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Narrative, Identity, and the Politics of Exclusion: Social Change and the Gay and Lesbian Life Course

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Abstract The social and political context of sexual identity development in the United States has changed dramatically since the mid twentieth century. Same-sex attracted individuals have long needed to reconcile their desire with policies of exclusion, ranging from explicit outlaws on same-sex activity to exclusion from major social institutions such as marriage. This paper focuses on the implications of political exclusion for the life course of individuals with same-sex desire through the analytic lens of narrative. Using illustrative evidence from a study of autobiographies of gay men spanning a 60-year period and a study of the life stories of contemporary same-sex attracted youth, we detail the implications of historic silence, exclusion, and subordination for the life course.

Keywords Sexual identity · Homosexuality · Social policy · Exclusion · Discrimination · Narrative · Gay · Lesbian · Bisexual · Voice and silence

Introduction

In less than a century, the social and political meaning of same-sex attraction has shifted considerably in the USA and across the globe. Once relegated to hidden gathering places, demonized as deviants, pathologized as mentally ill, and even considered threats to national security in the USA, same-sex attracted individuals can now live beyond the shadows of shame and stigma. In some countries, such as Canada and Spain, same-sex attracted individuals are accorded the full rights of citizenship and may even receive full legal recognition through the right to marry someone of the same sex. In the span of only a few generations, the social and political discourse around same-sex attraction has dramatically transformed from complete *exclusion* to increasing *inclusion*.

The significant degree of social and political change regarding same-sex sexuality possesses profound implications for the life course of individuals with same-sex desire. While earlier generations might have married someone of the opposite sex and kept their same-sex attractions and behaviors furtive (Rosenfeld 2009), same-sex relationships are increasingly legitimized across a number of societies, and the assumption of a non-heterosexual identity does not necessarily bring with it the same level of stigma it once did (Savin-Williams 2005). At the same time, however, same-sex attracted individuals continue to suffer from persecution and even the possibility of death in much of the world (e.g., Uganda, Iran), and legal recognition for same-sex relationships remains controversial even in societies where homosexuality has been depathologized (e.g., the USA). Thus, while same-sex attraction, behavior, and identity are increasingly recognized as normal, legitimate forms of human relations with legal recognition, there continues to be considerable political resistance to policies of inclusion for same-sex attracted individuals.

The purpose of this paper is to examine how same-sex attracted individuals engage with shifting social and political storylines of the meaning of same-sex desire and identity as they narrate their life stories. We are particularly

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interested in how same-sex attracted individuals of distinct generation cohorts use narrative to make meaning of the politics of desire and identity. That is, how does the shifting social and political meaning of same-sex attraction alter the possibilities for personal meaning-making in the course of development? We consider this question through the analytic lens of the *personal narrative*—a document of one's life that provides a sense of coherence, unity, and purpose as it evolves over time (Cohler 1982; McAdams 1990, 1997). We call upon data from two sources—a study of five generations of gay male autobiographies (Cohler 2007) and a study of contemporary youth with same-sex desire (Hammack et al. 2009)—to examine these questions about narrative, social change, and the life course.

The Politics of Storytelling

A growing movement across the social sciences has come to recognize the utility of a narrative approach to the study of lives in context (for review, see Hammack 2008; Hammack and Pilecki 2011; McLean 2008). The central tenet of this approach is the idea that humans make personal and social meaning by constructing stories that make experience sensible (Bruner 1990). That is, the sensory world is rendered comprehensible to the extent that individuals are able to link events and perceptions in the form of a story. Through constructing narratives, individuals ascribe meaning to their actions (Bruner 1990) and a sense of unity and coherence to their life experience (Cohler 1982; McAdams 1997).

Narrative approaches are now increasingly utilized across a number of social science fields, including anthropology (e.g., Ochs and Capps 2001), sociology (e.g., Giddens 1991), gerontology (e.g., Kenyon et al. 2001), history (e.g., Suny 2001), legal studies (e.g., Bruner 2002), and psychology (e.g., McAdams 2001). What unites all of this work is the centrality accorded to *language* and *discourse* in the framing of thought and experience (Hammack and Pilecki 2011). As such, the process of narrative identity development is socially situated (McLean et al. 2007) and necessitates negotiation with dominant discourses and master narratives of identity in a given society (Fivush 2010; Hammack 2008; Hammack and Cohler 2009; McLean 2008).

Key to our view of narrative is thus the idea that the nature and content of story-making is not arbitrary. Rather, it is contingent upon the structures of narrative to which individuals are exposed (Sarbin 1986). In the case of the life story, how one constructs a personal narrative is contingent upon the "canonical forms" (Bruner 1987) of autobiography available in a given cultural and political setting (see also Fivush 2010). A growing body of empirical research on narrative has begun to chart the contextual specificity of storytelling, and much of this work has emphasized the impact of political, historical, and economic factors on narrative form and content (e.g., Gregg 2007; Hammack 2009, 2010a, b, 2011; McAdams 2006).

Narrative approaches to the study of identity bring with them vital implications for public policy and social advocacy. Frost and Ouellette (2004) argue that narrative and life story methods importantly reveal the meaning individuals make of social positions and life course possibilities. They suggest that narrative data are critical because they provide evidence that questions received assumptions about thought, feeling, and action. Psychologists, Frost and Ouellette (2004) argue, might use this evidence to advance social justice and equal rights agendas.

In sum, the narrative approach to social science research considers the way in which individuals make meaning of the social and political surround through the construction of stories. This process provides a critical social and psychological function for coherence in time and place, and it is characterized by confrontation of a dominant mode of story-making and storytelling (Hammack 2008). Individuals whose thoughts, feelings, and actions do not conform to a received master narrative must construct a counter-narrative or a "resistance" narrative (Fivush 2010) that fulfills basic human needs for meaning and integrity. In the case of same-sex attracted individuals, their experience of desire and identity places them in a position of subordination vis-à-vis a dominant discourse that privileges heterosexuality (Foucault 1978; Rich 1980). Research on the life course of same-sex attracted individuals has increasingly come to recognize this point of counter-narration as the starting point for narrative identity development (e.g., Westrate and McLean 2010).

Narrative and the Course of Gay and Lesbian Lives

Our approach to the study of sexuality and social policy is informed by a historical view of life course development (e.g., Hammack 2005; Hammack and Cohler 2009). Fundamental to the life course model is the notion that human development occurs in a distinct sociopolitical setting that results in distinctions across generation cohorts (e.g., Elder 1998). Consistent with this perspective, Baltes and his colleagues developed a model that requires cross-cohort comparison of persons of about the same age living in different historical times in order to reveal the interplay of developmental transitions and social and historical change (e.g., Baltes et al. 1979). Life span developmental perspectives in psychology maintain that neither age nor any defined developmental stage has any meaning apart from historical time. Elder and Caspi (1990) have suggested that there is a range of historical events that link lives to historical context and that foster a sense of

shared consciousness within a generation cohort (Esler 1984). However, as Mouw (2005) and Settersten and his colleagues have noted (e.g., Settersten and Mayer 1997), there is also considerable intra-cohort variability. Such factors as gender (Diamond 2008) and different life chances, such as the impact of poverty or discrimination (Valocchi 1999), may lead to variation in life outcomes.

Life course perspectives are particularly important in the study of lesbian and gay lives (Cohler and Galatzer-Levy 2000; Hammack 2005; Hammack and Cohler 2009). Successive generation cohorts of same-sex attracted women and men coming to adulthood over the postwar era have encountered unique historical events and social change that has defined the meaning of identity and desire (Cohler 2007). The increased social activism of the 1960s that presaged the emergence of the gay rights era in the 1970s, the emergence of the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s and early 1990s, and the advent of successful antiretroviral treatment for HIV in the late 1990s, together with a shifting conception of same-sex desire across a number of national settings, have been cohort-defining events (Cohler and Hammack 2006). More recently, policy shifts that allow equal marriage rights likely represent cohort-defining events for contemporary same-sex attracted individuals.

Life course perspectives on the lesbian and gay experience suggest that the present cohort of same-sex attracted young adults has encountered a context of living as gay and lesbian that is somewhat different from that of prior generations (Savin-Williams 2005). While prior generations encountered a “sickness” script as they sought to make sense of their same-sex desire, contemporary youth engage with a more differentiated set of storylines on the meaning of desire and identity (Hammack and Cohler 2009; Hammack et al. 2011). While antigay prejudice remains a serious social problem, there is some evidence that young adults in the present generation experience greater acceptance and lessened stigma compared with earlier cohorts of lesbians and gay men (Herek et al. 2007; Meyer 2003, 2007; Smith 2005).

In our view, the historical arc of sexual identity and society is not, however, linear. We have suggested, rather, that discourses of sickness and stigma continue to proliferate but are accompanied by competing discourses of “normality” for same-sex attracted individuals (Cohler and Hammack 2007; Hammack and Cohler 2009; Hammack et al. 2009, submitted for publication). That is, rather than viewing dominant discourses of desire and identity as clearly moving *toward* some dichotomous end, we suggest the existence of a *polyphonic* (Bakhtin 1984) set of stories about the nature and meaning of sexuality. In other words, narrative identity development is characterized by a process of engagement with a multiplicity of storylines that individuals appropriate in the course of their lives, dependent upon local, national, and regional possibilities. This view thus allows for a competition of discourses in a given society and better speaks to the diversity of human development.

