



The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and Private

By Susan Bordo

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A fresh, unconventional look at the male body and contemporary notions of masculinity.

The male nude is everywhere now, from mainstream movies to magazine covers. What do we see when men take off their clothes, in public and in private? Is the male body truly exposed? In this candid cultural analysis, Susan Bordo speaks to men and women alike, scrutinizing the images and experiences of everyday life.

Drawing on personal anecdotes and insights from movies, novels, advertisements, news stories, and academic work, she inspects the assumptions that influence our perspectives on date rape, harassment, homosexuality, and pornography. She also considers recent changes in perceptions of masculinity, including a look at ad campaigns displaying the male body, the booming male beauty industry, and androgynous body ideals. Playboy, Marlon Brando, Viagra, Calvin Klein, The Full Monty, Lady Chatterley's Lover, Michael Jordan, and Philip Roth are all subjects of discussion. But whether she is examining Clarence Thomas, John Travolta, or Humbert Humbert, the butch phallus or her own grade-school experiences, Bordo rejects rigid characterizations. In exchange, she gives us a frank, tender view of her own father's body, a refreshing look at the penis in all its incarnations, and, overall, a clear and candid vision of men as flesh-and-blood human beings.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Shock waves riveted the Mattel, Inc., boardroom in 1961 when female executives suggested that Barbie's boy-toy, Ken--in keeping with Barbie's own physiognomy--ought to be a little more anatomically correct. No one was suggesting 1.25-inch-to-1-inch-scale plastic genitalia, mind you, just a modest groin bulge. But male execs at the toy company were scandalized; the suggested modifications did not make Ken more "authentic" in their eyes--they made him pornographic.

My, how things have changed. In *The Male Body*, Susan Bordo (who snagged a Pulitzer nomination for 1993's *Unbearable Weight*) offers a frank, sprightly, and, yes, educational look at the male nude as an index to attitudes about sexuality in the broth of media and pop culture in which, like it or not, we all stew. While the Greeks were unafraid to celebrate masculine beauty, men have been strangely sexless throughout most of Western history--until Hollywood rediscovered the male body when Marlon Brando first shed his T-shirt in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. It's only been in the '90s, however, that the male image has gone so far as to reclaim its penis. From de facto censorship to near idolatry, has ever an organ made *such* a journey in one brief decade? But it's not the penis alone that makes a man a man; perhaps, Bordo concludes, it's time for us to rethink our metaphors of manhood. --*Patrizia DiLucchio*

From Publishers Weekly

Equipped with wit and savvy, Bordo sets out to map the ambivalent attitudes that exist in the American cultural imagination toward male bodies and, in particular, to ward the penis and its "symbolic double," the phallus. Ranging from such topics as "Viagran science" to discussions of Long Dong Silver on the Senate floor, masculinity in the movies to Plato's Symposium, Nabokov to gay aesthetics, Bordo (*Twilight Zones*) deftly uses academic theories without straying into abstraction. Beginning and ending with memories of her father, her focus on the male body never wavers. Part One concerns the penis: size does matter, but it is "always a collaboration with the imagination, and therefore with culture." Bordo's discussion establishes a provocative context for her subsequent examination of the complex legacy of Marlon Brando's representations of masculinity. She convincingly explains how the "lean, fit body that virtually everyone, gay and straight, now aspires to" has resulted from the commercial triumph of the gay aesthetic first introduced to the mainstream by Calvin Klein. Bordo's theme is that men and women are not species alien to one another: "We're all earthlings, desperate for love, demolished by rejection." There is anger here, but it is directed at a culture "that has us all behaving like sexual robots." Part memoir, part elegy, this feminist guided tour of the male body concludes with real hope for improved relations between the sexes.

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From Library Journal

Bordo (humanities, Univ. of Kentucky) was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize for her earlier *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (LJ 8/93). Her new book is a further exploration of the interdisciplinary field of "body studies" she has developed. Premising her work on earlier writings, Bordo provides a frank personal/cultural analysis of the male anatomy. She outlines contemporary cultural attitudes toward the male body, especially the penis and the symbolic phallus. Through personal insight and incidences, she scrutinizes issues surrounding the penis, the male image, and the male animal. Starting and finishing with recollections of life with her father, Bordo never lets her focus waver. She rejects male characterizations and gives a candid portrayal of men as human beings, addressing men and women alike. A valuable selection for gender studies collections. AMichael A. Lutes, Univ. of Notre Dame Libs., IN

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