

Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representation of the Male Body

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Main content

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by Peter Lehman

THE RIPPLED, MUSCULAR TORSOS OF MEN are finding their way onto academic book jackets faster than you can say "Claude Van Damme" in hunky monosyllables. Under the various and often quite distinct agendas of gay studies, queer theory, feminism, and "Men's Studies," publishers are hungry for discussions of the male body in all its discursive and semiotic dimensions. One is inclined to be skeptical as to whether this focus on masculinity actually deconstructs patriarchal forms of representation or just centers boys and their subjectivities once again. Peter Lehman's *Running Scared* acknowledges the risk of replicating patriarchal viewpoints but firmly contends that both avoiding the sexual representation of the male body and carefully controlling its limited and explicit representations work to support patriarchy.

Feminist criticism and theory have understandably been more concerned with the construction of the female subject and body. Back in 1975 Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking and now ubiquitous essay "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema" pointed to the operations of voyeurism and sadism in the male gaze--a gaze directed at women. But as regards the representation of the male body, Mulvey states with a touch of polemic oversight that "the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like."

Since then, much feminist film writing by scholars such as Miriam Hansen, Linda Williams, and Gaylyn Studlar has explored issues of women looking at women and men's bodies. Work in queer theory continues to examine the way lesbians and gay men view and "construct" the male body. Much of this critical effort is grounded in readings and re-readings of Freud and Lacan. Lehman chooses not to hypothesize a single theory of sexual difference. Though drawing on film and feminist theory, he emphasizes the historical particulars of texts and their operations within broader cultural discourses. Films, novels, paintings, photographs, popular music, sex manuals, and videos come under his close scrutiny.

In approaching the male body in myriad form, Lehman's book moves through considerations of masculinity as constructed in language, through scars, markings, and body types which signify particular kinds of (weak or powerful) masculinities, to finally confront the extremely limited representation and often pronounced absence of the male genitals in popular culture. Lehman believes that "the awe surrounding the penis in a patriarchal culture depends on either keeping it hidden from sight or carefully regulating its representation."

Roy Orbison's 1961 pop hit "Running Scared" forms something of a template for Peter Lehman's...

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Request PDF | On Feb 11, 2008, Neal King and others published Book Review: Running Scared: Masculinity and the Representations of the Male Body. New Edition. By Peter Lehman. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2007, 304 pp., \$34.95 (paper) | Find, read and cite all the research you need on ResearchGate. We use cookies to make interactions with our website easy and meaningful, to better understand the use of our services, and to tailor advertising. For further information, including about cookie settings, please read our Cookie Policy . By continuing to use this site, you consent to the use of cookies. Got it. We value your privacy. Masculinity's death tolls are attributed to its more specific manifestations: alcoholism, workaholism and violence. While much of the scholarship about gender depictions in media has come from feminists deconstructing the endless damaging representations of women, there's been far less research specifically about media-perpetuated constructions of masculinity. But certainly, we all recognize the traits that are valued among men in film, television, videogames, comic books, and more: strength, valor, independence, the ability to provide and protect. While depictions of men have grown more complicated, nuanced and human over time (we're long past the days of "Father Knows Best" and "S