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## Abstract

This chapter presents theory and research on gender and sexuality as well as on knowledge production in this area. Study in this area begins with the idea that gender and sexuality are interactional, socially constructed through micro and macro institutions ranging from family and individual couples to the nation, with effects varying by different social markers like race, class, cohort, age, and relationship status. What we know of the history of sexuality plus what we recognize as challenges for contemporary work are contingent on our epistemologies. This is because knowledge, too, about gender and sexuality is socially constructed, hampered by the legacy of constrained categories combined with limitations of imagination—our habits of mind. This chapter will help students and scholars of gender recognize transformations in the expression of gender and sexuality, even as it highlights the persistence of normative linkages between the two through heteronormativity. Do we think gender and sexuality

will ever be disconnected from one another? It matters less to us whether they are connected or disconnected than that heteronormativity ceases to be a source of social control, racism, and structured inequalities by regulating gender and sexuality.

## 1 Two Questions

Let us begin with two questions: First, how does gender play a role in sexuality? And, second, how does sexuality play a role in gender? Work on *what gender is* gives clear direction for answering these. Our starting place is to recognize gender as a social structure, as Risman (2004, 2018 [this volume]) has demonstrated. Gender is performed (West & Zimmerman, 1987), gender is intersectional (Crenshaw, 1989; Robinson, 2018 [this volume]) with multiple and fluid statuses, and gender is forever carrying us backwards even as we move forward in time (Ridgeway, 2011; Fisk & Ridgeway, 2018 [this volume]). All this gendering happens at the macro, organizational, and cultural level; it is not just something that happens face-to-face, but involves structures of work, economy, and politics.

Next is to recognize the extent of “gendered sexualities”—defined as how “individual and societal constructions of gender overlay and intermingle with sexual behaviors, ideations, attitudes, identities, and experiences” (Gagné &

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Tewksbury, 2005, 4). Heteronormativity—in its expression as well as resistance to it through breaking the imaginative limits of heteronormativity—looms large. Heteronormativity references the way that heterosexuality is assumed to be the “norm,” and that social systems and interactions work to promote and idealize it. Heteronormativity has gender binaries (i.e. male + female) as a cornerstone and dominates these “gendered sexualities.” But we see it tentatively giving way to transformational experiences, structures, and identities. We say “tentatively” in part because scholarship—such as that guiding this chapter and this book—fills us in, but also reproduces explicit as well as sneaky ways that gender and sexuality are repressively linked, as suggested by Weeks (2009) and Foucault (1978). Therefore, to grasp links between gender and sexuality we also address the social construction of knowledge about it. Through our lens—pulling on the current approaches in areas ranging from hooking up to coming out; from the heteronormativity of U.S. family policy to marketing of gay porn; from the racialized respectability politics of gender and sexuality to effective resistance of those very forces—the links are *persistent*, though their relations are evolving and unstable.

In our approach, we present a vast array of cases to depict approaches to gender and sexuality. Multiple identities and contexts make it difficult—antithetical to our perspective, even—to provide a quick blurb about what sex and gender are like for each (falsely assumed) monolithic group. Doing so might obfuscate the common (though differently experienced) ways that context and institutions inform and follow from gender and sexuality. Thus, our approach aspires to resist the performance of socially constructed boundaries such as analyzing straight versus gay versus married versus single versus trans versus cis versus an enormous matrix of other identities. Our approach, though, should lead you to understanding more about all of these.

Think, for example, of discourse on family policy, seemingly devoid of categorical information: yet it reveals gender and sexuality

structures by affirming some identities and neglecting others. The de facto model of family in debates about paid leave or childcare persists as a heteronormative, biologically based family: Sexuality—from norms to practices—is fundamental and yet not central in these debates. Norms and practices are, instead, submerged, often naturalized. The default model of the aspirational family is frequently inflected with whiteness when one traces the debates on family structure that are infused with racist backlash. In a 20th anniversary look back at the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, Cohen (2016) demonstrates how racist stereotypes were a key basis for making welfare more punitive, especially towards black single moms. He mapped attitudes linking poverty, race, and family structure to overwhelming belief that dependence (rather than a lack of opportunities) was a serious harm. The popular sentiment against single parents that grew in the early 1990s justified a welfare reform program that limited opportunities even more. You see the synergy between gender and sexuality, and the relevance of intersecting statuses. The unsexy case of family policy reminds us that gender functions in remote and impersonal ways (Mills, 1959) to organize personal experience. Sexuality seems personal, private, and particular, but it really isn't only that. Looking at sexuality with a gender lens (Rutter & Schwartz, 2012) allows us to start with thinking about what gender *is* to move on to look at what gender *does*. And while heteronormativity, as the family policy example suggests, is the cornerstone of gendered sexuality, resistance to these constraints is real and has implications for other forms of inequality by means of calling out the essentialism implied by rigid categories in fixed relation to one another.

