

Farmers framing fatherhood: Everyday life and rural change

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Abstract

This article explores how farming fathers frame fatherhood according to time-specific ideals. Based on interviews with fathers and their adult sons in Norway, findings show clear differences between the two generations concerning how fathers engage with their children and justify their practices. For the older generation, the major frames are “complementary gender roles,” “good farming practices” and “farm succession.” The current generation frames their fathering practices in “involved fathering,” “changing childhoods” and “intensive parenting.” It is notable that the older generation refers to local cultural accounts of agriculture when justifying their fathering practices, while the frames used by the current generation are not farm related but refer to broader social and cultural accounts of their time. The framing perspective used in this article has aided the examination of the ideological transformation of agricultural fatherhood in a period in which the contours of agriculture are changing.

Keywords: Fathers, fatherhood, framing perspective, agriculture, rural change

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Introduction

Social and cultural transformations in the ways in which fatherhood is understood, and in how men are responding to new expectations to them as fathers, are currently of great interest to scholars (McDonald and Jeanes 2012; Brandth and Kvande 2013; Eydal and Rostgaard 2015; O'Brien and Wall 2017). Studies report a range of practices in which fathers from various social backgrounds practice fathering differently, and have different understandings of what fatherhood means. At the same time, there are distinct commonalities in the involvement of fathers living in the same society in the same time period as fatherhood is socially constructed through common discourses.

The physical/spatial processes of fatherhood have rarely been a key focus in fatherhood research (Marsiglio et al. 2005), so rural fatherhood has received a scarce amount of attention (Brandth 2016; Pini and Conway 2017). Childcare has been a fairly invisible practice for men living in the countryside. To examine rural fatherhood may seem especially important if, as has been claimed, fatherhood is more sensitive than motherhood to contextual factors such as local culture and social values (Doherty et al. 1998; Marsiglio et al. 2005).

The broader cultural context within which fatherhood is embedded, and where different values are played out, can be studied from a variety of perspectives. This article puts an emphasis on the habitual and everyday life of farming families. Following Smith (2005), who points to the importance of working from people's perspectives to explore how the organization of local and everyday experiences is connected to- and shaped by institutions, the article deals with how the everyday experiences of fathers may help shed light on rural change. It aims to examine how fatherhood is framed at the micro-level of everyday life, in order to produce knowledge about how the discourses and activities of fathering are linked to wider socio-cultural processes affecting rural areas.

Farming, fathering and childhood - cultural accounts

For decades, family farming has been subject to interest as a persistent mode of production, being fundamentally gendered in its unequal distribution of power and influence between men and

women (Price and Evans 2009; Pini et al. 2015). However, agriculture has undergone massive changes that have affected the life of farming families over the years (Andersson 2017). One such change is the diversification of the rural economy, which has reduced its reliance on agriculture. The number of farms has declined, but farms have become larger in size and productivity; nonetheless, farm families are more dependent than ever before on income from work outside the farm. For the most part, Norwegian farmers work alone, as women are commonly employed off the farm and children attend kindergarten from an early age (Melberg 2005). Yet, research has had a limited focus on the everyday life of farmers beyond the business aspects and gender-unequal situation produced by family farming, which has particularly stimulated feminist research. It has described the cultural ideologies of fatherhood within agriculture as embedded in a fairly rigid, patriarchal social structure in which men have been defined as heads of the farm and the family (Alston 1998; Shortall 1999; Price and Evans 2009), and patriarchy has been the hegemonic definition of agrarian masculinity (Little 2002), even if it has eroded in other sectors. Succession rights to farms in Norway are gender-neutral. Nevertheless, most farms are passed down to sons, something that influences the interaction between fathers and sons (Peter et al. 2005; Riley 2009).

A further aspect that makes farming an interesting context for studying the relationship between farming fathers and their children is the overlap between work and home. It implies that fathers are present and available for their children during the working day, but as research on home working in a range of sectors has shown, this does not necessarily affect fathers' involvement in caregiving (Craig et al. 2012; Brandth 2017). In agriculture, there exists a gendered separation between "outdoors" and "indoors" that designates childcare as women's responsibility in the home, whereas men, even when they work close to home, operate in spaces defined as masculine, such as the tractor, fields and the barn. Farmers are known to work hard and gain respectability for their work ethic. The importance of "good farming" ideals have been noted by several scholars who have linked it to men's identity and reputation as farmers (Burton 2004; Riley 2016; Haugen and Brandth 2015; 2017). Good farmers are assessed by their experience-based competence, the importance of which is illustrated by sons inheriting the farm from their father (Saugeres 2002).

