vain. What would have been
the point of the financial hardship and of the struggle of having to do without, if it
was to be sold by a brother regardless of whether he did so with a heavy heart or
gleefully took the money? The farm here has meaning beyond its capacity to provide
an income. It is a representation of the family’s past; both personal and historical and
their stubborn unwillingness to yield to the challenges they encountered in the harsh
physical conditions and gruelling workload her parents faced. It also provides a
measure of security against unknown misfortunes, as mentioned by Bridget:

I suppose it’s an integral kind of Irish thing if you go back even
to the play \textit{The Field}\textsuperscript{74} that one person could sell you know a
piece of land […] it’s very upsetting. I suppose maybe it’s just
an Irish cultural thing in that when you have land you have
money. So it’s a very secure kind of thing and I remember
growing up, and you know we weren’t in any ways wealthy or
anything like that, and we did you know have to go without a
lot of things and my mother just saying to my dad ‘‘you know
sell land, sell a field or something like that’’, and he was like
‘‘no, no, no we'll never sell a field!’’.

It is the responsibility of her brother, the ‘farmer’, to preserve this legacy, but as a
non-succeeding sibling she facilitates and eases this handover of the farm from one
generation to the next through not viewing the land as something she can
legitimately take a share of or campaign to be sold.

\textsuperscript{73} By this she means leaving the land idle rather than cultivating it.
\textsuperscript{74} \textit{The Field} is an Irish play about a farmer’s relationship with the land he rents and his fierce
determination to protect his right to continue farming it up to and including the murder of an outsider
who had the temerity to buy it. It also created a profoundly dysfunctional dynamic within his family.
Section 7.5.3 Summary of the ‘Farmer’ as the Successor

The ‘farmer’ is identified as the natural successor to the farm. They possess certain characteristics e.g. drive and interest, which mark them out as suitable for this role.

Non-successors appear happy for the ‘farmer’ to take over because they are perceived as having an innate attachment to it.

Retaining the farm helps to preserve non-successors’ informal attachment to it into the future.

The ‘farmer’ is capable of protecting the family’s connection to the farm because they are seen as worthy and able to carry it on.

If a ‘farmer’ is available non-succeeding siblings can detach themselves from the debate about the future of the holding:

- they are not indifferent but their concerns are eased;
- it is a personal reprieve from the duty of taking over the farm.

Non-successors are ‘othered’ from the idea of formally belonging to the farm through not being regarded as possessing the same characteristics as the ‘farmer’.

But non-successors are essential to the process of transferring the farm from one generation to the next.

They support it e.g. through not looking for a share of it and/or continuing to assist the sibling who does take the farm.

This highlights the importance of creating deep informal attachments to the farm among all children in the family as they need to see it as essential to the family narrative.

Section 7.6 The Attitude of Parents towards Formal Belonging

This last section is not intended to be an exhaustive examination of family succession strategies since this is outside the remit of the research. However, a brief mention needs to be made here of the participants’ perceptions about their parents’ attitudes to the subject of formal belonging.
Section 7.6.1 Characteristics of Parental Attitudes

Very few of the participants said that the subject of succession had been discussed within their family or that their parents had specifically vocalised their wishes about this. In fact, for many of the participants these plans were quite opaque with the identification of a potential heir often resting on suppositions and the presence of a sibling who had already marked themselves out as the ‘farmer’ through their actions and enthusiasm. However, where such an individual is not readily identifiable, participants do not necessarily feel their parents have a deliberate strategy in place to deal with this issue such as coaxing at least one of their offspring into the position. Instead, many are under the impression that their parents hope the dilemma around succession will somehow resolve itself over time. This is true even in families like Julia’s, where her father has made it clear that he wants the farm to be kept. Although one sister appears to be interested it has yet to be openly addressed. Another participant, Aisling, has tried to talk to her father about this subject, but he has refused to help her devise a viable solution for the future of the farm. It should be pointed out that in some families, such as Brian’s parents have already revealed the contents of their will, but this is an exception and perhaps linked to his parents’ determination to see him leave the farm behind.

One way the idea of formal belonging is crystallised in a family without direct discussions taking place is through, for example, differentiating one child from an early age, by particular actions and words, from their other siblings. In the interviews this was largely seen as the work of parents. James, for instance, noted that his little nieces and nephews will be brought around the farm by their father and told that all this could be theirs one day. In childhood, then, it can become clear who stands as next in line so that both successors and non-successors internalise this idea. As a result, the former usually expect to own the farm almost in its entirety in the future and the latter that they will not. This is actively reinforced during their upbringing through, for example, the way their functional attachments are delineated. Jane spoke of how, from a young age, her brother was marked out as different from his sisters by being expected to assist on the farm while they did homework. Therefore, from then on they all knew that he was to be given the farm. In her interview Jane expressed sadness for her brother because this curtailed his choices and he has some
grievances with it too, but there is an acknowledgement from all parties that this is how the issue of formal ownership of the farm should be arranged. In Rita’s case it was her grandfather who took her around the farm when she was very young and insisted that she would own it one day. This early socialisation had a profound impact on her relationship with the landholding as it gave her a strong feeling of ownership. She noted this in her interview:

[…] granddad probably told me in some way I was going to get it you know. Not in a way of like-you're going to sit me down and have a big serious chat-but kind of you know like probably walking around the fields and saying ‘‘oh someday you're going to have this and it's going to be yours kind of thing’’. So, I think it's always been kind of etched in my mind that it is going to be mine.

Additionally, parents can have a significant influence through encouraging their children away from the idea of needing to become a farmer. Within the parameters outlined previously in Section 7.2.2.2 of this chapter, more than one male participant spoke of the support they received from their parents in making choices for themselves about their lives. This is seen, for example, in George’s story where his parents, despite his ‘worker’ position always viewed his education as important and pushed him to take advantage of it. However, his parents sent somewhat contradictory messages about this issue. While he was steered away from viewing farming as a full-time job in the future through his father’s praise of his mother’s steady employment he was still conditioned into the role of the ‘farmer’ with its attendant underlying obligations to take charge of the farm. His socialisation into this dual position showed the aspirations his mother and father had for him. George’s movement into adulthood is, thus, partially a reflection of complex parental goals, of wanting on some level to keep him on the farm—shown by how they did not distance him from it through placing him in a ‘helper’ role and trying to push him away from it through promoting his education. Another interviewee, Donal, spoke of how his mother wanted him to concentrate on this educational pathway rather than go into farming with the result that he has moved far away from his background in terms of his career aspirations. This shows that parental emphasis on education can have an
impact on the construction of formal relationships with the farm into the future, regardless of an individual’s informal connection to it.

A number of male participants presented their detachment from the possibility of formally owning the farm as a fragile idea resting in large part on their parents’ agentic capacity rather than their own. In some cases, actors felt they were lucky their parents did not agitate for them to take the farm because if they had done so it would have been very difficult, if not impossible for them to refuse. It should be noted that none of the female participants gave the impression that this had been true of their parents. This lack of control over the process of creating formal attachments within the family was alluded to by James when he discussed his parents’ disbelieving attitude towards his brother, the ‘farmer’s’ decision to become a mechanic rather than go to university. As his parents tried to convince his brother Ciaran of the foolishness of this decision James remembers pondering whether they had him in mind to take over the farm instead. This shows a kind of helplessness—that if his parents had wanted him to take over the farm he would have been nearly powerless to say no. Donal felt relieved that his parents had not tried to convince him to go into farming because if they had done so he doubted if he would have been able to refuse. Similarly, George spoke of being fortunate that his parents did not push the farming route on him. There is a sense here that his decision to not take on the farm immediately upon leaving school was heavily influenced by his parents. They have facilitated a kind of indefinitely postponed formal attachment for him whereby he can make his transition to adulthood away from the farm, underpinned by the knowledge that he can return to farming in some guise in the future. Rather than playing an active role in the creation of their own relationship with formal belonging for a number of participants it is a reactive position heavily connected to their parents’ outlook and strategic actions.

Some individuals realise that keeping the farm on into the next generation is about parental concerns more than any deep personal compulsion to do so. This is true of Seamus who hates the idea of succeeding but has no choice in the matter. This is because of his brother’s ambition to be a farmer and because his father wants it
retained as a lasting memorial to his life. This is linked to the farm’s potential to eternalise an individual as it means that even after they are dead they will continue to be remembered in some way. Seamus likened this concept to the relationship between an author and producing a published book. Perhaps this hope for an enduring presence is crucial to the preservation of the farm within the family—a person’s life represents something bigger and longer lasting than their mere corporeal existence will allow for. These were Seamus’ thoughts on the subject:

[…] you know when a man dies [he thinks] this is what I’ve done in life I want it preserved. […] Da wants to like-he wants to say he's left something behind, he's left his farm behind you know. This is what he has made for himself in life and he wants to continue it and he wants to continue it strongly.

Julia was also aware of her father’s hopes to see the farm retained; she is unlikely to be given the farm and displays little interest in it having not set foot on it for nearly a year. Yet if no one else is available she would assume formal ownership of it because she knows how important this would be to her father even beyond the grave.

Various interviewees touched on a serious dilemma they feel their parents potentially encounter around the formal dimension of belonging. While they might be as anxious as the younger generation is to honour their own parents through preserving the farm or view it as a vault for their memories they must perhaps deal with two very pertinent matters. One is the difficult future small family farms face. If they urge their children into taking on the holding they must do this is in the knowledge that the socio-economic landscape the farm is situated within has changed. When they entered the profession their relative incomes were probably higher than they are now and farming was a more dominant cultural force in Irish society. Audrey’s parents did not push their offspring to take over the farm; to some extent because her father does not think it is possible to make the same living as when he was starting out. He would prefer for his daughters to get better paid, off-farm work and would in Audrey’s opinion have pushed any son he might have had away from it too. Allied to this is the fact that although most parents would probably like to see the land being farmed rather than sold or held in trust for the next generation they are also aware of
the sacrifices this requires in terms of lifestyle, income, etc. and so yearn for easier lives for their children. Aisling felt her father is caught up in this predicament:

I don't think he'd like that [farming] lifestyle for any of us. Like he sees how hard he's had to work for his whole life and the sacrifices he's made. […] Obviously he loves what he does too, but I don't think he'd like it for us do you know, but I'd imagine at the same time it's playing on his mind […] what's going to happen to it.

7.6.2 Summary of the Attitudes of Parents towards Formal Belonging

- Usually no clear succession strategy has been outlined or developed within the family.
- The problem of securing a successor can be surmounted by parents differentiating one child from an early age as the ‘farmer’.
- Parents can influence their children away from taking on the role of farmer. This can be complex as they can push their children away through encouraging education but pull them in by assigning a ‘worker’ role.
- Participants sometimes feel their detachment from succession is fragile and rests on the attitudes of their parents. Some felt that if parents wanted them to take over they would not have been able to refuse.
- Succession can be linked to a parental wish to be eternalised through preserving the farm as a testament to their life’s work.
- Parents face a dilemma about their children keeping on the farm:
  - desire its continued survival;
  - but it is less viable as a source of employment;
  - and want their children to have an easier life than they had.
Section 7.7 Conclusion

The idea of passing the farm down from one generation to the next remains hugely significant to Irish family farming culture. This is not simply about the continuation of an income-generating business but also the preservation of the farm as a central component of the family’s narrative. For most participants the idea of retaining ownership and, as a result, formal belonging to the farm within the family is still highly influential. This is underpinned by the widespread refusal to countenance the sale of the farm across most of the interviews. This is true even for actors who through the kind of transition to adulthood they seek to make are in the process of distancing themselves spatially and professionally from their farming background.

This is not necessarily about the idea of maintaining the family name on the landholding itself with several participants appearing to be quite pragmatic about the possibility of this separation if their sisters take on the farm. It is not always based on some grasping intention to hold on to land as a kind of protection against the cold breath of the Famine or a desire to maintain a certain status and security. This is demonstrated by how few actually spoke of the land as providing a financial safety net. It is, instead, largely based on the informal connections individuals have developed with the farm from their earliest childhood. For the respondents it is partially about maintaining a place to belong that can link them into a shared personal and historical past and into a familial future. It also allows the intergenerational context of the family to be honoured and the wishes of parents to see the farm continue on realised. For those who are somewhat indifferent to the fate of the farm this can be connected to, for instance, personal detachments driven by parental attitudes or a perceived lack of historical connections.

The smooth continuity of the link between the family and the farm rests in part on the hope that at least one child, preferably a son, will emerge as the ‘farmer’ and successor-one who is worthy of taking on the mantle of ownership of the farm with all it implies in terms of protecting the farm and the family’s association with it. The construction of this successor seems to rest to some degree on the kind of functional attachments, which were created in childhood. As was shown in this chapter this
acceptance of formal ownership can have a significant impact on the life path of the individual especially if they are noticeably the ‘farmer’ in the family. Those who are identified as non-successors also play an important role in the succession process and their support is vital for the continuation of their family’s association with the farm into the future. Furthermore, even for those who will not take ownership of the farm, the concepts underpinning formal attachments in this community, such as loyalty, pride and obligation to their background will continue to exert an influence on their lives even as they move away from their youth and towards adulthood. However, these strong emotions can be modified or diluted with regard to their connections to communities outside of the homeplace, a topic explored in depth in the last findings chapter.
Chapter Eight The ‘Social Dimension of Belonging’

Section 8.1 Introduction
This chapter focuses on the social dimension of belonging as it applies to the relationships this group have with the local community they grew up in as well as the more abstract concepts of the rural and farming ones. Although most of the participants’ childhoods revolved around the family and the homeplace they were also embedded in a broader network of cultural and social communities. All the interviewees, regardless of their affection or dislike for their background, viewed their belonging to these communities as an on-going feature of their lives even as they moved towards an adult path, which will potentially take on a very different complexion to their childhood. The nature of these interactions and the relationships they developed often depended on the symbolic meaning attached to their surname by others as well as their own personal actions and preferences. However, the social dimension of belonging is more fragmented and appears less likely to be deliberately constructed than its on-farm counterparts by, for example, parents. It seems to be almost a by-product of these other aspects rather than an inherent feature of an individual’s socialisation. The social dimension of belonging is largely predicated on the degree to which an individual feels embedded or disembedded in their community, i.e. how strongly they feel they are immersed into its cultural or public life. The notion of social belonging also rests on the idea of being known and knowing within a community from which is simultaneously derived comfort and conflict. This is because it can provide a sense of security but also the feeling of being under surveillance. A deeply contradictory relationship can be created for the individual with where they grew up as while there are factors pulling them back towards this background there are elements pushing them away. An intrinsic component of their social belonging appears to be the presence of an urban ‘other’ against which they identify themselves and retain a sense of being a member of their own community. Usually this is irrespective of whether they look to detach themselves from their culture through the particular contours of their path towards adulthood or reintegrate into it at a later date.
This chapter is divided into five main sections. Firstly, it briefly explores the participants’ conceptualisation of the term ‘community’ as it relates to the place of their upbringing and their culture. The second section discusses some of the main characteristics of embeddedness. Subsequently, influences on the embeddedness or disembeddedness of an individual in their community are looked at, including the performitivity of farming, the role of family ties and shared or discordant value systems. The fourth part of the chapter examines attitudes to the social dimension of belonging focusing specifically on the contradictory ideas the group develop towards their background. Lastly, attention is paid to the role and use of ‘othering’ in the development and maintenance of identities and membership of the community.

Section 8.2 The Social Dimension of Belonging
The first section elaborates in more detail on some of the main characteristics of how the social element of belonging is regarded by the participants. It particular focuses on how the different communities they are grounded in overlap and are viewed as collective rather than distinct entities.

Section 8.2.1 Characteristics of the Social Dimension of Belonging
The social dimension of belonging refers to membership of and connections to communities outside of the immediate environs of the farm and the family. Although in their childhoods the majority of participants spent most of their free time with their family within the boundaries of the homeplace, they were also embedded to varying degrees within a broader network of actors and place attachments. While these include, for example, peer groups and school this research is limited to connections to three interlinked communities. These are firstly, the spatially based local community they were raised in, secondly, the rural framework this is nested in and thirdly, farming culture, which is in some ways separate to yet still deeply intertwined with the fabric of rural living. It is difficult to distinguish between participants’ perceptions about belonging to the three of these communities. For instance, while a farm and the family who live on it are engrained in a particular
local environment they are also considered to be part of a broader cultural community. Myles noted his membership of this framework:

We're [farmers] almost like a different class like you know that sort of way. [...]. Like it's almost like you're just-like someone from Galway, someone's from Cork, someone's [from] a farm. [...] There's always a kind of a difference you know.

The farming community is usually not framed within spatially derived boundaries, i.e. participants identify with it as an abstract cultural idea without reference to specific geographically based alignments. On the other hand, the local community they grew up in is often delimited by perhaps unofficial but still relatively discrete physical boundaries about what qualifies as ‘their’ neighbourhood. Sometimes, the parameters are linked to, for example, attendance at a particular church or loyalty to a social hub, such as a GAA\textsuperscript{75} club rather than a recognised administrative area like an electoral district. While individuals specifically referred to their own local community this was usually blended into a broader rural framework. For example, in describing their reaction to a scandalous event in their area an actor could segue into a general diatribe against the pitfalls of rural living. To further complicate matters, participants often talked about the rural and the farming communities in aggregate terms with few clearly demarcated boundaries between them. This disregards the fact that in reality they are not directly interchangeable as many inhabitants of rural areas are not involved in agriculture\textsuperscript{76}. In spite of this, participants presented these social attachments as almost interchangeable ideas. The community could be defined as the local, which as pointed out fuses with the wider rural one, or the farming one depending on the context of their conversation.

However, the social dimension of belonging is not simply about what participants are part of and what they identify themselves with but also what they are not. Most

\textsuperscript{75} The GAA or Gaelic Athletic Association is an Irish amateur sporting organisation which has two main sporting codes-hurling and Gaelic Football. Personal affiliations are usually based on specific long-term spatial derived attachments at all representative levels. It is one of the most significant social and cultural organisations in Ireland particularly in rural areas.

\textsuperscript{76} The 2006 Census showed that only 21.5\% of the working rural population was involved in farming as either a farmer or a labourer (Irish Rural Link, 2009).
clearly distance themselves from the value system and way of life they see as representative of a discrete alternative-the ‘urban’. This is used as a means of identifying themselves as belonging to the wider imagined community of the rural and located within this the narrower farming one. Even if some like Joan or Seamus want to reject their rootedness in the farming community, they usually still recognise their membership of the broader rural idea. As already discussed in Chapter Six Section 6.2.1, these two individuals resent the impact of the farm on their lives. This extends to the communities they grew up in as both profoundly disliked this element of their identity and the attitudes and values, which underpin life there.

Section 8.2.2 Summary of the Social Dimension of Belonging

Three different communities can be recognised:
-the spatial one they were raised in;
-the rural framework;
-the cultural one of farming.
There are few discrete distinctions between the three and depending on the context ‘community’ can mean any one of the three or a blend of two or more.
They distance themselves from the urban ‘other’ and through this signal what they are not.

Section 8.3 Embeddedness
This section defines the concept of embeddedness and discusses its principal characteristics. It also outlines the reasons why typologies based on embeddedness and disembeddedness similar to ‘worker’/’helper’ are not possible to develop. Nevertheless, it is necessary to explore this concept in some detail as it is the foundation of much what is explored in the remainder of the chapter.
Section 8.3.1 Features of Embeddedness
The term embeddedness best describes and defines the degree of attachment individuals feel to the communities they grew up in and how closely they align themselves with them. This concept can be used to understand relationships between the research cohort and the wider social environment outside of the homeplace. It is more applicable than, for example, a conceptual framework focused on the terms ‘marginalisation’ and ‘inclusion’. This would imply the presence of differentiations linked to access to services or discrimination within the community, which none of the participants appear to have experienced. Instead, if the concept of embeddedness is used to frame the discussion the debate becomes more nuanced. It is connected to the creation of statuses and roles rather than an individual automatically being considered to have suffered or gained from their position in the community, as the terms marginalisation and inclusion could point towards. An example of this differentiated embeddedness was described in Chapter Five Section 5.3.2 when Bridget mentioned that neighbours would normally not discuss the subject of farming with girls—instead of asking about the progress of a field of wheat a neighbour might inquire after their family’s welfare. This shows that female members of a farming family are not systematically ignored but rather that they are engaged with in a different way than their male counterparts are. In saying that embeddedness is not a neutral concept and can influence individuals’ lives and the transitions to adulthood they make. The positions associated with how it is manifested have the potential to, for example, make it more challenging for females to become farmers if the community do not consider this to be an appropriate route for their gender.

