

Masculinities and geography, moving forward: Men's bodies, emotions and spiritualities

Abstract

Geographical work on men and masculinities has expanded and diversified since the 1990s. *Gender, Place and Culture* has been, and continues to be, a significant outlet for this research. Geographies of masculinities now range across diverse sub-fields – social, cultural, economic, health, post-colonial, urban and rural geographies. We provide a brief overview of this scope, including the expansion of geographies of masculinities beyond the Anglo-American sphere. We then focus on two vibrant fields of research on geographies of men and masculinities, which cut across the various sub-fields of the discipline: men's embodied and emotional geographies, and their experiences in relation to religion, faith and spirituality. We discuss these fields, suggesting further productive developments for geographies of masculinities, which include work on the body and wellbeing, body size, male care giving, men's experiences in diverse faith communities, and men and alternative spiritualities. Ongoing development of geographical work on men and masculinities is important for helping to contest patriarchal structures and knowledge production.

Keywords: men, masculinities, the body, emotions, religion

Introduction and background

In this article, we focus on some topics that, we argue, need to be further developed within geographical scholarship on men and masculinities. These cut across the sub-disciplinary areas that have taken an interest in this field, which include social (Hopkins, 2009), cultural (Meah, 2017), economic (Warren, 2015), health (Thien and Del Casino, 2012), post-colonial (Tang, 2017), urban (Gorman-Murray, 2013), and rural geographies (Gibson, 2016). This piece offers a review of research and a proposed agenda for future work rather than being an empirical study. We attend to research about men and masculinities in relation to embodied and emotional geographies – that is, the relationships between men and their bodies, emotions and everyday geographies. An important extension of this work – which links back to considerations of place, power and politics in the contemporary world – are experiences of men and masculinities with respect to geographies of religion, faith and spirituality at multiple scales. What brings these two areas together is a common interest in men's emotional and bodily practices in everyday spaces. Given the way this suite of concerns cuts across social, cultural, economic and political domains, we suggest added attention to these topics will enrich and enliven geographies of men and masculinities. In particular, it is important to explore how certain 'ways of being a man' challenge – or not – dominant understandings of masculinities. So, despite some artificial separation between these interests, we discuss the body and emotions, and faith and spirituality, in turn. Before doing so, we provide a brief contextual history of how work in this area has developed over the last few decades.

In their 2003 review of masculinities and geography in *Gender, Place and Culture*, Berg and Longhurst observed that it was only during the late 1980s and early 1990s that a distinct literature about geographies of masculinities emerged, largely inspired by the work of Jackson (1989, 1991, 1994). Berg and Longhurst (2003: 353) pointed out that 'social and cultural geographers, particularly those utilising feminist perspectives, in the late 1990s intensified their interest in masculinities'. At the same time, there was also diversification and expansion of interest from other sub-disciplinary areas, including urban geography, rural geography, economic geography, health geography, post-colonial geography and geographies of sexualities, which started to think through the distinctive geographies of men and masculinities.

This interest in masculinities stemmed from the shifting focus of feminism (Longhurst, 2000), and the rise of an increasingly politicised gay consciousness (Jackson, 1991). However, before feminist geographers started paying attention to masculinities, social scientists interested in gender

relations – and particularly sociologists and researchers in education and cultural studies – were working to develop critical studies of men and masculinities (e.g. Connell, 1995, 2000, Kimmel, 1987, Mac an Ghail, 1994, 1996). This work provided – and continues to offer – important foundations for geographers work on men and masculinities. For example, important concepts, such as hegemonic masculinity, have been introduced, debated and contested within this terrain (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005, Hearn, 2004), and have provided useful frameworks for geographers interested in this area to grapple with.

In 2005, not long after the publication of Berg and Longhurst's (2003) review of the field, van Hoven and Hörschelmann (2005) were more cautious about the development of this field of research in the introduction to their collection *Spaces of Masculinities*. They suggested that 'there has been a notable lack of attention to the formation of masculine identities and spaces', and that 'a focus on the relational formation of male identities and masculine spaces seems long overdue in both feminist and gender-oriented geographical work' (van Hoven and Kathrin Hörschelmann, 2005: 5). They contended that despite the growing interest in men and masculinities in geography, research had mainly been focused on men as empirical rather than gendered subjects.