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## 2 What Gender Does to Sex

Is the persistent connection between gender and sexuality necessary? Some evolutionary psychologists argue yes: they observe behavioral *differences* between men and women and see these as an affirming product of reproductive

differences between males and females (Buss, 1995). Men inseminate, women incubate, and these biological differences, goes this essentialist view, are fundamentally fixed and as such account for differences in desire and social relations. Others critique these as “just so stories” (Gould & Lewontin, 1979). For sociologists of sexuality, the causal ordering, if anything, seems backward; social context may generate desire, rather than desire generating a social order. Looking to social context leads to recognizing when categories of “man” and “woman”—as well as “male” and “female”—are invoked as restrictive binaries rather than used as a heuristic—a short-hand to reference a broad range of social experience. Binaries assume the relation between gender and sexuality is already known, and neglect the persistence of gender and sexual fluidity, intersex, and transgender statuses. Recent work we review here invokes categories of man, woman, male, and female in a way that broadly can be understood as heuristics used for discovery and understanding how context generates a wide range of reinforcing connections between gender and sexuality. Recent attention to gender and sexual fluidity has enriched scholarship, and also serves as a robust rebuttal to the rigid relation between gender and sex category that is often reinscribed even by sociological accounts of gender difference.

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### 3 Gender Difference Constructs and Reconstructs

Gender difference—what in the 1990s was made popular by the notion of “men are from Mars, women are from Venus”—is a powerful, and sometimes sneaky, tool for upholding binaries and keeping links between gender and sexuality alive. A recent study shows how the social world uses sex to tout, tease, and toy with ideas of gender difference: In 2013, Kornrich, Brines, and Leupp (2013) reported that heterosexual couples who shared household tasks equally had less sex than those who followed more gender-traditional scripts—think men in the yard, women in the kitchen. The study tore up the media with

coverage in *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, *CNN*, and others.

It harkened back to ideas widely popular in earlier times. For example, Kościańska (2016, 236) analyzed the work of Polish sexologists from the 1970s and 1980s and found that experts suggested that sex was vital to happy marriages, that traditional gender roles were best for a couple’s sexual relationship, and thus worried that heterosexual couples in which the wife worked would be less satisfied. For analysis in more recent times of discourses on gender, Kuperberg and Stone (2008) demonstrated how media mislead about women’s work/family decisions in preference for “opting out”; editors were seemingly influenced by gender stereotypes even as data demonstrated contravening evidence (Boushey, 2005).

The scholarly critiques of the provocative Kornrich article pertained to the recency of the data—from 20 years prior to publication. Couples from 1993 might be different from couples today, given changes in resources and cultural norms (Carlson, Miller, Sassler, & Hanson, 2016; Rutter, 2014). Multiple new studies made the correction, showing that when more recent data are used, couples with more egalitarian arrangements (income, housework, childcare) report greater sexual satisfaction (Sassler, 2016).

Yet, those corrections aren’t so different from the argument made by Kornrich et al. Their study recalls the insight of Blumstein and Schwartz, who, in their 1983 *American Couples* research, asked whether gender, sexual orientation, or type of relationship would be more or less influential over sexual behavior—as well as decision making and other power-related issues. Times—and patterns—may change, but intersecting features such as gender and relationship type keep coming up. The new work in response to Kornrich from Carlson and others in the 2010s tells us that structures of gender do *something* to sex. The updated cases argue that egalitarian relationships exceed traditional ones in terms of measures of sexual satisfaction or frequency. There is a “sexual mystique inside our heads” (Rutter, 2013) that is infused with the way that gender structures that have nothing to do with doing sex

nonetheless influence behavior, and even influence desire. Those structures are strengthened when uncomplicated versions of gender difference are presented.

You will continue to read new and updated versions of the gender-housework-sex story. The story will change but, epistemologically, the components will continue to persist: gender, sex, and larger contexts (such as domestic arrangements and the political economy<sup>1</sup> that dictates them) are useful for understanding sexual desire. These studies don't focus on race, ethnicity, and national status, as we do below; they begin, however, to show us the robust, embedded features of the political economy that influence personal matters.

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#### 4 Gendering Desire, Intersectionally

You can read many articles about the power of context over desire. Consider this recent study: Hypothesizing that there was more than biology at play in women's orgasms, Harris, Hornsey, and Barlow (2016, 1924) found that women's frequency of orgasm related negatively to their own endorsement of "benevolent sexism," that is, a system of "prejudicial attitudes toward women [that] are justified through the guise of care and protection" such as through chivalry. Benevolently sexist attitudes predicted women's "decreased willingness to ask a partner for sexual pleasure," which ultimately resulted in fewer orgasms for women. The connections between attitude and experience enabled by statistical techniques are missing from popular explanations: adolescent women in an online message board noted gender inequality as a reason for the gender gap in orgasms, but many attributed orgasm gaps to differences in biology (Saliars, Wilkerson, Sieving, & Brady, 2017). Sexist beliefs predicted what might be thought of as the natural proclivities of men, too: Swami and Tovée (2013) found that sexist, oppressive, and

hostile attitudes toward women predicted men's preferences for large breasts. Social psychological research abounds with examples like these.