The fact that all the participants felt they were still in some way connected to their background demonstrates the need to view social belonging as a continuum rather than a stark either/or categorisation of being a member of a community or not. However, the idea of a continuum of embeddedness is more difficult to link into a typology of individuals than, for example, functional belonging is with its relatively clear distinctions between ‘workers’ and ‘helpers’ or its formal equivalent where participants often self-identified as a successor or non-successor. By contrast the degree to which individuals are embedded within the different communities varies
widely, with actors often displaying fragmented and disjointed attitudes about their relationship with them. While an actor might perceive themselves to be distanced from the farming community in not being the ‘farmer’, they could still view themselves as embedded within it, albeit with a more symbolic than practical interpretation of their affiliation with it. Likewise, a participant’s comments about the status they continue to enjoy in their local community could be followed by a description of their deliberate decision to pull away from it on a permanent basis. In addition, this continuum is further complicated by the temporally fragile nature of the participants’ relationship with it. Unlike say divisions in the allocation of tasks on the farm, which remain relatively constant over time it alters as participants grow up and move towards adulthood. This is shown by actors’ reflections on how over the years, the nature of their association with the farming and local community has changed, depending on, for example, their own attitudes to this element of their identity or their current life plans. Developing a discrete categorisation of embeddedness is made more difficult by the tangled nature of the relationship an individual has with the idea of ‘community’. The farm is quite a straightforward concept to explore since by its nature it is bounded by the constraints of its ditches and walls both physically and metaphorically. However, the community is a more difficult notion to unpack because which manifestation of it is being referred to? Is it the one found at the livestock sale, the church gate after Sunday services or the nodding acquaintanceship of a pub on a night out? For an individual could feel part of all of these and none of these depending on a given context or mood. Furthermore, if the local and/or rural community or its farming counterpart were under discussion, invariably attitudes towards one trickled into the other since for these individuals they are tightly bound together. This adds to the problem of creating accurate typologies of this kind especially within the scope of this research.

Although it is difficult to attach a concrete label of embeddedness to any one actor, an ideal type of the socially embedded individual can be constructed from the data gathered in the interviews. This character would be recognised as a ‘farmer’ or successor to this status; have a publicly visibly performative role in farming; strong social ties; a personal desire to retain deep connections to their background and shared common interests and cultural markers of identity, such as membership of the
GAA. On the other hand, the socially disembedded individual would be perceived as not having ‘farmer’ or successor status; as performing a less visible or more private role on the farm; having weak social ties; sharing in few of the prevailing interests or tastes and see themselves as fully detached from their community. When the participants’ narratives are examined, all appear to combine elements of both the embedded and disembedded individual\textsuperscript{77}. For instance, Orla does not see herself as a ‘farmer’ but is closely linked and actively involved with the management of the farm and, yet, does not envision a return home in the future. Another participant Ben regards himself as deeply embedded in the community, often works on the farm his father manages but shares few of its prevailing sporting interests and, instead, considers his tastes to be more urban in the music he likes and the hobbies he enjoys.

### Section 8.3.2 Summary of Features of Embeddedness

- **Embeddedness:**
  - more applicable than frameworks centred on marginalisation/inclusion;
  - more nuanced and connected to differentiated statuses and roles.
- It is a continuum rather than discrete either/or categories of belonging or not.
- Difficult to develop a typology as all participants exhibit features of both embeddedness and disembeddedness.
- Characteristics of embedded ideal types include strong social ties, visibly performative roles and successor status.
- Characteristics of socially disembedded ideal types include weak social ties, detachment from dominant rural interests and non-successor status.

\textsuperscript{77} This could be a feature of this particular research cohort since, on the one hand, their attendance at university means that at present they are somewhat disembedded from both the farming and local community. However, they remain sufficiently immersed in their background to have actively sought to take part in this research.
Section 8.4 Influences on Embeddedness
Due to the issues outlined in the previous section the following segments of this chapter are not an attempt to place individuals into embedded or disembedded categories but rather are an exploration of the different influences that come to bear on the social dimension of belonging. These are significant concepts because they illuminate some of the factors serving to increase an actor’ attachment to or detachment from the community. In turn this impacts on their transition to adulthood. The first part looks at the performitivity of farming and its gendered underpinnings. It also highlights the relationship between the roles that participants assume and the depth of an individual’s embeddedness in the community.

Section 8.4.1.1 The Performitivity of Farming
There is a performative aspect to farming that impacts on an actor’s level of social embeddedness in the farming community, which is linked to functional roles of ‘worker’/’helper’. When interpreted in the context of this community and especially in light of the increasing mechanisation of much of agricultural labour, farming is about a visible manifestation of a status. As the physical effort required is reduced, arguments around the need to rely almost exclusively on male input are negated so that other justifications for continued dominance are needed. The division of tasks based on whether they are carried out on the farm or off the farm, e.g. providing assistance to neighbours, therefore, can become important to the creation of functional attachments to farming. These allocations represent a particular kind of masculinity and femininity linking in turn to specific public and private social roles appropriate to each gender. It also creates a role actors can play that accords with certain notions of who and what they are in an overarching sense, for example, whether they have been marked out as the successor grounds the role they assume in the local community. One participant, George, argued that there was a difference between his sisters who were ‘helpers’ and him, the ‘worker’, in terms of the recognition gained in this community by virtue of their roles. Partially through his public performance of work his position gradually shifted from that of his father’s apprentice to being perceived as a farmer in his own right, both on the farm itself and in the community. However, his sisters’ positions continued to be rooted in and acted out within the private family domain. It would be known or at least presumed that
they had this role of working in the house or helping on the farm, but its invisibility to outsiders, unless they happened to visit the farm, meant they lacked an off-farm functional role, which would help to embed them in local social networks. This denied them the deeper social embedding that ‘farmers’ such as George or ‘workers’ like James had as a result of their interactions with this community.

Participants like George and James were also initiated into the local community network through, for example, driving tractors on local roads or being asked to borrow farm machinery from neighbours. However, female participants especially ‘helpers’ did not mention having access to this form of acceptance. Whether they liked it or not male ‘workers’ were identified as part of the farming fraternity, which increased their social embeddedness as well as the level and kind of contact they have with members of the local community beyond what most female participants could expect. For example, James argued that when he returns home he fits straight back into the community, which he attributed in large measure to how well known and integrated he is into it through the ‘worker’ role he has occupied since childhood. However, at times this public performitivity created pressure and conflict for actors such as Seamus who struggle to discharge their responsibilities to the farm. He told a bitter story of his efforts to drive a tractor-itself a practical and symbolic expression of farming masculinity:

If you're just driving the tractor slowly into the yard cos you're shit, a lad might slow down [on the road] to gawk\(^{78}\) at you and I remember Luke Murphy [a neighbour] doing it […] he was slowing down and I felt embarrassed, but why should I feel embarrassed? First time learning to drive a tractor-he thought it was weird cos I was seventeen. The social view in society is you learn at twelve, thirteen or fourteen years old to drive the tractor.

This does not mean that ‘helpers’ who are not publicly involved in farm work do not have a place in their community but, nevertheless, it is not constructed in the same way. Bridget, for instance, has developed a sense of belonging that provides space for the validation and use of her own talents and capacities in what she sees as a

\(^{78}\)This means to stare at someone in a disrespectful or rude manner.
socially and personally befitting manner. She does this through helping with the administration of the farm and reading the liturgy at Sunday mass rather than through physical labour on the farm:

I fit in just fine [in the community]. Because I'm a girl I have a clear girl's role. Culturally I suppose girls don't take on a farming role, so you go home and you slot into your role as you do around the house and you slot into your role in the parish and things like that. So it's [farming] not something I feel like I'm being left out of or anything like that. I feel like if I wanted to get involved I could, but I choose not to because I'm happy enough with the role I am in.

In addition, the performance of agriculture can bind a young person to their local community through the social networks many ‘workers’ become part of as a result of assisting other farmers during busy periods, such as spring planting. Through this young men who are more likely to occupy the role of ‘worker’ can come to be viewed as legitimate members of the local and/or rural community. This opportunity is not usually available to female participants or male ‘helpers’ since they are not typically allocated similar opportunities. In her interview Shauna somewhat enviously referred to the bonds male members of the community had as a result of these interactions:

I remember seeing it [the harvesting of silage79] and thinking God sure they are having great craic80 out drawing these bales81 and all the boys are together, and you know there is a real sense of community in the field when the silage is getting done.

A number of female participants such as Susan, Paula and Shauna argued that their brothers had deeper relationships with the community because of this performative

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79 Silage is animal fodder made from cut grass harvested during the summer months and stored for subsequent use during the winter. It is one of the most labour-intensive and demanding jobs on the farming calendar.

80 A slang term meaning to have fun and a good conversation.

81 This means bringing bales of silage in from the field to a barn after they are made. It is a time consuming task much speeded up by having plenty of helpers to take on different roles in the process.
role. While these actors could build ties with social networks through their active involvement in farming the interviewees’ own exchanges were more limited to participating in community based events such as religious services. The social bonds produced by this kind of participation in farming were noted by Bridget as an important factor in encouraging individuals into a career in agriculture. Farming was so publicly engrained in her community that from a young age it spurred her own brothers into wanting to be part of this in an active way. Although Bridget also wanted to maintain her position in the community and is proud to be part of it, she shrank from being similarly associated with farming. She hated, for example, when her neighbours noticed and commented on her herding cattle on the roads nearby to the homeplace. Furthermore, some actors, such as Shauna noted the broader range of opportunities available to their male siblings to build relationships with the community outside of farming work, through socialising, involvement with the GAA and a stable network of friends. By contrast she did not have access to these possibilities for various reasons including the absence of a local peer group. This shows that there is differentiated social belonging within families where those who have publicly identifiable roles are more deeply embedded in the local community because of the working relationships they develop and the social networks, which often emerge from these. In turn, for some female participants, this gives rise to shallower social ties and possibly distances them from the idea of constructing a strongly embedded relationship with the community in the long-term.

For a number of females the idea of being seen to be openly involved in what would typically be defined as a ‘male’ role such as machinery work was discomfiting and a source of shame. Bridget’s acute embarrassment about working with cattle in public appears to be linked to her fear of being perceived as occupying a ‘manly’ role and contravening gendered norms of behaviour as explored in Chapter Five Section 5.3.2. She was more willing to accept her role on the farm as long as it was within the boundaries and relative privacy of the farm. Similarly, Aisling spoke of her father asking her to roll a field\textsuperscript{82} when she was a teenager. Although she carried out the task and enjoyed doing so she was also uneasy because the field was close to the

\textsuperscript{82} Rolling refers to either smoothing uneven surfaces when the soil is being prepared for seeding crops or when grass is flattened to encourage better growth.
road thus making her visible to passersby. While she attributed these feelings to the insecurities of being a teenager, male participants did not mention a comparable embarrassment about being seen to carry out farm-based tasks. Their relative invisibility within the farming community did not appear to cause conflict for female participants and in fact was welcomed by some. It did, however, have implications for the kind of future they imagined for themselves as it often detached them from the possibility of socially belonging to the agricultural world in the same way as their brothers or other male members of this community.

There are exceptions to this pattern in that some female participants took on a performative role without any apparent misgivings. This is true in particular for Maura who was deeply enmeshed in the workings of the farm growing up and is proud of her contribution to it. Unlike Bridget, it never bothered her to be seen to work in public or to be easily marked out as a farmer through, for example, wearing wellington boots into the local shop. She ascribes this to being comfortable with her positioning on the landholding and in the farming community. No doubt this was influenced by the fact that, say unlike Bridget’s mother who pushed her daughter away from the idea of engaging with farming, her parents encouraged her to work on the farm. The desire to identify herself as embedded in her background could also be connected to the significance of the farm lying not in its financial aspects but in its familial and cultural underpinnings. Through this it unifies the family and identifies it as belonging within a particular social milieu. As a result of the farm’s vital role in the family dynamics it was important for Maura and her sisters that if the neighbours came to the homeplace they would see the girls out working in the farmyard. This helped to reinforce the legitimacy of their role in the working life of the farm:

> I suppose it was important for us that like if locals ever did come to the yard they'd always see us. The girls would always be out in the wellies and the jeans and the t-shirts, pulling and dragging out of something…I calved a cow when I was thirteen cos I was [on my own]-the lads were gone to the Ploughing Championships. [...] I think for us being girls it

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83 This is a large agricultural show, which is a hugely popular event in the farming and rural
was like anything the boys could do we can do better that kind of thing.

Katie also spoke of being relaxed about friends knowing she had to work on the farm and did not feel embarrassed-if only because all her friends were doing the same thing. This implies that where there was a measure of either familial or social acceptance of these ‘worker’ roles that individuals were themselves more comfortable and likely to feel that they could embed themselves in this way.

**Section 8.4.1.2 Summary of the Performitivity of Farming**

- Performitivity of farming is connected to ‘worker’/’helper’ roles.
- ‘Workers’ are more likely to have a visible role visible in the farming and local community. This is connected to norms of masculinity and femininity.
- ‘Helper’ role is more private and invisible to the community.
- Gives workers deeper social embeddedness as they had significant opportunities to interact with the local and/or farming community.
- ‘ Helpers’ roles are constructed in a different way, e.g. take on administrative tasks.
- The differentiated social interactions they have can lead to social disembodiedness.
- Some female participants expressed shame at being seen to publicly perform a masculine farming role.
- Other female participants had no misgivings about taking on this role. It was a source of pride and was encouraged by their parents.

**Section 8.4.2.1 The Importance of Familial Ties to Embeddedness**

This section discusses the significance of an individual’s family ties particularly the impact it can have on how young people are assessed and placed into a certain category by others in the community on the basis of concomitant inferences.
A strong influence on the concept of embeddedness is membership of a specific family, which can grant an individual a general status in the community irrespective of their own behaviour or attributes. For instance, Aisling’s family have a long history in the community and so the neighbours are well versed in the accomplishments of previous generations, which automatically embeds her in the local social narrative. On the other hand, Bridget explicitly denied her surname increased her standing in the local hierarchy. However, irrespective of whether a particular surname is important to the creation or maintenance of a status it still permits an individual to be placed by strangers. Placing is where someone asks what a person’s surname is, which allows them to work out who their family are, who they are related to, etc. Based on what is known of the family’s history a calculated guess is made about the individual’s character and likely personal traits. Therefore, being a member of a certain family symbolises and says something about the individual and the way they can be positioned within a community and made into the familiar. This is how Andrew described the placing process:

If someone didn't know who you were, just drop a name from someone in the family and you go “oh you're [a] certain person's brother, oh you're John Kelly’s son”. They'd know you from that and straight away then they think they know ya and that they know your family and you're great friends and there's so much there between ye.

In his interview Myles also mentioned his experience of this custom when he described a conversation he had struck up with an individual in a bank prior to our interview. They did not know each other but through a similar process to the one outlined by Andrew the other man could place him within his family, thus, turning him into a known quantity capable of being instantly assessed and connected with or dismissed.

For two actors, Ben and Myles, being associated with their surname and realising that this could create assumptions in another person’s mind about the kind of character they had was welcomed. It signified their position within a family lineage and temporal continuum, which began long before they were born. Myles strongly identified with the farming and local element of his identity and accepted the
influence of familial ties as a natural consequence of living in this kind of environment. While it did not necessarily bestow elevated status the act of being placed brought with it a heightened sense of belonging. However, for other participants bearing a particular surname appears to be of little consequence as Audrey who does not feel deeply attached to where she grew up noted:

I don't see it [her surname] as having any certain standing in the community or anything. I don't see it as a positive or a negative; it's just my surname.

For others being placed by their surname can be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it can have a positive influence in the embeddedness it represents and the affirmative presuppositions it can engender. On the other hand, it also creates a set of expectations, which could make it difficult for an individual to act in a manner that would be considered to be out of character for their family. This further reinforces the roles or labels connected to bearing a particular surname. For example, Andrew spoke at length about the consequences of this and how he had been judged by others within the context of his family. Being placed within his family means that even if he tries to resist being bounded by its governing parameters, any behaviour not deemed to be in character for his family is quickly frowned upon by other actors. As a result, he is expected to follow particular bounded paths, such as emulating his older siblings’ academic achievements. When he misbehaved in school his teachers did not scold him out of concern for the damage he caused himself but rather because of the trouble it would create for his parents. Although he tried to fight against this he has come to realise he does indeed fall into a certain category heavily linked to his family whether he likes it or not. It is as if his overall family identity has created a barricade of expectations so that, especially in his local community, he is embedded within a particular idea of who he is supposed to be. However, he also uses his surname to his advantage in his interactions with other actors in the area where he grew up, as is discussed in section 8.5.1.
Section 8.4.2.2 Summary of the Importance of Familial Ties to Embeddedness

-Familial ties:
  -grant status to an individual;
  -can increase embeddedness in the community as a long history of the family in an area positions them more deeply in the local narrative;
  -surnames are used to ‘place’ individuals and make them more familiar.
-Some welcomed this as it signalled their rootedness in a family lineage and temporal continuum.
-Others saw it as a mixed blessing as it increases their embeddedness but makes it difficult to be seen as an individual or act in a manner contrary to expectations attached to their family.

Section 8.4.3.1 The Role of Values in Creating Embeddedness

The part looks at the role of values in the development of levels of embeddedness. Whether an individual feels their values are connected to local norms or are markedly different can contribute to the relationship they build with the local community. It also discusses in detail one particular cultural institution, the GAA, and its role as an inclusionary and exclusionary mechanism.

One of the influences on the degree to which an individual feels embedded in a community is the congruence between their values and lifestyle choices and the prevailing local social norms. When there is a clash between how they grow to see the world and the norms of their birth culture a sense of being an outsider can be created. This leads to a corresponding desire to distance themselves both spatially and emotionally from it. For two participants in particular, this tension between how they viewed the world and the kind of conservative, Catholic attitudes they associated with rural Ireland became a significant factor in the level of contact they choose to have with their home community. Donal argued that his homosexuality
had contributed to his disembeddedness not necessarily because he completely disagreed with its values but rather because he feared rejection by its members. In parallel to being forced to pull away spatially because of his educational and career aspirations, he has also withdrawn socially. While he still goes home regularly, when he is out in the community he downplays the expression of his sexuality and, instead, assumes a persona, which his neighbours are familiar with and recognise as being within the normative range of behaviours. Since moving away from home a second participant, Seamus, appears to have developed an increasingly complicated and enraged relationship with the prevailing social norms of his community. In his opinion, social embeddedness in the farming world and rural Ireland is a crippling and disfiguring part of his identity that distorted his childhood views. Additionally, he argued that these attachments prevent him from being the person he could have been if he had been brought up in another environment. He acknowledged that this background is indelibly ingrained in him but yearns to escape from the dark side of rural Ireland with, as he sees it, its prejudice, its stultifying atmosphere and petty hatreds for those who dare to be different.

Most participants portrayed their local communities as having relatively homogenous cultural channels revolving around particular sports and music with few alternatives for those who are interested in other hobbies, social outlets, etc. Of these vehicles, it is the GAA with its dynamic role as a major rural social outlet, which featured most prominently in the interviews as a cultural influence. As part of this it can be interpreted as having the power to act as an inclusionary/exclusionary mechanism. The GAA functions as a community marker of belonging so that a decision to abstain from any involvement in it or to actively withdraw can have practical and symbolic implications for the social connections an individual has with where they are from. Although no one indicated that individuals would be ostracised for not playing and, indeed, Joseph mentioned socialising with his ex-teammates after quitting the sport, it does potentially weaken the ties an individual has with the community. Some participants participated in the GAA when they were younger but gave up principally for non-sporting reasons such as frustration with its cliquish nature. In Seamus’ case, this was partially because of his disgust at the norms he felt it represented such as an obsequious deference to traditional institutions like the
Catholic Church. Thomas’ decision to stop hurling at fourteen signalled the beginning of a withdrawal process from meaningful social interactions with the community. As he was not going to succeed to the farm and wanted to build his life elsewhere, his decision to focus on alternative social networks was a symbolic statement of his intent to detach from the area where he was brought up. These were his views on the subject:

I think when I stopped playing hurling I very much-not cut my ties but reduced my ties anyway with the home community and, then, I started placing more emphasis on my community of friends in school or whatever. So I think since then I don't think I've felt I've fitted in at home, like not at home sorry, but in my parish\textsuperscript{84} or whatever, or in my local village, or in my community at home. I don't know why that [is]-I think because hurling is such a huge part of life there.

For those who did not engage with this cultural institution there were practical implications for the development of relationships with the community during their childhood. As adults this probably affects their embeddedness in local social networks since their non-participation in the GAA militated against forming meaningful connections with other young people from the local area. Bridget, for instance, observed that in not playing Gaelic Football she missed out on the social interactions accompanying it and so did not have as strong a set of associative ties to peer groups as others in the neighbourhood have. This detachment can also, as in the case of Joan, act as a statement of self-positioning vis-à-vis the community. Partially because of her religious affiliation\textsuperscript{85}, her parents’ own emotional distance from their neighbours and a feeling of alienation from the local social world as represented most prominently by the GAA, she viewed herself as an outsider growing up. Furthermore, she was always frustrated by what she sees as the closed nature of the community, its underlying racism, wariness of strangers and the paralysis that affected the place. Her rejection of the GAA was, therefore, emblematic of a larger

\textsuperscript{84} This is a small administrative district, which usually includes a church. Its boundary lines are often used by individuals to delimit their home community.

\textsuperscript{85} She is Protestant but lives in a predominantly Roman Catholic community.
problem rather than being the sole root of her ire. Her friends were involved in the
sport and built stronger connections to one another, but she pushed against this
identity framework and did not perceive it to be representative of who she was. This
rupture was shown in this statement:

There's a very particular life there [in her home community]. If
you don't fit that exactly, like kind of country idea like farming
and whatever, then it's kind of you don't fit in. Like it's much
more like narrow kind[s] of...ideals of what makes you fit in
there.

The slender, defined parameters around how to belong means that not conforming to
these expectations makes it difficult to avoid becoming disembedded and detached
and, importantly, to desire this outcome. As a result of her interest in Goth music and
culture, Audrey felt isolated from her peers during her youth. Her preferences
ensured that she did not fit in with the image of a farmer’s daughter or how it could
be manifested, for example, through playing Gaelic football. While her mother tried
to increase her integration into the community through encouraging her to play this
sport, she refused since she had no enthusiasm for deepening her connections to an
area she longed to escape from.

