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DESIGNING MEN: READING THE MALE BODY AS TEXT

PHILIP CULBERTSON

“Why does it always have to be the *female* body that’s presented as exotic, other, fascinating to scrutinize and imagine?” one woman asked me. “Why is it never the *male* body?”¹

An essay of this type must begin with definitions, in order that the author and the reader may construct together a line of reasoning. Of particular consequence between author and reader is a mutual agreement within the definitional fields of Social Construction and Reader Response. Once these two fields have been defined and wed, the author will proceed to his central argument: that there exists no such reality as a heterosexual male body, for it is a socially-constructed textless text² which blocks all attempts to read meaning into it.

We know a fair amount about what happens when the heterosexual male gaze is turned upon women. The victims of that gaze are increasingly

¹ Laurence Goldstein, *The Male Body: Features, Destinies, Exposures* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1997), vii.

² I first encountered the term “textless text” in Perry Dane, “The Oral Law and the Jurisprudence of a Textless Text,” *S’vara* 2:2 (1991), 11-24. Dane uses the term to describe Oral Torah, but I find its usefulness much wider.

finding their own voices and refusing to submit to objectification. But what happens when the heterosexual male gaze is turned upon another heterosexual male? What happens when a heterosexual male turns his own gaze upon himself? Writers such as Rosalind Coward³ and Maxine Sheets-Johnstone⁴ have complained about the absence of study and analysis, and indeed it would seem the male body, already a textless text, has absented itself completely within the past two decades. I recently suggested that a student do some work on the same materials this essay addresses, and suggested that he begin by stripping off and studying himself naked in the mirror. So far two weeks have gone by, and he's still trying to get up the nerve to look.⁵

Social Constructionism argues that human identity, both individual and interpersonal, is the product of the social contexts within which we have spent our lives. A social context teaches us what we are allowed to feel or not feel and how to express our feelings; which relationships are mandatory, preferred, obligatory, optional, or undesirable; what we can dream and what we must never dream; which wishes are within the realm of possibility and which are not; and the common standards of aesthetics, virtue, and common good. Social constructionism creates each of us, in this sense, by teaching us how to see; what to value; and how to respond once we have seen and valued.

The foundational assumption of Reader Response is that a text does not have a sole inherent meaning, but has as many possible meanings as

³ Rosalind Coward, *Female Desires: How They Are Sought, Bought, and Packaged* (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 227.

⁴ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, "Corporeal archetypes and Power," *Hypatia* 7:3 (Summer 1992), 69.

⁵ This is not, however, R. Judah the Patriarch, who was referred to as "our holy rabbi" because he never looked at his own penis, or even touched it (b. Shabbat 118b). Nor is it George Eliot's Daniel Deronda, who seems to take three-quarters of this eight-hundred-plus-page novel before he ever notices that he is circumcised. Both serve as examples of men's enormous investment in dissociating from their penises, while simultaneously making them synecdoches of masculine identity.

its readers bring to it.⁶ The idea is long familiar in both Christian and Jewish traditions. Early Judaism spoke of the “seventy faces of the Torah,” a metaphor for multiplex meanings.⁷ St. Augustine sought out nine separate meanings for each of the opening verses of Scripture,⁸ and medieval Christianity asserted that every verse of the Bible has at least four meanings: the literal, the allegorical, the tropological and the anagogical.⁹ While the early writers in both traditions understood the meanings as inherent in the text, today we understand that they are created by the interaction between a text and a reader, placing as much responsibility for meaning-making upon the reader as upon the text itself.

Social constructionism and reader response theory, then, help us understand that we read meaning into many things other than the printed page. What we are able to see, value, and respond to in a text is socially constructed, and the meaning we draw from whatever we encounter is a priori resident within-generated by—ourselves, and shaped by the complex interaction of culture, life experience, and individual need.