In sum, a life course approach to the study of sexual identity development reveals the way in which social and historical change has impacted gay and lesbian lives. While some have argued for an increasingly positive context for same-sex desire and identity, we propose that a polyphonic model of narrative engagement for same-sex attracted individuals better speaks to the breadth and diversity of dominant discourses to which contemporary same-sex attracted individuals are exposed (Cohler and Hammack 2009). Such an approach positions individuals in a larger context of shared historical experience, while also recognizing the significance of cultural and ideological variability across social ecologies of development.

In the remainder of this paper, we apply this life course and narrative approach to the study of sexual identity development. We call upon data from two projects to illustrate the value of this approach and its connection to issues of sexuality and social policy. First, we present illustrative data from a study of five generations of gay male autobiography (Cohler 2007), which reveals the way in which the meaning-making process is historically situated and connected to a political regulation of desire (Foucault 1978). Second, we present new data from a study of the life stories of same-sex attracted youth, assuming an interpretive approach to narrative analysis (Tappan 1997). Our intent is to illustrate the vitality of a theoretical and methodological approach to the study of same-sex sexuality that takes history, culture, and politics seriously, while it simultaneously provides evidence of the lived experience of silence, exclusion, and subordination.

Narrating Desire and Exclusion: Five Generations of Gay Men

As we have suggested, a life course perspective is particularly important in the study of gay and lesbian lives because it considers the historical and political context in which lives are embedded (Hammack 2005). One valuable source of data on the course of gay and lesbian lives in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is the genre of memoir. Memoirs represent personal narratives of meaning-making, and the analysis of memoirs as texts of identity can be linked to Allport’s (1942) argument for the use of personal documents in the study of lives—an approach that has been well-integrated into humanistic social science approaches (e.g., Plummer 2001). Analysis of lives as texts is a fundamental tenet of the narrative approach in social science research, particularly among those who embrace an

interpretive methodological approach (e.g., Josselson 2004, 2006, 2009; Tappan 1997).

Memoirs represent documents of life that are ideal for the study of the gay and lesbian life course because they command a degree of historical reflection among authors that facilitates sociopolitical analysis. In this section, we draw upon a study of five generations of gay male memoirs from the USA to detail the way in which these men narrate the experience of exclusion. We recognize that a memoir is distinct from a life story collected and analyzed in psychological research in that a memoir is written as a marketable product. Yet we contend that the analysis of memoirs of subordinated groups is extremely useful in social science research because it provides a window into the way in which particular individuals create coherence through life writing while simultaneously seeking to influence the master narrative of the group through their account.

Our analysis here focuses on memoirs of US gay men written in the postwar period. Following Elder (1996), we define each generation cohort in terms of decade of birth, which parallels major events in gay and lesbian history quite well (for further discussion, see Cohler 2007). Following the suggestion of Plummer (2001), we have selected those personal accounts that are particularly “information rich” or that are exemplary narratives for understanding the lives of gay men within particular generation cohorts (for further discussion of selection of memoirs, see Cohler 2007).

Our focus here on the memoirs of gay men should be viewed as incomplete in the larger study of the narratives of same-sex attracted individuals. Our analysis of memoirs is limited to white gay men in the USA—a group of life writers whose voice has assumed greater presence than that of female life writers, life writers of color, and transgender life writers (for early exceptions, see Lorde 1982; Werther 2008). We view this skewed representation as reflective of the historic hegemony of the white male voice in literature and have been encouraged by the recent proliferation of autobiographies by same-sex attracted women (e.g., Faderman 2004), people of color (e.g., González 2006; Harris 2004), and transgender individuals (e.g., Boylan 2003). We hope that the model of narrative analysis we provide here might inspire similar approaches to the study of these more recent memoirs.

From Silence and Sickness to a Gay Identity: Coming of Age in the 1950s and 1960s

A summary of results of the analysis of memoirs is presented in Table 1, including the public policy context, resistance context, representative memoirs, and life story themes which emerged in the texts. Men born in the USA in the 1930s and coming of age in the 1950s experienced a discourse of sickness about homosexuality that motivated a strict code of silence. In the 1930s and 1940s USA, the idea of homosexuality as pathology was normative and relatively unchallenged in both popular and scientific discourse. In the postwar period, in fact, there was a strong emphasis on crystallizing conceptions of heteronormativity, perhaps in response to the dramatic social changes the war brought to gender roles (with the need for more women to work) and to family dynamics (with so many men away from home). Compulsory notions of gender and sexual conformity (Rich 1980) appear to have been very strong at the time, leaving little social and psychological space for same-sex attracted individuals to make meaning of their desire (or to act on it).

It was in this historical context that two prominent gay male life writers—Martin Duberman and Alan Helms—came of age. The memoirs of these two men reveal stories of formidable struggle with societal stigma of homosexuality, while also revealing the excitement and possibility of the coherent gay and lesbian culture that began to flourish in the 1960s and 1970s. Neither man was intimately involved in the political movement that culminated in the Stonewall Inn riot of 1969, though Duberman became more politically active in the 1970s and wrote a highly acclaimed account of Stonewall (Duberman 1994).

Duberman and Helms reached their formative years of identity development in the 1950s. This period was historically significant as a transitional era in the cultural and professional discourse on homosexuality. It was in this decade that a number of challenges to the received cultural narrative of homosexuality as pathology emerged. First, the Mattachine Society’s establishment in 1951 as the first official gay and lesbian social and political organization marked the gradual beginning of a gay civil rights movement. Second, the famous Kinsey report on male sexual behavior, published in 1948 amid much cultural interest, had explicitly challenged the idea of homosexuality as uncommon or non-normative by empirically revealing its ubiquity (Kinsey et al. 1948). Finally, the pioneering study of Evelyn Hooker published in 1957 dealt a further blow to the sickness narrative of homosexuality by revealing that clinicians were unable to distinguish personality data from self-identified gay men and straight men (Hooker 1957).

In spite of these major events of the 1950s, men like Duberman and Helms were born into a cultural narrative of same-sex desire as a sickness and struggled significantly to resolve the internal sense of shame, insecurity, and self-hatred that such a narrative created. Both men actively sought the help of the mental health profession, sometimes to benefit, but often to great detriment, as at that time homosexuality remained a diagnosable mental illness. Both men internalized the societal view of same-sex desire as a

Table 1 Summary of memoir study findings

Cohort	Decade of birth	Decade of coming of age	Public policy context	Resistance context	Representative memoirs	Life story themes
1	1930s	1950s	Criminalization, pathologization of homosexuality	Aftermath of Kinsey report (1948); founding of Mattachine Society (1951); emergence of gay and lesbian civil rights movement; publication of Hooker study challenging pathologization (1957)	Martin Duberman; Alan Helms	Struggle to resolve internal sense of shame and stigma; detrimental impact of mental health profession; inferior sense of self; psychological support through integration in gay community
2	1940s	1960s	Criminalization, pathologization of homosexuality	Movements for civil rights and social change across the globe; growth of gay and lesbian civil rights movement and social/political organizing; embrace of the term “gay” in place of “homosexual”; Stonewall Inn riots (1969)	Arnie Kantrowitz; Andrew Tobias	Self-loathing and internalized homonegativity; continued struggle for self-acceptance but distrust of mental health profession; achieving success and happiness by coming out in young adulthood; active in politics
3	1950s	1970s	De facto decriminalization in many states; depathologization through removal of homosexuality from DSM; emergence of AIDS and sluggish governmental response	Success of gay rights movement; establishment of open, visible communities and institutions; formal community celebrations (Pride); political organizing around AIDS activism	Mark Doty; Tim Miller	Absence of seeking psychiatric help; redemptive narratives; coming out and immersion into community creates positive sense of self; ability to fulfill sexual desires without concern for legal consequences; emergence of AIDS pandemic in adulthood, subsequent loss of partners and friends, contaminating sequence in life stories
4	1960s	1980s	Growth in power and influence of Religious Right; cultural and political upheaval about homosexuality and AIDS; Bowers v. Hardwick (1986) upholds Georgia sodomy law	Success of gay rights movement and political activism about AIDS; established institutions, rituals, communities (“gay ghetto”)	Daniel Mendelsohn, Marc Adams	Compartmentalization of gay and straight worlds; need to reconcile redemptive narrative of coming out with contaminating narrative of AIDS and discourse of homosexuality as “sin”; loss of partners and friends to AIDS less common as prevention strategies become effective
5	1970s	1990s	Movements for gays in the military and same-sex marriage gain force but also setbacks (“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” Defense of Marriage Act); domestic partner and civil union ordinances passed	Emergence of Internet as new resource; individuals coming out at younger ages	Kirk Read; Bryan Phillips	Disclosure in high school; resilience through coming out (redemptive narrative); increased sense of “normality”

deficit and an indication of abnormality. An excerpt from Duberman's (1991a) memoir, *About Time*, illustrates:

> I remember long talks with my gay friends at Harvard about whether we could achieve any sort of satisfying life, 'stunted' as we were. We accepted as given that as homosexuals we could never reach 'full adult maturity'—whatever the fuck that means. The it means what everybody said it did: marrying, settling down, having a family. We knew we'd never qualify, and despised ourselves for it. But it's too simple to reduce 'growing up gay in the fifties' to a one-dimension horror story. (p. 344)

Duberman's account reveals the extent to which men of his generation engaged with a heteronormative master narrative of the life course. Many of this generation, in fact, did their best to conform to this narrative and married members of the opposite sex, often engaging furtively in same-sex behavior (Rosenfeld 2009). Those like Duberman and Helms, however, experienced the internal sense of inferiority while pursuing a life course that challenged heteronormativity.

