



UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
JOURNALS + DIGITAL PUBLISHING

Pacific Sociological Association

Gendered Sexuality Over the Life Course: A Conceptual Framework

Author(s): Laura M. Carpenter

Source: *Sociological Perspectives*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Summer 2010), pp. 155-178

Published by: [University of California Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/sop.2010.53.2.155>

Accessed: 21/07/2011 09:16

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucal>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of California Press and Pacific Sociological Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Sociological Perspectives*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

GENDERED SEXUALITY OVER THE LIFE COURSE: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

LAURA M. CARPENTER

Vanderbilt University

ABSTRACT: *Despite increasing interest in gendered sexuality over the life course, a comprehensive conceptual model, applicable to all aspects of sexual life and incorporating recent developments in life course sociology, feminist theory, and sexuality studies, has yet to be elaborated. The model presented here posits that sexual beliefs and behaviors result from individuals' lifelong accumulation of advantageous and disadvantageous experiences, and adoption/rejection of sexual scripts, within socio-historical contexts. Women and men follow distinctive sexual trajectories insofar as they accrue gender-specific experiences and scripts and as their sexuality and gender trajectories intertwine. Empirical examples include virginity loss and involuntary celibacy, (de)coupling, and chronic illness/disability. The proposed framework helps explain the coexistence of differences and similarities among individuals and cohorts and holds particular promise for studying lifelong aspects of sexuality like agency and interest. It also suggests improvements on interactionist theory, conventional life course models, and the sexual scripting approach.*

Keywords: sexuality, sexual scripts, life course, gender, aging, intimate relationships

How do sexual and social experiences at one point in a person's life affect her or his sexual beliefs and behaviors later on? How are individual sexual biographies shaped by broader cultural and historical changes? In what ways does gender—as it intersects with race, ethnicity, social class, and sexual identity—shape these life course processes, even as it is shaped by them? In short, how can we conceptualize sexuality as unfolding over the life course, intertwined with gender, in specific socio-cultural contexts?

Consider the example of gender and sexual agency. Most studies focus on heterosexual adolescents, typically finding girls disadvantaged relative to boys (Holland, Ramazanoglu, and Thomson 1996). However, evidence suggests that at least some women gain skills in sexual negotiation and an enhanced sense of control as they mature (Meadows 1997). These gains stem both from personal

Address correspondence to: Laura M. Carpenter, VU Station B, Box 1811, 2301 Vanderbilt Pl, Nashville, TN 37235; e-mail: l.carpenter@vanderbilt.edu.

Sociological Perspectives, Vol. 53, Issue 2, pp. 155–177, ISSN 0731-1214, electronic ISSN 1533-8673.

© 2010 by Pacific Sociological Association. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, at <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/sop.2010.53.2.155.

experiences, such as coping with a sexually dissatisfying marriage, as well as the psychological and social development that occurs as people age. (Conversely, some life experiences may erode sexual agency.) Physiological aging also may affect sexual agency, as when women who believe their physical attractiveness has declined with age feel less comfortable pursuing sexual activity (Koch, Mansfield, Thureau, and Carey 2005) or when heterosexual post-menopausal women feel more in control sexually because they no longer have to worry about pregnancy (Barbre 1998). Broad social changes around sexuality, gender, and family life moreover mean that members of Generation X typically approach sexual life with different resources and expectations than their Baby Boom counterparts, who in turn differ from the World War II generation (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988).

Scholars began explicitly to train a life course perspective on sexuality in the early 1990s. The foundational work in this growing field, Rossi's (1994:7, ix) edited volume, *Sexuality Across the Life Course*, advocated using a biopsychosocial approach "integrat[ing] biological and social-behavioral variables" to explore sexual "scripts" across the "full age range of sexual life." Yet Rossi and the contributors largely eschewed concepts from life course sociology (e.g., transitions, trajectories) and declined to present a generic conceptual framework that could guide other scholars' investigations. Moreover, although the volume spanned adolescence to old age (notably omitting childhood), most chapters concentrated on a discrete segment of the life course (e.g., youth, midlife), thereby giving short shrift to the ways early life experiences affect later ones. In the same year, Marsiglio and Greer (1994:130) proposed a conceptual model of *older* men's sexuality that viewed sexual behavior in terms of "scripts," attended to physiological processes, and understood later-life sexual activity as "conditioned in significant ways by previous patterns of sexual activity and social-psychological factors." Scholars of sexual identity, such as Rust (1996), focused on the impact of "milestone" events (and their sequencing) on sexual self-definitions, carefully locating individuals' unfolding sexual lives in specific social-historical contexts. Yet neither Marsiglio and Greer nor Rust explicitly employed the powerful concepts developed by life course scholars, nor did they present their frameworks in terms generic enough to be transferred easily to other scholars' research.

Life course theory and research have evolved considerably since the mid-1990s, with scholars replacing models of linear progress (e.g., education to work to retirement) with perspectives positing multiple and overlapping trajectories (e.g., work, health, sexuality) that extend from birth to death. At the same time, sexuality researchers have greatly expanded the range of topics they study as well as the theoretical approaches they deploy, augmenting the sexual scripting approach with insights from Foucault and queer theory. Gender theory, too, has moved in new directions, notably bridging interactionist and structural understandings of gender dynamics and attending more carefully to gender's intersections with race, class, and sexuality.

Recent empirical studies have directly applied more life course concepts to an increasingly diverse array of sexuality-related issues. For example, Browning and Laumann (1997) drew on the concepts of turning points and cumulative continuity to reveal how childhood sexual abuse results in different sequences of experiences,

some of which produce enduring negative effects (e.g., depression, sexual dysfunction). Donnelly, Burgess, Anderson, Davis, and Dillard (2001) focused on the timing of sexual and romantic transitions (e.g., dating, sexual initiation), showing how delays in “expected” transitions accumulate to produce involuntary celibacy. Wade and DeLamater (2002) demonstrated how the dissolution of marital and cohabiting relationships represents a life-stage transition—specifically, a turning point—that enables people to adopt new sexual scripts.

Together with Rossi’s (1994) edited volume, these studies have suggested the basic contours of a framework for studying gendered sexuality over the life course (GSLC). However, none of them include all of the elements necessary for a complete, transferable conceptual model that can be used to study all manner of sexual phenomena. Moreover, although some studies in this area have conceptualized gender in terms of power relations and social structures (e.g., Marsiglio and Greer 1994) or as accomplished in interaction (e.g., Rust 1996), none has posited gender and sexuality as jointly constructed within specific social-structural contexts. Nor have more than a handful considered how sexual identity develops over, and influences experiences across, the life course (e.g., Rust 1996; Savin-Williams and Diamond 2000).¹

In short, a comprehensive general model, applicable to all aspects of sexual life, that incorporates these recent developments in sexuality, life course, and gender studies has yet to be elaborated. The framework outlined here—the gendered sexuality over the life course (GSLC) model—draws on life course sociology, feminist theory, and the scripting approach to sexuality.² It proposes that sexual beliefs and behaviors result from individuals’ lifelong accumulation of advantageous and disadvantageous experiences, and their adoption and rejection of sexual scripts, within specific socio-historical contexts. Women and men follow distinctive sexual trajectories to the extent that they accrue gender-specific experiences and scripts and insofar as their gender and sexuality trajectories intertwine.

