

## **Narrative, psychology and the politics of sexual identity in the United States: from ‘sickness’ to ‘species’ to ‘subject’**

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Since early legal, medical and scientific discussions of homosexuality, the discipline of psychology has assumed an instrumental role in both maintaining and challenging cultural and political perspectives on same-sex desire, identity and behaviour. This article presents a critical historical review of psychological research on same-sex desire in the United States, with a focus on the way in which studies reflect three master narratives on the nature and meaning of same-sex attraction: (1) a *sickness* script that dominated the majority of research from the late 1800s to the 1970s; (2) a *species* script that became popular with the removal of homosexuality as a diagnosable mental illness in 1973 and initiated several new lines of research; and (3) a *subject* script inspired by scholarly and cultural shifts beginning in the 1990s that challenged the taxonomy of sexual identity. We conclude with a discussion of the transformative potential of a narrative approach that integrates analysis of historical forces and individual psychological development.

**Keywords:** homosexuality; gay; lesbian; bisexual; queer; sexual identity; history; politics; public policy; narrative; script; discourse

### **Introduction**

Discussions of same-sex desire are central to contemporary policy discourse in the United States and across the globe. The discipline of psychology has assumed a role in these discussions, arguing for the rights of same-sex-attracted individuals to the same social and legal benefits as opposite-sex-attracted individuals (e.g. Herek, 2006; Patterson, 2009). These policy discussions and psychology’s role in them do not occur in a cultural or scientific vacuum. Rather, contemporary discourse on public policy regarding same-sex desire, behaviour and identity is the latest chapter in a history of the social regulation of desire that can be traced to the nineteenth century, when social, political and economic conditions changed dramatically with industrialisation and urbanisation (D’Emilio, 1983; Foucault, 1978). Several scientific disciplines, including psychology, have assumed a significant role in this history.

In this article, we seek to contextualise the contemporary relationship between the discipline of psychology and public policy matters related to same-sex-attracted individuals in the United States. Since its formalisation as a distinct discipline in the late 1800s, psychology has assumed an instrumental role in both maintaining and challenging cultural and

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political perspectives on same-sex desire, identity and behaviour. We present a critical historical review of psychological research on same-sex desire conducted in the United States, with a focus on the way in which studies reflect three larger narratives on the nature and meaning of same-sex attraction.

We want to foreground our analysis with two caveats. First, we do not intend to present US psychology as monolithic and recognise that the discipline, like all fields of inquiry, has been heterogeneously practiced. Yet by focusing our analysis on empirical work produced in primary outlets in the United States, we seek to interrogate what we view as the dominant or hegemonic form of psychological science which developed in the United States over the twentieth century. Thus, the reader ought not to interpret our analysis as exhaustive, particularly with regard to critical work that has always existed in some form at the margins of the discipline. Rather, our intent is to interrogate the dominant psychological discourse on same-sex attraction which assumed a role in the political life of same-sex-attracted individuals.

Second, we recognise that the hegemony of US psychology has been greatly challenged by critical work from across the globe, and the area of psychology and sexuality in particular has benefited from this turn (e.g. Clarke & Peel, 2007a; Peel, Clarke, & Drescher, 2007). Given the historic hegemony of US psychology and the fact that critical approaches to sexuality research within US psychology have been slow to develop, we believe that a focus on US psychology is worthwhile for the present analysis. We recognise, however, the vast amount of important critical work that has occurred in this area in non-US psychology (see Clarke, Ellis, Peel, & Riggs, 2010; Clarke & Peel, 2007b).

### **Culture, politics and psychological science: a narrative approach**

Critical and historical perspectives on the role of psychological science in challenging or perpetuating a political status quo are not new (e.g. Fox, Prilleltensky, & Austin, 2009). Although the discipline of psychology has consistently struggled to integrate sufficient consideration of history and historical time in its conceptual frameworks and interpretations of empirical findings, a vibrant conversation has occurred since at least the 1970s about the historical and political basis of psychological knowledge (e.g. Gergen, 1973; Hegarty, 2007). We suggest that the assumption of a *narrative* approach to the study of human development in context provides a useful way in which psychologists can historicise the data an individual provides about his/her presently understood thought, feeling and action. This approach offers a valuable set of ideas and tools for psychologists to study the way in which individuals and settings are co-constituted through language (Hammack, 2008; Hammack & Pilecki, in press), thus offering a bridge between the traditional positivism of psychology and a social constructionist framework.

The idea of narrative emerged in the 1980s as a response to psychology's movement away from personal and social meaning in context towards a decontextualised view of human thought (e.g. Cohler, 1982; Gergen & Gergen, 1983; McAdams, 1988; Sarbin, 1986). The fundamental tenet of narrative psychology is that we make meaning of the social world by constructing *stories* (Bruner, 1990) and that human development is characterised by a process of life-story construction – a process which provides key integrative functions for cognitive, social and personality development (e.g. Cohler, 1982; McAdams, 1996; 2001). But life-story construction is not a personal, idiosyncratic process. Rather, we craft our personal narratives using an available vocabulary for self-understanding within a given cultural, historical and political location (Bruner, 1987; Sarbin, 1986). Thus, the formation of life stories and autobiographical memories is socially embedded and best understood in

*transactional* or *reciprocal* terms between person and setting (McLean, Pasupathi, & Pals, 2007; Pasupathi, Mansour, & Brubaker, 2007).

Theory and empirical work in narrative psychology have increasingly examined the way in which personal and master narratives are co-constitutive – that is, the way in which personal narratives both appropriate and repudiate the discourse of particular historical and cultural contexts (e.g. Hammack, 2008; Hammack, Thompson, & Pilecki, 2009). In the case of same-sex desire, this work suggests that how individuals make social and psychological sense of their attractions depends upon the scripts or master narratives that are available to them in a particular social ecology of development (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Hammack, 2005b; 2008; Hammack & Cohler, 2009; Westrate & McLean, 2010). Consistent with Foucault (1978), we view these master narratives as linked to particular political interests and thus in need of critical interrogation.

