Although not a special call, the articles in the current issue of NORMA: Nordic Journal for Masculinity Studies could be read as contributing to spatial aspects of men and masculinities. This is perhaps not that surprising since all individuals, including men, live their lives in different places. It is however not self-evident that researchers explore men’s places and spaces, neither as physical environments nor as dimensions of men’s subjective and lived experiences. On the contrary, in Western culture men have most often been seen as transcendent, as not restricted to their bodies and physical surroundings, while women have been more or less ‘doomed’ to their immanence (Ferguson 1993). Spatiality has at the same time been defined by the gender order, where men have been able to move relatively freely and which has contributed to the production of Man as an unmarked norm and men’s relation to place and space as being at once evident and invisible.

During the last decades, however, research exploring the relations between place, men and masculinities has emerged. Earlier studies focused on sexuality and location (Jackson 1989) as well as a feminist critique of the discipline’s inherit masculinism (Rose 1993). Since the early 1990s geographers of masculinities have published research on a variety of topics, including urbanity, rurality, aging, migration, and regional development (Berg & Longhurst 2003, Campbell and Bell 2000, Hopkins and Noble 2009, Stenbacka 2010, van Hoven and Hörschelmann 2005). In addition to this, numerous gender researchers from other disciplines have explored geographical and spatial aspects of men and mas-
culinities (e.g. Brandth and Haugen 2005, Donaldson et al. 2009, Hearn, Blagojević and Harrison 2013, Mellström 2012).

As Hugh Campbell and Michael Bell (2003) have pointed out, geographical perspectives contribute to research on men and masculinities by emphasizing the importance of place for masculine identity construction. By focusing on geographical variations and how power relations are ‘inhered in the relationship between space and identity’ (Stenbacka 2010, 1867) geographers of masculinity explore how space is used in order to create gendered difference, as well as similarity. One example is the boundary between the private and the public spheres in Western culture, where women historically have been expected to remain in the private while public life has only been available for men. This spatial segregation, however, also meant that men to a great extent stayed away from family life. As Linnea Ytting and Lone Friis Thing demonstrate in their contribution to this issue, this spatial division affects contemporary men’s opportunities to be involved fathers. In ‘Fatherhood and family-life during hospitalization of children suffering from heart diseases’, they show that hospital regimes of sleeping and eating determine how families live their lives while their children are hospitalized and traditional gender division of labour and a traditional and distanced fatherhood are reproduced. Issues regarding the gender division between public and private spheres are also raised in Roger Klinth’s review of Jørgen Lorentzen’s book Fra faderskapets historie i Norge 1850–2012. As shown, Klinth and Lorentzen have different perceptions of women’s role in maintaining spatial separation between mothers’ and fathers’ responsibilities.

Another area that men traditionally have kept away from is family cooking (Olsen and Aarseth 2006), while the professional chef ironically has been connected to masculinity. In his article ‘Cooking as masculine escapism: Masculine identity in The naked chef and Spise med Price’ Jonatan Leer argues that cooking in TV shows can be used to create a space for homosocial bonding that allows men to play with the demands of everyday life. In particular the Danish cooking show with the brothers Price could be seen as part of a tendency to portray cooking shows as male escapisms, Leer argues. In the program, the brothers’ cottage becomes a location for masculinity of exception; it is a place where the brothers can distance themselves from everyday demands and instead create playful homosocial bonds. Another article in the current issue of NORMA that highlights the relation between place and homosociality is Elina Ihamäki’s ‘Homosocial heterosexuality in the sexscapes of Sortavala, Russia’, where she studies how Finnish men are able to go across the border to Russia to buy sex thanks to the ‘relaxation’ of these international
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Borders in the 1990s. Her study draws attention to what Jeff Hearn (2009) labels as 'transpatriarchies', that is, patriarchal relations in a transnational context and in relation to intersectional formations of social categories and structures.

Places are often connected to certain values, affects and notions that give rise to stereotypical understandings based on class, gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Just as there are stereotypes of ‘migrant’ suburbs (in the US, inner cities carry the same negative connotation), there are many preconceived ideas about the countryside. The rural has often been seen as more ‘natural’, traditional and safe place than the modern city. But rather than being a place for ‘Gemeinschaft’ (Tönnies 1887/2001) rural communities are also part of modernity and have their share of social problems. At the same time, rural men are often portrayed as problematic, conservative and generally backward (Stenbacka 2010). In their article 'To age as a man: Ageing and masculinity in a small rural community in Sweden', Magnus Nilsson, Jan-Erik Hagberg and Eva Jeppsson Grassman explore how older, unmarried and childless men in a rural community articulate their masculinity in relation to ageing. This reaffirms the rural aspect of their masculine identity as well as the work-centred values of midlife as a reference point in the identity construction in old age when their bodies to a lesser extent can live up to the physically defined masculinity of the rural context. In this situation, the local rural community is important for the way the men perform both age and masculinity in their daily lives.