Engagement with the mental health profession represented a common theme for men of this generation. Following Cushman's (1995) analysis of the role of psychotherapy in American society, men like Duberman and Helms sought psychotherapy to reconcile their senses of self with society's existing narratives. Influenced by reductionist postwar understandings of the dynamics of homosexuality, Duberman encountered psychotherapists committed to changing him to fit with the postwar conception of a heterosexual self. Helms was fortunate to find a psychotherapist more focused on helping him to feel comfortable with his same-sex attraction.

In the accounts of men such as Duberman and Helms, a turning point occurs when the source of pathology is redirected from inside the self to society. That is, internalized homonegativity eventually transforms into a recognition of stigma as an unjust social construct. Duberman (1991b) describes this process:

> I've internalized for so long the social definition of homosexuality as pathology and curse that I'm unable to embrace a different view, though I'd honestly like to…. I've progressed to the point where I can (occasionally) relive the guilt and shift the castigation from me to society. (p. 212)

Duberman's narrative reveals the dilemmas that men of this generation faced to reconcile their desire with the received master narrative of homosexuality as pathology. He describes the "split existence" many of his generation had to live in order to evade the legal and political consequences of fulfilling their desire.

Both Duberman's and Helms' narratives reveal the significance of a coherent gay community and its concurrent social and political institutions emerging in the 1960s as central to resolving their profound internal crises. Helms (1995) describes the psychological impact of his initial discovery of the existence of an underground gay community at a cocktail party in New York:

> Without any preparation or the slightest hint of what was about to happen, I had just walked into a world of men like me, and I simultaneously experienced two overwhelming, diametrically opposed responses: 'My moral universe has just been turned upside down,' and 'Thank God, I'm no longer alone.' The dread of a new fear, the euphoria of an immense relief. (p. 81)

As Helms narrates his realization of an alternative to the confining heteronormative life course that framed his upbringing, his sense of internalized shame and loneliness begins to dissipate. In solidarity and community, he begins to see the possibility for expression of a coherent social identity—a gay identity. In finding the social and cultural space for the practice of such an identity, some men of this generation began to shift their own inner discourse from one of sickness, stigma, and silence to affirmation and belonging.

Two well-known memoirs of gay men who were born one generation after Duberman and Helms and thus coming of age in the 1960s—just before the Stonewall rebellion—reveal important shifts in the course of gay lives. Most centrally, these men's stories appear to focus less on seeking psychiatric treatment for their desire, even as they continued to struggle with self-acceptance. With the rapid social and cultural changes that accompanied the shift from the Eisenhower era to the era of Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Civil Rights Movement, men reaching early adulthood in the 1960s encountered a divergent context of development compared with men born just 10 years earlier. One key marker of distinction centered on the embrace of the identity label "gay" as preferred over the term "homosexual," marking a key discursive shift from same-sex desire as *pathology* to a distinct *identity* and concomitant "lifeway" (Hostetler and Herdt 1998).

A key point of distinction for these two particular memoirs—Arnie Kantrowitz' (1996) *Under the Rainbow* and Andrew Tobias' (1993) *The Best Little Boy in the World*—is that they were both penned shortly after the events they describe. This stands in contrast to the memoirs of both Helms and Duberman, which represent accounts constructed long after events actually unfolded. The memoirs of both Kantrowitz and Tobias are replete with accounts of self-loathing and internalized homonegativity, similar to men of the preceding generation. But these men's stories present what has become an archetypal

master narrative of gay identity (Plummer 1995) from early acknowledgment of desire in childhood through perceptions of contamination or a "spoiled" identity (Goffman 1963) to acceptance and happiness as out gay men. For men who came of age in both the 1950s and 1960s, finding a sense of community and solidarity through the explicit claiming of a gay identity was central to their management of stigma and exclusion.

These memoirs reveal the extent to which same-sex attracted individuals actively resisted—often at great personal risk and psychological cost—policies of marginalization and social exclusion. In fact, all of the life writers reviewed here became active in politics in some way as a form of resistance to subordination. After a life of shame and secrecy about his desire, Arnie Kantrowitz went on to be a prominent political activist in the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), an important organization which completed work begun by its predecessor, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF). This and other organizations were vital to the political activism that emerged in the 1980s in response to the Reagan administration's response to the AIDS crisis. For Kantrowitz and other men who came of age in this era, sexual identity was highly politicized and, as a result, represented the primary aspect of one's social identity. As Kantrowitz (1996) says, "I was a homosexual first and anything else second. I was professionally gay" (p. 114).

Andrew Tobias also became very politically active but immersed himself into formal party politics rather than political advocacy groups like the GAA or GLF. In 1998, he disclosed that he was the author of the 1973 memoir published under the pseudonym of John Reid. Since 1999, he has been treasurer of the Democratic National Committee and has a close personal relationship with the Clintons. Thus, both Tobias and Kantrowitz sought to influence the larger sociopolitical context for same-sex attracted individuals, though through different avenues.

From "Gay Is Good" to the "Gay Plague": Coming of Age in the 1970s and 1980s

The personal and political hardships of men coming of age in the 1950s and 1960s paved the way for a new generation of gay men who came of age in the 1970s as the master narrative of same-sex desire dramatically shifted from one of shame and secrecy to pride and liberation. The successes of the gay rights movement, which culminated in the Stonewall rebellion in June 1969 and subsequently became commemorated through annual Gay Pride celebrations across the USA, ushered in a new cultural context for the realization of same-sex desire. The de facto decriminalization of homosexuality was coupled with the depathologization of homosexuality by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973—a major turning point in the popular and scholarly conception of same-sex desire (see Hammack et al. 2011). This success in removing homosexuality from the DSM was achieved only following a long struggle that reflected the social change accompanying the gay rights era (see Bayer 1987; Cohler and Galatzer-Levy 2000; Kutchins and Kirk 1997; Minton 2001).

The memoirs of men born in the 1950s and coming of age in the 1970s and early 1980s reveal the consequences of this major sociohistorical shift. Their life stories lack a focus on seeking psychiatric help for their desires as adults. Though they do narrate the significant psychological challenges of growing up with same-sex desire, in the midst of the 1960s upheaval of which they were too young to fully be a part, their stories are *redemptive* (McAdams 2004, 2006; McAdams and Bowman 2001) in the sense that coming out, acting upon their desire, and becoming a part of the gay community provide a sense of positive self-worth and identity.

The redemption provided by the political successes of the gay rights movement was, however, short-lived for this generation of gay men. This cohort uniquely experienced both this triumphal moment for the social and legal recognition of gay identity and the tragedy of AIDS (Cohler 2007)—a collective event that threatened to *contaminate* their life stories (McAdams and Bowman 2001). Writing on the eve of the introduction of new retroviral medications that radically transformed the meaning of HIV/AIDS, psychologist Walt Odets (1995) aptly summarized the experience of this generation:

> At the center of the internal homophobia of gay men is a kernel of hopelessness invariably first experienced by the gay adolescent: my life will be impossible because of *what* I am. The [AIDS] epidemic so often feels as if it has brought that hopeless future to adult fruition. Gay sex will be punished, and AIDS is the punishment…. As adolescents caught in confusing webs of sexual drive, hopelessness, and societal prohibition, many men found sex itself the only completely convincing, natural, and conflict-free way of being gay…. Sex has now become as problematic and conflict-ridden as the social complications of being gay. (p. 198)

Men coming of age with the success of the gay rights revolution achieved psychological success in part through the remarkable new extent to which they were actually able to fulfill their sexual desires, with the 1970s characterized by easy accessibility of same-sex partners no longer *as* criminalized or pathologized as before. But the emergence of the AIDS epidemic shattered this brief period of sexual liberation and, as Odets suggests, served as a form of symbolic punishment for the fulfillment of gay desire and identity.

The memoirs of two life writers of this period—poet Mark Doty and performance artist Tim Miller—reflect the significance of the twin cohort-defining events of sexual liberation and AIDS. Doty's story, recounted in *Heaven's Coast* (Doty 1996) and *Firebird* (Doty 1999), begins with the care of his partner dying of AIDS, revealing the centrality of the collective trauma of AIDS for men of this generation. Doty's story is a classic tale of self-discovery characterized by a traumatic childhood with an alcoholic mother. He struggles as a child to accept his same-sex desire while also dealing with the psychological challenges of such a family context. After a suicide attempt in adolescence, he finds solace in the counter-cultural movements of the 1960s and ends up finding self-worth in coming out as a gay man in the 1970s. Thus, the ability to openly assume a gay identity and find a partner was key to redeeming his childhood traumas. Yet Doty's partner Wally tests positive for HIV in the late 1980s, and he found himself caring for Wally in his final days in Provincetown, Massachusetts.

Tim Miller's memoir also reveals the twin feelings of liberation and contamination men of this generation had to endure. Common to the master narrative of growing up gay (Plummer 1995), Miller narrates a childhood framed by shame, fear, and secrecy about desire. In his 1997 memoir, *Shirts and Skin*, Miller describes his realization of a sense of difference while huddled in a football game with other boys. Surrounded by male bodies and recognizing his strong sense of attraction to them, he claims to have realized he was "on the skins' team for life. I could cover up and slip into different shirts and disguises, but underneath it all I would always be there with the other boys who were stripped bare. We would always be recognizable as a different team" (Miller 1997, p. 25). Like same-sex attracted men before him, Miller's narrative is characterized by an internal struggle to reconcile desire with received cultural scripts. He views his desire in terms of his belonging to a whole different "species" of men—one for which silence and secrecy were necessary (Hammack et al. 2011; Savin-Williams 2005).