The GSLC model improves on existing conceptual frameworks for studying life course sexuality in several ways. It provides crucial tools for unpacking the life-long chains of (dis)advantageous transitions within sexual, gender, and other life trajectories that accumulate to produce patterns of similarity and difference across individuals and groups. It also helps to illuminate processes of change and continuity in individual sexual lives, including the means through which people select and reject sexual scripts. Moreover, by elucidating the mutual construction of gender and sexuality over the life course, the GLSC framework significantly improves on conceptual models of sexuality that treat gender as a relatively fixed master status and life course models that fail to view gender as an ongoing biographical construction and/or that neglect the intertwining of gender and sexuality. The GSLC model holds particular promise for studying complex phenomena like sexual agency and interest in sex, the lifelong unfolding of which is poorly captured by models that treat life stages in isolation. Critically, it can also improve knowledge about sexuality in mid- and later life—stages that are understudied, especially relative to the increasing proportion of the U.S. population they represent.

Below, I demonstrate the GSLC model using three empirical examples representing a range of sexuality-related issues: celibacy and virginity loss, marriage (from

gay and heterosexual perspectives) and divorce/decoupling, and chronic illness.³ The conclusion proposes enhancements to gender theory, the sexual scripting approach, and research on gender over the life course.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Life Course Perspective

Individual life courses are composed of multiple, simultaneously occurring *trajectories* through various dimensions of life (e.g., family, work, sexuality). Each trajectory extends from birth until death and can be divided into a sequence of *transitions*, such as retirement in the work trajectory and virginity loss in the sexuality trajectory (Elder 1985). Trajectories in a particular life dimension unfold differently to the extent that people undergo different transitions and that most transitions have more than one potential outcome. For example, not every heterosexual person marries, and those who do may remain married or may experience separation, divorce, or widowhood (Sussman, Steinmetz, and Peterson 1999). Features of earlier transitions—including their timing, order, and duration—influence later transitions, with the opportunities and constraints brought about by each transition promoting later rounds of opportunity and constraint (O’Rand 1996).

Certain transitions can be understood as *turning points*—events that markedly change a trajectory’s direction (Clausen 1995). For example, González-López (2005) found that, after immigrating from Mexico to the U.S.—a dramatic change in geographical trajectory—many women and men were exposed to new ideas about sexuality (and gender) through conversations with U.S.-born coworkers. Heterosexual married couples often complained that the fast pace of U.S. life, combined with working multiple jobs, left them with little time and energy to enjoy sex. Thus, the different trajectories within individual lives—here, geography, family, work, and sexuality—intersect in significant ways.

Given the opportunities and constraints brought about by sequences of transitions, life course trajectories may be understood in terms of cumulative advantages and disadvantages (O’Rand 1996). Positive transitions tend to produce advantageous transitions at later life stages, while negative transitions tend to generate further disadvantages. To the extent that different members of a cohort accumulate different patterns of advantages and disadvantages, inequality (or diversity) among cohort members increases over time (O’Rand 1996). Consider a hypothetical cohort’s employment trajectories. Of the cohort members in the paid labor force, only some will hold jobs that offer pensions, which ensure greater resources after retirement, enhancing their holders’ ability to pay for uncovered health expenses. Other cohort members accrue disadvantages—not working, not having a pension, or losing a good job. At the group level, these cumulative processes result in considerable economic inequality within retirement-age cohorts. Similar dynamics can be observed regarding sexuality. Browning and Laumann (1997) showed how different trajectories following childhood sexual abuse produce diverse adult outcomes, with some survivors reporting substantially more adverse consequences than others. For example, although women abused as children were

more likely to initiate consensual sex before age 16, not all of them did; those who postponed first sex were, in turn, less likely to have 11 or more partners and thus less likely to contract sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

How does one decide whether a particular sexuality-related experience is advantageous? Ideally, such determinations would be based on individuals' subjective interpretations, as could be offered in life history interviews. When such interpretations are impractical or unavailable (as in most extant social surveys), I propose assessing sexuality-related experiences as advantageous when they bring pleasure (physical or emotional), enhance self-esteem, or are consonant with an individual's desires or moral convictions and disadvantageous when they are coerced, painful, or result in STIs or unintended pregnancy (see World Health Organization 2002). Any given encounter may include advantageous *and* disadvantageous elements.

Life course analyses of sexuality (or any human behavior) also must consider human agency (Elder 1994). Hitlin and Elder (2007) recommend distinguishing analytically among four kinds of agency, all exercised within limits imposed by biology and social structures; each type of agency helps to sustain and create the self. Existential agency is the capacity for self-directed action that underlies all other types of agency. Identity agency is exercised when people enact their everyday social roles (e.g., teacher, spouse), selecting into situations that help build and fulfill their identity commitments. Conversely, pragmatic agency refers to choices people make when habitual responses break down; such choices are not completely random but guided by the (already existing) self, biography, and values. Life course agency incorporates both individuals' attempts to shape their life trajectories over an extended time period and their beliefs about their capacity to achieve life goals. Major life transitions often require people to exercise agency in ways that reinforce or alter their sense of identity (Hitlin and Elder 2007).

Especially in societies like the contemporary U.S., where almost every transition can be approached in multiple ways, life trajectories are diverse and heterogeneity within cohorts tends to increase over time (O'Rand 1996). Consider, for instance, the different sexual trajectories set in motion by the varied approaches to virginity loss that coexist in the U.S. (Carpenter 2002; 2005). Compared with people who venerate virginity, individuals who disdain virginity tend to initiate sexual activity earlier, thereby becoming more likely to accumulate skills for negotiating with sexual partners as well as to contract STIs; after the loss of a long-term partner later in life, sexual negotiation skills gained in youth may prove beneficial whereas STIs may prove a hindrance.

In most societies, cumulative (dis)advantage processes are gendered, insofar as women and men tend to follow different life course trajectories (Moen 1996). For example, the disadvantages women experience early in their occupational trajectories—being clustered in poorly paid jobs with short promotion ladders and limiting labor force activity due to family obligations—constrain later opportunities and result in minimal retirement resources, whereas men's early advantages—continuous employment, better paying jobs, and longer promotion ladders—enhance their later prospects. Likewise, virginity-loss trajectories tend to differ by gender, with men typically encouraged to "get it over with" and women urged to "save themselves."

But gender is not simply a social status that predisposes individuals to adopt certain beliefs and behaviors. Individuals construct—or “do”—gender throughout their lives, within specific institutional and social-historical contexts (West and Zimmerman 1987). Thus, gender itself can be understood as a trajectory. Although interactionist gender theories have thus far lacked an explicitly longitudinal dimension (West and Fenstermaker 1995; West and Zimmerman 1987), doing gender is an inherently longitudinal process. People become gendered through continually experimenting with gender rules—obeying some, breaking others—gauging others’ reactions, and revising their gender performances accordingly (Lucal 1999; Pascoe 2007; on varying ways of “doing” gender, often called hegemonic/emphasized versus subordinated masculinities and femininities, see Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Moments of experimentation and revision represent transitions in one’s gender trajectory. For example, women tend to be passive in sexual relationships not directly because of childhood socialization but because of lifelong cultural and experiential lessons that non-passivity brings undesirable consequences. Life course scholars have not adequately recognized the ongoing accomplishment of gender, yet a life course model is ideally suited to capture the fact that gender is (re)created through accumulated transitional moments over the life course.