It isn't just microinteractions and cultural attitudes that play a role in gendering sexuality. Institutions, too, inform the combined shape of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity. Institutions pick and choose who or what is a "social problem" or a "social good." Mann (2013, 681–682) studied "Latina youth sexualities in the context of sexual and reproductive health care provision" to highlight "that providers emphasize teenage pregnancy as a social problem... to the exclusion of other dimensions of youth sexualities." Hood and colleagues (2017) found that African American women, like Latinas, were similarly encouraged to use condoms as a way to prevent pregnancy. Such a limited way of envisioning sexuality—as only about reproduction—reduces the impact and focus on other kinds of sex positivity as well as sexual health, as was the focus for these scholars concerned with HIV prevention. Pathologizing extends across sexual identities: social stigma motivates socially subordinated groups such as the Latina lesbians studied by Acosta (2016) to police their sexuality, further marginalizing those outside of their "charmed circle" of respectable femininity.

Resistance, too, makes institutions and racism visible. Young Latinas, profiled in Garcia's *Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself: Latina Girls and Sexual Identity* (2012), developed empowering strategies to go beyond school- and family-based raced and classed fears about their sexuality. The Black Women's Blueprint (2016) in "An Open Letter from Black Women to the Slutwalk" demonstrated how race intersects with sexuality for white women versus women of color. The background is this: In 2014, mainly white students at the University of Toronto, outraged by woman-blaming comments regarding "slutty dress" by campus police, initiated Slutwalks, which spread across North America. The Black Women's Blueprint (BWB) letter argued that marching publicly in revealing clothes as a symbol is easier for white women than for women of color: "As Black women, we do not have the privilege or the space to call

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<sup>1</sup>Political economy here simply means the conjunction of market and non-market determinants of behavior.

ourselves ‘slut’ without validating the already historically entrenched ideology and recurring messages about what and who the Black woman is,” (BWB, 2016, 10). They continue, “The personal is political. For us, the problem of trivialized rape and the absence of justice are intertwined with race, gender, sexuality, poverty, immigration, and community” (11).

Geography is a more diffuse, yet key factor in gendering sexuality. Historically, links between gender, sexuality, and geography have been recognized in examining the city as a space for non-normative sexualities, transgender people, and non-gender conforming identities (Chauncey, 1994). Such work has evolved into observing how cities generate paths and opportunities for LGBTQ identity formation (e.g., Muñoz Laboy, Parker, Perry, & Garcia, 2013; Brown-Saracino, 2015). For example, the role of place is highlighted in a study of same-sex attracted youth in urban and rural high schools (Wilkinson & Pearson, 2009). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual teens were more depressed in rural schools than urban schools—with results more pronounced for men. (Religiosity affected women more.) Regional differences highlighted in “Midwest or Lesbian?” by Emily Kazzyak (2012) showed how in rural areas, “butch” gender expression is understood in ways that relate to the outdoors and rustic life: Thus, women who are butch can be interpreted as “tomboys”—that is straight women who do masculine things—or as lesbian. Thus, gender performance is coded as a way to understand sexuality (whether to signal or to interpret), but that performance varies by context, including geographical context.

Nation is another aspect of geography that can drive expression: In 1920s Hungary, anti-Semitic scientific racism motivated “race biologists” to emphasize that women’s (procreative, intra-racial) sexuality was fundamental for the survival of the Magyar [Hungarian] people (Kund, 2016). To achieve this goal, women were encouraged to pursue motherhood at the cost of employment and education (Kund, 2016, 197). In contemporary China, economic prosperity enabled by the opening of Chinese markets in 1978 spurred on a culture of

individualism—and with it a culture in which asexual dating sites and support for “notions such as platonic love, celibacy, the DINK (double income, no kids) family and the big family” have become popular (Wong, 2014, 100). At the same time, however, the Chinese government and medical establishment have pathologized asexuality. The government’s emphasis on the importance of sexual relationships is intended as a corrective to disintegrating trends such as rising divorce rates, which are perceived as resulting from a growing trend toward asexuality (Wong, 2014, 105–106).

National comparisons are also a tool for understanding gendered sexuality. Schalet’s study of U.S. and Dutch adolescents and their parents included comparisons of women’s sexual subjectivity. Sexual subjectivity involves perceiving oneself as one who can “be aware of one’s sexual feelings, ...enjoy sexual desire and pleasure, ...conceive of oneself as the subject of one’s sexual acts, and ...experience a certain amount of control in sexual relationships” (Schalet, 2010, 305). In The Netherlands, where teen sexual health and education are provided without strings or stipulations such as abstinence-only, many practices from childhood lead to the “common sense” that sex is for relationships. In the U.S., parents and institutions assume teens are in a “war between the sexes,” gripped by “raging hormones” rather than a wider range of emotions; parenting and policies reflect this. Relationships at this stage are not real to the U.S. parents, so sex is “acting out.” Indeed, reinforcing Schalet’s findings, another study, comparing popular magazines read by adolescent girls in the U.S. with those in the Netherlands, found that U.S. media featured more content on the hook-up culture and casual sex, while Dutch media “focused more on committed sex” and “sex within the emotional context of love” (Joshi, Peter, & Valkenburg, 2014, 291).

