American Journal of Men's Health
2017, Vol. 11(5) 1536–1546
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DOI: 10.1177/1557988315619677
journals.sagepub.com/home/ajmh
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"Do it All by Myself": A Salutogenic Approach of Masculine Health Practice Among Farming Men Coping With Stress

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Abstract

Farming is often considered one of the most stressful occupations. At the same time, farming men symbolically represent a strong, traditional, or hegemonic form of masculinity based on stoicism, resourcefulness, and resilience to adversity. A contrast is observed between this social representation and their health status, marked by higher levels of stress, social isolation, psychological distress, and suicide than many other subgroups of men. A salutogenic approach was taken in this study to enable the investigation of the social contexts in which farming men positively engage in health-promoting behaviors that may prevent or ameliorate mental health problems. A focus was placed on how farming men cope with stress on their own, and the relationship of this to their popular image of being resourceful and resilient. Thirty-two individual in-depth interviews with farming men and a focus group with five key informants working in rural areas within the Province of Quebec, Canada, were carried out. Self-distraction and cognitive strategies emerged as the most relevant for participants. Notably, taking work breaks conflicted with the discourse of the "relentless worker" that farmers are expected to be. Pathways to positive coping and recovery implied an ambivalence between contemplation of strategies aligned with negative aspects of traditional masculinity norms in North America and strategies aligned with more positive, progressive aspects of these norms based on the importance of family and work life balance. Health promotion and future research should investigate how various positive masculine practices can be aligned with farmers' health and well-being and that of their family.

Keywords

men's health, rural, stress coping, salutogenesis, masculinity, health promotion, Canada

Introduction

Farming men are a relevant group to observe in relation to the connections between gender and health. They symbolically represent a strong, traditional (or hegemonic) form of masculinity (Alston, 2012; Cambell, Mayerfeld Bell, & Finney, 2006; Price & Evans, 2009), similar to soldiers, professional athletes, and firefighters (de Visser, Smith, & McDonnell, 2009; O'Brien, Hunt, & Hart, 2005). They are often depicted as strong, relentless workers, who are resilient, resourceful, and stoic. Such qualities would theoretically privilege their health and well-being. However, in contrast to this symbolic representation, they are actually more likely to experience high levels of stress, social isolation, psychological distress, and suicide than many other subgroups of rural and nonrural men (Fraser et al., 2005; Hawton, Simkin, & Malmberg, 1998; Judd et al., 2006; Kennedy, Maple, McKay, & Brumby, 2014). It is possible then that alignment with the agrarian values often linked with traditional masculinity norms has a major relation to farming men's poor mental health outcomes (Alston & Kent, 2008; Apesoa-Varano, Barker, & Hinton, 2015; Droz, Miéville-Ott, Jacques-Jouvenot, & Lafleur, 2014; Judd

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et al., 2006; Kõlves, Milner, McKay, & De Leo, 2012; Sturgeon & Morrissette, 2010). However, other aspects of agrarian values, such as a sense of belonging and local social support, appear to be key elements of positive health and well-being among farmers (Greenhill, King, Lane, & MacDougall, 2009; Kutek, Turnbull, & Fairweather-Schmidt, 2011; McLaren & Challis, 2009). Critical perspectives on these connections and contradictions between agrarian values and traditional masculinity then raise questions about the social contexts in which farming men can positively engage in health-promoting behaviors that may prevent mental health problems. It is a nuanced view of these connections and contradictions and the positive steps farming men can and do take in relation to their mental well-being that form the basis of this article.

Conceptual Framework

These issues are considered through the lens of a salutogenic approach that has become commonly understood and used in health promotion (Antonovsky, 1987; Lindström & Eriksson, 2012; Macdonald, 2005). Salutogenesis focusses on what pushes individuals and communities positively toward the *health* end of the *health and illness* continuum (Antonovsky, 1987). This approach is consistent with recent developments in men's health research (Macdonald, 2012). Historically in this field, there has been a strong focus on how male socialization generates negative influences on health, particularly on mental health and well-being in terms of lower sensitivity to symptoms of depression, reluctance to seek help, and radical and violent expressions of distress (see review by Gough, 2013). This thesis is notably supported by the influential work of Harrison (1978), Connell (1995), Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), and Courtenay (2000, 2011) among others. While these issues are very relevant and still require further investigation, this view of masculinity may mask more complex and sometimes contradictory social constructions of masculinity or, more precisely, masculinities (Gough, 2013). A currently understudied topic are the various ways men positively engage with health practices and how these relate to more negative aspects of men's practices (Robertson & Williams, 2012).