We can now understand bodies as a textless text into which outside meanings are read. The study of the human body as a metaphorical vehicle is sometimes called “Human Social Anatomy.” Dutton describes it as follows:

The human body, in this view, can be understood only in the context of the social construction of reality; indeed, the body itself is seen as a social construct, a means of social expression or performance by which our

⁶ Such a claim is, of course, simplistic, for however passive a text may be, it still has its own syntax, rhetorical structures, and genres. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

⁷ See Philip Culbertson, *A Word Fittingly Spoken: Context, Transmission, and Adoption of the Parables of Jesus* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 25-52; see also “Multiplexity in Biblical Exegesis: The Introduction to Megillat Qohelet by Moses Mendelssohn,” in *Cincinnati Journal of Judaica* 2 (Spring, 1991), 10-18.

⁸ St. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, trans. by John Hammond Taylor, S. J. 2 vols. (#41-42) in the Ancient Christian Writers series (New York: Newman Press, 1982).

⁹ See Philip Culbertson, “Known, Knower, Knowing: The Authority of Scripture in the Anglican Tradition,” in *Anglican Theological Review* 74:2 (Autumn 1991), 144-174.

identity and value—for ourselves and others—are created, tested, and validated.¹⁰

The human body is not simply a blank page upon which words have not yet been written. It is, more aptly, a textless text whose meaning is read by many readers, whether they are invited to read or not. It is a text which is almost always read from the outside (the reader introjecting meaning), but which always has the potential to be read from the inside, in that the body-bearer may at any point choose to wrest control over the text to interpret it as his or her own, making unique meanings and giving them primacy of place.

Objectification, The Male Gaze, and Homosociality

To read indicates “to objectify.” We maintain the comfortable fiction that encountering a text is an I-Thou relationship, though the history of religious literalism and fundamentalism indicates it is mostly an I-It relationship. In fact, we can’t read into a subject because it won’t sit still for us to do that. We have to objectify in order to interpret and then meaning-make.¹¹ In the same way, we objectify the body texts around us. At present, the way that men look at women is the most commonly studied form of objectification with the field of gender studies.

The term “the male gaze” seems to have been first used by Laura Mulvey, who argued that within the classical structure of cinema, men possess the gaze and women are its object.¹² As Schehr explains:

¹⁰ Kenneth Dutton, *The Perfectible Body: The Western Ideal of Male Physical Development* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 13.

¹¹ Many authors develop this idea. Among the foundational texts are J. L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 2nd edition, ed. by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); and Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

¹² Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16:3 (1975), 6-18: see also the analysis of Peter Lehman, *Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993). 2-3.

it is the gaze, the defining mode of operation of masculist discourse, that constructs the "woman" as textual object, prevents the woman from being herself—from "being," from "Being," from having a "self" separate from or prior to the socio-visual construct imposed by the male gaze and its/his discourse.¹³

A gaze turns a subject into an object. The male gaze values—when turned toward a woman, it desires; when turned toward a gay man, it often despises. In either case, it seizes control from the other. The other may experience the male gaze as a violation, a rape; the object of the gaze is no longer another person, but someone to be possessed or disposed of. Within the world of texts, the male gaze might be described as "one-handed reading," in that its purpose is clearly one of self-stimulation and erotic satisfaction.¹⁴

Homosociality is a term coined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to describe the basic structure of patriarchy: men pleasing other men via the medium of women.¹⁵ Sedgwick describes the process whereby men attempt to establish some intimacy with each other, usually in a triangulated relationship with a woman who functions to disguise the gestures between the men, as "homosociality":

"Homosocial" is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex;

¹³ Lawrence Schehr, *Parts of an Andrology: on Representations of Men's Bodies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 82-83.

¹⁴ See Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*Confessions*) and Jean Marie Goulemot (*Ces livres qu'on ne lit que d'une main*); see also Schehr, 113.