In this article, we argue that US psychology's penchant for essentialism about concepts and social categories has limited the ability of scholars to challenge the status quo in ways that are genuinely transformative. Rather, the discourse in empirical psychology in the United States has tended to reflect whatever prevailing legal and cultural view of same-sex sexuality is circulating at the time the research is conducted. By accepting concepts and categories as natural kinds (Stein, 1999), rather than asking critical questions about the very origins of them in society, US psychology has tended to reify them, thus perpetuating a status quo of inequality for some groups relative to others (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Our intent is to both expose and potentially transform this historical dynamic in hegemonic US psychology. As we outline the three master narratives of homosexuality that have dominated the discourse in the United States from the late nineteenth to the early twenty-first century, our key question concerns how the knowledge generated might have either supported or challenged the policies of the time, thus either reproducing or repudiating the status quo. Our analysis is interpretive; thus we do not make claims about the causal relation between legal and scientific discourses or between social movements and scholarly developments. Rather, in documenting and analysing the relation between legal and scientific discourse, we seek to theorise the relationship between psychology and politics, with the hope that our analysis might inspire greater reflexivity among scientists, as well as a better appreciation for the role of historical time in the study of mind, behaviour and human development.

### **The sickness script**

Following the medical model of homosexuality which originated in Europe in the late nineteenth century (Foucault, 1978), the first generation of empirical work within US psychology assumed a narrative of sickness and pathology with regard to same-sex attraction. Although the intent of many European scholars may have been benevolent (Brennan & Hegarty, 2009; Bullough & Bullough, 1997), this conception of same-sex desire codified a master narrative of sickness that likely created tremendous psychological challenges for same-sex-attracted individuals (e.g. Duberman, 1991). US psychologists in the early twentieth century assumed a role in supporting the sickness script.

The early literature produced in the United States was dominated by psychoanalytic case reports that relied upon a sickness narrative for interpretation (e.g. Brill, 1912). That is, their claim for an association between homosexuality and mental illness is circular, because their subjects were almost exclusively the mentally ill. Following this dubious epistemological stance, early psychological research successfully linked homosexuality to

hallucinations and delusions (Sutherland, 1914), manic depression (Dooley, 1921), alcoholism (Riggall, 1923) and schizophrenia (Robie, 1927). Rather than being a direct focus of inquiry in these early works, a sickness script of homosexuality was simply assumed and used for case interpretation.

Studies in this era defined and constructed the male homosexual but said little about females. This was likely related to laws in Britain at the time, which criminalised male homosexual acts while ignoring the possibility of female homosexuality (Weeks, 1989). In spite of this historical absence of the voices of women in studies of same-sex sexuality, a path-breaking study of women conducted in the 1920s began to challenge the sickness script decades before the better known work of Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin (1948). Katharine Bement Davis (1929) studied the sex lives of 2200 women who represented a non-clinical sample. She discovered that 50% of unmarried women reported 'intense emotional relations with other women'. Twenty percent of unmarried women reported that these relations were accompanied by some sexual behaviour. This study challenged the sickness script by revealing the relative frequency of same-sex intimate relations among women, suggesting that such relations might better be conceived as a normative aspect of human sexuality rather than an illness or disorder.

In spite of the attempts of scholars such as Davis to study homosexuality among non-clinical samples, the majority of empirical work in psychology in the mid-twentieth century continued to be conducted with clinical or institutionalised samples of same-sex-attracted individuals (e.g. Ford, 1929) and continued to document a link between homosexuality and psychopathology, including paranoia (Bollmeier, 1938) and stammering (Krout, 1936). Thus, homosexuality continued to be conceived as an illness to be treated (e.g. Stekel, 1930).

The sickness script among US psychologists in the 1930s was likely rooted in rigid notions of gender and gender roles (Minton, 1986). Terman and Miles (1936) sought to validate their scale of masculinity–femininity using a homosexual sample, operating on the basic assumption that homosexuals represent gender inverts. When they found that homosexual males did not score lower in masculinity than heterosexual males, they suggested distinctions among homosexuals: 'true inverts' (i.e. men who assume the 'passive' role) versus 'perverts' (i.e. men who assume the 'active' role). Rather than interpreting their data through a more transformative lens that might have challenged the status quo thinking within psychology at the time, Terman and Miles appear to have unquestioningly assumed the gender inversion view of homosexuality.

US psychology began to make its distinctive mark on the study of homosexuality in the area of testing. This work began in earnest in the 1940s, with studies of performance on the Terman–Miles M-F scale (Barnette, 1942), the Rorschach inkblot test (e.g. Davids, Joelson, & McArthur, 1956; Due & Wright, 1945; Wheeler, 1949), the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Burton, 1947) and the Thematic Apperception Test (e.g. Davids et al., 1956). Part of this effort appears to have been linked to a desire to develop effective methods to surreptitiously identify homosexuals using personality tests (e.g. Burton, 1947; Zamansky, 1956).

It took the efforts of a disciplinary insider to disrupt the sickness narrative within psychology. Evelyn Hooker (1957) administered a battery of projective tests and a life history interview to matched non-clinical samples of gay and heterosexual men. Three expert raters were unable to distinguish the tests of the two groups of men in terms of general adjustment or psychopathology. Hooker (1957, p. 30) offered three key conclusions based on the study:

- (1) Homosexuality as a clinical entity does not exist. Its forms are as varied as those of heterosexuality.
- (2) Homosexuality may be a deviation in sexual pattern which is within the normal range, psychologically.
- (3) The role of particular forms of sexual desire and expression in personality structure and development may be less important than has frequently been assumed.

Hooker's research represented a significant challenge to the paradigm of homosexuality conventionally accepted in psychology at the time.

In spite of the major conceptual shift that Hooker's work would seem to call for among psychologists, the following decade was characterised by studies that continued to promulgate a sickness narrative and hence support existing policies which rendered same-sex behaviour unlawful (i.e. sodomy laws; see Hammack & Windell, 2011). Studies published in US psychology journals in the 1960s relied heavily on ideas from psychoanalytic theory, including parent identification (e.g. Chang & Block, 1960). Such work rarely, if ever, cited Hooker's studies. Friedman (2002), in fact, argues that psychoanalytic training in this period failed to even mention the Hooker study – a reflection of the unwillingness to submit to a reconceptualisation of homosexuality. And studies continued to attempt to improve methods to detect homosexuality indirectly through tests (e.g. Cattell & Morony, 1962; Krippner, 1964; Panton, 1960; Whitaker, 1961), with the explicit intent to exclude homosexuals from military service (Doidge & Holtzman, 1960).

The period between Hooker's seminal study and the 1975 policy statement of the American Psychological Association (APA) which explicitly repudiated the sickness narrative (Conger, 1975) represented an era of competing paradigms. An examination of empirical work in psychology journals reveals the contested nature of this period. With rare exception (e.g. Dean & Richardson, 1964), most studies published in APA journals during this period took a pathology narrative of homosexuality for granted (e.g. Feldman, 1966).