In the context of men's health, some suggest that health behaviors are best understood as social practices by which men can demonstrate their level of conformity or resistance toward traditional masculinity norms, which hold a dominant position among discourses of masculinity. Robertson's (2007) model of men's health suggests that hegemonic masculinity requires that men should not show interest (at least publically) in their own health as health is a "feminine" and feminized concern. Furthermore, hegemonic norms suggest that men should cope on their own with personal problems and engage with health services only as last resort and when strongly encouraged by others to do so. Men as "morally good," responsible citizens are simultaneously expected to care for their own and their family's health and well-being in alignment with "provider" and "protector" male roles. Men constantly negotiate health practices in relation to hegemonic masculinity norms, revealing movement and fluidity between the requirement to "not care" and the requirement "to care." "Doing health" then is indeed a form of "doing gender" (Saltonstall, 1993).

This study focuses on coping in the context of the adversity common to many farmers. These adverse events include stressful situations related to farms (accountability, bad weather, livestock illness, and relentless work schedules), family–work reconciliation (work demands vs. aspiration to spend quality time with the family), and interpersonal issues (divorce, tension in the process of farm transfer, and conflicts with other farmers or community members). In these situations, a large array of manifestations of stress are self-reported from physiological symptoms—like fatigue, muscular tension, appetite, and weight imbalance—to more severe experiences of irritability, emotional outbursts, panic attacks, depression, suicidal ideation, and suicide. This set of symptoms are consistent with empirical studies and reviews on stress among farmers (Garnham & Bryant, 2014; Raine, 1999; Robertson, Elder, & Coombs, 2010; Roy, Tremblay, Oliffe, Jbilou, & Robertson, 2013; H. V. Thomas et al., 2003). Stress coping among farmers is gaining increasing research attention, particularly in relation to their help seeking and service use (or misuse) when experiences reach crisis level. While such work is crucial and necessary, the conceptual framework used here shifts the focus toward health promotion and the positive coping mechanisms that some farmers use in these stressful situations. A study by McLaren and Challis (2009) reveals that social support and a sense of belonging can buffer the effects of stress. While these two elements concern the contribution of community to stress reduction, little attention has so far been paid to how farming men cope with stress on their own and to the relationship of this to their popular image of being resourceful and resilient. This article therefore investigates the contribution of coping strategies displayed by farming men beyond the support provided by significant others or professionals. Salutogenesis and critical men's health approaches have guided the analysis to illuminate the subjective experiences relating to a combination of masculinities and agrarian social norms and the impact of these on farming men's mental health practices. Combining a salutogenic approach with critical men's health studies enables us to consider underinvestigated connections between masculinities and coping; particularly the positive health practices used to maintain well-being and avoid mental health problems.

