



Boystown: Sex and Community in Chicago

Jason Orne

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From neighborhoods as large as Chelsea or the Castro, to locales limited to a single club, like The Shamrock in Madison or Sidewinders in Albuquerque, gay areas are becoming normal. Straight people flood in. Gay people flee out. Scholars call this transformation assimilation, and some argue that we—gay and straight alike—are becoming “post-gay.” Jason Orne argues that rather than post-gay, America is becoming “post-queer,” losing the radical lessons of sex.

In *Boystown*, Orne takes readers on a detailed, lively journey through Chicago’s Boystown, which serves as a model for gayborhoods around the country. The neighborhood, he argues, has become an entertainment district—a gay Disneyland—where people get lost in the magic of the night and where straight white women can “go on safari.” In their original form, though, gayborhoods like this one don’t celebrate differences; they *create* them. By fostering a space outside the mainstream, gay spaces allow people to develop an alternative culture—a queer culture that celebrates sex.

Orne spent three years doing fieldwork in Boystown, searching for ways to ask new questions about the connective power of sex and about what it means to be not just gay, but *queer*. The result is the striking *Boystown*, illustrated throughout with street photography by Dylan Stuckey. In the dark backrooms of raunchy clubs where bachelorettes wouldn’t dare tread, people are hooking up and forging “naked intimacy.” Orne is your tour guide to the *real* Boystown, then, where sex functions as a vital center and an antidote to assimilation.

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