¹⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, (New York: Columbia, 1985); see also Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. by Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975). Sherry Ortner, in *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), describes Polynesian cultures as homosocial, in that powerful men retain their position by bartering young virgins in order to form political alliances. Such a social structure appears to make women important, but in fact their value is only in their agency as "negotiable tender." Mark George, in "Assuming the Body of the Heir Apparent: David's Lament," in Timothy Beal and David Gunn, eds., *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book* (London: Routledge, 1996), 164-174, describes the relation between David and Jonathan as sitting at the homosexual end of the homosocial spectrum.

it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with "homosexual," and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from "homosexual."¹⁶

Sedgwick's theory is directly related to family systems theory, presuming that human beings relate to each other within triangular structures.¹⁷ In the triangle of two men and a woman, the attraction between the two men must be taken at least as seriously as the attraction between each man and the woman. The attraction is heightened when either man realizes that he can accumulate further power and influence by forming an alliance with another of the two members of the triangle. Since women rarely have power, the obvious choice with whom to form the alliance is the other man. The alliance may take the form of cooperation or competition or even aggression. Whatever its form, the alliance as power-brokering cannot be denied. This desire to unite powers with another man is one possible non-genital form of Eros, this desire and attraction creating the exaggerated impulse to homosociality. Sedgwick even describes the attraction as "intense and potent." Most men operate this way on occasion, though few are aware of it.

The male gaze not only objectifies, but must objectify for homosociality to work. Ironically, the homosocial system can be maintained only when men avert their gaze from each other; the gaze, however figuratively, must remain focused on a woman. When the male gaze turns toward another man, homosociality threatens to disintegrate into homoeroticism, as the novels of D. H. Lawrence illustrate.¹⁸ Thus patriarchy is built upon the assumption that a male body is a text which will reject all attempts by other men to read it. To accept such an attempt would be to destroy the basis of power and control.

¹⁶ Sedgwick, 1.

¹⁷ See Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1985); and Philip Guerin, Thomas Fogarty, Leo Fay, and Judith Gilbert Kautto, *Working with Relationship Triangles: The One-Two-Three of Psychotherapy* (New York: Guilford, 1996), for cogent explanations of this theory.

¹⁸ See, for example, the relationship between Maurice and Bertie in his short story "The Blind Man," or between Gerald Crich and Rupert Birkin in *Women in Love*.

Thinking about writing this essay, I decided to poll a group of men I spend a lot of time with. Sitting in a corner at a party, I asked them "When a woman walks into the room, what's the first thing you notice about her?" They answered variously "Her breasts; I'm a tit man." "Her legs." "Her hair." "Her ass." Each man had a quick and clear answer. I continued: "So when a man walks into the room, what's the first thing you notice about him." "The whole package," they seemed to answer in one voice. Not satisfied, I asked my question about men again, and got the same univocal answer again. In fact, the guys wouldn't budge. They would not name a male body part that attracted their attention, would not name any aspect of a male that they read first as an entry point into the larger text. They were willing to engage the text as a whole, but not to do the sort of close reading which is now assumed within the field of textual criticism.

Averting the Gaze, Refusing to Read

Why is it so difficult for men to direct their heterosexual male gaze toward another man? Why is it apparently even more difficult for them to turn the gaze upon their own male bodies? The complexity of the answer may help explain why the subject is almost completely ignored in the exploding literature on masculinity. Let me explore five different reasons.

Reading is Dangerous

To read is to risk making one's self vulnerable, to risk encountering what Wayne Booth has called "the otherness that bites."¹⁹ Most people are highly selective about what they read, and will avoid texts which threaten their comfortability or security. A man may not be consciously aware that to read another man's body is dangerous, but subconsciously he is aware. He is also aware that to read another man's body raises the possibility that

¹⁹ "I embrace the pursuit of the Other as among the grandest of hunts we are invited to;...But surely no beast that will prove genuinely *other* will fail to bite, and the otherness that bites, the otherness that changes us, must have sufficient definition, sufficient identity, to threaten us where we live." Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 70.

another man may attempt to read his, and perhaps in the reading find him wanting.