Method

This research is based on 32 individual in-depth interviews with farming men and a focus group with five key informants working in rural areas, including mental health community practitioners, a suicide prevention volunteer, and a farming union advisor, all within the Province of Quebec, Canada. Ethical approval was granted by the Research Ethics Council of Université Laval. All interviews were completed by the first author who has no background in farming, and important preparation was therefore necessary to bridge this gap and create the necessary trust with research participants. Exploratory discussions were undertaken with key informants such as rural doctors, agronomists, farming union representatives, and farmers involved in suicide prevention. Farming-focussed publications were read, TV shows watched, and farming fairs attended. Advertisement for recruitment to the study was done with the help of these key informants, and through e-mail chains and media interviews. Two participants were recruited through a snowball technique following these earlier contacts. Selection criteria for the study, highlighted in the advertisement, were the following: being a farming man, aged between 25 and 64 years old, experiencing any level of stress (low to high), and speaking French. Twenty-eight participants completed the interview at home/farm, two on the phone, and one at a university with the choice of venue being of the participants choosing. On arrival at each participant's home and farm, the interviewer asked if they could tour the farm prior to the interview. This helped establish a conversational tone, positioned the participants as the expert in their own life, and demonstrated an interest in what interests them. Again, this was an important part of the process of establishing trust, which is particularly important in health research with men (Deslauriers & Deslauriers, 2010; Oliffe & Mroz, 2005). Informed consent was taken prior to the interview commencing. The interview schedule covered areas around the participants' farming background and their experience of stress and adversity. All interviews were digitally recorded. Debriefing was done after each interview and a list of mental health and other resources provided. Interviews were subsequently transcribed and coded using NVivo. Following the guidelines of a general inductive approach (D. R. Thomas, 2003), analysis included deductive processes (based on the research objectives) and inductive processes (data interpretation). Analysis started immediately following the first interview and continued throughout allowing the approach to be amended and improved (including adjusting the interview guide) in line with suggestions by Miles and Huberman (1994). Initial coding reflected the themes provided in the interview guide. Further analytical interpretation subsequently emerged from the data through considering its relation to the theoretical framework and the research question. Such an approach, where there is a cyclical relationship between data and theory, has been aligned with the process of "abductive reasoning" (Blaikie, 1993) and has been well used previously on research around men and health (e.g., Robertson, 2003). Saturation was achieved around the 15th interview as the number of new categories diminished. At this point, analysis focused on challenging interpretations and searching for alternative content (deviant cases) among the data. The overall research process meet generally accepted validity criteria for qualitative research: audit trail, credibility, integrity, and sensitivity (Shek, Tang, & Han, 2005; Turcotte, F.-Dufour, & Saint-Jacques, 2009; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). The interview techniques included many reformulations to assure proper understanding of the participants' point of view, and triangulation was possible with the key informants' focus group being useful for discussing the appropriateness of the links between data and interpretations, as well as in helping with recommendations for knowledge translation into practice and policy (Roy, 2014).

Results

Consistent with their social image of being resourceful men, participants disclosed a wide range of coping strategies to maintain their well-being and avoid mental health problems. The first section discusses self-distraction strategies such as work breaks, which is followed by a set of cognitive strategies that form the second theme. The third section discusses substance abuse, social withdrawal, and suicide, which are often referred to as "maladaptive coping strategies." The analysis generated a focus on self-distraction and cognitive strategies as these emerged as the most relevant for participants both quantitatively (in terms of the number of times they were mentioned) and qualitatively (in terms of the importance participants placed on them). Notably, most attention is devoted to work breaks because, more than any other themes or subthemes, it emerged as being particularly in conflict with the discourse of what farmers are expected to be. Finally, strategies with negative outcomes are briefly presented.

Between Necessity and Acceptability: Positioning Work Breaks and Vacations as Gender Issues

Farming, and especially working with livestock, is very intensive and often requires working 7 days a week. This was especially true for the farmers interviewed as all have family-size farms with no or few employees, which is a common reality in Québec and a contrast to the larger industrialized farms in the Canadian Prairies Provinces (Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba), or the United States. Additionally, the proximity of the house and the farm created a constant presence at work; that is, there is very little geographical work/home separation, creating a psychological feeling of constantly being "on call." In this context, one of the most crucial coping strategies was having work breaks and a vacation plan. This generally meant paying an employee or having an agreement within the family or with another farmer to take such breaks. The farmers were unanimous on the necessity of breaks while simultaneously recognizing the prevailing discourse that farmers should work all the time. This created a situation where such breaks then become stigmatized. Simon, a 30-year old dairy farmer living in a remote region, explains this dilemma:

> Many farmers don't take any vacations but I often go South. I did three 1-week trips last year. What I do is highly stigmatised, so at the town's coffee shop I only declare one trip and remain quiet about the others. My friends say, "You spoil yourself, why don't you work?" I let them talk because I know during summer I work very hard sometimes 100 hours a week so I earn these vacations. My house is next to the farm so I always keep an eye on it to see if everything is ok. To disengage, I have to leave. I get picked on because of that. (Simon, dairy farmer)

