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The Sociology of Sexualities: Queer and Beyond

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Abstract

We identify three trends in the recent sociology of sexuality. First, we examine how queer theory has influenced many sociologists whose empirical work observes sexuality in areas generally thought to be asexual. These sociologists also elaborate queer theory's challenge to sexual dichotomizing and trace the workings of power through sexual categories. Second, we look at how sociologists bring sexuality into conversation with the black feminist notion of "intersectionality" by examining the nature and effects of sexuality among multiple and intersecting systems of identity and oppression. A third trend in the sociology of sexuality has been to explore the relationships between sexuality and political economy in light of recent market transformations. In examining these trends, we observe the influence of globalization studies and the contributions of sociologists

to understanding the role of sexuality in global processes. We conclude with the contributions sociologists of sexuality make toward understanding other social processes and with the ongoing need to study sexuality itself.

Key Words

sexuality , identity , globalization , intersectionality , queer studies

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the sociology of sexualities has experienced growth that is at once queer and phenomenal. In its infancy and early childhood, the sociology of sexualities was mainly the province of scholars interested in “deviance” of one sort or another, and especially of the homosexual sort: the coping mechanisms of discredited and discreditable sexual beings (e.g., [Leznoff & Westley 1956](#), [Reiss 1961](#)) and the “deviant sexual underworld of hustlers, prostitutes, prisons, tearooms, baths, and bars” ([Seidman 1996](#), p. 7; see, e.g., [Humphreys 1970](#)). As it came of age with sexual liberation movements in the 1970s and 1980s and a budding interdisciplinary field of gay and lesbian studies, the sociology of sexualities became more interested in sexuality as a basis of community and political life. Ethnographers documented life in gay and lesbian communities (e.g., [Krieger 1983](#), [Levine 1979](#), [Newton 1972](#)), political sociologists pulled lessons from lesbian and gay movements (e.g., [Adam 1987](#), [Altman 1982](#), [Ponse 1978](#), [Taylor & Whittier 1992](#)) and studied the form and impact of sexuality-based discrimination (e.g., [Herek 1989](#), [Jeness & Broad 1994](#), [Schneider 1987](#)), and survey researchers continued to demonstrate the prevalence of both antigay sentiment and non-normative sexual practices (e.g., [Klassen et al. 1989](#), [Laumann et al. 1994](#), [Reiss & Miller 1979](#)).

At the same time, many sociologists drew heavily on the social constructionism donated by symbolic interactionists, phenomenologists, and labeling theorists (e.g., [Gagnon & Simon 1973](#), [McIntosh 1981](#), [Plummer 1981a](#)), and by theorists outside sociology such as [Foucault \(1978\)](#). The sociology of sexuality became tightly linked to a denaturalizing project, demonstrating, as Epstein put it, that “sexual meanings, identities, and categories were intersubjectively negotiated social and historical products—that sexuality was, in a word, constructed” ([Epstein 1996b](#), p. 145; see, e.g., [Greenberg 1988](#), [Weeks 1985](#)). Sociologists demonstrated the variability of sexual meanings, identities, and categories; many shifted their focal point from “the homosexual” as a fixed, natural, universal sort of being to “homosexual” as a social category that “should itself be analyzed and its relative historical, economic, and political base be scrutinized” ([Nardi & Schneider 1998](#), p. 4). (Work in the social construction of sexualities—including heterosexualities—is still going strong; see, for example, [Carpenter 2002](#), [Dellinger & Williams 2002](#), [Frank 1998, 2002](#); [González-López 2003](#), [Murray 2000](#), [Schalet 2000](#), [Schalet et al. 2003](#), [Seidman 2002](#), [Seidman et al. 1999](#)).