The larger contexts combined add up to influence over sexual subjectivity: In the U.S., Schalet argues, women have less access to the experience of being in control of their sexuality. The U.S. and Dutch cases have much in common: they are economically and politically

similar countries. Teens in both countries start having sex on average at age 17. U.S. teens, however, have a high rate of unintended pregnancy and STDS (though lower than two decades ago) while the Netherlands has the lowest worldwide (Schalet, 2011).

Zeroing in on family life, parents make their child's sexuality about gender even as the parents themselves are gendered. For example, heterosexual fathers, in interviews, reported that they want their children "to be as heterosexual as possible" (Solebello & Elliott, 2011, 301). The dads distinctly emphasized this with sons through myriad methods of reinforcing hetero masculinity and punishing anything outside these strict boundaries. Such identity work in families dynamically constructs heteronormative desire. LGBTQ parents are conscious of being held accountable for their children—and for themselves as queer parents, reports Averett (2016). She advises, "LGBTQ parents are involved not only in the continual bringing forth of their own self-identities but also in bringing their children's identities into social being when they, as parents, (mis)recognize gender expression and sexuality in their children" (193). Dozier (2015), writing about parenting as a trans man, highlights the significant opportunity—as well as the many challenges—of being a "guy mom." Dozier notes, "upending expected gendered behaviors and family structures forces both individuals and institutions to examine heteronormative systems that create and perpetuate gender inequality" (473). Embedded in national and cultural contexts, the work done in families around gender and sexuality is continual, even relentless. It reveals the reliance on marriage—and family—as a staging ground for heteronormative sexualities (Goffman, 1977). This means it is a space for resistance as well as control.

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## 5 Markets Mediating Gender and Sexuality

What about "free markets?" An infinity of heteronormatively gendered and racist stereotypes are sold and displayed through mainstream media,

as well as alternative markets, such as gay adult film. Casting in the gay adult film industry relegates (presumably dominant, hypersexual, hypermasculine) black men to the "niche sites" and Asian men to submissive and less prestigious roles (Burke, 2016, 596), and privileges young (20–35), white, "jockish," "well-endowed" men with more scenes at higher pay rates (599). These casting choices reify ideals of "hegemonic masculinity" for viewers (Burke, 2016, 601), suggesting that "gay adult film studios are complicit in the domination of gay and effeminate men" (587). You can look, for example, at the most popular gay porn categories on Pornhub (2016)—to see a map of gendered desire in the marketplace: (1) Black; (2) Straight Guys; (3) Bareback; (4) Big Dick; (5) Daddy. In contrast to some of the less-popular categories like "Reality," "Solo Male," and "Japanese," the top searches draw on notions of hegemonic, racialized masculinity and femininity.

Lesbian dating sites provide similarly gendered examples. Women, using labels such as femme, butch, and queer, telegraph different expressions of gender and sexuality. Hightower (2015, 20) observed: "Femme members sought to highlight their femininity, butches' boundary work made salient their sexual interest, and queer members defended their sex category as female and sexual identity as lesbian." Marketing desire and the sexual self, even in settings that are quite remote from the "family policy" example at the beginning of this chapter, keeps landing us back in the world of gender conventions. While links between gender and sexuality persist, they persistently offer opportunities, like these, to use those links for unconventional desires and interests.

Colorism, too, contours gender and desire. Colorism is skin color stratification seen across groups but also within racial and ethnic groups; it shapes employment opportunities as it does romantic ones (Darity, 2010). Darity and others have shown, for instance, that lighter-skinned African Americans earn more and are promoted more quickly than darker-skinned peers; and so goes attention on the dating market. The racialized romantic market is evidenced in the slow (though persistent) rise of interracial marriages

(Poulin & Rutter, 2011). A 2013 study of online dating showed that white women and men received the most interest online, while blacks received the least; Asians and Latinx were in between (Lin & Lundquist, 2013). Biracial and multiracial individuals add additional dimension to this simplified hierarchy, suggesting colorism as well as race stage desire (Curington, Lin, & Lundquist, 2015). Three multiracial groups, in Curington et al.'s study, appeared to get more attention when online dating. Asian-white women were viewed more favorably than any other group of women by white and Asian men, getting more responses than women of the same race or ethnic group. Asian-white and Hispanic-white men were also of greater interest to Asian and Hispanic women. Asian and Hispanic women responded more frequently to the multiracial men than to either their co-ethnic men or whites. While it seems that barriers are declining, preferences that mirror advantages for lighter skinned mixed-race individuals shape online dating. This suggests markets—including dating markets—are not “free.”