Some scholars have framed fatherhood using a historical perspective (e.g. Pleck & Pleck 1997; Marsiglio et al. 2005), arguing that the meaning of fatherhood is primarily a cultural product; and, as culture changes, so too do standards for what it means to be a good father (Morman and Floyd 2006). The “culture vs. conduct” debate within the fatherhood literature has identified a contradiction between words and deeds (LaRossa 1988; Ranson 2001; Dermott 2008). Cultural representations of fatherhood often suggest that there exists a new model of increased involvement and nurture, whereas the actual practices of fathers may indicate much less change. For example, Ranson (2001) found that although fathers defined themselves as “new fathers,” they continued to organize their lives around the demands of the workplace.

This article focuses on the interaction between cultural ideas and practices. Considerable research has noted both that men’s participation in childcare has broadened, and that the cultural expectations and understandings of fatherhood have changed towards more care orientation (Doucet 2006; O’Brien et al. 2007; Miller 2011, Brandth and Kvande 2018). Tensions exist, for instance “between a push towards new subjectivities and the pull of old discourses” (Coltart and Henwood, 2012:35). How influential old discourses are may vary with contexts and groups of fathers. Farstad and Stefansen (2015) noted class differences, as middle-class fathers used the discourse of the “new father” to a greater degree than working-class fathers.

This indicates that fathers shape their practices in relation to what can and cannot be culturally thought of as proper ways to be men and fathers. Many studies have shown that contemporary fathers lean on the father involvement frame as a motivation for their caregiving (Plantin et al. 2003, Wall and Arnold 2007; Vuori 2009; Eerola and Huttunen 2011). Yarwood’s (2011) study from Britain shows how fathers construct themselves as “good fathers” in line with the current political and social discourses of parenting, and most of the men in Eerola and Huttunen’s (2011) study of Finnish fathers narrated their fatherhood using storylines such as shared parenting, nurture and caregiving.

In addition to describing how fatherhood is enmeshed within societal norms and practices of working and caring, research has connected parenting to existing understandings of children and childhood. Scholars have described a cultural shift in the landscape of childhood in late modern society, in which it is the individual child who is placed center stage (Gullestad 1996). This includes a transformation in the way children are viewed (Jensen 2003). Their worth is no

longer estimated in economic terms; children have instead become emotionally priceless and turned into an important “project” for parents. Over the last few decades, increased possibilities and choices for children have formed the content of parenting (Hays 1996; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995). In a Norwegian context, childrearing goals such as happiness, independence, self-maximization and self-confidence are stressed, while conformity, obedience, and “hard work” are less valued (Hollekim 2017). Current childrearing ideology rests on the assumption that contemporary parents need to deliberately cultivate their children’s progress in life.

The flipside of child-centeredness is “intensive parenting.” This term was first used to describe the intensification of mothering (Hays 1996), but has increasingly been used to denote parenting behavior in general, including the practices of fathers (Shirani et al. 2012). Hence, the ideals held up for fathers parallels “intensive mothering,” which requires emotional commitment, placing the child’s needs first and investing large resources in terms of time and energy in child-centered activities (Hays 1996). For a father’s relationship with children, spare time, play and games have assumed importance (Shirani et al. 2012; Smyth and Craig 2017). Fathers are reported to spend the bulk of their childcare time in activities such as playing and talking with children, with sports and the outdoors being particularly important spaces for fathers to connect with their children (Harrington 2006; Miller 2011).

The following analysis will be concerned with the degree to which farming fathers use these accounts in framing their practices.

Framing as theoretical perspective

The framing perspective is rooted in symbolic interactionist principles, and starts from the assumption that meanings are not inherent in objects and experiences, but instead are constructed interactively through interpretative processes (Snow 2008:384). Consequently, there are multiple interpretations (Lombardo et al. 2012) or “repertoires of interpretations” (Mooney and Hunt 1996). Frame analysis is useful because it helps identify important cognitive schemas through which people give meaning to reality (Goffman 1974). In Creed et al.’s (2002:481) words, frames are “interpretative schemas that render events meaningful, organize experience, guide behavior

and motivate action.” As organizing principles they direct our attention to how people speak and act within the boundaries available to them.