In sum, for the majority of the twentieth century, as the discipline of psychology became established and sought to distinguish itself in the United States, its scholars promoted a sickness narrative of homosexuality which supported the underlying rationale of legal and cultural subordination for same-sex-attracted individuals. Only when the basis of this narrative – that homosexual desire in and of itself was indicative of psychopathology – was challenged by an authority in the field, using acceptable tools of the discipline, did this story begin to shift. In the case of the first period of psychological research reviewed, it appears that psychological science provided a legitimising force for the criminalisation and cultural stigmatisation of homosexuality.

### The species script

By the late 1960s, pressed by the social and political activism of the gay and lesbian community (D'Emilio, 1983; Minton, 2001), scholars began to directly challenge the sickness script. The narrative of same-sex desire began to shift from one of *character* or *psychopathology* to a *minority identity*. This discursive shift was consistent with the aims of the gay and lesbian civil rights movement, which fought for equal rights and protections on the basis of a minority identity, irrespective of the stance towards assimilation that frequently divided organisations in the movement (D'Emilio, 1983).

Studies conducted in this era of research on homosexuality within US psychology began to gradually shift from a dominant reliance on the sickness narrative to a *species* narrative – one that identified homosexuality as a normative form of human diversity and a representation of the spectrum of sexual desire. In this era of empirical research within US psychology, the idea of the ‘homosexual type’ as a *clinical category* began to erode and was replaced by the idea of the ‘sexual minority’ as a *social identity*. This discursive and taxonomic shift in the meaning of same-sex desire had tremendous consequences for the role that the discipline began to assume in the lives of same-sex-attracted individuals. The space was opened up for psychological science to assume a more socially transformative role in challenging the legal and political status quo.

The story of this shift within the discipline is intimately linked to institutional changes, most notably the removal of homosexuality as a mental illness from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association and the APA’s 1975 supporting policy statement (Conger, 1975). In the pages of the *American Psychologist*, the flagship journal of the APA, Morin (1977) argued that psychological research on homosexuality had been characterised by ‘heterosexual bias’ – an assumption of the moral superiority of heterosexual relations (i.e. heterosexism).

In US psychology, four streams characterise empirical work and theoretical discussions about homosexuality in the 1970s during this transition from the dominance of a *sickness* script to a *species* script. First, an empirical interest in using personality and projective tests to detect homosexuality endured. Relative to the 1950s and 1960s, this line of work was waning, with a focus on the Rorschach (Kwawer, 1977; Stone & Schneider, 1975), the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Ohlson & Wilson, 1974) and the Draw-A-Person test (Janzen & Coe, 1975). It is important to note, however, that this work challenged earlier studies that suggested homosexuality could be ‘detected’ via projective or personality tests, particularly with regard to the Rorschach. Thus, research produced within the discipline of psychology began to challenge the very knowledge it had produced only a generation prior.

The second and probably the most prolific line of empirical work in the 1970s continued to examine behavioural and other forms of therapy to reduce or eliminate homosexual desire. At the root of this clinical and empirical work was the continued belief that such desire could – and should – be altered. There was no shortage of studies detailing various forms of possible treatment, most notably aversive conditioning (see Adams & Sturgis, 1977).

The issue of ‘treatment’ for homosexuality following the declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness aroused a dynamic colloquy in several special issues and sections of peer-reviewed journals about the contested meaning of homosexuality and the ethics of attempts to modify same-sex desire. Davison (1976) argued that the willingness of psychotherapists to try to modify sexual desire was related to their own views of homosexuality as pathology and served to support societal stigma. He suggested that mental health professions only added to the distress experienced by same-sex-attracted individuals as a consequence of societal prejudice and called for an end to ‘change-of-orientation’ clinical and research programmes. The paper was met with considerable challenge (e.g. Bieber, 1976), but it also was well received among those who recognised the cultural and historical relativity of notions of pathology (e.g. Halleck, 1976).

A third line of empirical work that began to become more common in the 1970s concerned the biological study of homosexuality. This would become an increasingly dominant and politically important area of inquiry in the subsequent decades, as scientists provided evidence for the distinct biological makeup of same-sex-attracted individuals, with the



logical implication that their desire was linked to a 'natural' and unalterable status. This line of work was vital to the shift from *sickness* to *species* in terms of master narratives of homosexuality within the scientific community, and it also supported the minority identity model advocated by the gay and lesbian community. Relative to issues such as treatment, this area of work was modest in the 1970s and focused largely on the role of hormone levels in same-sex desire (e.g. Pillard, Rose, & Sherwood, 1974).

It is important to note that the biological work, along with a line of studies in psychology, supported the gender inversion hypothesis of homosexuality that had long been assumed (e.g. Ellis, 1925). Dorner, Rohde, Stahl, Krell, and Masius (1975), for example, argued that the findings of their laboratory research with rats suggested that homosexuals have a 'female-differentiated' brain. Perhaps the most significant programme of research in this area was conducted by Money, who argued for a biologically based link between homosexuality and gender identity inversion (e.g. Money, 1970; Money & Russo, 1979). This tendency for psychological and biological research to reinforce ideas about the rigidity of a gender binary and to associate homosexuality with gender inversion would come under considerable scrutiny in the 1990s (e.g. Hegarty, 1997; Stein, 1999), as literature in feminist studies and queer theory presented challenges to this paradigm.

The fourth and most novel line of research in the 1970s shifted the empirical gaze from the 'sick' homosexual to a stigmatising society. The focus of this work included correlates of negative attitudes towards homosexuality and the association between homosexual prejudice and support for a double standard for the sexes (MacDonald, Huggins, Young, & Swanson, 1973), sex-role stereotyping (Dunbar, Brown, & Amoroso, 1973) and sexual repression (Dunbar et al., 1973). One of the most important contributions within psychology in this era was probably Morin and Garfinkle's (1978) articulation of the concept of homophobia as an irrational fear of same-sex-attracted individuals.

This shift towards study of anti-homosexual views as a form of prejudice paved the way for a line of inquiry in which the pathology associated with homosexuality is located in the social environment, rather than within the same-sex-attracted person. This line of study remains extremely active today and has, in fact, laid the groundwork for response to political exclusion and subordination from within the discipline (e.g. Herek, 2006, 2007; Meyer, 2003; see Hammack & Windell, 2011). Similarly, early work that challenged anti-gay stereotypes began in this era. For example, Groth and Birnbaum's (1978) study of homosexual and heterosexual sex offenders suggested that heterosexual adults represented more of a threat to children than homosexuals. In the first research on the sexual identity and adjustment of children being raised in households headed by lesbians and transsexuals, Green (1978) discovered that children expressed heterosexual interest and engaged in sexual interests, thus challenging cultural assumptions about the impact of gay or lesbian parenting.