However, some participants have a long and enduring history of involvement with
the GAA in their own parish and through this view themselves as deeply embedded
there. During their childhoods this allowed them to build deep relationships with
where they grew up, and it also enables them to maintain these connections even
after they have moved away to university. This is because it provides reasons and
opportunities to return home and interact with locals and not just spend time with
their family in the homeplace. It can also impact on the nature of their relationships
with where they grew up because in continuing to play with their local club they can
remain an integral part of the public rituals of community membership as represented
by the GAA. For example, Oisin is still heavily involved with his GAA club and
returns home every weekend, partially because of these sporting commitments.
Similarly, Myles is interested in hurling and argued that where he is from, not
playing this sport decreases an individual’s embeddedness in the community. It is a
way of gaining acceptance since if actors play locally popular sports such as this one
they are viewed as normal but if they do not others tend to have a dismissive attitude towards them.

Section 8.4.3.2 Summary of the Role of Values in Creating Embeddedness

- Disembeddedness can arise through clashing with cultural and social values. As individuals move towards adulthood their view of the world can be in increasing discord with local norms.
- The GAA acts as a powerful inclusionary/exclusionary mechanism in rural Ireland:
  - it functions as a community marker of belonging;
  - non-involvement can weaken social tie;
  - can act as a statement of self-positioning as an outsider/insider;
  - allows actors to continue to play an integral part of the public rituals of the community.

Section 8.4.4.1 The Impact of Practical Considerations on Embeddedness

This section discusses the impact of practical considerations on embeddedness, specifically with regard to employment opportunities and the absence of suitable social outlets for actors of their age.

The practical realities of life in rural areas can influence individuals’ creation of social attachments and the degree to which they are willing or able to embed themselves in the local community. For a number of participants the dilemma of their rising level of educational attainments and the corresponding lack of suitable employment at home can impinge on their continuing connection to where they grew up. This was a thread running through Brian’s narrative as he wrestled with the idea of his future and which path to choose. While he loves where he is from unless he sets up his own business it will be almost impossible for him to live there again.
Therefore, although in many ways his past and his present are embedded in the community, the nature of his link to it in the future is no longer so easy to imagine. His predicament is further exacerbated by the different definitions of achievement available to him. He could become a success by staying away and accomplishing a lot career wise, but at the same time he wondered how fulfilling this would prove to be if he returned home and discovered he did not fit into his community anymore:

It's grand getting away, getting educated, getting away, but you've to remember where you came from in the same sense. Like it will always be in the back of my mind, like you can get away you can do well. But how well do you really do if you walk back [and] nobody knows you like [in] the place where you grew up and everything's changed do you know what I mean like? A rolling stone gathers no moss. So that's maybe a little bit of guilt getting away-that you're leaving everyone behind.

Julia also finds herself almost accidentally being pulled away from where she grew up by her attendance at university and the time she has spent working abroad. When she was younger she was well-known around her local community, but now when she returns home she is identified as the ‘one who is always away’ by neighbours no longer quite sure of who she is. Although she has a pragmatic attitude to this and is content with her path towards adulthood she wistfully regrets her detachment from the community. Thus, the social dimension of belonging takes on a bittersweet tone for these individuals in that the option of living at home is to some extent taken away from them. Not only is this a little sad, it also removes the element of choice, which is considered to be a vital feature of late modern life. Another participant, Maura, has had to pull away from home in order to make progress in her chosen career. While she loves being there she had to make a conscious decision to put the idea of being deeply embedded in the area to one side, at least for the immediate future. There is conflict here between wanting to build a satisfactory life and career, and the sacrifices, which underpin this such as needing to pull away from her background.

Another aspect of this is the lack of social opportunities available at home, which can discourage a feeling of belonging to or of wanting to be embedded in the local...
community. For many of the interviewees the stark reality is that their friends have often left home as well so that returning to that place carries a risk of social isolation. This is the case for Brendan who, in ways, loves being at home and through his role as a farmer and a GAA player is highly socially embedded but still tries to pull away from the idea of going back. There is an almost despairing sense of rage in his description of his relationship with the community he grew up in. The formal ties, which will be created through his succession to the farm, ensure that his future is bound to a place he cannot see himself living in due to, for instance, the lack of social outlets other than the pub. In his interview he shifted from imagining himself settled there because of the responsibilities he has to the farm, as discussed in Chapter Seven Section 7.3.4, to feeling he could not return because of his issues with life in the local community and rural Ireland in general:

If you're [a] young, single guy or girl I think with any ambition it's a fucking [...] it's a nursing home, like it's a retirement home like I see it as anyway. Nothing else there unless you're raising a young family or something or […] you're retiring or something […] kick back and enjoy it. […] Trying to go places I think […] it doesn't help as such. It's the same if you go into any local town at night especially mine at home […] nothing else to do it's just pubs.

Section 8.4.4.2 Summary of the Impact of Practical Considerations on Embeddedness

-A lack of employment opportunities and social outlets can force individuals to detach themselves from the community.

-This can create new options but also dilemmas and challenges, e.g. will they define success in the future?

-Successors who must return are forced to contend with the social conditions in rural Ireland. This can be a cause of distress.
Section 8.5 The Contradictory Relationship between Participants and the Concept of Social Belonging

The following part of this chapter focuses on the contradictory nature of the participants’ relationship with the notion of social belonging. This is a significant concept because it can be used to further understand the dynamics, which underpin the kinds of transition to adulthood this cohort make. It examines how individuals develop a love-hate attitude to their background often in relation to the same aspect of society. It also explores their positioning within the broader rural framework and the impact this has on their future path. Finally, it discusses the views of actors who are eager to return to their home community to live.

Section 8.5.1 Characteristics of this Relationship

An often profoundly conflicting relationship with the specific local and wider rural community participants grew up in emerged across most narratives. This was grounded in the push-pull dynamic of how they constructed and perceived their social attachments. It often veered between a desire to escape and to remain, to embrace the anonymity of urban life and a longing to return to live in the familiarity of rural Ireland. This connection is maintained by regular visits home where they experience the dynamic of both being known and knowing that is most truly found in the community of their upbringing. By this it is meant that for many there is a familiarity to their life and social networks there and they are, in turn, recognised as established figures by actors who they have been acquainted with since childhood. There is a sense of shared history here and of being embedded in a local narrative and timeline within which community members can trace their paths from childhood onwards. Almost all of the participants remarked on being from sparsely populated areas and are often members of prominent local farming families, which makes it difficult for their actions to go unnoticed by others. For some individuals the sense of coming under constant scrutiny and being seen as a known quantity is a challenging element of the relationship with where they grew up. One interviewee, Donal, spoke of loving the tight-knit nature of his area but also recognised the problems this caused in how everyone assumed they knew him intimately. This must have been especially troublesome and tormenting when one considers his attempts to hide his homosexuality in his youth.
This conflict over the nature of their social embeddedness was also occasionally connected to the expectation that they would follow certain patterns of behaviour predicated on their surname or the actions of older siblings or previous generations. Andrew, for instance, was particularly expansive about his inability to create an identity based purely on his own character or merits. In school whenever he behaved in, as he described it, a too light and free kind of way he was admonished by his teachers and parents. This was because his actions jarringly clashed with his family’s image, which was linked to traits of quietness and steadiness. As a result, he relishes how detached and unknown he is in Galway since the norm of being placed by other individuals is less likely to prevail. This allows him to avoid being framed within his family’s supposed dispositions or the role of the ‘farmer’, a label he is assiduously trying to avoid as he attempts to circumvent cultural norms around taking on the farm, as outlined in Chapter Seven Section 7.4.1. These were some of his thoughts on the subject:

I genuinely do like it more down here [in Galway] […] I don't know why I like it though that I'm unknown because I'm so used to, of knowing [...] of walking down [the street in his local town], being known, people just left, right and centre knowing you. […] but over time...you're known as ‘Kelly farmer’ […] certain sort of things [are attached to this] whereas here I'm just known as ‘Kelly student’ and the rest is blank.

However, his attitude was somewhat contradictory since he also said he likes to be placed as a member of his family by others and draws some comfort at being recognised as a Kelly by strangers:

It's no problem [being known or placed] like sure everyone likes it, if you just drop a name of your older sibling or your father they'd know straight away who you are, and that's it they know who you are [so] you're sorted then.

Thus, there is both conflict and consolation in his social embeddedness and boundedness as on the one hand, its implications carry a wearying kind of constraint as he struggles to be distinguished in his own right. On the other hand, it also provides a measure of security in allowing him to interpret social interactions and actors in a relatively untroubled and knowing fashion as well as protecting against complete anonymity.
There were further ambiguities to the conceptualisation of social belonging when participants combined a desire to escape the community they grew up in, with either an equal wish to remain embedded in it or expressed a deep love of it. While they might dislike certain aspects such as its cultural homogeneity the symbolic power of home continues to exert a powerful hold. In fact, these emotions of love and hate can often underpin the relationship an individual has with the exact same aspect of the community. For instance, Paula abhorred her neighbourhood’s narrow-mindedness and atmosphere of surveillance, fed by a corrosive long-running land dispute that has poisoned relationships. However, this stance conflicts with the sense of security she derives from the fact of being known and looked out for within this place. From a young age, another participant, James was eager to flee and longed to break out of the confinements of his upbringing. Yet he retains a deep affection for where he grew up and his cultural background and appears to have little enthusiasm to see changes take place. This is demonstrated by his wish to see the gravedigging tradition retained, as touched upon in Chapter Six Section 6.5.2, and the farm preserved into the next generation. Furthermore, he self-identifies as a ‘country boy’ still keen on rural pursuits and has a relatively in-depth knowledge of the state of Irish farming. James looks to retreat from the boundaries created by his membership of the community and the social attachments imposed on him by virtue of being part of a well-known farming family. Nevertheless, however unwillingly he accedes to this, he does not want to entirely abandon this part of his identity or see it disappear.

In some situations, the idea of belonging to the general rural framework appears to clash with the practical implications of social embeddedness in a specific community. While actors might feel loyalty to this broader idea and seek to continue their attachment to it, they do not want to be fully immersed in it. Thus, while some individuals might want to re-embed themselves into the rural by moving back to this environment in the future this will not necessarily be to the place they have been deeply enmeshed in on a personal or familial level since childhood. This also links into the conflicting viewpoints expressed about the birth community mentioned in the previous paragraph. For example, in one breath James spoke with loving nostalgia about the social support available at home, and in the next referred to the area as mired in gossip and nosiness. A possible solution to the dilemma of wanting
to remain connected to a cultural framework they understand and are comfortable in and, yet, be somewhat aloof from its everyday interactions and manifestations is shown in James’ narrative. After his admittance into university he moved to a rural community, which is relatively similar to the one he grew up in. This allows him to continue to experience what he views as the positive side of rural living whilst enjoying the anonymity and detachment from the intense social ties of home with its prying eyes and whispered chatter. This choice of residence symbolises a personally crafted, elective compromise between the benefits of rural and urban living-a country lifestyle with the freedom borne out of being as unknown as if he lived in an urban area. Similarly, Aisling wants to live in rural Ireland but is unsure if this will lead to a return home. She feels too visible there and understands the consequences her embeddedness in the community would have for her adult life. This was noted in her comments:

The area just feels I don't know, people know like too much. [...] I guess they [the neighbours] know your family and they know all [the] ins and outs and you have experiences with some people. [...] It does feel a bit claustrophobic whereas maybe I'm a bit like idealistic and I think the grass is greener somewhere else. But...yeah other small places [...] where you can start from scratch—that's what I think I like do you know that you're not going on...people's pre-conceptions of your family, or [...] cos I think that all influences [...] how people relate to you and everything. You're kind of getting a chance to start from scratch but you have that small community feel.

However, a number of participants have a strong wish for continued social attachments to their own community with few hints at any underlying conflicts strong enough to push them away from their homeplace and towards building a long-term future elsewhere. In these scenarios, social belonging to the home community has been put on hold while they attend university. This can be described as postponed embeddedness. For individuals like Bridget and Jane, going to university was not viewed as proffering an opportunity to escape an intensely surveilled relationship with their background. Instead, the decision was driven by an
urge to gain educational qualifications followed by a return home to live among their family and community. This is true of Jane’s story when she firmly declared an ambition to move home again. While Galway is enjoyable it is nothing more than a means of allowing her to establish a career and is little more than a stepping stone back to where she belongs. She described her relationship with her background as follows:

What’s drawing me home is just I suppose it's the whole nostalgia of being home and kind of feeling that security of just you know not fully like breaking away in a way you know from what you're used to as a child. […] I wanna go home because that's where I feel I belong do you know that kind of way. […] I have friends like that grew up in the town, and they love where they're from, but they never want to live there like. They want to live in Dublin, and they want to be there forever, and do you know I just couldn't see myself being like that. I'd always have [in] the back of my mind coming home do you know what I mean.

Even where other participants do not see themselves as living at home in the foreseeable future the strength of their social embeddedness in the community can bring a grounding sense of inclusion. This ensures that the option of returning home remains available to them, albeit with a more indefinite period of postponement than say Jane anticipates. Actors such as Oisin and George firmly position themselves within the fabric of their home community but do not see their transition towards adulthood as immediately leading them back home. While Oisin continues to play with a local GAA club and George is happy to visit home as much as he can, both dream of travelling and building fulfilling lives away from the farm and the community, at least for a period of time.
Section 8.5.2 The Contradictory Relationship between Participants and the Concept of Social Belonging

-Contradictory relationships with local community and rural framework:
  -push-pull conflict between wanting to be part of it and yearning to escape;
  -being known can be difficult especially if they are expected to emulate siblings;
  -but this can be a source of comfort and being placed can help in interactions with strangers.
-Some participants love their home community but do not want to live there again.
-The idea of home still exerts a powerful influence on individuals and draws them home.
-Attachments to the general rural framework can clash with the implications of their embeddedness in a specific community:
  -they might like elements of it, for instance, the way of life but want to escape downsides, e.g. the gossip and surveillance.

Section 8.6 The Use of Othering in the Social Dimension of Belonging
The last section of this chapter concentrates on how participants develop their sense of social belonging and identity in opposition to an urban other. Here the focus is predominantly on their positioning within the rural framework, which in ways appears to be regarded as interchangeable with the farming one. This is a vital component of their continued membership of their community especially in light of their transition to adulthood, which could take them away from this place on a permanent basis. It is divided into two main parts, firstly, it focuses on the use of labelling as a means of distancing themselves from the urban other and secondly, it discusses the (re)construction of childhoods and the way this can also proclaim an attachment to their background.
Section 8.6.1 The Application of Labels

For the majority of participants the nature of their social attachments and embeddedness in their home community does not seem to impact on their continued affiliation with the idea of the rural rather than the urban. Evidence for this comes from the fact that most repeatedly self-labelled and self-othered themselves from the concept of the urban during their interviews. A difference emerged between how relationships are perceived and imagined internally and externally. The subtle distinctions they drew between themselves and others with regard to the internal aspect of this concept, i.e. with the local and the rural were usually replaced by a stance of unity and uniformity when speaking of interactions with the external other, i.e. the urban. There are nuances in the way they are differentially attached to the community as they interpret and understand it from within and how they view it from without. In the case of the latter, they neither want to consider themselves nor be regarded by others as outsiders. Despite their spatial shift away from this background in their transition to adulthood, they continue to strongly identify with their belonging to the rural. Participants feel this way irrespective of whether they feel detached from the farming side of their identity and in situations where they yearned to discard this background. Many will not be formally acknowledged as belonging to the farming community through taking ownership of the farm or recognised as ‘farmers’ in a functional sense. Nevertheless, they usually still want to connect with this particular background through mechanisms such as self-labelling as a ‘farmer’s daughter’. This is often bolstered by an aspiration to return to live in the countryside either to where they are from or to another rural location. Even where some might have problems with the continuing connections they feel have been forced upon them, there is a brooding sense that they cannot fully escape the influence of their birth culture and community.

This concern around identity seemed to be more important for females than males who rarely mentioned these kinds of issues in their interviews. The recognised and visible place within the home community, males often have by virtue of, for example, their performative farming role could be a factor in this. In addition, they must take into account the inexorable influence of their background and the normative gendered frameworks they are entrenched in, as described in Chapter
Seven Section 7.2.2.2, which create deep links to the idea of staying within this community. Male participants were concerned with how they could escape this position and forge their own futures without being influenced by their background. By contrast females usually do not have the same kind of visibly functional position to tie them to the community and are bounded by frameworks of expectations often leading them away from their background. Since they have fewer means of expressing their continued membership of the community, as they move towards adulthood they are at a greater risk than their male counterparts of being viewed as detached and othered from their background. If the othering process is completed, whereby their right to claim membership of this community, if only in a symbolic way, is dismissed by other actors, then this impacts on the depth of social belonging they feel and the preservation of their primary identities. Thus, while some female participants fought to be viewed as members of the community through firmly identifying with this background some of their male counterparts tried to break away from this. However, not all women were so keen to be recognised as a member of this community with Joan, as already mentioned in Chapter Six Section 6.2.1 speaking of how much she had struggled against the influence of her background and the panicked conflict it had led to. Ultimately, she felt she had no choice but to come to terms with her background as she realised she would never be able to fully move away from this:

I feel less of like a conflict now. I think it's more about living with both of them [the academic and farming aspects of her life], and you don't have to have a single defined identity, and it's more like a kind of collection of several things. It doesn't have to be in conflict, I mean they can kind of be in conflict but like not in a really kind of antagonistic way, more like it's [a] co-existent way.

The self-othering and labelling participants were eager to embrace in the interviews was of not being a ‘townie’, or where this term was not explicitly used sentiments

86 ‘Townie’ is a label used by rural dwellers to describe individuals who they identify as urban. It is a very dismissive term denoting ignorance of appropriate ways to behave and often a lack of knowledge about farming. The use of the label almost invariably has negative connotations and would be applied,
to that effect. There seemed to be a fear amongst female members of the cohort that through going away to university they could be transmogrified into one of these actors. To be accused of being a ‘townie’ would symbolise having lost awareness of the intricate knots that bind communities together and the intangible understandings contained within this. For some female participants in particular they went farther than the self-othering of not being a ‘townie’ and explicitly positioned themselves as ‘culchies’. Both the label of ‘townie’ and ‘culchie’ are used as a means of othering the opposite, urban, community. Furthermore, by ascribing specific attributes, usually unpleasant ones, to this group they are marked out as separate to and what they themselves are not. Often the term ‘culchie’ is used by outsiders in a sneering manner but in employing the word ‘culchie’ to describe themselves the word is positively appropriated and signals pride in belonging to and membership of this community. This was especially true where individuals are positive about their childhood experiences on the farm such as was the case for Susan. In her description of a job she had prior to returning to university, which she hated, she used the word ‘culchie’ to distance herself from male co-workers from urban areas. In addition, it demonstrates where her loyalties lie and equally importantly the values she embraces and connects with. Jane also proudly labelled herself as a ‘culchie’ and feels this is how her identity is best expressed. However, this term is not always deployed in a positive way but rather can be used as part of an attempt to detach from a background they are ill at ease with. In these situations participants apply the word ‘culchie’ to other individuals but not themselves. For instance, Joan mentioned how someone would have to be a ‘culchie’ to enjoy rural activities as if she herself was at a remove from this community. When Florence was growing up she used to joke about ‘culchies’ driving tractors to school – this seemed to be an attempt to put distance between herself and this group:

Certainly growing up [I] identified myself as […] someone from a farm and like you know in our hometown you know

for instance, with regard to a newcomer to an area complaining, whether rightly or wrongly, about a smell coming from a neighbouring farm. It is used when actors feel under threat from outsiders’ encroachments on their rights and/or when they are angry about the power and resource distribution balance between urban and rural areas.

 Culchie is usually used as a pejorative label and stereotype by urban dwellers to describe rural individuals and has derogatory connotations of being backward, old fashioned and dim-witted.

This is an imagined construction since the connections and interchanges between rural and urban run deep in terms of employment, leisure, social and kin networks.
there were kids that would've driven their dads’ tractors to school and it would have been kind of a joke. [...] I would have joked [about] the ‘culchies’ driving their tractors to school.

Section 8.6.2 Othering as Part of the (Re)Construction\textsuperscript{89} of Childhoods

In addition to using labels to distance themselves from the urban ‘other’ both male and female participants (re)constructed their childhoods in opposition to this idea. It should be noted that this was not necessarily from a judgemental stance since almost all spoke of being comfortable and content in their current urban surroundings. Instead, this is used as a way of positioning themselves as different to other groups and as a means of imagining and understanding their primary sense of social belonging. However, this was not always welcomed since some like Harry and Joan resented their embeddedness and at times longed to have had a different upbringing. For others such as Orla, Katie or Oisin who were positive about their experiences, their childhoods were imagined in opposition to urban ones especially estate\textsuperscript{90} upbringings, which inspire a shuddering horror in participants. This attitude is shown in Oisin’s comments about the wasted life one of his ex-schoolmates has fashioned:

[...] he's a bum like, does nothing yeah he's-ah he lives in an estate. He’s not eh....he'd do nothing with himself like, as if somehow his supposed failings are solely attributable to the place he grew up.

The image they have of their childhoods, which strongly reflects the rural idyll framework is sketched as a place\textsuperscript{91} and time of purity and innocence. By contrast individuals who grew up in towns and estates were pitied by the participants for their

\textsuperscript{89} This term is used in recognition of the way participants (re)construct their childhoods in light of changing relationships with their background, for example. They cannot be said to be simply constructing their childhoods because they are open to alteration and reframing over time. This process was discussed in Section 6.4.1.