Fatherhood therefore acquires its many meanings through framing processes. When a frame changes so, too, may the practices of fathers have done. Frames develop and vary across cultures, times and places, and different frames may be complexly intertwined with each other; they are embedded in “networks of other more or less widely shared and practically relevant meanings” (Feree 2012:89). To make it more complicated, one practice may be traced back to several frames (Alasuutari 1996:111). Fathering practices are not only justified by one frame or another, but may travel between and be transformed in relation to different frames. Because they include normative assumptions, frames may also constitute conflicting meanings. Foucault (1980) argued that specific discourses come together at particular historical moments to produce subject positions. So too do particular frames produce fatherhood over time.

Frame analysis has most prominently been developed by the social movement literature (Snow 2008; Snow and Benford 1988; Mooney and Hunt 1996), and there are useful concepts to be borrowed from this field of research. For instance, Creed et al. (2002) differentiate between what they term broad “cultural accounts” and “legitimizing accounts,” also called “framing work” (Feree 2012:89). The broader cultural accounts function as more universal conceptions and are used by people to construct legitimating accounts, which are what people use locally when they give meaning to experiences. This implies that (local) legitimating accounts receive their authority from the broader cultural schemas that often function across contexts. Although the two are nearly indistinguishable, the broader cultural accounts are never reproduced identically in a local setting.

This meeting between levels is an important aspect of frame analysis. In this article, starting with farming fathers’ own framing work, I am interested in how their legitimating accounts link to the broader cultural accounts of their times. Hence, comparing the framing work of two generations may help understand the dynamics of rural society.

Drawing on these perspectives, the article explores how fatherhood assumes meaning in farmers’ stories about family, work and leisure. The research questions to be analyzed are: 1) What frames do the two generations use to legitimate their fathering practices?; 2) How do these

frames define and motivate fathering practices?; and 3) What are the broader cultural accounts used in building local legitimating accounts? Of special interest is the extent to which their frames relate to broader cultural accounts, such as agricultural change, gender equality and understandings of childhood. In the first empirical section, I explore the older generation of farmers and locate three major frames used for legitimating their fathering practices. Thereafter, I do the same with the current generation, in which three completely different frames are identified.

The study

Although farm families today are much like other families, there are some important differentiating characteristics: Family farming is often seen as “a way of life,” and connected to a specific set of cultural values associated with the rural idyll (Price and Evans 2009; Bryant and Pini 2011). Relevant to this article is that in farm families several generations are likely to work and live together on the same farm. For this reason, two generations of farming fathers represent a compelling case for studying change in fatherhood and fathering. Brannen (2017) contends that an intergenerational approach is particularly valuable when it comes to exploring family change.

The study is based on retrospective interviews with retired farmers and their adult sons, who are also farmers in an agricultural district in Norway. The farmers were recruited by means of a person who knew the agricultural area and suggested possible farms to contact. Men who had one or more children 10 years old or younger, who were farmers on a full- or part-time basis, and whose fathers had operated the same farm, were interviewed. Fourteen fathers within seven extended families were asked to tell about their farm, their work, their family and their experiences as fathers. At the time of the interview the older generation was in their 60s, whereas the younger generation was in their 30s. The older generation had been full-time farmers during their working lives, and their wives had also worked on the farm when their children were young. The younger generation of fathers had been employed off the farm before taking over, and at the time of the interview five of them were full-time farmers and two part-time farmers, while the wives, with the exception of one, worked away from the farm either full- or part-time.

Fathers and sons were interviewed separately, aided by two slightly different interview guides. We were especially interested in the relationship between farm work and childcare in their lives. Their work situation, working hours, the interface between home and work, and the participation of children in farm work, were all important aspects of the context. The interviews were conducted on the farms that were visited.

Ethical demands for confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, in part by supplying scant background information. We chose farms located in the same agricultural area, but at a distance from each other, to avoid them identifying each other. The fathers were all given pseudonyms, and fathers and sons were given personal names that started with the same capital letter to signify their kinship.