By the mid-1990s, “queer theory” began to make its mark on academic studies of sexuality. Its poststructuralist roots were revealed in its claims that sexual and other identities are “arbitrary, unstable, and exclusionary,” and in its interest in “those knowledges and social practices that organize ‘society’ as a whole by sexualizing” ([Seidman 1996](#), pp. 11, 13; see also [Jagose 1997](#)). Sociology was a bit slow on the draw and then somewhat resistant to what had initially been a humanities-based intellectual enterprise; complaints abounded about queer theory’s tendency to understate the role of institutions in sexual regulation, to overstate the benefits of category-deconstruction, transgression, and textual analysis, and to be written in obfuscatory language ([Edwards 1998](#), [Gamson 1995](#)). Since the late 1990s, however, there has been something of a reconciliation between the sociology of sexuality and poststructuralist queer theory as sociologists began more assertively to make their own contributions to a “queer sociology” (see [Seidman 1996](#)). As [Green \(2002\)](#) has recently written, rather than conceiving of heterosexual and homosexual identity and community as “monolithic empirical units of analysis—as points of arrival for our research agendas—sociologists have been challenged to sharpen their analytical lenses, to grow sensitized to the discursive production of sexual identities, and to be mindful of the

insidious force of heteronormativity as a fundamental organizing principle throughout the social order” (**Green 2002**, p. 521). Indeed, as we discuss below, over the past decade queer theory has helped set a different sort of agenda for sociological research in sexualities: to operationalize and then investigate the claims that sexual identities are “discursively produced” and unstable and that the social order rests on “heteronormativity.”

Although it has been perhaps the most visible influence, queer theory has been only one of several important influences on the field over the past decade. In this chapter, we detail the new directions in the sociology of sexualities set in motion by challenges in two other areas, as well. In taking up theory and research on “intersectionality,” sociologists have begun to specify more concretely the ways in which sexuality is intertwined with the cultural creation of other categories of inequality (race, class, and gender). In taking up the political economy tradition, sociologists have expanded the investigation of the material aspects of sexual identities, values, and exchanges. Running across these themes, as well, is the impact of “globalization,” as sociologists have started to look more closely at the global aspects of queerness, intersectionality, and the political economy of sexuality.

QUEER THEORY, FLUIDITY, AND HETERONORMATIVITY

In their essay in *Queer Theory/Sociology*, Stein & Plummer suggest four “hallmarks” of queer theory: (a) a notion that sexual power runs throughout social life, and is enforced through “boundaries and binary divides;” (b) a “problematization” of sexual and gender categories as “always on uncertain ground;” (c) a rejection of civil rights strategies in favor of “deconstruction, decentering, revisionist readings, and antiassimilationist politics;” and (d) a “willingness to interrogate areas which normally would not be seen as the terrain of sexuality” (**Stein & Plummer 1996**, p. 134). Although sociologists have not taken up each of these four hallmarks with equal vigor, the past several years have seen them translated into research at both the microsociological and macrosociological levels.

The notion that sexuality could not simply be understood through the presumptive binary categories of “homosexual” and “heterosexual” resonated with much earlier sociological constructionism, of course. Queer theory pushed even further, arguing that sexual identities, desires, and categories are fluid and dynamic, and that sexuality is inevitably intertwined with, even sometimes constitutive of, power relations. Recent microsociological research in the sociology of sexualities has examined how, where, and when that may be the case (**Brekhus 2003; Frank 1998, 2002; Puri 1999**)—providing a welcome empirical anchor to floating, speculative queer theoretical insights.

Brekhus (2003), for instance, in his ethnography of suburban gay men, pushes both identity theory and gay and lesbian studies in queer directions. Identities—sexual or otherwise—he demonstrates with his data, are neither stable nor unified across time and space; they vary in “duration, durability, and dominance.” In particular, Brekhus distinguishes several “ideal types” of gay male identity: the “lifestylers” or “peacocks,” who live and work in exclusively gay circles, and for whom being gay is a full-time, master identity; the “commuters” or “chameleons,” who live and work in the suburbs, and commute to hard-core, urban gay lives for sex and socializing; and the “integrators” or “centaurs,” who live and work in the suburbs and mix that with gay social and sexual activities here and there. Lifestylers treat “gayness as a noun,” commuters treat their identity as a verb, and integrators treat it as an adjective (**Brekhus 2003**, pp. 28–29). Analyzing it from the ground up, Brekhus uses the gay suburban case to demonstrate what queer theory has aggressively asserted: “contrary to the public perception of a unitary, easily identifiable, and coherent way to be gay (or to be any other identity), there are multiple ways to present and organize a marked identity” and “there is considerable conflict within identity categories about how to perform one's identity” (**Brekhus 2003**, p. 11).

