

Women and the Historical Record of Psychology: Archival Collection, Curation, and  
Interpretation

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Good afternoon everyone. Thank you so much for being here and thanks to our hosts for bringing all of us together today. I'm really glad to be here and to have the opportunity to join with all of you in celebrating the New View Campaign.

As a historian, a feminist, and as someone who works intimately with the historical record on a daily basis, I am so very happy that this unique and powerful project, The New View Campaign, has been so well documented and will be preserved digitally as well as physically here in Bloomington at the Kinsey Institute. It can be quite rare that people who have the determination and the skill to plan and execute an important project also have the forethought to preserve that project. Having the NVC, its activities, its spirit, and its philosophy available 100 years from now is important. It is important for contemporary stories about women's sexuality, but equally important for future stories about women's sexuality. Looking over the abstracts of my co-participants today, I think this is a theme that seems to float through all of them: documenting and preserving history can open up and create spaces for future feminist acts and can itself be a strong activist enterprise. And I see the creation of the New View Campaign archive as a shining example of that. So, I'm glad to be here to celebrate not just the past 16 years of the New View Campaign, but also its future.

I am the Assistant Director at the Cummings Center for the History of Psychology. The Center is a Research Institute devoted to collecting, preserving, and interpreting the historical record of psychology and making it openly available for examination. Today, I want to spend my

time talking about the Center and our archives, focusing on women and their stories in the historical record of psychology. I'll look at the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women in the archival record and in the kinds of stories we tell about psychology and its history. And of course, I'll look at how those two things—the nature of the historical record and the nature of our historical stories—are intimately linked.

The Cummings Center for the History of Psychology is located in Akron, Ohio—a very flat, nondescript, 6 hour drive from Bloomington, it turns out! We are part of the University of Akron, though not affiliated with any particular department. The Center was created in 1965 and started out just as an Archives. We've since then grown immensely. We now operate a museum of psychology, provide educational programs for students as well as the general community and we recently started offering new undergraduate courses out of the Center. Which is really fun and exciting because we're now in a position to create really interesting, interdisciplinary courses.

Let me tell you more about the Archives and Museum. The Archives of the History of American Psychology is, we believe, the largest collection of its kind in the world, focused on the history of psychology and related human sciences. Our collections tell the story of psychology's history in schools, scientific laboratories, hospitals, the military, the world of advertising, and many other settings. We house moving images of an aging Sigmund Freud, photographs of lab rats running through mazes, rare psychological tests used to measure the intelligence of recruits during World War I, sound recordings of interviews with black psychologists that lived and worked through the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and more than 1500 objects from the history of psychology. The focal point of our collections is the manuscript papers, comprised of the personal papers of more than 400 psychologists. We also

care for a diverse collection of organizational papers, including the collections of the Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. All together, we house approximately 2,000 linear feet of material documenting the history of psychology in its many different incarnations from 1900 to the present.

In 2010, we opened a small Museum of Psychology, which explored and interpreted psychology's history for the public. Exhibits explored a pretty wide variety of topics, ranging from the history of behaviorism and animal learning to the history of research on race and school segregation. The Museum gave us a really great opportunity to engage a broad audience in psychology and its history. I'm speaking in the past tense about the museum here because it's currently closed. We are in the process of completely renovating and expanding our museum space and redesigning all of our exhibits. So we currently do not have a museum, but will again have a wonderful one in the fall of 2017.

So this, in a nutshell is what we do at the Center for the History of Psychology. Our byline or vision at the Center is "Exploring what it means to be human." We collect and preserve the historical record of how psychologists and other human scientists and practitioners have studied, examined, defined, and delineated the human experience. And we think this historical record can tell us a lot about what it means to be human and how we have historically grappled with that question.

Now, I came to the Center as Assistant Director straight out of grad school. As a graduate student, I studied the history of psychology, at first mainly using books and journal articles—the kinds of things we would call secondary sources. And then somewhere along the way—probably when I finally figured out how to get external funding—I discovered archives. And the archives, it turns out, was totally my jam. I loved sitting down in strange libraries in new cities, digging

though boxes, getting dusty, getting overwhelmed by all the minute details you find in archival collections. But most of all, I loved discovering. It felt to me like everything that had ever happened in the history of psychology was right there in front of me. In all these boxes. All I had to do was take the time to read it and then take the time to tell those stories. It was all right there in front of me. The stories I had read about the history of psychology in books and journals—those were other people's stories. The real stories, the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth--was in the archives. And so I set about reading these materials, telling psychology's stories, based on this archival record.

And then I started working in an archive. And—much to my chagrin—I realized that archives are not impartial, objective places. They can never hold the entire historical record and often, what they do hold tells us more about the values of contemporary society than it does about what happened historically. What becomes part of a record of psychology's history depends very much on where we place the boundaries of psychology, what we consider to be historically important enough to add to an archive, and what others consider to be important enough to consider contributing to an archive. Because of this, the archive reflects contemporary ideas and contemporary narratives of psychology perhaps even more than it reflects the past. Let me illustrate this idea by giving you a little more information on the Center's Archives.