\textsuperscript{90} These were not really defined by any of the participants but seem to involve housing estates most likely located in working class areas rather than suburbs that the participants see as less than salubrious environments to be brought up in.

\textsuperscript{91} The word place is deliberately used here because for these participants it was as much about a spatial concept as a period of time since their childhoods revolved to a large extent around their engagement with the physical surroundings of the farm.
perceived early exposure to the perils of modern life, such as drugs or idleness. For example, Katie described her upbringing on the farm as sheltered and prolonged in comparison to the experiences of friends who lived in towns. At the age of thirteen or fourteen when she was still paddling in streams, she claimed they were sneakily drinking alcohol behind buildings in the local town. Paula mentioned the differences in her interview as well:

> It took us longer to you know to get into alcohol, or whatever than I'd say [...] town children did. Even our secondary school was in the country, which was really unusual cos every other secondary school is in the town, and we would hear these awful stories about people getting completely plastered [drunk] and girls getting pregnant and we really didn't have that in our school; it was more protected. I think it's [the rural environment] just more innocent and kind of pure I suppose.

It is interesting to note that while there is an overarching idealistic narrative connected to a desire to be recognised as an insider in a community looking out at the ‘other’, the minutiae of the participants’ own story often appears to contradict this presentation. This can be seen in the case of Rita who presented her childhood as being difficult with an overbearing and controlling mother and a harassed father and, yet, she insistently described her childhood as carefree and happy. It is as if she has chosen a version of her childhood she wants to carry forward into her adulthood and through this manages to remain positively integrated into her background. Likewise, while Jane spoke of her early years and her relationship with home in glowing terms, she also hinted at difficulties caused by her parents’ material poverty and the taunting she endured because of her father’s religious affiliations. Another participant Katie rhapsodised about her worry-free childhood and, yet, told stories of losing a multitude of beloved pets not to mention vividly recalling her sister’s near death in a farmyard accident. While it was sheltered from the peculiarities and dangers of the outside world Katie was not protected from those located within the domain of her home. These stories are perhaps more indicative of conceptualisations of what a rural childhood should be, especially in comparison to the construction of an imagined urban counterpart, than any objective reality.
More than one participant measured themselves favourably against specific urban-based cousins, friends or vague others in their willingness and desire to work. Thus, farming life and by extension social embeddedness in this is linked to a particular moral and value framework. This is portrayed as an underpinning component of their community that is absent from the other. Some actors, such as Conor and Harry, who begrudged the time they spent working on the farm when they were younger, nevertheless, sought to distance themselves from their off-farm counterparts. For instance, both emphasised their amazement at how individuals, with the implication being that they were not from farms, who had access to money growing up did not always appreciate what were given and, instead, took it for granted. Conor and Harry imputed that they were grateful because they had had to work hard and/or because they had tougher, more impecunious childhoods than their off-farm counterparts. Participants felt there were substantive lifestyle differences since as a group they had had to make a greater contribution to the family either as ‘helpers’ or ‘workers’ than other individuals they knew from different backgrounds. Jane spoke of her shock at visiting a ‘townie’ friend and observing the girl’s mother cosseting of her when, by contrast, she herself would usually have been outside assisting on the farm. Similarly, George described his childhood astonishment at seeing his urban-based cousins spend all day watching television when he was usually required to work outside with his father.

However, it is not simply the case that this group construct the social dimension of their belonging in opposition to the urban ideal, instead, it is also about identifying with their own background and continuing to be part of something they are deeply familiar with. This membership provides security and satisfies a desire to belong and to still be considered an insider. This can be accompanied by a sense of defiance as demonstrated, for instance, in Myles’ interview. Although he was teased heavily in secondary school because of his farm background he is proud of who he is, and readily suggested ways he is different from ‘estate’ youth such as their differing musical and sporting tastes. He wants to be part of his own community and feels comfortable locating himself within its boundaries and being recognised as part of this by others. Oisin referred to the divide in his university course between people from the rural community and those who come from urban areas. He finds it more
difficult to develop relationships with the latter as, for example, he does not really understand their sense of humour. He claimed to be on the same wavelength as individuals from the same background as himself as they are easier to talk to and share common interests. There is a slight defensiveness here to this stance as he alluded to his urban counterparts’ disdainful attitude towards him and his ilk. Regardless of the attitudes of outsiders both of these participants remain comfortable with the continued fact of their belonging to their own communities.

The ‘other’ again features in this notion of being part of rather than against something but this time it originates within the locality actors come from. This is not about the ‘townie’ but rather the unsettling stranger, who was used by participants as an oppositional means of including themselves inside the boundaries of their community irrespective of whether they want to create their lives there or elsewhere. This is seen in Rita’s wish to give plots of the land she will come to own to family members to build houses on. The alternative of selling them to ‘blow-ins’ is vaguely horrifying since they could cause problems for locals in the future with regard to gaining planning permission for their own houses. This decision marks her out as being inside rather than outside the community and as such shows her to be capable of falling into line with and contributing to the upkeep of particular cultural norms and ways of being. Joseph also alluded to this in his interview when he lamented the consequences of outsiders coming into the community:

The cows’d knock a wall or something like that. The next thing-it wouldn't be anything-they could go on to the lawn or do a bit of damage and they'd [newcomers] be sending solicitors letters and all this kind of craic. Cos if that happened to one of ours-us-you'd be kind of like it happens, so just keep them there till the owner comes and […] brings them off.

Both of these participants demonstrate that even within their home community, the other-albeit usually someone who is assumed rightly or wrongly to be a ‘townie’, can be used as the basis of creating an identity and indicating continued membership of this group. Through marking out their behaviour in this way they highlight their own awareness of cultural norms and behaviours and the ways in which these can be supported or gone against.
Section 8.6.3 Summary of the Use of Othering in the Social Dimension of Belonging

-Labels:
  - Almost all continue to proclaim their affiliation to the rural rather than the urban;
  - Self-labelling and self-othering from the urban is a feature of their identity construction and belonging.
- They look to present a unified and uniform relationship with the rural in the face of the external ‘other’ but as shown throughout the chapter reveal differences when they reflect on these purely from an insider perspective.
- The issue of identity appears to be more important for females than males.
  - Perhaps because of:
    - Male performative roles on the farm and in the community;
    - Gendered frameworks pulling males back to the farm in the future.
- Female participants have fewer outlets to express their membership of the community and are more at risk of being regarded as detached.
- Self-othered from the ‘townie’ label and/or used the culchie label to describe themselves.

-Othering:
  - Childhoods were constructed in opposition to the urban ‘other’;
  - This is a means of imagining and understanding their social belonging.
- The (re)construction of their childhoods is bound into the rural idyll framework, e.g. they were pure and innocent whereas urban versions were shorter and more exposed to dangers.
- Farm life is also linked into a particular moral and value framework centred on hard work and frugality, which is by implication absent from the external other.
  - Look to make positive connections and identifications with their background as shown through expressing pride.
Section 8.7 Conclusion

This chapter explored the concept of social belonging and the potential impact this has on individuals’ movement towards adulthood in terms of, for instance, their migration intentions. This is a more fragmented notion than other dimensions of belonging with fewer linkages to definite continuums and frameworks than functional or formal types, reflecting perhaps the disparate ideas of what ‘community’ can be defined as and other external influences, which were outside the scope of this research, such as school and peers. However, certain clear patterns did emerge across the data and findings. Some participants saw little to resent in the nature of their social belonging and either were in accord with this aspect of their background or accommodated the problems they encountered with it. For others it was a cause of almost powerless frustration since they realised it could not be fully discarded or disregarded. There are quite contradictory attitudes amongst the participants towards the concept of social belonging and the degree to which they are embedded in the community. For instance, the idea of being known in the community could lead to complaints about the restrictions this placed on them while simultaneously providing a sense of security in being deeply rooted in this framework. Thus, social belonging is a push-pull concept, which can draw individuals back to a spatial and cultural community and/or precipitate a partial detachment from it.

How the social dimension of belonging is constructed and continued is not based solely on the participants’ own experiences or beliefs but rather incorporates engrained social norms and expectations about, for instance, public engagement with farming activities and the act of placing. There is a degree of embeddedness associated with defined roles and statuses so although the cohort might be accepted as legitimate members of the community it might not necessarily be viewed in the same way or regarded as being at a similar depth of intensity or longevity as others in their family. A strong appreciation underpinned the interviews of insiders and outsiders and a determination to be ‘othered’ from counterparts who grew up in urban settings. In this way they can still identify themselves with and as members of a local, rural and farming community. This proclaims an affiliation, however reluctantly this might be carried at the time, with their own backgrounds and
upbringing notwithstanding the future path they take. This concern with self-labelling and identity was a cause of anxiety for female participants in their present life but their male counterparts were also keen to distance themselves from outside communities through the (re)construction of their childhoods. Although this concept of social belonging is undoubtedly more disjointed and less patterned than the other three dimensions, ultimately participants demonstrated a continued attachment to their background even as it often drove and inspired a transition to adulthood, which takes them away from it. The relationship between these four dimensions is touched upon further in the discussion, which is contained in the next chapter.
Chapter Nine Discussion Chapter

Section 9.1 Introduction
This chapter discusses the implications of the thesis’ findings for the core concept of belonging. This notion of belonging is the central framework around which the participants’ experiences of growing up in a farming family can be conceptualised, as the dynamics grounded within it shapes their relationship and attitudes towards their background and their transition to adulthood. This chapter also locates the research in the wider fields of literature relevant to this study that formed the basis of its conceptual framework. Specific subthemes from within the dimensions of belonging are only briefly referred to as Chapters Five to Eight intensively focused on these. Instead, it concentrates on the linkages between these dimensions and the overall concept of belonging and to a lesser extent to each other. The first section of the chapter summarises the research and the main arguments put forward in support of the Research Question. Secondly, the four dimensions of belonging, namely, ‘functional’, ‘informal’, ‘formal’ and ‘social’ are explored in broad terms. The next area focused on is the nature of belonging in the farming community and it continues from there to the inferences, which can be drawn from this notion for transitions to adulthood. After this, specific reference is made to the concept of elective belonging as it is highly pertinent to the cohort’s lifestyle at the present time. Literature from the canon of rural studies is then engaged with as is theoretical material from youth sociology, which acted as the conceptual and theoretical framework for this thesis.

Section 9.2 Summary of the Research
This section describes the Research Question and outlines the argument of this thesis firstly, around the concept of belonging and secondly, its individual components.

Section 9.2.1 The Research Question
The premise of this research was to explore the experiences of growing up in a farming family and the impact this has had on individuals’ lives and their movement
towards adulthood. The cohort chosen for this study was a group who because of factors such as gender, birth order and personal predilections are extremely unlikely to take up a full-time role in farming. While a number of participants will probably be given the landholding and/or will succeed to the title of farmer, like their non-succeeding counterparts, they do not intend to return to the farm in the near future.

The Research Question developed for this study was:

- What are the experiences of growing up in a farming family among farm youth attending university?

This broad question was designed to facilitate the emergence of narratives about the relationship with the farm and the wider community it is situated within and the impact it had on the participants’ life and view of the world. Data was collected to support this by means of a series of interviews carried out with a group of university students in Arnett’s (2000; 2004) ‘emerging adulthood’ category.

**Section 9.2.2 Belonging**

While belonging was not identified in the research question or in the initial stages of the research as an essential aspect of the work, it became clear in the analysis phase that this was one of the most significant underpinning influences on a childhood spent in a farming family. Furthermore, this thesis argues that through the inclusionary/exclusionary processes bound up in how belonging is moulded, farm youth are conditioned into a particular view of how their transition to adulthood should proceed in terms of whether they will stay on the farm, go elsewhere or achieve a combination of the two. However, belonging should not be viewed as a single concept but rather should be treated of as containing and referring to different dimensions of farming and community life. How these dimensions, i.e. ‘functional’, ‘informal’, ‘formal’ and ‘social’ are created and shaped in both their manifestation and meanings serves to draw in and push away members of this group on the farm and in their communities. It is these concepts that act as the basis of this thesis’ findings and which are concentrated on in the second part of this section.
Within the overall patterns emerging across the cohort each dimension is, nevertheless, contextually located in and related to the narrative of the individual and their surroundings. However in saying this, actors’ decisions to take what if only superficially seems to be a unique path, are borne out of an awareness of the choices they are foregoing. In other words, they operate on a spectrum composed of cultural scripts, family narratives, temporal rootedness and gendered expectations of appropriate behaviour. Regardless of whether these are embraced or rebelled against, actors still build their lives within a relatively concrete set of boundaries. Even in appearing to be starkly moving away from their background in terms of the shape of their transition to adulthood, which potentially takes them towards professional careers and urban living, they are still driven by their cultural and familial norms and environment. As part of this, the farming background can exert an influence in an oppositional sense in motivating them to escape spatially and lifestyle wise. For others, their attachments run deep on a practical level, and they remain embedded in it and hope to reconnect either directly through taking over the farm or indirectly by moving back to rural Ireland in the future. In either case, a thread runs through the philosophical framework of these young people whereby they do not see themselves as being able to fully detach from their childhood experiences and the consequences of their belonging to the farm and its associated communities even if they wanted to pull away completely. Irrespective of whether this is recognised by others they feel no choice but to belong and are anchored to their background in spite of particular socialisation processes, attitudes and intended transition plans that help to push them off the farm.

It is clear, however, that belonging is differentiated between family members. This is facilitated and created through different forms of attachment, which build up bounded relationships on the farm and off it. This has two very different purposes; firstly, to secure the research cohort’s commitment to the farm in the short-term by ensuring they actively contribute to the survival of the farm on a day-to-day basis and in the long-term to generate a philosophical and moral responsibility to preserve it into the next generation. Secondly, how belonging is expressed in the family encourages most if not all of its offspring to permanently build a life away from the farm with the probable exception of those who are identified as the successor. In
addition, these attachments are usually gendered with men carrying an obligation, whether they choose to act on this or not, to protect the farm not only as a landholding but also as a working entity even when this threatens to impinge on their own life plans. On the other hand, women, having been exposed to a different enculturation and socialisation process, usually do not feel a similar sense of duty to maintain the farm or become embroiled in the complex and sometimes distressing dilemma around how to preserve the farm in the family. When they do take the farm this is less likely to be accompanied by an assumption that they need to run the farm in the same way as previous generations did and, therefore, often seem to be less conflicted about this issue. While on the surface the apparently detached relationship between female participants and the farm could be mistaken for indifference, there is a very real and enduring attachment on their part to their background and the farm. It continues to play an important role in their belonging and identity as they move towards adulthood.

Section 9.2.3 The Dimensions of Belonging
Belonging in the farming community can be unpacked into different types of attachments that influence an individual’s sense of belonging and how this is practically manifested. These are: ‘functional’, ‘social’, ‘informal’ and ‘formal’. The formation of these dimensions is only partially within the control of the individual. In addition to the influence of their own preferences and views they are also moulded by external voices including parents, community members, temporal and cultural norms and continuums such as gender. Therefore, the creation of these dimensions of belonging should be regarded as a dialectical act between the individual and outside forces requiring recognition and performance on both sides of roles, suitable behaviours and cultural norms. Childhood experiences, socialisation, transitions to adulthood and succession strategies are shaped and produced through the framework of these attachments. These core dimensions of belonging exist independently of each other but are intertwined as well, i.e. an actor could have had a significant role as a ‘worker’ and yet not seek formal ownership of the farm or be deeply embedded in the local community. These concepts were explored in detail in separate findings
chapters so in order to avoid repetition the overall themes rather than the subthemes analysed within them are dealt with here.

Section 9.2.3.1 The ‘Functional’ Dimension of Belonging
Functional attachments relate to the participants’ role in the working life of the farm. There are divisions between ‘workers’ and ‘helpers’ with the former routinely engaged in what is perceived to be the ‘real’ work of the farm. By contrast ‘helpers’ are viewed as either sources of aid in case of emergency or as a pool of unskilled and transient labour. These roles are heavily gendered and linked to succession strategies as a family’s offspring are steered towards taking on a position that can either nudge them in the direction of a life on the farm or away from it. As the findings in Chapter Five demonstrate it has both short and long-term consequences for the individual. In the short-term as it is a means of guaranteeing a supply of labour it can impact on the intensity of an individual’s interaction with the farm and with how their childhood experiences are generally structured. In the long-term it is an important socialisation tool in the process of building differentiated relationships with the farm as actors can be made to feel they are a vital or peripheral part of the operational life of the farm. This is bounded by cultural norms that ground the framework each family lives within, but these are interpreted at the family level where pragmatic strategies are adopted, which serve the needs of the family and the farm such as encouraging girls to take on ‘worker’ roles. According to the majority of this group, there is often little choice in these decisions, since it is parents and especially fathers who dictate the type and degree of assistance they provide on the farm. Nevertheless, this does not always prevent an individual from exerting agency as is demonstrated by how some constructed their functional relationship according to their own personal preferences, in taking on specific tasks and assuming certain roles that, for instance, cross gender lines.

Section 9.2.3.2 The ‘Informal’ Dimension of Belonging
The second type of attachment is informal. This is about the attachments young people have to the farm outside of legal and community markers with respect to their emotional connections and proprietorial feelings towards it. Through emphasising,
for example, the intergenerational legacy/context, its capacity to hold and prompt memories and the cautionary tales it engenders the farm is largely framed in emotive and symbolic terms rather than economic ones. In doing this the farm assumes an almost anthropomorphic position where the family has an active relationship with it going beyond its productive capacities that helps to shape identities and experiences. By anthropomorphic it is meant that the farm is granted almost humanlike powers in its capacity to act as a catalyst for and provoke intense emotional responses and become part of and affect the relationship a family has with each other. This is also denoted by how it is framed as an integral part of their identity and for some that it is ‘in their blood’ as if there is a genetic or sanguineous affiliation between them and the farm. While the farm’s physical landscape can be important in creating conditions, which individuals must adapt and react to, what is more significant is the emotional power it has been granted or presumed to have in the family. It becomes an active agent and force in their life and its needs must be taken into account when making daily or future plans. Informal attachments are not as circumscribed by gender concerns or the division of labour as other types are. Males and females, ‘workers’ and ‘helpers’ are equally likely to express attachment or detachment from it, love or dislike, pride or indifference, regardless of their position and role in the family or on the farm. As the findings in Chapter Six show its development appears to be influenced by a complex set of emotions, loyalties, perceptions about the importance of the intergenerational connection between the family and the farm and so on. In generating a sense of informal attachment the transmission of cultural values and norms into the next generation is facilitated. This is because for the majority of this cohort it appears to induce a desire and yearning for continuity rather than disruption as providing the impetus for this process. More importantly, one could argue that this lack of differentiation is because of the vital part informal attachments play in reducing conflict for and between successors and non-successors in farm-related succession strategies. Through these connections a relationship is built up, which places primacy on the retention of the farm even at the expense of individuals’ life plans. In making this claim there is a danger, however, of over-instrumentalising the development of this attachment. It is also, no doubt, motivated by love and affection between parents and children and the farm’s status as a childhood home rather than solely connected to pragmatic succession strategies.
Section 9.2.3.3 The ‘Formal’ Dimension of Belonging

The third type of attachment is *formal*. This is linked to succession practices and attitudes about who is considered to have a legitimate claim or required commitment to formal belonging through their perceived capabilities and/or normative status. Findings from Chapter Seven indicate that amongst this cohort there is great significance placed on the creation of formal attachments in the family to the farm in its ability to ensure ownership of the land is maintained within this unit. Regardless of attitudes towards the influence of gender in terms of life away from the farm, in the environment of the homeplace there are strong normatively grounded perceptions among this cohort around who should/will be bequeathed the land. It is intrinsically connected to how functional belonging is built during childhood as where possible it is a ‘worker’ who simultaneously or subsequently came to be recognised as the ‘farmer’ who is considered most suitable. On an abstract level, retaining the farm, whether in a productive capacity or holding it in trust for the next generation, is related to processes contained within the informal dimension of belonging in the deep ties and moral obligations, which emanate from this. Participants’ agentic capacity appears to be curtailed here—it is parents who usually shape expectations around their future involvement with the land and push their children towards taking on the farm, education or a blend of both. The concept of choice is particularly relevant to male participants who feel bound within a gendered framework to protect the farm even where they do not wish to do so, in ways that their female counterparts are not bound. As not all participants’ parents had urged them towards the farm and, instead, urged them away from it, for some a sense of duty could override how they were brought up or how their parents now frame their relationship with it as they move into adulthood. While daughters might care as deeply for the farm as their male counterparts they are perhaps more detached by other forces such as parents or cultural norms from viewing it as a responsibility they are compelled into. Therefore, their choices with regard to their formal relationship with the farm are as liable to be shaped by their parents as is the case for their brothers, even if this has a different appearance.
Section 9.2.3.4 The ‘Social’ Dimension of Belonging

The social dimension of belonging is concerned with membership of and connections to the spatial and cultural communities in which young people live. This centres on degrees of embeddedness in the fabric of these communities and how this is practically and symbolically performed. At first glance, embeddedness appears to be grounded in a combination of personal tastes and social and cultural norms regarding involvement, for example, in farming and sport. However, on further examination it could be argued that it is a consequence of and relational to patterns found on the farm, for instance, in how roles performed in its working life are transposed into the public domain and legitimised there. While each family adapts its own approach this is not a one-way dynamic with decisions and plans about this or other dimensions developed in conjunction with outside circumstances. Although strategies around work, transitions to adulthood, etc. are often pragmatically flexible at the individual family level they are still bounded within community sanctioned norms, which in turn influence behaviours on the farm. Nevertheless, in general it is quite fragmentary and appears to be less constructed and shaped in the deliberate way that on-farm aspects of belonging are.