The older fathers talked about their practice and understandings of fatherhood when their children were small. The younger fathers also talked retrospectively, touching upon childhood memories when being around their fathers. Retrospective interviews take into account the temporal aspects of a phenomenon (fathering practices), and are able to relate to the varying social and economic conditions surrounding the individual over time, e.g., gender equality policies, economic and normative conditions in society. Thus, in this analysis of frames, I regard it as an advantage to ask about practices that occurred in a time context different from the one at the time of the interview. Stories from the past are produced with hindsight and framed in light of the present. That current frames shape the stories of the past may sometimes be a methodological challenge (Brannen et al. 2004), insofar as when individuals revise and edit their past to fit the present (Riessmann 2008).

In general, people comment upon and justify what they do with reference to others. This aspect of retrospective interviews has also been methodologically useful in exploring changing frames. Riley (2014), who interviewed fathers and adult sons together, notes that they co-constructed their stories, and provided a comparative context for narrating the change that occurred on the farm in their lifetimes. Although the fathers and sons in our study were not interviewed together, they constantly referred to each other and made comparisons to the other generation, something that added layers of meaning and illuminated their different framings.

An analysis of the interview material relies on repeated close readings, cut in several ways and analyzed from various perspectives and with various focuses. It was helpful for identifying frames that the material had been previously analyzed with other research questions in mind and other conceptual categories to aid in the analysis (see Brandth and Overrein 2013; Brandth 2016; 2017). After re-reading and assigning selected portions to categories corresponding to frames, cases and examples were selected, and thick descriptions were used for presentation in this article.

The framing work of the older fathers

This section identifies and examines three main frames used by the older fathers to justify their fathering practices. This generation became fathers in the 1960s, a historical period when the father had a very prominent role in the farm family, women were not employed outside the farm and farm work was central in the lives of children growing up on farms.

Complementary gender roles

The older farmers in the study related that they were not expected to be involved in domestic activities in the 1960s. Childcare was defined as indoor work, and indoor work was women's responsibility on the farm. Consequently, fatherhood was framed in terms of gender complementarity: "Not many men did care work back then. She took care of the children. It was women's work," Carl said, referring to the most common frame at the time. It was the mother who did the changing, feeding and bathing of the small children. The division of work was rather fixed: "I had my job outdoors" is the fathers' uniform explanation for why they participated so little. Gunnar told that he had never minded his children alone. The fathers' outdoor work duties released them from care work, and the gendered culture of agriculture was a primary factor legitimating their fathering practices.

Complementary gender roles allowed fathers' non-participation to mirror women's identity and self-respect. Arthur's wife, Astrid, who served coffee during the interview, added that as a farm wife she could never demand that he came inside to work. Expecting him to come

in “to nurse the children or vacuum or do anything in the house . . .” was never in her thoughts. When asked why they did things this way, Christina, Carl’s wife, said that:

It came naturally in a way because Carl was preoccupied with work all the time. He was worn and tired when he came inside, and I could not just say, “I think you should do the dishes and clean the floor!” It didn’t occur to me. He was tired, and I saw him working all the time.

The complimentary way of dividing the work was part of the taken-for-granted – and almost naturalized – accounts of gender differences in agriculture at the time, and this affected how fatherhood was practiced and understood. Speaking in retrospect, they thought they spent too little time with their children. “Work took all my time,” Harold explained.

That things have changed was recognized by this generation when observing contemporary fathering practices. Reflecting on both his son and his son-in-law, Arthur said: “The fathers today, they change [diapers], they nurse their children even if they have a farm. Men today ... it is different, it is expected of them.” Such expectations change with the new cultural accounts of gender equality and greater father involvement. According to Gunnar, “compared to the demands on fathers today, there is no doubt that I was together too little with the children.” Barry of the younger generation shared this perception: “We are a bit influenced by the times. Now, it is more common to be together with your kids, for the father.” In this way, both generations acknowledged that their interpretative schemas of good fathering had changed in line with new cultural expectations in the larger society. In particular, the discourse of more gender-equal sharing of childcare seems to have affected their understanding of good fathering.