There is then a contradiction experienced by the farmers who resisted the social pressure to present themselves as intense and relentless workers yet who also recognized the pressure exerted (often by farming peers) to live up to such an image. Denis, a corn farmer in his 50s explains how this social pressure is reinforced in farmers' assemblies:

> It's weird, I already saw a guy winning the farming gold medal. He went to the stage and proudly said he had never taken any holiday in his life. Then he got loudly applauded. I never had a gold medal, am I lazy? There is something wrong. Last year, I did a snowmobile trip with some friends. I cried inside of me the whole time, telling myself I shouldn't be here, I should be working relentlessly, earning money. I have no right to be here. You punish yourself, you think you are lazy. (Denis, corn farmer)

This experience had a negative impact on Denis's ability to cope by taking breaks because it positions his own holidays as illegitimate, and they are therefore experienced with shame and guilt rather than with the pleasure that should bring the necessary rest and relaxation. This dilemma—between the necessity of work breaks and its negative view among other farmers—is perceived as a norm generally recognized by all farmers but simultaneously transgressed by many of them.

> Interviewer: Are vacations necessary?
> Pascal (dairy farmer): Yes yes [laughs].
> Interviewer: Are vacations positively perceived?
> Pascal: Hmm . . . not all the time, no. My brother and I have a weekend off out of two but my father said it should only be on Sunday [laughs] and he was serious. It bugged him because we took one weekend out of two.

At one point, Sylvain, a farmer in his late 50s suggests with some humor that vacations were "invented" by the younger generation of farmers. He expresses the difference between the mentality of his generation, based on relentless work, and that of the new generation, being more focussed on a balance between work, leisure, and family.

> Sylvain (fruit and vegetable grower): It changes, well my generation—I am near 60—and even those before us, it was worse, breaks just didn't exist on a farm. We begin . . . well personally, I started to learn breaks must be taken. But the new generation who's 40 years old, it's another approach.
> Interviewer: How did you discover that breaks "existed," that it was ok?
> Sylvain: Now I know [laugh]. I've known for a long time that it exists . . . but the right to take it, that's another story. We always have the impression we will have too much work after [a break]. I could work 24/7 and never get through everything so it is better to stop and come back in a better shape. At one point, I realized it's not only the body, my head too didn't keep up at this pace. I was exhausted, got to get out of this. My children are now old enough to take care of the farm when I am away.

Despite the stigma mentioned above, all farmers interviewed agreed with the benefits of work breaks and vacations. Most of them were very critical of the work habits of their father's generation based around a "relentless work" ethic and its negative impact on their health. A multiproduction farmer in his early 40s explains this:

> My dad worked all his life, all the time, and what did it do? Not much. He is 71 and his shoulders are worn out, he's got something wrong with his hip. Did he benefit from it? Yes, he built a nice business, it's ok but it's not all about the business. My social worker told me, "There is a guy with a good business, when it goes wrong, he leaves on vacation and when he comes back, he comes back with solutions." And that's true I did the same this year. (Bernard, multiproduction)

Also, the father's relationship to vacations is compared with someone who stops smoking, highlighting that this habit is not seen as "natural" among farmers and learning to disengage from the farm is a long process.

> When my dad took vacations, it was 2 days and it was a record. It could be seen in his behaviour, like someone who stops smoking. He wasn't particularly nice when we left for 2 days. It generated conflict because he was there [on vacation] physically but not mentally. Mentally he was still there [at the farm]. I mean, I fought a bit against this with my own vacations. I had to learn to disengage, it wasn't natural I haven't been raised that way. (Louis, wine grower)

This point of view was consistent across all interviews. Mathieu is a dairy farmer in his late 20s waiting for a second child and is very representative of the younger farmers' relationship to work:

> Our generation, we shouldn't expect that working 40 hours per week should be enough. Yes, we work on weekends and finish past 7:30 p.m. most days. Every guy recognizes that. What differentiates us [from the previous generation] is the will to have steady breaks to spend with your partner, your children, doing activities other than that. That's the most difficult, to reconcile the farm with the family. We succeed at it better than our parents but it is still tough. (Mathieu, dairy farmer)

It would be wrong to assume *all* older farmers embrace this relentless work ethic. It is true that most farmers never really retire when the next generation takes a greater role in the family business, and it is common to see older men still assuming some chores on the farm. This is consistent with the fact that their interests tended to remain centrally focussed around farming. However, as some farmers explained, their fathers often started to take vacations and travel after the farm transfer (passing on control of the farm).