As people accumulate life transitions—growing older in sociological terms (acquiring new social roles)—they are also growing older physiologically (and psychologically) (Riley 1987). A complete analysis of gendered sexuality over the life course must, therefore, consider biological aging (which is closely related to health trajectories). Levinson’s (1986:12) conceptualization of adult development in terms of the “life cycle” may be useful in this regard. Positing that all people transition through the same basic sequence of life “seasons” (e.g., early adulthood, midlife), owing to “the psychobiological properties of the human species,” Levinson recommends attending closely to biological (as well as social and psychological) growth and decline—which may co-occur in complex ways—across the entire life cycle. Of particular relevance to sexuality, physiological changes that typically come with age—slower, weaker erections for men; reduced lubrication after menopause for women—may make it more difficult and/or painful to engage in certain sexual activities (Schiavi 1994), and physical signs of aging—wrinkles, gray hair, diminished muscle tone—may leave people seeing themselves, or being seen by others, as less “sexy” or less appropriate as sexual partners (Koch et al. 2005).

The Relationship Between Gender and Sexuality

Feminist scholars have long sought to theorize the relationship between gender and sexuality. Some have proposed that gender relations determine sexuality, as when MacKinnon (1989:209) declared that feminist theory must treat “sexuality as a social construct of male power: defined by men, forced upon women, and constitutive in the meaning of gender.” Others have critiqued gender as the key organizing concept of feminist sociology. According to Ingraham (1996:169), “the material conditions of capitalist patriarchal societies are more centrally linked to institutionalized heterosexuality than to gender,” even as such institutional arrangements shape gender in turn. In 1984, Gayle Rubin (1984:308)—whose influential

1975 sex-gender system framework treated gender and sexuality as intimately intertwined—began to advocate the analytic separation of gender and sexuality: “Gender affects the operation of the sexual system, and the sexual system has had gender-specific manifestations. But although sex and gender are related, they are not the same thing, and they form the basis of two distinct arenas of social practice.”

More recently, Valentine (2004) argued that distinctions between sexuality and gender, while politically useful, do a disservice to the many people who experience sexual desire, social gender, and bodily sex as aligned. He proposed treating the relationship between sexuality and gender as an empirical question, with distinctive answers in different social/historical locations. Pascoe (2007), for example, has shown how high school boys (and girls) simultaneously construct and negotiate masculinity and sexuality at institutional, interactional, and individual levels. Likewise, Montemurro (2006) revealed how bridal showers and bachelorette parties enable women to construct alternate versions of gendered, heterosexual identities in a context of competing notions of femininity.

The GSLC model proposed here offers an empirically based tool for examining the mutual construction of sexuality and gender in specific contexts. Throughout the life course, transitions in an individual’s sexuality trajectory will affect his or her gender trajectory, even as the gender-related transitions he or she experiences help construct his or her sexuality trajectory. Attending to these mutually constitutive processes can provide insight into the ongoing gendering—and (hetero) sexualizing—of every aspect of human life. A full GSLC analysis would moreover engage with race, ethnicity, and social class as they *intersect* with gender, rather than merely “controlling” for these aspects of identity (Spelman 1988).

The Sexual Scripting Approach

Transitions related to family and sexuality—such as divorce, sexual abuse, and illness-related erectile dysfunction—represent points at which people may adopt new ways of negotiating sexual life. The scripting approach to sexuality offers a useful tool for understanding such processes. Developed by sociologists Gagnon and Simon (1973), the sexual scripts framework proposes that people’s sexual lives are governed by socially learned sets of sexual desires and conduct, rather than by biological imperatives.

Sexual scripts exist at three interrelated levels (Simon and Gagnon 1986). At the societal level, *cultural scenarios*, which are created and perpetuated by social institutions like mass media, serve as sexual “roadmaps” that people can consult to guide their choices about when, how, why, and with whom to be sexual. The belief that widows should remain “faithful” to their deceased husbands is a cultural scenario. A variety of cultural scenarios may be simultaneously available in a single society, although some may be perceived as specific to certain social groups (as with that just mentioned). At the level of social interaction, people “write” *interpersonal scripts* when they mutually influence one another’s sexual conduct and beliefs (e.g., during sexual encounters). Interpersonal scripts often entail improvisations on existing scenarios, as when sexual partners who favor different cultural scenarios must find ways to compromise. The individual, or *intrapsychic*, level of

scripting refers to people's particular desires, fantasies, and intentions (which are influenced by cultural scenarios and interpersonal scripts).

Historically, most societies have encouraged women and men to follow different sexual scripts (Laws and Schwartz 1977). To the extent that the scripts people follow in one stage of life help determine what scripts are available and appealing to them at later stages, this is a gendered process that tends to produce different cumulative outcomes for women and men. For example, heterosexual women who have learned the "nice girls don't plan to have sex" script are more likely to engage in unprotected sex and thus to experience unintended pregnancy, which may in turn preclude certain sexual and relationship options later (Thompson 1995). Social class, sexual identity, and race/ethnicity—intersecting with gender—likewise shape life trajectories by conferring opportunities and constraints and by influencing preferences for sexual scripts.

Social and Historical Context

Individuals' life course trajectories, transitions, and cumulative (dis)advantages must be situated in specific socio-historical contexts (Elder 1985). It is also crucial to distinguish the physical, social, and psychological changes brought about by aging from changes effected by broader forces (Riley 1987). For example, the economic boom following World War II promoted early marriage, high fertility, and conservative sexual values among the cohort born in the 1930s (D'Emilio and Freedman 1988). Secure prosperity, burgeoning mass media and consumerism, social justice movements (Civil Rights, antiwar, and feminist), and the development of effective contraceptive technologies fostered a permissive and relatively gender-egalitarian sexual culture among Baby Boomers (Seidman 1991).⁴ Generation X grew up during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, increasing visibility of GLBTQ communities, resurgence of moral conservatives' influence over sexuality education, and backlash against second-wave feminism (Risman and Schwartz 2002). Both Baby Boomers and Gen-Xers moreover matured during a period of rising divorce rates, cohabitation, and "delayed" first marriages and of decreasing gender differences in education and labor-force participation (Sussman et al. 1999). Thus, on average, men and women in each successive generation will spend more years being single, participate in a larger number of sexual relationships, and (if heterosexual) enjoy more equal levels of power and resources with partners. (Conversely, changes in life course patterns may transform social institutions, as when widespread changes in sexual morality helped "institutionalize" cohabitation; Riley 1987.)

Life course concepts, in general, and the cumulative (dis)advantage framework, in particular, can be usefully applied to sexuality, as the preceding examples suggest. Yet not one of the studies that have examined aspects of sexuality from a life course perspective contains all the elements necessary for a comprehensive, transposable conceptual model such as the one I propose here. Virtually every study focuses on a specific issue (e.g., widowhood) or stage in the life course (typically adolescence, young adulthood, or midlife) rather than considering multiple issues over life courses in their entirety. Most do not unpack the generic processes through which people might learn or reject new scripts; nor do any

posit cumulative (dis)advantages as fundamental to understanding GSLC. Only a few studies conceptualize gender in terms of power relations or social structures, none posit gender and sexuality as jointly constructed, and few explore cohort differences that might result from changing socio-historical contexts.

EMPIRICAL EXAMPLES

To illustrate the potential of my proposed framework, I present three case studies drawn from empirical research conducted by myself and other scholars. Most of these studies have explicitly used life course and/or scripting principles, but none has elaborated a thoroughgoing model for analyzing GSLC. Juxtaposing these cases illuminates the model's critical components. The three cases appear in a rough approximation of life course chronology, beginning in adolescence with virginity loss and involuntary celibacy, proceeding to adulthood with gay and heterosexual perspectives on marriage and decoupling, and concluding in later life (by extension) with adult-onset chronic illness. Each of these empirical "snapshots" shows how experiences at one stage of the life course affect gendered sexuality at later junctures. For each case, I delineate key conceptual elements—transitions, turning points, and their timing; agency; cumulative (dis)advantages; sexual scripts; lifelong "doing gender" processes; intersections with other trajectories; and the effects of generation and other aspects of social identity—and discuss how applying the full GSLC model could elucidate the case further.