Reading Re-Positions the Reader

As I have claimed elsewhere, masculinity as a gender construction in virtually every society is fragile and must be constantly defended.²⁰ Michael Satlow makes the same claim in relation to the rabbinic understanding of masculinity: "For the rabbis, therefore, manliness is never secure; it is achieved through the constant exercise of discipline in pursuit of virtue, and vanishes the moment a male ceases to exercise that discipline."²¹ To gaze at another man re-positions a straight man as a gay man, thereby shattering his fragile masculinity. Reading affects the reader much more deeply than it affects the text; gazing affects the gazer much more deeply than the one toward whom the gaze is directed. Susan Bordo points out that the male gaze has the power not only to objectify, but to feminize:

What exposure is most feared in the shower? Not the scrutiny of the penis (although this prospect may indeed make a heterosexual men uncomfortable), but the moment when one bends down to pick up the soap which has slipped from one's hands. It is in the imagination of this moment that the orthodox male is most undone by the consciousness that there may be homosexuals in the shower, whose gaze will define him as a passive receptacle of *their* sexuality, and thus as "woman." There is a certain paradox here. For although it is the imagined effeminacy of homosexual men that makes them objects of heterosexual derision, here it is their imagined *masculinity* (that is, the consciousness of them as active,

²⁰ Philip Culbertson, *New Adam: The Future of Male Spirituality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992); *Counseling Men* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994); "Men's Quest for Wholeness: The Changing Counseling Needs of Pakeha Males" (in press).

²¹ Michael Satlow, "'Try to Be a Man': The Rabbinic Construction of Masculinity," *Harvard Theological Review* 89:1 (1996), 27.

evaluating sexual subjects, with a defining and “penetrating” sexual gaze) that makes them the objects of heterosexual fear.²²

Men’s fear of the male gaze, ultimately, is the fear of becoming, feeling, or representing female desire within the phallogocentric order. In the shower, the homosexual body is the same as the heterosexual body, the only difference being in the desirer.²³

Reading a Text Which Won’t Focus

As if the male body were not already a difficult enough text to read, it seems to disappear altogether when a man is unclothed. In a patriarchal system, the penis cues masculinity, and once that occurs, the body, “the being” disappears and the person becomes a function, the form becomes the essence, the masculinity, the “doing.” The part overwhelms the whole, so that the whole fades into insignificance, leaving us to attempt to read a part or “member” which is, at best, dissociative. Phillip Lopate writes:

This part of me, which is so synecdochically identified with the male body (as the term “male member” indicates) has given me both too little, and too much, information about what it means to be a man. It has a personality like a cat. I have prayed to it to behave better, to be less frisky, or more; I have followed its nose in matters of love, ignoring good sense, and paid the price; but I have also come to appreciate that it has its own specialized form of intelligence which must be listened to, or another price will be extracted.²⁴

The penis will not behave: now a penis, now a phallus, the one when we wish the other, it is itself a text that we can barely read, even with double-vision. It seems not one thing but two. The phallus is haunted by the penis and vice versa. It has no unified social identity, but is fragmented by ideologies of race and ethnicity. “Rather than exhibiting constancy of form, it is perhaps the most visibly mutable of bodily parts; it evokes the temporal not the eternal. And far from maintaining a steady will and

²² Susan Bordo, “Reading the Male Body,” in Goldstein, 287.

²³ Schehr, 151.

²⁴ Phillip Lopate, “Portrait of My Body,” in Goldstein, 211.

purpose, it is mercurial, temperamental, unpredictable.”²⁵ It is this unpredictability which fascinates, frustrates, and ultimately offends many readers of male bodies.

Because it is two and not one, we do not even know how to count the male body parts. Girls are made of indiscrete amounts of stuff: “sugar and spice and everything nice.” No quantities are given, nor do they need to be. But boys are made of countable things: “snips and snails and puppy dog tails” Countable, if not to say detachable, things, metonymies of their always castrated penises.”²⁶ But do we count the penis as one and the phallus as another? Or is the penis simply a potential text, a text which seems to self-create at will? St. Augustine claimed it was two: the penis, which is the “logical extension” of all rational men, created in the image of the divine logos, and the phallus, which as rationally uncontrollable, must simply be the handiwork of the Not-God, Satan. The phallus for Augustine is the wily serpent in the garden²⁷ and, as the only body part which refuses to submit to the brain, the constant reminder of our fallenness. Augustine despised the phallus, the conveyer of original sin. And yet even so great a saint could be overcome by his phallicly-inflated male ego, declaring that in heaven, women will receive their penises back. Perhaps he would have been happier if the penis really had been detachable, to be awarded, or not, like a prize for good behavior.