The transition in epistemological understanding and political positioning of the discipline with regard to homosexuality appeared complete with the publication of an issue of the *Journal of Social Issues*, the flagship of APA's Division 9 (Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues), in 1978. The issue outlined a new vision for the role of US psychology in the study of homosexuality, with a focus on understanding the lived experience of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals on their own terms. Topics included the coming out process and its distinction between men and women (de Montefiores & Schultz, 1978), aging and the gay and lesbian life course (Kimmel, 1978) and the nature of lesbian relationships (Peplau, Cochran, Rook, & Padesky, 1978). Hooker (1978) contributed an afterword to the issue in which she acknowledged the epistemological turning point at play within the

discipline, indicated by a shift from the study of ‘homosexuality’ as a phenomenon to ‘gay and lesbian persons’ as a minority.

The species script took the social category of ‘homosexual’ – a clinical category indicating a particular ‘type’ of person – and rescripted the meaning of its content. Following the political movement and social organising of same-sex-attracted individuals themselves, who had sought to reclaim the idea of homosexuality through the homophile movement (D’Emilio, 1983), many social scientists began to accept the idea of the same-sex-attracted individuals as a social, rather than clinical, type (see Minton, 2001). A project of category reification thus began in this era – one which, quite benevolently, sought to address the wishes of same-sex-attracted individuals to fulfil their desires through a set of social and community practices, yet never questioned the categorical basis upon which a notion of sexual identity was being promulgated. Hence psychology, as it did for the concept of race, failed to critically interrogate the basis upon which these social categories of identity were being constructed (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Simply put, the normativity and hegemony of heterosexuality were not questioned.

The emergence of identity development models meant to capture the experience of same-sex-attracted individuals marked the shift from sickness to species within psychology (e.g. Cass, 1979). These models were largely derived from clinical experience and clinical research and posited a sequence of stages that individuals passed through in the gradual process of identification and self-acceptance as a sexual minority. To their credit, these models avoided claims of universal relevance, and theorists were careful to suggest that they represented merely prototypical developmental milestones. Regardless, by the early 1980s, the stage was set for an entirely new approach to the study of homosexuality within US psychology – one in which the sexual minority was considered to inhabit a stigmatised social category.

Empirical work published in US psychology in the 1980s continued along a trajectory of social category reification, largely following the research agenda outlined by Morin (1977) and contributors to the *Journal of Social Issues* issue. Thus, psychological science became concerned foremost with documenting the unique experiences of the sexual minority person, focusing on issues such as disclosure (e.g. Gross, Green, Storck, & Vanyur, 1980), self-esteem (e.g. Jacobs & Tedford, 1980), aging (e.g. Kimmel, 1980), same-sex relationships (e.g. Kurdek & Schmitt, 1985; Peplau & Cochran, 1981) and the effects of stigma (e.g. Fein & Nuehring, 1981; Malyon, 1981). The discursive link to other social categories which were considered ‘natural’, such as race or ethnicity, was solidified with the new major line of research which focused on homophobia and homonegativity among heterosexuals as a form of irrational prejudice (e.g. Herek, 1984a, 1984b; Wright & Storms, 1981).

As we have argued, one of the major problems in the history of psychology has been a tendency to silence the voices of ‘subjects’ through a top-down research process that either implicitly or explicitly assumes that the basis of social categorisation represents a ‘natural’ state of affairs (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). This perspective accounts for the absence of a critical, transformative approach to theory and research on homosexuality in much of the discipline’s history. Yet the transition to a species narrative in fact marks an important transition within the epistemological practices of the discipline – a move towards the provision of voice that characterises the struggles of the subordinated to receive proper critical study within psychology (Fivush, 2004; Sampson, 1993). We suggest, however, that the discipline’s concern with ‘naturalising’ the concept of sexual identity ultimately inhibited its transformative potential by the 1990s and thus resulted in its inability to make proper sense of the queer theory movement and its implications for psychological science.



In the 1980s, rather than questioning or challenging the idea of heterosexual desire as indicative of a 'majority' identity, and thus interrogating the meaning of the social matrix of identity itself, psychologists were more concerned with issues of individual functioning and adaptation.

By the 1990s, the idea of sexual orientation as a biological, rather than purely psychological or 'chosen', reality had consumed both popular and scholarly discourse. This decade witnessed the emergence of several lines of enquiry in the biological sciences, but also within psychology, that argued for the significance of neurological, hormonal and genetic factors in the development of sexual orientation (for review, see Mustanski, Chivers, & Bailey, 2002; Rahman & Wilson, 2003; Stein, 1999). As critics noted, these studies tended to embrace the classic gender inversion thesis in their research designs, suggesting similarities between women and gay men on several indicators (see Byne, 1997; Byne & Parsons, 1993). And perhaps more important, they assumed an ahistoric approach to sexuality (Hegarty, 1997), suggesting that sexual orientation represented a 'natural human kind' (Stein, 1999). This underlying tendency towards an ahistoric view of sexuality likely isolated both biology and psychology from other, more critical forms of knowledge production that emerged in the 1990s, such as the claims of feminism and gender studies that would radically alter the way we think about identity and desire.

The explosion of empirical work on 'gay adolescence' in the 1990s represented a clear embodiment of the new dominance of a species narrative in US psychology (Savin-Williams, 2005). Having established the gay or lesbian person as a 'minority', psychologists now became largely concerned with the impact of minority status on psychological well-being and adjustment. There thus emerged a minoritising discourse of 'risk' within the discipline, with a plethora of empirical studies demonstrating the prevalence of psychological difficulties among same-sex-attracted adolescents, including body image problems and eating disorders (e.g. French, Story, Remafedi, Resnick, & Blum, 1996), health risk behaviours (e.g. Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & DuRant, 1998), HIV/AIDS risk (e.g. Remafedi, 1994), mental health problems (e.g. D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993) and parental rejection (e.g. Savin-Williams, 1989). Perhaps the most extensive body of empirical work linking same-sex attraction with significant social and psychological harm focused on the increased risk of violence and victimisation (e.g. Hunter, 1990; Pilkington & D'Augelli, 1995) and suicide (e.g. Garofalo, Wolf, Wissow, Woods, & Goodman, 1999; Remafedi, Farrow, & Deisher, 1991). In mainstream outlets in developmental psychology, empirical work on same-sex-attracted youth focused on the 'multiple problem behaviors' (Rotheram-Borus, Rosario, Van Rossem, Reid, & Gillis, 1995) and 'gay-related stress' (Rotheram-Borus, Hunter, & Rosario, 1994) that youth experienced.