Virginity Loss and Involuntary Celibacy

Virginity loss is widely seen as a signal transition in the sexual trajectory—both by those who define it traditionally, as occurring through first vaginal sex, and by the increasing number of people who apply the term to first genital sex with a same-sex partner. Popular, policy, and academic sources commonly posit virginity loss as having the potential to affect individuals' sexual beliefs and behavior in enduring ways. My interviews with 61 women and men, aged 18–35, from diverse sexual identities and social backgrounds, suggest that this is often the case but not in the simple or deterministic (much less entirely negative) ways often presumed (Carpenter 2005). Notably, although most participants described virginity loss as an important event in their sexual trajectories, many indicated that other experiences—such as first orgasms or coming out—represented turning points of equal or greater significance.

How virginity loss affected later sexual trajectories depended, to a large extent, on the meanings people attributed to virginity—and the choices they made (agency they exercised) accordingly. Almost all of the men and women I interviewed made sense of virginity loss through one of three metaphorical frames, variously comparing virginity to a gift, a stigma, or a step in the process of growing up. These metaphors represent cultural scenarios—with deeply, if increasingly challenged, gendered meanings—and help define interpersonal scripts. For example, "gifters" drew on a script, rooted in generic norms of gift-giving, that emphasized choosing a partner who was precious (like virginity), who understood virginity's special

nature, and who would reciprocate the gift of virginity with increased love and commitment to the erstwhile virgin.

Whether virginity loss represented a transition along a relatively consistent sexual trajectory or a turning point between divergent stages of sexual life depended on whether a person's virginity-loss encounter conformed to their preferred metaphorical script. Women and men whose experiences generally "fit" their script tended to approach subsequent sexual relationships much as they had approached virginity loss; thus, their sexual trajectories remained relatively continuous. For instance, many who favored the process metaphor spoke of bringing what they had learned from virginity loss (e.g., "practice makes perfect") to future sexual relationships. On the whole, these patterns reflect chains of cumulative advantage. Having a virginity-loss experience consistent with one's preferred script was not only inherently satisfying but also tended to reinforce one's commitment to that script—consistent with the identity agency processes identified by Hitlin and Elder (2007).

In contrast, people whose encounters diverged markedly from their favored scripts tended to experience virginity loss as a turning point. Men who viewed virginity as a stigma and were teased as "sexual incompetents" by their first (female) partners typically avoided sex for months or years following virginity loss—a striking change from their previously eager pursuit of relatively casual partners. Conversely, women gifters who were rejected by their (male) partners generally felt so "worthless" when their special gifts went unreciprocated that they no longer saved physical intimacy for committed relationships, much less insisted that sexual partners return their "gifts" with affection (i.e., the self-reflective aspect of their life course agency was impaired). These patterns reflect chains of cumulative disadvantage overall. An embarrassing or heartbreaking virginity-loss experience frequently led to decisions that produced considerable unhappiness and made it more difficult to revert to previous patterns of behavior—as when performance anxiety "forced" a man who deplored celibacy to avoid sexual encounters. Yet some individuals whose early sexual trajectories were largely disadvantageous described virginity loss as a turning point that helped them launch a more positive sexual trajectory (i.e., exercise pragmatic agency). The GSLC framework would predict that trajectories triggered by virginity loss would become increasingly varied as individuals underwent additional, diverse chains of transitions in all their life trajectories (a prediction I could not test, given how recently most of my respondents had lost their virginity).

Although most Americans lose their virginites (however defined) by their early 20s, and most continue to have sex (when they have a partner), these sexual transitions are not universal. Drawing on a survey of 60 men and 22 women, all unwillingly chaste, Donnelly et al. (2001) showed how "off-time" transitions into and out of sexual activity can accumulate to produce involuntary celibacy. Prevailing norms in the U.S. posit a "typical" sexual trajectory (i.e., cultural scenario) that proceeds from dating and experimenting with kissing and foreplay to sexual initiation to establishing a long-term committed relationship that includes sexual activity until the partners decouple or become "too old." Given widespread expectations that men and women will complete this "date, sex, mate" sequence at least

once by their late 20s (barring some culturally intelligible reason, such as strong religious convictions), the young adults in Donnelly et al.'s study who had never had sex—or a serious relationship—began to feel, and to be seen by others as, “off time.” Consequently, they found it increasingly difficult to achieve the transitions expected of them, such that a chain of delayed sexual and romantic transitions accumulated to produce involuntary celibacy. (Feelings of “timeliness” may be closely related to metaphorical virginity loss scripts; Carpenter 2005.)

Notably, delayed transitions at different junctures led to distinctive celibacy patterns. Men and women who did not begin dating by early adulthood—typically due to shyness, concerns about appearance, or living at home—“missed” important opportunities for making the transition to sex. Remaining virgins while their peers dated and became sexually active, these individuals found it more difficult to date and thus to lose their virginity. Another group reported initial sexual encounters (often dissatisfying) but found it difficult to establish (i.e., make the transition to) ongoing relationships. Outside committed relationships and unwilling to engage in casual (or commercial) sex, these individuals remained chaste against their wishes. (In terms of identity agency, they were unwilling to make choices about sex that diverged from their existing sense of self.) Moreover, having never been in a serious relationship, when most of their peers had, made them less attractive to potential partners. The more “off time” a person felt, the more difficult it seemed to turn their trajectory around. As one male virgin put it, “Most people assume some experience, and get unnerved [by my lack of experience]” (Donnelly et al. 2001:166). In short, “off-time” (or absent) transitions accumulated into disadvantageous (unwillingly celibate) trajectories. By contrast, “on-time” transitions (which Donnelly et al. do not address) presumably facilitate the formation of romantic and sexual relationships—producing cumulatively advantageous trajectories.

Both my research and Donnelly et al.'s underscore the connections between sexual and other life trajectories. Historically, mainstream cultural scenarios linked virginity loss with the family transition of marriage; in the U.S. today, virginity loss often occurs alongside the educational transition of high school graduation (Carpenter 2005). Heterosexual men in gender-segregated occupations find it difficult to meet potential partners (sexuality + work trajectories) and virgins delay or forgo child-bearing (sexuality + family trajectories) (Donnelly et al. 2001).

Both studies also demonstrate the profoundly—if complexly—gendered nature of sexual scripts and trajectories. Men enact traditional (hegemonic) and unconventional (subordinated) masculinity, respectively, when they favor the “virginity as stigma” and “virginity as gift” scripts; conversely for women and femininity. Notably, women and men who drew on the same script underwent similar virginity-loss transitions, with two exceptions shaped by gendered power relations: some male partners used their social power to take advantage of women who viewed virginity as a gift, while women partners who teased men about their stigmatizing inexperience were deploying a power strategy of the weak (Carpenter 2002; see also Holland et al. 1996). Celibacy trajectories were likewise shaped by cultural expectations about—and enabled individuals to construct—masculinity and femininity, as when women felt that their virginity would have been more off-putting to others had they been men (Donnelly et al. 2001). By providing

tools for exploring how earlier events influence later ones, the GSLC model can help future scholars assess more completely the ways people select and reject gendered sexual scripts.

Neither of these studies features a diverse enough sample to permit a thorough analysis of gender's intersections with race/ethnicity, social class, and other aspects of identity as mandated by the GLSC framework; however, such analysis is critical given the ways race and class shape trajectories (e.g., family, work, health) that profoundly impact sexuality. Nor did Donnelly et al. survey enough GLBTQ individuals to establish sexual identity's effects on involuntary celibacy. The gay, lesbian, and bisexual people I interviewed disproportionately favored the "process" script, largely because they experienced virginity loss as intertwined with the process of coming out, and tended to follow somewhat distinctive trajectories, in terms of types of sexual partners (platonic vs. romantic friends) and approaches to "foreplay" while virgins.

