

## **“Daddy’s Gone and He’ll Be Back in October”: Farm Women’s Experiences of Family Leisure**

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This study addresses the role of family leisure on the family farm. An interpretive interview approach was used to explore the meanings of family leisure for a purposively selected group of farm women in Ontario, Canada. The analysis showed that while children’s leisure, family excursions and vacations were all highly valued, attempts to facilitate these activities were often experienced with disappointment and frustration due to the demands of farm life and the absence of the husbands from family activities. The women’s experiences were seen as “single parenthood within the marital context.” Comparisons are drawn between the family leisure experiences for these farm women and previous research on leisure in urban families. The importance of context for understanding family leisure is emphasized.

**KEYWORDS:** *Family leisure, rural, women.*

### Introduction

Research has identified the value and significance of family leisure on family life. Parents see family leisure as an important way to build and strengthen the family, and mothers in particular, put considerable time and effort into organizing and facilitating family activities (Harrington, 2005; Larson, Gillman, & Richards, 1997; Shaw, 2001). However, most of the research on family leisure has taken place within an urban or suburban context, and has typically focused on traditional white middle-class families. Clearly there is a need to expand this research to other types of families to obtain a more complete understanding of this form of leisure practice (Shaw, 1997).

One type of family that has received little attention in the leisure literature is the rural family, and this study represents a step towards understanding diversity within families by exploring the meanings of family leisure on the family farm. Although research has shown the importance of family in the lives of rural women (Kelly & Shortall, 2002; Little & Austin, 1996), this research has not focused specifically on leisure, and family leisure may have different meanings or different forms in rural settings than in urban environments. For example, geographic isolation, as well as the rhythms and

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demands of farm work may influence opportunities for family time or family activities.

The purpose of this present study is to examine the meanings and experiences of family leisure from the perspective of farm women. Specifically, an interpretive interview study was conducted to explore the extent to which family leisure is valued by farm women, their perceptions of the positive and negative aspects of family togetherness on the farm, and the advantages and challenges that farm life provides in this regard. Prior research on family leisure in the urban context as well as leisure on the lives of rural women was used to help frame this study and to provide sensitizing concepts.

### Research on Family Leisure in Urban Settings

Freysinger (1994) noted, "in contrast with the industrial period when family bonds were primarily instrumental, individuals today look to the family as a source of companionship and psychological gratification" (p. 212). Moreover, family leisure is central to this aspect of family life because of its potential to foster togetherness and intra-familial communication (Daly, 2001; Shaw, 2001). In particular, research has shown the significant role that leisure plays in the lives of families with young children. Parents organize family leisure activities to build and strengthen family relationships through encouraged togetherness and child socialization (Harrington, 2005). Parents also believe that family leisure activities provide a range of other benefits as well, including the inculcation of life lessons and moral values as well as the promotion of children's physical development (Townsend & Murphy, 2001). Moreover, some parents hope that family leisure will provide important learning opportunities to aid their children when they become parents and have their own family (Shaw & Dawson, 2001).

However, facilitating the family's leisure activities may not be freely chosen or intrinsically motivated by parents, as there is often a sense of duty or responsibility associated with organizing and participating in these activities (Harrington, 2005; Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Women, in particular, tend to see the facilitation of family leisure as an obligatory part of their parental role (Larson, Gillman & Richards, 1997; Shaw, 1992), and in many cases women organize family leisure activities around the needs of their children and husband, rather than around their own personal needs.

The obligatory nature of family leisure, and the expectation that facilitating and organizing such activities is part of the parental role led Shaw and Dawson (2001) to suggest that family leisure should be seen as "purposive leisure", rather than "pure", or freely chosen leisure. Moreover, the purposive nature of family leisure suggests that parents work to facilitate such activities even when they feel a sense of lack of time or time stress from responsibilities associated with employment and domestic work (Daly, 2001).

A considerable body of research has accumulated in recent years about the stresses experienced by parents. For example, Zuzanek (1998) noted that parents in the 24 to 44 age group with children under the age of 11 expe-

rience the highest levels of time pressure. In particular, time stress and fatigue is severe for women who experience societal expectations of being the primary caregiver of children, while maintaining the bulk of household and domestic responsibilities (Brown, Brown, Miller, & Hansen, 2001; Jackson & Henderson, 1995; Shaw, 1994). The emotional demands and responsibilities associated with the care of the family members' physical, social and emotional health often goes unnoticed by women's partners and society as a whole (Shaw, 2001).

As the primary facilitators of their family's leisure, women experience a further increase in demands on their time through the additional physical and emotional workloads involved. Family leisure opportunities generate a considerable amount of physical work in the preparation, organization, clean up and unpacking of activities (Shaw, 1992). Furthermore, there is a substantial amount of emotional work that is generated to ensure that everyone is having a good time (Shaw, 2001). It is taken for granted that women will be responsible for the organization and production of special events, and that accordingly such activities will require emotional support and energy to ensure its success. Given the very positive expectations about family time, it is clear that women organize family leisure activities with high expectations of positive interactions. When conflict between family members is experienced and the activity does not turn out as expected there are often high levels of disappointment, frustration and lack of enjoyment (Shaw, 2001; Shaw & Dawson, 2001).

Overall, the literature presents a picture of family leisure among urban families as highly valued, but also stress-inducing. That is, parents have high expectations about the positive outcomes of family activities, but organizing and facilitating these activities takes time and effort, particularly for mothers, who are already experiencing high levels of time stress. Because of these conflicting perspectives on family leisure, it has been suggested that family time should be conceptualized as inherently contradictory (Shaw, 1997). Framing the family leisure paradigm in a contradictory lens helps to capture the conflicting realities of parents' experiences as they seek to enhance family life. Also, this perspective can be seen to provide a more holistic understanding of family leisure and can help to sensitize researchers to both the positive and negative aspects of family life.