Puri (1999), too, examines the microlevel construction of identities, but she adds to this an explicit focus on how national- and global-level power relations shape these identities. Puri criticizes conventional sociological definitions of sex and gender, arguing that these “miss the point that these constructs may be the effect of regulating, normative mechanisms of power” (**Puri 1999**, p. 5). Drawing on Foucault's notion that power works in and through microinteractions, Puri also notes that Foucault's work focused almost exclusively on elite productions of discourse rather than on the more everyday. She addresses this tension by analyzing data from her interviews with 54 middle- and upper-middle-class Indian women, demonstrating the ways their accounts of their own experiences of gender and sexuality—growing up female, getting their periods, and experiencing sexual aggression, as well as the meanings of chastity, marriage, motherhood, pornography, and homosexuality—are shaped by and respond to nationalist and transnationalist discourses.

The analysis of collective identities, sexual and otherwise, has also received a queer kick. Taylor & Whittier used research on the lesbian feminist movement to argue—along with new social movement theorists (see **Laraña et al. 1994**)—that “collective actors do not exist de facto by virtue of individuals sharing a common structural location,” but are “created in the course of social movement activity” (**Taylor & Whittier 1992**, p. 109). Social movement scholars influenced by and analyzing the “queer” movement have built on this insight, arguing, for instance, that the queer impulse to “blur and deconstruct group categories, and to keep them forever stable,” spotlights “a dilemma shared by other identity movements,” that “fixed identity categories are both the basis for oppression and the basis for political power” (**Gamson 1995**, pp. 391, 393; see also **M. Bernstein 1997, 2002**). Others have found everyday, microlevel enactments of queer collective impulses. **Rupp & Taylor's (2003)** ethnographic study of drag queens at a Key West cabaret suggests that drag, in certain forms anyway, is best viewed as a form of queer, deconstructionist social protest—an embodied, witnessed challenge to binary sexual (and gender) categories and to heteronormativity. Drawing on queer theory's focus on “performativity,” transgression, and antinormative principles, Rupp & Taylor argue that the queens they observed use drag “to articulate political ideas that challenge conventional understandings of male and female, gay and straight, to create new collective identities, and to disrupt existing collective identity boundaries” (**Rupp & Taylor 2003**, pp. 212–13). Drag performers use their bodies to call attention to “the social basis of gender and sexuality,” to “expand the range of possible gender and sexual categories and meaning, shaking up, questioning, and reworking the lines between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (p. 220), and thus “to contest dominant heterosexual gender codes” (p. 214). That is, they use their bodies and identities for queer purposes.

The impact of queer theory can also be seen in studies of the institutional regulation and management of sexualities, and in people's responses to that regulation by media, religion, kinship institutions, and political organizations. **Walters (2001)**, for example, in her examination of the “explosion of gay visibility” of the 1990s, advocates a “third way” between the closet of invisibility, the cloistered ghetto, and “the dubious status of public spectacle.” In this third way, gay identity is understood as “never singular ... but as also never separate from the vicissitudes of commercialization and heterosexual, mainstream culture,” and “lesbians and gays are full citizens in a society that is fundamentally altered by their inclusion” and forced to “rethink and reimagine marriage, family, partnerships, sexual and gender identity, friendships, love relationships” (**Walters 2001**, p. 24). She points to a visibility in which sexual identities are plural and ever-moving, and in which queer visibility undercuts and challenges heteronormative assumptions. Similarly, Gamson's study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender visibility on daytime television demonstrates how the institutional imperatives of TV talk shows routinely led producers, among other things, to undercut heteronormative assumptions, to “amplify a crisis in sexual boundary making,” and to raise “the possibility that gay/straight and male/female dichotomies might be unworkable” (Gamson 1998a, p. 152; see also **Erni & Spires 2001**).