> My dad is over 65 and he still milks the cows, only in the morning though, I do the evening shift. But my dad doesn't only do farming, he travels a lot. He spent 3 weeks in Asia, and other time in Southern USA. That enables us to see vacations positively. (Simon, dairy farmer)

The enlargement of modern farms was also seen to make it easier to establish a break schedule, such as one weekend out of two, enabling them to "recharge the batteries." In the same sense, technological improvement facilitates a better quality of life as reported by Isaac, a dairy farmer in his 30s, whose large family farm is structured with five members, giving him the opportunity to work less than the average farmer:

> Nowadays we're more mechanized. That's why I have the time to take a beer. It's also because of the work schedule. But it's mainly because of technology. The farm runs 7 days per week. One year I worked at Christmas, the next one it's on New Year's Eve and the next one is neither. (Isaac, dairy farmer)

Thus, evolution of farming technologies was said to enable a more balanced reconciliation between work, family, and leisure. Other views suggested that while farms of the past employed a whole family, farmers are presently more likely to work alone. This isolation can reinforce isolation and therefore represents a risk to mental well-being. In sum, the majority of farmers interviewed experienced a dilemma regarding two seemingly contradictory moral challenges. On one hand is the relentless farmer who never takes any vacations and sacrifices his body to work, as his father's generation used to do. On the other hand, most farmers aspire to an alternative work ethic in which work breaks and vacations are positioned as a wise and efficient way to reconcile productivity and provide a better quality of family life.

It is relevant to note what these farmers do during those breaks to promote their well-being. Some activities enabled participants to be far away from the worries of the farm, such as playing ice hockey in a farmers' league. This league is organized according to farmers' atypical work schedule. Sport and physical activities play an important role in maintaining a balance, especially when it comes to social activities. Some leisure activities are rooted in the rural culture, such as rodeo (practicing and watching) and line dancing. For others, work breaks were spent in social activities such as dining at restaurants, going out dancing, or volunteering. Many participants highlighted the importance of family among farmers, and time spent with children was described as a particularly powerful barrier to adversity.

> You can have a bad day on the farm: bad weather, injury. A children's laugh, a hug from those little arms can wipe away

> everything accumulated during the day. You've gotta be able to catch the moment, finding one small positive piece somewhere and hanging on to it. (Yvon, dairy farmer)

A powerful discourse among the participants positioned family ties as the best form of support possible. Some of them expressed the view that family is more valued among farmers than it is among the population in general. While this is clearly a contestable view, it nevertheless highlights the importance that these farmers gave to the role of their families in sustaining their mental well-being. But they also displayed coping strategies on their own, at the cognitive level.

Focussing on Cognitive Strategies With Positive Outcomes

According to the vast majority of farmers interviewed (29 of the 32 interviewed), one of the best coping strategies was being able to take a positive long-term perspective of both the farm and their family circumstances. Although not quantitative in nature, as Silverman (2001, p. 35) points out, numbers such as these can be helpful in qualitative work as they give a sense of the strength of a particular theme or issue. Olivier, a lamb farmer, was one of the strongest advocates of taking a positive attitude in farming as a means of surviving tough times. This attitude was important in this context as, in Canada, lamb is considered an expensive product with prices varying greatly from year to year, often leaving farmers with financial pressures:

> The investments are massive actually. I am on the edge, exhausted and I have a wonderful business. I probably have the most beautiful lamb flock in the region because I know them all. My technical results [health of the flock] are excellent, not financially yet, but I can explain all of them [deficits] and still, I am exhausted. It takes everything to motivate me and keep on going . . . but I know I have only a few months like this. We must learn to live on hope and optimism, not dreams. (Olivier, lamb farmer)

Olivier displays a good performance technically, in the care and knowledge of his lambs and therefore the quality of what he produced, but this did not always lead to financial success. This situation was shared with other farmers who aimed to produce quality products for highly ranked restaurants. Such objectives generated social benefits (good reputation) but could simultaneously jeopardize the businesses profitability. Likewise, Louis, a wine grower, who went through tough times building his business, echoed this need for a positive perspective in light of difficult and competitive trading markets. His point of view is clearly aligned with the importance of optimism as an essential skill for farming.