### The Lives of Rural Farm Women

For women living on rural farms, farm life provides an environment where the home is the place of business. The nature of work is different compared to the urban context as rural life is driven by cyclical seasons of planting and harvesting, alongside the daily responsibilities associated with the livestock. These differences in rural versus urban or suburban contexts may affect many aspects of everyday life including the meaning of leisure, the significance of family, and, as a result, the experiences associated with family leisure.

The coexistence of work life and home life on the family farm, as well as the ongoing daily and seasonal demands of farm work (Machum, 2006), mean that work and leisure are not separate for farm men and women, but are often overlapping and infused into daily life (Shortall, 2006b). In addition, the time and energy commitment required to operate a family farm is associated with a strong work ethic among rural farm populations. This high value placed on hard work and the difficulty separating work from leisure seems to have led to a way of life in which leisure, as defined by free time, relaxation and fun, does not appear to be significant or to be considered important. While there is relatively little research on leisure for farming populations, it has been suggested that farm work may take the place of leisure in explaining life quality for farm men and women (Ackerman, Jenson, & Bailey, 1991).

In recent years, the challenges associated with running a family farm, particularly the economic challenges, have been exacerbated, and this has reduced access to leisure even more. For many families, the farm income is no longer sufficient to pay the farm debt or support the family household (Shortall, 2006a). This has resulted in an increase in farm-related work for individual farmers as they seek to reduce the cost of hired labor (Alston, 1995), and at the same time it has led to increased participation in off-farm work to help fund farm operations and to attempt to ensure economic survival (Kelly & Shortall, 2002; Machum, 2006).

For many farm families it is the wives rather than the husbands who have taken paid jobs away from the farm to increase the household income, resulting in a dramatic increase in their participation in the paid labor market. However, as Shortall (2006a) notes, this has not affected the traditional gender roles of family and domestic responsibilities: "There is little evidence to suggest that women's off-farm work has led to any renegotiation of child-care roles, household work or on-farm responsibilities. Rather, it is another work role that women have assumed" (p. 313). As a result farm families, and particularly farm women, have felt increased time pressures, demands and fatigue, as they try to balance paid employment, farm work and domestic responsibilities.

Despite the lack of time and the apparent devaluation of leisure among farm families, two studies conducted in the 1980s which focused specifically on leisure meanings and experiences (Henderson & Rannells, 1988; Henderson, 1990) suggested that leisure did play a role in the lives of farm women. Specifically, Henderson and Rannells (1988) reported that many of the farm women in their study could not explain the value of leisure and had difficulty discussing or defining it. The terms "leisure" and "relaxation" had underlying negative connotations. However, further research by Henderson (1990) indicated that farm women did value "meaningful experiences", or "minute vacations." That is, while the women were not comfortable with the term "leisure", they could describe the circumstances and contexts of important leisure moments, and these were seen as significant. Thus, these notions of meaningful experiences or meaningful moments may

be relevant to the quality of life for farm women today as they struggle with the stresses of farm life.

In terms of the significance of family, the research has been unequivocal in suggesting the centrality and importance of sense of family in the farming communities (Little & Austin, 1996; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). This may be partly because of the intergenerational nature of the family farm business, and the strong tradition of passing the family farm from father to son (Shortall, 2006b). In addition, the family farm has traditionally been a family business in that all family members have been expected to contribute to farm work once they were old enough to do so. This has meant that, over the years, the farm has literally been at the center of family life. An added dimension that may contribute to the centrality of family in traditional farm life is the social isolation that many farm families experience. The ongoing demands of farm work, as well as the relative geographic isolation in rural communities (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; Warner-Smith & Brown, 2002) means that social interactions are much more likely to occur within the conjugal family rather than with friends, neighbors, or even extended family members.

Given the centrality of family among farming populations, it is not surprising that the research that has looked at rural women's lives has shown that time spent together as a family is highly valued by farm women (Alston, 1995; Warner-Smith & Brown, 2002). This suggests that family leisure may be important and, perhaps, that it is enjoyable moments with children that may constitute meaningful leisure moments for farm women who are mothers. Indeed, Henderson (1990) and Henderson and Rannells (1988) reported that farm women view the social benefits of spending time with their families as more important than the individual benefits of their own leisure. Despite the high level of time stress that farm women experience, farm women like their urban counterparts, may also put time and effort into facilitating family activities and family togetherness.

In sum, the literature on rural women indicates that there are differences in the conceptualization of "leisure" by farming versus non-farming populations, and that the work ethic and the work load may be particularly high for farming families. This may mean that the challenges and circumstances of family leisure may be different for rural compared to urban families. While there is little research on the specific meanings and experiences of family leisure for farm women, some of the literature does suggest that such activities may be an important part of farm family life.

### Methods

The study used a qualitative interview approach to explore the meanings and experiences of family leisure for farm women. The rural studies literature provided an initial sensitivity to the demanding work lives of farm women, many of whom combine family and household responsibilities with

off-farm paid work. The authors were also sensitive to the daily and seasonal demands of farm work and to the fact that the term "leisure" may not be meaningful or may be viewed in negative ways among farming populations. In addition, the literature on family leisure in urban settings led to a number of sensitizing concepts, including the idea of family togetherness, parental expectations about the outcomes of family activities, and the contradictory nature of family leisure. These sensitizing concepts helped the initial design of the study and of the interview guide, although no assumptions were made that these concepts would necessarily apply, or that the family leisure experiences of farm women and urban women would be similar.