In highlighting the way in which same-sex-attracted youth were 'spoken about' (Foucault, 1978) within the discipline, we by no means claim that the knowledge produced was somehow inaccurate with regard to the lived experience of youth at the time. No doubt youth struggled tremendously then and now in the context of a heterosexist society. Rather, we mean to suggest that psychology's attempt to confront heterosexism – by problematising the psychology of its victims – used the received vocabulary of identity and desire, inherited from the sickness narrative, in its production of knowledge. This strategy, we suggest, is intellectually conservative in that it fails to challenge the very basis upon which such experiences become socially and psychologically likely. Fundamentally, essentialisation and naturalisation of the idea of sexual orientation obstructed the discipline's ability to contribute to a more dynamic conversation about gender and sexuality that was emerging from the queer theory movement and from the voices of many youth themselves who often experienced the concepts of 'gay' or 'lesbian' identity as insufficiently radical (de Lauretis,

1991). In addition, by assuming the cultural and historical fixedness of social categories of sexual identity, psychology cut itself off from capturing the full range of sexual desire and, thus, the very empirical reality of desire as it is lived and embodied. This range, we argue, has begun to be more fully acknowledged within the discipline only in the past decade.

### The subject script

Just as the political concerns related to same-sex desire relied so heavily on the species script (e.g. the gay marriage movement), a new master narrative began to compete for primacy among same-sex-attracted individuals. We call this narrative the 'subject' script, referring to Foucault's (1982) twin meaning of subjectivity:

There are two meanings of the word 'subject': subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. (p. 781)

Intellectually, this shift towards concerns with power, discourse and identity inspired the 'queer theory' movement that emerged in the humanities in the 1990s (e.g. Butler, 1990; de Lauretis, 1991).

*Queer* denaturalises conventional understandings of sexual and gender identity by deconstructing the categories and binary relationships that sustain them (Hennessy, 1994). It does not have a concrete definition or set of characteristics. 'There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers . . . It is an identity without an essence' (Halperin, 1995, p. 62). By refusing to assume any specific form, queer maintains a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal. Like early gay liberationism, queer resists the normative models and conventional categories of sexuality. It is anti-assimilationist and anti-separatist and acts on the premise that sexuality is a discursive effect (Foucault, 1978). Queer attempts to expose the differences and silences suppressed by the homosexual-heterosexual binary and the monolithic identities 'lesbian' and 'gay', including the intricate ways lesbian and gay sexualities are inflected by race, gender and ethnicity (Sedgwick, 1993).

Hostetler and Herdt (1998) summarise six key assumptions of queer theory. First, queer theory 'denaturalizes' concepts of gender and sexuality identity by assuming that the very idea of fixed, timeless, natural gender and sexual categories represent a modernist myth. Second, queer theory assumes that the forms, meanings and social formations associated with sexual behaviour are culturally and historically contingent. Third, 'identity and subject positions are fluid, dynamic, and multiply determined' (p. 252), which calls into question the ontological basis of the categories 'gay' and 'lesbian'. Fourth, the idea of gender and sexual identity binaries is linked to a particular (and peculiar) 'Western epistemology and discourse'; these binaries 'structure processes of self-construction and social and political engagement' (p. 253). Fifth, cultural and scientific discourse and social movements that attempt to legitimise gay and lesbian identities (e.g. through procurement of civil rights on the basis of constituting a 'protected class') 'reinscribe normative taxonomic structures that can only operate through the articulation of an excluded other' (p. 253). Finally, '*queer* . . . signifies an open, multiperspectival, and fluid . . . conceptual space from which to contest . . . a heteronormative and heterosexist social order' (p. 253).

Hostetler and Herdt's (1998) analysis is particularly important because its first author is a US developmental psychologist. In fact, the genesis of the subject script within psychology can be traced to this and other early interdisciplinary approaches that focused on the historical and cultural contextualisation of same-sex desire (e.g. Boxer & Cohler, 1989).

Herdt and Boxer's (1993) seminal study of same-sex-attracted youth represented just such a collaboration. Herdt, a cultural anthropologist, and Boxer, a developmental psychologist, studied a community sample of 202 youth participants at a social organisation. Their analysis focused on the critical role of the community centre in the identity development of youth, focusing on processes such as ritual, culture and resocialisation. Most importantly, their report acknowledged the cultural and historical basis of sexual identity development for same-sex-attracted youth at the time.

These interdisciplinary and more historically sensitive works were more the exception than the rule within US psychology in the 1990s, which ignored the literature in queer theory and continued to unquestioningly assume the ontological stability of categories of sexual identity. Empirical work published in major psychology journals in the 1990s continued to naturalise the concept of sexual orientation, probably in part out of necessity to produce knowledge that might help reduce the risk of HIV (e.g. Cochran, Mays, Ciarletta, Caruso, & Mallon, 1992) or improve the lives of HIV-positive men (e.g. Nicholson & Long, 1990). Studies considered the psychological lives of gay men and lesbians from an ahistorical stance, thus failing to differentiate the experiences of various cohorts and instead promulgating a timeless view of the nature and consequences of identifying as a sexual minority. This work included studies of stigma and mental health (e.g. Ross, 1990), disclosure of sexual identity (e.g. Anderson & Randal, 1993; Franke & Leary, 1991), relationship satisfaction (e.g. Kurdek, 1991, 1995), self-presentation in personal ads (e.g. Gonzales & Meyers, 1993; Kenrick, Keefe, Bryan, Barr, & Brown, 1995), identity and self-esteem (e.g. Walters & Simoni, 1993) and friendship (e.g. Nardi & Sherrod, 1994). The critical problem in all of this research – probably most clearly evident in the relevance of knowledge on sexual risk behaviour produced in this era on sexual practices among men today – is that notions of sexual identity and behaviour were frozen in time and place. Missing was an analysis of the historical grounding of desire, identity and behaviour (for exceptions, see Bringle, 1995; Frable, Wortman, & Joseph, 1997). Instead, the idea of a stable, coherent and natural 'species' of person was constructed and reified through psychological research.

