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since 1983

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Letters to the editor should be limited to two double-spaced typed pages. **Deadline for submissions** to the editorial department and for the **Calendar** is the Thursday before the first and third Friday for the next issue. Views expressed in letters to the editor, columns and features are not necessarily those of the publisher.

The **display advertising** deadline is the Monday after the first and third Friday for the next issue.

**Classified ads** must be received at the office of **just out** by the Monday after the first and third Friday for the next issue, along with payment. Ads will not be taken over the telephone.

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# steppin' out



PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

## guest editorial

# Force-fed images

*Unfortunately, queer culture can be just as oppressive as straight culture*

by Aaron Bong

**B**efore I came out, while still in high school, I had a severe eating disorder. I would literally eat at every chance I could. I remember one specific day after being viciously taunted and called a "fag," I went home and ate a container of Cool Whip with syrup on it. What I ate didn't matter.

I stuffed myself until I finally began to deal with my queerness, instead of trying to push it deeper into my body. Since I came out, without the aid of diets, I have lost 75 pounds. I lost my eating disorder, but I continue to hang on to a contempt for my body. I am not alone.

Micah (not his real name) is seventeen. He is gay, and, occasionally, he does drag. Micah has been in and out of the hospital in the four years I have known him. He constantly deals with an addiction to diet pills. Micah weighs maybe 120 pounds and is at least six feet tall. One of the last times that I saw him, he was complaining about how fat he was, that he would never fit into the dress he was planning to wear. He commented once that he was "too fat to be gay."

Recently I went dancing with some friends of mine. Sue and Julie (not their real names) have been together for about three months. We went to a club, and Julie's bag was searched before we went in. I thought it was quite odd that she had a spoon in her purse. Julie said she had brought yogurt to work that day. That weekend, when Sue and I were alone, she confided in me that she believed Julie was bulimic, that she used the spoon to help herself throw up.

I began to watch Julie more closely than before. I began to look at the pattern of her behavior. I noticed whenever she ate

with me she made a trip to the bathroom afterward, and always returned looking flushed. Soon after, she would complain of dizziness and nausea. I couldn't believe it was true, that she could be bulimic.

So many times, looking at the tangible objects of our culture, I have tried to picture where I fit in. All of the men in the magazines have perfect hair, cut just the right way. Their bodies are all gym-toned and muscular, and their teeth seem to have some unearthly glow to them. Nothing less than what is thought to be beautiful. I wonder what Micah and Julie think about the images they are force-fed.

I am very upset and angry at the culture we have created, where we allow young people to kill themselves—literally—over what they look like. These people I speak of have all been very brave to come out so young.

I don't see anorexia or bulimia as isolated problems. I believe they are only manifestations of much larger and more complex issues that we, as a community, are not yet prepared to face. These issues are also manifested as drug and alcohol abuse, spousal abuse (within our community), homelessness and sex work among queer youth, and the sexual exploitation of youths by adults.

What I had hoped for when I came out was to find an embracing culture that wanted to love me—not conditionally, based on how I looked, but no matter what. What I found out instead is that we are at times just as vicious toward our own as some heterosexuals are toward all of us.

What I have learned is that no matter how we wish that we were different from "them," in many ways we are just the same.

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