> I think I am someone naturally very optimistic and it has helped me enormously. I am not naturally a depressive person, I could have been though! (. . .) I try to talk about the good things rather than the bad ones. (Louis, wine grower)

Similarly, participants were prone to take the drama out of situations, notably through humor and by looking at past experiences of successful coping that provided confidence and hope. Also, positive reframing as described above was commonly associated with a strong focus on strategic planning. Many participants highlighted their business management skills in this regard. But the most important aspect in carrying on through tough times was their passion for agriculture and the time they took to appreciate it.

> My strength is that I am a guy who loves being outdoors, animals, machinery, land, and soil. Like tonight, it's sunny and it's going to smell of warm grass. I am going to sit on the porch, take a deep breath. It will recharge my batteries. I like this. (Bernard, multiproducer)

This passion for agriculture was closely aligned with taking pride in "feeding the world." This responsibility was highly valued by the farmers and was one of the main motivators to carry on during tough times. Organic farmers pushed this motivation further with a strong emphasis on quality and ethics. Such is the case for Eric. He runs an organic farm focussed on quality rather than financial benefits. Despite the suicidal ideations he associates with financial problems, he considers farming very significant. His motivation is fuelled by the pride of producing food that is considered suitable for the country's best restaurants.

> Years ago, I thought about suicide. I still think about it sometimes when I am exhausted, sickened of the financial stress. (. . .) [But] I'm happy about feeding people properly, having a product beyond the market's standards. I sell to [Restaurant]. The other day I brought my kids there to sensitize them: "See, our product, our name is on the menu." That's wicked! Back on the farm, this recognition and client's testimonies boosts me. I don't do it for the money but to feed myself, my family, and people who choose our organic food. (Eric, organic farmer)

This pride in food provision has also been expressed outside interviews. Driving across the countryside during data collection, the interviewer noticed many roadside billboards in fields "*Pas de nourriture sans agriculture*" (no food without farming). It is a part of a national campaign to promote the value of farming by the *Union des producteurs agricoles* (farming union). Thus, many farmers countered the strains of farming with an emphasis on the pride and value of their work at a personal and social scale. In addition, within these cognitive strategies, three participants found guidance and hope in prayer. For instance, Sebastien is a farmer and father in his mid-40s. He surrounds himself with many sources of support: technical advisors, a business coach, and God. He explains the role of religion in his coping.

> As a kid, I went to the Sunday church. I may not be the most religious man around but I have learnt ways to seek help through prayer. I found strength and resilience when things are bad. (Sebastien, dairy farmer)

While this discourse was shared by some farmers, the wide majority positioned themselves as too "grounded" or rational to put their hope in religious support. Thus, within and in addition to the quotes above, most participants valued the crucial importance of optimism, resilience, and solution-focussed and long-term perspectives. But some strategies could lead to negative outcomes as they have been experienced by participants themselves or people around them.

Distancing From Strategies With Negative Outcomes

Strategies like drug and alcohol abuse, social withdrawal, and suicide are, understandably, not considered as positive (or socially acceptable) options for coping with adversity and are generally referred to as "maladaptive coping" mechanisms. However, many of the participants had some experience of these if not personally then among their farming peers. The theme of suicide was not specifically raised but emerged from five participants who had contemplated or attempted suicide. They expressed ambivalence between despair and hope that, thankfully, in these cases favors the latter. Ludovic had been through many stressful issues such as prison and financial problems. Despite this adversity, he remained clear about the non-sense of suicide as an option when the wider consequences are considered.