By the early 2000s, however, some US psychologists began to call into question the species narrative, particularly among scholars who studied same-sex-attracted youth. It became increasingly clear that the research produced within psychology had been dominated by retrospective studies of white gay men, and that the knowledge produced in this work was being framed as the essential experience of all same-sex-attracted individuals. Missing in adequate numbers were studies that focused on the experience of women, non-white individuals, and bisexual and non-identifying individuals with same-sex desire.

These absences of voice within the discipline inspired several frameworks that reconceptualised same-sex desire away from an androcentric paradigm. Peplau and colleagues called for a new paradigm within psychology to speak better to the experience of same-sex-attracted women (e.g. Peplau, 2001; Peplau & Garnets, 2000; Peplau, Spalding, Conley, & Veniegas, 1999). These calls were path-breaking in terms of their challenge to the species narrative, suggesting that a focus on gender as the object of desire spoke more to the experience of men than women and that women's 'close relationships' represent the context for sexual desire (Peplau, 2001). Empirical studies within the discipline that focused on the experience of same-sex-attracted women were key to this paradigmatic shift (e.g. Morris & Rothblum, 1999; Rosenbluth, 1997).

This challenge to the androcentric basis of the species narrative, while absolutely critical for the discipline's changing views on same-sex desire, was limited by its reliance on an essentialised, naturalised view of gender. Peplau (2001) endorses an unproblematic

binary of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ and makes claims about a seemingly monolithic group of ‘women’. Among her claims about women’s sexuality are the following: ‘Women’s sexuality tends to be fluid, malleable, and capable of change over time’ (p. 10); ‘women’s sexuality is not tightly scripted by genetic or hormonal influences’ (p. 12); and ‘women have a relational or partner-centered orientation to sexuality and men a recreational or bodycentered orientation (e.g. DeLamater, 1987)’ (p. 12). Much of the evidence she provides is physiological or neurological in nature, forcing a conflation of the biological category ‘female’, not unproblematic in itself, with the social category ‘woman’. Like Peplau, others who study gender differences in sexual attraction, desire, behaviour and/or identity often assume that there are greater differences between the genders than within them (e.g. Baumeister, 2000; Diamond, 2000, 2008a, 2008b; Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000; Peplau & Garnets, 2000). Because these paradigms call for the distinction of sexual desire along the lines of gender, they simultaneously contest the categorical basis of sexual identity while actually reifying the concept of gender.

In developmental psychology, one of the leading scholars on same-sex attraction among adolescents, Ritch C. Savin-Williams (2001), argued in a critical paper that ‘[d]evelopmental scientists should seriously reconsider traditional empirical and theoretical paradigms that narrowly define sexual-minority adolescents in terms of those who adopt a culturally defined sexual identity label’ (p. 5). This article represented one of his first attempts to construct a radical critique of the literature on gay adolescence that had developed in the 1990s (a literature to which he himself contributed substantially). His argument was straightforward: by relying almost exclusively on self-identifying youth in their empirical work, psychologists had failed to capture the full range of same-sex experience among youth. The experience of non-identifying youth was not represented in the literature. And he suggested that the link between homosexuality and pathology had been overstated, since studies relied upon help-seeking youth for most of their subjects.

Interestingly, it was also in the area of health psychology and the interface of psychology and public health that a categorical vision of sexual identity was challenged in the 2000s. Recognising that HIV risk was not based on identity status but rather on sexual behaviour, researchers began to use the term ‘men who have sex with men’ to better describe the full population of interest to them (e.g. Carballo-Diéguez, Dolezal, Nieves-Rosa, & Díaz, 2000; Mustanski, 2007). These researchers recognised that a focus only on self-identifying gay men was problematic because it did not address men who were engaging in sexual contact but identifying as heterosexual. Some in psychology and public health have suggested that this taxonomic shift was problematic in that they effectively ‘erased’ the sexual minority person from public health discussions – a discursive shift not beneficial to the study of health, adjustment and sexuality (Young & Meyer, 2005).

In spite of these currents within the discipline, empirical work in US psychology conducted from 2000 to 2010 generally maintained a species narrative of homosexuality. Most studies focused on the psychological development and adjustment of gay men and lesbians (and, less frequently, bisexuals) under the assumption of ontological stability as a social category of identity. To this end, studies published in psychology journals documented sexual practices and gender roles (e.g. Wegesin & Meyer-Bahlburg, 2000), eating disorders and body image (e.g. Hospers & Jansen, 2005; Strong, Williamson, Netemeyer, & Geer, 2000; Tiggemann, Martins, & Kirkbride, 2007), the experience of workplace discrimination (e.g. Ragins & Cornwell, 2001) and disclosure at work (e.g. Griffith & Hebl, 2002; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007) and sexual risk behaviour among men (e.g. McCoul & Haslam, 2001; Peterson & Bakeman, 2006).

In our view, it seems fairly unlikely that the critiques that emerged within the discipline in the early 2000s, whether from social psychologists such as Peplau or developmental psychologists such as Savin-Williams, were rooted in a queer theory perspective. Both lines of critique called into question the received taxonomy of sexual identity, but an underlying critique of the larger sex/gender system seems less present, and the works of these scholars do not cite queer theorists such as Butler, de Lauretis or other sexuality scholars within the humanities. Unlike psychologists in the United States, psychologists in Britain seem to have integrated a queer theory perspective much earlier, and some of their work was published in US journals (e.g. Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995). The emergence of the British-based journal *Psychology & Sexuality*, which featured a special issue on queer theory and psychology in 2011 (see Hegarty, 2011), revealed the need for institutional support for the previously stifled colloquy between psychology and queer theory in US-based journals.

In general, it seems fair to say that links between US psychology and the queer theory intellectual movement have been relatively empty. Exceptions at the theoretical level include Hostetler and Herdt's (1998) attempt to link insights from queer theory with developmental psychology and, in that process, to reconsider the idea of sexual taxonomy. Unfortunately, perhaps owing to its publication in a journal less widely read within the discipline, this article has been infrequently cited or acknowledged within disciplinary publications in psychology (for exceptions, see Hammack, 2005b; Hammack et al., 2009). We suggest that the reluctance of psychology to explicitly integrate queer theory into its canon of theory and empirical work stems from threats to US psychology's fundamental epistemology and philosophy of science. The ahistorical and atheoretical nature of the discipline, as practiced in its dominant form in the United States, is in conflict with the relativism and perspectivalism inherent in queer theory. Since queer theory focuses on the 'non-essentializing nature of sexual identities', it 'moves beyond the minoritizing agenda of homosexual rights' (Minton, 1997, p. 349). For psychology, though, this shift would require abandonment of its tendency to naturalise social categories (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001) and instead to focus on the 'subjective agency' of sexual desire (Minton, 1997) – a shift that would challenge the epistemological core of the discipline (as practiced in the United States).

