

SIZE MATTERS

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Plastic makes perfect

Apparently I'm not alone. My friend Jim Kilgore, a plastic surgeon in Tualatin, tells me he's seen the number of cosmetic procedures for men double in the last 15 years, the operation of choice being liposuction on love handles, at a cost of about \$2,000 per handle. His average male patient is in his 40s and is physically fit already.

"Liposuction is a body contour operation," he says, "not a weight-reducing procedure."

The good news is that fat cells are unipotential (meaning they can't reproduce themselves), so they can't grow back once you suck them out of an area. The bad news is that, because it can cover a large area, liposuction is the most invasive plastic surgery there is, resulting in more complications and more deaths (yeah, you read that right: deaths) than any other cosmetic procedure.

Yet I still find myself thinking, "Hey, it might be worth \$4,000 to be able to take my shirt off at gay pride."

I ask Bill Belcher, a gay mental health counselor I know from PABA, if I'm nuts. No, he says, my thinking is typical of thirty-some-



PHOTO BY MARY DAVIS

things. In his practice Belcher has seen obsession with perfection grow as gay men reach their mid to late 20s.

"In general, gay teens are tuned into being unique," he says. "The beads, the colored hair, the piercings...but once they enter 'the scene,' they often start comparing themselves to others and become acculturated to conform to the 'Ken doll' standard."

(Except, of course, in the genitalia department, where—to my childhood frustration, and Barbie's no doubt—Ken has always been lacking.)

"It's almost like they go through a 'gay machine,'" says Belcher. "They go to the bars, they get the haircut, they get the gym body... Once they realize the bloom is off the rose, they start fertilizing."

Belcher sees a mellowing and self-acceptance in gay men as they reach their 40s, except in cases of older men coming out. Men who have been married and whose only exposure to gay culture has been the media feel they have to be buff and tan and have their hair to fit in.

"They have the impression that's what being gay is," he says. Men who felt reasonably attractive as heterosexuals suddenly become very insecure when facing the scrutiny of gay men. I'm reminded of Aaron the barfly: "One flaw, and that's it—you're out."

Writer Michelangelo Signorile calls it "body fascism," and let's face it, boys, we've been doing it for years. You think it was straight guys who got the bright idea to paint naked muscle boys all over Renaissance cathedrals? I don't

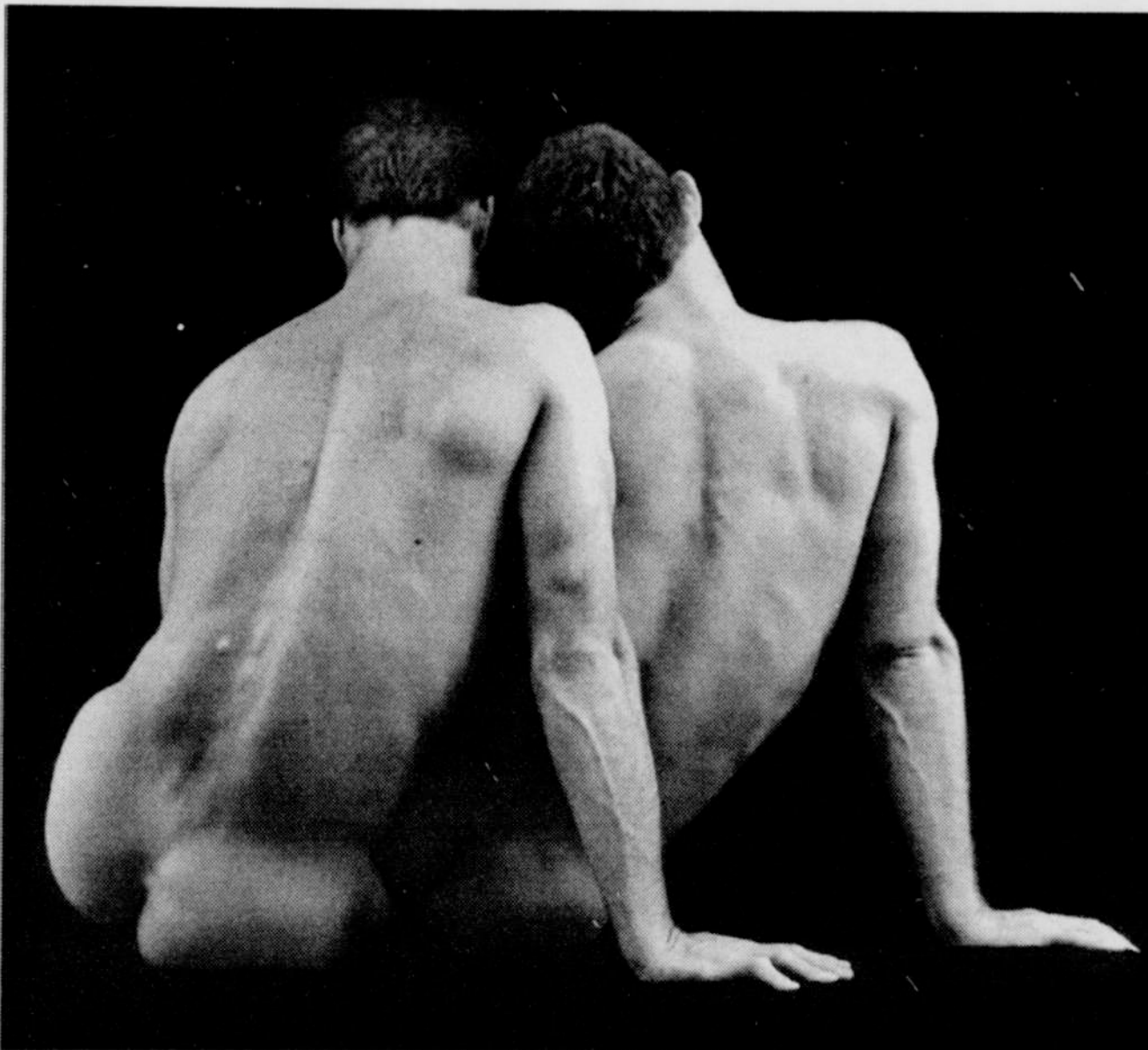


PHOTO BY TAMARA LISCHKA

think so. To look at *Genre* or *Out* magazines, you'd think all gay men are young and gorgeous and having way more fun than you are.

