

## **“Tough and tender”? Agricultural masculinities and fathering activities**

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### **Abstract**

This article is concerned with how hegemonic masculine activities comply with farming fathers' caregiving to possibly change masculinity and produce gender equality. Based on interviews with farming fathers, several activities with children are narrated as part of their fathering practices, such as hunting, outdoor leisure activities. These are firmly within traditional male areas and serve to uphold hegemonic masculinity. This notwithstanding, combined with caregiving, they show a fluidity and hybridization of masculinity in which the “tough” is combined with the “tender.” The fathers also report avoiding prioritizing work at the expense of their children and that they do more caregiving in the home than previous generations, although mothers are still in charge. This implies blurring, but nevertheless conservation, of gender boundaries. A dismantling of rural hegemonic masculinity still seems to be a distance away.

Keywords: fatherhood, farmers, rural masculinity, caregiving, gender equality

### **Introduction**

This article combines two areas of research: rural masculinity studies and fatherhood studies. Research on rural men and masculinity started in the mid-1990s, and since then has produced a rich body of literature (see reviews by Brandth and Haugen 2016; Pini and Mayes 2018). Despite the progress being made in this area, interrogations into masculinity and rurality

largely remain on the fringes of scholarship on masculinity and has only to a small extent engaged in conversation with critical masculinity theory. It has largely failed to address the implications of masculinity as constituted in relation to femininity and other masculinities (Pini and Mayes 2018). This article attempts to meet the call for more awareness of the gender regime in rural men and masculinities studies.

Studies of rural men and masculinities have largely concentrated on the most recognizable embodiments of rural masculinity such as farmers, loggers, hunters and fishermen with traits such as strength, endurance and domination over nature and the environment. The rural industries have thus contributed to shaping a homogeneous picture of men who live and work in rural areas, overshadowing softer characteristics of masculinity (Campbell et al. 2006:3; Lobao 2006), and creating conceptualizations of rural masculinity that have very different associations than childcare. Until recently, fatherhood and fathering practices have been absent from the literature on men and masculinity in rural society.

There exist distinct commonalities in the masculinity of men living in the same area in the same time, since masculinity is socially constructed through local discourses and conventions (Author). Notwithstanding, following Connell (1995), rural research has established that rural masculinities are dynamic in nature, showing how images and practices evolve over time (Brandth 1995; Ní Laoire 2002; Ferrell 2012), and how they are articulated across different scales. Yet, tensions exist between old and new subjectivities, indicating both a persistence of male dominance and a potential for change. Ní Laoire (2002:16) calls this a “traditional-modern dualism” in rural masculinity following agricultural restructuring processes. For instance, the dominant construction of the farmer – that of an able-bodied worker engaged in hard and dirty work – is found to exist along with, or perhaps change into, a new form of service-minded masculinity when farmers engage in farm tourism (Author).

While research on men and masculinity in agriculture has obscured aspects of fatherhood that go beyond merely recognizing their parental status, fathers’ involvement in caring for children has been an important focus for scholars concerned with changes in masculinity more broadly (Doucet 2006; Johansson and Klinth 2007; Dermott 2008; Aarseth 2011; Eerola and Mykkanen 2015; Hunter et al. 2017). The international literature suggests that fathering has shifted from breadwinning only towards an increased involvement in the care of children, and thus towards masculinity characterized by more attentive and nurturing practices (Hanlon 2012). However, there is no uniform pattern of change reported. For example, scholars have

documented that work continues to dominate men's time use and identity construction, which is in line with the ideal of the provider who is described as detached and distant (Ranson 2001; Thébaud 2010).

In this paper, I am interested in the combination of agricultural masculinity and fathering practices. In many ways, these are antithetical concepts, one of them constructed as "tough" and the other as "tender." Based on an interview study with farming fathers, the paper discusses the question of how farming masculinity and fathering practices sit alongside of and influence each other, addressing the implications of masculinity as constituted in relation to femininity and other masculinities. In choosing this focus, I hope to be able to explore processes through which rural hegemonic masculinities may change – or perhaps fall?