Unlike men of previous generations, Miller does not seek a professional "cure" for his desire. Rather, he benefits from the ability of prior generations to challenge the received discourse about homosexuality. Rather than viewing his desire in the frame of an "illness," Miller is able to come out and identify as a gay man, acting upon his desires in the newfound liberty of 1970s New York. As a performance artist whose work is in many ways *defined* by his sexuality, Miller is able to achieve a level of coherence in his personal narrative perhaps more challenging for earlier generations of same-sex attracted men. He is able to enact a *sexual lifeway* (Hostetler and Herdt 1998) that is consonant with his desire and that provides him with a sense of meaning and purpose. Like Doty, he finds great success in his career as an openly gay artist. Also like Doty, however, Miller's personal narrative returns to a place of possible contamination with the onset of AIDS.

For Miller, sex represents a symbolic act of union with another man, and his ability to achieve this union undeterred by fear is cut short by the emergence of the "gay plague" in the 1980s. Like Doty, he began to witness the death of countless friends and ex-partners.

> The early reports in the *New York Native* of gay-related immune deficiency heralded a time when doom was underneath every newspaper headline and turned down bed sheet…. How did I manage to live in my 24-year-old body, terrified constantly that I might not make it to twenty-five? (Miller 1997, p. 160)

Miller's account of this period reveals the sense of fear and the equation of sex with death that men of this generation experienced. His experience was further complicated by the fact that a reliable test for HIV did not emerge for some time. As a result, men of Miller's generation, who benefited from the sexual liberation of the 1970s, lived with the mystery of whether they themselves were infected.

> My body had felt so isolated in a paralyzing fear of AIDS. With the bathroom door locked, I would check the lymph nodes in my groin and armpits each morning to see how my immune system was doing. (Miller 1997, p. 203)

Miller, it turns out, remained HIV negative throughout this period, but he nevertheless had to live with the constant fear of potentially being infected.

AIDS did provide a new context for political activism among men of Miller's generation. He and partner Doug Sadownick were involved in the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, the successful campaign to bring public attention to the way in which AIDS patients were stigmatized and unjustly treated in hospitals (see Gould 2009). Thus, Miller found a new sense of meaning and purpose in his political and artistic response to the AIDS epidemic.

Men born in the 1950s and coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s narrate life stories that reveal the cultural and political successes of the previous generation. The extent to which theirs are narratives of *exclusion* is moderated by the ability to psychologically benefit from the success of the gay rights movement. In particular, the decriminalization of gay venues meant that these men were able to practice a gay identity largely free from police harassment or threat of imprisonment. The days of furtive encounters were gone, and men could live and love one another openly in a number of urban enclaves. The depathologization of homosexuality by the APA in 1973 also meant that these

men were less likely to view themselves as mentally ill and thus they did not tend to seek psychiatric treatment for their desire. The "sickness script" (Hammack et al. 2011) was on the wane, replaced by a "species script" (Hammack et al. 2011; Savin-Williams 2005) that provided a distinct sexual lifeway (Hostetler and Herdt 1998) to realize same-sex desire. Unfortunately, this shift in the cultural meaning and political context for same-sex desire was dealt a significant blow by the emergence of AIDS, originally dubbed "gay-related immune deficiency," a discursive move that linked the terrible sickness with this nascent sexual lifeway. Thus, men of this generation had to encounter a whole new level of stigma and social exclusion, all the while managing the psychological consequences of losing countless friends and partners to the epidemic.

Men born in the late 1960s and coming of age toward the end of the 1980s narrate substantively different life stories from men like Doty and Miller. Examples of life writers in this generation include Daniel Mendelsohn and Marc Adams. These men experienced adolescence and the internal navigation of same-sex desire in the midst of cultural upheaval around homosexuality and AIDS. The 1980s political context was characterized by the growth in power and influence of the Religious Right, most of whom explicitly sought to link AIDS with the "sin" of assuming a gay identity and preached about AIDS as "God's punishment" for homosexuality. At the same time, however, the success of the gay rights movement meant that the fulfillment of a gay lifeway was possible for men of this generation—if they were willing to leave their communities of origin for the "gay ghetto" (Levine 1979).

This complex social context for the development of sexual identity meant that men of this generation tended to narrate life stories that reveal a particular degree of experiential compartmentalization—of finely demarcated chapters in their narratives and carefully negotiated boundaries. Daniel Mendelsohn (1999) describes this experience well in his memoir, *The Elusive Embrace*:

> Gay identity…is, in the end, nothing if not structured by paradox and conflict…. You can be two things at once…. You can, some of us have learned, be 'queer' and 'mainstream' at the same time, someone equally committed to your family in the suburbs…and to the pleasures of random encounters with strange men in the city…someone who argues for equal rights but insists on living in an all-gay, all-male enclave; someone who desires love but also loves desire. (p. 35)

Men born in the late 1960s and coming of age in the late 1980s thus embody a cultural shift in the narration of identity and desire when compared with men born only a few years prior. They now needed to negotiate the meaning of identity and desire in a context of great cultural and political ambivalence around homosexuality. On the one hand, a gay lifeway was legitimized and (quietly) recognized. On the other, the discourse on same-sex attraction was by no means one of universal acceptance.

The memoir of Marc Adams (1996), *Preacher's Son*, is particularly illuminating in this regard. Adams grew up literally immersed in the antigay discourse of the Religious Right. He was the son of an extremely conservative preacher and attended Liberty University, a conservative Christian institution founded and run by Jerry Falwell. Falwell openly spoke out against homosexuality at the time and linked AIDS to the fulfillment of same-sex desire. Any sign of homosexuality at Liberty was met with immediate expulsion. It was in this setting that Marc Adams had to navigate his same-sex desire and to reconcile this desire with the notions of homosexuality as contaminating that were heavily promulgated in his social ecology. Not surprisingly, Adams interprets this setting as highly oppressive, reporting that sermons focused on hate rather than love (Cohler 2007). Yet Adams' ability to manage his desires and ultimately come to a self-affirming gay identity and (eventually) satisfying relationship with Todd, a classmate from Liberty, reveals the cultural shift in narrative possibilities for same-sex attracted men. Men of Adams' generation now had ready access to resources from the gay community, such as magazines, and were very much aware of the existence of a gay community. Rather than seeking professional "treatment," as men of prior generations almost instinctively might have, Adams came to accept and embrace his same-sex desire and to assume a gay identity. Because men of his generation came of sexual maturity at a time when practices to prevent the acquisition of HIV, such as condom use, were known, Adams and his peers did not experience AIDS in the same way as men born only a few years prior.

"Virtually Normal": Coming of Age in the 1990s

Men born in the 1970s and coming of age in the 1990s were immediately confronted with the idea of being gay as "virtually normal" (Sullivan 1995) as President Clinton, who assumed office in 1992, pledged to end the ban on gays in the military. He framed the exclusion of gay men and lesbians in the armed services as discriminatory, hence equating the subordination of sexual minorities with the history of exclusion and segregation along the lines of race and ethnicity. In spite of his lack of success in achieving this vision, the fact that the President of the USA so actively sought to challenge the exclusion and subordination of gay men and lesbians marked a clear shift in the politics of sexual identity that defined the experience of this generation of gay men.

Men coming of age in the 1990s also experienced the emergence of the Internet as a vital resource for the understanding and fulfillment of desire and identity. Same-sex attracted youth could now easily connect with one another virtually, and meeting friends and potential sexual partners was now greatly enhanced through this major technological apparatus. The 1990s was not, however, a time exclusively of possibility and celebration for same-sex attracted individuals. The brutal murder of Matthew Shepard in 1998 represented a reminder of the continued context of rejection and violence that could characterize the course of gay and lesbian lives. Studies conducted in this era also revealed that youth experienced harassment, victimization, and mental distress at high rates (e.g., D'Augelli 2002; D'Augelli and Hershberger 1993; D'Augelli et al. 2001; Remafedi et al. 1998). The 1990s thus represented an era of increasing possibility for the realization of same-sex desire, yet stigma, exclusion, and violence continued to represent threats to positive development.

The memoirs of two gay men reveal the possibility and ambivalence of coming of age in the 1990s. Youth activist Kirk Read (2001), growing up in Virginia, narrates in his memoir that when he disclosed to his high school English class that he was gay, the class applauded him for his courage and honesty. The title of his memoir, *How I Learned to Snap*, refers specifically to the advice of an older gay classmate about how to deal with antigay prejudice. Though it certainly retains themes of earlier gay life writers, such as internal struggles about same-sex desire at an early age, Read's memoir is a document of resilience and the increasing ability of same-sex attracted individuals to realize a legitimate sexual lifeway.

The genre of life writing among gay men itself changed dramatically in this era, as the emergence of blogs allowed for simultaneous narration of experience, in contrast to the memoirs of prior generations which were typically written retrospectively. In his blog, “Among the Populace” (Cohler 2007), University of Missouri college student Bryan Phillips reports on his life with Matt, his husband and now legal partner. Bryan describes his life with Matt and a group of straight friends with whom they go to the family's lake property on summer weekends and their life in the apartment that they share with a straight couple who are their best friends. Bryan and Matt spend time in their straight friends' fraternity house, and the whole group goes off to a local sports bar on a weekend evening. Most recently, Matt has begun law school, and Bryan has started graduate studies in English. When finished with their education, the couple plans to buy a condo in a neighborhood with other young adults and to have children.

