



How to Do the History of Homosexuality

David M. Halperin

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In this long-awaited book, David M. Halperin revisits and refines the argument he put forward in his classic *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*: that hetero- and homosexuality are not biologically constituted but are, instead, historically and culturally produced. *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* expands on this view, updates it, answers its critics, and makes greater allowance for continuities in the history of sexuality. Above all, Halperin offers a vigorous defense of the historicist approach to the construction of sexuality, an approach that sets a premium on the description of other societies in all their irreducible specificity and does not force them to fit our own conceptions of what sexuality is or ought to be.

Dealing both with male homosexuality and with lesbianism, this study imparts to the history of sexuality a renewed sense of adventure and daring. It recovers the radical design of Michel Foucault's epochal work, salvaging Foucault's insights from common misapprehensions and making them newly available to historians, so that they can once again provide a powerful impetus for innovation in the field. Far from having exhausted Foucault's revolutionary ideas, Halperin maintains that we have yet to come to terms with their startling implications. Exploring the broader significance of historicizing desire, Halperin questions the tendency among scholars to reduce the history of sexuality to a mere history of sexual classifications instead of a history of human subjectivity itself. Finally, in a theoretical *tour de force*, Halperin offers an altogether new strategy for approaching the history of homosexuality—one that can accommodate both ruptures and continuities, both identity and difference in sexual experiences across time and space.

Impassioned but judicious, controversial but deeply informed, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* is a book rich in suggestive propositions as well as eye-opening details. It will prove to be essential reading for anyone interested in the history of sexuality.

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