### **Review of the literature: Rural masculinity and fathering**

As established in the research literature, there is a fundamental connection between masculinity and rurality, and the two aspects feed off each other (Little 2002; Cloke 2005). Rural communities have been characterized by rough masculinities in direct interaction with the natural resources, in which hegemonic discourses originating from the primary industries have emphasized physical strength, stamina and hard work. Ideas of domination and control over the land and the farm family have been a key theme. When the environment is imagined as wild, dangerous and hostile, hegemonic masculinity in farming rests on the ability to tame these elements to help maximize production (Bryant 1999). Hence, the mastery of demanding and dirty manual labor outdoors are important signifiers of agricultural manliness. Likewise, the gendered nature of the farm space and farm practices have been central themes in research on agricultural masculinities. In early scholarship on agricultural masculinity, the focus was directed at these aspects, which showed how men's tools and machinery supported the dominant ideal and functioned as symbols of masculinity that served to exclude women (Brandth 1995; Saugeres 2002b; Pini 2008).

One dominant ideal of agricultural masculinity is the so-called "good farmer" (Burton 2004). This norm has been related to production-oriented goals, hard work, tidy farms and good stockmanship (Riley 2016: 96) in addition to keeping the family name on the farm (Cush and Macken-Walsh 2018). Good farmers are also assessed by men's experience-based competence, which is epitomized by sons learning to farm and inheriting the farm from their fathers (Saugeres 2002a). In agriculture, patriarchy and patrilineal farm succession constitute

an important context for father-son relationships (Peter et al. 2005), framing farm children as a low-paid labor supply on family farms (Riley, 2009). Heggem (2014) has explained the persistence of the good farmer ideology by male farmers' fears of losing their sense of self, meaning and socio-cultural rewards, particularly in a time of ongoing transformations. The power of masculinity in its traditional or "monologic" form (Peter et al. 2000) also tends to downgrade men who do not fulfill its ideals.

While definitions of what it means to be a "good farmer" are imbued with ideas of male dominance over the elements, to allow nature to disrupt or destroy the process of production may mean to fail as a farmer. Recent research has considered the unsustainable character of hegemonic masculinity in farming, and shown what may happen when ordeals such as natural disasters and economic hardships put masculinity to test (Alston and Kent 2008; Tyler and Fairbrother 2013). When men confront circumstances beyond their control, the felt inability to live up to masculine ideals are found to result in depression, and even suicide (Ni Laiore 2002; Alston and Kent 2008; Bryant and Garnham 2015).

The ideals, which assume a high degree of stoicism, seem to undermine men's mental health (Courtenay 2006), therefore preventing them from expressing distress and seeking help before it overwhelms them (Coen et al. 2013). However, Roy et al. (2014), who investigated how masculinities influence help seeking, find that farm men adopt a variety of strategies, some of which demonstrate that these traditional ideals of masculinity are under pressure to change.

Although it is impossible for all men to meet ideals of hegemonic masculinity, rural/agricultural men grow up in a culture that encourages characteristics such as able-bodiedness, emotional independence and a denial of weakness. It is a puzzling question as to why such ideals of hegemonic masculinity among farmers are found to be so unflinching. Nonetheless, an emerging body of work does suggest that some men are able to shape masculinities that are considered "positive" and conducive to health and well-being (Lomas 2013).

Masculinity and fathering vary according to cultures, situations and places. Obviously, there is a complex interplay between the traditional ideologies of agricultural masculinity and the ideals of the "new father," with fathers found to combine elements from both spheres of activity. In Krange and Skogen's (2007) study, young rural men who were also fathers handled their situation in a way that was both flexible and creative. They shared domestic

work and caregiving with their wives, while at the same time engaging in activities that mediated central male values and gender norms, namely hunting. They adopted what is viewed as feminine values (caring, emotions and sensitivity) without departing from or rejecting masculinity, and hence were able to incorporate caring within a conventional masculine frame. They could be both “tough and tender” (Duncanson 2015), without necessarily undermining hegemonic masculinity in any fundamental way. It seems that hegemony may persist even though new elements are appropriated. As Bye (2009) observed, it may be easier to add new elements than to remove older ones. In her study of young hunters in rural Norway, she observed that men continued to express “monologic” characteristics, although still incorporating more emotional openness and family involvement. This ability to adapt may be precisely what makes hegemonic masculinities so powerful (Demetriou 2001).