The institution of the family has also been newly investigated through a queer lens. In a collection on “queer families” (**Bernstein & Reimann 2001**), for instance, various authors consider the significance of “family

structures formed by those with non-normative gender behaviors or sexual orientations,” which pose “new challenges to the privatized nuclear family, contradicting the sexual dimorphism upon which the ideal family is based.” “Queers of color, low-income LGBTs, resistance to dyadic coupled bliss, preference for nonmonogamy, same-sex couples wanting children, lesbians not wanting children—all confound heteronormativity, contest the hegemonic family, *and* complicate lesbian and gay politics” (**Bernstein & Reimann 2001**, pp. 3, 5). Stacey’s research on gay and lesbian families similarly finds that “queer families serve on the pioneer outpost of the postmodern family condition, confronting most directly its features of improvisation, ambiguity, contradictions, self-reflection, and flux” (**Stacey 2002**, p. 405; see also **Carrington 1999**, **Fields 2001**).

Religion, long a source of sexual-moral discourse, has also been reexamined recently through queer lenses. An example is **Moon’s (2004)** ethnographic study of two American Protestant congregations’ debates about homosexuality. It examines how the congregations, consisting primarily of heterosexual members, define and redefine such oppositions as those between righteousness and sin, and between love and politics, as they struggle to reconcile their duty to love everyone with their deep disagreements about the nature of God and the limits of appropriate sexuality. She finds that debates about homosexuality vent deep-seated differences in individuals’ understandings of who or what God is and what God intends for them. Yet these debates can have consequences for sexual minorities, forcing them to exhibit particular feelings and sexually normative patterns of life in order to be welcomed. Moon problematizes the construction of sexual categories such as heterosexual and homosexual while empirically examining how, in everyday religious life, people produce sexual hierarchies (see also **Cadge 2002**).

In looking at how sexuality and the meanings people impute to it shape various institutions, these sociologists all demonstrate core queer-theoretical assertions: that in creating and reproducing sexual categories, people reproduce relations of power; that every social institution, however asexual in appearance, relies on and enforces sexual boundaries and divisions.

SEXUALITY'S INTERSECTIONS

Long before queer theory began speaking of “multiple identities,” black feminists had articulated an intersectional analysis of oppression that recognized race, gender, class, and sexual oppression as interlocking systems (**Collins 2000**; see also **Hull et al. 1982**, **Moraga et al. 1984**). With some notable exceptions (e.g., **Collins 2000**), sociologists of race, class, and gender nonetheless tended to treat sexuality as a weakly integrated addendum to the list of intersecting oppressions—something to mention here and there, often parenthetically, but not so much as to press for analytical revisions. Sociologists of sexuality, for their part, while long attending to intersections of sexuality and gender (e.g., **Chodorow 1994**, **Connell 1992**, **Kimmel 2000**, **Lorber 1994**, **Schwartz & Rutter 1998**, **Stein 1997**), tended to treat race and class as secondary variables—relevant differences to note, but whose presence or absence did not affect general understandings of sexuality. Queer theory, for its part, continually suggested that sexual subjects were “constructed and contained by multiple practices of categorization and regulation” and that all categories of sexuality, including heterosexuality, contained within them “varying degrees and multiple sites of power” (**Cohen 1997**, p. 439). Yet, as Cohen points out, queer politics often served to “reinforce simple dichotomies between heterosexual and everything ‘queer’” (**Cohen 1997**, p. 438; see also **Cohen 1999**), subsuming differences of race, class, and gender.

Perhaps it is the gradual absorption of both black feminist theories of intersectionality and queer theory that has encouraged sociologists of sexualities to go beyond the acknowledgment *that* gender, sexuality, race, and class are linked systems to the more difficult task of specifying *how* sexuality intersects and interacts with other systems of oppression. In recent years, sociologists have been increasingly active in their investigations of the sexualization of race, the racialization of sexuality, the classing of sexuality, and the sexualization of class. Collins’ widely-used **Black Feminist Thought (2000)**, which includes detailed discussions of sexuality—more

detailed in the second edition than in the first—serves as something of a template for investigating intersections. Collins details how black sexuality becomes “constructed as an abnormal or pathologized heterosexuality” through the female jezebel and the male rapist images and subjected to “sexualized racism” that justifies segregation and racial containment (pp. 129–130). Collins also examines how black women's specific experiences with prostitution, rape, and pornography illustrate “how intersecting oppressions rely on sexuality to mutually construct one another” (**Collins 2000**, p. 135; see also **Lancaster & di Leonardo 1997**, **Morrison 1992**). Scholars have examined how those in power use languages of sexuality to naturalize oppression based on race, class, and gender, such as in racist understandings of black women as sexually voracious, Asian women as sexually exotic, black men as sexually predatory, and white women as sexually innocent. These assumptions, whether spoken or unspoken, have influenced policies as broad as colonization, marriage and welfare law, healthcare and education—not to mention less institutionalized practices.