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## 6 What Sex Does to Gender

Is the unstable relation between gender and sexuality the very source of its persistence? To understand gender and sexuality combined, you need to recognize that sexuality and sexual practices influence gender, not just the other way around. In the 19th century, the “True Woman,” which was central to the homemaker/breadwinner model of family life, was a mother and wife, completely devoid of sexual desire and yet situated in society based on her reproductive function; this was a marker of her femininity (D’Emilio & Freedman, 1988). The same relation—where sexual desire confirms gender—operates in other contexts, such as trans sexualities. Close examination of trans men’s autobiographies, for example, points to how sexual behaviors “materialize maleness” (Latham, 2016, 362). Through examination of trans men’s narratives, Latham suggests that these men’s purported lack of sexual desire is more artifact than fact. Trans

men are aware that in order to receive gender-affirming healthcare, they must conform to a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, which is “persistent discomfort” with their body (Latham, 2016, 348). This may be the source of medical claims that low sexual desire is definitive of trans men’s sexuality. Even the small amount of legitimacy granted by medical diagnosis shapes how trans men report (in some spaces) their level of sexual desire. In this case, *how one does sex*—including refraining from it—affirms “maleness.” Latham’s point is that for medical practitioners—who can legitimate patients’ claims to identity—reports of (lower) sexual desire become a stand-in for confirming that patients are “true” trans men. Links between how one does (or says one does) sex and identity emerge elsewhere as well: Dozier’s study of trans men’s sexual encounters also highlights this. Dozier (2005, 297) explains, “When sex characteristics do not align with gender, behavior becomes more important to gender expression and interpretation.” The power of the fragile link between gender and sexuality is clear where the 19th century “True Woman” as well as 21st century trans men link low sexual desire to gender affirmation.

Prison is another space for gendering sexuality. Jenness and Fenstermaker (2014, 2016) wrote about the interactional processes between desire and gender in men’s prisons: Gender dictates sexuality/desire in prisons such that inmates identified as “real men” were drawn toward the femininity of transgender inmates. Yet, in this setting, sexual desire also had an influence on gender affirmation. For women or femme-expressing individuals in men’s prisons, “the attention and affection of ‘real men,’ in turn, is taken to be a measure of gender status” (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2014, 14). Transgender women in prison also noted gender norms that constrained their behavior: Women in men’s prisons felt the need to “act like a lady,” which entailed “staying in line,” and enabled some women to slut-shame those who were non-monogamous. Prisoners occupy a world where sexuality and gender are intertwined, and punishment, including rape (Jenness & Fenstermaker, 2016) are among the

stakes of gender transgression. Indeed, a dilemma with the intersection between gender and sexuality is that it has a costly hierarchy of idealized forms with femininity consolidating inequality at the bottom of that hierarchy, as illustrated in the context of an “all-male” prison.

Gendering desire infiltrates many contexts and leads to a wide range of expressions that nonetheless return us to the persistent link between the two. We’ve looked at social psychology that shapes people in or out of orgasm. We’ve reviewed national contexts and cultural statuses that can generate normalcy for asexual identities, or sex-positive sexual health, or a war between the sexes mode of thinking about sexuality. Examples have shown how family and parenting can be a setting for generating fear or optimism about their children’s range of self-expression, and how the role of being a parent can also be stressed by whether one is conforming to hegemonic versions of gender and sexuality. We’ve seen how racism—as well as colorism—shapes what desires get revealed or expressed. We’ve recognized how these same social contextual factors shape gender non-conforming people’s experiences. Finally, we’ve seen how the relation between gender and sexuality can be viewed in terms of what sex does to gender, as in cases where how we do sex or claim desire itself becomes a way to be accorded a gendered status. You can read copiously about the diverse ways that social context impinges on the expression of desire. Throughout all, the prominence of gender as a mediating factor means that gender and sexuality are rarely de-linked.

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## 7 Newer Sex Research

As gender and sexuality are socially constructed, so is knowledge in this field. Researchers of sexuality and gender occupy contexts, carry histories, and have identities that influence the knowledge produced. Sometimes researchers encounter “inconvenient facts”—facts that can conflict with taken-for-granted positions in the world (Weber, 1946, 147). Newer research

brings to light the inconvenient facts that might threaten dominant group ideologies about gender and sexuality. Prior to the 1970s, sex research was very busy telling the story of sexuality from straight white men’s point of view. For example, the assumption that women were devoid of sexual interest meant that white women’s interracial sexual relationships could be easily read by white people as evidence of rape of white women—and made it easy to overlook the possibility of white women’s desire or even sexual coercion against black men, as suggested in the case of Willie McGee (Brownmiller, 1975, 263–270). McGee was a black man in Mississippi who was convicted in 1945 and sentenced to death for raping a white woman, who made the accusation. Subsequent reporting suggested that the relationship had been consensual or possibly forced by the white woman (Heard, 2010). Similarly, in 2017, news emerged (Tyson, 2017) that a white woman had very belatedly confessed that no verbal or physical advances towards her had occurred, even though her claims that she had been targeted had been at the center of African American child Emmett Till’s 1955 murder in Mississippi by a group of white men. None of Till’s murderers or false accusers were brought to justice.

