

Get thee to the gym

FRAMELINE FILM FEST: Body image issues stud Frameline docs and narratives

06.15.10 - 8:42 pm | [Dennis Harvey](#) (/category/author/dennis-harvey) | (2)

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arts@sfbg.com

(<mailto:arts@sfbg.com>)

FRAMELINE It's a little-noted fact that the gay community is absolutely thick with twins. Not biological, but the kind that grow more identical when they take their shirts off.

Whoever said opposites attract clearly never went to the Folsom Street Fair, where every body type runs in packs of two (or several). Sure, mom said looks aren't everything. But was she a gay

man? It's brutal out there. Combine a sophisticated, compartmentalized urban gay scene like San Francisco's own with the Internet's heightened judging-book-by-cover — no actual book reading implied — and you've got a recipe for looks obsessiveness that can snare even the safely off-market.

An older friend who said at 40 he'd eventually retire from gym habituation because "I don't want to be a 50-year-old face on a 25-year-old body" is now a 60-year-old with a 35-year-old bodybuilder's torso — plus the blown-out knees and other ailments decades of body-sculpting punishment have wrought. What for? Not for his committed partner, one assumes, but for the accustomed thrill of feeling the breeze shift from swiveling heads.

A number of films in Frameline's 34th edition (*Skinnyfat*, *BearCity*, *The Adonis Factor*, *Bear Nation*) address the complicated landscape of gay male body image issues. They're not always pretty — at least emotionally. Although it is generally also the business of people in movies to be pretty. It is also the business of these particular movies to question just what pretty is, and why the hell it has to be so important.

The topic is taken head-on — if also superficially, which is ironically apt — by *The Adonis Factor*. Its interviewees from various gay terrariums (SF, Palm Springs, West Hollywood) say things like "Gay men tend to have more of an appreciation for beauty in all aspects, whether it is other male bodies or just antiques."

Leafing through relevant issues magazine-style, from circuit parties to surgery to eating disorders, Christopher Hines' documentary ponders endemic, sometimes compulsive shallowness while providing a lot of eye candy. "If you're gonna be gay, you're just gonna have to experience the wrath of the A crowd," one perfect 10 in search of an 11 attests. Some of us are just too allergic to house music to hazard that.

A mutable "culture of desire" has spawned myriad subdivisions based on body type, the greatest latest boom being bear-ish. But Malcolm Ingram's documentary *Bear Nation* finds fissure in a movement supposedly all about including the excluded. One specialty magazine publisher bluntly insists "bear" means hairy, not big (save musculature), and who asked these fat fucks to the party anyway? If there was a fetish mag focused on the proudly obnoxious, he'd rate the cover.

FrameLine 34 ... still holds close with the ... features a lot of films that in one way



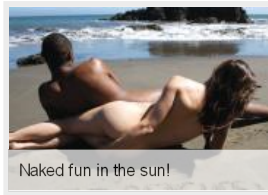
I'm too sexy for my shirt: "The Adonis Factor" examines the gay male hunger for beefcake.



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