Fatherhood framed in hard work and “good farming” principles

A second important legitimization of fatherhood used by the older generation was the norms of “good farming” (Burton 2004), in which farmers’ strong work ethic shapes their everyday life on the farm: “The work in the barn with the cows, this always had to be prioritized no matter what,” said Bart. “When I took over and started working on this farm, I threw away my watch for good. You just have to work until you’re finished” Edward related: “Mentally, your thoughts are with

the work all the time, and you never put it aside. For me it has been an occupation with tremendous work and very little leisure. (...) I have been a farmer in body and soul.” His son, Evan, confirmed this, saying: “He was a real toiler, my father.” Their statements that “work came first” voice a pattern commonly accepted in the 1960s and 1970s. Working hard for long hours and being able to handle almost everything themselves, such as repairing tools and machinery, carpentry and building, used to be *the* sign of a good and steady male farmer (Riley 2016). Hard-working and devoted farmers enjoyed a high standing and great respect in the rural community, which was essential for their sense of masculine identity (Haugen and Brandth 2017). This parallels the breadwinner frame in the wider literature on men’s family involvement; the culture of hard work legitimated their absence in childcare.

This means that fathering framed within the “good farmer” ideology motivated how they related to their children. Instead of minding the children in the house, these fathers had their children join them where they worked. Carl said, “My kids came along a lot, but I never thought I had to mind them inside.” Fathers and children were around each other in the barn, but according to Arthur, “They saw me, but I didn’t have much time to play with them. We were together side by side.” The fathers were physically present around the farm, but being together with the children was rarely their main purpose. This started when the children were quite small and joined their fathers in the barn where they could ride their tricycles or play. As they grew, they were expected to participate in the work. Harold said: “To begin with, they joined me in the barn and played there. Then it gradually went from play to work. They fed the animals and gave milk to the calves. Later, they came with me on the tractor.” As a child, Bart had to help his parents on the farm, so that when his children were about the right age, he expected them to help him like he had done. In those days, Carl reminisced: “We expected children to work, or do something useful!” This was what he himself grew up with, and no other cultural accounts seemed to invite objections or change practices in his time. In this way, children learned how to farm from their fathers. Elder and Conger (2000) have called this type of fathering an “apprenticeship model.” Children would gradually grow into the daily routines of work through their presence at the work site.

As we shall see below, several of the younger fathers, comparing their own practices with that of their fathers, pointed out that priorities are different today. Gard, for instance, whose first

child was born in the late autumn, told how he just dropped everything to concentrate on the baby. “So when spring came I had to remove machines and tools from the fields where they had stood since the harvest. The threshing machine was in one place and the harvester two kilometers away. Everything was just tossed around,” he said to illustrate how the child gained priority over work. The “good farming” imperative was definitely weakened in his story. Echoing current cultural accounts of “new fathers,” it seems that the ubiquitous character of farm work is not a legitimate reason for non-involvement in childcare for the younger fathers. Work should not come at the expense of time with their children. This indicates a change in the norms of fatherhood when it comes to the dominance of work in their daily lives.

Like father like son: farm succession

For the older generation the “good farming frame” overlaps with what we may call the “farm succession” frame. Both derive their legitimacy from the importance of work in pursuit of a viable farm. What rendered strenuous labor meaningful was articulated by Arthur, who was born in the early 1940s, stating that his goal was to hand over the farm to the next generation in a better shape than it was when he took over from his father. “Working for the future” is what the farming ethos is all about, and thus it is one of the most unflinching cultural accounts of farming.

Hence, expecting their children to take over made teaching them to work seem like an especially important part of their fathering practices, assuring the next generation’s ability to carry on the farm and prosper. This was a strong legitimation for how they understood fatherhood and practiced fathering. Arthur said: “I wanted my oldest son to learn how to farm when he was young so he would know what he was in for later.” He saw his children’s work as valuable to developing their farming skills, work experience and work habits. The importance of this frame is gleaned from the view that not having children taking over makes farming almost meaningless. If this were to be the case, the farm would then be sold on the free market. Arthur’s wife Amy, reflected: “[If so], what have you been working for? (...) You work and you work ... but there is so much working for the future, the forest you’re growing and everything else you’re working on – it often brings results many years later!” Bart was very satisfied that his son carried on farming, and that the farm survived as a production unit instead of just becoming a place to live.