In a 1986 movie called “Dick Talk,” a group of women are filmed discussing their responses to the male body, and to male genitals in particular. In the opening section, “The First,” the moderator asks women about the first time they thought about a penis and what they thought about it. One relates how she thought penises were like rockets that

²⁵ Bordo, 265-266.

²⁶ Schehr, 80.

²⁷ See the excellent comments by Ilona Rashkow, “Daughters and Fathers in Genesis...Or, What is Wrong with this Picture,” in Athalya Brenner, ed., *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 32 n.32. For a vivid picture of adolescent revulsion at phallic erection, see Stephen Fry’s novel *The Hippopotamus* (London: Arrow Books, 1994), 88- 89.

detached themselves from men, entered women's bodies, and transformed themselves into babies. She had seen diagrams in a book, and since she had seen her father walking around the house in his shorts without a visible erection like that in the diagram, she assumed that his had become detached. She then relates a dream about men in suits with attaché cases in which they keep their penises.²⁸

A detachable phallus, in the above fantasy, must leave behind only its shadow, the penis. Schehr argues that this is why the penis is hidden so often: "It is my contention that the penis has been the most hidden of male body parts because of the ideological as well as the psychoanalytical temptation to turn the penis into its evil twin brother, the phallus."²⁹ Note the genitals in the ceiling paintings in the Sistine Chapel: they are all disproportionately small. This makes them safe and aesthetic, an extension of ancient Greek ideals of desirable male nudity. K. J. Dover analyzed the representation of penises on Greek vases within the context of his study of homosexuality in ancient Greece. Attractive penises were particularly small, with no pubic hair: the penis of a pre-adolescent. Unattractive penises were exaggeratedly large, threatening, and attached to hairy bodies. The cultural index of penile beauty, then, in Dover's reading of vases, is that of modesty and subordination, an abjuration of sexual initiative or sexual rivalry.³⁰

Source of pride, seat of shame, many men cannot figure out how to read their own penises realistically, and refuse to read the penises of others. Judaism attempted to resolve the textual dilemma with the cry "Off with its hat!" Christianity responded more adamantly: "Off with its head," creating a culture of either symbolic or literal castration. The Christian male body was symbolically castrated through body-denial, the circumscription of sexual activity to heterosexual intercourse within marriage for the sole purpose of procreation, and the forbidding of

²⁸ Lehman, 148-149.

²⁹ Schehr, 16.

³⁰ K. J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 125.

jouissance.³¹ For some of the saints, this was not enough. Origen in the 3rd century, and Peter Abelard in the 12th century, are two who excised altogether any genital text from their body.³²

Reading a Text Which Does Not Belong To Us

Those who have the greatest investment in reading interpretive meanings into textless texts are those whose power is most easily promoted by the interpretation. The entire subject of identifying readings, of deconstructing the construction of the heterosexual male body, is so inherently elusive that I had repeatedly to struggle to keep any sense of objectivity while writing this essay.

Those with the greatest investment in reading meaning into the male body are governments and politico- military authorities which need men to conceive themselves in certain ways in order to retain their present positions of power. In other words, the primary reader who inserts meaning into the male textless text is the government structure of the society in which these men live. In his essay "Consuming Manhood," Michael Kimmel points out that in order for a man in nineteenth-century puritanical America to become a real man, a "Marketplace Man," governments realized it would be necessary to control the flows of desire

³¹ See, among various sources, Uta Ranke-Heinemann, *Eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven: Women, Sexuality, and the Catholic Church* (New York: Penguin, 1990).