We have approximately 405 processed collections at the Center. Of those 405, 70 percent are the papers of male psychologists. 30% are female psychologists. To some extent, this underrepresentation of women in our collections mirrors the historical reality of our field: they are underrepresented in our collections because they have historically been underrepresented in the discipline. Our processed collections primarily represent the period before 1975 and, the National Science Foundation reports that up to that point, 70 percent of psychology PhDs were

men. But this is changing, right? By 2008, women accounted for 70 percent of psychology PhDs. So, psychology is becoming more diverse. Perhaps the manuscript collections at the Center will naturally become more diverse, then, with time. These women will retire, donate their papers to the Center, and the collections will change as the discipline changes. Photographs, sound recordings, writings, and videos of these women psychologists will be more readily available for research, for museum exhibits. And indeed, I think this will happen.

But I think this is a much larger issue. Women have always been active players in psychology. They have been teachers, practitioners, scientists, clinicians, psychometricians, and counsellors. However, their stories have never been prominent in historical narratives of the field. Their stories have often appeared in “grey boxes” in textbooks, running alongside standard narratives of the rise of scientific psychology and the PhD-earning men who have been credited with that rise. Women’s stories are there; they are just not often part of the histories that we have told and continue to retell concerning how psychology as a science and practice came to be. Because of this, they seem somehow peripheral to or outside of psychology’s history and are therefore excluded both from historical collecting and historical storytelling.

And I say this from personal experience. I have studied the historical record of psychology, but I have also collected it. One of my main jobs at the Center is to make choices about we do and do not accept into our collections at the Archives. I find myself trying to figure out whether or not the materials being offered are relevant to psychology’s history. Anyone who has worked with Archives will tell you that one of our major practical concerns is space. There is something very daunting about realizing that the amount of material you have can only grow and that the space that you occupy is strikingly finite. So, choices have to be made. But, it’s an interesting position to be in. You must decide whether material is or is not relevant to the history

of psychology. And to do this, I rely on my and my institution's understanding of what counts as the history of psychology and what is perhaps peripheral enough to be turned away. It is in this way that our contemporary understandings of history dictate the historical record that will be available in the future. This a strikingly circular and slightly frightening situation. The contents of the historical record often at least partially dictate what stories get told and what stories do not. And in turn, those stories influence what is included in the historical record. Creating a historical record with a diversity of voices and perspective is therefore critical. So how do we do this? I have a few ideas:

**1. Actively seek out materials** from women to ensure that they are part of the historical record. Staff at collecting institutions need to actively seek out new collections that differ in some way from those typically offered to institutions. Collections usually just come to us. Someone calls me up and says I'm retiring, I'd love to donate my materials to the Center and we go from there. But, I can also actively seek collections, encourage people to donate their collections. And I can encourage those I meet at conferences like this one to spread the word, to do the same.

**2. Consciously create materials that tell the story of women in psychology.** We do this at the Center through our colloquium series. We invite women to come to the Center and tell their stories, explore their experience as female psychologists. And we record those stories, capture photographs of these women. And you can do the same by considering things that will represent women in history and find ways to capture and preserve them. Alex Rutherford will discuss the Psychology's Feminist Voices Project, which is a wonderful example of exactly this kind of thing.

**3. Tell New Stories.** The third thing we can do to diversify the historical record is to tell new stories. When we step outside of standard narratives of psychology's history, we can often step into and create narratives that include women. And this means doing much more than inserting women's stories into male-dominated and male-centric narratives. Historian of Elizabeth Scarborough expressed this best more than a decade ago when she called on historians to think about women and the history of psychology with a much broader historical net. She wrote:

So far in the development of this history, we have documented the lack of suitable recognition of women's contributions, but we have not provided much in the way of explanation or interpretation. I submit that if we are to construct a fully-fledged women's history of psychology, we need more than a record of women's life experiences. We need now to determine women's effect on the field. When and how did women's changing status affect the social values and operations of psychology, the science as well as the professional discipline with its organizational and political components? Can we identify a distinct "women's culture" within psychology, perhaps cutting across its sub-fields? If so, when and how did it emerge? (Scarborough, 2004)

These questions invite new narratives, new stories and in turn encourage a more diverse historical record. These stories and the archival record work together to change the way we think about women in the history of psychology or any other endeavor.

When it comes to diversifying the historical record, we need to think of the archives not as a place of passive collecting. It is tempting to see archives as neutral spaces, neutral remnants of historical moments. I would argue that instead of seeing them as places of passive collecting, we begin to view them as places of active curation. We have opportunities to help determine

what stories will be told about our fields of practice in the future. Those stories will depend on the historical record that we create today. In this way, collecting institutions can be seen as spaces of social activism, places where historical moments are not simply stored, but rather actively sought and actively created.

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