

Dear Adam,

I like you, I really do. Although I'd never watched *American Idol*, I became a fan this year thanks to your unapologetic flamboyance and sexual swagger. It was refreshing to see someone playing by his own rules among so many cookie-cutters. And although you narrowly lost to Kris Allen, you were the real winner for those of us who saw your success as a test of America's growing tolerance. That's why we're proud to have you in this year's Out 100, along with all the other men and women who don't believe their sexuality should be a barrier to success. It's unfortunate, therefore, that your record label and management don't share the same view.

We're curious whether you know that we made cover offers for you before *American Idol* was even halfway through its run. Apparently, *Out* was too gay, even for you. There was the issue of what it would do to your record sales, we were told. Imagine! A gay musician on the cover of a gay magazine. What might the parents think! It's only because this cover is a group shot that includes a straight woman that your team would allow you to be photographed at all—albeit with the caveat that we must avoid making you look “too gay.” (Is that a medical term? Just curious). Luckily, you seemed unaware that a similar caution was issued to our interviewer.

Perhaps we should have had you and Cyndi in a tongue lock. That *would* be radical. It's odd, because this magazine has done covers with Pete Wentz and Lady Gaga—getting straight men and women to do *Out* is easy these days. It gives them cred. Getting gay stars like yourself is another matter. Much easier to stick you in *Details*, where your homosexuality can be neutralized by having you awkwardly grabbing a woman's breast and saying, “Women are pretty.” So are kittens, Adam, but it doesn't mean you have to make out with them. Imagine how much more radical it would have been to go down on a guy instead of that six-foot Barbie. We don't think you would have a problem with that—why should you?—but your

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record label would, and letting them dictate the terms is the very opposite of rock 'n' roll. And did you read the article? You would think your entire fan base was made up of women and heterosexual men, or “straight dudes” as the writer describes them, just so we can all be clear. No mention of your gay fans, which is kind of disappointing, don't you think, given what your success represents?

We don't want to sound ungrateful—you agreed to do our cover, and your interview (page 62) is gracious and frank—but if the Out 100 has a purpose it's to challenge the kind of apartheid that lays down one rule for gay mags and one for all others. We think you probably feel the same way—you even say as much—so we don't mean to diminish your achievements this year. That's why you're in this issue. You're a pioneer, an out gay pop idol at the start of his career. Someone has to be first, and we're all counting on you not to mess this up. You have to find your own path and then others can follow. We just hope it's a path that's honest and true and that you choose to surround yourself with people who celebrate your individuality. The irony is that right now it would be easier to get Kris Allen to do a solo cover shoot for us. But only because he's straight.

Aaron Hicklin, *Editor in Chief*

P.S. It would be remiss of me not to thank the amazing dedication, perseverance, and grace under fire of the *Out* editorial team that put this—the largest original portfolio of its kind in *any* magazine—together in challenging circumstances. In particular, I must acknowledge deputy editor Bill Keith, who oversaw the project, photo director Annie Chia, who has made this most daunting of issues as painless as it's ever been, and photographer Jason Bell, who took on this time-consuming assignment with a relish and passion that was simply awe-inspiring.