In remote places, the “great outdoors” is valorized as a masculine space. Another take on this problematic is done by scholars who report how fathers are more able than mothers to choose their parenting activities, and thus to make them fit with activities considered to be masculine (Miller 2011, 45). In Brandth and Kvande’s (1998) early study of fathers on parental leave, taking walks in the woods, engaging in outdoor activities and playing are favored activities even when children are very young. Fathers are generally reported to spend the bulk of their childcare time in the more fun activities, such as playing and sports (Craig 2006; Miller 2011, Cohen et al. 2015). Sport seems to be a particularly important site for fathers to connect with their children. Even rural fathers with a disability report sport, physicality and the outdoors to be central elements of good fathering (Pini and Conway 2017), thereby reflecting the construction of fathering identities (Harrington 2006). Creighton et al. (2015), who compared rural and urban fathering practices, found that regardless of place, outdoor activities and play were considered a legitimate masculine endeavor that functioned as a means of emotional engagement, spending time with children and teaching them survival skills.

In sum, empirical research has demonstrated that rural/agricultural masculinity are both change-resistant and prone to change. Hegemonic masculinity may shift styles and adopt new practices, and yet retain its dominance. Research showing a fundamental transformation in the gender order is ostensibly lacking. A pertinent question is therefore what involved fathering practices can do to dismantle hegemonic rural masculinity.

## **Theorizing change in hegemonic masculinity**

Some of the examples above reflect processes of hybridization where “hybrid masculinities” is a concept used to make sense of contemporary transformations in masculinity (Bridges and Pascoe 2014). The concept refers to “the mixing of two separate species,” with the concern in masculinity studies being with the ways that men incorporate elements of various “Others” into their own identity. Hybrid masculinities appropriate characteristics that have historically been used to marginalize other masculine and feminine identities. Consequently, hybridization may represent significant changes in the *expression* of masculinity, but the impact of hybrid masculinities on the gender system is more uncertain. Instead, as Bridges and Pascoe (2014, p. 247) argue, hybrid masculinities “shape, reflect and mask inequalities.” It may create an illusion that patriarchy has changed (p. 250) by discursively distancing hegemonic masculinity, by strategically borrowing performative styles and by obscuring boundaries. Normative constraints and social structure may be shifting. Even so, Bridges and Pascoe (2014) argue that these shifts have happened in ways that have sustained existing ideologies and systems of power and inequality “to advantage men collectively over women and some men over other men” (p. 247).

Michael Messner (2007) offers an example of hybrid masculinity in his article on muscle and compassion. He points at Schwarzenegger, the “Kindergarten Commando,” who during an election campaign represented hegemonic masculinity accentuating muscle, toughness, and the threat of violence, but which was followed by symbolic displays of compassion.

Tim Lomas (2013) introduces an approach similar to hybridization, which he calls “critical positive masculinity”. In the spirit of CSM he calls for an exploration of men and masculinities with greater sensitivity to the nuances and complexities of change. He argues that men may negotiate hegemonic masculinity to construct more “positive” masculine practices where caregiving is involved. Men’s potential for change, Lomas argues, does not normally mean active resistance to hegemonic norms and practices as complex social processes influence this change. Instead, care practices may be incorporated within conventional masculinities and in the process be able to both endorse and challenge existing masculine norms and practices (Lomas 2013, 177). Masculinity may thus be reframed to include caring as a necessary capacity as fathers.

Caring for children includes emotional aspects (love) as well as practical activities (leisure, playing, housework), the practical activities being the focus of this paper. If activities

transgresses previously gendered boundaries they may “have the potential to change masculinity by blurring the symbolic and social boundaries between masculinity and femininity” (Eisen and Yamashita 2017, 6).

Hegemonic masculinity was initially conceptualized as the form of masculinity that structures hierarchical gender relations among men, as well as between men and women (Connell 1987). The concept therefore has two dimensions: men’s patriarchal domination over women and the social ascendancy of some men over other, alternative or subordinated masculinities. Respectively, these two forms of hegemony are termed “external” and “internal” hierarchies (Demetriou 2001). The concept of “hegemonic masculinity” has attracted a wide range of critiques. Scholars have, for instance pointed out that it is problematic to include the two types of hierarchies in one unified concept or a single social-structural framework (Christensen and Jensen 2014). The two might not always work together, but instead act separately in some domains of life, so they might go through different processes of change and stability.