Bryan's blog postings read like those of any somewhat introspective and very literate young adult with appropriate ambitions and little concern with issues of stigma or sexual minority stress (Meyer 2003).

> What's the big deal about being gay? …It is only one facet of my life, and there are many things in my life that are important.... It's not that Matt and I ‘choose’ not to be involved with the gay community; we choose to be members of…a huge community, sharing, experiencing, and learning about all the differences and similarities between individuals. Rather than flying a rainbow flag that says, ‘Hey, I'm gay,’ I would rather fly a flag that says, ‘Hey, I'm me, and I'm part of it all!’ And on that flag, a smaller rainbow patch is more than welcome. …Being gay is only a part of my life. The gay factor is only a part of who a person is, and it shouldn't be the dominating factor in a person's life.

Bryan's narrative stands in contrast to previous generations of life writers who obtained social and psychological success through a strong identification with the gay community. Writers such as Duberman, Kantrowitz, and Tobias all needed to bifurcate their lives in such a way to realize their same-sex desires. For young men of Bryan's generation, it is not clear that this kind of identity compartmentalization is as necessary (see Savin-Williams 2005). Rather, identifying as gay, while still significant for youth (Russell et al. 2009), is perhaps just one aspect of identity. No longer perceived as a source of significant shame and stigma, men of Bryan's generation may not consistently need to accentuate this aspect of their identity over others and may not require the kind of separation from the straight community prior generations seemed to benefit from.

Bryan's narrative account is consistent with Westrate and McLean's (2010) report that, in contrast to the personal accounts of earlier generations of gay men, personal accounts of the present cohort of same-sex attracted men is less explicitly concerned with sexual identity than with becoming a citizen in the larger society. This phenomenon is well reflected in the title of Bryan's personal account that stresses his participation “among the populace,” rather than as living separately from his heterosexual counterparts. Westrate and McLean (2010) note that the narrative of the present generation of gay men emphasizes emancipation (Cohler and Hammack 2007). They are concerned, however, that this narrative may silence the narratives of older cohorts, may reduce the pluralism of lesbian and gay voices in the community, and may hasten the end of a distinct gay culture.

While there is still much stigma and discrimination that both young people and adults expressing same-sex attraction experience (e.g., Frost and Bastone 2008; Frost and Meyer 2009; Meyer 2003), a combination of state and

federal statutes protecting the civil rights of same-sex attracted men and women (Mucciaroni 2008) and increased media visibility (Gross 2002; Walters 2003) has contributed to the "normalization" of a sexual minority lifeway. The narrative consequences of shifting sociopolitical and cultural circumstances are far from settled, as researchers continue to debate the interpretive emphasis on risk and resilience and the centrality of same-sex attraction to identity formation (e.g., Gray 2009; Martin and D'Augelli 2009; Russell et al. 2009; Savin-Williams 2005; Seidman 2002).

Summary: Narrating Life Stories "from Margin to Center"

A life course perspective on sexual identity development is particularly valuable because it reveals the intimate connection among cultural discourse, social policy, and personal narratives. By taking history and membership in a generation cohort seriously, the life course approach offers a rich, dynamic paradigmatic lens through which to consider the relation between context and lived experience (Hammack 2005). Rather than consider sexual identity development as a static or "essential" process, with clearly delineated stages, a life course approach views identity and desire as socially situated and politically embedded. The analysis of personal narratives provides access to the meaning individuals make as they navigate the politics of marginalization, subordination, and exclusion.

Our review of the memoirs of gay men in the USA of distinct generation cohorts in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries reveals the value of a life course approach to the study of social exclusion based on sexual identity and desire. The content of these personal narratives reveals their connection to competing master narratives of same-sex attraction over the course of the late twentieth century. These memoirs support characterization of a change over this postwar period from a master narrative of *struggle and success* to *emancipation* (Cohler and Hammack 2007; see also Hammack and Cohler 2009; Hammack et al. 2009; Westrate and McLean 2010). Men of earlier cohorts narrate accounts of significant struggle in the management and acceptance of same-sex desire. But their life stories assume a *redemptive* form (McAdams 2006) in their ability to realize success by "becoming gay" (Cohler and Hammack 2006). That is, to the extent that they are able to "come out" and assume a gay identity and concomitant sexual lifeway (Hostetler and Herdt 1998), these men narrate life stories characterized by social and psychological success. They avoid the dangers of narrative *contamination* by repositioning their stories from the shadows of subordination to a place of positively affirmed identity. This shift, which was common to other identity-based political movements of the twentieth century (Bernstein 2005), represents a reclamation of stigma from a place of *discreditability* (Goffman 1963) to legitimate "normality" (Cohler and Hammack 2007).

Memoirs such as those of Martin Duberman, Arnie Kantrowitz, and Andrew Tobias all reveal a pattern of struggle and success, realized through the construction of a "resistance" narrative (Fivush 2010) that challenges the heteronormative narrative of the life course. Central to this resistance narrative is the assumption of a gay sexual lifeway, with its accompanying participation in a community of shared social practice (Cohler and Hammack 2006). The narratives of men in these generations are also characterized by immersion into the world of political activism, a cohort-defining pattern that would pave the way for a new cultural and political context for subsequent generations. However, the political successes of these generations experienced a major setback with the emergence of the AIDS epidemic and its social and political consequences. Nevertheless, a pattern of narrative shift toward emancipatory stories clearly emerged for men born in the 1970s and coming of age in the 1990s, at a time when same-sex desire was increasingly considered "virtually normal" (Sullivan 1995). In this way, there is a discursive shift in the framing of same-sex desire, behavior, and identity "from margin to center" (hooks 1984)—an attempt to gain power through voice, by constructing a coherent resistance narrative to challenge the hegemony of compulsory heterosexuality (Fivush 2010; Rich 1980). In the next section, we call upon data from a study of the personal narratives of same-sex attracted youth conducted in 2007–2008 to examine the way in which contemporary youth narrate desire and exclusion and to problematize the linearity of this account of narrative identity development.

The Politics of/Beyond Identity: Narratives of Contemporary Youth

In 2005, leading scholar of same-sex attracted youth Ritch C. Savin-Williams argued that scholarship on this population failed to reflect the resilience and shifting identity development processes of youth (see also Savin-Williams 2001a, b). Most studies, he argued, relied on self-identifying youth and tended to assume an "at-risk" script for same-sex attracted youth, thus focusing on factors like victimization, psychopathology, and mental distress. In a provocative thesis, he suggests that, in contrast to the story constructed by the vast number of studies focusing on these negative issues, most contemporary same-sex attracted youth are doing well, even perhaps (in the mold of Bryan) "post-gay" (Savin-Williams 2005).

Our response to this thesis was to suggest that sexual identity development is best conceived as a process of *narrative engagement*—of confronting multiple master

storylines about the nature and meaning of a particular lifeway—and that contemporary youth are confronted with multiple master narratives of what it means to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual (Cohler and Hammack 2007). The empirical project, then, seems to be interrogating the relation between these master narratives—these cultural scripts accessible in artifacts such as media, educational materials, and political rhetoric—and the personal narratives of youth (see Hammack 2008).

In this section, we report new data from one attempt to empirically address this link. In a study of the narratives of same-sex attracted youth (Hammack et al. 2009), we invited youth to discuss their processes of sexual identity development, their experiences with stigma and discrimination based on sexual desire or identity, and their views on public policy issues related to same-sex sexuality. It is important to note that our study included participants who assumed a range of sexual identity labels, including gay, lesbian, straight, mostly straight, and queer. The only criterion for inclusion in the research was some level of same-sex desire over the life course (see Hammack et al. 2009 for a complete description of the participants and procedure). This selection process allowed us to obtain a rich and diverse sample of contemporary same-sex attracted youth. We view this study as the first in a series that seeks to address the link between politics and the management of desire among contemporary same-sex attracted youth.

Participants underwent an extensive interview in which they were first asked to narrate their life stories, without any specific reference to sexuality. McAdams' (1995) Life Story Interview was administered in this part of the study. Participants were then asked a series of questions related to sexual desire, behavior, and identity. The format of the interview was semi-structured, which allowed for interviewers to ask clarifying and elaborating questions. Participants were asked specific questions about experiences with discrimination based on sexual desire, behavior, or identity, as well as their views on public policy issues related to sexuality. All interviews were conducted by two interviewers (one male, one female), lasted from 1.5 to 3.5 h, and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Consistent with our holistic, interpretive approach to the analysis of these narrative data (Tappan 1997), we will present three brief case profiles from this study to provide a window into the way in which contemporary youth navigate issues of exclusion and public policy through personal narrative construction. It is noteworthy that our data were collected in California in 2007–2008, following the landmark State Supreme Court decision that allowed same-sex couples to marry, but just prior to the passage of Proposition 8, which struck down this decision and returned to a policy of marriage exclusion for same-sex couples. Our selection of these three cases is meant to reflect larger patterns that emerged in our analyses of the narrative data, with these stories serving as exemplars of prototypical patterns (see Rosenwald 1988).

