QYA SUMMER ZINE

Cover art by Ricky (he/they/any) and Jesse (they/them)
Dear reader,

Welcome back to the Queer Youth Assemble's zines! We're starting off this year with a summer zine, just in time for pride month. The theme for this season was "bodies," aiming to promote acceptance and positivity towards all types of bodies, especially queer and trans ones. Inside, you will find beautiful pieces of art, writing, and poetry created by Queer Youth Assemble members. We acknowledge the intersecting elements found within the content of this zine, and encourage you to read with both compassion and understanding.

Due to our strong belief in uncensored creativity, we decided to not put content limits on our creators for this publication. However, we understand that some of the content within this zine may be triggering to some readers. In this and future QYA zines, a list of specific triggers can be found at the top of each page, and any potentially triggering themes can be found at the beginning of each zine. There are no potentially triggering themes listed for this issue. If you find yourself struggling after reading, we encourage you to reach out for support. We hope you enjoy this publication, and are inspired to create whatever your heart desires.

With love and care,

Esmée Silverman (she/they)
Queer Youth Assemble Co-Founder

Kai Khaund (they/them)
Queer Youth Assemble Zine Lead
What is QYA?

Queer Youth Assemble is a non-profit youth-led organization dedicated to serving queer youth across the United States and its territories. We are committed to nurturing the joy, interests, and talents of queer youth, and giving queer youth the resources and support to create positive change within their communities. We envision a day where all queer youth are happy, supported, and able to reach their fullest potential.
by Ricky (he/they/any)

Image description (left): a digital drawing of a beach at sunset. Someone sits on an orange towel near the shore. They have short brown hair and are wearing a tank top and shorts, plus pink high tops. They’re sitting under an umbrella with water and sunscreen sitting next to them.

Image description (right): A digital drawing of two people outside; one is sitting on the grass and the other is standing to the left of them with a popsicle to share. The one sitting down is wearing a pink and blue sundress with a brown belt and black boots. The one standing up is wearing a maroon t-shirt with a cartoon skull image on it, blue shorts, and brown boots. They also have a silver cane.
OCD and Transness
by Cadence (they/them)

My experiences with genderlessness and transness as a whole aren't as linear as the average trans person. Even other people with complex nonbinary identities don't share the same doubt, fear, and a sense of metaphorical life or death. I feel as though I'm looking through stained glass, watching everyone know all of the answers while I'm behind it lying to myself. That's because I have GOCD, a subtype of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder that can make identity a living hell for me and others like me.

Imposter syndrome is a defining part of my subtype and has impacted my line of thinking even before OCD developed. It delayed the amount of time it took for me to realize I'm nonbinary and convinced me I wasn’t experiencing transness the “right” way. My dysphoria fluctuates unlike the common narrative that it is constant and unchanging. From social dysphoria to wanting a flat chest, to feeling static, nothingness. I don’t present androgynous. My hair isn’t electric blue nor does it rest above my ears. I don’t fit within arbitrary prerequisites about what trans should “look like” by societal standards. There is nothing wrong with these stereotypes, it’s just what my consciousness clings onto. It’s who I wish I was to define the unknown.

These feelings intensified when I developed OCD. They manifest not only in the form of intrusive thoughts, but compulsions. I would confess my thoughts to people,
look at articles or videos online about others’ trans experiences to prove my doubt wrong, attempting to reassure myself that the thoughts in my head aren’t telling the truth. It’s like a merry-go-round I can't exit from, and no matter what I do, the feeling never fades. Of course every trans person experiences doubt now and then, except this feeling will stick with me even when I ruminate for the umpteenth time. I can't connect with my identity the same way anymore. I'm praying to a religious idol begging for forgiveness, endlessly waiting at the steps of the chapel.

It affects the way I approach my transition too. It may be delayed until I manage my symptoms and find a treatment plan that works for me. Mentally ill people, like trans people, aren't given the autonomy of what to do with their bodies, and it's something I have to worry about on both ends. I've been told multiple times that I shouldn't take medication or get top surgery, or else a part of myself will be lost. Everyday my brain echoes sentiments from my parents, ex-friends, and strangers. As challenging as it is, I do my best to focus on my wellbeing whether it makes people comfortable or not.

While it's common for trans people, especially trans youth, to develop mental health issues because of intersectionality, I never see the connection made between OCD and transness. To trans people with OCD who are struggling like me: it's okay to mourn who you were before OCD. I know that someday we can find ways to accept uncertainty and feel confident to make informed decisions about our bodies, and shake off the expectations that people have for us.
The thing that sets dance apart from any other type of creative expression is that your body itself is your instrument. Where an artist has their pencil and a musician their violin, the tools of your practice are muscle and sinew, and sometimes you forget that while you can afford to bend lead and string until they break, your own limbs are far more fragile. When you paint or sculpt or play the guitar, the quality of what you produce is between you and the paint and the clay and the wood under your fingers. But when you dance the burden is wholly on you and your traitorous flesh and how far you’re willing to push and burn and bleed. Because brushes and bows don’t give under pressure but your body does, and you can’t help but see that as your own personal failure.