Since these 2003 and 2005 overviews, research about the geographies of men and masculinities has continued to diversify – and to interrogate men as gendered, and not only empirical, subjects – although social, cultural and feminist work remains central to the ongoing development of this field. Many key geography journals have now published work on this and related topics, including *Dialogues in Human Geography* (Boyer et al, 2017), *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (Wilton et al, 2014), *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* (Thien and del Casino, 2012), *Social and Cultural Geography* (Meth and McClymont, 2009), *Geoforum* (Waite and Stanes, 2015), *Health and Place* (del Casino, 2007), *Geographical Research* (Gorman-Murray, 2013), and *Emotion, Space and Society* (Laurendeau, 2014). Yet, *Gender, Place and Culture* continues to be a critical outlet for this field, with work on men and masculinities being a regular focus for recent research published in the journal (Bonner-Thompson, 2017; Friedman, 2017; Gökariksel and Secor, 2017; Lofstóttir et al, 2017; Meah, 2017; Snider, 2017). Adding to the sub-fields identified above, researchers working on geographies of age have started to explore issues pertaining to masculinities for younger people and older people (Hopkins, 2009; McDowell, 2003, Nayak, 2006, Tarrant, 2010a, 2016), as well as debates about fatherhood and intergenerationality (Aitken, 2001, 2009; Richardson, 2015). Alongside this, men and masculinities have been the focus of research about development (Cornwall et al, 2011; McIlwaine and Datta, 2003), and migration (Datta et al, 2009, McIlwaine, 2010, Walsh, 2011). Much of this work has been accompanied by sensitivity to the methodological and ethical issues involved in researching these issues (e.g. Meth and McClymont, 2009; Vanderbeck, 2005), which often require constant reflection and evaluation (Bilio and Hiemstra, 2013). The field has been consolidated further by the publication of a special issue of *Social and Cultural Geography* about masculinities and intersectionality (Hopkins and Noble, 2009), and a collection on *Masculinities and Place* (Gorman-Murray and Hopkins, 2014).

Berg and Longhurst (2003: 355-356) observed an 'international division of attributes' that 'leads to a scaling of knowledge produced in metropolitan Anglo-America as universal (read: "theory"); while work produced in non-metropolitan "peripheries" is scaled as local (read: "case study")'. This remains a key issue for the discipline of geography and for research on a wide range of topics, including geographies of men and masculinities. However, there has been important new work in the field published about Europe, Latin America and Asia. In 2011 *Justice Spatiale/Spatiale Justice* published a special issue about gender, sexual identities and spatial justice (Hancock, 2011), which included an insightful article about the negotiation of masculinities in a prison in New Mexico (van Hoven, 2011). Garcia Ramon et al (2012) have explored the ways in which issues of masculinities and performances of power shape men's and women's promotion experiences and access to positions of power in Spanish universities. The collection by Bauriedl et al (2010) on

Geschlechterverhältnisse, Raumstrukturen, Ortsbeziehungen: Erkundungen von Vielfalt und Differenz im Spatial Turn (Gender relations, spatial structures, local relationships: explorations of diversity and difference in the spatial turn) includes a chapter about masculinities (van Hoven and Hopkins, 2010). A significant contribution is the collection on *Espaco, Genero, and Masculinidades Plurais* (Space, gender and plural masculinities) by Maria Silva et al (2011), which includes a series of insights that focus upon the contested spatialities of masculinities in Latin America. Several recent articles in *Gender, Place and Culture* have examined masculinities and men's experiences in relation to transnational marriage and migration in Asia (Cheng et al 2015; Friedman 2017; Johnson 2017; Maycock 2017; Mirza 2015; Tang 2017). This all provides evidence of the recent diversification of interests and locations for research on the geographies of men and masculinities. In doing so, it offers a brief snapshot of the current range of the field. We now turn to two areas that, we argue, would be fruitful for further research: the body and emotions, and religion, faith and spirituality.