### *Farm Women Characteristics and Recruitment*

A purposive sample of seven women residing on family farms participated in semi-structured interviews. To ensure elements of homogeneity, only married women with one or more children in the 6 to 12 year old age group were selected, this criterion being based on the assumption that family leisure might be particularly important at this lifecycle stage. Since economic hardship has led to the need for secondary income sources for most family-run farm operations, only women who had part-time or full-time jobs away from the farm were interviewed. Finally, an additional inclusion criterion that the family farms had livestock as part of the farming operations also contributed to the homogeneity of the sample.

Initial participants were recruited through contacting rural nonprofit organizations in two rural communities in southern Ontario. In the first community, the Agricultural Society's Board of Directors was contacted. This volunteer based organization is devoted to educating and entertaining members of the community and surrounding area by organizing an annual fall fair. In the second community, the Farmers' Santa Claus Parade of Lights organizing committee was contacted. Each year twenty of the area's farmers and their families decorate their farm equipment with Christmas lights and other seasonal decorations and drive along the town's main street. Both communities are located within 30 kilometers of each other. Members of these groups were asked to assist in the identification of any potential farm women in their community that met the criterion as outlined. Snowball or chain sampling strategies were then used to find additional information rich participants. Of the seven women interviewed, four were from the first community and three were from the second community.

All women interviewed were married and living on farms on which their husbands were born and raised. The farms had been passed down or purchased from previous generations. All women had completed a post-secondary education; four of them university degrees, and three of them college diplomas. The women reported working 12 to 40 hours in off-farm employment with diverse occupations that included book-keeping, technical writing, software support, a hotel executive recruiter, a veterinarian and a

human resources coordinator. All women had at least one child in the 6 to 12 year old age group, with children ranging from 2 months to 15 years and family sizes varying from two to five children.

### *The Interviews*

The interviews, which typically lasted between one and two hours, were all tape-recorded and later transcribed. Presented with the option of conducting the interviews in a local café of their choice or within their home, all seven farm women preferred that the interviews took place within their respective homes. This provided not only a convenient and relaxed setting for the women but also allowed the first author the opportunity to see and experience the farm setting. The preferred interview location was a room in the home where the women could openly and freely discuss their experiences, without the concern of other family members overhearing their responses. Accordingly, for the majority of the interview time span, the women and the first author were alone. However, on occasion a husband or child would pass through the room, with minimal disruption or impact on the interview. The women were informed that the interview transcripts would be kept confidential with only the authors having access to them. With the women's permission, quotes were used from the interview transcripts using an assigned pseudonym name.

An interview guide was used to ensure that the same topics or subject areas were explored in each interview (Patton, 2002). As indicated earlier, the initial questions suggested in the interview guide were developed based on concepts developed from a review of the literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The first section of the interview guide asked questions related to what a typical day on the family farm looked like within the context of work patterns and responsibilities. These questions provided insight into the various dimensions of the farm women's lives through farm work, off-farm paid employment, and domestic responsibilities. In addition, the purpose of this set of questions was to begin the flow of discussion through activity-based questions. By asking these questions first, a sense of rapport developed between the participants and the first author, prior to questions which centered on feelings, emotions, and meanings.

The next section of the interview focused on the value and importance of family togetherness and meaningful activities that they experienced together with their families (e.g., with their children and husbands). These questions were designed to provide insight into the types of activities that the farm women perceived as meaningful, the frequency of the activities, and who was involved in the participation of these activities. Also, in this section, the farm women's workload requirements in the organization and implementation of these activities were discussed. The third section of the interview guide focused on the discovery of the positive and negative aspects of the meaningful experiences. Framed by the contradictory conceptual model of family leisure, this set of questions was centered on the perceived

benefits and outcomes in planning these activities. The difficulties and conflicts that arose from these activities when things did not go as planned, and their feelings and emotions when this occurred were also explored. The final section of the interview concerned issues related to family leisure that might be unique to the farming population. Specifically, the aim of these questions was to provide insight into how the harvesting and planting seasons and the daily responsibilities associated with the livestock, shaped the family's opportunities to share meaningful experiences.

As outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) the use of an interview guide provided a beginning focus only. The guide allowed for the flexibility and freedom to explore new topics of importance that emerged from each individual interview. During the discovery of emerging themes, the research questions were slightly changed and refined with each subsequent interview. The first author's former experience residing on a family farm was also used to enrich the understanding of participants' experiences while engaging in interactive dialogue during the interview process. The first author's experience residing on a family farm also enhanced sensitivity in setting up the interview schedule conducive to the farm women's specific needs. Interviews were scheduled around morning and evening chores, and special consideration was given to avoid interviewing the women during planting and harvesting seasons. Therefore, interviews were conducted in the winter months when time stress factors associated with the crops were minimized.

Although not originally planned in the initial research design, additional insightful information was gathered after the interviews were completed as the women walked with the first author to her vehicle, often resulting in extended conversations as they wandered around the vicinity of the house and farmyard. Descriptive notes were taken after these extended conversations in a reflective journal. This journal was also used to provide detail as to the emotional context and non-verbal communication that occurred throughout the interviews. The journal served a third purpose in recording reflexive thoughts, identifying personal values and perceptions that emerged throughout the course of the study. Finally, the journal provided an important role informing the analytical process through recording the development of emerging concepts and themes.

