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From Drag Queens To Leathermen: Language, Gender, And Gay Male Subcultures (Studies In Language Gender And Sexuality)



Synopsis

This book examines gendered language use in six gay male subcultures: drag queens, radical faeries, bears, circuit boys, barebackers, and leathermen. Within each subculture, unique patterns of language use challenge normative assumptions about gender and sexual identity. Rusty Barrett's analyses of these subcultures emphasize the ways in which gay male constructions of gender are intimately linked to other forms of social difference. In *From Drag Queens to Leathermen*, Barrett presents an extension of his earlier work among African American drag queens in the 1990s, emphasizing the intersections of race and class in the construction of gender. An analysis of sacred music among radical faeries considers the ways in which expressions of gender are embedded in a broader neo-pagan religious identity. The formation of bear as an identity category (for heavysset and hairy men) in the late 1980s involves the appropriation of linguistic stereotypes of rural Southern masculinity. Among regular attendees of circuit parties, language serves to differentiate gay and straight forms of masculinity. In the early 2000s, barebackers (gay men who eschew condoms) used language to position themselves as rational risk takers with an innate desire for semen. For participants in the International Mr. Leather contest, a disciplined, militaristic masculinity links expressions of patriotism with BDSM sexual practice. In all of these groups, the construction of gendered identity involves combining linguistic forms that would usually not co-occur. These unexpected combinations serve as the foundation for the emergence of unique subcultural expressions of gay male identity, explicated at length in this book.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"In these refreshingly sympathetic chapters, Rusty Barrett explores the ways in which notably contrastive groups of gay men use language as a central medium at once reflecting and constructing a sense of belonging and distinctiveness. In the complex field that aligns sexuality with race, class, and gender identities, among others, *From Drag Queens to Leathermen* guides us to appreciate the sites of performance, of ritual, and of ecstatic practice where the semiotic work is of indexically infusing sexual identity with sociocultural meaning and value, and with the dignity of subjectivity, is accomplished."--Michael Silverstein, Charles F. Grey Distinguished Service Professor of Anthropology, Linguistics, and Psychology, University of Chicago.

Rusty Barrett is an Associate Professor in the Linguistics Department at the University of Kentucky. His research examines a broad range of issues in sociocultural, descriptive, and historical linguistics. In addition to his work on language, gender and sexuality, he has conducted a great deal of research in Mayan linguistics. With Kira Hall, he is co-editor of the forthcoming *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Sexuality* (Oxford University Press).

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