The GSLC model demands attention to the ways generation affects key (non) transitions. The two cohorts in my study came of age before and after the HIV epidemic and resurgence of moral conservatism and thus followed different sexual trajectories on average (on differences between previous cohorts, see Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, and Michaels 1994). Younger gay men and lesbians were much more likely to come out before having sex and to have first sex with a same-sex partner, and younger heterosexual men were disproportionately likely to favor the "conservative" gift script. These patterns were not universal, however. Were Donnelly et al. to address cohort effects, they might have found that members of generations for whom early sexual activity was normative would, on average, experience involuntarily celibacy as more problematic than members of generations who were encouraged to postpone sex until marriage. Through concepts that help account for biographical variation within cohorts (e.g., transitions, timing), the GSLC framework offers a more satisfactory account than analyses that simply compare cohorts as a whole.

Marriage and Decoupling

Throughout Judeo-Christian history, marriage has been so central to the organization of human sexuality (and gender) that virtually everyone—regardless of sexual identity—must respond to its existence. Intersections between sexuality and family trajectories are highlighted by the cases of gay and heterosexual men's responses to the institution of marriage and the effects of marriage/cohabitation dissolution on heterosexual adults' sexual attitudes and conduct.

In his interview study of 60 gay and 50 heterosexual men, aged 21–52, in New York City, Green (2006) showed how the (im)possibility of marriage, given one's sexual identity, shaped men's sexual and relationship trajectories. All of the men were raised to assume that they were heterosexual and that they would eventually marry and have children. The heterosexual men's trajectories were largely consistent with this conventional "marriage-and-parenthood" script. Dating experiences in adolescence socialized them to sexual scripts anticipating monogamous commitment. Some men framed youthful sexual relationships in terms of the possibility

of future commitment, whereas others “played the field” in deliberate opposition to marriage, even as they expected eventually to enact the conjugal script (exemplifying the long-term aspect of life course agency). As they aged, many of the men felt restricted by some aspects of marriage, especially monogamy, but found it difficult to imagine a future completely outside the dominant script. In GSLC terms, these men’s sexual trajectories reflected continuities, composed of transitions rather than turning points.

By contrast, the gay men had to negotiate the discrepancy between their own sexual desires and the “heterosexual marriage-and-parenthood” script they learned as children, given the limited institutional possibilities open to them. Coming out marked a major turning point in most of these men’s sexual trajectories. Self-identifying as gay and living in New York, an urban center ripe with same-sex-centered institutions, combined to give these men access to alternative sexual scripts—emphasizing relatively casual sex with multiple partners and/or non-monogamous long-term relationships—that historically developed as a result of the unavailability of marriage. Green’s informants negotiated different sexual pathways with these semi-established gay scripts in mind (i.e., they exercised identity agency consistent with their sense of self). Some men embraced the dominant sexually “free-wheeling” script; others wanted to build more permanent monogamous relationships but found it difficult to enact a new script.

Thus, Green (2006:164) argues that the (im)possibility of marriage served as “navigational reference points” according to which gay and heterosexual men developed sexual trajectories and enacted sexual scripts. As an institutionalized set of opportunities and constraints, marriage prompted heterosexual men to shift from bachelorhood to conjugal scripts as they aged; from the GSLC perspective, this could be seen as trading one way of doing masculinity for another. In contrast, gay men followed alternate pathways triggered by the unavailability of marriage; many saw their sexual histories as somewhat disordered in the absence of marriage-related milestones. A complete GSLC analysis of Green’s data would additionally consider how the ongoing construction of masculinity influences gay and straight men’s sexual scripts and trajectories and how lifelong gender and sexuality trajectories contribute to divergent script preferences within, as well as across, sexual identities. Although he did not interview women, Green suggests that the (non)availability of marriage would shape women’s sexual trajectories less dramatically than men’s, insofar as lesbians and heterosexual women behave more similarly, sexually, than do gay and straight men. A GSLC-informed analysis might further ask whether the incentive to do femininity in relatively passive ways transcends sexual identity. Nor would a GSLC analysis be complete without closer attention to the effects of race and social class; Green’s sample is predominantly middle-class and college educated; most of the heterosexual men were White.

It is worth considering how the key GSLC framework components of transition timing and cumulative (dis)advantages, which Green does not discuss, could further illuminate his participants’ lives. The timing of certain transitions may meaningfully affect sexual trajectories, as when gay men who believe they came out “late” feel compelled to “catch up” by rapidly accumulating large

numbers of partners. Applying the lens of cumulative (dis)advantages highlights the complexity of men's marriage-related trajectories. Gay men appear to be initially disadvantaged by growing up isolated from sexual scripts that resonate with their desires. But the extent to which *adult* gay and heterosexual men's sexual trajectories comprise accumulating advantages or disadvantages depends largely on the consistency of their desires with prevailing gay and heterosexual scripts. For example, heterosexual men who long for traditional family life may find the transitions of marriage and childbirth more advantageous than their less-commitment-minded brethren.

Given the increasing visibility and acceptance of GLBTQ lives in recent decades, as well as the evolving history of HIV/AIDS, a GSLC-informed analysis might predict that men from different generations would approach the (im)possibility of marriage in distinctive ways. Green's respondents, aged 21–52 in 2002–03, encompass two if not three cohorts—including men who were as young as 3 and as old as 34 when Rock Hudson died of AIDS-related complications in 1985, and who ranged from their mid-teens to late 40s when highly effective antiretroviral therapies became standard treatment for HIV. Yet, surprisingly, Green (2006:177) concludes that "most gay men in this study [including the 20-somethings]...experienced their homosexuality as a problematic, emerging life pathway without concrete precedent and with limited cultural support." Perhaps the lives of the next generation of gay men will be affected more profoundly; or perhaps living in a relatively tolerant metropolis like New York muted generational differences among Green's interviewees. The increasing legal recognition of same-sex unions is likely to alter GLBTQ sexual and family trajectories in significant, if complex, ways and may prompt GLBTQ men and women to do gender in new ways as well.

A complementary example comes from Wade and DeLamater (2002), who demonstrate how the dissolution of marital and cohabiting relationships represents a life-stage transition that enables people to adopt new sexual scripts. Using data from the National Health and Social Life Survey—specifically the 2,680 heterosexual, non-widowed women and men, aged 18–59 in 1992—Wade and DeLamater compared people who had never married or cohabited to those who had left a marriage or cohabiting relationship (a) within the last year and (b) more than 12 months before. Strikingly, becoming single *within the last year* was a better predictor of adults' sexual behavior than either demographic or attitudinal variables. Men and women who had resumed their single status in the previous year acquired new sexual partners at significantly faster rates than people who had been single longer (suggesting a pragmatic agency dynamic). Wade and DeLamater conclude that women and men adopted new sexual scripts as they made the transition from partnered to single, then, after about a year, reverted to scripts more "typical" of people who shared their social identities and initial perspectives on sex. In short, decoupling represents a key turning point in sexual careers—but a turning point that may have only temporary effects.