The social dimension is quite contradictory in how the very nature and act of belonging to the community provokes feelings of both security and claustrophobia; a wish to return and an urge to flee. This is strongly linked to identity particularly for female members of the cohort who repeatedly attempted to distance themselves from the urban ‘other’. One could speculate that male actors are less concerned about this because there is an automatic kind of belonging conferred on them that is theirs to lose or pull away from by virtue of, for instance, the working role they are often expected to take on. This tends to lead to deeper fraternising and practical interactions with the local and farming community. On the other hand, girls might be expected to have to work harder at this connection because they are socialised into roles, which are assumed will take them away from the farm and perhaps the local community. In addition, they have fewer means to express their membership of this body. This is because they have less access to social or performative outlets where behaviour is commensurate with gender appropriate actions such as farming.
organisations and fewer ways to act out the public rituals of what it means to be rural or to be a farmer such as being seen to work with machinery.

Section 9.3 The Nature of Belonging in the Farming Community
Before any discussion of the idea of belonging, some concerns need to be voiced about engaging with the concept in this way. Firstly, the findings of this thesis suggest there is no single all-encompassing notion of belonging. Therefore, in trying to speak of an overall framework of belonging there is a risk of reducing it to a singular conceptualisation—precisely what this work tries to move away from. This should be avoided in part because of the implications the creation of an overarching idea of belonging has had for the academic imagination in how its selection of research subjects, whether deliberately or not, privileges particular groups as being worthy of study, often those who own the farm, over others who grow up on farms but who do not fall into this category in adulthood. As this research shows there are different dimensions of belonging and to try to correlate these under one idea of belonging could lead back to the notion that the designated farmer has an almost exclusive right to claim belonging over their siblings who do not succeed to the farm. This would originate from the fact that the formal and functional attachments the ‘farmer’ has to their background are the most visible expression of belonging in the farming community. Therefore, this could create the illusion that they have a greater right to this or, indeed, that they are the group with the most desire to be identified in this way. Furthermore, as a researcher I am uncomfortable with conceptualising belonging in such a reductionist manner, as, for instance, it begs the question about what are the implications for a chosen successor who hates the farm and is uncomfortable with being linked with the markers of this identity. Is this individual not forced into a frame of belonging, which they do not feel is representative of who they would like to be? If the concept of belonging is unpacked into different dimensions there is more space for alternate parts of their identity to emerge as the title of ‘farmer’ is not so overwhelming. Whilst these caveats need to be borne in mind the nature of belonging in the farming community, especially as it relates to this research cohort must be discussed as it is a vitally important element of this work.
The concept of belonging in the farming community is linked to attachments to not only a social and cultural community but also to a homeplace that in its unique contours of history, landscape, memories, parental experiences and so on shapes actors in ways, which will reverberate throughout their lives, regardless of the nature of their long-term relationship with it. Belonging is interpreted here as both an organising concept and a process. It is an organising concept in how an individual’s transition to adulthood is, from an early stage, usually based on their positioning as probable successors or non-successors. This frames relationships with the farm, engagement with education, parental admonishments and expectations, etc. In addition, belonging is processual because the gradual development of its four dimensions is based on a series of interlocking decisions, actions and patterns of behaviour within a set of norms and temporal and gender continuums that occur over the duration of a childhood and beyond. For each individual the organisational and processual elements of belonging are ongoing and simultaneously productive and reactive in that they emerge from and create new experiences. Furthermore, they arise out of responses to stimuli such as the changing position of the family and the farm within their respective life cycles.

For farming offspring, the pursuit of a third-level education path is often underpinned and accompanied by an assumption that their belonging to the farming community is not permanent or fixed. In this sense one could speak of a stymied sense of belonging for those whose attendance at university is regarded as constituting a spatial detachment from their background and their homeplace and also a symbolic one. Theirs is imagined as a transient belonging regardless of their early immersion into a proprietorial attitude towards the farm, the pleas or demands to actively contribute to its survival throughout their childhoods and the experiences and memories shared and imprinted into their habitus. Despite these influences rooting them to their background there is a constant counterweight pushing them into a life away from the farm and perhaps the communities they were born into. For some of the cohort, this is a relief as it facilitates the creation of an adulthood of their own making, albeit within the guiding confines of their experiences and upbringing. For others this is a bittersweet concept in how their love for their background and yearning to belong is never fully met or acknowledged once they move away from
the farm and towards their future. This push-pull dynamic operates on an abstract unspoken level in framing relationships and transitions to adulthood within family and community norms and expectations surrounding their withdrawal from or engagement with this background. However, it is also concretely integrated into everyday conversations and the public and private imaginings and constructions of what it is to be a farmer, a potential successor and a member of the community and implicitly or explicitly what it is not.

Belonging is strongly influenced by parents, the community and cultural norms as is seen in how, for example, certain members of the family come to be positioned as the ‘farmer’ with the connotations this has for the individual and the degree to which they are viewed as fittingly involved in farming work. Thus, how belonging is conceptualised is at least partially dependent upon the level of recognition bestowed on it by other actors. Although the non-succeeding participants in this research cohort might identify themselves as members of the farming community it is doubtful if they are fully recognised as such by others. Neither one would imagine are they seen as legitimate in the way the ‘farmer’ is. While there was little evidence in the interviews to indicate that other actors such as parents refused to acknowledge their membership of it in any directly verbalised manner, the exclusion or minimising of participants’ involvement in certain dimensions of belonging like functional and formal acts as proof of this. In the cultural precepts of farming culture it is likely that these concepts help to determine whether an individual fully belongs or not. In excluding individuals from, for example, learning certain skills a statement is made. In mastering these challenges, a pathway is provided towards legitimately belonging in terms of its linkages to the formal succession to the farm. Nevertheless, through the process of labelling and othering individuals do continue to maintain a position within their family and community. Through distancing themselves from the idea of the ‘townie’ and the values associated with this they can proclaim a continued knowingness of cultural tenets and a status within it in relation to the farming element of their identity. As belonging and transitions to adulthood have been linked throughout this discussion chapter, the following section explores these connections in more detail.
Section 9.4 The Implications of Belonging for Transitions to Adulthood

Transitions to adulthood in the farming community are shaped by the exclusionary and inclusionary mechanism of belonging. Through including an individual in the life of the farm and the community, by means of the dimensions described and analysed in this thesis, there is an increased likelihood that an actor will view their life as inextricably linked to the farm and make their life plans accordingly. Conversely, where an individual is excluded or at least distanced by these same devices, they can be expected to want to or feel compelled to build a life elsewhere, as is the case of this cohort through the mechanism of third-level education. There are exceptions to this where actors recoil from their anticipated path by such means as taking on a ‘helper’ role instead of a ‘worker’ one but generally these linkages appear to hold true within this cohort. In turn these frameworks bring differentiated obligations and moral responsibilities, which some are eager to grasp and others anxious to avoid. While as discussed in the findings’ chapters the specific nature of these duties are gendered in terms of ideas around who should take over the farm the majority of both male and female participants continue to feel some obligation towards the farm or a sense of entanglement in its fortunes. However, a small number of participants are relatively detached from the farm often because they have not have been encouraged by their parents to view their relationship with the farm in this enmeshing light. The attitudes of other distanced actors appear to be grounded in the way they try to disconnect themselves from the gnawing residual guilt or urge to make visible and embody their belonging through taking ownership of the farm. If they did so they would have to accept a position within a certain conceptualisation of belonging in the community and on their homeplace. Despite the almost universal expression of continued attachment to the farm across the cohort it is clear from the findings that some actors by virtue of their label and role as the ‘farmer’ or the landholder will find their adulthood is practicably shaped by their involvement with the farm to a greater degree than will be the case for others.

Belonging is a double-edged sword serving to both constrain and enable farm youth in the boundaries imposed and the choices and opportunities given within these with respect to access to education, guidance and the capital needed to make a ‘successful’ transition to adulthood. It provides security and surety but is also
thwarting and bewildering in the emotional consequences it can have. For instance, an actor can continue to use the pronoun *we* in relation to the farm even when they have long since established their life elsewhere and are unable or unwilling to return to it. Or equally, for the minority of this group who are likely to be given the land whether this represents the position of landholder or farmer the belonging encoded in this can appear to be a threatening and overwhelming concept. In view of their need to fulfil the obligations this brings with it, little space might be left for them to pursue their own life path. It must be noted that some male members of the group were comparatively free to make decisions about their life going forward as they were not likely to become the successor to the farm. The transition to adulthood at least in this community can be regarded as an active and deliberate process on the part of parents and the individuals themselves. It is based on a series of events and decisions, which given the varied nature of the participants’ future careers might appear to be somewhat haphazardly made, but are, nevertheless, underscored by distinctive patterns and strategies involving parents and their offspring.

The relative incompatibility of the values of society as proposed by, for example, Beck (1992) and Bauman (1995) and the norms still prevailing in the farming community can cause conflict for its young people in how they make their transition to adulthood. On one side there is mobility, urban living, DIY biographies, elective belonging and liquid identities as conceptualised in Chapters Two and Three. In the farming paradigm there is an emphasis on tradition, rootedness in the homeplace, identities defined on local and temporal terms, distinct norms and required belonging. Despite these continuities, the farming community has reacted to changing socio-economic factors through integrating practices such as pluriactivity, diversified agri-businesses, etc. into its survival strategies. Nevertheless, how do young people weigh their personal experiences and the belonging associated with this against wider social norms without facing some conflict and misgivings? This is further complicated by the research cohort’s socialisation into two paradoxical and competing gendered frameworks, with one preparing them for life within the family in the context of the farm and one for life outside of this. These frameworks are not necessarily compatible since the gendered requirements and expectations they are both grounded in are not always the same. Females are not encouraged to see
themselves as equal to their brothers on the farm in terms of their roles and ownership rights and, yet, off it are generally urged to pursue professional careers and be independent. Similarly, sons are pushed towards education and mobility but are often perceived as potential returnees to the farm and, through this, can be moored tightly to a spatially based community and the homeplace. Findings in this research show that, in spite of their contradictory nature, the boundaries of the farming paradigm are usually situationally adhered to even after they move away to university. While male actors build their life away from the farm they do so in the knowledge that this might be curtailed by a duty to return to the farm. Likewise, female actors confidently pursue academic qualifications with the intention to develop strong careers but, nevertheless, continue to support the uneven gendered strategies, which underpin succession plans in their families. They also face a tricky balancing act since, in order to make a successful transition to adulthood they must embrace ways of being that could run contrary to ones followed in the farming community. Yet to avoid being othered and mistaken for a ‘townie’ they must continue to reconcile their behaviour with the norms of their own background and display an awareness and knowledge of appropriate ways to behave in relation to their family and the farm. In the case of this cohort, this transition usually requires outward migration at least for a certain period, which brings the chapter to the next element contained in the conceptual framework that of elective belonging.

**Section 9.5 Elective Belonging**

While much of the transition to adulthood for this group is only made possible through moving away from home this does not necessarily lead towards Savage et al.’s (2005) concept of elective belonging. This research suggests that there is a marked difference between choice of residence and choice of belonging as the elective idea would seem to argue for. Admittedly, on a superficial level this group bear the hallmarks of elective belonging in that they have moved away from their birth community and do not always intend to return. However, this view can be countered by some participants’ stated intentions to return to live in rural Ireland in the future because it reflects who they are. This migration pattern could be regarded as a pragmatic, short-term choice, which will enable movement away from urban
areas in the future. Returning to rural Ireland does not necessarily imply they will go home to where they are from but, instead could entail choosing to live in an unknown area. This choice is a careful compromise that allows individuals to enjoy the benefits of living somewhere very similar to where they grew up in terms of values and lifestyle while gaining the freedom and anonymity they associate with urban areas but, which is not possible to achieve at home. In any case, this shift to urban life does not necessarily reflect where this group really see their homeplace as being or where they feel they belong. While they are free to choose where to live outside of the farm this cannot be equated with having a choice as to where to belong. The research here points to a need to come to terms with the underlying fact of this enduring belonging rather than being able to shrug it off and conjure up a new belonging with its accompanying form of identity, freedoms, etc.

There is an inexorable pull to a homeplace that is like a Pole Star in its relative fixedness with all that it evokes and burns into the habitus of the individual. Some participants spoke of trying to pull away and in the end feeling that, whether willingly or not, they still belong. There is something lonely about this idea especially for those who want to have a visible and acknowledged membership of this community but find it difficult to maintain or achieve this. Or, for those who will not return to live near home through lack of employment opportunities or a yearning for the anonymity of urban living there is often still an unfulfilled part lurking within themselves. Even where relationships with the homeplace and with farming are complicated there is an ease that comes from being in this context—a knowingness borne out of long experiential immersion in this world that is not easily replicated elsewhere. This was evident not just from the content of the interviews where all participants spoke with informed candour about the farming world but also their demeanour during them. In the course of the interviews it was as if a skin was sloughed off and any initial stiffness caused by the slightly formal nature of the interaction was tempered by a switch to a conversation about the farming world and their homeplace. There is an intrinsic knowing and ease with these aspects of their life, as if on some level this is who the person is and it is a part, which is usually dormant as they are continuously away from these contexts of the homeplace and farming life. Irrespective of whether it is a visible or more hidden element of their
identity, their relationship with the concept of belonging is complex and must be reconciled with the different influences they have been exposed to throughout their upbringing and beyond. The next part of this chapter positions this study against the backdrop of its conceptual framework of this study as outlined in Chapters Two and Three around theoretical and rural literature.

Section 9.6 The Relationship with Rural Sociology Literature
In some ways it is difficult to locate this work within the field of rural sociology. This is because this specific cohort does not appear to have been intensively studied previously so direct comparisons with other research is challenging. This group’s absence from the field of rural studies could in itself be seen as an indication of how belonging is understood and framed within academia. As already noted, through focusing on particular sections of the community such as farmers, certain types of belonging are (re)produced in the literature since these actors are granted a voice presumed to be noteworthy and interesting. This serves to perpetuate ideas of what it means to legitimately belong to a community. Through this exclusion rural literature neglects the impact of this childhood on those who are not regarded as the ‘farmer’ and would suggest that others who experience this upbringing are not as worthy of fruitful consideration in the popular or research imagination. This is a slightly narrow approach to the farming community in which perhaps only those who are positioned as the successor are considered to belong or to possess relevant knowledge. It could be argued that this is true even of feminist authors in this field who in expanding the research focus to include the lives of farming women, e.g., those who are married to farmers overlook those who were born into this community but who have made a transition away from it. This includes the work of, for instance, Shortall (1999), Kelly and Shortall (2002) and Price and Evans (2006). It should be noted that there are exceptions to this in, for example, Brandth (1995) and Leckie’s (1996) work on young women and farming. This raises wider questions of how belonging is conceptualised-most especially whether belonging is perceived as based on actively embraced visible markers of identity such as the public performance of agriculture or more passively and less discernibly through one’s birth and upbringing. If actors feel they have no choice but to claim belonging because of its
indelible and enduring influence what if this is not recognised as such by other actors because they lack ways to outwardly identify themselves? What implications does this have for how they build their identity in the future? Theirs is invisible scaffolding often not having an outlet for performances of membership or ways to be acknowledged. It should be pointed out that not all participants felt torn about the framing of their belonging since many had a role, whether attached or detached, both on and off the farm that in their view was appropriate and satisfying for them.

This thesis expands upon and branches away from what has already been written in rural sociology in particular through exploring the role and importance of belonging in the farming community. However, while it is challenging to locate this work within the field of rural sociology its findings broadly do not contradict previous interpretations of life in the farming community, either in the Irish context or abroad. One could speculate that this is because of the presence of near universal cultural norms, which ground farming practices across much of the developed world. These create uniformity in terms of the parameters that surround experiences and attitudes. For instance, these findings highlight the influence of the rural idyll framework in its capacity to monopolise the experience of growing up in the countryside in such a way as to dominate the idea of how it should be understood and presented and the conflicting feelings this background creates in individuals. By this it is meant that the cohort often appear to struggle with the reality of their lives and how this must compete with the image of the rural as pure or backward, dull and exciting and so on. This chimes with research, highlighted in Chapter Three, by Glendinning et al. (2003) and Rye (2006) in Scotland and Norway respectively. Additionally, the argument contained in the findings about the continued importance of the gendered division of labour and succession corresponds to a study on the Finnish farming community relating to the presence and importance of cultural scripts and the norms arising out of this (Silvasti, 2003). Elsewhere, the analysis of informal attachments, which points to the importance of emotional connections to the family resonates with Elder and Conger’s (2000) American study on the significant role family relationships play in the farming community. There are also links to research carried out in Norway by Brandth (1995) on gendered behaviours in the working life of the farm. Additionally, it reinforces Riley’s (2009) work on the vital contribution of
children to the present and future of the farm as well as Ní Laoire’s (2005) analysis of the challenges facing young people in terms of their future connections to the farm. It fits into concepts from the literature on migration and place attachments such as Corbett’s (2000) theory about the interlinking influences of education and migration on the decision to leave a birth community and the dilemmas associated with moving away (Bjarnson and Thorlindsson, 2006).

The relationship predominantly focused on in the literature around the concept of succession in the farming community, is the one between the farmer and potential successors. This is apparent in the work discussed in Chapter Three by, for instance, Villa (1999), Ní Laoire (2002; 2005), Bjørkhaug and Wiborg (2010) and Brandth and Overrein (2012). The results of this thesis do not counter these studies since the evidence also points to the importance of potential successors to the farm and to the role of the division of labour in creating attitudes towards this. However, what this thesis demonstrates is that other offspring in a family are crucial to this process since their cooperation is often required for the smooth transfer of the farm from one generation to the next through preserving the unit’s identity and standing within their communities. This is true because firstly, they are sometimes required to relinquish the possibility of succeeding themselves or of receiving an equal share of their parents’ estate. It is not argued here that they actually want to take the farm since some are relieved not to be given what they view as a burden of responsibility with the power to constrain their futures. Nevertheless, if they demanded a ‘fairer’ distribution of the land then this could potentially create difficulties legally and/or for relationships in the family. Secondly, as is the case for some of this cohort, they act as a safety net to guarantee the link between the family and the farm into the next generation. A number of individuals insist that they would take the farm, even if they would not necessarily intend to actively run it, if their succeeding sibling was incapacitated or there was no one else available. In addition, the thesis differs in an important way from much of the material mentioned above, which mainly concentrates on aspects of socialisation and work, etc. as guiding succession. This work shows how the quasi-anthropomorphic framing of the farm, as described earlier in Section 9.2.3.2, and the relationship that ensues can also play a significant part in the (re)creation of this dynamic. The farm becomes an essential element of how the
family imagines itself another character in their narrative with the ability to preserve and trigger memories, to engender such loyalty however torn and demanding it might be that an individual would consider changing their life path in order to preserve it. This is also shown in how individuals emphasise the connectedness of the family to the farm, its importance as a repository of memories, the strong emotions it elicits and so on. While this is in part a product of the influences explored in other studies such as cultural norms and is only possible because the family chooses to engage with it in this way, this demonstrates the significance of the holding as a living and productive dimension within the family dynamic especially with regard to succession.

The feminist influenced literature already mentioned, which has emerged around farming families has focused on the disadvantaging of female actors through their exclusion from access to resources. This concept holds true if formal belonging through ownership of capital such as land is considered the optimal and most aspired to outcome for young people from this community. However, what if succession is not viewed through this favourable prism but rather is considered to be a less than desirable life course? In this case would the gender differentiation not actually work in favour of women and to a lesser extent non-succeeding men as they can detach from the farm with less turmoil and guilt? In a scenario where entry to the farming profession is forced on a reluctant individual rather than chosen could ‘belonging’ to the land become a noose around the future of male lives? What the usual approach perhaps fails to take into account is that the practices, norms and socialisation processes that lead to sons being regarded as the natural successor constrains this group’s future and builds an indelible relationship with the idea of formal belonging even where they would like to escape. This is true of even unwilling or disinterested individuals who can carry a responsibility towards the farm, which does not appear to be equally shared by their sisters or female members of the cohort. The concepts of structure and agency can be used to further understand and explain this relationship. The cultural parameters and norms of the farming community impose awareness on men of what they should do and it is the behaviour and attitudes of parents, which through the demands they can make that largely dictates whether this moves from the level of guilt and conflict to one where action on their part is
required. This would cause one to question the agency individuals have since it is parents, through the pressure they place on their children or their allocation of tasks on the farm, who usually mould their offspring’s responses to the farm. The following piece places the findings from this thesis within the broader theoretical literature around this conceptual framework of structure and agency, most particularly the individualisation debate.