All the interviewed sons had learned how to farm from their fathers, and the fathers felt it was to their credit that the sons had taken over and become farmers. Knowledge transferred to the son from childhood is therefore an important aspect of fathering, and represents their own success as farmers. In short, the new generation and their taking over the farm was an important motivating factor for the older generation's fathering practices. This frame is at the core of fatherhood in farming, in which patriarchal succession and "keeping the family name on the farm" have been so essential (Riley 2009). This way the previous generation of farmers framed fatherhood in accordance with the traditional patriarchal frames.

Framing contemporary fatherhood

In this section, the focus is on the ways in which the current fathers frame their fathering practices in relation to the prevailing accounts of contemporary society.

Involved fathering: The new ideal and practice

The involved father or "new father" characterized by more shared parenting has been described as the proper way to be a contemporary father in the research literature.

Two of the fathers, Gard and Andy, framed their practices in terms of equal co-parenting. Gard took parental leave for 12 weeks while the baby's mother went back to her work as a veterinarian, describing himself in the following terms:

During the parental leave period, it was self-evident that the one of us who was home on leave did most of the care work. But there were a couple of things I couldn't do, like breastfeeding. (...) Other than that, when she was away, I fed the baby. When both of us are home, she does the most, but we share. I think we share well.

The parental leave period reserved for fathers introduced in the 1990s in Norway (father's quota) is a strong social signal that fathers are expected to take responsibility for childcare. Gard described his taking parental leave as "self-evident," and continued: "It was the most natural thing to do. It was expected of me, and I expected it of myself. I had very much looked forward

to it, and I think it is quite natural that I participate.” Calling his involvement “natural” (and a different natural from the older generation for whom the complementarity gender roles were natural) is a clear indication that the current cultural account of father involvement in Norwegian society has also reached men on farms.

Andy described his involved practice when his children were infants as follows: “They slept in the cradle beside me, as in a gender-equal society it is the father who should mind them at night.” He tells how he woke up every night to check on his firstborn’s breathing. “Number two, he would never take the comforter, so when he wasn’t breastfed anymore he woke at three o’clock every night and cried, and I got up many a night for that reason.” In his story, the father involvement in early childhood is a distinct element. The children slept on Andy’s side of the bed, and he had laid there worrying and listening to their breathing, comforting them during the night as a regular matter. He felt that direct involvement in the daily care of the babies was expected of him as a modern father, and he referred to the norms of a gender-equal society to legitimize his practice. The change in the cultural accounts concerning gender and parenting in society since the 1970s seems to have affected these farmers, who expressed sensitivity to the norms of gender equality in caring.

Four additional fathers described an involvement that differed distinctly from the past generation. Becoming a father had clearly influenced their everyday lives from the start. “It was a hell of a transition,” Chris said. “You know (...) suddenly there is someone else to care for. I felt that I was no longer number one in my own life,” Didrik explained. To have become a father was experienced as a pronounced shift, in which the baby’s continuous need for food, sleep and nursing seemed to steel the fathers’ focus, and influence their daily lives.

However, their involvement was not framed in gender equity norms, but instead referring to the necessity brought about by the mothers’ participation in the labor market. Because women’s involvement in paid employment competes with the time they have available for nurturing their children, fathers’ contributions to childrearing have become important. Barry emphasized that he shared indoor work with his wife, and that he had significantly changed his routines after he became a father in order to more actively participate indoors. “In the morning, I get up at the same time as my son and help him get ready for school, as Britt [his wife] has gone to work. So I get him organized and have breakfast with him before I go to the barn. . . . I meet

him when he comes home from school. It is nice.” The fathers who use mothers’ employment to frame fatherhood seem to have changed their gender practices to a smaller degree than Gard and Andy. “I participated, but she has done the most,” described their involvement, even though the mothers were away at work during the day.

One of the younger fathers, Hans, who has two small children, differed from the others. He attributed his low involvement, which he estimated to be only 10%, to the fact that his wife was a homemaker. Legitimizing this fathering practice, he said: “It is because the farm is my responsibility, and the children are hers. It is practical, and we want it like that.” Hans’ framing work is therefore very much in line with the older couples’ complimentary way of dividing the work between themselves. Nevertheless, he claimed he did more than his father: “I have changed diapers and given them milk from a bottle,” he told. Hans’ way of framing fatherhood may be an example of a resistance to the ideals of involved fatherhood, as his fathering practices resemble the previous generation. By opting out of father-specific parental leave and having a non-employed wife, his account verifies that traditional fathering accounts still play an active role in local framing work.