### *The Analysis*

The interview transcripts and reflective journal were initially analyzed through open coding procedures (Strauss, 1987). This "unrestricted" type of coding involved reviewing the interview transcripts line-by-line, examining and exploring concepts. This initial stage of analysis was seen as tentative, its primary purpose being to invoke creative thinking and engage in conceptual exploration. Throughout the process attention was paid to potential verification and saturation of individual codes. This led to a considerable number of descriptive codes related to daily and seasonal activities, obligations and responsibilities, perceptions, experiences and values related to fam-



ily activities, and information about the changing nature and context of farm life. Throughout the lengthy process of open coding, codes were discarded, modified and expanded with the goal of saturation and placing them in relationship to other codes.

During the subsequent analysis, axial coding became a prominent process. This type of coding consisted of intense analysis of the paradigm items (conditions, consequences, and so forth) conducted around one code at a time. This process resulted in the discovery of emerging relationships between categories and/or subcategories. The process of selective coding followed. The purpose of this coding procedure was to build and engage in only those codes that significantly related to the core codes. Selective coding became increasingly dominant throughout the coding process as the data were explored for one or more core categories that captured the meaning or significance of family leisure on the family farm. The selective coding process was conducted systematically focusing on the core category or main theme that emerged, co-constructed in the words of the farm women and the authors interpretations of their lived experiences.

### Findings

A primary finding from the analysis of the data revealed the important value these farm women placed on facilitating family togetherness. However, consistent with the contradictory nature of family leisure the high physical and emotional workload for the women was also revealed. Four sub-themes emerged that defined the context and experiences of the family's activities: (1) Men and Women's Division of Labor, (2) Importance of Facilitating Children's Leisure, (3) Frustrations of One-day Family Excursions, and (4) Family Vacations—A Rare Exception. From these four sub-themes a core theme emerged: Single Parenthood within the Marital Context. The four sub-themes and core theme are discussed in the following sections.

#### *Men and Women's Division of Labor*

The farm women noted that their husbands were responsible for the majority of the farm related tasks, and that these tasks seemed to be never ending. As exemplified by Amy: "But I mean trying to run the whole farm on his own. He pretty much works from the time he gets up in the morning until the time he goes to bed." All of the farm women described their husbands as being hard workers, dedicated and passionate about their livelihood. Spatially their husbands spent a good portion of their day on the farm. However, the farm women and children were not able to spend a reasonable amount of time with them as the husbands were often away from the house, working outside in the fields or in the barns. As Angela noted, there was always a task at hand that required her husband's attention: "Even though dad's around, the concept of having him on the property . . . but you don't get to see him that much because he comes and goes. He's always got things he's behind on in the barn too."

As a result of their husbands' work ethic and time dedicated to the farm related tasks, the farm women (who were employed off the farm as well) had primary responsibility for the household and care of the children. The majority of the women emphasized that this was deemed necessary because of the nature and time commitment of their husband's work on the farm. As exemplified by Tara:

As far as washing and all that kind of stuff, that's my job. He will empty dishwashers and that kind of stuff. Things that he sees that need to be done, he will do. But I don't expect it of him, because he works from dawn to dusk. (Tara)

All of the women spoke of fatigue as they tried to balance employment, facilitate the primary care of their children and maintain the home. As much as they enjoyed spending time with their children, a typical day for them was consumed with domestic responsibilities related to the home's upkeep and daily childcare responsibilities. This situation led to considerable stress and fatigue for the women who often felt that without more assistance from their husbands, they could not keep up with their frantic lifestyle. As Kate noted, "Something's gotta give. [My husband] works too on Sundays now. He works all the time, 7 days a week, and 4:30 [a.m.] in the morning to 6:00 [p.m.] at night."

What is interesting to note as the women talked about their "typical day" on the farm, was the absence of farm related work. When asked what their role on the farm was in terms of work related activities, many of the women indicated that they were not really involved in the farming operations on a daily basis; they fulfilled more of a "behind the scenes" role. Almost all of the women looked after the bookkeeping for the farm and were only involved in the physical aspects of farming when peak times required extra assistance (i.e., planting and harvesting). As Hilary and Kate indicated, they were involved in supportive roles and had minimal involvement in the day to day care of the livestock:

It's occasional just because I'm not here an awful lot. So basically I'm more of a support. Keep everybody fed, and keep everybody going. Somebody needs a ride somewhere to a field or to drop off equipment and I do the banking. But I don't do any feeding or milking. (Hilary)

I'm doing the book work, not very much on the farm itself. I used to before the kids were born. I did a lot actually. And then when the kids were small, I stayed home and then I started working with my career so I really don't do anything in the barn. (Kate)

The workload related to off-farm employment and fulfilling the primary role in domestic and childcare responsibilities were cited as common reasons for the women's minimal involvement in the farming operations. As exemplified by Kate's quote, it would appear that the women's role on the farm may change when they have children and are employed in off-farm labor, due to perceived time pressures felt by the women. A reduction in their involvement in the farming operations was evident and a move towards a traditional division of labor as it related to household and childcare respon-

sibilities was suggested for the family's survival. This division of labor strongly shaped the other three themes, defining the context and nature of the family's leisure. The other three sub-themes will now be explored.

### *Importance of Facilitating Children's Leisure*

The second theme revealed that the farm women perceived the facilitation of their children's leisure, in particular minor sports and school athletics, to be one of the most highly valued and important activities in their daily lives. Although the women described this as a shared family leisure activity, time spent in minor sports was specifically for the children's leisure and benefit. With the husbands' inability to leave their farm work between the hours of 4:00–7:00 p.m., the women facilitated all of the requirements needed to support their children in the minor sport leagues and school athletics. Speaking from her own experience, Angela revealed, "Daddy, he can't. It's during his milking time. He milks at 4:00 [p.m.] and he isn't done 'til 7:00 [p.m.] at night and that's when all the extra-curricular activities tend to be."