Section 9.7 The Connection with Theoretical Literature
Part of the rationale underpinning the data analysis phase of this research was to trace patterns of individualisation at the level of the actor and in the farming community. Many of this group are individualised away from their upbringing so that their transition to adulthood appears to follow the model suggested by Beck (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) in creating a DIY biography. However, in reality it is not usually within the power of the individual to choose to do so but rather is imposed by others such as their parents and by the expectations of their cultural and local community. Although they were relatively free to decide which university course to apply for and their subsequent career path the initial decision to pursue their education was driven by their experiential background. In making this point it should be noted that this is not about whether an individual actually wants to stay at home but whether this is an option even available to them. The constraints on their agency are demonstrated in the construction of functional belonging where few participants indicated that they rebelled against parental decisions around the division of labour or the demands made on them to succeed to the farm. This highlights how succession processes are, in most cases, heavily guided by strategies encompassing the entire family since roles must be created and parts played by the whole group, which ensure the smooth transfer of the farm from one generation to the next. Even for those who have taken the decision to step away from the expectations of their parents in terms of taking over the farm their individualised path is accompanied by the nagging realisation that this is not what was envisaged for them with regard to gender or cultural norms.
Irrespective of the underlying source and motivation of this individualisation, it is clear from the research that how it is manifested and even the opportunity to follow such a path continues to be significantly bounded by the farming family context and experience. It largely depends on the kind of role and transition envisaged by their parents and nested within this the attitude of the actor concerned. For both parties this is a careful balancing act between community norms, attitudes to the future of the farm, personal preferences and the gendered frameworks described earlier in Section 9.2.2. Boundaries are differentiated for each gender with even the male participants who occupied a ‘helper’ role sometimes presumed to be willing to step back onto a regulated path of taking the farm in order to continue family traditions and connections to the land. While this is generally true, in a small number of cases parents had made it clear from an early stage that taking on the ownership of the farm was not required of them so not all male participants are faced with this conflict even if there are no other successors available. On the other hand, women can usually expect to be detached from the notion of building a formal relationship with the farm and according relationships with it and, instead, develop alternative life and career paths. Furthermore, among the female participants in this cohort, it appears that the prospect of being given the homeplace is not always tied to becoming productive farmers. Instead, they will perhaps be expected to preserve it in the family in the hope that a solution to this conundrum might be found in the next generation.

Participants who were prepared to fight their way past the normative impositions of their family and the culture they belong to still cannot be regarded as making fully individualised decisions. Their actions are oppositional but set within a relatively rigid spectrum of possible options. For instance, in seeking to minimise involvement with the farm a ‘worker’ could exchange this role for a position of ‘helper’ in the house and outside. While this might look like an independent decision akin to choosing an individualised path away from a working relationship with the farm, they still operate within a system created by other agents and structures. They have little choice but to contribute in some way to the farm and the family and it is in the actualisation of this that their choice lies—not in a decision to do so or not. This does not imply helplessness or powerlessness since many worked to build relationships
with their background, which satisfied their needs and minimised conflict with the family and the farm rather than dutifully and blindly following their parents’ wishes. However, the findings in this research supports criticism of Beck’s work by, for instance, Furlong and Cartmel (1997) particularly where they claim that the weakening of collective social influences has been exaggerated within this theory. This is demonstrated by how strongly aware the cohort was of norms in their community and the impact this has had on their childhood experiences and their movement towards adulthood. It also fits with Shucksmith’s (2004) argument around differentiated individualisation, with access to this concept often governed by factors such as parental resources and capital allocations.

Based on the empirical evidence of this research, belonging to the farming community and a particular family exerts as strong an influence on actors who move away from the farm as on those who remain on it. The difference is that it is less visibly and obviously manifested than, for example, would be the case for the sibling who assumes formal ownership of the farm. While their attendance at university and the myriad of opportunities this presents gives them the appearance of having embraced the DIY approach to the creation of their biography, this is driven by their experiences and socialisation on the farm and in the family. Just as the ‘farmer’ takes on a particular role so do they, of the non-successor academic child, or the one whose entry into university provides a measure of redemption for parents whose shortened educations were the fuel for childhood cautionary tales. This would cause one to question whether the idea of choice exists for this group at anything other than a superficial level. Their ‘choice’ is often largely connected to the types of attachments they form with their background and their engagement with the dimensions of belonging outlined in this thesis. The expression of a DIY biography within their narrative is compulsorily driven by the circumstances of their family, succession strategies, the nature of their embeddedness in the community, etc. If from childhood one child is labelled as the ‘farmer’ who spends most of their free time on the farm and the rest are fashioned into a supporting pool of ‘workers’ or ‘helpers’ destined to eventually leave and who are encouraged and cajoled into studying, what choice really exists for either those who stay or those who go?
In some ways either of these groups could easily rebel against these characterisations since there are no legal impediments preventing an individual from leaving the farm or means by which a parent can actually force their children to attend university. However, this fails to take into account their socialisation into positions, which become part of their identity or the moral obligation they feel to their parents with its accompanying anxiety to avoid disappointing them. This connects in with Bourdieu’s theories around the significance of habitus in actors’ lives as their inability to completely withdraw from their connections to their family or their belonging to this background appears to emanate from their upbringing and socialisation. This can led them to feel they have no choice but to take the farm or if they do not this to continue to feel guilt or distress over this. Likewise, individuals can feel they must live up to certain expectations such as attending university. This balance between structure-agency in the life of farm youth differs from Beck’s conceptualisation. Although there are similarities to the individualisation theory in how young people are forced to incessantly make decisions in order to build a successful life, the difference is that this approach appears to argue that the choices they make are largely unconstrained by factors such as their upbringing or belonging (Beck, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). However, this thesis shows that in the context of the farming community this view of the structure-agency debate should be reinterpreted to acknowledge the socialisation and belonging engendered, which creates a very particular set of choices that keep a tenacious grip on individuals.

Section 9.8 The Relationship with the Post-Traditional Conceptualisation of Identity
There is a desire on the part of many in this group to try and hold onto a particular conceptualisation of their family and their life within it and the constancy and routine encapsulated in the farm. This goes against Giddens’ arguments about the separation of actors from their past (Giddens, 1991; 1994). In any case, where the rupture with the past does occur actors do not always have a choice in the matter as parents can actively discourage any aspiration to preserve the farm and, instead, push for a pathway towards adulthood based on participation in education. They are also keenly aware of their enmeshment in a temporal continuum, which references both
previous generations and those who are yet to come. However, it should be pointed out that many in this group while remaining aware of their own background actively embrace life away from the farm. In doing this they too are shaped by the identities they were born into and the choices and type of belonging that arose from this. In addition, it opposes Bauman’s idea of a liquid identity (1995). In a changing world where forms of communication and ways of viewing social interactions are predicated on the immediate and to use Bauman’s phrase ‘the liquid’ the farm takes on a permanency and a promise of endurance often not found elsewhere in relationships, employment or housing. By retaining ownership of the land within the family, the farm can act as an aide-mémoire capable of acting as a reminder of childhood experiences, parental accomplishments as well as debts of gratitude owed to deceased generations either half-forgotten or half-remembered. Even where life paths take individuals away from their birth culture and original spatial identity this part of their life is merely suspended rather than dissipated or diluted irrevocably and can still perhaps be accessed through returning to the farm. This is accompanied by an awareness of tradition and of being part of something bigger and perhaps more permanent and solid than that which is available in the late modern society with its emphasis on the now and its claim that the echoes of the past are an increasingly moribund notion.

Section 9.9 Conclusion
For those who either are not perceived by others or themselves as likely to take a full-time or, indeed, any role on the farm the experience of growing up in a farming family can be somewhat confusing and challenging and at the same time act as a source of pride and security. Whatever the feelings or thoughts invoked, belonging takes on the appearance of a slightly fragmented, incomplete nuance for this group. In completing the transition to adulthood through the mechanism of the four core dimensions of belonging, they are usually left with little choice but to build their lives elsewhere regardless of the attachment they have developed to the farm and their communities. Furthermore, there is a paragon idea of belonging in this community, which they also work towards or against. This underpins their transition to adulthood in how they incorporate the dimensions underpinning this concept of
belonging into their lives, i.e. they are drawn towards the idea of the ‘farmer’ or pull away from it. It is about a group who have no choice but to belong in some way but often in the face of external influences, are marginalised. How belonging currently seems to be viewed, whereby it is the designated farmer who appears to be regarded as legitimate, would lead to the question as to whether being considered a community member is based solely on possessing certain forms of capital symbolically and practically representative of a status. Is it enough for an individual to self-identify as belonging or does it require the recognition of others to do so?

This discussion located the findings within two separate strands of literature—rural studies and youth sociology, which formed the conceptual framework of this thesis. It especially showed the gaps in rural sociology in terms of how belonging is viewed and developed as well as demonstrating the need to include a wider range of voices in, for example, studies on succession. In terms of youth sociology, it argued that the individualisation theory and late modern conceptualisations of identity need to be modified for farming communities as young people continue to be brought up within clear constructs of behaviour and life paths. These are rooted in an awareness of the need for continuity and the importance of preserving intergenerational relationships as represented by the farm. This implies that young people from this background seek to build a life, which incorporates the values of wider society and farming culture as they move forward into adulthood. These concepts are further discussed in the concluding chapter, which is where attention now turns to.
Chapter Ten Conclusion

Section 10.1 Introduction
From the mid-twentieth century onwards the transition to adulthood in the farming community appeared not to be as structured as it once was. Much of the literature produced in this period positioned family farming as on the cusp of imminent breakdown. Although the numbers of farmers has continued to steadily decline this has not resulted in a concomitant increase in the sale of land. Nevertheless, the move towards late modern society has brought about changes in farming culture and how relationships between young people, their families and their futures are viewed. One of the main catalysts for these adjustments was education, which initially allowed daughters greater freedom to fashion their own life course followed later by an increased uptake among sons. Young people were apparently no longer as tied to paths mapped out for them by their parents and culture as they once were, and they now had more autonomy to choose to stay on the farm or move away. This connects to the idea that in late modern culture, young people are less constrained by their family background and are more likely to reject the precepts that had governed previous generations’ lives ((Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). However, the family farming culture, although it faces challenges, remains an important cultural, social and economic force in rural Ireland. It is against this practical and theoretical backdrop that a discussion of the experiences of emerging adults who have grown up in farming families and enrolled in university was situated against.

In this chapter an overview of this thesis and the arguments contained within it are provided. The first part concentrates on the research question that was addressed over the course of this study. It begins with a reiteration of its general underpinning aims and the broad field it looked to investigate. Next, its scope is discussed, followed by a summary of the gaps in the literature it sought to attend to. Then, it recaps the research question, and subsequently the principle argument of this thesis as developed in each chapter is outlined. This includes a specific focus on the four main dimensions of belonging and the subthemes grounding these findings. After this, some limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations made for
future avenues of research. In the remainder of the chapter some concluding remarks about the relationship between this thesis and the theoretical material around the individualisation debate are made and finally, the nature of belonging in the farming community is touched upon.

Section 10.2 The Aim of the Thesis
The aim of this thesis was to explore the childhood experiences of a cohort of university students who grew up in farming families and who are unlikely to return to farming in a full-time capacity. This study was set against the background of changing dynamics between the Irish family farming system and the wider context of its increasing economic, political and social vulnerability. It was also positioned against the medium of a late modern societal environment with its emphasis on the individual path and identities supposedly predicated on the liquid over rootedness in a personal and familial past. From this a number of broad questions were generated that acted as a catalyst for this work: What is it like to grow up in a farming family? What impact do these experiences have on actors’ movement into adulthood and their identity? In light of the shift from traditional to late modern social models does a childhood spent in the farm environment continue to have the power to shape the course of a life? What is the relationship between farm youth and the farm? Do they wish to see the farm preserved in the family or are they indifferent about the possibility of it being sold in the future?

Section 10.3 The Scope of this Thesis
With these general questions in mind, this study was framed as an exploration of the experiences of a research cohort who had grown up on a farm and who were now attending university. It particularly focused on the impact of their upbringings and the processes and norms underpinning these on their transition to adulthood. This was further grounded in a desire to examine the pathways they were bounded into by virtue of their positioning within their family, the farm and the wider culture and community they grew up in. It sought to examine the impact of their relationship with these frameworks on how their identities were shaped as well as the avenues
available to them in their movement towards adulthood. In addition, it focused on the boundaries placed on their engagement with the farm in terms of gender and succession norms as well as expectations around their active working contribution to it in the short and long-term. Although the intention was to analyse the participants’ interviews as a means of interpreting their narrative experiences of farm childhoods, the broader structures actors operated within at the level of their individual homeplace and the wider cultures and communities these were located in were also included. However, it did not look to accommodate, for example, young people who have remained on the farm in a successor capacity or those who have made their transition to adulthood through mechanisms other than participating in third-level education. Nor did it seek to address specific transition to adulthood markers but rather to explore the processes, which influenced the path they took.

Section 10.4 Inadequacies in the Literature
Bearing in mind the generalised nature of this research’s early parameters and although the research question underpinning this study was deliberately broad in its scope, nevertheless, there were specific inadequacies in the literature pertaining to youth sociology and rural studies that this study looked to fill. Firstly, this cohort appears not to have been intensively investigated previously in rural studies. This is quite a large gap in the research into the lives of farm youth since this group constitutes the majority of children who are raised in this community. In addition, they could shed valuable light on the dynamics and relationships that thread their way through life in the farming community around, for example, succession practices, emotional connections, identity and so on. The second gap in the literature, which this thesis looked to engage with was in the structure-agency debate with specific reference to theories around individualisation. This was because this area, while well developed theoretically, appears not to have been commensurately grounded by empirical evidence. Secondly, this cohort as a group who have been raised in a community largely still bound by traditional normative frameworks were a potentially rich source of data to either support, disprove or modify this theory’s main characteristics. This study, thus, looked to examine the structure-agency framework with regard to one particular sample population and to consider the
degree to which they either had agentic capacity, uninfluenced by their background or whether the structures they were positioned within exerted a stronger influence. The alternative to either of these outlooks was how these could combine together to produce a particular pathway towards adulthood blending elements of structure and agency. As the study progressed and as belonging began to assume greater importance in the work, greater theoretical and empirical detail about this core concept was also generated. This was underscored by a need to unpack belonging into different components and explore whether young people were still anchored into and by their membership of their birth culture and community. Or, equally, whether they had become detached or disembedded from their background by virtue of their migration away from the homeplace.

Section 10.5 The Research Argument
This section is divided into two parts. First, a succinct reply to the research question is provided and secondly, it outlines how the argument underpinning this was advanced over the course of this thesis.

Section 10.5.1 The Research Question
To restate the research question again:

- What are the experiences of growing up in a farming family among farm youth attending university?

No one specific answer can be provided in response to this research question. What can be said, however, is that the experience of growing up in a farming family has had a profound impact on the lives and world view of this cohort. This had a significant influence on their childhoods since for almost all of them their family life, which provided much of the context for the formation of their primary identity and belonging, was intertwined with the farm. It was a dominant feature in a practical sense since all had had to contribute to varying degrees to the working life of the farm. In addition, it had an impact habitus-wise in how it shaped their value system and symbolically since the family largely framed its relationship with itself and the
outside world in terms of their identification with the farm. From a practical point of view, this deep connection is necessary as the farm is often the main source of family income. Thus, it needs careful management so that it endures as a business, with part of this strategy resting on making sure that the family’s offspring contributed to and worked on it. However, it is also important to the family’s symbolic survival as the retention of the farm and its connections to their history helps to guarantee their continuity into the next generation. Surprisingly, given the patrilineal nature of succession this does not necessarily revolve around the retention of a link between the landholding and their specific surname. Instead, it is about the need to preserve it in its essence and the family’s lineage rather than as a fossilised monument or as absolutely revolving around maintaining the link between the farm and their name. The farm itself also acts as a kind of palimpsest\(^\text{92}\) in which the lives of previous generations and their own are recorded and writ large in their management of and alterations to its physically constructed landscape. Furthermore, in preserving the connection to the farm the personal, familial and historical memories associated with it are protected as well.

The experience of a farm childhood has also shaped the participants’ relationship with their family, their community and the world at large in how it has helped to position them within a particular path towards adulthood. For some it will result in migration away from the farm with the exception of sporadic visits. For this group the relationships they developed with the four different dimensions of belonging had a significant impact on their broad transition towards adulthood as it detached them from the idea of succeeding to the farm in the future. Instead, from a young age female participants were socialised into a framework, which pushed them towards entry into university with all the implications this could be expected to have for their life course such as gaining professional employment. This does not mean their parents disconnected them emotionally or proprietarily from the farm since their commitment to preserving it was vital. If they still feel bounded to the farm in an informal way they would be less likely to agitate for the farm to be sold instead of

\(^{92}\) This is usually taken to mean a page of parchment or paper from which the writing has been erased either in part or full to make room for more words. This seemed to be an apt metaphor for how the essence of the farm could be handed on intact while allowing space for new directions to be taken in light of the changing goals of the next generation and shifts in socio-economic conditions.
being passed on relatively whole into the next generation. Neither does it imply that they were excluded from the working life of the farm in their childhoods as their status as ‘helpers’ or ‘workers’ meant that they often took part in farm-based tasks. In addition, for these actors their relationship with their local spatial community and the more abstract notions of the farming and rural ones combines embedded and disembodied elements. For some they either never were or are no longer deeply embedded in the local community they grew up in. Others might feel deeply immersed in some way in their community and, yet, still not foresee a return home.

However, these participants, regardless of their love of or dislike for farming or the nature of their experiences of a childhood spent on the farm, consider themselves to be still bound to the farming and/or rural culture. This is demonstrated by their continued self-othering from outsider identity brackets such as the ‘urban’ and by their determination to adhere to the positive values they associate with their background. They will be influenced by their socialisation even where they might, by choice or necessity, physically remove themselves from everyday contact with their background. Many female members of the cohort fit within this category as the normative work and succession frameworks they are located within are predicated on a dual status and position inside and outside the family and farm context. Within the farm environment they are expected to play a supporting role in the short and long-term but, externally, are positioned within an ideology of independence and equality. While this seems to allow them greater freedom to build their own lives, at the same time, this is limiting in that it usually precludes them from taking a serious role on the farm, especially in adulthood, if they wanted to. Some male participants also fit into this category and were often encouraged into this role by their parents or found themselves in this role because of the presence of siblings who had already been identified as the ‘farmer’.

For other members of the cohort the fact of their belonging to their families and their culture will potentially have a very different practical impact on their lives as they move towards and into adulthood. The experience of growing up on the farm had a weighty influence on participants’ everyday lives as many males and some females
were regarded as ‘workers’, which added a great deal of intensity to their interaction with the farm during their childhoods. However, female ‘workers’ are usually distanced from responsibilities towards the farm in the future and have moved off the farm in a manner similar to ‘helpers’. Furthermore, this position seems to have been taken on by females only when parents wanted this to happen. Even if they are given the farm it is more likely that this will be as landholders rather than farmers, which potentially relieves them of the need to deal with some of the obvious consequences of taking over the farm, such as returning home to live. Male participants appear to be bound more deeply to the future of the farm. Even those who will not succeed are more likely to feel either a personal sense of guilt over not acting as a ‘farmer’s son’ or believe that it is only through parental intervention that they have not been placed into a position where they must manage the holding. Therefore, the lives of many male participants will continue to be concretely shaped by the changing needs of the family and the farm even as they take tentative steps towards moving away from it.

Some who have siblings already identified as the ‘farmer’ or where their parents have pushed them towards a life off the farm have been relieved of an obligation to retain it. This does not preclude residual feelings of guilt or the fact that were other siblings to become unavailable or if their parents pleaded with them to continue it on that they would do so. A small number who are already marked out as the successor will probably find that their life plans must be radically altered in the future to incorporate their label as the ‘farmer’, which is a duty they cannot give up lightly, if at all.

In either case, male participants seem to be more tied by frameworks, which give them an increased role and stance on the farm and legitimacy as ‘farmers’ in local communities compared to their female counterparts. Outside of the parameters of the homeplace and farming culture they are positioned within the individualisation framework with its emphasis on the need to make personal choices. The encouragement of parents and the enthusiasm participants feel about their engagement with education is paralleled by their possible obligation to the farm. Regardless of their views of the farm many are so constrained by, for instance, duty, norms and their relationships with parents that at present they cannot contemplate stepping away from their connections or responsibilities to their backgrounds.
Likewise, they consider their experiences within and membership of the specific environs of the family and the broader context of the frameworks they are bound into, to be an unbreakable attachment that informs their emotional and practical worlds. In these situations positioning themselves as insiders in the farming community can be accompanied by a desire to break away and build identities that are not entangled in their past and the farm.

Section 10.5.2 The Progression of the Argument
This part outlines the progression of the argument from the conceptual framework outlined in Chapters Two and Three through to the findings contained in Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight, which concentrated on the four dimensions underpinning the concept of belonging.

Section 10.5.2.1 The Theoretical and Conceptual background to the Argument
The conceptual framework of this thesis was developed in Chapters Two and Three. Chapter Two predominantly focused on providing a theoretical backdrop with particular regard to the structure-agency debate. It specifically looked at Beck’s theories of individualisation, Giddens on the reflexive biographical construction and Bourdieu’s arguments around the impact of fields. These were included because of their capacity to provide theoretical grounding for this thesis. They were a means of framing the interplay between an actor and the structures they grow up within as manifested by the farm, their family and the community as well as the norms and traditions these are structured within. Beck’s theory on individualisation concentrates on the creation of DIY biographies by actors and how in the current social model they can build their own life path through the choices they take. This would seem to suggest that an individual’s background is somewhat irrelevant in terms of its ability to condition the present. While they have no option but to choose, they are driven by personal preferences rather than wider structures. Similarly, Giddens’ idea of the reflexive biography is governed by the notion that the actor constantly and personally decides on their path and is not overly bound by a personal or historical past. Bourdieu, on the other hand, suggests that the concept of habitus is the main
catalyst for personal decisions and actions, which is in turn heavily shaped by their early experiences. Although much of this study resonates with his theoretical ideas an early decision was made not to concentrate on this since it seems to be a relatively complementary idea to this thesis but, instead, to explore the individualisation theory, which has a number of gaps and inadequacies. This section of the conceptual backdrop was completed by Bauman’s identity theory as his conceptual arguments about the liquidity of modern life was a good starting point for comparing and contrasting the positions of this cohort against. While material around transitions to adulthood was included in this chapter it was not dealt with in an in-depth theoretical way as this thesis primarily focused on the influences, which root and shape it and not the specific mechanics of engagement with, for instance, education or employment.

