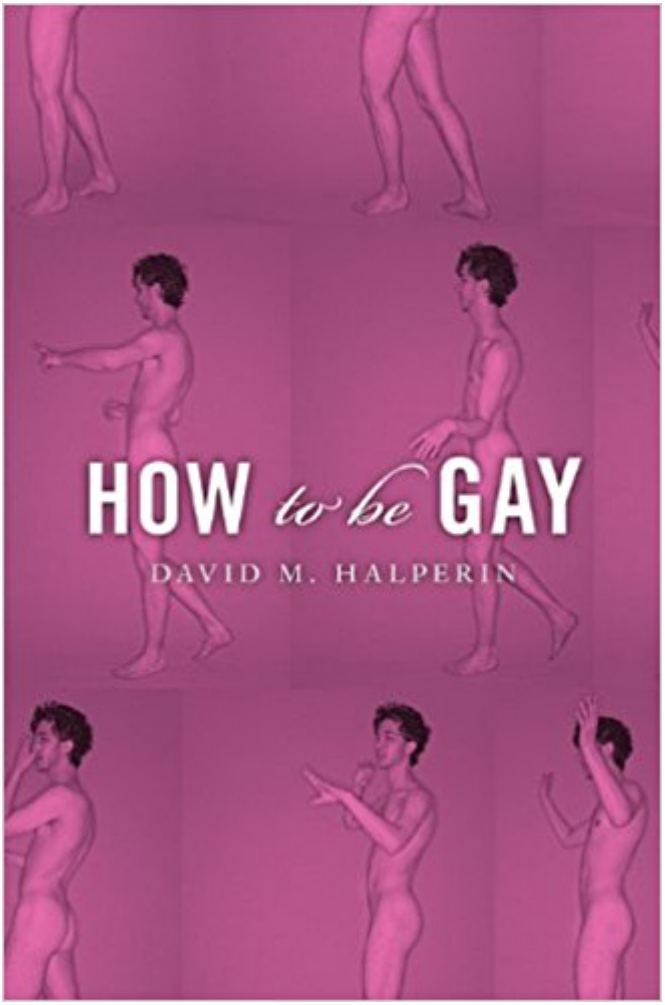
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How To Be Gay



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Synopsis

A pioneer of LGBTQ studies dares to suggest that gayness is a way of being that gay men must learn from one another to become who they are. This book traces gay men's cultural difference to the social meaning of style.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Halperin is an openly gay University of Michigan professor who achieved notoriety in 2000 when his class Ã¢â ¬Å“How to Be Gay: Male Homosexuality and InitiationÃ¢â ¬Â• was included in the schoolÃ¢â ¬â„¢s online-course catalog. Angry e-mails and outrage quickly followed, with the Michigan chapter of the ultraconservative American Family Association launching a crusade against a perceived militant homosexual political agenda. Based on that same controversial college course, How to Be Gay posits that Ã¢â ¬Å“gaynessÃ¢â ¬Â• is not simply the act of two men having sex but a mode of perception that must be learned fromÃ¢â ¬â •and shared byÃ¢â ¬â •other gay men. Halperin homes in on, among many topics, the yin and yang of gay male existence: the beauty and the camp. A pivotal scene from the 1945 Joan Crawford melodrama Mildred Pierce is used, repeatedly and somewhat jarringly, throughout the text as a musty yet still potent example of how gay subjectivity is shaped by heteronormative society. If this sounds a bit like reading a dry, sprawling textbook, to some degree it is, but the provocative subject matter ensures a strong niche audience. --Chris Keech --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

How to Be Gay works hard to unpack the stereotypical characteristics of gay male culture and

succeeds in demonstrating how the taint of pathology and the rise of a post-Stonewall ethos of hypermasculine self-determination conspire to shut down a frank inquiry into the persistence of such "faggy" traits. His claims for the egalitarian effects of gay culture are less convincing, and for all the nuances he brings to his reading of camp, his totalizing language can sound like that of an apologist. Ã¢â ¬â œÃ¢â ¬â œNathan Lee --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

I'd love to have had a course like this in my 20's - level-headed, amusing, detailed without being overly academic or polemical - a great handbook for may one wondering what it's like to be gay -

Admittedly, there is quite a lot of repetition in this very thick book. But if you can overlook that (or simply fast forward every now and then) you will be rewarded with many thought provoking observations. For me, personally, a direct result of reading this book was to embrace to 'camp' and 'gay' side of my personality more, instead of trying to look/appear 'normal' and 'fit in' with the rest of society. Because, as Halperine describes, just wanting to be 'normal' throws away the unique gift that is given to many gay people. His account of a lesbian activist who wants to get married to her girlfriend, only so she can dress up for the wedding like everyone else and enjoy the normal joys of run-of-the-mill-heteros, was truly shocking. (Is that what the LGBT community is fighting for: boring normality?) You certainly come out of reading this book wanting to watch your old Joan Crwaford movies again! Instead of being ashamed of liking such films, Broadway musicals etc., one should celebrate the fact that different things speak to gay men, or men with a gay sensitity (which heteors can also have). Hughly enjoyable, on the whole.