Despite the additional workload associated with the facilitation of these activities the women felt it was important for their children to participate in the community minor sport leagues and school athletics. One of the primary motivations was to provide socialization opportunities with other children, considered important because of the isolated nature of the rural locale. The women believed that this experience gave the children the opportunity for social and physical growth and development. They also felt that it was important that the children learned many life lessons, especially those lessons that could not be learned on the farm. All of the women believed that sport experiences were essential for ensuring their children's success, through preparing them for the world outside of the farm environment. As exemplified by Angela and Shannon:

I want them to be able to experience all kinds of settings, not just the farm setting. I want them to fit in at school and to learn social skills and to learn how to do other physical skills. I think sports builds confidence in them and so they can have some personal achievements. I think they set goals for themselves and that enables them to strive for things and reach their goals. (Angela)

So by putting them in summer sports, it gave them an opportunity to meet other kids that they may hook up with later. Being on the farm, they don't get the interaction daily with the kids. If you don't take them out to those intramural sports, they can't just walk across the street or go to the park like the kids in town can to play. I think that's a bit of a disadvantage for them in that respect because they don't get that constant interaction if they wanted. Like in the summer they can go days without seeing other kids, you know. (Shannon)

However, facilitating the children's minor sports participation was physically and emotionally exhausting for the women, who sometimes spent up to 20 hours per week dedicated to these activities. As Tara explained, in addition to hockey practices and games, time was also required to prepare

their equipment, and participate in fundraising activities and tournaments: "Probably about 20 hours per week and then I also volunteer time as well and that would probably be another four to five hours per week. Lots of time."

Transportation also seemed to be a major hurdle for the women in terms of the time demands placed upon them. Alternative methods such as car-pooling, walking to activities, or the use of public transport were not an option for these children due to their rural locale. Typically, the children in the family were completely dependent on their mothers for transportation to activity locales as revealed by Amy and Shannon:

Sometimes it's a bit of a hassle, like for the skating we are a way over at the West End Rec. Centre. Sometimes it's a bit of a drive. I can't count on him. It's not like I can say you keep these two and I'm going to take [my daughter] skating. So having to take the others with me is a bit of a challenge. (Amy)

Driving. Gas. Miles on the van. Last winter when [my son] played hockey his practices were on Saturday and his games were Sunday, and [my daughter] was doing yoga that year on Saturdays. So I was going to [the city] everyday, 7 days a week, which I hated . . . So that is a definite disadvantage in that respect. (Shannon)

Nevertheless, despite the time commitment, one of the mothers had a positive perspective on her responsibility for transporting her children to minor sports and athletic events. Tara viewed this as an opportunity to spend quality time with their children. Tara explained that while she was driving her children to activities she engaged in a broad range of discussion topics with her children: "The drive there and back is key. It's important we have discussions on whatever. It's not necessarily hockey, by any stretch of the imagination."

For most of the women, though, practices, games, travel time and the inability of the husbands to absent themselves from farm work compounded feelings of time stress and frustration. As a coping mechanism, some of the women would make the decision to limit their children's involvement in more than one sporting activity. However, with emotions of guilt evident, Kate and Jeannette described how they felt about this decision:

I can only do so much, so sometimes I get really frustrated because they want more. Everybody [referring to the coaches] always wants more of your kids all the time. A few more practices, a few more of this, and a few more of that. Finally, I said, "That's it. We can only do so much." (Kate)

But again it all lies on me. [In reference to transporting her sons to soccer games and practices]. So they're not at hockey because my husband will never take them and at this point I'm refusing to be a hockey mom. They haven't really said, "I really want to be in hockey yet." If they did, I might consider it. (Jeannette)

The farm women's facilitation of their children's participation in leisure outside of the farm context provided contradictory meanings and experiences. Although it created additional elements of time stress, fatigue and frustration

within their daily lives, it was also important and seen by the farm women to have significant value to their children's lives.

### *Frustrations of One-day Family Excursions*

The third theme related to the mothers' efforts at organizing one-day family excursions. Family trips to places such as the zoo, amusement parks, and visiting extended family members were perceived to be important for quality time and family togetherness. The women also organized these types of activities to ensure their children were able to experience new and different activities that would broaden their horizons away from the farm. However, one-day excursions were greatly constrained by the fathers' farm work. As with other family activities, most of the time it was only the mothers and children who would go on these one-day excursions. As Angela noted, it was on rare and special occasions that her husband would be able to join them:

We have our summer trips and I take them to the city, and we go to Centre Island, and Canada's Wonderland, and the zoo, and all those things. But it's really very difficult for [my husband] to get there with us.

One-day excursions that involved the whole family together were severely constrained, and the additional emotional stress in trying to organize such events on the mothers was evident. Livestock and the weather made the participation by the entire family difficult to achieve. For the father to be able to participate, the activity had to be confined in-between morning and evening chores (11:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.). As Hilary explained, any day trips that may have included the father were often experienced as stressful and rushed because of the need to return home and attend to the livestock:

One of the most difficult things that you deal with is always being in a rush, because often you have to be home for chores so your day is always cut short. You can't leave until the chores are done and then you are heading out and it's always cutting it short . . . rushing back for chores. It's always been a real disappointment I guess I would say. It's always a bit of a downer because you would like to get the benefit of the full day, but you don't always get to.