The body and emotions

In her book on *Bodies: Exploring Fluid Boundaries*, Longhurst (2001: 66) noted that:

Much of the large interdisciplinary literature on the body that has emerged over the last decade focused on women (including menstruating, pregnant and lactating women), lesbians, gay men, 'blacks', the 'poor', aged and/or 'disabled'. These are bodies that often constructed as Other. Less has been written about the (supposedly hard) bodies of heterosexual, 'white', able-bodied men.

Longhurst pointed out that 'men's material bodies are too often overlooked' (2001: 67), which enables white men to maintain a (disembodied) position of rationality and privilege. Longhurst responded to this by using focus groups to explore how men talk to other men about the practices they engage in when using bathrooms and the different concerns and anxieties that men show with respect to this. In doing so, she aimed to explore the 'soft, viscous and liquid' aspects rather than only investigating the 'hard, solid' male body. Further to this important work, Longhurst (2005) has also written about the experiences of men who have 'man-breasts', noting that her participants felt uncomfortable in many public places (swimming pools, beaches, changing rooms) and were subject to derision because of their 'man-breasts'; simultaneously, men's lifestyle magazines promote a male body that is muscular and hard, marginalising the types of men involved in her research.

Curiously, it has taken a little while for work that explores the intersections between masculinities and the body – the body in place and/or as place – to move forwards. Nonetheless, alongside the work of Longhurst (2001, 2005), there is some scholarship about masculinities and the body in geography that forms a critical foundation for future work in this area. We briefly reflect upon some of this work before suggesting some ways forward; further work in this area has the potential to significantly enrich the field, and extend existing research about bodies (Lloyd, 2014, Longhurst and Johnston, 2014).

Research about men's bodies and cultures of work and employment has mapped out different bodily performances of masculinity in the workplace (McDowell, 1995, 2005). This includes observations about the change from a 'loud, aggressive, macho version of masculinity' that was often required when trading and dealing – for instance, in the merchant, banking and finance sector – to a computer-savvy and fast-thinking masculinity (McDowell, 1997, 2005). In a different set of examples, Nayak (2006) outlines the decline of traditional employment opportunities for young working-class men, while McDowell (2005:25) shows that issues relating to 'weight, style, clothes and accent' have increased in significance, as has the requirement of these young men to 'learn to serve' customers politely and empathically (McDowell, 2010). These changes have all meant that young men have been forced to think carefully about how they present their bodies and how they construct their masculine identities.

Since these wider social and economic imperatives have prompted younger generations of men to be more reflexive about their bodily presentation, embodied performance and interpersonal interactions, a heightened awareness of emotions and affect has also been advanced. This can be termed emotional embodiment: as ‘a “personal space” of self-identity and inter-subjective encounter, the body is a sensuous site where emotions are generated, received, and experienced’ (Gorman-Murray, 2013: 139). Emotions can be understood as connective tissue between bodies and spaces: emotions are ‘socially derived through relationships with others within specific structural conditions’ and spatial settings (Philipose, 2006: 63). It has been argued that the hegemony of ‘unemotional masculinity’ (a companion to the ‘hard-bodied’ masculinity described above) contributes to gender inequity and correlates to poor health outcomes for men (Seidler, 2007). Responding to these concerns, some recent geographical work has sought to examine men’s emotional embodiment – including participant reflections on its significance to their wellbeing and interpersonal relationships – at work, home and the public/private interface. A small selection of such work includes: Gorman-Murray’s (2013: 137) study of how some professional men ‘use their bodies as emotional and sensuous instruments to manage the interplay of work(place) and home(place)’; Warren’s (2015) study of surfboard-making as ‘deeply emotional and embodied work’ for male workers, whose ‘soulful’ labour is dependent on touch, movement and an eye for detail; and Meah’s (2017) study of fathers’ domestic foodwork (shopping, cooking, eating) as an emotionally embodied practice that reinforces familial intimacy in and beyond the home.

From this work on the spaces and places of men’s bodies and emotions, we suggest three possible avenues for future research. First, the cultural production of the ‘hard’ masculine body – and the practices, politics and spaces associated with this – could offer fruitful insights into the contested geographies of masculinities. Tanner et al (2013: 60-61) note that:

For men, changing physical demands in employment and daily life in Western societies have reduced the need for physical strength but have paradoxically intensified the demand for hard, buff masculine bodies that signal health and power.