The various degrees of involvement and their justifications underscore the variability of fathering. This means that changes in either practice or framings are not even and uniform. Contemporary fathering, even within one social segment such as farmers, evolves at various speeds, indicating the partial adoption of the new cultural accounts of fatherhood.

Changing childhoods: Child-centeredness

Childhood and parenting are inextricably linked, and a shift in one of them necessitates a shift in the other. Scholars have argued that to be a child today means something different than it did a generation ago, and that understandings of what children can manage to do, and what they ought to be exposed to, have changed over the years (Gullestad 1996). Thus, parenthood may be seen as a response to culturally based understandings of children’s needs and what the parenting mission implies.

Ideologically, Norwegian childhood today is considered to be a happy and carefree stage of life, and this influences fathering. The norm asserted by the younger fathers in the sample seemed to be that children should “play or do homework and not engage in farm work.” Football, skiing, music and computer games are popular activities for children after school, and fathers frame their fathering activities in the idea that “children should be allowed to be children,” even if they live on a farm. Contrary to their own childhood, their children have few work duties on the farm, and the fathers do not want to burden them with expectations to regularly help out.

Andy explained this as a consequence of changes in agricultural production and technology – that nowadays there are fewer tasks in which children can participate (see Brandth and Overrein 2013): “Removing rocks for instance; this was a task children did before that has now completely come to an end. To walk behind and throw rocks onto the trailer is out of the question today!” In comparing their children’s lives with their own childhood, the current fathers also pointed to the potential risks of farm work for children due to changes in agricultural machinery. “When I was a child (...) more work was done with the bare hands instead of machines. Work has become far more dangerous – there is not much work young children can do,” Barry explained. Moreover, their view of children’s capabilities was that their children were too young to contribute at the same age that they themselves had been involved. “He (the son) is not of much use now being nine years old,” said Barry, asserting what he thought children ought to be exposed to.

We can also identify greater child-centeredness in the fathers’ concern that their work interferes with time they could spend with their children. As noted, this was a critique they had of their own fathers, who always seemed to be busy working. Making comparisons with his father, 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 come because he has to go to the barn!” ... that their childhood won’t be marked by me working all the time! Because I remember well my own father (...) he rarely had time to come to my activities.

Didrik views his own father in light of present day framings to tell about how this does not suffice today. For example, Barry emphasized that his children expected him to take time off

from work: “The children, if they don’t demand it, they would think it was very strange if their father never joined in. It has become normal.” For this reason, the new fathering moralities in the larger society as conveyed by children are an important frame.

The changing rural context is part of the background for this shift in frame: Most neighbors are not farmers any longer; farmers’ children want to do what friends and other children do, and farm fathers want to be involved like other fathers in the rural community. They take care not to be defined as “traditional” or “bad” fathers because they do nothing but work, which is in accordance with today’s general cultural accounts of what fathers are expected to do. The extent to which this norm is carried out in practice is a different matter. As noted, scholars have claimed that conduct is lagging behind culture (Dermott 2008), and studies have documented that men continue to work long hours after having become fathers (Ranson 2001), although children have become more important in their lives.

“Doing stuff” with the children: Intensive fathering

A third major frame that the younger generation use to legitimize their fathering practices is what in accordance with the literature may be called the “intensive fathering” frame, in which they do things *with* the children. This is a clear response to the changing landscape of childhood. Within this frame, the obligation for fathers to spend time together with their children means new activities and duties for fathers. Evan compared himself with his father, saying:

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!

Instead of children helping their fathers at work, it seems to be expected that the parents owe their children time and interest. Fathers are ready to respond to their children’s initiatives, considering what they think is best for their children’s development. The younger fathers are thus involved in many activities together with their children that are not farm-related. Again, relating to the practices of the previous generation, Andy 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.” When the older generation related their previous fathering practices to this frame, which they sometimes did, they constructed themselves as poorer fathers. Edward, who was in his 60s, reflected about his son’s different practices in the following way:

It’s a great difference, particularly when it comes to following up on the children’s organized activities. I was a *nobody* in this respect. He is a champion! He has two children, and he is fantastic in participating in whatever they are occupied with.