This study, like Green's, could benefit from explicitly incorporating the cumulative (dis)advantages analysis proposed by the GSLC framework. Whether post-dissolution trajectories are cumulatively advantageous or disadvantageous for individuals presumably depends on a variety of factors (not addressed in the study), including the nature of the relationship—was it satisfying, violent, financially

secure?—and whether or not the individual wanted it to end (Vaughan 1986). The aftermath of the dissolved relationship would also shape trajectories in (dis)advantageous ways. For example, acquiring many new partners after a divorce might result in more opportunities to contract STIs (disadvantageous) but also in chances to explore new sexual techniques and (re)gain sexual-negotiation skills (advantageous). Specific events must be interpreted cautiously, given different outcomes and subjective interpretations.

Finally, the GSLC model demands closer consideration of the ways cohort, gender, sexual identity, and race/ethnicity shape script adoption and cumulative (dis)advantage dynamics following decoupling. Wade and DeLamater's regression models indicated that age, while inversely related to permissive attitudes and numbers of new partners, was a less important determinant than other factors. However, they did not address patterns across generations, beyond noting that certain broad social changes, especially the rise of cohabitation, may differentiate current and future cohorts. Their findings about social identity likewise provide mainly food for thought. Although post-dissolution trajectories were broadly similar across gender and race, for men but not women, being African American was associated with greater permissiveness. In Wade and DeLamater's view, this finding suggests that the higher numbers of sexual partners often observed among African American men, compared with White men, may result from life course processes—specifically from higher rates of (more fragile) cohabiting relationships and greater amounts of time spent in the “dissolution” state among African Americans—rather than cultural norms or racially specific ways of “doing” masculinity. Such examples can help refine the GSLC perspective, revealing subtle or unanticipated ways of accomplishing gender. Greater attention should also be paid to how the gendered power dynamics of heterosexual relationships might affect decoupling. Moreover, though the small number of non-heterosexual NHSLS participants limited the analyses Wade and DeLamater could pursue, Green's findings point to the importance of examining how sexual identity, and the gendered scripts and institutions it makes available, might affect relationship dissolution.

Viewed together through a GSLC lens, these cases show how sexuality- (and gender-) related life course processes help produce the differences and similarities observed within and across social groups, and among individuals and cohorts over time. They also reveal the profound effects of sexuality's interactions with other life trajectories (family, health). Understanding how these phenomena unfold over time is critical to understanding human lives in their entirety.

Disability and Illness

Although Schlesinger (1996) does not explicitly use a life course perspective or analyze sexual scripts, her interview study of chronic pain among 28 heterosexual women suffering from chronic back, muscle, or joint pain illustrates insights made possible by the GSLC framework. Aged 20–50, Schlesinger's respondents had not expected to deal with physically disabling illnesses so early in life. From a GSLC perspective, they experienced an off-time (early) transition to having physical impairments that limited their sexual lives—something people anticipate (if dread)

happening in old age. This case therefore helps illuminate the ways that aging shapes gendered sexual trajectories, especially as they intersect with health. (That said, the distinctive effects of disability and aging should be studied in their own right.)

Training a GSLC lens on Schlesinger's findings reveals that chronic pain affected women's sexual trajectories and enactment of sexual scripts differently depending on their family trajectories. Of the ten single women, nine wished to be (hetero) sexually active but felt that their physical conditions had made doing so less likely and/or more complicated. (The tenth was intentionally celibate, for reasons presumably unrelated to her disability.) Many worried that it would be difficult to find partners who would be sufficiently understanding of their physical limitations. Two of the women had ended (or lost) relationships due to unsympathetic partners, like an avid motorcyclist who could not accept that chronic neck problems prevented his girlfriend from riding with him.

Conversely, the 18 women living with male partners attributed the endurance of their relationships to their ability to communicate and negotiate, which depended in turn on how long the couple had known one another. Common strategies included the use of humor and mutually understood signals of sexual unavailability (e.g., wearing a flannel nightgown). Half the women reported making adjustments—in GSLC terms, agentially adopting new sexual scripts—that helped them to continue feeling and being sexual, such as finding new positions and engaging in alternative romantic activities (e.g., backrubs) (on people who are involuntarily celibate due to partner's illness, see Donnelly et al. 2001).

Nonetheless, chronic pain and related exhaustion took a toll on these women's sexual lives. Many feared aggravating their pain through sexual activity, while their partners feared hurting them (though a few women said pain had brought the couple closer together). Several women withdrew from sex because of what they saw as negative changes to their physical appearance (e.g., surgical scars), even if their partners were supportive. Notably, pain was not the only factor affecting these women's sex lives; lack of time, stress, and financial worries also diminished sexual desire and activity. Particular concerns arose at the intersection of the sexuality, health, and family trajectories. Several women decided not to have children because of their pain, and many worried about how their worsening conditions would affect their relationships in the long run (reflecting life course agency processes).

From a GSLC perspective, the onset of chronic pain and disability represented a turning point for the women in Schlesinger's study, dramatically altering their sexual trajectories. Despite some positive developments (e.g., creative responses), as a rule, the transition to chronic pain represented a disadvantage for sexual life, which seemed to set sexual, familial, and other disadvantages into motion. Yet some women and their partners did manage to adopt new sexual scripts that enabled them to remain sexually active in satisfying ways.

Although gender was not her central focus, Schlesinger contends that traditional gender socialization may have exacerbated her participants' concerns about attracting and keeping partners. Alternatively, the GSLC model would suggest that these patterns issue from, and promote, specific ways of doing femininity. How men deal with the sexual implications of disability—and, by extension,

aging—while accomplishing masculinity is a crucial question for future research, as are the effects of sexual identity, race/ethnicity, social class, and religion (Schlesinger's all-heterosexual sample was predominantly White, middle-class, and Christian). A full GSLC analysis would also evaluate cohort effects. To the extent that the disability rights movement, which began in the 1970s but gathered steam in the 1990s, has changed attitudes about disability and improved access to assistive technologies (e.g., ramps, scooters), younger-generation women and men may be less willing passively to accept negative sexual outcomes of illness/disability and may enjoy more resources (including medical advances) to combat those outcomes (Garland-Thomson 2005). Changing attitudes about sexuality and aging, along with new technologies like Viagra (Loe 2004), will likely result in greater resistance to aging-related changes in sexuality among future cohorts, in ways that are gender-specific (Calasanti and Slevin 2001). The GSLC model would emphasize linking these broad social changes to individual biographies, for instance, as they prompt transitions and help guide sexual and other trajectories.

CONCLUSION

How do sexual and social experiences at one point in life affect a person's sexual beliefs and behaviors—and gender identity—later on, within specific socio-historical contexts? This article outlines a comprehensive, transferable framework for studying gendered sexuality over the life course. This approach posits sexual beliefs and behaviors as resulting from individuals' lifelong accumulation of advantageous and disadvantageous experiences, and their adoption and rejection of sexual scripts, within particular socio-historical circumstances. Gender-specific experiences and scripts, along with gendered structures and power relations, work to produce distinctive sexual trajectories for women and men—which influence gender trajectories in turn. This model is indebted to previous scholars who applied life course concepts to sexuality but stopped short of developing a general framework that might be deployed in all manner of circumstances.

To demonstrate the utility of the proposed approach, I presented three empirical examples representing a range of sexuality-related issues at different life stages. Each case study employed some combination of key life course and scripting concepts and/or addressed crucial issues around gender and social identity, but none included every component necessary for illuminating the lifelong unfolding of gendered sexuality. My discussion of each case indicated how further insight could be gained by employing every element that comprises the GSLC model: transitions, turning points, and their timing; cumulative (dis)advantages at individual and group levels; agency; physiological processes; intersections with other life trajectories; doing gender; adoption/rejection of sexual scripts; and the effects of generation, sexual identity, and other aspects of social identity. The GSLC lens may help us identify key transitions and turning points (sexual and otherwise) and links among trajectories that shape sexual lives in ways that merit further study. For scholars wishing to employ the GSLC perspective in their own research, Table 1 provides a checklist of features to which GSLC-based research projects should attend.