The 1970s ushered in efforts to rethink women’s orgasms with such works at Barbach’s *For Yourself* (1976), which dismissed earlier ideas of the supremacy of vaginal orgasms and celebrated sexual pleasure. In the 1990s, efforts to collect nationally representative data about sexual behavior, attitudes, and interests were quashed and ridiculed from the U.S. Senate floor. Scholars had been both spurred on and punished by the legacy of the 1970s sexual revolution. The “Sex in America” survey—modestly named The National Health and Social Life Survey (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994)—became a key resource for understanding evolving sexualities in that decade and was eventually funded by private foundations. But not without resistance: A backlash around sexuality and unsettling shifts towards gender equality and queer identities curtailed earlier, ambitious plans that were funded and then rescinded by the U.S. National Institutes of Health.



Beyond survey research, a newer, more diverse generation of sexualities scholars has made ethnography key to more intersectional understandings about gender and sexuality. Indeed, study of gender and sexuality has been improved by having more queer scholars and scholars of color asking and answering questions. *Dude, You're a Fag*, a 2007 study of how high school boys relate to each other and engage in what author C.J. Pascoe named the “fag discourse,” made heteronormativity—the joint social construction of gender and sexuality—recognizable to scholars and students well beyond those who were already studying gender and sexuality. Pascoe’s description of raced and classed differences around heteronormativity made a lasting impact on how others study gender and sexuality.

In 2011, Mignon Moore’s *Invisible Families: Gay Identities, Relationships and Motherhood among Black Women* (2011) profiled lesbian women of color and the multiple intersections of sexuality with class and national origin, and presented variations of “coming into the life”—her frame for coming out. Moore’s work decentered the story of gender and sexuality from privileged white binaries. The decentering was not just an augmentation of categorical knowledge, but shifted theories of gender and sexuality. Moore foregrounded accounts of social class, immigration status, and gender expression and how they related to a whole set of ways that lesbians come into the life. This set forth the view that intersectional looks at gender and sexuality provide more reliable knowledge of experience. For *Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself: Latina Girls and Sexual Identity* (2012), Lorena Garcia spent time with Mexican American and Puerto Rican high school women, and offered their accounts of managing home, school, and societal sources that stigmatized their sexuality. Garcia wrote of these women’s resourcefulness when countering racist, sexist, cultural, and institutional forms of social control. These works highlight how ethnography has filled in the ample, white-washed blind spots on heteronormativity, coming out, and coming of age sexually as women of color. This kind of

work—and much other—has been valuable empirically but also theoretically, as it demands more of scholars as they apply an intersectional analysis.

Research methods influence the complexity of analysis, but also directly affect data. For example, women report their sexual behavior differently depending on race: One experiment found that, among college women, “non-White participants were more sensitive to changes in ... experimental variables and more likely than White participants to report fewer behaviors and more conservative attitudes when completing computer-based surveys, when in laboratory experiments, or while in the presence of experimenters” (McCallum & Peterson, 2015, 2296). As emphasized by the Black Women’s Blueprint (2016), women of color are more likely to live under regimes of respectability politics as well as to live in a world where state surveillance of them is familiar and common.

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## 8 The Production of Knowledge

Social trends affect what we know about gender and sexual behavior. For example, using data from the General Social Survey (GSS), Twenge, Sherman, and Wells (2016) found that in 2010, twice as many American adults had at least one same-sex sexual encounter than in the 1990s. Twenge et al. (2016, 1713) reported numerous group differences: “Increases in same-sex sexual behavior were largest in the South and Midwest and among Whites, were mostly absent among Blacks, and were smaller among the religious.” Attitudes liberalized in this time, more of the increase was among women than men, and nearly all of the increase was among people who have sex with *both* men and women. The increases in behavior could only be partially explained by the historic liberalization of attitudes towards homosexuality that occurred in that time period. Twenge and colleagues (2016, 1724) speculate that more accepting media depictions of homosexuality may lead people to overestimate what is admissible, and to act on those estimates. Alternatively, one’s overestimate

of social acceptability may also make people more comfortable reporting their behavior in a person-to-person survey like the GSS. Work by Paula England and colleagues demonstrates that women's behaviors and attitudes—engaging and supporting same-sex sexuality—have a stronger influence than men's, giving hints that the “fluidity” is less of an option for men (England, Mishel, & Caudillo, 2016). Our point is that data can facilitate a recognition of greater diversity of gender and sexual experiences—but that social context—or in this case social trends—make our ability to *see* what is in our data possible.

## 9 Fluidity

Recent focus on gender and sexual fluidity suggests that researchers might not have a clear consensus on what to study. Surveys are only as good as the (socially constructed) measures they use (Westbrook & Saperstein, 2015). Albury (2015, 649), in research on “alternative” sex subcultures, suggested that attention to survey respondents’ “simultaneous affiliation with heterosexual, homosexual *and* bisexual identities might (productively) trouble academic research and sexual health policy frameworks” that assume a single and fixed sexual identity. For example, Pfeffer's (2014, 15) study of women dating trans men documents how they surpass binary definitions of their sexuality: 50% of the sample (partners of trans men) identified as queer, 22% “lesbian” or “dyke,” and 14% bisexual. Vrangalova and Savin-Williams (2012, 96–99) recommend that researchers add survey categories to reflect “mostly heterosexual” and “mostly gay/lesbian,” because of significant differences in same-sex attraction and behavior along a five-stage sexual orientation scale. As England et al. (2016) echoed (discussed above), they find that fewer men than women use the “non-exclusive” categories.