As the second part of the theoretical and conceptual framework of this thesis, Chapter Three largely drew on material from the broad field of rural studies. An interdisciplinary approach was taken to this whereby literature was used from cultural geography, history, anthropology and rural sociology to ground and uncover concepts applicable to this study’s axial theme of belonging and to its four dimensions. It demonstrated the relevance of a number of concepts to how the arguments of this study were to be developed and also crucially their absence. This chapter highlighted how under-conceptualised belonging is and the lack of research into this cohort as a segment of the farming population. The discussion on place attachment linked into the structure-agency debate as it outlined the potential for choice that is seen to exist within this dynamic in late modern society. Furthermore, the chapter provided thematic grounding for the dimensions of belonging in elaborating on the prevailing norms in the farming community that are pertinent to functional attachments, i.e. the division of labour in families and formal around succession and the role gender plays in both of these. It also helped to situate the social dimension of belonging in, for example, introducing the connection between education and migration and the differentiated and gendered nature of interactions with networks outside of the boundaries of the homeplace. The informal dimension of belonging to the farm appears to have been relatively under-researched as an idea-
where it is referred to it is almost in passing in relation to other aspects such as studies about ownership and succession rather than being scrutinised in its own right.

Section 10.5.2.2 Chapter Five-The ‘Functional’ Dimension of Belonging
The first dimension of belonging to be explored was the ‘functional’ one. This concentrated on the active relationship participants had with the farm and on how labour roles, as dictated by parents and cultural norms were constructed and divided. The essential organising basis of this is the creation of two relatively discrete roles that of the ‘worker’ and the ‘helper’. Typically, it is sons who are expected to take on a ‘worker’ role but in some families daughters assumed this position. Where this occurred it was largely motivated by parental demands and wishes showing that while normative conventions are generally adhered to they are also pragmatically altered to suit the needs and strategies of the family and the farm at that particular moment in time and with regard to the future. Irrespective of the roles they take up, the entire group were aware of the gendered nature of the spectrum along which assistance on the farm was constructed. When participants were able to exert their own agency in switching into preferred roles, they were still required to make some kind of contribution to the family such as helping in the house. This shows that while the cohort have agentic capacity it is located inside a fairly rigid structure that gives them options but does not allow them complete freedom to act as they want to. These ‘helper’/‘worker’ roles, were differentiated in terms of the degree to which actors were expected to be involved, their perceived centrality to the working life of the farm and so on.

However, these were not the only roles discussed within this chapter as evidence was also provided to support the argument that participation in education could also become a vehicle for playing a valued part in the life of the family. In addition, the role of ‘worker’ and ‘helper’ were accorded different statuses within the family. These helped to build distinct attitudes around obligations to the farm. Working was viewed as significant and deep-rooted while helping was considered to be almost casual in nature and a passing fancy. In reality, while ‘helpers’ could be distanced in
some ways from the farm, especially as they got older and became more engrossed in their education they regularly contributed, albeit not always in a similar manner to ‘workers’. However, during their childhoods all ‘workers’ were expected to perform a dual role of assisting outside on the farm as well as attending to their studies and were more intensely engaged with the former than ‘helpers’ were. It could be argued that from early childhood, pathways towards adulthood began to be formulated through the respective labour positions that individuals took on within the family. This aspect of belonging is a crucial element in the development of gendered views about the long-term relationship an individual is expected to have with the farm—not to mention its immediate consequences for their childhoods in how much of their lives were devoted to it.

Section 10.5.2.3 The ‘Informal’ Dimension of Belonging
The second form of attachment as explored in Chapter Six was that of informal connections participants feel to the farm. It was within this aspect of their narrative that their continued proprietorial attitude towards the farm was most apparent. Regardless of whether they aspire to or intend to either succeed to the farm or inherit the landholding or, equally, neither of these, most participants continue to feel attached to the farm on a deep emotional level. In some cases, this is welcomed as it roots an individual to a homeplace and an intergenerational continuum of memories. It also gives specific focus to their pride in their family’s strengths and identities. In a smaller number of cases, actors shrink away from this as they long to detach from certain aspects of their identity and the futures that others envisioned for them. Nevertheless, they realise that they are positioned within this framework whether they like it or not. This chapter partially revolved around how participants viewed the farm in business or emotive terms or a delicate balance of the two. Predominantly, it was looked at through an emotive lens rather than imagined as a business or an asset. This emotive framework partially drives the fervent desire to see the farm retained within the family rather than as something that can be disposed of in the future. In addition, it is strongly associated with three different kinds of memories; personal, familial and historical. Access to all three would be damaged by
the sale of the farm as would the intergenerational positioning of the family within a continuous chain of ownership.

This chapter demonstrated the willingness and desire of the participants themselves to remain connected to the farm. Parents do not necessarily control or push them into an ongoing attachment with the holding as they move towards adulthood. Instead, many regard their informal relationship with the farm as a proclamation of their ties to a family legacy and a rootedness and belonging to something older and more extensive than themselves. Perhaps here the farm serves as a counterpoint to the societal need to rework identities because while memories can and are reframed in light of changing attitudes to it and their family as they ease into adulthood, there is an immutable quality to the holding. It is a constant during a time of change, which, indeed, carries the possibility of greater uncertainties as they move through the emerging adulthood phase and beyond. These informal attachments are usually undifferentiated in terms of gender considerations or ‘worker’/‘helper’ status. It is likely that these are developed in order to ensure a continued commitment to the farm and to preserving it into the future. This is also no doubt driven by the affective nature of a loving nostalgia for childhood homes, but this potential variable was outside the scope of this research.

Section 10.5.2.4 The ‘Formal’ Dimension of Belonging
Chapter Seven looked at the ‘formal’ dimension of belonging, which paid specific attention to the dynamic around official succession to or ownership of the farm. Almost the entire cohort wish to see the farm maintained within the family, a desire largely connected to the informal attachments they have formed with it. Discussed in detail were the impact of gender on this link and the interplay between structure (parents, the farm, cultural norms and social frameworks) and the individual (preferences, roles, gender and attitudes to the farm). As part of this, it looked at the agency an actor was allowed to have or could hope to wield in this process. Also emphasised was the importance of cautionary tales in the narrative constructions of some individuals. As some interviews illustrated these cautionary tales are a
powerful and perhaps previously underdeveloped concept in sociology, which support and reinforce the roles and attitudes young people are socialised into. These stories around, for instance, the denial of parental opportunities in education appear to increase the sense of personal or familial responsibility towards keeping the farm within the unit. They serve to either preserve an individual’s sense of loyalty to the farm or pull them away depending on their gender or the wishes and educational experiences of their parents. Additionally, the stories are used as a rationale to partially justify why the farm should never be sold. Their awareness that the farm possibly prevented their own parents from fulfilling an alternate destiny to the one they were allocated debars some participants from thinking about selling the farm as this would mean betraying all that these individuals had sacrificed themselves for. In other cases, they were a means of ensuring certain offspring, especially daughters, do not try to presume to a share of the farm in the future.

Furthermore, this chapter illustrated the continued import of norms such as succession at both an individual and cultural level. In some cases this includes the idea of inheritance as actors can position themselves as the heir to a landholding willing to take it on in the anticipation that the next generation will have a greater interest in farming it. The lack of resentment over the farm being given to another sibling emerged here as a narrative theme. Many were content with the idea of a sibling taking the farm who they and their families identified as the ‘farmer’ with the capacity and determination to protect the landholding into the future. Others were simply glad that they had not been socialised into the position by their parents and, instead, were able to pursue their own lives away from the farm. A small minority of this group face the prospect of succeeding their father. While in the immediate future they are likely to be able to build their own lives this is set against the knowledge that at some point they will have to confront the dilemma of what to do with a holding they might not want to farm. Nevertheless, they must either choose to return to it and in doing so please their families and fulfil their normative duty, or they must reject this and bear the consequences of disappointing their parents and in some way failing those generations who have gone before and those as yet unborn. The concept of individualisation is relevant here as actors construct the lives they are allowed to within the confines of succession strategies, parental aspirations, personal
preferences and so on. If their positioning appears to point them in the direction of
the successor label then they are far more likely to be expected to return to the farm
in the future than those who have been conditioned to see their lives as leading away
from it. However, as this study argues this latter group still play a significant part in
the smooth transfer of the farm from one generation to the next by acting as an
alternative successor/inheritor or through tacitly or overtly supporting the handover
of the farm to their sibling(s).

Section 10.5.2.5 The ‘Social Dimension’ of Belonging
In some ways the last findings’ chapter looking at the social dimension of belonging
deviates from Chapters Five-Seven as it concentrated on the relationships’
individuals develop off the farm. While the other three chapters focused on the
dynamic between the actor, the family and the farm, this considered their
engagement with the wider communities they grew up in. The plural communities
was often used in this thesis as it reinforced how participants lived within three
different interlinked concepts, i.e. the local spatial one, its broader rural counterpart
and a farming cultural framework. This is quite a fragmented relationship with few
definitive patterns emerging across the cohort. Perhaps this can be linked to the fact
that it does not appear to be the product of deliberate socialisation processes in the
way that say functional attachments are. However, it is not irrelevant to this study of
belonging since the degree to which they are embedded or disembedded from these
communities can reflect the nature of their relationship with paradigms such as
farming ideology. It can also temper their identification with their local community’s
values and interests. Undoubtedly, this influences their willingness to have
immersive contact with these aspects of their lives. This chapter sought to uncover
some of the influences on this such as their engagement with cultural institutions like
the GAA and the congruence between their values and their communities’ ones.

It also treated of the structure-agency debate in how belonging to a particular family
and a gender shaped interactions with the local community. For instance, the practice
used by community members of placing individuals, which links them to their
family, constrains or enables individuals. This is because of the expectations attached to this surname and the kinds of behaviours associated with it. Furthermore, their gendered farming role on the farm took on a public performative aspect as sons who worked also interfaced with this community in a functional manner. On the other hand, females and ‘helpers’ had tasks that were more hidden, less socially interactive and gave fewer opportunities to participate in their community. These processes helped to reinforce the form of their relationship with the community as it could embed or disembed them further into or away from it.

Many members of the cohort had a profoundly contradictory relationship with the community they grew up in, as love rivalled hate and claustrophobia clashed with a sense of security derived from being known and knowing. One consequence of their embeddedness is that while many might not be able to return to the farm in the future they contemplate returning to their rural roots either near their homeplace or in a similar community where they will be less bounded in their actions. Just as participants felt tied to the farm they also felt connected to their cultural background as they move towards adult life. Even where some might wish to escape its influences there is an overwhelming feeling in their narratives that this is an unavoidable part of their lives. Belonging in this manner can also be a positive as many are anxious to retain their affiliation to their community and to be marked out in some way as being culchies, or farmers, or at least not townies. This is a greater concern for females due to their less visibly embedded role in the farm and/or in the community. Nevertheless, both genders seek to continue their association with a set of values and a way of living that speaks to them on a deep level regardless of their transition to adulthood path and its inherent potential to detach them spatially or professionally from their background.

Section 10.6 Limitations of the Research

This section outlines three of the principal limitations of this research. One limitation is that it might not be applicable to younger generations of farming youth. This is due to the alterations in parenting practices that have taken place in the past number
of decades. Research carried out by Brandth and Overrein (2013) on changing succession practices in Norway highlights clear generational differences about children’s level of involvement in the working life of the farm. They note that younger fathers do not expect their children to labour on the farm in the way their fathers had required them to, usually because they frame their childhoods as a time to play rather than work. This means that these results are possibly only appropriate to this age group and might not be generalisable to those who are growing up at the present time. While the intention was not to produce a thesis containing grand statements about the wider farming community these shifts in the parent-child relationship could make it difficult for this research to have long standing relevance or replicability in the future.

A further potential limitation in this research is the life stage of the participants and their families. Almost all the cohort’s parents were still actively farming with only one whose father had passed away. Potentially, the opinions expressed about the future of the farm or relationships with it could alter depending on adjustments to familial circumstances. For example, an individual who professes to be indifferent to the distribution of their parents’ estate could abruptly change their views once the farm is handed over to a sibling. This is because their conceptualisation of the farm as their own homeplace might come under threat in light of this new reality. Similarly, the obligation to keep the farm in spite of the personal costs this might incur could fade as actors settle into a life of their own and put down alternative career and family roots.

A third limitation is that no other perspectives were directly included in the research. This was a deliberate decision as it allowed this previously unheard group to be focused on within the research process. Nevertheless, it opens the findings to accusations of being too one-sided and narrow. Thus, for instance, discussions of parental views gave no space for corroboration or challenges by these same individuals, a process which might have provided interesting results or refutations. Through including other actors who might have qualified or contextualised their words, the findings could have been richer and broader in their scope.


**Section 10.7 Recommendations for Future Research**

One recommendation for future research would be to concentrate on a cohort who neither worked nor helped on the farm during their childhoods. It is not being implied here that the functional dimension of belonging is of paramount importance to other kinds as these connections would need further research. All the same, as this is a common characteristic of the participants’ childhood experiences it would be worthwhile to explore the experiences of those who felt detached from this aspect of the farm. This could perhaps counterbalance the limitation, outlined in the previous section, about the impact of changing functional relationships with the farm on the younger generations’ attitudes towards it.

A second avenue of research would be to explore in greater detail the impact of family dynamics on the interplay between growing up on the farm and the transition to adulthood. This could particularly look to embrace the perspectives of other family members and in doing so take account of the intergenerational relationship between parents and children. By doing this the potential bilinearity of this connection could be examined in terms of the younger generation’s power to influence their parents’ attitudes and relationship to the farm in the present and future.

**Section 10.8 Concluding Remarks**

This final section provides concluding remarks on the overall argument made in this thesis around the conceptual backdrop of the work and the core notion of belonging.

**Section 10.8.1 Transitions to Adulthood/ Conceptual Backdrop**

For both male and female participants the idea of a DIY biography, as outlined within individualisation theory, is engaged with in a contradictory manner. In ways their lives usually appear self-constructed especially in terms of the array of career choices available to them and, yet, underpinning this is a parental ambition, conviction and strategy pushing them in a particular direction. Their movement into
adulthood through university with the myriad of careers and pathways this potentially opens up presents at least a semblance of freedom. However, on a deeper level this is usually driven by explicit parental wishes and expectations and theirs, at least partial, construction of their children’s relationship with the overall concept of belonging and its dimensions. As the findings’ chapters showed both genders’ responses to the farm are often driven by a relationship as imagined for them by others. Even those who seem to be rebelling against what is expected of them through the roles they take up or the attitudes they adapt do so in the awareness that this goes against cultural and community norms. It should be noted that participants do not always blindly follow parental rules and neither do most parents have a tyrannical hold over their children. This is demonstrated in the findings’ chapters where it was argued that some participants created a role for themselves in the family they were relatively content with rather than obeying their parents and taking up a hated ‘worker’ role on the farm. Nor do the communities they grow up in always exert an obvious pressure to conform. Therefore, farm youths’ agency should be interpreted as resting on a bounded and contingent notion of the self that is intertwined with parental wishes and ambitions.

This group continues to be strongly influenced by their background in the choices they make. In some cases the farm and their background act as a kind of oppositional force in pushing individuals in a direction that is in stark contrast to their childhood experiences. Hence, even in these situations the decisions they take, which appear to mirror the reflexive or DIY life biography model, are ultimately grounded in the experiences of their childhood. For others there is even less flexibility around their engagement with this kind of a societal framework because the need to take on the family farm means that the practicalities of their life bound their path. The farm, thus, becomes a way of enabling or constraining the transition to adulthood of the individual. This delimits their perspectives and choices. For example, they can choose what course they will take in university but usually not if they attend or not, as from a young age they were encouraged to see this as the key to their future success. While the possibility of a formal relationship with the farm has practical consequences for some of the cohort through their need to assume ownership of it all participants’ decisions and the nature of their biography construction are influenced
by their background. Their childhood usually grounds the direction of their life. It is structured through their inclusion or exclusion on the farm and to a lesser extent their embeddedness or disembeddedness from the community and how these influence their movement towards adulthood and the way these are envisioned. However, it should not be taken to mean that they do not have agentic power of their own as within these boundaries they create their own lives. Nevertheless, while the decisions participants make to actively pull away from the farm might appear to be of their own making, in many cases as this is the traditional path they are expected to and have been socialised into taking, they have little choice in the matter.

Even a superficial engagement with the individualisation model is grounded on differentiated processes and opportunities. What came out in these interviews was that young women need to reconcile their traditional framework positions of hierarchal inferiority, based on the ‘helper’ status they normatively assume and their distancing from the concept of formal ownership, with ones largely drawn from feminism, which centre on equality and independence. Depending on how long-term attachments to the farm are viewed, this can either enable female members of the community to build their life in a freer manner than their male counterparts or detach them from a culture they want to remain part of. On the other hand, male respondents were usually tied into traditional farming frameworks around being a ‘worker’ and/or a ‘farmer’ with all this entailed for their functional and formal relationship with the farm while simultaneously incorporating some of the key points from the individualisation model around mobility and choice into their lives. It should again be pointed out that there was little obvious resentment on the part of young men in how they viewed their sisters’ relationship with the farm and their ability to escape the responsibility of working on it during their childhood or future ownership of it. Although on some level they have an equal capacity to spatially distance themselves from this duty, for the present at least, some male participants are bound on, what Bourdieu (1977) describes as the level of habitus, to the farm—something that will be very difficult for them to shrug off.
While actors might appear to be in the process of building a discrete life, its foundations are often firmly entrenched in parameters delimited by parental attitudes, familial and cultural norms, societal trends and so on. This demonstrates that one cannot look at an actor’s identity as a liquid and relatively discrete concept as Bauman (1995) appears to suggest but rather as an amalgamation not only of their own habitus and experiences but also of external influences. Their upbringing on a farm has positioned them within something more permanent and solid than that which is available in the late modern society with its emphasis on the transient and the now. Entrenched within their lives is an intergenerational relationship embedded in a temporal continuum as opposed to the reflexive biographical focus on current life (Giddens 1991; 1994) as if somehow the past is erasable. The desire or need to keep the farm within the family for all that it represents of a shared past, in a real or imagined sense, represents a longing to not be liquid in the manner that Bauman (1995) suggests. A return visit to the homeplace has the potential to trigger memories and reposition actors, however, temporarily not only within their childhood but also in a framework that includes earlier generations of their family. The past is not forgotten but, instead, is an omnipresent part of how they grew up and construct their movement into adulthood. This is true even for those who on the surface appear to be ignoring their parents’ footsteps by detaching from farming culture. This group retain a deep and affective emotional attachment to a past whether this is willingly embraced or not that incorporates their own personal memories blended with parental experiences and historical familial figures. Thus, when one speaks of belonging or biographical and identity building one cannot look at it in isolation but as part of a wider chain that stretches from the past into the future. This is visible in the acceptance of clearly gendered roles and norms in terms of both functional and formal belonging. These are not only largely acknowledged and incorporated into their sense of self and their family but, additionally, are expected to be passed down into the next generation with their assistance as well. However, in emphasising the importance of history to the relationship individuals develop with the farm, it should not be seen as fixed since the meanings imputed to this can change over time. One powerful way continuity is facilitated is through the memories individuals associate with their childhoods on the farm. The farm and the work that was done on it functions as a repository of memories and as a way of
binding families together into the future despite the different paths their lives might take.

**Section 10.8.2 Belonging**

Belonging to the farm is partially about the development of a deep thread of obligation and morality, of knowing and doing the right thing not just by the family but also the farm. This is true of those who are perceived as having a strong set of markers of belonging such as participants who are likely to succeed to the farm or those who had the role of ‘workers’ but, equally, those who do not fit into these categories. For some of the cohort there is a practically manifested lifelong commitment and obligation infused into the relationship they have with their background. This can create a personal feeling of satisfaction—of having an opportunity to perform a role they were destined for or socialised into. However, for others it causes a dull but constant feeling of foreboding—that in being forced to take the role of the ‘farmer’ alternative careers or lifestyles are excluded or at least limited. That is not to say that other participants who are non-successors or ‘helpers’ are detached from their background or from on-going emotional responses to it. The commitment of the ‘helper’ while less visible is expressed in the assistance they provided on the farm throughout their childhoods, which often continues into the present and by their wish to see the farm retained. The strong desire of many female participants to remain linked to this community through othering themselves from urban place, personal or identity attachments and their deep emotional and proprietorial affiliation to their homeplace demonstrates that theirs is a commitment of an enduring duration.

The continued importance of preserving the farm in the family among almost the entire cohort is not based solely on pleasing their parents, repaying a debt of gratitude to them or guilt about letting the farm pass out of their hands—as if it is only negative emotions or the wishes of others that serve to influence their actions. It is also about a positive—of actively wanting to see the farm kept in the family in all it symbolises for them. The significance attached to this idea indicates that in the construction of belonging in the farming community the land remains a central part of its members’ attitudes and values. In some cases, there is a separation here
between the idea of the landholding and the farm in how a fervent desire to see the farm preserved is not necessarily accompanied by similarly intense feelings about maintaining it as a productive unit. It should be noted that not all participants feel strongly about the farm being kept in their family with some seeming to be quite ambivalent about this or pragmatic. This is usually linked to parental attitudes, socialisation processes or perceptions about the relative brevity of the connection between the family and the farm. However, even those who dislike the farm and the possibility of returning to it do not feel able to sell the farm if their parents appear to think otherwise.