Due to its understanding of gender as dynamic, relational and imbued with power, hegemonic masculinity is open to change through struggles for hegemony in which older forms will be replaced by new ones (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 833). The theory should therefore be able to explain both change and persistence. Yet, according to Duncanson (2015, 241) the change aspect is theoretically underdeveloped. She suggests two stages of change, in which the first would be the adoption of traits, practices and values associated with femininity. This resembles hybridization – the process of change identified in much empirical research, and that can be superficial, but need not be so. This first step is necessary as a transitional stage, Duncanson contends, but a mere softening of masculinity is far from sufficient. The second stage would be the establishment of masculinities that are open to equality with women, and where hegemonic masculinity is dissolved. This is a more radical and fundamental process, in which the softening of masculinities (at least theoretically) does not just mean that an existing hierarchy is maintained or replaced with another, but that hierarchies are broken down and replaced with relations of equality (p. 242).

Although these theories are not concerned with fatherhood, we will use them to try to understand the meanings of possible change in masculinity caused by fathering practices in an agricultural setting. The question in this article is how involved fathering practices influence rural hegemonic masculinity. It is interested in the two stages of change and extent

to which hybridization processes changes masculinity to incorporate the softer qualities of care and whether we can identify a second stage change with greater gender equality. We discuss these questions by examining several fathering activities of contemporary farmers. The activities examined are hunting, leisure, work and childcare in the home.

## **Method and data**

Empirical narratives in this paper come from interviews with farming fathers in a local area in mid-Norway. The area represents some of the country's most fertile farmland, which supports both grain cultivation and animal husbandry. The farms also have considerable land that is not cultivated, but instead consists of forests and mountainous areas that the farmers use for recreation. All the farms in the study are family farms that have been passed down from father to son, and the current farmers have expanded and modernized the operation after taking over the farm.

The sampling criteria included having one or more children 10 years old or younger, and being an active farmer on a full- or part-time basis. Seven fathers, drawn from a larger sample of farmers, were interviewed. The interviewees were recruited by means of a person who knew the selected agricultural area well and suggested possible farms to contact. Five of the fathers were full-time farmers and two were part-time farmers, while their wives, with the exception of one, worked away from the farm either full- or part-time. They had one, two or three children. The children's ages ranged between 18 and one year.

The relationship between farm work and childcare in their lives was of particular interest in the study. Their work situation, working hours, the interface between home and work and the participation of children in farm work and leisure were all important aspects. The interviews were conducted on the farms that were visited, and a semi-structured interview guide was composed. We were interested in their answers to prepared questions, but at the same time we wanted the interviews to be explorative and open for initiatives from the interviewees. The interviews lasted between 1.5-2.5 hours, and took place in their homes. They were recorded and later transcribed; the total number of pages from each interview ranged from 20 to 46.

Ethical demands for confidentiality and anonymity are taken care of in this paper, in part by supplying limited background information and by using pseudonyms. We chose farms that



were located in the same agricultural area, but at enough of a distance from each other to avoid them identifying each other.

Analysis of the interview material has relied on repeated close readings, cut in several ways and analyzed from different conceptual frameworks, and with multiple focuses and research questions in mind. Thus, from the same set of data, order and pattern have been made in different ways in the reports and publications from the project (Authors 1,2). Analysis of the data has also been inseparable from the writing process, and the dialogue between data and theories have been pervasive.

## **Results**

### ***“My children come with me when I go hunting”***

Norwegian farmers own the right to hunt on their property, and this right is often shared with other residents in the rural community. Their motivations for hunting are harvesting, recreation and male bonding, as hunting for sport and trophies is regarded as improper in Norway (Bye 2009). Hunting is a typically masculine-gendered activity that requires handling guns and killing, and for long has been central to the construction of rural masculinity (Bye 2003). The farmers in this study hunt for moose, which is a deeply rooted cultural phenomenon in many rural areas, particularly in districts where these animals are numerous. Symbolically, it expresses important values and gender norms. According to Krange and Skogen (2007), moose hunting represents a collective identity, and at the same time a separate masculine sphere where norms other than family are important.