The intensive fathering frame was not available in his time, and when he interprets his practices within this frame, he defines himself as a “nobody.”

Lately, leisure activities for fathers and children have increased in both rural and urban areas (Creighton et al., 2015). That activities are organized makes children’s leisure time very different from when the younger fathers grew up. In contrast to his father, Evan narrates his own involvement within the intensive parenting frame, saying that “Whenever I was with my dad as a kid, I had to work,” but that he himself is “... involved in driving them to practice, participating in their practice, and coming along to watch. And, it is fun! And, I get to spend time with them. I think this is being a good father.” The current generation restructures their working hours to be able to respond to their children’s initiatives. Giving priority to spending more spare time with their children and what is seen as fun, they frame fatherhood in opposition to work duties.

In sum, we see that the father-child relationship on farms has changed considerably, as children are interpreted according to how the fathers handle the cultural accounts about modern childhood and what is considered good for their children.

Conclusion

Examining agricultural fatherhood from fathers’ everyday perspective over two different periods of time, this article responds to the academic interest as to how fathers react to the new expectations on them to be more involved in childcare. Because there has been a relative dearth of research on rural/agricultural fatherhood, the article contributes to filling a gap in the rural literature. Moreover, since fatherhood is known to be very sensitive to locality and culture, it

adds knowledge to the more general fatherhood literature on the ways that fatherhood may vary in meaning and practice and change in different directions, as well as at different speeds.

Family farming offers an interesting context for examining fatherhood given the pervasive patriarchal system, with its patrilineal inheritance practices and discourses that dictate family relationships. In this article, the focus has been more on the socio-cultural, rather than structural dimensions of father-son relationships in family farming. With the aid of framing theory, the article shows how farming fathers speak and act within their local, normative frameworks, and also how their meaning making in terms of local, legitimating accounts may be connected with broader cultural accounts of fatherhood.

Frame analysis assumes multiple perspectives. In analyzing how the two generations of fathers justify their practices, very diverse frames are identified within the analysis. This underscores the variability of fatherhood – even within the same geographical area on the same farm with the same agricultural production. More importantly perhaps, it shows how the meanings and practices of fathering among farmers have changed (or are in a process of change) in the direction of a “modern,” more involved father. This involves investing time and energy in children’s leisure activities, freeing their children from the expectations to work and later take over the farm operation, and involving themselves in caregiving in the home.

Although both generations frame fatherhood in the specific context of farming, it seems that farming culture is losing its influence as current fathers narrate deviance from the traditional patriarchal frames, and instead use broader cultural accounts even when they explain and justify their practices locally. In contrast to the older generation, their local justifications are clearly enmeshed with the discourses of the larger society. More gender-equal sharing, including the discourse of the “new father,” is actively used to justify their practices. The changing societal meanings of childhood and intensive fathering are further major justifications for their fathering practices. It is quite remarkable that their frames refer to accounts not characteristic of rural/farming culture, and that past cultural patterns that have seemed so inertial no longer seem to play a central role in informing present practices. Rather, when they do refer to agriculture, the justification is negative: They do *not* bring children with them to work because there are no tasks children can do, and farming has become too risky and technically advanced. The changes in agricultural production necessitate new accounts, and here child-centeredness – what children are

expected to do – is an accessible frame. Comparing the legitimating accounts of the two generations, this finding stands out and hints at a possible dismantling of the patriarchal system in family farming.

One central value of the framing perspective used in this article is its provision of a looking glass into the link between micro-interactions within families and broader socio-cultural accounts. It has opened up for the study of encounters between personal experiences and cultural understandings of fatherhood. Furthermore, the framing perspective has been useful because it has aided the examination of the ideological transformation of agricultural fatherhood in a period in which the contours of agriculture are changing. None of the frames described in this article can, however, be claimed to exhaust the options in farming men's accounts of fatherhood. They stand out as master frames to the extent that they possibly obscure others. Generally speaking, some frames always have greater salience than others, and act as the principal interpretative device. For this reason, research in other rural- and national contexts is recommended in order to expand knowledge on the variable and complex character of rural fatherhood.

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