Limitations were also evident related to the planting and harvesting seasons. Many of the farm women suggested that between the months of April to October, it was only on a rare occasion that the entire family would be able to spend a day away together. Daily weather patterns also influenced the husband's participation in one-day excursions, and made it very difficult to plan ahead of time. Speaking from her own experience, Hilary revealed that during the summer months, her husband would only join her and the children on rainy days when the crops could not be tended to:

You learn to be very impromptu. Okay if it's been nice for 2 weeks and you haven't really seen much of him, but all of a sudden it's raining and drizzly and he doesn't have to work, so okay let's go do something for the day.

This situation caused conflict with some of the farm women's schedules in off-farm employment. A day away from the office would be booked off anticipating the predicted rainy forecast. However, when it turned into sun-

shine after all, their husbands would need to be on the land, and consequently their day away would have to be postponed. As Hilary further explained,

Everything sort of revolves around what's going on with the weather. Even if for me to schedule a day off work there's been so many times, I've taken the day off and we don't do whatever we were supposed to do because it was supposed to rain and it didn't.

During the summer months, being reliant on activities that can only be done on rainy days provided additional constraints with respect to the type of activities the family could enjoy together.

With the husbands' inability to leave their farm work, the women would still plan activities without their husbands as they felt it was important that the children were able to experience the benefits of one-day family excursions. When reflecting upon these experiences without their husbands, the women expressed feelings of sadness and disappointment. As exemplified by Hilary and Jeannette:

I mean I don't like going to the cottage on the weekends very much by myself. But I do it because it's for the benefit of the kids. But I would enjoy that more if we could go together as a whole family. (Hilary)

I do it for the kids and if [my husband's] not involved I think he's missing out. That's how I feel about it. Just has to be done. And I work my schedule around that. (Jeannette)

It was evident that the farm women experienced contradictory emotions and feelings when organizing and participating in one-day family excursions. The women highly valued time spent with their children in off farm activities but the frequent absence of their husbands led to considerable frustration and disappointment for the women, and sometimes to family tension and conflict as well.

#### *Family Vacations—A Rare Exception*

The fourth theme was the significance but elusiveness of family vacations. Although rare events and difficult to facilitate, the families had sometimes managed to go on vacation, for example to Disney World, cottages, camping trips, and visits to extended family members. As Hilary and Tara noted, these vacations were the most memorable family experiences for the farm women:

Every three years we go on a holiday to Walt Disney World and those have been great experiences. (Hilary)

They [the children] forever talk about going to Balsam Lake in the summer! They have an absolute riot doing whatever. They learned to ski up there, there's swimming and everything just escalates when they're up there. (Tara)

These activities were memorable for the farm women as it promoted family togetherness with their husbands and children. The initial motivation for organizing these family vacations seemed to be to get their husbands

away from the farm environment so that they could spend relaxed time with their children. Otherwise, the women felt, there was always some sort of distraction that would compromise the quality of family time spent together. Amy, Shannon, and Hilary reflected upon their motivations for organizing such family vacations:

If we are on the farm [my husband] is working. Even if he says he's taking a day off, he's still here. We're still working. So unless we go away it's not really huge quantities of time without him working. I think it's probably just because for [my husband] to spend a lot of time with us we have to go away. People who have regular jobs just don't get that. So for us to really relax and be able to count on something not blowing up that he had to go fix, we have to be away. That's why. That's my motivation. (Amy)

Because if my husband is home, he's working. If we don't leave the house, we don't get a holiday. He wouldn't just hang out inside for the sake of being on holidays. It's the same sort of thing in the summer. If we wanted to do something we went to Collingwood one weekend a couple of years ago, because it's the only way to get his full attention because we live at his job. So unless we are away, it's not a holiday. (Shannon)

Just for him to get away. He just enjoys himself so much and it's good for him to get away. To get some rest and relax with the kids. We always have a great time. We have so much fun. Spend a lot of time with them and doing things that we don't typically do. (Hilary)

The women's main motivation, though, for organizing family vacations was for the children and for the family as a whole. As Tara suggested, family vacations were centered on the children's interests such as Disney World, and the farm women also believed that these vacations would enhance family relations through providing opportunities for positive sibling interactions:

The kids have fun doing it. It's just time spent with each other, and learning to get along with the next guy. And just seeing something different, like the trip to Florida was. They had so many first time events that they were just thrilled with that kind of stuff.

Often though, fathers were not able to go on these planned and highly valued family vacations because of their farm responsibilities, and this situation again caused frustration and disappointment for the farm women. Many of the women noted that it had been several years since the last time they went on a family vacation together. Rather, it was common for the women to organize family vacations where their husbands would join them for a portion of time or not at all. As exemplified by Hilary and Angela:

[My husband] rarely makes it [to the family cottage]. He might make it once a summer. So [my husband's] parents will be up there and we'll be up there with them. (Hilary)

My husband can't get away. My grandmother has a cottage in Georgian Bay. I take the kids to the cottage. We go by ourselves because daddy can't leave. (Angela)

Clearly the farm women maintained the primary role of organizing and planning the family vacations. In addition to preparing for their vacation with the children, though, they also faced a "second set" of preparatory domestic tasks to help out their husbands who would remain behind on the farm. Amy and Hilary noted,

Oh all the packing. All that is me. I'm the organizer. I tend to get everything ready. (Amy)

I mean mostly its making sure you've got whatever food you need, and packing is a big part of it. Making sure that laundry is done, making sure there's food in the fridge for [my husband] to eat [while she and the children were gone]. That's a big thing. (Hilary)

One of the main reasons that family vacations were difficult to schedule related to the limitations and challenges of livestock farming. As Angela explained, the responsibilities associated with the livestock's care were extremely difficult for the husbands to absent themselves from the farm:

We look forward to the day that the cows won't be here and we can do more of those things together. They are your priority, the animals. I think that you just learn to be second to them, you just are. They are so dependent on you.

