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Karaoke Idols: Popular Music and the Performance of Identity

Kevin Brown

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Most ethnographers don’t achieve what Kevin Brown did while conducting their research: in his two years spent at a karaoke bar near Denver, Colorado, he went from barely able to carry a tune to someone whom other karaoke patrons requested to sing. Along the way, he learned everything you might ever want to know about karaoke and the people who enjoy it. The result is Karaoke Idols, a close ethnography of life at a karaoke bar that reveals just what we are doing when we take up the mic – and how we shape our identities, especially in terms of gender, ethnicity, and class, through performances in everyday life. Marrying a comprehensive introduction to the history of public singing and karaoke with a rich analysis of karaoke performers and the community that their shared performances generate, Karaoke Idols is a book for both the casual reader and the scholar: a fascinating exploration of our urge to perform and the intersection of technology and culture that makes it so seductively easy to do so.

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