



Peacocks, Chameleons, Centaurs: Gay Suburbia and the Grammar of Social Identity

Wayne Brekhuis

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What does it mean to be a gay man living in the suburbs? Do you identify primarily as gay, or suburban, or some combination of the two? For that matter, how does anyone decide what his or her identity is?

In this first-ever ethnography of American gay suburbanites, Wayne H. Brekhus demonstrates that who one is depends at least in part on where and when one is. For many urban gay men, being homosexual is key to their identity because they live, work, and socialize in almost exclusively gay circles. Brekhus calls such men "lifestylers" or peacocks. Chameleons or "commuters," on the other hand, live and work in conventional suburban settings, but lead intense gay social and sexual lives outside the suburbs. Centaurs, meanwhile, or "integrators," mix typical suburban jobs and homes with low-key gay social and sexual activities. In other words, lifestylers see homosexuality as something you are, commuters as something you do, and integrators as part of yourself.

Ultimately, Brekhus shows that lifestyling, commuting, and integrating embody competing identity strategies that occur not only among gay men but across a broad range of social categories. What results, then, is an innovative work that will interest sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, and students of gay culture.

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