TABLE 1
Elements to Consider When Employing the GSLC Model

<i>Element</i>	<i>Questions to Ask</i>
Transitions	Between what social roles are people moving? How are those transitions timed (on time, early, late)?
Turning points	Do some transitions represent major changes in the life course? With what consequences?
Cumulative (dis)advantages processes	How do experiences at one life stage impact later experiences? Are these chains of experience positive, negative, mixed?
Agency	In what ways are people exercising agency, and of what type(s) (existential, identity, pragmatic, life course)?
Physiological processes	How might physiological changes, including those related to aging, affect this aspect of sexual life?
Intersections among trajectories	How does the sexuality trajectory affect other life trajectories (e.g., family, work, education) and vice versa?
Doing gender and sexual identity	What gender and sexual identities are being accomplished via sexual conduct? How are gender and sexuality co-constructed?
Sexual scripts	What sexual scripts are available? Which do people choose? Which do they reject?
Historical context and generation	How might major historical changes affect this aspect of sexuality? To what extent do members of different generations have distinctive experiences?
Other aspects of social identity	How do race, ethnicity, social class, religion, and other dimensions of social identity affect GSLC dynamics?

Each of the above cases connects events at one stage of life with later-life consequences. As such, they represent an improvement over the “single stage” studies that characterized early work in this area. But a model for studying GSLC must go beyond such “snapshots” to examine cumulative (dis)advantage and scripting processes over the entire life course. Consider the dynamics that could be revealed if it were possible to link these studies empirically. For instance, we might see how the different (gendered) sexual pathways, including different choices about virginity loss/first sex, prompted by the (im)possibility of marriage for gay and heterosexual men would be altered by the onset of chronic pain, likely making it more difficult to maintain long-term relationships, potentially resulting in involuntary celibacy.

The GSLC model holds particular promise for understanding fundamental aspects of gendered sexuality that unfold across the entire life course—like sexual

agency, assertiveness in intimate relationships, and interest in sex. These complex phenomena have long resisted simple explanation. Some people exhibit similar levels of sexual agency or interest throughout their lives, while others experience dramatic shifts; sexual interest is sometimes associated with qualities of current relationships, but often not; and sexual agency is patterned by, but never reducible to, gender and other aspects of social identity. The GSLC model provides crucial tools for unpacking the lifelong chains of (dis)advantageous transitions within sexual, gender, and other life trajectories that—along with sexual scripts—accumulate to produce such patterns of similarity and difference across individuals and groups.

By highlighting the mutual construction of sexuality and gender over the life course, my GSLC model provides fresh, empirically grounded fodder for theorizing the relationship between gender and sexuality. It advances gender theory by demonstrating the utility of conceptualizing gender as continually accomplished over the life course, via accumulated gender-related transitions. Likewise, the GSLC framework recommends enhancing the sexual scripting approach with a more sophisticated understanding of gender as continually (re)constituted through human action. In practical terms, the model can help predict the gender and sexual variations that are observed among girls/women and boys/men in any given cohort, based on their different accumulated experiences. The GSLC model also shows how life course scholarship can be enhanced by an understanding of gender as jointly created and inextricably intertwined with sexuality, as an active, lifelong construction rather than a stable master status.

Ideally, future iterations of this GSLC model would attend more explicitly to physiological changes and their effects. Of the cases considered here, Schlesinger's (1996) goes furthest in this direction, showing how physical illness affects sexual desire and behavior in lasting, cumulative ways. By a similar token, some research links pubertal development to the timing of first vaginal intercourse (Udry and Campbell 1994) and, conversely, the timing of first vaginal sex to physical health outcomes such as STIs (Browning and Laumann 1997). Greater attention to biological processes will enrich the proposed framework considerably.

Collecting new types of data, with new goals in mind, can help develop the GSLC model further. The lack of detailed longitudinal data on sexuality represents a major impediment to producing nuanced studies of sexuality over the full life course. Every case considered here relies on cross-sectional data and retrospective reports. Such data do not permit scholars to assess causality definitively, to disentangle aging from cohort effects, or to map chains of actual events over time rather than imagining pathways through statistical inference. Retrospective data are, moreover, subject to the failings of memory (though analyzing people's retrospective reinterpretations of key life events can tell us much about social processes; e.g., Hopper 2001). The major current longitudinal studies ask only the most basic (if any) questions about sexuality; however, the National Social Health and Aging Project (NSHAP), which focuses on sexuality, may become longitudinal, and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) would become an invaluable resource were respondents to be followed past young adulthood. Considerable progress could be made by launching new sexuality-related longitudinal

studies and encouraging major surveys (longitudinal and retrospective) to include more nuanced questions about sexuality and gender identity. Collecting fuller sexual histories—for instance, asking questions about sexual satisfaction, agency, and interest with each successive partner—would be extremely helpful.

Gathering data on theoretically relevant cases, following the precepts of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), may also help to build a fuller picture of gendered sexuality of the life course. In addition to examining diverse sexual turning points, such as widowhood and migration between sexual cultures, scholars must include participants from all stages of the life course—childhood and old age are particularly understudied—and the widest possible range of social backgrounds, especially insofar as critical trajectories like family, work, and health are known to differ by race/ethnicity and social class. Training a GSLC lens on the experiences of transgender women and men may be especially useful for illuminating the ways people “do” gendered sexuality (see, e.g., Witten 2003). Finally, most studies, including those presented here, rely exclusively on either large-scale surveys or small-scale, open-ended interviews. Developing analyses that interweave quantitative and qualitative data—thus not only enjoy generalizability and representativeness but also capture nuanced, subjective, hard-to-quantify aspects of sexuality—would go far toward illuminating the complexities of lifelong gendered sexual trajectories.

Acknowledgments: The author thanks Dana Britton, Karen Campbell, John DeLamater, Meika Loe, Judith Lorber, Constance A. Nathanson, Amanda Nothhaft, and Richard Pitt for their comments on earlier drafts of this article.

NOTES

1. In order to disrupt heterosexual normativity, I have specified *all* study participants' sexual identities when known and included examples involving participants of diverse sexual identities. Regrettably, the preponderance of empirical research on sexuality from a life course perspective has focused on heterosexual women and men. When drawing on such examples, I have indicated some ways in which GLBTQ experiences might be distinctive.
2. The GSLC model is a conceptual rather than a statistical model. The usefulness of such conceptual models is revealed, for example, by Connell's (1987) influential unpacking of gender dynamics into labor, power, and cathexis (emotional attachment).
3. The studies from which I took these examples draw on data gathered via in-depth interviews and surveys, just two of the methods commonly used in life course sociology. See Giele and Elder (1998) for an extensive discussion. On the use of event history analysis in life course research, see Wu (2003).
4. Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964, and Generation-Xers between 1964 and 1979.