"I Always Felt That I Was Different": Elsa's[1] Story

Narrative approaches to the study of sexual identity development not only provide access to the meaning same-sex attracted individuals make of desire and identity but they also provide voice to individuals whose experiences have been all too often silenced (Fivush 2004a, b, 2010; Sampson 1993). Elsa's story represents a good example of the way in which the emphasis on a master narrative of gay and lesbian identity development that emerged over the course of the twentieth century fails to capture the complexity of gender and sexual identity diversity (Cohler and Hammack 2007). Contemporary youth are actively interrogating this master narrative as they construct life stories that challenge the received taxonomy of identity (Cohler and Hammack 2007; Hammack and Cohler 2009; Hammack et al. 2009).

Elsa is a 19-year-old from a small city in northern California she describes as "not safe." Her current life story reveals an active process of negotiation with gender and sexual identity labels.

> I think I put down 'lesbian' on the [eligibility] survey. I think [my preferred identity label] is actually queer. Um, I guess I like the identity of lesbian in the fact that it reflects that I like women, but I don't particularly identify with the word. I went through a phase, (laughs) 'phase' I guess, last year where, um, I did. When I was coming out, I very much identified with the word. Um, and I don't know if that is because I needed some stability or what. But, um, I think just the general term like 'queer' or 'gay,' like, um, is more what I identify as because it reflects, probably because it reflects a community more than, um, such a strict box, I guess. …And, yeah, I mean it reflects my gender, I guess, and my sexuality at the same time.

Elsa is in an active process of identity construction at age 19, clearly engaging with the taxonomy of gender and sexual identity she has inherited. In the chronology of her narrative, however, this struggle over identification is not explicitly addressed until late in our interview. Elsa's present life story is characterized by an active attempt to create coherence in the context of her lived experience of feeling outside of society's narrow conceptions of gender and sexuality.

[1] Names of participants in this study are pseudonyms.

The challenge Elsa experiences to integrate her self-understanding of gender and sexual identity is apparent in the current construction of her life story. Her story begins without an explicit focus on gender and sexuality but rather with the vague narration of mental distress as a young child and a strained relationship with her mother, the source of which Elsa initially purports to not understand. Elsa reports feeling "depressed from about the third grade on," including feeling suicidal at a young age. She says, "I always felt that I was different." And though she initially does not explicitly attribute her psychological struggles to her feelings of "difference" regarding gender and sexual identity, her narrative eventually centers precisely on the centrality of this experience. Her reluctance to initially discuss these issues outright suggests the struggles she currently experiences to construct a coherent life story narrative in which gender and sexuality are at the foreground.

Though her narrative is characterized by an ongoing quest for self-discovery and understanding, Elsa's story in its current form is contaminated by her memory of rejection and exclusion, particularly from her mother. In initially discussing her family as part of her life story interview, she says, "I could never do the right thing to satisfy them." The rejection of her mother is rooted in Elsa's early signs of gender and sexual identity exploration. Elsa describes a salient memory of her mother's rejection which centered on Elsa's preferred attire in middle school.

> I, um, always wore, I guess, baggy clothes, and that kind of thing. And then when I went into seventh grade, my mom said that I needed, um, nicer clothes. And, so we got the, the um, you know, just more fitted, girl-cut clothes, um, uh, and that, I guess, was the first real controlling thing, I guess. …I wasn't comfortable in those clothes, um, at all. …I've always been mistaken for a boy, so it was a big thing to like try and go shopping in like the boys' section or anything. Like, it was, and sometimes it is still, um, a big deal and that kind of thing.

Approximately 40 min into our life story interview (which lasted approximately 3 h), Elsa began to feel comfortable explicitly discussing her feelings of gender and sexual identity "difference." Until this point in the interview, she had been vague and evasive, suggesting initially that she did not know why she struggled with depression earlier in life or had a strained relationship with her mother.

At age 19, Elsa's current interpretation of her struggles around gender and sexual identity center on the injustice of society's narrow conceptions of these constructs.

> …I knew that society prescribed for me to go into female bathrooms, and that is what I was expected to do…, and that sometimes that would be uncomfortable because I would get mistaken for a boy in there, but, um, that those kind of clothes and going to that, that particular bathroom and that kind of thing, that was what was expected. And, um, I guess I never really identified with either gender inside. …Um, but, and then I guess recently, just regarding gender, um, I've been kind of in limbo I guess because I wouldn't say that I identify as either one. Still, but, um, recently, um, I've been wondering if, you know, I wouldn't be happier, well, I think I might be happy if I looked more like a guy, meaning physically, like, I didn't ever particularly like when I got breasts and that kind of thing. I don't particularly want a penis. I don't think. But I'm not really sure. I guess right now I am kind of playing with the idea of transgender, being transgendered but, uh, I, or a third gender, or something. Well, I guess I have been playing with third gender, but I don't know. I guess, I always, I guess throughout the time where it was kind of ambiguous, I always just thought, you know, 'I am me.' And, that was, you know, enough?

At the time of narrating her life story, Elsa is in an active state of identity exploration in which she is considering the possibility that she might explicitly identify as transgender. As part of this exploration, she is considering the link between her sense of self and her physical self-presentation in terms of gender. She explicitly locates the challenge of her own narrative identity development not within any kind of personal "deficit," as earlier cultural scripts around gender and sexual identity might have suggested (Hammack et al. 2011; Westrate and McLean 2010). Rather, she locates the nature of her challenges in society itself, arguing that society's conceptions of gender identity are narrow, limiting, and do not speak to the full range of lived experience. In her own words, Elsa says, "I don't think society's way of setting up things has reflected me very well, or made me very comfortable anyway.…When society puts such parameters, I guess you have to figure out where you fit."

In Elsa's story, concern over gender identity begins at a much earlier age than sexual identity, given her early experiences with gender misrecognition and her parents' response to those incidents. Elsa reports not thinking about her sexual desire and identity until the seventh grade.

> I remember from the very beginning with homosexuality, thinking you know 'What if I am?' [I remember] going over to a girl's birthday party or something with a group of girls, and they are like, 'Who do you like?' And my answers to that were always like, 'Well, I don't know, what does that feel like?' And, I was like, 'I don't think I like any

> boys'…. And then, um, eighth grade summer camp I met the first person who was my age who identified as bi, uh, first queer person that I met who was my age and who I knew, um, like on a friend-friend basis. And she was awesome, and I really liked her.

Elsa narrates a sequence of internal negotiations about the meaning of her sexual desire, eventually coming to identify as "gay" late in high school.

> It wasn't until, I guess, um, I realized that I wanted to kiss [a girl] that I was like, 'Oh, ha ha ha, okay.' But then I was like, 'No, it's just her. She's the only one.' Like, I was like, 'Well, I haven't felt like this about anyone before.' And I was like, 'No, no, it's just her.' Um, then I guess senior year, um, first day of senior year, I talked to the girl who had come out in tenth grade—because by this time she was one of my really good friends—and was like, you know, 'Hey, I think I might be gay,' and she was like, 'Congrats!' and, like, gave me a hug.

In spite of reporting that she had never experienced sexual attraction to boys, Elsa initially understands her same-sex desire in high school as an exceptional, person-specific phenomenon (Diamond 2008). As her internal negotiation about sexual identity labels evolves, however, she begins to identify as "gay," viewing that label as consonant with her desire (Hammack 2005).

At the time of narrating her current life story, Elsa is very close to the process of coming out as non-heterosexual. She reports that her first year of college (1 year prior to our interview) was her time of "public coming out" and that her goal for the year has been "building visibility." She came out as gay to her parents the summer between her first and second year of college, which was an "intense" but "positive" experience in that her parents had been quite accepting. Currently, though, Elsa continues to explore identity labels, recognizing her inability to "fit" within society's narrow gender and sexual identity categories.

> I guess, I am more, I think, well, if people were referring to me they would call me lesbian, and if I am referring to myself in a more formal context, I guess I would refer to myself as a lesbian. But, um, I would closer identify with queer, and, um, that is, and again lesbian is probably what I would be known as, what I came out as. Um, that signifying to most people that it's at least not very likely that I'm going to be dating men.

In this excerpt, Elsa reveals the extent to which her own process of identification is largely a matter of her own social signification. That is, her identity label represents a social marker that largely serves to indicate the primary object of her sexual desire—in her case, not men. Yet this excerpt also reveals the way in which Elsa focuses on herself as a gender and sexual identity *object*, more concerned with what label others will ascribe to her than to asserting a gender or sexual identity label that resonates with her own internal sense of self. This emphasis on objectification might be linked to the trauma of her gender misrecognition as a child and the subsequent focus on how others perceive her.

A central recurring theme in Elsa's current narrative of identity negotiation is the framing of her struggles in terms of the limits of societal categorizations of identity and desire.

> Yeah, society is kind of the more, the more 'ah' thing right now. …'Queer's here,' 'Gay is okay,' and society has been more portrayed as a menace towards me, you know, since I've come to that realization.

This focus on society's limitations has led Elsa to view the silence around issues of gender diversity and transgender identity as politically problematic, and she positions her current goal to raise visibility for issues of gender and sexual identity diversity, thus finding in her life story a sense of meaning and political purpose.

Elsa's story offers an important corrective to the historic silence around narratives of gender and sexual identity diversity, even within the mainstream gay and lesbian community. Because the master narrative of sexual minority identity has focused narrowly on the experience of gay men and lesbians (primarily white, middle and upper-middle class from the USA), youth like Elsa often lack the discursive resources to make meaning of desire and identity. Thus, the struggles around issues of coherence in her present narrative can be linked to the historic silence of narratives that speak to her experience (Fivush 2010; Westrate and McLean 2010). Her story speaks directly to a common phenomenon in the current generation of same-sex attracted youth to challenge and resist the received gender and sexual identity taxonomy (Savin-Williams 2005), yet her ability to locate the source of this struggle in society speaks to an emancipatory movement regarding the rigidity of this taxonomy (Hostetler and Herdt 1998). In fact, Elsa's narrative may speak more to the destabilization of narrative itself, as suggested by postmodern theorists of identity (e.g., Gergen 1991), her sense of self-fragmented by the proliferation of competing discourses.