It’s hard to love your body in the studio. The room is small and yet the floor-to-ceiling mirrors on every wall make it stretch twice as far in every direction. And the shine of that glass, though dusted with years of childhood fingerprints, makes it all too easy to watch the girls around you. Because the way their leotards and tights cling to their forms only accentuates how they can make their very bodies move in ways you’ve only dreamed of—how they can shape their very bodies in ways you’ve only dreamed of—and here, surrounded by mirrors, you can’t help but compare.

Their proportions are different from yours. You try your hardest not to see it as a bad thing. And yet you linger there at the mirror for longer than you should, tracing the lines of your form with the kind of scrutiny reserved for that which you judge—that which you hate—the most. With a deep breath,
you turn your attention to the way your hair is tied back; you hate the way it frames your face. You take it down, put it back up again. No, that’s worse. For some reason you never seem to be able to get the long ponytail quite right.

And then one summer you cut your hair, and you walk back into the tiny room and the horizons of glass, and you realize why. With the ponytail replaced by fluffy bangs and an undercut, long pants in the place of the pink tights that never even matched your skin tone in the first place (because even if you were white, what white person is that shade of raw chicken?), and other proportions altered by a high-impact sports bra, you look into the mirror and grin. Because the person in your reflection looks more like the male ballet dancers who carry themselves through leaps and twirls with the same long-legged masculinity than the ballerinas with their high buns and platter tutus. And you like that.

You watch yourself dance in the mirror. For the first time, you love how your body moves. For the first time, you’re not looking at a single other person in the room. For the first time, the music fills you with the good kind of butterflies.

It occurs to you that, as well-suited of an instrument as it might have been to someone else, your body wasn’t right for you before. Just like a colored pencil that’s dulled a little too much, or a double bass twice as tall as you, adjustments needed to be made before it was right for you. And you love your body now. You won’t push it until it breaks, because it’s more than just an instrument to you. It’s joy, it’s euphoria, it’s confidence, it’s creativity, it’s you, and it’s everything. You’re everything, and you won’t be forgetting it anytime soon.
Something kinda grounding
Something profounding
You can wish it to be better
Or you can realize it’s not the center
It’s your shield but not your weapon
It’s not worth obsession
It’s worth appreciation
As it is your foundation
But your intellect is far more stimulating
The body is imitating
The mind’s disposition
The body doesn’t deserve self-demolition
by Danny (he/him)

Image description: a person floating in a space with their hands over their heart and their eyes closed. They look content. Their head is floating slightly above the rest of their body. The person is colored in a downwards gradient of teal colors and has teal stars around their head. The background is a gradient of light to dark purple colors, the lights starting at the head of the person and getting darker towards the edges of the drawing.
"the red shape is my old female body. then the black art is my current body. i can't wait until my body becomes the white lines."
Self Imposed Deadlines Like the Pounding in My Head Like a FOB Song
by Ray Balleisen (he/him)

My head and my body overlap, like twin siblings who can finish each other’s sentences. My fingers know where to go like they’re made for typing and my anger finds it is home in my white knuckles and my bouncing feet. My ears carry the thumping. Thump thump. Thump thump. Thump thump. I work my body and my body and my body and my body until my mind collapses and reminds itself it’s not alone. I’ve climbed mountains like they’re nothing - the pain is just in my head - I know that separation is an illusion because I know that pain in my head like an old friend. I watch sunsets and waterfalls and I wonder if the earth were my body would I still feel that pain? Deep breath. Straighten your back. Relax your shoulders. Crack your jaw. Live.
[ID: An illustration of five people, sitting in a green, grassy field. The background has dark green bushes with purple flowers, and a light purple-blue sky with purple-tinted clouds. The person on the far left is using a pink-framed wheelchair. They have medium-dark brown skin, mid-length dark purple wavy hair, black wire-rimmed glasses, and space-themed dangling earrings. They are smiling, clasping their hands over their chest. They have a star-shaped necklace, a pink beaded bracelet, and are wearing a green t-shirt, reddish brown pants, and teal Converse-style shoes. To their right and slightly behind them is a person, smiling, with dark brown skin and dark curly hair. They have pink circle and triangle earrings, and an orange t-shirt. Their lower body is obstructed by a white person sitting cross-legged in front of them. That person is smiling, and has orange wavy hair and a pink cropped t-shirt, revealing their stomach. They are wearing light gray pants. Standing behind them and to the right is a tall person with medium brown skin, red long hair with an undercut. They are smiling, wearing a yellow cropped t-shirt, red basketball shorts, and are holding an orange ball. Their feet are obstructed by a person sitting to their right. The person on the far right is white, with a green spiky mullet. They are smiling, and sitting with their legs stretched out in front of them. They are wearing an orange shirt with a purple shirt with a gray collar over top. They have dark blue cuffed jeans and yellow shoes.]
THANK YOU!

Stay tuned for next season's edition & QYA Zine announcements!

Visit us at:
Website: queeryouthassemble.org
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Twitter: @qyouthassemble

QYA Zine Feedback Form

Page decorations by Jesse (they/them)