Schalet et al. (2003) explore empirically how intersectional identities develop in a comparative case. Although these scholars do not seek outright to develop the concept of intersectionality, their work on girl gang members' understandings of their own sexuality explores how young women's experiences of sexuality are constrained simultaneously by their age, sex, class, and ethnicity. The authors interviewed 61 female gang members in the San Francisco Bay Area, mostly African-American and Latina, and focused on a member from each ethnic group. Felicia, 16, a first-generation Latina immigrant, married and remained faithful to the one young man with whom she had had sex to avoid being labeled a “ho,” as such a distinction would mean members of her husband's gang would expect to have sex with her on demand. The authors write, “By insisting on her own sexual respectability ... Felicia asserts her status as a full member of the institutions of which she is part, her marriage and her gang. Moreover, in asserting her sexual purity, Felicia carves out a discursive space to refuse sex with other gang members” (**Schalet et al. 2003**, p. 124). In contrast, Denise, a 28-year-old gang leader, exemplifies a trend the authors found among the African-Americans in their study, a discourse of sexual autonomy. Denise reports that she prefers “to do without any type of emotional attachment to man,” and in her words, will “dip and dab when I feel it” (p. 129). Schalet et al. observe that Latinas in their sample tend to maintain family ties, even when their families have been abusive, whereas African-Americans tend to disengage from abusive families and relationships. The authors thus empirically explore the varied experiences of intersectional identities, how the women in the study produce and respond to the meaning of being a young, black woman or a young Latina in an urban gang the United States today, and how managing sexuality is central to developing a sense of personal integrity and autonomy.

Social psychologists of sexuality, too, have focused more attention on how race, age, ethnicity, and gender intersect to shape sexual preferences, identities, and attractions. Drawing from Simon's groundbreaking work with Gagnon (**Gagnon & Simon 1967, 1970, 1973**), **Whittier & Simon (2001)** examine individuals' accounts of their “type”—the kind of people they find attractive—to determine what factors contribute to sexual preference. They argue that a definition of sexual preference based only on the gender of the desired neglects the many factors that contribute to a person's experience of sexual attraction. Drawing from interviews with gay men, they find that individuals' desires are shaped not only by gender but also by constructions of race, ethnicity, age, and class. In everyday life, their study suggests, people do not see gender, race, ethnicity, and age as discrete categories of desire; instead, they experience desire along intersections. They thus echo a central tenet of the intersectionality perspective, that identity cannot be understood as simply an accumulation of the effects of different categories. Empirically, these authors find that desire, too, stands in contrast to the dominant system of discrete categories; race, class, gender, and similar categories intersect to create people as well as others' images of them.

Historical sociology has been particularly strong in tackling the intersections between sexualities and race, class, and gender. Donovan, for instance, in his study of an early twentieth-century antivice crusade that ended in the

imprisonment of a mixed-race woman, demonstrates that “native-born white Americans attempted to define what it meant to be ‘white’ and ‘colored’ through white slavery storytelling and concomitant antivice efforts” (**Donovan 2003**, p. 708). His analysis highlights how racial lines are marked by sexual danger and perversity, and how racial coercion is routinely justified in the name of sexual purity and morality. **Donovan (2003, p. 707)** argues that “the ongoing maintenance of racial categories depends upon cultural narratives about sexual deviance and purity” (see also **Beisel 1997**)—that is, like Collins, he demonstrates how pathologized sexuality becomes a tool for racial domination, and how racial categories are given radically different sexual content. In her recent book *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*, Nagel works along similar lines, examining how European colonists asserted and developed their position of power as they both repudiated and desired racial “others” in the conquest of the Americas (**Nagel 2003**, pp. 63–90; see also **Nagel 2000**), and how laws, practices, taboos, and images of ethnicized sexuality and sexualized ethnicity have shaped the black/white color divide since slavery (**Nagel 2003**, pp. 91–139).