L.A. confidential

Nowhere is this pressure more apparent than in the story of Evan, a buff 33-year-old actor friend of mine. Evan had been making beaucoup bucks doing commercials in Los Angeles when a rare spinal disorder rendered him unable to walk more than a city block, and even that with immense strain and spasticity.

"Sitting down, I'm still a hottie by L.A. standards," he says. "In fact, as a result of dragging these useless legs around, my upper body has never looked better."

"I was at this party in the Hollywood Hills, being superbly charming, and I could tell this guy was falling in love with me right there," he continues. "Then, when I got up to walk to the dining room, my legs began to shake uncontrollably and this guy walked right past me, definitely not loving me. It was brutal, but that's L.A., babe."

Sensing Evan's humiliation, a female friend took him by the arm, noted his wildly bucking hips and said lewdly for everyone to hear, "Mmm, I wish I could get underneath that."

I urge Evan to move to Portland. "It's not like that here," I say, but then I think of Aaron's words—"One flaw..."—and I wonder.

Au naturel

Flavio Semas, a hairy 43-year-old Portlander of Portuguese descent, tells me he has actually had men say to him "Look who just got out of the zoo" when they see his hairy shoulders and back—and I think, "Geez, it is worse than high school."

Semas sees more and more men with shaved bodies at Oregon's gay nude beaches, one more way in which we're succumbing to the kinds of cosmetic pressures women

have endured for centuries. (My friends who work out at 24 Hour Fitness in Northwest Portland testify to the ever-lengthening toilette of some men, as they fuss with various emollients and creams ad nauseam. It might not be long before we refuse to leave the house without "putting our faces on.")

Semas' decision to go au naturel with regard to body hair was part of the process of embracing his Portuguese heritage, and it led him in an unexpected direction: "I look at myself and I see a natural, hairy body, more primitive, if you will," he says.



"And my penis didn't look right to me circumcised," he adds.

So Semas began the process of foreskin restoration. (No, I'm not making this up.) Using a penile uncircumcision device, or PUD, Semas is in the midst of a four- to five-year process of stretching the skin on the shaft of his penis to cover the head, effectively forming a new foreskin.

I won't go into all the details—see *The Joy of Uncircumcision* if you're interested—but I will tell you it can involve subjecting one's penis to all manner of hardware-store paraphernalia: O-rings, duct tape, weights and alligator clips, to name a few.

Just having penis and duct tape appear in the same sentence makes me cringe, but Semas says the



process has made him feel "whole" and reports increased sensitivity of the glans and more pleasure in sex—and it's working!

Yank my doodle— it's a dandy

Men dissatisfied with the size of their penises, however, must go—ahem—to much greater lengths.

According to Dr. Kilgore, surgical enlargement is possible by releasing the interior muscles that connect the penis to the body, but this lengthening will only increase the flaccid size. The muscles in the penis that affect volume during erection can't be manipulated. Although some surgeons are injecting fat into the penis to increase girth, the problem there is that the fat can turn lumpy or be absorbed back into the body—which seems to me to be an excessively cruel joke on nature's part. (Why doesn't the fat in my butt get absorbed back into the body, huh?)

So just how important is size? The ancient Greeks valued a small flaccid penis as an indication of man's control over his baser, animalistic nature. Nowadays, Viagra is—pardon the pun—a growth industry, and porn stars peddle dildo replicas of their cocks that are so large you could bunt a baseball with them.

"Oh, I hate size queens," says my friend Jeremy. "I hate size queens and small dicks."

Jeremy has slept with a number of well-endowed men, so naturally I hang on his every word.

"I'm mostly a top," he says, "and, as has been my experience, most tops don't care how big their bottom's penises are, but I really do. If I'm being totally honest, I would prefer a 10-inch dick with plenty of girth any day of the week. Otherwise, I feel like it's a waste of my time."

Perhaps I should fix him up with Larry, a well-hung Portland man who advertises his bounty on the Internet. I e-mailed Larry (all in the name of journalistic research, of course) and asked him how he feels about being amply endowed.

"I've always felt good about having a large cock," he said. (*Quelle surprise.*) "I may get the response that it's too large for most, but the ones who are able to take it just love it."

Or, as Jeremy puts it, "Sometimes it's so big you can't fuck it, you can't suck it, all you can do is put your arms around it and weep."

But most men I spoke with had a more realistic grasp on penis size.

"I don't worry about it," says Richard, a physically fit 45-year-old runner. "Not on myself or other guys. I'm not exactly what you would call 'gifted' but, you know, I'm happy. I would never think of asking a guy 'How big are you?' If some guy asked me that, I would probably tell him 'You're never going to find out.'"

I like Richard's attitude. He seems to be the mature, spiritually evolved person I strive (and fail) to be. He exercises daily, but not to excess, and he manages to keep his physical life in balance with the rest of his life. And even though I've cited the more extreme examples, Richard seems to speak for the majority of Portlanders.

On average

Take for instance, Patrick, a 38-year-old science professor, who has found self-acceptance by maintaining a realistic reference point.

"If I compare myself to the guys in porn magazines, of course I feel lousy," he says. "But if I compare myself to other scientists, hey, I

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