



What Do Gay Men Want?: An Essay on Sex, Risk, and Subjectivity

David Halperin

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“Compelling, timely, and provocative. The writing is sleek and exhilarating. It doesn’t waste time telling us what it will do or what it has just done—it just does it.”

—Don Kulick, Professor of Anthropology, New York University

How we can talk about sex and risk in the age of barebacking—or condomless sex—without invoking the usual bogus and punitive clichés about gay men’s alleged low self-esteem, lack of self-control, and other psychological “deficits”? Are there queer alternatives to psychology for thinking about the inner life of homosexuality? *What Do Gay Men Want?* explores some of the possibilities.

Unlike most writers on the topic of gay men and risky sex, David Halperin liberates gay male subjectivity from psychology, demonstrating the insidious ways in which psychology’s defining opposition between the normal and the pathological subjects homosexuality to medical reasoning and revives a whole set of unexamined moral assumptions about “good” sex and “bad” sex.

In particular, Halperin champions neglected traditions of queer thought, including both literary and popular discourses, by drawing on the work of well-known figures like Jean Genet and neglected ones like Marcel Jouhandeau. He shows how the long history of gay men’s uses of “abjection” can offer an alternative, nonmoralistic model for thinking about gay male subjectivity, something which is urgently needed in the age of barebacking.

Anyone searching for nondisciplinary ways to slow the spread of HIV/AIDS among gay men—or interested in new modes of thinking about gay male subjectivity—should read this book.

David M. Halperin is W. H. Auden Collegiate Professor of the History and Theory of Sexuality, Professor of English, Professor of Women’s Studies, Professor of Comparative Literature, and Adjunct Professor of Classical Studies at the University of Michigan.

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