Such changing demands have led to a ‘rise in gym culture, fitness and the pursuit of the buff, toned body’ (Tanner et al, 2013: 67), and a situation where ‘men now have to work at being men’ (68). Tanner et al (2013: 65) focus on the issue of vanity, and point out that the production of a very healthy and appropriately sized body is no longer seen to be vain, but is instead regarded as a morally positive way of being: ‘bodies of the right size and appearance have become a social good. These bodies must be actively produced through proper care, attention and effort’. As such, attention to the body is a quality that no longer associates men with femininity as ‘it is sanctioned through current aspirations to health and wellness demonstrated through a lean, muscular body’ (Tanner et al, 2013: 67). These changing politics of masculinity can be connected to debates about the crisis of masculinity, changing models of acceptable masculinities and a demand for softer and more emotionally astute men:

The new social landscape has meant that men’s bodies, previously conceived as hard and impermeable, have been remade as porous and potentially vulnerable. New attentiveness to managing and maintaining the masculine body is required ... Men’s cosmetic products are now commonplace: moisturisers and facial scrubs have become part of contemporary Western masculinity (Tanner, 2013: 79-80).

We contend that this ‘new’ social landscape is enticing for geographers interested in exploring spatialities of masculinities and men’s identities. In particular, this new landscape ‘produces new demands on men to create bodies that are simultaneously healthy and appropriately masculine’ (Tanner et al, 2013: 80); it would be interesting to see how men in different contexts are managing these potentially conflicting challenges in different ways (cf. Gibson 2016), and the ethical and methodological issues involved in research in such contexts (cf. Giazitzoglu, 2018).

Second, the recent foray that geographers have made into debates within Fat Studies could provide an interesting focus for research about masculinities and the body. In their article on *Feminism and the Invisible Fat Man*, Bell and McNaughton (2007: 108) 'argue that the complex ways in which gender and fatness are intertwined, understood and experienced have not been fully examined in the extant literature, particularly in so far as they relate to men'. Although Longhurst (2001, 2005) has explored the experiences of men in relation to body size, much of the literature about body size in geography does not draw explicit attention to the construction and contestation of masculinities in relation to the body and processes of embodiment. In recent research about young people and body size, one women participant felt that her height and larger size made her feel more masculine, and a gay male participant argued that he felt compelled to be very thin in order to comply with his perceptions about normative body size for men within the gay community (Hopkins, 2012). There is scope for nuanced explorations of gender, (sub)culture and body size.

Third, men's changing role and increased involvement in care giving (in domestic/familial environments) demands greater attention from geographers. Work by Tarrant (2016) on grandfatherhood, Giesbrecht et al (2006) about caring for family members of chronic conditions, and by Milligan and Morbey (2016) about older men's negotiations of providing care for their spouses provides a useful foundation for work in this area. An excellent example is Boyer et al's (2017) article on male care giving and stay-at-home-fathers in the UK in *Dialogues in Human Geography*, accompanied by a set of commentaries and responses. As Boyer et al (2017) and their commentators collectively suggest, there is much scope to examine the development of male care giving through a geographical lens, teasing out differences and connections between regions, nations, cultures and urban/rural divides, as well as how factors like age, ethnicity, sexuality and disability inflect men's capacities and commitments to care giving at home and beyond. Clearly questions of emotions, emotional labour and wellbeing – particularly men's involvement in these – should be part of this developing research agenda.

Religion, faith and spirituality

In the last ten years or so, geographies of religion has developed considerably as a sub-field of social and cultural geography and the gendering of religious spaces and bodies has been a key focus of research (Dwyer, 1999; Falah and Nagel, 2005). Focusing upon Islamic gender identities, there is a relatively well-developed scholarship in geography about Muslim femininities and masculinities. Earlier work by Dwyer (1999) and Mohammad (1999), for instance, about Muslim women and constructions and contestations of Muslim femininities and provided an important basis for more recent research about Muslim women's spatial identities (e.g. Ehrkamp, 2013; Gökariksel, 2012; Gökariksel and Secor, 2017; Mohammad, 2013), as well as work about Muslim masculinities (Dwyer et al, 2011; Ehrkamp, 2008; Hopkins, 2006, 2009). However, geographers working in this area have said relatively little about the masculinities of other religious people, including how masculinities are constructed, performed, reinforced or challenged, resisted or marginalised in a range of contexts (including those beyond the officially sacred) or about how forms of alternative spiritualities intersect with masculine identities. We explore both of these in turn.

