



Private Practices: Harry Stack Sullivan, the Science of Homosexuality, and American Liberalism

Naoko Wake

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Private Practices examines the relationship between science, sexuality, gender, race, and culture in the making of modern America between 1920 and 1950, when contradictions among liberal intellectuals affected the rise of U.S. conservatism. Naoko Wake focuses on neo-Freudian, gay psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan, founder of the interpersonal theory of mental illness. She explores medical and social scientists' conflicted approach to homosexuality, particularly the views of scientists who themselves lived closeted lives.

Wake discovers that there was a gap--often dramatic, frequently subtle--between these scientists' "public" understanding of homosexuality (as a "disease") and their personal, "private" perception (which questioned such a stigmatizing view). This breach revealed a modern culture in which self-awareness and open-mindedness became traits of "mature" gender and sexual identities. Scientists considered individuals and societies lacking these traits to be "immature," creating an unequal relationship between practitioners and their subjects. In assessing how these dynamics--the disparity between public and private views of homosexuality and the uneven relationship between scientists and their subjects--worked to shape each other, *Private Practices* highlights the limits of the scientific approach to human subjectivity and illuminates its strange career--sexual subjectivity in particular--in modern U.S. culture.

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