Occasionally, a family member would help out, but as Angela further explained, they did not feel it was appropriate for an extended family member to cover more than the occasional day due to the heavy workload:

My brother-in-law just does it by himself. A couple of milkings is okay. But to start asking someone to do more than two or three milkings by themselves is a lot of work. Because of the mastitis [inflammation of the mammary gland] you have to make sure you are on time.

On occasion the husbands would employ a hired laborer to do the chores during the family vacation. However, this also posed a difficulty with the excessive cost of wages on top of spending financial resources on the trip itself. In addition, the amount of training that would be required for the hired laborer to familiarize themselves with chore requirements was another difficulty. As explained by Tara and Hilary, this was an onerous process:

While the first thing we always have to do is make sure we've got someone for the farm. We don't have that, we don't do anything further. So when we plan vacations its usually 6 months in advance. Because we have to plan it. Because if we don't have the relief milker nothing else happens. But once that's done, the rest of it can fall into place readily. (Tara)

It's also very expensive, because you are also paying somebody to do your job while you're not there. You don't have just the expenses of a trip; you have an extra expense of paying someone to do your job. (Hilary)

Perhaps the largest problem to overcome was the difficulty of feeling comfortable enough to go away. To leave the farm for any extended period of time meant leaving behind the family's livelihood. Since their livelihood



and assets involved living animals, a disease or mismanagement of the animals while the entire family was gone would wipe out their assets and lifetime investment. As Lori explained, this was often seen to be too great a risk for the husbands to take, and consequently they would decide not to accompany their wives and children, even if they had the financial resources to hire someone while they were gone: "No. It's hard to get someone to come in and cover. And if something goes wrong, you can wipe out the whole crop. So we don't."

Despite all of the difficulties associated with the entire family's participation in vacations, when family vacations did occur they were clearly one of the most memorable and highly valued experiences for the farm women. Despite the additional physical and emotional workload demands in organizing family vacations, all of the women remembered these all too rare experiences with fondness.

#### *Single Parenthood within the Marital Context*

From these four sub-themes a core theme emerged reflecting the women's experience of feeling like a single parent within the context of their marriage. Throughout the interviews, there was an overall sense of the difficulties and stresses faced by the women because their husbands were essentially absent from daily family life, because of the workload demands of the farming operation. The value that the women placed upon family togetherness made this all the more frustrating. With a tone of sadness, Amy and Angela explained,

It starts at the end of March, beginning of April, that daddy's gone and he'll be back in October. (Amy)

I'd like to see us spend more time together as a family, especially dinners. We don't eat together ever, because the kids are at school. They're eating breakfast before he comes in from milking. He doesn't come in until after they are done at night. (Angela)

In essence these different, yet parallel lives and schedules of the farm women and their husbands provided the framework for their family interactions, work and leisure. When the women spoke about "family time", they were, in fact, usually referring to time spent only with their children. Some of the women specifically used the term 'single parent' while describing their own role within the family. Reflecting upon their marriages, Shannon and Jeanette noted,

I always said I was a single mom . . . I think that's why the kids are so dependent on me. In the beginning I found it very hard because I had these two little kids and I was working all day. It was just me and them. There were a lot of issues at that time. Yeah it was hard. And then I adjusted and found outlets for my time. Got used to packing the kids up on Saturday morning and taking off or going to visit a friend. You know what I mean? I made not another life, but concessions to keep life smooth for what it was . . . (Shannon)

But you know, I can only handle so much too, and I feel I'm a single parent a lot of the times. So I do what I can handle. [Tears begin]. (Jeannette)

### Discussion and Conclusion

The themes that emerged from this study reflect the contradictory nature of family leisure, including the high value placed on family togetherness as well as the high workload for women. Family leisure, when it occurred, was seen to provide the opportunity to build and strengthen the family unit through encouraged togetherness and the opportunity for memorable experiences. Family leisure was also purposive, with children's activities, day trips and vacations being planned to promote positive family interactions and enhance children's social and moral growth and maturity. However, at the same time, family leisure also represented considerable additional workload for the women due to the preparation, organization, and unpacking of the activities. As the primary facilitators of these activities, the women discussed the time stress and fatigue that they experienced. When things did not go as planned the farm women reported heightened negative emotions of frustration and disappointment. In these ways, the women's experiences seemed to be similar to those of the urban women who have been the focus of previous studies on family leisure (e.g., Harrington, 2005; Shaw, 2001; Shaw & Dawson, 2001).

Nevertheless, the study also indicated how the farm women's experiences of family leisure seemed to be different from those of urban or suburban married women in a number of significant ways. The physical isolation of farm life, and the need to provide socialization opportunities for children away from the farm (Haugen & Villa, 2006) meant that family leisure was deemed to be all the more valued and vital. The children's inability to readily play with other children in close proximity, and the desire to develop life-long skills that would help the children succeed later in life, motivated the women to create off-farm experiences through their children's participation in minor sport activities and school athletics. One-day trip excursions and family vacations were also deemed necessary and important for the children to have life experiences and memories outside of the farm context.