Regardless of the intrinsic conflict between queer theory and psychology, we suggest that the emergence of a loosely anchored 'subject' script in the past decade reveals the infiltration of queer theory to an extent, largely because psychological researchers are responding to the same historical and political forces that produced the queer theory movement itself. These forces centre on the lived experience of contemporary same-sex-attracted individuals – an experience which at times maps onto the species narrative but which also occurs within a time of social and political change with regard to same-sex desire and identity. Most notably, this script has come to characterise recent work that challenges the received taxonomy of sexual categorisation – primarily through providing voice to subjects.

Based on extensive qualitative work with youth, Savin-Williams (2005, p. 1) called for the emergence of a 'new gay teen' in 2005 – one for whom the very concept of a rigid social category of sexual identity was on the wane:

... Teenagers are increasingly redefining, reinterpreting, and renegotiating their sexuality such that possessing a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity is practically meaningless. . . . The notion of 'gay' as a noteworthy or identifying characteristic is being abandoned; it has lost its definition.

Savin-Williams suggests that the very concept of a predictable social and psychological experience of same-sex attraction has changed dramatically for contemporary youth relative to the previous generation, on whose voices the species narrative of gay identity had been constructed.

Diamond's longitudinal study of sexual identity development among women also presents a challenge to the species narrative. Rather than following a predetermined sequence of developmental stages, she discovered that a sample of US women's process of sexual identity development was best characterised by the *fluidity* of attraction and several changes in identity labels over time (e.g. Diamond, 2000, 2003, 2008a, 2008b). Her work suggests the androcentric basis of the received sexual identity taxonomy.

Another recent line of inquiry within psychology that speaks to the subject script extends beyond critical consideration of homosexuality to heterosexuality as well. Thompson and Morgan (2008) contested the binary vision of sexual identity in their argument for the existence of a category of 'mostly straight' young women. Contrasting the behavioural and developmental profiles of these women with those who identify as 'exclusively straight' or 'lesbian' reveals distinctive experiences. The narratives of these women also revealed unique processes of sexual exploration.

These exemplary programmes of research are emblematic of a quiet shift within the discipline towards critical interrogation of the meaning and utility of the received sexual taxonomy. It is important to note that, in all cases, the use of qualitative methods was central to this interrogation and allowed for the discovery of the unexpected or anomalous – a process critical to the development of paradigms within science (Kuhn, 1962). They reveal that, in psychology, qualitative methods are central to the generation of new knowledge because they provide space for assumptions to be challenged (see Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992; Marecek, Fine, & Kidder, 1997).

Unfortunately, queer theory's infiltration remains quite limited in US psychology, even while it has been thoroughly integrated in English-language literature beyond the United States, such as from the United Kingdom and Australia (e.g. Clarke & Peel, 2007a; 2007b; Clarke et al., 2010; Downing & Gillett, 2011; Hegarty & Massey, 2007; Langdrige, 2008; Riggs, 2007; Robinson, 2008). Although a species narrative continues to dominate the psychological literature on same-sex attraction and sexual identity development, the past 10 years have witnessed the quiet infiltration of a new narrative, which we call, inspired by Foucault (1982), a 'subject' script. This narrative challenges the naturalised, essentialised vision of sexual desire and identity promulgated by a species narrative and, in fact, originating in the foundational sickness narrative of homosexuality. A subject script can be linked to queer theory's influence within the academy, as well as the shifting historical forces in the US society (as well as in other societies) in which ideas about the fluidity of sexual desire as more 'natural' than rigid ideas about sexual identity have begun to flourish. As contemporary youth are exposed to these ideas – ideas that compete with a received rigid sexual taxonomy – they provide psychological scientists with a new set of data (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Hammack & Cohler, 2009; Hammack et al., 2009). For the few researchers within the discipline who have been open to hearing these voices, and hence gaining access to subjectivity as it is lived and embodied in personal narrative construction, a new set of ideas about sexual identity has been generated. The anomalous nature of much of these data suggests movement towards a new paradigm of understanding sexual orientation and identity (Hammack, 2005a).



### Conclusion: historicising psychological theory and method through narrative

In this article, we have suggested that the history of US psychological research on same-sex desire has been rooted in three master narratives – a sickness script, a species script and a subject script. These master narratives have shaped the questions psychological scientists have asked, as well as their interpretation of data and, hence, their participation in either maintaining or challenging a status quo of public policy in the realm of same-sex desire. We suggested that the promulgation of a sickness narrative within the discipline provided the rational justification for a policy context hostile to same-sex desire. If same-sex-attracted individuals were ‘sick’, they required treatment, not legal protection or the provision of rights as a protected class of citizens. Ironically, the sickness narrative had emerged out of a desire to argue against legal persecution of same-sex sexual behaviour (Bullough & Bullough, 1997).

For the majority of the discipline’s history, psychological researchers in the United States produced knowledge that pathologised same-sex attraction, even for decades following significant empirical challenges (e.g. Hooker, 1957). This tendency for psychological knowledge to support, rather than to challenge, the status quo provides evidence for the claims made by critical psychologists who have argued that the discipline has historically represented a conservative force in society (e.g. Fox et al., 2009; Prilleltensky, 1989). A clear narrative rupture occurred as the gay and lesbian civil rights movement challenged the scientific community to understand their experience on their own terms – in other words, to base their interpretations not on societal values and discourse about sexuality but on their own personal narratives. This eventual shift within the discipline became embodied in a new master narrative – the species narrative. This narrative was predicated upon the idea of a transhistorical, transcultural category of identity or ‘type’ of person – the sexual minority.

The emergence of a subject script – most clearly *outside of* US psychology but increasingly infiltrating it – coincided with a growing movement within gay and lesbian communities that sought to challenge all forms of gender and sexual categorisation (see Gamson, 1995). This view had been present within the gay and lesbian rights movement itself, best represented by the Gay Liberation Front, but it gained considerably in momentum in the 1990s with debates about assimilation and the concept of ‘normality’ (Sullivan, 1995; Warner, 1999). The queer theory movement provided an intellectual prism through which to make sense of the dissatisfaction of many same-sex-attracted individuals with a rigid species script that seemed to benefit some members of the community more than others and to silence or minimise intragroup dissent. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, these forces have run concurrent with the increasing ‘normality’ of same-sex attraction among contemporary youth (Cohler & Hammack, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2005), which has further destabilised the species narrative.

