

## CHAPTER 3

# Modern Sexology: The Science of Objectification, or the Science of Empowerment?

*What a curious thing to be so uptight about. Nature delights in diversity.  
Why don't human beings?*

LOLA COLA

### Key Questions

1. The word normal means different things to different cultures. What does the word normal mean to you?
2. In what situations have you had to fill out a form that asked you to classify yourself in one way or another? What questions were asked? How did filling out this form make you feel?
3. Why is it important to create a scientific field that studies gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation?
4. Scientists are supposed to be unbiased; however, they often are not. To what extent do sexologists' own sets of identities matter when they are doing scientific work in the field of sexology?

### Chapter Overview

This chapter begins with a look at the very public nineteenth-century (Victorian era, 183–1901) obsession with people who were seen as different. During the Victorian age, Italian, German, and British men of science measured bodies, observed actions, and attempted to classify all the differences they saw. Their goal was to create a *taxonomy* of humans around the world; they wanted to create a system to understand humans as diverse living organisms. They ran into

trouble early on, however, because they used themselves as the *control group*—that is, the group that represented *normal*. Everything and everyone else was measured against these European men of science.

Part of the burgeoning field of taxonomy was **sexology**, the scientific study of human sexuality. Sexology quickly became controversial, partly because it created the equation that gender presentation equated to sexual orientation. Different groups of people whom the scientists deemed *abnormal* took public issue with the definitions these scientists set forth as absolutes.

This chapter introduces some of the individual sexologists whose ideas and theories about gender and sexual orientation have had a major influence on the ways that trans people are perceived and treated. The sexologists' theories offer insight into the reasons why, to this day, we still conflate gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. The chapter ends with a look at trans people and trans allies in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Some of these people work in the field of sexology, but others do not. They have all worked tirelessly to reshape and broaden sexology as a more welcoming and inclusive field of study.

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