"Rocks Keep Being Thrown, But I Keep Walking": Karen's Story

While Elsa's story reveals the ways in which contemporary youth engage with a received sexual taxonomy and resist the press to conform to restrictive categories of identity and

desire, the stories of other contemporary youth reveal the continued relevance of a master narrative of gay and lesbian identity constructed in the gay civil rights era. In other words, rather than viewing a narrative of *emancipation* from a traditional taxonomy as a new dominant discourse to which youth are exposed, it is probably more accurate to consider the discursive setting of contemporary desire and identity negotiation as *polyphonic* (Bakhtin 1984; Hammack and Cohler 2009). That is, master narratives do not *replace* one another but rather form a cumulative "web of discourse" to which individuals have access.

Narrated at age 21, Karen's life story blends discourses as it assumes a redemptive form in the tradition of the master narrative of struggle and success for same-sex attracted youth, while it simultaneously integrates a critical stance toward the sexual identity taxonomy and the idea that same-sex attraction diverges from "normality" (Cohler and Hammack 2007). Like Elsa, Karen considered herself something of a "tomboy" at an early age but was never misidentified as male. Karen was extremely active in sports and "always teased as not being a girl, but I took it as, like, a total compliment, cause I was always picked before the guys." Though she characterizes her family situation as very unstable growing up (with her parents ultimately divorcing), none of this instability appears to be related to Karen's gender or sexual identity.

Like Elsa, most of Karen's friendships growing up were with boys. She reports having considerable difficulty forming friendships with other girls, claiming to dislike what she perceives as the "passive aggressive" approach of girls to solving conflicts. She identifies more with what she claims is a "direct" style more common among boys.

Karen claims to have not thought explicitly about her same-sex attractions until college, though she recalls in hindsight a distinct moment playing basketball in elementary school and thinking, "I'm probably gonna be gay, but I'll deal with it in like 10 years." She describes furtively purchasing and reading issues of *The Advocate* and *Curve Magazine* in high school, stashing them under her mattress. She acknowledges needing to resolve her own sense of internalized homonegativity in high school, citing "how society influences you before you realize it influences you."

Speaking specifically about sexual identity labels, Karen reveals the extent to which contemporary youth engage with a number of discourses on taxonomies of sexual identity.

> It's, like, an everyday changing concept. Um, I still like a label, but I like to be flexible within a label, I guess. …I'm not really good with the word 'queer.' Um, I mean I'm getting more used to it, I think. 'Homosexual' sounds like I'm, like, a medical case. I'm okay with 'gay.' I'm pretty good with 'gay,' and I go up and down with 'lesbian.' …['Lesbian'] just sounds like a disease sometimes. …The only problem with the word 'gay' is that, like, it's a male stereotyped term….

Though she recognizes faults with all the possible terms she could use to identify herself, Karen is most comfortable with the label "gay" because it clearly positions her as someone with same-sex desire. She identifies the historical legacy of the "sickness" script that framed the term "homosexual" (Hammack et al. 2011), and she is uncomfortable with the increasingly popular, inclusive term "queer." She states that too many opposite-sex attracted individuals who want to claim themselves as "allies" are using the term "queer," which she thinks is problematic because they do not have same-sex desire.

Karen thus currently identifies as "gay" and reports a strong feeling of inclusion in the gay and lesbian community. She is about to spend her summer as an intern at the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation and is highly involved in the "queer community" on her college campus. She describes forming an official group on her campus that focuses on social networking among lesbians. The focus of the group, she makes clear, is on affirmation and a positive stance toward sexual identity. She says, "Like, my group is totally, like, a social group. It's not, like, 'Oh God, I'm afraid to be gay' group, like, 'What do I do? Like, my mom's gonna kill me.' I'm just, like, no, let's, like, have fun."

While on the one hand Karen's narrative echoes the classic master narrative of struggle and success through coming out that characterizes previous generations of same-sex attracted youth (Cohler and Hammack 2007), her narrative does challenge the "species script" (Hammack et al. 2011; Savin-Williams 2005) of gay and lesbian youth as forming a monolithic category of person. In fact, Karen's social activism in the queer community on her campus is focused on providing a specific alternative space for affirmation and belonging, in contrast to what she perceives as a space emphasizing the struggles of being gay or lesbian.

> I don't wanna go to groups that's, like, … 'How are you gonna tell your mom you're gay?' …Like, it's really depressing for me to be in stuff like that, and I think it's really unhealthy to be in an environment like that because then I start freaking out that I'm so different, when I don't feel that different. At least that's my approach to it, and, like, if it helps other people, like, congratulations for them….

Karen's story is representative of a new generation of same-sex attracted youth who explicitly reject the notion of a gay or lesbian identity as problematic or indicative of suffering

(Savin-Williams 2005). Rather, they seek to construct a space of affirmation that questions the very notion of same-sex desire as unusual or abnormal. Stories like Karen's are infused with a pervasive discourse of resilience, defiantly resisting attempts at contamination through an explicit focus on suffering caused by same-sex desire.

When asked specifically about the theme of her life story, Karen says, "rocks keep being thrown, but I keep walking," revealing the overall redemptive form and tone of her narrative. "You know, just roll with the punches," she says. Coming to terms with her same-sex desire and assuming a gay lifeway was, for Karen, a surmountable task in life. She says,

> …I've gotten to the point where, like, I just don't, I don't think [being gay is] a big deal anymore. …Why the hell do I have to come out when it's just so natural to me? …I've gotten to that point of just, like, the only goddamn freakin' difference in my life is, like, that I picture, like, sleeping with a woman. …I don't feel like it's so different….

Karen's account is consistent with Savin-Williams' (2005) claim that contemporary same-sex attracted youth are increasingly unconcerned with their desire as "different" from their opposite-sex attracted peers. In other words, they are actively challenging the notion of "normality" (Cohler and Hammack 2007), suggesting that their desires are perhaps equally normative. This discursive shift is distinct from the "virtually normal" narrative apparent in memoirs of gay men growing up in the 1990s in that it seeks to position same-sex attraction in a place of complete parity with opposite-sex attraction.

Karen's desire to position her desire and identity in a place of normality on par with her straight peers is particularly apparent in her discussion of same-sex marriage in her current life story.

> I hate the title 'Gay Marriage'—like, like, do you believe in 'gay marriage'? Be, like, do you believe in 'marriage'? …It's so weird, like, *gay* marriage. It's just, like, call it fucking marriage. Like, I don't need, like, another, like, homosexual, like, put me off in, like, my corner….

Karen's sentiments on same-sex marriage suggest a resistance to the "species" script about gay identity (Hammack et al. 2011; Savin-Williams 2005)—that being gay or lesbian presents a radically distinct life course compared with heterosexuals. It is precisely this script which many have argued represents the legacy of a disease model of same-sex desire inherited from the nineteenth century discourse on sexuality (Foucault 1978).

Karen's personal narrative reveals the way in which contemporary same-sex attracted youth engage with a polyphonic discourse on the meaning of desire and identity. While on the one hand she is comfortable assuming a gay identity and has immersed herself into the gay and lesbian social and political community, she resists a "minoritizing" discourse on identity and seeks instead full acceptance of the normality of same-sex desire and relationships. In this way, her narrative illustrates an active, ongoing process of narrative engagement as she seeks to construct a sense of meaning and purpose within her historical and cultural surround (Hammack 2005; Hammack and Cohler 2009).

"I'm Becoming More Comfortable with It": Michael's Story

Karen's life story at age 21 reveals the continued relevance of both a "struggle and success" script and an "emancipation" script of gay youth (Cohler and Hammack 2007). On the one hand, the assumption of a gay identity is central for Karen; immersion into the gay and lesbian community has provided her with a strong sense of purpose and a unity to her life story that is not present in Elsa's story. On the other hand, Karen views her gay identity as entirely "normal." She wants to avoid the "species" script of gay identity—that gay people constitute an entirely distinct group from their heterosexual peers (Savin-Williams 2005). Michael's story reveals that some contemporary youth continue to see their lifeways as critically distinct from heterosexual peers and even, in fact, embrace a species script of identity.

Michael is a 19-year-old white man who currently identifies as gay. He reports significant struggle over the course of his life in coming to terms with his same-sex desire, mainly because of lack of exposure to diversity in sexual lifeways as a child and adolescent. He has vivid memories, as a result, of the few instances in which he saw two men kissing or holding hands in public places. These were salient memories for Michael in which he realized that there were other men who shared his desire. Thus, in spite of the vast resources potentially available to him to feel a relative sense of normality (e.g., through the Internet), Michael felt a sense of loneliness regarding his desire.

Michael's life story fits nicely with our notion of a master gay narrative of "struggle and success" that characterized the first generation of research on same-sex attracted youth (Cohler and Hammack 2007). His is a redemptive life narrative in which coming out as gay has provided Michael with a sense of unity and purpose lacking during his childhood and adolescence, when he struggled to make meaning of his desires. He reports coming out as gay at the start of college (approximately 18 months prior to our interview) and having just ended an 8-month relationship with another man. The context of ending his relationship involved his need to devote considerable time to a gay-themed performance, which he identified as important for

his own positive identity development. He says, "It definitely did help me to become more comfortable with myself as a gay person. And I think I needed that more than I need one specific relationship."