Our intent in this article has been to consider the psychological study of same-sex desire through the lens of history and narrative. Rather than simply deconstructing or dismantling ideas about sexual identity within the discipline, we have sought to illuminate the intersection of history, science and policy through the idea of narrative. As we conclude, we suggest a theoretical and empirical way forward for psychology, such that our analysis might be viewed as positively *constructive* rather than solely an exercise in critical deconstruction.

The narrative approach we have applied in this article has been primarily concentrated at the level of what many have called *master* narratives – storylines that circulate in a society and that provide individuals with a cultural discourse with which to make meaning of

their lives (e.g. Hammack, 2008). We suggested that paradigmatic shifts within psychology have often relied upon an assessment of *personal* narratives of research participants (e.g. Diamond, 2008b). We want to claim that psychology ought, if it is to *advance* knowledge about sexuality rather than to merely *reflect* or *support* a status quo way of thinking, to assume an historical approach that is anchored in the idea of *narrative engagement* (Hammack & Cohler, 2009).

The idea of narrative engagement offers a ‘polyphonic’ (Bakhtin, 1984) way of thinking about the relationship between language and human development. It suggests that identity and subjectivity are embodied in practices of *narration* – storymaking and storytelling in social settings. These social settings, we suggest, are not characterised by a single, monolithic master narrative. Rather, they are saturated with a plurality of narratives. This is, in fact, a hallmark of a postmodern, postindustrial era in which information flows quickly and freely across settings of shared social practice (Gergen, 1991). As Giddens (1991) has argued, biography assumes a central function in such an era because the proliferation of discourses necessitates an anchor for the life course in a personal narrative (Cohler, 1982; McAdams, 1988, 1996).

Although our own historical account of master narratives within the discipline has suggested a linear process, we argue that it is better to think of these master narratives as all accessible in some form to contemporary same-sex-attracted individuals. That is, each script continues to exist in some form in some communities in the United States, and individuals engage with all three narratives as they construct their own personal narratives. Thus, rather than thinking of thought and feeling as influenced by the most dominant script available, we suggest that thought and feeling ought to be seen as embedded in a context of competing storylines about the meaning of desire and identity. This narrative approach is sensitive to historical forces in that investigators must be analysts not only of individual psychological processes but also of the discourse that might influence those processes within a particular social setting.

When interpreted through this epistemological lens, certain contrary findings within the discipline become sensible. For example, many youth indeed are today questioning the received sexual taxonomy of identity and thus constructing life stories in which same-sex attraction is only marginally significant (Savin-Williams, 2005). At the same time, many youth continue to construct life stories in which their sense of sexual desire and identity is a source of shame – a legacy of the sickness script that remains accessible to contemporary youth (Hammack et al., 2009). Many youth are also engaging with a species narrative as a form of empowerment and community-building; they see a gay or lesbian identity as a central part of who they are (Hammack & Cohler, 2011; Hammack et al., 2009; Russell, Clarke, & Clary, 2009). Thus, the lives of contemporary same-sex-attracted youth can only be understood in relation to these several discourses on the nature and meaning of desire. A holistic psychological analysis of their lives requires historical sensitivity to these discourses.

The most significant constraint to the assumption of the kind of historical approach to theory and empirical inquiry we are advocating is methodological. With the rise of statistical thinking in psychological research emerged an approach to data that relied upon aggregation (Danziger, 1990; Porter, 1986). It is beyond our scope here to review this historical occurrence within the discipline – the shift away from studying *individuals* to essentially comparing *group means* on variables. Yet two significant paradigmatic shifts within the discipline have now, in our view, opened up space for empirical inquiry that is sensitive to historical forces. The first shift involves a movement in some versions of *cultural psychology* to analyse the distinct and particular forms of psychological life, directly

challenging a vision of ‘psychic unity’ which suggests a kind of psychological uniformity (e.g. Shweder, 1990; Shweder & Sullivan, 1993). The second shift concerns psychology’s own ‘interpretive turn’ (Held, 2007; Tappan, 1997): its shift towards studying thought, feeling and action as discursively situated. The narrative psychology movement, as well as the emphasis on discourse analysis in European psychology (e.g. Parker, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), is a part of this shift (e.g. Josselson, 2009; McAdams, 1996, 2001).

What precisely would empirical work that embodies a narrative approach look like? First, it would rely more on qualitative than quantitative methods, since it is precisely concerned with the way in which same-sex-attracted individuals use language to make meaning of desire in context. Second, the approach would be multi-level in the sense that the individual as a bounded, isolated unit of analysis represents an insufficient unit. Rather, psychologists must employ the tools of ethnographic and historical analysis to understand lives in context. They must become analysts of the master narratives to which individuals are exposed, embodied in the discourses and artefacts with which individuals routinely engage.

It should be clear that our methodological prescriptions take the discipline beyond its current dominant statistical paradigm towards a more holistic approach to the study of lives in context. While we would like to claim that this call is innovative, it is not. Rather, it is well represented in the ‘study of lives’ tradition pioneered by personality and social psychologists such as Henry Murray and Gordon Allport in the twentieth century (e.g. Allport, 1924; Murray, 1938). The nature of our call is certainly novel – neither Murray nor Allport spoke of ‘narratives’. But their approach to the study of mind and behaviour recognised that the analysis of individuals benefits from analysis of the society in which those individuals reside. They were not constrained by method but rather emphasised the importance of *questions*. We join the chorus of many other voices within the discipline that have argued against methodolatry in favour of a psychological science which embraces a plurality of methods to address the pressing research questions of our time (e.g. Brydon-Miller & Tolman, 1997; Fine, 2006), certainly one of which concerns the nature and experience of same-sex attraction. Laura Brown (1989, p. 453) made an explicit call for such a change within psychology:

An alternative approach that draws upon lesbian and gay experience must allow for the use of many methodologies and the possibility of many, even conflicting, answers. A lesbian/gay psychology would be one of many truths, one in which a dialectical tension would constantly operate in such a manner as to stimulate new and wider inquiry. Rather than endless replications of the old, researchers would begin asking the questions not yet raised in the first place and then question further the answers received. If they allow their scholarship to live in as many realities as they do themselves, they find the possibility of many shades of meaning.

As of this writing, the discipline of psychology has failed to fully embrace this project.

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