The agenda set by questions of “intersectionality” has been taken up with considerable energy by sociologists conducting cross-cultural studies or studying the global circulation of sexual meanings—in which intersections between sexuality and nation come to the fore. **Nagel (2003)** broadly demonstrates how definitions of ethnicity, race, and nation are constructed in part through processes of sexualization and sexual definition—“ethnosexualization,” in her terminology. From consensual intermarriage and its prohibitions to rape and other violent forms of sexual policing and conquest, Nagel argues, sexual desire, desirability, and power are constructed through racial categories, and vice versa. Drawing from historical and ethnographic studies, Nagel shows that in times of war and in moments of international cooperation, such as international business ventures and tourism, the sexualities of men and women are policed and speculated about differently depending on their ethnicity. For example, in the context of the “troubles” in Ireland, Irish women's transgressions were interpreted as sexual, and their punishments were correspondingly sexual; forced sexual slavery and the sexual use of children were organized along ethnic and racial lines. In regional and national conflicts, “differences in language, religion, culture, and color often become justifications for sexual assault” and “sexual warfare is waged against ethnically defined enemies” (**Nagel 2003**, p. 193). Neither sexuality nor race and ethnicity, that is, can be understood without careful analysis of their mutual constitution, regulation, and use.¹

Approaching intersectionality from a similarly global angle, **Moore & Clarke (2001)** analyze Internet depictions of sexual anatomy and find a “standard,” racialized, and gendered body in science and medicine. This normative standard creates a situation in which anatomical difference becomes deviance, resulting in material hierarchies of treatment. In critiquing anatomical Web sites' predominating neglect of the clitoris and its function, they point out that such images can create a single, hegemonic, global standard for human bodies, while making invisible the work that goes into creating that standard (**Moore & Clark 2001**, p. 61). These authors thus examine not the effects or experiences of intersectionality, but how the sexualities of simultaneously racialized and gendered bodies are given meaning globally by a dominant medium. In other words, Moore & Clarke build upon the concept of intersectionality by examining how a particular raced/gendered/sexualized category of personhood can acquire dominance.

Finally, **Bacchetta (1999)** examines how nation, religion, gender, and sexuality intersect in a right-wing response to globalization. Seeking to move beyond those who examine only the role of gender in nation building, Bacchetta looks at the place of “queers [those who challenge hegemonic heterosexuality], queendom, and queerphobia” in postcolonial nationalism (**Bacchetta 1999**, p. 141; see also **Nagel 2003, Puri 1999, Bell & Valentine 1995, Mumford 1997**). Examining Hindu nationalist organizations in India, she notes the equation of Hindu nationality with virile, heterosexual masculinity. This inherently masculinist and heterosexist nationalism, she argues, paradoxically reproduces British categories in the name of repudiating the West and Western men (along with Muslim men, non-nationalist Hindu men, Hindu queers, and women). Such work, built on the same

insights as black feminist intersectionality scholarship, links sexuality to the formation and transformation of national identities. “Historical and contemporary studies of nationalism and its predecessor, colonialism,” as Nagel puts it, “suggest that building nations and national identities involves inspecting and controlling the sexualities of citizens and condemning the sexualities of noncitizens and those considered outside the sexual boundaries of the nation” (Nagel 2003, p. 166).

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SEXUALITY

In critiquing the common (and very popular) understanding of “the pleasures of the body” as enduring and acultural, Altman (2001) points out that, “however seductive the phrase, ‘the pleasures of the body’ cannot be separated from the world outside.” He continues to remark that, “only when political and economic conditions allow can we engage in ‘pleasures.’ Indeed, bodily pleasures are often shaped by political and economic conditions” (Altman 2001, p. 2). Although feminist and gay scholars have long pointed to the ways sexuality is structured by the economic system (e.g., D’Emilio 1983, Hartmann 1977, Pateman 1988, Rich 1980) and to commodified sexuality (e.g., Fraser 1989, Hochschild 1983), sociologists of sexuality have taken up the political economy of sexuality more recently. In part because of the rise of globalization studies, sociologists of sexuality have moved to consider how economic and political transformations have shaped sexual experiences, identities, politics, and desires. In addition to those who look at how transnational processes rely on and affect sexualities, some focus on the specifics of the transformation of gay and lesbian movements into markets, while others look at sexuality to study intersections between market transformations and sexual morality.