> I was getting into legal problems, I devalued myself . . . didn't believe in anything, no hope. Suicide seems like a miracle solution. At the same time, a friend committed suicide. Then, I thought about my kids. A gesture like this leaves consequences. It's not the inheritance I want to leave them with. Lately, some teenagers committed suicide in surrounding towns. It shook me hard, there are other things in life than problems. (Ludovic, maple producer)

Ludovic's discourse was shared by all participants who experienced suicidal ideation. Such thoughts are a common outcome of the many issues farmers can face: bankruptcy, farm fire, accident, family crisis, divorce. However, substance abuse, social isolation, and suicide were seen by the farmers themselves as having a detrimental impact on their family, business, livestock, and community. Therefore, what seems to be a potential solution, or coping mechanism, in time of despair was recognized as most likely making situations worse, as these participants explain.

> Alcohol is not a solution, it only adds other problems. (Jocelyn, dairy farmer)

> Drinking is not a winning solution because you know you are going to hit a wall. It's gonna explode in your relationship, business, or within yourself. (Sebastien, dairy farmer)

These two participants, along with many others, shared the same point of view although coming from different experiential backgrounds. Jocelyn got very depressed, dysfunctional, and suicidal in a context of social isolation. For him, emotional attachment to the flock, and the pride of taking care of these animals, contributed to him rejecting suicide as a possible solution and to him seeking professional help. In contrast, Sebastien displayed a very confident attitude regarding farming stress. He explained his resilience in relation to his strong sense of self-management and his positive outlook and perspective. This rationale connects with participants' general prioritization of strategies that generate positive rather than negative outcomes.

Discussion

This study aims to better understand the connections between various masculinity practices, farming practices, and health-promoting behaviors. Farmers are generally seen as resourceful, and these findings identified ways in which they coped with adversity. A reinterpretation of the social norms of the farmer as a relentless worker seemed a key element in maintaining a good mental health balance. Results support prior observations by Robertson (2007) examining how coping strategies are mainly orientated on "instrumental action" (doing) rather than "communicative action" (talk) for men when dealing with stressful and emotional issues. These mechanisms include cognitive (i.e., optimism) and management actions (breaks). It might be possible that farmers engage these emotional coping strategies as a last resort, such as during a crisis situation like a breakup or bankruptcy (Roy, 2014). Cognitive strategies can be positioned both as conforming to or resisting traditional masculine norms. They can be interpreted as ways of demonstrating control, at least publically, over adversity. There are situations where optimism may be actioned as a strategy to hide or mask problems and mental health symptoms. This pattern is highlighted in the gap found between Canadian and European men's positive self-evaluated health with epidemiological data reporting high levels of mental health morbidity (European Commission, 2011; Tremblay, Cloutier, Antil, Bergeron, & Lapointe-Goupil, 2005). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, men often self-report their health as better than women even when the levels of symptoms are similar. However, optimism could equally be interpreted in relation to positive acts of perseverance and endurance; attributes of pride among farmers can be mobilized to overcome adversity with confidence and resilience.

Consistent with a stereotype of farming men is the general assumption that they embody many traditional masculinity norms. Consequently, they may also be expected to favor some more negative masculine coping strategies—such as substance abuse, social isolation, and suicide—as many studies suggest (Alston, 2012; Alston & Kent, 2008; Courtenay, 2006; Garnham & Bryant, 2014; Hawton et al., 1998; Judd et al., 2006; Sturgeon & Morrissette, 2010; H. V. Thomas et al., 2003). While this no doubt holds true in some contexts, findings reported here suggest important nuances. Pathways to positive coping and recovery may imply an ambivalence between contemplation of strategies aligned with negative aspects of traditional masculinity norms or strategies aligned with more positive, progressive aspects of these norms based on the importance of family and work life balance. The challenge in public health is to find ways to reduce farmers' (and other men's) engagement with the former, negative, strategies and facilitate engagement in these latter, more positive strategies.