Recent collegiate “hooking up” studies (Wade, 2017) have been a source of information about sexual behavior and fluidity, and have made distinctions about different contexts. Women on middle class campuses who identified with professional goals were more likely to see

hooking up as the dominant sexual script (Armstrong, England, & Fogarty, 2012). Those mainly middle-class campus studies highlight, too, the way that “straight girls kissing” is an extension of the sexual script in those mainly heteronormative spaces (Rupp & Taylor, 2010; Rupp et al., 2014)—yet also, for some, a pathway to exploring and moving toward lesbian and queer identities. This potential for movement to queer from (defaulted and assumed) straight identities has looked more limited for working class women. Nevertheless, as Budnick (2016) points out, working class women have the highest prevalence of same-sex behavior. This qualitative study shows that working class women were influenced by other life scripts—such as earlier parenthood and greater preference for “bisexual” over “queer” identifiers. Taken together, these studies highlight *sexual fluidity*. They also point to how much context—social class in this case—shapes expression and meanings of sexual desire. Ultimately, these cases show that we are still limited in understanding fluidity even when we include lots of questions about people's sexuality and present them as a spectrum, because different groups define the same concepts differently.

Researchers at the Williams Institute (2009, 6) recommend that surveys assessing sexuality use three measures: identity, behavior, and attraction. This might better enable subjects, like the straight men studied by Jane Ward in *Not gay: Sex between straight white men* (2015), to fully describe their sexuality. Ward's study examines settings where straight men have sex with each other, such as in fraternity and military hazing routines, and yet do not see this as gay or queer sex.

Not everyone comes to a survey with the same experiences. Adolescents, for example, may not have had sex, and may not be ready to commit to a particular sexual orientation, but may be able to tell a researcher the gender of the type of people they are attracted to. In one representative sample of Swedish high school students, “Prevalence rates of sexual minority orientation varied between 4.3% for sexual behavior (males 2.9%, females 5.6%) and 29.4% for emotional or sexual attraction (males 17.7%, females 39.5%)” (Priebe & Sveden, 2013, 727). Researchers have found that

“milestones” of understanding of one’s sexuality occurred at different ages based on gender and sexual orientation identification (Katz-Wise, Reisner, Hughto, & Keo-Meier, 2016, 10). On the whole, men achieved these milestones earlier (Katz-Wise et al. 2016:10) and adolescent women and bisexuals less stably reported their sexual attraction (Savin-Williams, Joyner, & Rieger, 2012), but all adolescents tended to decrease their reports of same-sex attraction over time (Savin-Williams & Joyner, 2014).

The use of multiple measures allows for further recognition and discovery of emerging newer arrangements between gender and sexuality. James Joseph Dean’s *Straights: Heterosexuality in a Post-Closeted Culture* (2014) examines manifestations of sexuality (and gender) in an age when heterosexuality, he argues, is not taken for granted. Metrosexuals, for example, may display non-traditional masculinities (Bridges, 2014), and it is increasingly unacceptable to be overtly homophobic. But straight men still have methods to convey their heterosexual identity, including through frequent reference to their girlfriends or through hypervigilance about not crossing their legs (Dean, 2013, 547–554). Similarly, Ward’s *Not Gay* tells the story of how straight men, occupying a world where sexual fluidity is more evident and acknowledged, go to great efforts to deny sexual fluidity, harkening back to the idea of Weber’s “inconvenient facts.” These studies challenge the ultimate “naturalized” and taken-for-granted comparison group (straight white men) as well as the “biological essentialism now at the heart of gay rights claims” (Ward, 2016, 75) by merely studying them from a social constructionist perspective. Ward refers to this as part of “dyke methods” (2016). These efforts are core to disentangling that long history of uncertainly intertwined relations between sexuality and gender.

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## 10 Sex/Gender/Politics

Want to witness the synergy between gender and sexuality? Watch politics and read political history. In the 19th century, U.S. Postmaster General

Anthony Comstock used the anti-pornography regulations of the postal service to prevent mailing contraceptive information: This garnered him political power via the gambit to control women’s bodies. Sexual scandals bring to mind the 1990s President Bill Clinton’s encounters with a White House intern or the case of Donald Trump’s “Grab’em by the pussy. You can do anything,” (New York Times, 2016) televised remarks. Such cases use women’s bodies and sexual stories about them to generate a hostile climate, anxiety, and fear, all in the service of raising or lowering the power of the figures involved.