Five of the fathers in the study report how they bring their children along on hunting trips. The fathers themselves learned to hunt in their childhood, coming along with their fathers. Ewan’s recollection of the origins of his interest in hunting is thus typical: “I got interested in hunting when I was little and went with my father.” The fathers carry on this practice with their own children. Chris explained:

Yeah, my children come with me when I go hunting. (...) I would like to see them develop the same interest in hunting as I have. I have enjoyed hunting for a long time and I still enjoy it very much myself. I’m very concerned about teaching them healthy hobbies for the future.

Bringing children is a traditional, local practice. The hunt takes place during a couple of months in the autumn. It is therefore not a frequently occurring practice. The children came along as companions and observers, typically from the age of six-seven, and several of the men in the hunting party brought their children. Moose hunting requires walking quite a distance to get to the hunting area, so children had to be of school age, but some were carried by their fathers. For a young child, the challenges are considerable, such as walking with stealth and waiting patiently. Sitting on guard requires great patience and discipline so that the possibility of bringing down a moose is not diminished. Ewan recalled:

We [the children] sat there waiting and waiting and waiting . . . It sounds boring, I know, but we didn't really think so. (...) And, to search out the moose with the dog, it was great fun! I bought my first hunting rifle when I was 14.

Endurance and stamina are important elements of masculinity (Little 2002), and the gun and killing add to it. However, for the fathers bringing their children with them into the wilderness, this necessarily implied elements of care. One of them said:

It is quite natural ... yes, I can't quite give words to it because you do what must be done in relation to the children. You give them food, you keep an eye on them, dress them well, fix things and get them things. Keep them cheerful and see to it that they don't start crying.

The hunting trip required extra planning when children were coming along, as the fathers had to make sure their children were warm and dry since autumn weather is shifting and often wet and cold. They also had to assure themselves that the children did not go hungry or get too worn out, that they were safe and that they enjoyed themselves. This training activity of the young children implied a more nuanced sense of masculinity since they had to focus on nurture and not just the violent activity of hunting.

This activity is one in which men socialize with each other into normatively masculine behaviors and practices (Bye 2003). The wilderness is a setting where manhood is tested, and where masculinity is defined in relation to other men. For the children, this activity offers an opportunity to learn the central qualities of rural masculinity, and demonstrate their fitness for inclusion in a community of rural men. In this sense, hunting tends to fortify the boundaries between the genders – the external hierarchy. The young apprentices also contribute to maintaining an internal hierarchy.

Bringing the children along on the hunting trip may exemplify a hybridization of masculinity, as it combines the violent and tough activity of killing the game with the nurturing of children. Because this is not a new practice, it can hardly be interpreted as a change in masculinity, but instead shows how masculinity is fluid and can combine very different elements. Ostensibly, the masculine capacities they hold as hunters are used to incorporate the more feminine practice of caregiving without consequences for their reputation as “real” men.

***Being together: Leisure, not work***

As noted, the symbolic and physical conditions of rural/agricultural space have been central to rural masculinities. This dimension finds resonance in the value placed on activities in the natural environment in a wider sense than hunting. In appreciation of rural space, Ewan said: “I had a super childhood! For me, who is interested in farming, cattle and tractors and country life, with hunting and fishing as hobbies and stuff, I thought I was living in clover.” Living in the countryside, with lakes, forest and mountains practically at their doorstep, made the outdoors easily accessible, and this environment influenced what fathers and children did together. Gard, whose daughter was only one year old, said: “When she gets older I want to take her hiking, get her used to the mountains and the fjord and such. Be outdoors and teach her things there.” When Chris minded his children, he chose outdoor activities for them to do together: “I usually suggest that we go out in the nature and do something outside. Go for a walk or just do any kind of activity outside.”

Chris and his children spend a lot of time outside, both during the summer and in the wintertime. The farm is located close to the sea, so they often went down to the seashore where they had a small boat. During the summer, they went swimming in the ocean, and in the winter, they went cross-country skiing together. There are also wooded hills connected to the farm, and they used the entire area as a “playground”. He told:

This fall, we made a small hut out of some tree branches together, and we visit the hut from time to time and make sure it’s intact. And, we do some fishing together; we go down to the sea and we take little fishing trips with our boat. I try to rub my own interest for the outdoors off on the children.