Since this therapist knows of my work with gay males - he thought this book would be helpful. I have not finished it as of yet because it is long and reads a bit like a text. Of what I have read so far - I agree with Halperin - you can see some of these issues manifesting in the gay community. I would say that most every gay man needs to read this book to get in touch with his inner gay man - Halperin believes gay men are losing their identities because they have worked so hard to be "normal" and straight - except for the sex issue. I believe there is a lot of truth to what he says and am anxious to finish the book.

Sociological study, therefore wordy. In true professorial style every major point is repeated at least four different ways, sometimes seven. But this does have some good points to make and should be enlightening to anyone curious about "those people" and their different take on culture. Perhaps a

little much for those of us who are just people.

Really an excellent view on how it is to grow up in a heter normative environment regardless of how that environment view homosexuality. Also how we gays re-interpret straight representations. However, too much emphasis on 2 movies.

This reminds us that oh' yeah we need this culture, that provides: artists, hairdressers, fashion designers, film producers, novelists, and architects, just to mention a few of the trades heavily relied upon by every other culture. This is an important form of education.

Halperin's book is a tour de force. He's making an important contribution to new ways of thinking about what it means to be gay in America. In this book, Halperin works from the premise that there is a recognizable gay male culture (e.g., Broadway, drag, camp, love of certain female icons, architectural restoration) that was created initially to provide a means of self-expression when no explicit representations, at least no stigmatizing ones, were available. Although the details change over time, and post-Stonewall liberation has afforded a bevvy of positive gay male cultural objects, Halperin argues this practice of appropriating straight cultural objects still continues. His question is: if this practice continues, then why? What might it say about the experience of being gay in a society that is still culturally straight (i.e., heteronormative), no matter what political or legislative inroads have been made? He also wants to know how we can describe and account for the way it feels to be gay without resorting to psychology or essentialist ideas (i.e., that we are "born this way."). Halperin isn't interested in whether or not people are born this way, or how they get gay, but how they engage with gay culture (which may be to not engage it) and why. Some gays aren't very gay, to say it differently.Halperin is clear that the gay culture he describes in this book is American, white gay male culture. Beyond the scope of this book, he encourages others to pick up this project, if they are so inclined, and use it for other aspects of gay culture (e.g., while he uses a scene from _Mildred Pierce_, and discusses the cult of Joan Crawford, he acknowledges that examining the interest gay men have of Bette Davis may produce different insights) and with other gay populations (e.g., gay men of color, non-American gays, lesbians, trans people). He is not making totalizing claims about gay experience--or positing that gay men have some kind of inherently superior experience or existence. In fact, he notes that many gay men, or men who are attracted to other men, don't "do" gay as well as some straight men and women. Gay, in the way Halperin discusses it, is a cultural practice, not a sex-object choice, and so anybody can do or not do gay, regardless of

their sexuality.Halperin asserts that, if it's true that being gay in a straight dominated world produces a certain kind of subjectivity,then gay people do themselves a disservice by denying and underplaying that difference. Gay culture makes a contribution--understanding the world differently, gay-ly (whether one is homosexual or heterosexual), provides a way of undoing limiting and harmful norms that will stay in place (and are still in place) no matter how many equality gains are made on a political or legal level. Understanding gay subjectivity through cultural appropriation may open up freedoms not available through the lens of identity.I find this work masterful and a necessary intervention in queer studies. As a gay man (and a gay nerd), I find it compelling and a welcome response to modern gay identity politics. This is an inventive, rigorous piece of academic work, although Halperin's language is very accessible. Readers will benefit, however, from some familiarity with lesbigay or queer studies, particularly Michael Warner's _The Trouble with Normal_. I strongly recommend this to anyone who has ever felt queer, or different (regardless of your sexuality), from the rest of society. Halperin's methodology doesn't have to be limited to gay men, but following his lead, one can think differently about the cultural objects one picks up and what they might say about how you feel to be queer.

I don't necessarily agree with some (or even most) of Halperin's arguments, but you cannot deny that they are provocative and make you think. This book will challenge your preconceived notions of homosexuality and what it means TO BE gay. A very accessible and enjoyable read.

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