Another way to explore relations between space and masculinity is to focus on boundaries. Places coded as masculine are relatively inaccessible to women and children. But not all places are equally accessible to all men. Such differences must be understood in relation to class, race, ethnicity, embodiment, age, mobility, etc. A critical analysis should therefore focus on who is allowed to enter a particular place as well as who the gatekeepers are of that place. An example that illuminates such boundaries issues is mental illness. In line with Mary Douglas (1966/2002), mental illness could be understood as being ‘out of place’. Douglas argues that dirt consists of odd things in wrong places. The same could be applied to marginalized people, including the mentally disabled. As Michel Foucault (1961/2001) has shown, the ‘insane’ have often been confined and excluded from society since they are seen to transgress common moral and ethical boundaries and therefore constitute a threat to social order. In her contribution to this issue, ‘Male mental illness and Norwegian compassion: A study of Elling (2001) and The art of negative thinking (2006)’, Adriana Margareta Dancus argues that the inclusion of mentally ill could be used to reproduce nationalist notions and affects. In her analysis of two popular Norwegian
films about men with mental disabilities, she shows how Norwegian cultural self-understanding is about being generous and compassionate, which produces notions of masculinity and Norwegian national identity. At the same time, Dancus argues, that care is conditional in that the men in the movies that enjoy care are White and heterosexual.

If most of the articles in this issue of NORMA in one way or another explore the importance of place for masculine identity, I finally want to point out the need to explore the importance of place for knowledge production in masculinity research (Campbell and Bell 2003). Masculinity research, like gender research in general, is characterized by something of an Anglo-Saxon hegemony. This is partly due to the fact that American, Australian and British researchers were early on in the field, but also due to their general dominance in social sciences—particularly in the Nordic countries and in research on men (cf. Hearn et al. 2012). This has certain consequences. In particular, it is somewhat problematic to import theories and perspectives that are developed in other social and cultural contexts when trying to apply them in a new context. But the hegemonic relation has also created a situation where studies from these countries appear as universal and become ‘theory’, whereas studies from other parts of the world, including the Nordic countries, are seen as local case studies where these ‘general’ gender theories are to be employed.

Within masculinity research globally, the Nordic countries are something of a semi-periphery and the field is fairly well established, with a journal and an association, Nordic Association for Research on Men and Masculinities. However, American, British and Australian researchers and their theorizing are incredibly influential in Nordic masculinity research. This is not necessarily bad, and I also use much non-Nordic theorizing in my research, but I think there is need for a dialogue about what a theorizing from the semi-periphery could mean for masculinity research internationally. For instance, Scandinavia and the Nordic countries have often been pointed out as extraordinary with regard to gender relations. Internationally, the Nordic countries are in the top tier regarding gender equality (e.g. Hausman, Tyson and Zahidi 2012) and Nordic countries seem to appear as something of a gender-equal paradise or nirvana. The problem, though, is that this notion of gender equality has been articulated through a national (and to some extent nationalist) discourse that creates an imagined community by excluding Other, in particular non-white, men (Gottzén and Jonsson 2012). Without reproducing simplified celebrations of the ‘Nordic’ we need to discuss the ways in which our position as relatively rich, homogeneous, gender-equal small countries in the north-
ern corner of the world influence our own theory, and contribute to international theorization on men and masculinities.

The importance of place in knowledge production, finally, also raises questions of the field’s relation to other gender and feminist research. What is the place for masculinity research in feminism and how do masculinity researchers relate to the feminist research tradition? As feminist researchers have pointed for some time now (e.g. Haraway 1988, 1992, Lykke 2009), the position from where one speaks and where one carries out one’s research is crucial for one’s knowledge production. Following Donna Haraway (1992), one might say that our site and our sight, but also how and whom we cite are interrelated and important for what sort of research is produced. As the history of Men’s Studies has shown, it is far from evident that masculinity scholars position themselves as (pro)feminist. Even when we do, there is a risk—and perhaps a tendency—of creating a spatial division between masculinity researchers and other gender researchers. A division where masculinity scholars do not use, relate to, or learn from feminist theorizing.

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References