It is interesting to note that Chris involved himself in building small huts with his children. In her study of how boys in a rural community in Norway construct masculine identities, Stordal (2017) describes how building huts is a favourite practice. She interprets it as a practice

through which children can learn and demonstrate skills of workmanship, and create a sense of belonging within a rural community of men across ages and generations (p. 72). Through outdoors activities with their children the fathers show their everyday involvement and emotional connection to them.

Attending organized activities for children was another central activity for the interviewed fathers. Organized leisure activities for fathers and children have increased in both rural and urban areas (Creighton et al. 2015), and today rural fathers are involved in many such activities together with their children. Their practices seemed to center around sports, games and the outdoors, in which the fathers were ready to respond to their children's initiatives concerning leisure interests. "The children, if they don't demand it, they would think it was very strange if the father did not join in. It has become normal," Bill said. Didrik confirmed this: "My youngest is very interested in football, so we spend time together watching the local team play their games. I enjoy it too, but it's mainly for his sake we go to the game." Arne said: "I do more things with my kids outside the farm than my father did.... I spend an awful lot of time accompanying them to football and skiing practice."

Ewan said that, like other fathers, he was "involved in driving them to practice, participating in their practice, and coming along to watch. It is fun! And I get to spend time with them. I think this is being a good father." In these places, fathers met other fathers, and they confirmed each other's identity as fathers and men. Chris explained: "Here, there are no macho norms saying that you are not supposed to have anything to do with your children. We appreciate our children and want to be together with them." In this way, the children were what made rural men come together.

That this represents a new area for farming men's fathering practices was reported by Ewan, who remembered well his own childhood and what he did together with his father:

I have more fun together with my kids! ... Whenever I was with my dad as a kid, I had to work. As a father, I have arranged for more time to be with my children, more fun and games! ... I probably spent just as many hours together with my dad, but it was work. With my kids, it is leisure time!

The changing rural context is part of the background for this shift: Now, most neighbors are not farmers; farmers' children want to join activities like other children and farm fathers want to be involved like other fathers in the rural community. They defined a good father in terms of participating in their children's activities and make it visible to others that they did so. This

redefinition is an indication of change in the moral obligations of fathering: Men are expected to be involved with and show interest in their children's activities, something which is in accordance with parenting norms in the wider society (Stefansen and Aarseth 2011).

The importance of being involved fathers was also illustrated by their aspiration not to let work come in the way for being with their children. They took care not to be defined as "traditional" or "bad" fathers because they worked too much. Farm work is flexible work, and they tended to make an effort to adjust work to the children, particularly when there was an added need for it. Didrik said:

I try to organize my work to prevent it governing their whole childhood, so that they won't say, "No, he can't do it because he has to go to the cowshed!" . . . that their childhood will not be marked by me working all the time!

Critically, he remembered that this was the case with his own father, who never took time off from work to prioritize the children. Chris told that, "Farming was a huge part of my childhood. I used to participate in the work, both inside the barn and in the fields during the harvest season and other times." Arne confirmed this by saying that, "My children aren't around me as much while I'm farming as I was around my father." They stressed that they wanted their children to have a childhood in which it was not expected that they do farm work.

The fathers assumed an identity of a father who was available for his children. The children live at their fathers' work site, and in comparing themselves to fathers in other occupations, they believed that farming gave them a greater possibility to be with their children than jobs with fixed hours located far from the home. According to Gard:

I think I have more time with her [daughter] than fathers who are away at work. In such cases, the child will wake up when they leave for work and go to bed a couple of hours after they return. They only get a few hours between dinner and bedtime.

Birger explained: "I regulate my working day as I wish. I have the milking and the barn and I can't change that, but otherwise I decide myself when to work or not, so definitely, this is an advantage for the children." It is interesting to note that spending time with the children meant taking time off from the ubiquitous farm work. This differed from the way they described their own childhoods, when being with their father implied having to join him at work.