³² See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 117, 168-169. I believe there are deeper psychological implications of male castration which are not yet adequately explored. For example, is Christian castration a form of despair masquerading as discipline? Is it an early form of mental illness like the forms of self-mutilation we know today, where a patient will bang her head against a wall repeatedly, creating a controlled external pain which distracts from the uncontrollable internal psychiatric pain? Unfortunately, the subject of voluntary castration in Christian tradition is little written-about; one of the few texts is Peter Browe, *Zur Geschichte der Entmannung: Eine religions- und rechtsgeschichtliche Studie* (Breslau: Muller, 1936).

and of fluids filling his body.³³ Certain flows of desire would need to be deemed morally repugnant because they were economically counterproductive; undesirable or counterproductive flows of desire would henceforth be deemed pathological. In *The History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault stresses the development of such discourses of biopolitics, those official discourses that seek to regulate the individual through a series of proscriptions, admonitions, and recommendations. The discourses of biopolitics involve the identification of the individual with his (and not “his or her”) political self as a citizen. The individual was to act so as best to fulfill the functions of a member of society. In order to produce Marketplace Men, bodies would need to be owned, men would have to be read as both heterosexual and “manly,” and the siring of children would be understood as mandatory. These were the responsibility of every good citizen.³⁴

Male bodies are textless texts into which governments read self-securing values and expectations, giving lie to the myth of genuine concern or human rights. Heterosexuality is read onto men’s bodies, which is why, in the present debate on the genesis of sexual orientation, gay men can usually chart the development of their sexual self-awareness, while straight men believe they have “always been that way.” Heterosexuality is a government-designed and -controlled process of breeding, of animal husbandry. Masturbation, voluntary celibacy, homosexuality, and any other alternative sexual expression has to be controlled and even anathematized, for only through heterosexual marriage and the procreation of children can a phallic political power assure its own authority into the future.³⁵ The heterosexual male gaze is

³³ Michael Kimmel, “Consuming Manhood: The Feminization of American Culture and the Recreation of the Male Body, 1832-1920,” in Goldstein, 12-41.

³⁴ In Jim Thompson’s novel *The Nothing Man*, protagonist Clint Brown returns from World War II having had his genitals blown off by a landmine. He describes himself as having “given his penis for his country.” (New York: Mysterious Press, [1954], 1988, 3)

³⁵ The Hite Report on Male Sexuality (1981) concluded that sexual intercourse for men was satisfying not only because of their attraction to their sexual partner “but also from the deeply ingrained cultural meaning of the act. Through intercourse a man participates in the cultural symbolism of patriarchy and gains a sense of belonging to society with

the ultimate sign of capitulation to an imposed external meaning, an abandonment of human *jouissance*.

Reading Unmasks the Divine Ambiguity

An additional difficulty in reading men's bodies confronts Jewish and Christian men, whether gay or straight. Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn,³⁶ and Howard Eilberg-Schwartz,³⁷ have explored extensively the central gender problem of scripture: how can men and women understand themselves as created in God's image when God apparently has no body? Eilberg-Schwartz writes:

Does God have genitals and, if so, of which sex? It is interesting that interpreters have generally avoided this question. This seems a particularly important lacuna for interpreters who understand Genesis 1:26-27 to mean that the human body is made in the image of the deity. By avoiding the question of God's sex, they skirt a fundamental question: how can male and female bodies both resemble the divine form? Since God's sex is veiled, however, any conclusions have to be inferred indirectly from statements about God's gender. But, however, this question is answered poses a problem for human embodiment generally and sexuality in particular. If God is asexual, as many interpreters would have it, then only part of the human body is made in the image of God.³⁸

The part of a man's body which is obviously not made in God's image is the penis. To read another man's body is to read the Divine Ambiguity.

status/identity of 'male.'" See Marianne Walters, Betty Carter, Peggy Papp, and Olga Silverstein, *The Invisible Web: Gender Patterns in Family Relationships* (New York: Guilford, 1988), 215.

³⁶ Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn, "Shifting the Blame: God in the Garden," in Beal and Gunn, eds., 16-33.

³⁷ Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, "The Problem of the Body for the People of the Book," in Beal and Gunn, eds., 34-55; see also his *God's Phallus, and other problems for men and monotheism* (Boston: Beacon, 1994).

³⁸ Eilberg-Schwartz, "The Problem....," 47.

And this ambiguity, too, is read into men's penises—into the penises of others, and into one's own.

Given how daunting all this is, no wonder that the heterosexual male gaze is never directed toward other heterosexual men. No wonder “the guys” only wanted to look at the whole package, if even that! If a man cannot read the body of another, what then is the effect when he turns his male gaze upon himself, upon his own body with all its strengths and weaknesses?