Scholarship about the relational gendering of Muslim identities could be extended to include a range of other faith groups, including other world religions or minority faiths in different contexts. It has already been suggested that social and cultural geography could potentially benefit from engaging with debates within the sociology of religion (Hopkins, 2011). Woodhead (2008) observes that on the vast majority of indicators of religiosity, women are more religious than men, yet for the last couple of decades more women are leaving the Church than men. More recently, drawing upon a project about Christianity and the university experience in England, Guest et al (2013) observed that men were more likely to describe themselves as not being religious or spiritual, and Christian men were more likely than women to have experienced religious change by asserting that their faith

has weakened or strengthened since starting university (rather than remaining constant). This study also found that Christian men were more likely than their women to claim that none of their men friends were religious, thereby suggesting that faith is more privatized for men than it is for women. These observations raise a series of questions about the relationships between men, masculinities and religion (and not only Christianity) that are worthy of further exploration and would help in taking research about religious masculinities beyond the focus on Islamic masculinities. Additionally, in setting out an agenda for the study of gender and religion, Woodhead (2007: 583) is concerned that 'the sociological study of religion has been slow to abandon its gender-blindness'. Feminist geographers of religion and researchers interested in the intersections between religion and masculinities have the potential to play a significant role here. This may include exploring issues of masculinities and faith in a range of officially sacred contexts (such as Churches, temples, synagogues and other religious contexts) as well as sites beyond the officially sacred.

Another avenue for exploring the relationship between masculinities and faith is through the rise in alternative forms of spirituality, such as those associated with yoga, meditation, retreat centres and other practices that focus on the enhancement of spiritual well-being. This may include what Conradson (2013: 186) refers to as 'here-and-now, earthly spirituality' which 'can be seen at New Age and Mind Body Spirit festivals, in yoga and meditation classes, and in many alternative healing classes'. Additionally, other life experiences – such as those relating to the birth of a child, the ending of a relationship or the death of a loved one – that may or may not be experienced in an explicitly religious manner but may involve engagement with some form of spirituality could also be included here. For example, Maddrell (2009: 675) notes that 'grief can result from various forms of loss: loss of a job, loss of fertility, ending of a relationship, removal or exile from a country, community or landscape of attachment'. This may also contribute to a move towards an 'emotional geography of everyday insecurity' (Bondi, 2014: 11), which is about everyday feelings of ontological insecurity, anxiety and insecurity. In what ways do constructions of masculinities and ways of being a man shape such experiences and engagements?

A final word

Geographical work on men and masculinities has expanded and diversified since the 1990s. Research published in *Gender, Place and Culture* has been, and continues to be, significant in shaping and reshaping geographies of masculinities. While much research tends to lie in social and cultural geographies, there are also key contributions across economic, health, post-colonial, urban and rural geographies. Geographies of sexualities have also been a cornerstone of work on masculinities, particularly studies of gay men's lives. In this commentary we suggested two fields of work that could be advanced further, and which cut across the various sub-fields of geography: men's embodied and emotional geographies, and the experiences of men and masculinities within geographies of religion, faith and spirituality – two areas closely linked by an interest in men's emotions and embodiments in everyday spaces. Indeed, these are already vibrant interests within geographies of masculinities, but we have pointed to fruitful areas for further development. At the same time, of course this is not exhaustive. Many other areas of inquiry need to be developed. Some others include indigenous masculinities (Lester and Dussart, 2009), masculinities in the academy (Berg et al 2014), place-based relations between different masculine identities (Gorman-Murray 2011), and men, masculinities and migration (Ye, 2014). In encouraging this range of work, we see potential not only for enriching understandings of masculinities and geography, but also for fostering insights and actions that contest patriarchal structures and knowledge.

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