Michael reports that his strong preference for sex with men over women makes the identity label "gay" resonant. He claims to have gone through a brief period of identifying to others as "bisexual," even though he says he knew inside that his feelings were exclusively for other men. He reports significant struggle in the acceptance of his same-sex desire.

> I think I'm becoming more comfortable with it, but I definitely think I have a lot more to go through with myself before I can really be…a proud member of [the gay] community. …I think I just have to get through the acceptance phase still.

Michael's personal narrative is in an active state of self-discovery, but it is clear that his identification as gay and his immersion into the gay and lesbian community has provided him with a sense of meaning and a set of shared social practices.

Interestingly, Michael ends his life story with expressions of uncertainty about aging and the gay life course. He says,

> I think the biggest thing for me right now is thinking about when I'm older, and still gay. Because I, there's not really any exposure to old gay people. I don't know, like, when you see gay, gays in the media or anything, it's always [young people]. …It's like, gay is new, being out is new, so like, the oldest people that are out are like, 45 because before then people weren't out. …So, I'm still trying to think through my head how it's going to be when I'm 80 or so and what it's going to be like, whether I'm gonna be with a partner or married or in a relationship. …I definitely want to get more exposure to… the community and the, the life of a, a homosexual person, …so I have an idea of what [to expect].

Michael's narrative reveals the impact of the history of silence and social exclusion, as well as the devastating impact of AIDS on the number of out gay men in their middle age and beyond, on an individual life story of a young man coming to terms with his same-sex desire. Even as he has assumed a gay lifeway and is becoming increasingly comfortable with his identity, the nature of the gay life course remains a mystery. As he notes, it is the silence in mainstream representations, such as the media, that creates this mystery and complicates the narratives of same-sex attracted youth like Michael. With little idea of what the future holds for him, he can only imagine a possible life course.

Michael's story at age 19 reveals the way in which contemporary same-sex attracted youth continue to find a sense of meaning, purpose, and voice in the assumption of a distinct gay lifeway, modeled upon the classic master narrative of struggle and success (Cohler and Hammack 2007). Unlike both Elsa and Karen, Michael finds a high degree of consonance between his desires and a gay identity label, perhaps revealing the way in which the sexual taxonomy has historically benefited male desire (Diamond 2008; Hammack 2005). Importantly, though, Michael has begun a path of meaningful social practice in the gay community that will anchor his evolving life course (Cohler and Galatzer-Levy 2000; Cohler and Hammack 2006). That he struggles to imagine a possible future for this life course speaks to the continued pervasiveness of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980) and the historic silence around non-heterosexual lifeways (Cohler and Galatzer-Levy 2000; Loughery 1998; Westrate and McLean 2010).

Conclusion: History, Identity, and the Endurance of Exclusion

In his classic treatise on the history of sexuality, social philosopher Michel Foucault (1978) argues that discourses on sex and sexuality exist in a sphere of power relations and the social regulation of desire. He suggests that discourses on sex are intimately linked to economic and political utility and are realized in law. As he argues, "There were two great systems conceived by the West for governing sex: the law of marriage and the order of desires" (pp. 39–40). It is precisely within this historical understanding of the relation between discourse and subjectivity that the idea of "the homosexual" as a distinct character emerged—first as an "invert" (e.g., Ellis 1960), later as a legitimate "minority" (D'Emilio 1983; Meyer 1995, 2003).

In this paper, we have argued for an approach to the study of same-sex desire and identity that emphasizes the historical grounding of lived experience and that accesses the meaning-making process through narrative. We believe that this approach is particularly useful for psychologists interested in issues of social justice and public policy, for it provides evidence of the psychological consequences of exclusion and subordination beyond the conventional focus on "mental health" (Frost and Ouellette 2004; Kitzinger and Wilkinson 2004). In other words, narrative data reveal the multiple consequences of exclusion and the social regulation of desire on individual meaning-making, beyond a focus on psychopathology or behavioral "risk." In this way, they provide evidence of particular import to public policy discussions, such as those on same-sex marriage.

The narrative approach not only speaks to concerns about the link between sexual subjectivity and public policy; it also addresses an important theoretical concern to social scientists to which Foucault's (1978) analysis speaks. At its core, a narrative approach is concerned with the relationship between discourse at the cultural level and the use of language to organize memory, thought, and feeling at the individual level (Fivush 2010; Hammack 2008). That is, narrative research has the potential to link persons and settings through a multi-level analysis of personal and collective meaning.

The interpretive analyses we presented in this paper from two distinct sources of data—the written memoirs of five generations of gay men in the USA and the narrated life stories of contemporary same-sex attracted youth—were intended to illustrate the vitality of a narrative approach to the study of sexual lives. We sought to link historical and political events, such as the gay rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, with personal narratives of identity development. In considering the life stories of contemporary youth, we sought to illustrate narrative identity development as a process of *engagement* with a polyphonic web of discourse about desire and identity to which individuals now have access (Hammack and Cohler 2009).

Our narrative data reveal the psychological consequences of public policies that explicitly prohibit, marginalize, and exclude individuals with same-sex desire. For example, the memoirs of gay men coming of age before the decriminalization and depathologization of same-sex behavior in the early 1970s reveal the internal struggle over self-acceptance and the challenges of constructing a coherent personal narrative. Policy shifts toward greater recognition and the discursive shift of same-sex desire from "sickness" to indicative of a "species-being" (Foucault 1978; Hammack et al. 2011) created new narrative possibilities for same-sex attracted individuals, as the memoirs of gay men who came of age in the 1980s and 1990s reveal. Yet the narratives of contemporary youth reveal the endurance of master narratives that stigmatize and subordinate same-sex attracted individuals as they seek to reconcile their desire with policies of exclusion in the realm of marriage, military service, and adoption. In our view, then, policy is intimately linked to master narratives intended to regulate and control the body (Butler 1990; Foucault 1978), and personal narratives importantly reveal the process individuals undergo as they navigate polyphonic discourses of identity and desire.

It is important to acknowledge that the scope of data we considered in this paper is narrow. For example, our analysis of memoirs is limited to white gay men in the USA, though of course there are important female life writers (e.g. Blum 2001; Faderman 2004; Welles 2001), life writers of color (e.g., González 2006; Harris 2004; Lorde 1982), and transgender life writers (e.g., Bornstein 1995; Boylan 2003; McCloskey 2000; Werther 2008) whose stories call for analysis. Our analysis of the life stories of contemporary youth is limited to a convenience sample of college students in California. By no means do we claim that either of these sources of data provides a "representative" sample of same-sex attracted individuals—a task that is largely considered impossible to obtain (Savin-Williams 2005). Nonetheless, by focusing in the life story study on youth with any level of same-sex desire, rather than solely youth who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual, we have responded to calls for greater inclusion of the range of desire in studies of same-sex attraction (e.g., Savin-Williams 2001a).

Our intent in this paper, however, was not to present representative data on the experience of same-sex attraction or the consequences of exclusion. Rather, we sought to illustrate the potential of a particular theoretical and methodological approach to the study of same-sex attracted individuals—an approach that considers the consequences of history and politics on lived experience and the active management of identity and desire. Consistent with other narrative psychologists (e.g., McAdams 2001), it is our view that individuals find a sense of meaning, purpose, unity, and integrity in the construction of a coherent life story. The political and legal regulation of desire and identity possesses profound implications for the construction of a coherent life narrative, as the illustrative data we presented in this paper suggest.

The primary way in which same-sex attracted individuals in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have managed the politics of desire and identity has been to construct narratives of resistance. As Fivush (2010) notes, resistance narratives challenge "the explanations and moral imperatives imposed by the dominant narrative" (p. 90)—in this case, the dominant narrative of a heteronormative life course. The key component of this resistance narrative, whether it is framed according to the redemptive model of "struggle and success" or the confrontational model of "emancipation" from a received sexual taxonomy (Cohler and Hammack 2007), is the individual's critical stance toward received master narratives of identity and the life course. For example, individuals embracing the struggle and success storyline of gay and lesbian identity development undergo a process of shifting the "problem" of desire and identity from *within* to *society* itself. The struggle and success storyline is thus a resistance narrative to the narrative of sickness and silence that dominated the nineteenth and twentieth century discourse on same-sex desire (see Hammack et al. 2011). Yet a new resistance narrative, evident in the life stories of youth like Elsa, goes

further in its challenge of socially constructed notions of gender and sexual identity.

Regardless of the proliferation of discourse on same-sex desire and identity in the twenty-first century, a common theme unites the narratives of individuals belonging to multiple generation cohorts: the need to manage the stigma inherent in any deviation from a regime of compulsory heterosexuality and gender binary (Butler 1990; Rich 1980). Thus, both Martin Duberman, born in the 1930s and coming of age before the era of gay civil rights, and Elsa, born in the late 1980s and coming of age in the 2000s, must negotiate received discourses that privilege heterosexuality and rigid conceptions of gender as "normal." That the discursive resources they possess and the political contexts they inhabit diverge considerably is unquestionable. Yet what remains central to their social and psychological development is the enduring legacy of exclusion and subordination on the basis of desire. While a life course analysis suggests formidable changes in the narrative possibilities of same-sex attracted individuals, that this core experience remains speaks to the injustice of a narrow taxonomy of identity and desire for understanding the complete range of human experience and the diversity of human development.

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