A small number of scholars have begun to look at how sexual meanings, processes, and identities have been shaped in response to transnational institutions and globalized flows of people, capital, and information. As Altman (2001) argues, understandings of and attitudes about sexuality are both affected by and reflect global political-economic phenomena such as commercialization; AIDS; international monetary organizations and their medical, economic, and political policies; gay and women’s groups; international trade and labor; tourism; and information technology. Altman traces the global flow of sexual identities, for example, how “gay and lesbian” identity has supplanted other sexual categories (Altman 2001, pp. 86–105). He also examines the global flow of commercialized sex, as “the rapidity of change is increasing the sex trade” (p. 112), and the various ways in which sexual mores and values have changed as “societies have come into contact with outside influences and new technologies” (p. 38).

Most recent work on sexuality and global politics is more geographically and/or institutionally focused. Massad (2002), for instance, looks at the effects of globalization on international gay and lesbian nongovernmental organizations working to promote gay and lesbian rights in the Middle East. He examines how these organizations draw from the rhetoric of recent “Orientalist” scholarship, which he sees as using tacit, culturally specific assumptions about sexuality and oppression. In his analysis, these scholars and organizations, like earlier colonial institutions, insist on the universality of their own system of sexual categories and define themselves as “progressive” and “enlightened” in comparison with Arabs and Muslims. “While the premodern West attacked the Muslim world’s alleged sexual licentiousness,” Massad argues, “the modern West [in the form of American- and British-dominated organizations] attacks its alleged *repression* of sexual freedoms” (Massad 2002, p. 375). He suggests that international gay organizations’ attempts to increase tolerance for homosexuality have, ironically, led to policies more repressive than those that preceded them; as sexuality is brought into public view, national leaders assert views about sexuality that had previously gone unspecified, with new policies to match.

Others have looked at the microlevel effects of globalization. Cantú (2002), for instance, sees the political economy of tourism and development in Mexico as shaping Mexicans’ sexual possibilities and identities, creating new sexual types such as the *internacional*, someone whose gay identity reflects North American sexual

categories and cosmopolitanism, rather than more traditional Mexican sexual types. He shows how gay and lesbian tourism has the “dual effect of creating sites in the country that are both sexually liberating and exploitative” (Cantú 2002, p. 160). Cantú (2001) elsewhere argues that “the sexuality of migration” can only be understood through a “queer political economy” analysis. He notes that Mexican “men who have sex with men” immigrated to the United States largely because of sexual marginalization at home, which often translated into economic liability. Once in the United States, new economic arrangements facilitated their shift toward the North American–style “gay identity” model of sexuality, yet existing ethnic enclaves provided them with a buffer against their new racial marginalization. In a similar analysis of the effects of globalization on everyday sexual identities, Farrer (1999) examines youths in the Chinese disco scene. In his analysis, these youths form not so much a subculture but a “superculture,” a group focused on imagining themselves in the gaze of a foreign audience—picturing themselves as cosmopolitan as they engage in Western-seeming sexual practices (he cites an example of young people discussing a “one-night stand,” referred to in English) and styles of self-presentation.

Both Cantú and Farrer regard with ambivalence how North American and European cultural and economic dominance affects sexual meanings in other cultures. Nardi (1998) also takes up the issue of the internationalization of the American-style gay identity model, but takes a more sanguine, evolutionary approach than many who focus on Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Nardi, taking the case of Italy as an example, explores how the American, egalitarian model of same-sex relationships (as opposed to the age- or gender-stratified models he sees as prevalent in less modern contexts) emerges in a context of international gay and nongay media, where local and global concepts engage each other dialectically.²