The psychosocial benefits of work breaks are well known in numerous professional sectors (Brown, Ling, Bradley, Lingard, & Townsend, 2009), but there is a cultural contradiction between the glorification of work and a devaluation of leisure (Zijlstra & Sonnentag, 2006), and findings here suggest this holds true for farmers. Work breaks become salient to farmers' health practices and how these link to configurations of masculinity because of the tension between the recognized benefits of such breaks and the stigma that this can generate. To manage this, some took these necessary breaks but tended to hide them from the public eye, or at least from their peers. This suggests that social pressure still persists among the farmers to demonstrate, at least publically, total dedication to the time spent on farm work. Taking a salutogenic approach enables a focus on processes promoting strategies with positive outcomes. Within this approach, the acceptability of work breaks can be negotiated and legitimated by aligning this coping strategy with the increased value that comes from a better quality of life and an improved balance and reconciliation between work, family, and leisure. It implies that farmers can depart from the potentially damaging, wholly relentless work ethic largely valued by their fathers' generation and to a lesser extent by younger farmers too. Strategies to negotiate the stigma attached to work breaks, such as hiding it from the public eye or valuing it, could be interpreted by inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson, 2005, 2009). This suggests that each man constructs his own masculinity by adopting a number of socially valued norms and rejecting others according to a very personal assessment of what is appropriate and what is not. Work and family balance seems to be more strongly valued by younger farmers, a trend observed also among young rural Norwegian men who often distance themselves from many traditional masculine norms (Bye, 2009). In addition, many older farmers are also now questioning the value of the relentless work ethic, which suggests that it is not just a generational clash but an ongoing process of wider cultural change across and within age-groups and individuals.

The results and discussion within this article should be considered within a set of limitations. Some of these limitations are inherent within the qualitative method used. Despite efforts to create a climate of trust and confidence within the interviews, social desirability might still have influenced what participants decided to disclose or not and the way they chose to disclose issues: that is, the language and tone they used to tell their story. Coding was completed solely by the first author. Constant attention to diversity in participants' discourses, and extensive discussions between authors through the subsequent stages of analysis and interpretation, aimed to protect against selectivity in the use of data. Even with multiplication of means of recruitment, the sample remained sociologically homogeneous (i.e., in terms of national and cultural background, ethnicity). This is most likely to be due to homogeneity among farming men in the province of Quebec. Nonetheless, this method enabled an in-depth examination of an issue through the conceptual and theoretical creativity typical to qualitative research.

Conclusion

Farming men in this study displayed a variety of coping strategies, aligned with or resistant to traditional masculinity norms. The findings suggest certain implications for future research. The theoretical framework of salutogenesis enables the investigation of men's health beyond the sole relationship between a deficit model of masculinity and negative mental health outcomes. It further advocates the development of future research on health-promoting behaviors among other subgroups of men (e.g., rural and nonrural men). Overall, the salutogenic approach helped guide the research process toward new results and interpretations about stress-related coping strategies for farming men outside psychosocial-based interventions. It brought attention to key elements of health promotion and the prevention of mental health problems among this group of men. For example, in practice, the implications of this work suggest that the development of farm stress support should start with farming men's desire and pride in resourcefulness. Services can be (re)presented as tools for boosting the men's own resilience against adversity rather than as being seen as a replacement when their own self-coping techniques have failed. A further major aspect is the importance of addressing directly the acceptability of work breaks. Some community services are already aligned in this direction, such as a replacement program providing farm staff to enable farmers to take a break once in a while. These could be complemented with a social media campaign highlighting the positive benefits that accrue to farming families when they enjoy time away together. The very existence of such services publicly demonstrates that work breaks are a "real," legitimate issue for farmers and thereby helps normalize it and constructs its social acceptability. Linked to this, it seems crucial to also directly address and question the pride in embodying the stereotype of the relentless worker. Deconstructing this aspect of traditional masculinity norms among farmers will likely help create greater social acceptability of a variety of (hopefully more positive) masculine practices aligned with farmers' health and well-being and their families' as well.

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgments go to the staff at the Centre for Men's Health, Leeds Metropolitan University, for a research traineeship and comments on the first drafts of this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: First author acknowledges financial support from Fonds Québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture; Masculinities and Society research team; Fondation Desjardins; Faculty of Social Sciences at Université Laval; Institute of Gender and Health, Public Health and the Agricultural Rural Ecosystem of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and their partners.

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