We see links between those tabloid scandals to legislative fronts that are really “exclusion from society” bills (GLAAD, 2016). As we write, many states are following North Carolina with bills that limit access to bathrooms. A spate of bills across the U.S. seeks to prevent people from using a men’s or women’s restroom that aligns with their gender identification. The HB2 bill—which was passed by the N.C. legislature in 2016 and was nominally repealed in 2017 only to have other discriminatory policies put into place—denies human rights to transgender people by using the troll that girls and women are made vulnerable by imagined predatory opportunities (Schilt & Westbrook, 2015). Whether 1890s, 1990s, or more recently, the sexual scandals and sex/gender legislation stories are about power. Finally, the wind in the sails of these stories is heteronormative structures of gender.

Any who doubt the frame of sex as a political football can consider the issue of wartime rape, where rape is literally a weapon of war, such as in the 1990s war in Bosnia. As Henry (2015) argues, crimes against humanity, including sexual violence in conflicts, are done by individuals, but they are not *individual* crimes “because victims are targeted predominantly on the basis of their membership of a targeted group,” (Henry, 2015, 45). Given documentation of a widespread campaign using rape to terrorize Serbians, the International War Crimes Tribunal prosecuted those involved. News reports (Goodman, 1997) illustrated the denials in one case:

In a reply to his accusers, Mr. Mejajic, who along with others under indictment remains safely in Serb territory, described Ms. Cigelj as being old and unattractive; he added that he wouldn't have leaned his bicycle against her, much less raped her.

Such remarks were paralleled in the 2016 statements of (then) presidential candidate Donald Trump:

Donald Trump on Friday intimated a woman who accused him of sexually assaulting her was not attractive enough to have drawn his interest, part of a broader attack on the integrity and physical appearance of multiple women who've come forward this week to accuse the GOP presidential nominee of sexual assault (Lim, 2016).

These men, in and out of military settings, first deny their actions and harms, and then repeat them through degrading women to elevate themselves specifically and symbolically. These cases are part of what Pascoe and Hollander (2016) call "mobilizing rape," which they argue is the case of men making claims of masculinity for their performing opposition to rape. They note "that *not* sexually assaulting may also do dominance work. Men can assert dominance both over women and over other men, who are constructed as ruled by emotions, unable to exercise masculine self-control, or not masculine enough to have young women simply fall over themselves with sexual desire" (76). In the case of Mekajic in the 1990s or Trump in the 2010s, the "denial" talk that purports not to threaten physical acts of harm and abuse reinforces the right to harm and abuse and normalizes the use of rape language to support desperate ties to masculinity. In the case of Trump, the denial talk is countered by the proud expression of "grab'em by the pussy," made in the same campaign.

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## 11 Conclusions

Dean's *Straights: Heterosexuality in a Post-Closeted Culture* (2014) offers the premise that heterosexuality is less naturalized, less often the default assumption, and examines how (straight) people signal straightness in such a world. The more things change the more they remain the

same—people do what they have always done around gendered sexuality—the Trump and Mekajic cases show this. Except that more and more people do not do the same thing, and that is new. On the one hand, our conclusions revolve around this gender conundrum (Jones, Rutter, & Boateng, 2015), that gender—including gendered sexuality—persists in different forms to do similar work of supporting inequality. On the other hand, the way forward is through detecting change and transformation wherever we find it. For example: Sennott and Angotti (2016) observed in their rural South African fieldwork that the majority of conversations about HIV/AIDS and gendered sexuality included questioning notions of hegemonic gender norms, because they put families and communities at risk for the disease. These reconsiderations were enabled by a raging epidemic, and even still members of the community appealed to the notions of the naturalness of gendered sexuality that are not unique to South Africa: Men should not have to "eat chicken (or fish) every day of the week," (947) and women should not be sexually agentic or challenge the behavior of their partners. Scholars and activists ideally will make use of both the change and stasis parts of this story.

Our reading of the literature on sexuality is that the synergy between gender and sexuality is alive and strong. In previous decades, sociology has seen the gendering of sexuality as a powerful tool for policing it, employing race, ethnicity, and social class along the way to strengthen that power. Heteronormativity and homophobia have fueled the mutually reinforcing connection between gender and sexuality such that the logic of heteronormativity—i.e. "to be a good woman is to be a good heterosexual woman"—idealizes hetero but also makes gendered identity a virtue, a kind of sexiness.

This has not gone away—but new connections are being forged. With the emerging recognition of gender and sexual fluidity, a wide range of gender expression (that has always existed) is gaining more legitimacy. With a growing understanding of the lives of transgender people, the connections of gender to sexuality keep getting decentered. Do we think gender

and sexuality will ever be disconnected from one another? It matters less to us whether they are connected or disconnected than that heteronormativity ceases to be a source of social control, racism, and structured inequalities by regulating gender and sexuality.

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# Handbook of the Sociology of Gender

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ISSN 1389-6903                      ISSN 2542-839X (electronic)  
Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research  
ISBN 978-3-319-76332-3              ISBN 978-3-319-76333-0 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76333-0>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018934862

1st edition: © Springer Science+Business Media, LLC 2006

2nd edition: © Springer International Publishing AG, part of Springer Nature 2018

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer International Publishing AG part of Springer Nature  
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

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