There are significant contradictions in the cohort around attitudes to rural Ireland with some having quite a strong love-hate relationship with this on a practical and symbolic level. While there is affection and security there is resentment and a constraining kind of surveillance. Part of their dilemma comes from the linkages they have with the local and farming communities as it can both root them and bound them. Many perceive themselves as representing the continuation of a sanguineous relationship and lineage with the specific homeplace and farming in general stretching back through generations of sacrifice aimed at remaining solidly attached to one place. There is an unbroken sense of pride, continuity and rootedness in this. Interwoven throughout the narratives was a recurring if obliquely expressed idea: I am of more than just me-I am a collection of parts of parents, grandparents, namesakes, land, geography, historical and family events, old wounds, old scores both settled and unsettled and private and public triumphs that all serve to push me towards and pull me from my roots, my homeplace and my culture. Yet while this gives rise to powerful feelings of pride, knotted through this is the fact that this can become a burden to be carried into the transition to adulthood and beyond-a weight of expectations either lived up to or defied serving to bound and shape actors. This internal conflict is further complicated by virtue of being set against a societal backdrop, which according to Giddens (1991; 1994) encourages and promotes the here and now-of living for and in a particular moment and making decisions based on individual needs and preferences and shifting societal dynamics.
Their belonging to the farm is the fullest of who they are on a deep and intrinsic level and, yet, for many of the participants in the future it will neither have room to be practically manifested nor any visible outlet since they will not be given the farm. Whatever the nature and extent of their socialisation into the different dimensions of attachment that shaped their belonging the experiential framework of the farm is what they grew up and into. In order to create a deep-seated emotional loyalty the virtues of protecting the homeplace are drilled in so that even when there are occasional complaints, normally actors accept financial and physical hardships, denials and the need for sacrifice as a part of their life. This socialisation is not confined only to the chosen successor or the ‘farmer’ but rather burrows its way into the habitus of all the family’s offspring. The majority of the cohort, both successors and non-successors, conform to this view and those who do not seem to be driven more by parental attitudes towards the farm than it beginning within themselves. As this thesis argued it is not always true that farm youth seek to hold onto this belonging; with some looking to escape and all having pulled away in some manner, but at some level their proprietorial relationship with the farm continues as they move into adulthood.

While the preservation of the farm is based on a desire to retain a means of making a livelihood it is also grounded in deeper layers of meaning. It goes beyond the still scarring collective wounds of the Famine or the perception by outsiders of farmers greedily clutching at an acre of sodden bog or a field with more rocks than clay. Instead, it relates to an intense yearning to belong, to be etched into a timeless panoply of the memorialised and revered in an intergenerational family continuum. It seems to touch a primal part of the soul beyond the descriptive or analytical prowess of a sociologist and speaks to an almost physical wish to be rather than to do, to belong and to be remembered rather than to merely exist and then vanish. It is against this backdrop that children’s lives in the farming community are shaped and formed. It is against the fields and ditches of the farm, not just in their physical boundaries but also their mental equivalent that actors clash against and clamour to either cling onto or to escape-sometimes a process that takes places in the same moment in the same person. For no matter how detached an individual becomes
through the process of their transition to adulthood it is the homeplace where, at least for the moment, a fundamental need to belong can be met and manifested.

As frequently pointed out in this thesis this cohort’s socialisation into the life of the farm on a functional, informal or formal level and into the communities it is nested within in terms of social attachments will continue to influence them in some way even as they make their own way in life. This is because from an early age it is drummed in to protect the farm, to go without, to watch and be part of the gnawing worry of rain beat a ripened crop, to listen anxiously for cattle prices and to feel the low thrum of tension as a dreaded letter arrives from the bank. And, yet, what is not said or openly contemplated in the family is as powerful—it is rarely suggested to give in and sell even where this might provide security and respite against cold financial winds. For this farm is where the family belongs so that is where they must remain regardless of the cost to the family or its individual members. Within this it appears to be the case that contrary to what Beck and Giddens claim in their concepts of the DIY or reflexive biography it is not the single individual who counts but the whole unit. If jarring sacrifices must be made in terms of reluctantly taking on the farm or not seeking a share of the estate then this is usually done irrespective of the dilemmas arising out of this. However, while in the minds of the participants this might appear to be a natural feature of farm life this is a carefully constructed idea. As the narratives of a small number of participants highlight some parents are willing to act against community norms and in doing this push their children into a life off the farm even if this might result in the eventual sale of the farm. This detachment is dependent on factors such as the relationship between parents and the farm or their hopes for their children to have an easier life than they had. The chain of succession and formal ownership of the farm seems to be a major component in the loyalty that people feel towards the farm. It is not necessarily because of avariciously wanting to hold on to the land as much as their perceived historical attachment of the family to the farm.

Even for those who will not take on the role of the ‘farmer’ in the future or were ‘helpers’ and whose movement away from farming and the homeplace is permanent,
the desire to represent themselves as members of the farming community can be strong. Through their use of, for example, self-labelling and othering they position themselves as insiders in their community. This demonstrates that it is not just the past that they want to align themselves with in their (re)construction of their childhoods within the rural idyll framework but the present and future too, if only in an identity they claim on a symbolic level. Thus, belonging has emblematic connotations in the farming community that represents a continued association with a particular set of values and way of viewing the world. Belonging is also a porous but solid frame, which takes into account personal narratives with all the potential influences that can be brought to bear on it, whilst at the same time allowing space for new effects to emerge from current circumstances.

Undoubtedly, the family’s relationship with the farm is based on its capacity to provide an income but it runs deeper than this. The farm is presented by the cohort as a combination of a memorial to previous generations and something open and indeed needing to adapt in order to keep up with changing conditions in agriculture and society. The farm is a working manuscript where the efforts of previous generations will always linger on, if only in the physical infrastructure of the place but, yet, it must be constantly transformed to produce new responses to problems and trends. This causes families to alter strategies and shift, for instance, how their functional or formal attachments to it are developed. If the farm is a palimpsest of the past, it can be for the present, and just as there is something enduring about the physical landscape, the soil and the cycle of birth and death that grounds farming practices this can be philosophically represented in how the farm is preserved into the next generation as well. The farm here becomes almost an active verb rather than a passive noun and is conceived of in a quasi-anthropomorphic framework. It is a holder of memories, childhoods, emotional and physical ties. It is not necessarily the case that the urge to retain ownership of the farm is driven by a folkloric desire to prevent a repeat of the Famine by keeping the land. Instead, it is partially driven by a desire to hold on to the past-to remain connected to both a personal and a familial linkage-a thread stretching through the triumph and heartbreak of the generations. This brings the idea of the landholding beyond the popular myth of farmers’ grasping and clutching at an acre of soil with the breath of the Famine and
impoverishment tapping at their back. This image is trapped in a dour portrayal of farming families willingly sacrificing all before it including their children. Instead, its preservation could be part of a positive attempt to remain rooted in a history and a landscape both physical and mental that is older and bigger than them and which represents a stubborn refusal to yield or be defeated. Nevertheless, as this thesis shows, parents seek to counterbalance this with creating futures for their children through the use of education, which could ultimately lead them away from the holding and to the demise of their family’s relationship with it.
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Appendix A

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

What impact has growing up in a farming family had on you and your future?
I am a PhD student at NUI, Galway carrying out a study on the experiences of
growing up in an Irish farming family and the impact this has on young people’s
identity, attitudes and choices. I come from a farming background and I think it is
important to highlight issues relating to the outlook for farm life in Ireland.

- I am interested in interviewing male and female third-level students in NUI,
Galway who grew up on a farm.
- If you agree to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and
a consent form to sign.
- It is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you choose to take part you
are free to withdraw at any stage.
- If you choose to participate you will be asked to take part in an interview
about your experiences growing up on a farm and the influence it has had on
you, your identity and the decisions you have made about your future.
- With your permission this interview will be audio recorded, transcribed and
used as part of my PhD research. The recordings will be stored securely and
will be destroyed after the transcriptions have been made. The information
will be kept confidentially and written in such a way as to protect your
anonymity.
- If you would like me to give you feedback about the results of this research I
will be happy to do so.

If you have any questions about the research please do not hesitate to contact the
researcher.

If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone
independent and in confidence, you may contact the Chairperson of the NUI,
Galway Research Ethics Committee.

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93 Please note that while the original document contained the contact details of the researcher and the
Research Ethics Committee they have been deleted here.
Appendix B

Aisling She is twenty four, comes from a dairy farm in the South-East and is a postgraduate student. Her sisters work in health care. She helped on the farm as a child and is interested in it but does not want to become a farmer. She faces difficult decisions about the future of the farm since she does not want to live at home, or become a farmer, but is anxious not to sell the land. The farm has been in the paternal line of her family for about two hundred years. She would like to live in a rural community when she is older but probably not in her home community.

Andrew He is in his late teens, comes from a dairy farm in the North-West and is an undergraduate student. His siblings are all university educated professionals. He has no interest in farming but worked on the holding extensively growing up. The future of the farm is uncertain since none of the family’s offspring wish to take it over, so it might be divided up between all the children and sold. He does not to be given it because he wants to build his own life elsewhere. It has been in the family for more than seventy five years.

Audrey She is twenty six, comes from a small sheep and cattle farm in the West and is a postgraduate student. Her siblings work in a variety of fields such as health care and most are university educated. She helped her father on the farm growing up. She has little attachment to the farm and is disenchanted with agricultural practices. It was passed down from her paternal grandfather and she accepts that it will probably be sold in the future. She is not connected to her local community either and while she would possibly live in rural Ireland it will not be in the home community.

Ben He is nineteen, comes from a beef and sheep farm in the Mid-West and is an undergraduate student. Two of his siblings are students and one works abroad. His family manage but do not own the farm. He worked on the farm growing up and
enjoyed it. He would like to have a smallholding of his own in the future and to travel.

**Brendan** He is thirty three, comes from a beef farm in the Border region and is an undergraduate student. His siblings have all left home and established themselves elsewhere in management and the arts. As he worked on the farm a lot growing up and because his siblings have all left, he will probably succeed to the farm in the future. He is reluctant to take it over because of its social isolation and poor financial prospects but does not want to sell it out of love for farming and loyalty to his father. Ideally, he would like to do postgraduate studies and travel.

**Brian** He is in his late teens, comes from a sheep farm in the Border region and is an undergraduate student. Neither of his parents grew up in his local community but his father’s family have long had ties with the area. He helped out growing up but will not inherit the farm and his parents do not want him to become a farmer. The land will be left to a sister and he will be given other property. He feels guilty but relieved about not getting the farm and does not know if it will be possible for him to live at home again.

**Bridget** She is twenty three, comes from a dairy farm in the Mid-West and is a postgraduate student. All her siblings are university educated with some having returned to farming and others work in health care and teaching. The farm has been in her family since at least her paternal grandfather’s time. She helped on the farm growing up but had little active interest in it. Her younger brother will succeed to the farm, which she is pleased with. She would consider buying it from him if he were to choose to sell it in the future. She would like to return home to live after she finishes university.

**Conor** He is twenty, comes from a dairy farm in the Mid-West and is an undergraduate student. His siblings work in a variety of fields such as IT and administration. He helped out on the farm growing up but did not like it and avoided it as much as he could. His family have been on this property for the past fifty years.
His brother who works part-time on the farm will be given the holding. Conor is happy about this as his brother has the determination to build it up. He does not want to live at home again permanently.

**Donal** He is twenty seven, comes from a dairy farm in the Mid-West and is a postgraduate student. His sisters are university educated and have jobs in the IT and media industry. He worked on the farm when he was younger. Growing up he had no ambition to become a farmer and his parents encouraged him to pursue his education. The farm has been in his family for at least a couple of generations. He is regretful but resigned to the farm being leased out or sold in the future. He will have to travel abroad for career development purposes but would like to return to live in rural Ireland in the future.

**Florence** She is twenty six, comes from a cattle and horse farm in the Border region and is a postgraduate student. She is an only child but is unsure about whether she wants to be given the farm. There are few career opportunities for her at home so it might be passed on to a member of her extended family. She would like to keep some small parts of it for nostalgic reasons. She is uncertain about whether she will live in Ireland in the future. She helped on the farm when she was younger. The farm has only been in its current format since her father’s time as it is an amalgamation of land inherited from various relatives.

**George** He is twenty two, comes from a sheep and horse farm in the Midlands and is an undergraduate student. He happily worked on the farm growing up out of love for it and loyalty to his father. He considers himself to be a capable farmer but wants to build his own life in the immediate future. His long-term involvement with the farm depends on whether he can find work nearby. There are no definite succession strategies but the land might be divided up equally between him and his sisters. It came together in its current acreage in his father’s time.
**Harry** He is eighteen, comes from a cattle farm in the Border region and is an undergraduate student. His two brothers are both likely to go into agriculture but he hates helping on the farm and only does so with extreme reluctance. He preferred to assist his mother in the house. The farm was passed down through the maternal side of his family. The farm will probably be left to his older brother, which Harry is happy about. He would like to travel but would have no problem living near home in the future.

**James** He is twenty four, comes from a dairy and beef farm in the Mid-West and is an undergraduate student. His sister moved away a long time ago and one brother works part-time at home on the farm. He hated most work on the farm growing up and is deeply relieved that his older brother will take over the land in the future. His family have an extensive historical connection to the farm and in order to preserve this he would be willing to run the farm in the event of his brother’s incapacity. He would like to live somewhere in rural Ireland but not near his homeplace.

**Jane** She is in her early twenties, comes from a cattle and sheep farm in the West and is a postgraduate student. Her siblings’ career paths range from teaching to construction. She helped on the farm growing up and wants to return to her home community after she finishes her education. Her family have been on this farm for three hundred years and she is happy her brother will succeed. Since childhood all the siblings have known he will get the farm and were steered down according paths of education or farming.

**Jennifer** She is nineteen, comes from a cattle and tillage farm in the South-East and is an undergraduate student. Her siblings are mostly still in school. The farm has been in her family since at least her paternal great-grandfather’s time. She loved working on it when she was growing up. She does not know what will happen to the farm since none of her siblings, as of yet, have shown a strong interest in taking it on. She would be willing to do so to keep it in the family but only when she is older.
**Joan** She is twenty two, comes from a cattle and poultry farm in the Border region and is an undergraduate student. One of her sisters is in university and one works in health care. She worked a lot on the farm. Her sisters have no interest in it and refused to work intensively on it. She has very ambivalent feelings towards the farm and the local community and does not want to take over the holding. Her father inherited the farm from his grandparents who bought it. She does not know what will happen to the property in the future but with the exception of the house would be indifferent to it being sold. She would like to travel and does not see herself living in the countryside in the near future.

**Joseph** He is twenty two, comes from a small cattle and horse farm in the West and is an undergraduate student. His siblings are in teaching and education. He works a lot on the farm and loves doing so. He continues to live at home with his parents. The farm was bought by his maternal grandfather, but its future is uncertain and depends on where he and his brother live and work. It might be left idle but it will not be sold.

**Julia** She comes from a dairy and beef farm in the Mid-West and is an undergraduate student. Her siblings are mostly still in full-time education. Her parents have their own farms, which they inherited from their respective parents. Julia disliked being outside on the farm and so chose to take up a helping role in the house. One of her sisters is likely to be given the farm. If this does not happen Julia would take it on because she knows how important it is to her father. She does not know what will happen to her mother’s land. She would like to leave Ireland and work abroad.

**Katie** She is from a sheep and horse farm in the Border region and is an undergraduate student. Her siblings are all in school or university. She helped out a lot on the farm growing up. Her role has gradually been taken over by her little brother who loves farming. The holding has been in her family since at least her paternal grandfather’s time. The succession plans for the farm are uncertain-she
would possibly take it on but she is aware that her father would like her brother to do so and in doing so keep it in the family name. She is unsure if she would like to return to live in her home community again.

**Lorraine** She is twenty one, comes from a cattle and sheep farm in the West and is an undergraduate student. Her siblings are all in professional careers ranging from engineering to teaching. She helped on the farm growing up, and while she is knowledgeable about it she does not have an active interest in it. Her parents bought the farm after they married. She does not know what will happen to it, but it might be leased out or taken on by one of her brothers. She is somewhat indifferent to the idea of it being sold. She wants to live in or near a city when she is older.

**Maura** She is twenty seven, comes from a cattle farm in the Mid-West and is a postgraduate student. Her siblings are all university educated and none work full-time in agriculture. She worked a lot on the farm growing up and loved doing so because of the close bonds it created in her family. Her parents bought the farm and are likely to sell it again to fund their retirement. Maura and her sisters are resigned to this but are not very happy with this idea. Her brothers, by contrast, pulled away from the farm a long time ago. She would like to live in a rural area when she is older.

**Myles** He is in his late teens, comes from a cattle farm in the West and is an undergraduate student. His siblings are all in school and he continues to live at home with his family. His father is a part-time farmer and the landholding has been expanded down through the generations. He works on the farm a lot, which he enjoys and strongly identifies with his farming background. The issue of succession has not been discussed, but while he might be given it, it is unlikely that this will happen. His father does not encourage him to follow in his path but, instead, wants him to get a good job off the farm. He would like to travel but come back to live in Ireland again in the future.
Oisin  He is nineteen, comes from a cattle farm in the West and is an undergraduate student. His siblings are all still in school. He worked on the farm growing up and enjoys doing so more now when he goes home, than as a child. The farm has been in his father’s family probably since the 1950s. He would love to be a farmer but does not think it is financially viable for him to enter this profession. He does not know what will happen to the land in the future since no one has expressed an interest in becoming a farmer. He might come home to it when he is a lot older. His parents have encouraged him to follow his own path in life.

Orla  She is in her late teens, comes from a dairy farm in the Mid-West and is an undergraduate student. Her siblings are in university and school. The farm has passed down two generations on her father’s side. She worked on the farm growing up. The succession issue has not been fully decided but it is likely to go to either her brother or her sister.

Paula  She is nineteen, comes from a cattle farm in the Border region and is an undergraduate student. Her siblings are students—one is in an agricultural college and the rest are in school. She helped on the farm growing up but did not enjoy it. The farm has been in her paternal family for many generations. One or both of her brothers will be bequeathed the holding. She is grateful for this as she would like to see it kept in the family and would consider buying it if they were to contemplate selling it. At the same time she cannot understand why they would want to go into farming. She does not like many aspects of her home community but could possibly see herself living back there again when she is a lot older.

Rita  She is twenty two, comes from a cattle farm in the West and is an undergraduate student. She has no siblings and will inherit the farm. She does not know what she will do with it but will not sell it. It has been in her father’s family for many generations. She helped on the farm and while she loves the homeplace she is not interested in actively taking on the running of it.
Seamus He is eighteen, comes from a cattle farm in the Midlands and is an undergraduate student. His sisters have all moved away from home and are in a variety of professions such as teaching. He worked on the farm growing up but does not like it. The farm has been in his father’s family for a number of generations. He detests the culture and attitudes of rural Ireland but will have to take on the farm when he is older. He has no choice but to do this partially because his father expects him to.

Shauna She is twenty one, comes from a cattle farm in the Border region and is a postgraduate student. Her sister went to university but her brothers did not and continue to live near home. She helped a little when she was growing up but her parents refused to let her take on a role as a ‘worker’. She resented her involvement on the farm when she was younger but is more interested now. Likewise, as she has gotten older she has developed deeper connections to the local area. The holding is a combination of her mother and father’s inheritances. Her older brother who loves farming will succeed to the land, which she is happy about.

Susan She is twenty five, comes from a dairy and cattle farm in the Mid-West and is a postgraduate student. Her brothers both attended third-level education but returned to the farm full-time and her sister works in the technology sector. She helped on the farm when she was growing up and likes to return home to visit. The property has been in the father’s side of her family for a hundred years and will be given to her two brothers. She is glad of this because they always worked hard on the farm. She would not like to live in her home community again.

Thomas He is in his early twenties, comes from a dairy farm in the South-East and is an undergraduate student. His sisters are all settled away from home and his brother is a full-time farmer. He helped a little when he was younger but was not very involved since he had no interest in it and because his older brother was already working on it. The farm has been in his family for hundreds of years and his brother
will succeed. Thomas is happy for him to do so because the farm will be kept in the family and it enables him to build his life elsewhere.
Appendix C

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Exploring the impact of growing up in a farming family on the transition to adulthood.

Name of Researcher: Anne Cassidy

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated....... (version.....) for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. □

2. I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and have had enough time to consider the information. □

3. I agree to this interview being audio recorded. □

4. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected. □

5. I agree to take part in the above study. □

Name of Participant Date Signature

Researcher Date Signature
Appendix D

Dear Ms Cassidy

RE: Ethical Approval for “Exploring the impact of growing up in a farming family on the transition to adulthood”

I write to you regarding the above proposal which was submitted for Ethical review. Having reviewed your response to my letter, I am pleased to inform you that your proposal has been granted APPROVAL.

All NUI Galway Research Ethic Committee approval is given subject to the Principal Investigator submitting an annual report to the Committee. The first report is due on or before 31st March 2012. Please see section 7 of the REC’s Standard Operating Procedures for further details which also includes other instances where you are required to report to the REC.

Yours Sincerely

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Vice Chairperson
Research Ethics Committee