Farm work was still narrated as time-consuming and important for the fathers' sense of masculine identity, but they seemed to challenge the idea that working *longer* necessarily meant working *better*. Farmers today are busy having to produce increased volumes with better quality in order to survive as farmers. Still, their self-respect did not seem so identified with hard work and toil, with no leisure time and holidays like in previous generations. In other words, priorities have changed. Moreover, the farmers seemed to set their children free from the expectation that they take over the farm. They invest masculine honor in monitoring their children in farm work and *teaching* them to become capable farmers in the future to a much smaller extent than did their fathers. This is an important change that particularly influences the father-son relationship in family farming; hence, it may possibly weaken the tie between masculinity and the patriarchal system in which farm succession has been so essential (Riley 2017).

In this section, we have seen a change in farmers' fathering practices towards a greater involvement, in which they are concerned with participating in children's outdoor leisure activities, and with avoiding work stealing all their time. This represents a change in farming men's fathering activities in the direction of combining the softer, caring elements with conventions of ideal masculinity. Nevertheless, it may also be interpreted as a praise of masculinity and the able body, and thus as a maintenance of the cultural ideal that links men to masculinity.

Concerning internal hegemony, the fathers aligned themselves with other rural fathers who did the same, thereby risking nothing. Interestingly, they positioned themselves against their fathers' generation, who mostly worked and were therefore less involved in children's activities. They also stressed their difference from other (non-farming/urban) fathers who had less flexibility to mind their children during the day, and were only available a few hours after work before their children's bedtime. In these ways, the internal hegemony among rural men is sustained, but in a way in which involved fatherhood is the position being elevated.

### ***Masculinity and caregiving in the home***

So far we have seen that several of the activities contain elements not commonly described as part of hegemonic masculine ideals among farming men. The third practice I will examine deals with their involvement in the home. Comparing themselves to previous generations of farmers, they stated that they did much more of the daily chores that had to do with children. Referring to his own father, Gard said: "He was a dad for *his* times, and I will try to be one in

*mine.*” In telling what he did differently than his dad, he underscored that “being present and having time for her [the daughter] is the most important thing.”

Generally, they described how they were involved in hands-on childcare to a larger degree than farming fathers were before them. This had become a matter of necessity because their wives worked outside the farm. However, doing more in the house did not mean that the gendered difference had disappeared. Their wives were in charge, although being away at work during the day as their husbands worked on the home site. Ewan said: “I think I have changed diapers as much as my wife, yes I think so. ... But it is she who has put them to bed the most, and she has bathed them more than me. ... She has done the most!” Gard, who recently became a father to his first child and took parental leave for 10 weeks, said: I did everything I could. I changed diapers, fed the baby, took walks with the stroller, put her to bed and got up at night – and I bathed her.” At the same time, he said that his partner had “changed more diapers, fed her more and washed more clothes.” According to Didrik, “It is my wife who prepares the baby’s food. I don’t fix porridge or dinner for the baby, no. And, likewise, well ... I put their clothes on, but she has to decide which clothes and find them for me.” Birger told how he had better time in the afternoon than his wife had because she had to do the housework after she returned from work. More time with the children did not seem to imply that the fathers did more housework. In this way, the wives contributed in the construction of masculinity by creating a complementary role for themselves that would also be subordinate.

The fathers constituted themselves as supporting players in the daily care routines. “She has done the most but I participated,” sums up how they described the division of care work in the farm family and their own role as supplementary and subservient. The father’s practices were dependent on the mother’s organization and management, her “orchestration” being necessary in order for the father to take an active part.

Men adapting these softer practices might mean a certain transformation of farm-based masculinity, but it did not seem to imply a loss of masculine status. Instead, they stated, “It was expected of me, and I expected of myself.” They proudly expressed their competences in care work, with the shift in this part of their identity project as being a modern man. This resembles what Johansson and Klinth (2008) observed, namely that acceptable masculinity with “strength” and competitiveness as defining characteristics is currently being re-coded into caregiving and connectedness. Birger said: “We are a bit influenced by the times. Now, it

is more common to be together with your kids, for the father. Earlier, it wasn't so important, I think. It has become very different." To a certain extent, it seems that fathering among farmers has changed in content and meaning in response to new gendered moralities. Some of them refer to the norms of "gender equality," indicating the change in the normative climate concerning gender and parenting in society in general.