In addition, the facilitation of such highly valued activities seemed to be particularly stressful for the farm women, and the physical and emotional responsibilities associated with family leisure seemed to be heightened compared to women in the urban context. The work demands of livestock and crops required the husbands to work seven days of the week, and their consequent absence from the outset of many important leisure activities with their children, made the organization of family activities that included the whole family both difficult and frustrating for the women. As well transportation issues seemed to intensify women's time stress and fatigue as long distances to activity venues were frequently noted. Other studies that have examined raising children in the "rural idyll" have echoed this sense of time

stress, exacerbated by far distances and time spent driving to activity locales (Little & Austin, 1996; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000).

Consequently, farm life altered the opportunity, context and meanings associated with the family's participation in off-farm leisure activities. With several families, the "time crunch" led to a deliberate decision not to register the children in additional minor sport programs leading to feelings of guilt for the women. At the same time, the opportunity for the entire family to go on one-day excursions or vacations was severely constrained by the responsibilities associated with the livestock and crops. Machum (2006) reported similar findings associated with the livestock: "vacation and personal time [were] oppressively structured by the demands of daily milking. The family becomes 'tied' to the milk schedule" (p. 53). For this reason, family leisure for the families in this study often excluded the husbands and created heightened feelings of emotional strain and disappointment. When the husbands were able to join their family on vacation it was seen as exceptionally meaningful and highly valued by the farm women, promoting family togetherness.

The role of women as the primary caregivers in the family is frequently mentioned in the literature (e.g., Karsten, 1995; Kay, 1998; Nelson, 2004; Roxburgh, 2006). However, for the farm women in this study, it appeared that the primary caregiving role was even more evident and heightened, because husbands were typically absent from everyday family life. As exemplified by the core theme of single parenthood within the marital context, functioning as a lone parent led to a high stress level and frustration expressed by the farm women. Several of the participants literally referred to themselves as being "single moms" within the domestic and leisure spheres in time spent caring for and participating in activities with their children. Although being a single parent can have both positive and negative attributes, the farm women in this study related primarily to the difficulties and challenges associated with single parenthood. For example, the farm women's time stress, lack of free time, and lack of relief from ongoing parental responsibilities were very similar to the situations experienced by single parents (e.g., Demo & Acock, 1996; Nelson, 2004; Townsend & Murphy, 2001).

All of the women created a separate schedule with their children, independent of their husbands. In essence, the women and their husbands were living two separate, yet parallel lives. From time to time the husband would be "parachuted" into their daily lives, but his absence was evident. Some parallels can also be drawn here with women whose husbands are often absent from home because of the dominance and nature of their careers. Military wives (e.g., Shores & Scott, 2005; Whyte & Grant, 2003), as well as wives of professional athletes (e.g., Ortiz, 2001) and wives living in rural mining and forestry communities (e.g., Hunter & Whitson, 1991) have all been shown to experience time constraints, lack of support, and social isolation; similar in many ways to the experiences of the farm women in this study.

What is interesting to note, too, is that when the farm women were given the preliminary findings of this study, a number of them expressed an overall sense of relief when they found out that other women were experiencing the same emotions as themselves, including isolation, frustration, and fatigue, as well as heightened responsibilities associated with the domestic and leisure spheres. Although some of the women knew each other, there seemed to have been some reluctance to openly discuss the negative emotions that the farming profession had brought upon their private relationships within the home. With the responsibilities associated with off-farm employment and ensuring their children's participation in the broader community they had, in essence, become isolated and separated from participation in traditional farming based groups (e.g., Women's Institute) that could informally provide a support network with other farm women. Given this sense of isolation, it is particularly noteworthy that there were considerable similarities and commonalities in terms of the reported experiences of the seven women within this study.

This study focused on farm women's perception of family time, and the contradictory experiences of family leisure, including the frustrations as well as the positive aspects. However, we would like to note that the farm women appreciated their rural lifestyles in a number of ways. For example, several said that farm life provided the opportunity for their children to develop a strong work ethic and other moral values. Further, despite the heavy workload that the women faced, many also expressed pleasure in the sense of solitude and peacefulness that rural living provided for them away from the urban environment. These positive aspects of farm life deserve further attention from researchers to fully understand the experiences of farm life for women.

The present study was limited to the experiences of selected farm women. Clearly it will also be important in future research to capture the experiences and meanings of other farm women as well as other members of farm families (e.g., fathers and children) to enhance understanding and to incorporate different perspectives. The geographic locale of the two communities (e.g., being within an hour drive to a major urban centre) may also have shaped the meanings and lived experiences for these farm women. The proximity to a large variety of colleges/universities may have influenced the women's relatively high education levels, their respective attitudes and perspectives about family togetherness and meanings associated with family leisure. All seven farm women had post-secondary education, either university degrees or college diplomas. In comparison only 47% of Ontario farm women have post-secondary education according to the Statistics Canada 2001 Census of Agriculture. Research in more isolated rural locales that are not geographically close to large urban centers, may reveal different findings and meanings related to family leisure for the farm women, their husbands, and their children.

In terms of broader implications, by revealing unique aspects of family leisure in rural farm settings, the study emphasizes the importance of context

for understanding the meanings of family leisure, and the need to explore family leisure in a range of social, environmental, and cultural contexts. Self-employment, feelings of single parenthood within the context of a marriage, and societal-cultural expectations felt by parents to provide opportunities for their children to participate in activities such as minor sport leagues, may be transferable to women living within urban and suburban contexts. However, the experiences, motivations, interactions, and challenges may also vary, and there is a need to explore possible divergent meanings for individuals in a variety of geographic and social contexts.

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