REFERENCES

- Barbre, Joy Webster. 1998. “Meno-Boomers and Moral Guardians: An Exploration of the Cultural Construction of Menopause.” Pp. 242–52 in *The Politics of Women's Bodies*, edited by R. Weitz. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

- Browning, Christopher R. and Edward O. Laumann. 1997. "Sexual Contact between Children and Adults: A Life Course Perspective." *American Sociological Review* 62(4):540–60.
- Calasanti, Toni M. and Kathleen F. Slevin. 2001. *Gender, Social Inequalities, and Aging*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.
- Carpenter, Laura M. 2002. "Gender and the Social Construction of Virginity Loss in the Contemporary United States." *Gender & Society* 16(3):345–65.
- . 2005. *Virginity Lost: An Intimate Portrait of First Sexual Experiences*. New York: New York University Press.
- Charmaz, Kathy. 2006. *Constructing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Clausen, John A. 1995. "Gender, Contexts, and Turning Points in Adult Lives." Pp. 365–89 in *Examining Lives in Context*, edited by P. Moen, G. H. Elder, and K. Lüscher. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Connell, R W. 1987. *Gender and Power*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- and James W. Messerschmidt. 2005. "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & Society* 19(6):829–59.
- D'Emilio, John and Estelle B. Freedman. 1988. *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Donnelly, Denise, Elisabeth Burgess, Sally Anderson, Regina Davis, and Joy Dillard. 2001. "Involuntary Celibacy: A Life Course Analysis." *Journal of Sex Research* 38(2):159–69.
- Elder, Glen H., Jr. 1985. "Perspectives on the Life Course." Pp. 23–49 in *Life Course Dynamics: Trajectories and Transitions*, edited by G. H. Elder, Jr. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- . 1994. "Time, Human Agency, and Social Change: Perspectives on the Life Course." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 57(1):4–15.
- Gagnon, John H. and William Simon. 1973. *Sexual Conduct*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. 2005. "Feminist Disability Studies." *Signs* 30(2):1557–88.
- Giele, Janet Z. and Glen H. Elder, Jr. (Eds.) 1998. *Methods of Life Course Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- González-López, Gloria. 2005. *Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and their Sex Lives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Green, Adam Isaiah. 2006. "'Until Death Do Us Part?': The Impact of Differential Access to Marriage on a Sample of Urban Men." *Sociological Perspectives* 49(2):163–89.
- Hitlin, Steven and Glen H. Elder, Jr. 2007. "Time, Self, and the Curiously Absent Concept of Agency." *Sociological Theory* 25(2):170–91.
- Holland, Janet, Caroline Ramazanoglu, and Rachel Thomson. 1996. "In the Same Boat? The Gendered (In)experience of First Heterosex." Pp. 143–60 in *Theorising Heterosexuality*, edited by D. Richardson. Bristol, PA: Open University Press.
- Hopper, Joseph. 2001. "The Symbolic Origins of Conflict in Divorce." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 63(2):430–45.
- Ingraham, Chrys. 1996. "The Heterosexual Imaginary: Feminist Sociology and Theories of Gender." Pp. 168–93 in *Queer Theory/Sociology*, edited by S. Seidman. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Koch, Patricia Barthalow, Phyllis Kernoff Mansfield, Debra Thureau, and Molly Carey. 2005. "'Feeling Frumpy': The Relationship between Body Image and Sexual Response Changes in Midlife Women." *Journal of Sex Research* 42(3):215–23.
- Laumann, Edward O., John H. Gagnon, Robert T. Michael, and Stuart Michaels. 1994. *The Social Organization of Sexuality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Laws, Judith Long and Pepper Schwartz. 1977. *Sexual Scripts: The Social Construction of Female Sexuality*. Hinsdale, IL: Dryden Press.
- Levinson, Daniel. 1986. "A Conception of Adult Development." *American Psychologist* 41(1):3–13.

- Loe, Meika. 2004. *The Rise of Viagra*. New York: New York University Press.
- Lucal, Betsy. 1999. "What It Means to Be Gendered Me: Life on the Boundaries of a Dichotomous Gender System." *Gender & Society* 13(6):781-97.
- MacKinnon, Catharine. 1989. "Sexuality, Pornography and Method: Pleasure under Patriarchy." *Ethics* 99(2):314-46.
- Marsiglio, William and Richard A. Greer. 1994. "A Gender Analysis of Older Men's Sexuality." Pp. 122-40 in *Older Men's Lives*, edited by J. Edward, H. Thompson, and M. S. Kimmel. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Meadows, Marilyn. 1997. "Exploring the Invisible: Listening to Mid-Life Women about Heterosexual Sex." *Women's Studies International Forum* 20(1):145-52.
- Moen, Phyllis. 1996. "Gender, Age, and the Life Course." Pp. 171-87 in *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences*, edited by R. H. Binstock and L. K. George. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Montemurro, Beth. 2006. *Something Old, Something Bold: Bridal Showers and Bachelorette Parties*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- O'Rand, Angela M. 1996. "The Cumulative Stratification of the Life Course." Pp. 188-207 in *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences*, edited by R. H. Binstock and L. K. George. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Pascoe, C. J. 2007. *Dude, You're a Fag: Masculinity and Sexuality in High School*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Riley, Matilda White. 1987. "On the Significance of Age in Sociology." *American Sociological Review* 52(1):1-14.
- Risman, Barbara and Pepper Schwartz. 2002. "After the Sexual Revolution: Gender Politics in Teen Dating." *Contexts* 1(1):16-24.
- Rossi, Alice S. 1994. *Sexuality across the Life Course*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rubin, Gayle. 1984. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." Pp. 267-319 in *Pleasure and Danger*, edited by C. S. Vance. Boston: Routledge.
- Rust, Paula C. 1996. "Sexual Identity and Bisexual Identities: The Struggle for Self-Description in a Changing Sexual Landscape." Pp. 64-86 in *Queer Studies*, edited by B. Beemyn and M. Eliason. New York: New York University Press.
- Savin-Williams, Ritch C. and Lisa Diamond. 2000. "Sexual Identity Trajectories among Sexual-Minority Youths: Gender Comparisons." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 29(6):607-27.
- Schiavi, Raul C. 1994. "Effect of Chronic Disease and Medication on Sexual Functioning." Pp. 313-39 in *Sexuality across the Life Course*, edited by A. S. Rossi. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Schlesinger, Lynn. 1996. "Chronic Pain, Intimacy, and Sexuality: A Qualitative Study of Women Who Live with Pain." *Journal of Sex Research* 33(3):249-56.
- Seidman, Steven. 1991. *Romantic Longings: Love in America, 1830-1980*. New York: Routledge.
- Simon, William and John H. Gagnon. 1986. "Sexual Scripts: Permanence and Change." *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 15(2):97-120.
- Spelman, Elizabeth V. 1988. *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Sussman, Marvin B., Suzanne K. Steinmetz, and Gary W. Peterson. 1999. *Handbook of Marriage and the Family*. New York: Springer.
- Thompson, Sharon. 1995. *Going All the Way*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Udry, J. Richard and Benjamin C. Campbell. 1994. "Getting Started on Sexual Behavior." Pp. 187-207 in *Sexuality across the Life Course*, edited by A. S. Rossi. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Valentine, David. 2004. "The Categories Themselves." *GLQ* 10(2):215-20.

- Vaughan, Diane. 1986. *Uncoupling: Turning Points in Intimate Relationships*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wade, Lisa D. and John D. DeLamater. 2002. "Relationship Dissolution as a Life Stage Transition: Effects on Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 64(4):898–914.
- West, Candace and Sarah Fenstermaker. 1995. "Doing Difference." *Gender & Society* 9(1):8–37.
- and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender & Society* 1(2):125–51.
- Witten, Tarynn M. 2003. "Life Course Analysis—The Courage to Search for Something More: Middle Adulthood Issues in the Transgender and Intersex Community." *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 8(3–4):189–224.
- World Health Organization. 2002. "Definition of Sexual Health." Geneva: WHO.
- Wu, Lawrence L. 2003. "Event History Models for Life Course Analysis." Pp. 477–502 in *Handbook of the Life Course*, edited by J. T. Mortimer and M. J. Shanahan. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum.