The fathers reported how they had become emotionally involved, gained new priorities in relation to work and did practical care work when their wives were away at work. In this way, they moved the symbolic boundaries between the indoors and outdoors that have been such a distinct marker between the feminine and masculine workspaces in farming.

Moreover, they obscured the gender hierarchy by showing how men can be in touch with their feminine side, and they elevated their own status as men and fathers by telling how they lived up to new expectations of men. However, when they stressed that the mothers were the ones in charge, they still kept a sound distance to domestic work traditionally regarded as female and with a lower status than farm work. Consequently, the impact of this hybridization on the gender system is fairly small in this area of activity.

## **Conclusions**

An aim of this article has been to explore how agricultural masculinity is responding to the new social demands on fathers to be involved with their children. It has been concerned to analyze the possible impact of their involved fathering on internal as well as external masculine hegemony.

We have analyzed masculinity based on the farming fathers' different activities with their children: hunting, outdoor leisure activities and domesticity. We have seen that the farmers have selectively appropriated characteristics traditionally defined as feminine to create a modern masculinity that incorporates an involvement in childcare into rural hegemonic masculine activities. Hunting, outdoor life and sports are masculine-coded activities that support conventional masculine symbols such as tenacity, bravery and competition. They connect with rural masculine ideals through an emphasis on physical ability in the natural environment. When fathers are present for - and take care of their children during these activities - they may at the same time assert hegemonic masculinity and produce male bonding without putting masculinity at risk. Affirming the internal hegemony, they elevate themselves over other men who have not, or cannot, spend such time with their children. As



they are still entrenched in hegemonic masculine activities, their involvement falls short of changing the gender order, the external hegemony.

However, bringing children along implies a softening of conventional masculine practices. This hybridization seems to create a transition to a modern farmer with less rigid gender expectations. Separating work and care, and appropriating ideals in the wider society of not letting work come in the way of time with children, represent practices that may change agricultural masculinities. Previously, the acquisition of skills essential to a future working life as a farmer occurred through a daily apprenticeship in which children joined their fathers at work (Authors). If this is no longer the case, it might imply a certain step towards loosening the tie between agricultural masculinity and patrilineal succession – from father to son – which upholds the system of family farming. In the long run, this could mean a transformation of the gender regime or influence the “patriarchal dividend” (Connell 1995), which is men’s patriarchal position with its material advantages.

Concerning the work-care orientation observed, the fathers’ involvement in caregiving inside the home is notable. This represents a certain change in masculine activities, and thus it might mean more fluidity between the genders even though women’s employment is a driver behind men’s house- and care work. The change may thus be superficial, and as noted by Bridges and Pascoe (2014) it may obscure boundaries that are still there. What the fathers seem to do is move the boundary, but still maintain it by insisting that the mothers’ are in charge.

The article has been concerned to see how the two axes of hegemonic masculinity, internal and external hegemony, are dealt with when agricultural hegemonic masculinity is confronted with fathers’ actual caregiving practices. In sum, concerning internal hegemony, we have observed that the fathers align themselves with other, contemporary rural men who are fathers. Children and caring are handled in ways that do not represent a threat to rural hegemonic masculinity. In contrast, the softer element of childcare seems to heighten their status, aided by a tendency to downgrade men with which they do not identify. Concerning external hegemony, the types of activity engaged in by the fathers maintain a distance to the feminine, a distance that is also upheld by their boundary setting in house- and care work. The fathers’ stories about their caregiving activities, however, hold no deliberate downgrading of women/feminine activities beyond this. The change we have observed in this sample of fathers may hence be a first step (as suggested by Duncanson 2015) towards

regendering in terms of dismantling hegemonic masculinity, although the second step may still be quite a distance away.

The article is based on a small, relatively homogeneous group of farmers in rural Norway, knowing well that agricultural masculinity may vary and change in different ways in other localities. The processes identified may, however, be of general value. Fatherhood is said to be more sensitive than motherhood to contextual factors such as local culture and social values (Marsiglio et al. 2005). Hence, comparative research with other samples and in other rural contexts is recommended in order to expand knowledge on how engagement in childcare may change rural masculinity.

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