While globalization studies have begun to call our attention to transnational economic and political processes, scholars who focus on the political economy of sexuality within Western countries have tuned in especially to the growth since the 1990s of a gay and lesbian niche market, examining the repercussions of marketing, and of commercialization more generally, on the gay and lesbian movement. Chasin (2000), for instance, finds evidence in the transformation of the gay and lesbian movement into a niche market of greater visibility for “gay men and lesbians with money,” a sort of “unintended disenfranchisement [on the basis of race, class, and gender] that is an effect of conceiving of political rights as market-based rights.” She elaborates this critique by pointing to the market's articulation of identity that gives primacy to sexuality, thereby ignoring “differences among gay men and lesbians, such as those of gender and race,” and a parallel tendency toward a “nationalist,” pseudoethnic paradigm, since the group must be a definable and identifiable market segment (Chasin 2000, pp. 7, 20, 45–46, 92; see also Fejes 2002, Gamson 2003, Sender 1999). Gamson (2003), in a study of gay Internet companies, notes “the transformation of gay and lesbian media from organizations answering at least partly to geographical and political communities into businesses answering primarily to advertisers and investors.” He also notes an accompanying “tightening of relationships between mainstream political organizations, nongay corporations, and national gay and lesbian media.”

While these scholars focus on the impact of commercialization on sexual subcultures, others examine sexuality and debates about sexuality to shed light on broader market transformations. Stein (2001b), for example, examines public debates over homosexuality in the context of broad economic transformations in Oregon in the mid-1990s—particularly the migration of relatively wealthy Californians to the state and a simultaneous decline in the lumber industry. Stein characterizes a particular grassroots conservative economic morality wherein masculine self-sufficiency is prized and seeking government support—whether in the form of welfare or civil rights protections—seems selfish, unfair, and even childish. In Stein's analysis, a few provocative organizers generated a grassroots antigay movement by mobilizing many Oregonians' sense of personal shame about their own economic troubles. She writes that many of the people she spoke to in the town she studied “believed that a system of entitlements had cropped up to benefit the least deserving: the lazy, the slothful, the morally

suspect.” In this view, she paraphrases, “Homosexuals and other minority groups are getting special rights, circumventing the channels that reward those who work hard” (**Stein 2001b**, p. 117). Stein thus shows how the question of sexual morality became joined to the moral vision of the market.

While Stein looks at the market to explain sexual morality, others look at sexuality to shed light on market morality. Prasad, for instance, disrupts sociologists' dichotomy between moral and market economies. Her study of prostitutes' clients shows that market economies, too, have moral weight: “Participants in such economies view buying and selling in moral terms” (**Prasad 1999**, p. 182). A number of those Prasad interviewed, in fact, made the case that a clear, cash-mediated sexual transaction bears less potential for hypocrisy than the supposed gift exchange of marital relations. Prasad proposes that this notion that cash-mediation is transparent and morally righteous exists not just in sexual markets but throughout the market economy. In a similar but less broad-reaching study, **E. Bernstein (2001)** examines two competing views of sex work in contemporary American society: the understanding that sex is a recreational cultural imperative, and the view that it is an unhealthy addiction. To make sense of these two competing ideologies' simultaneous existence, Bernstein turns to political economy, specifically the rise of the service sector. She argues that in the postindustrial service sector, a culture has emerged that sees commercial sex indoors as a legitimate, if racy, part of the service economy, while seeing lower-price, outdoor prostitution as bad—exploitative, addictive, and criminal. As she remarks, “Both street level policing and cultural normalization have facilitated the rise of the postindustrial service sector and the information economy, helping to create the clean and shiny urban spaces in which middle-class men can safely indulge in recreational sexual consumption” (**E. Bernstein 2001**, p. 411). Such studies of the political-economic aspects of sexuality—the economic basis for sexual moralities, the global flow of sexual migration and commerce, the political impact of niche-marketed sexual populations, the economic moralities at play in sexual interactions—point to a promising, if still relatively unworn, research path in the sociology of sexualities.

CONCLUSION: BRIDGES INTO FUTURE RESEARCH

Many of the sexuality scholars discussed here shed light on realms of social life that might seem on the surface to be completely separate from sexuality: the moral components of market economies, for instance, or the creation of national boundaries. The last decade in the field has seen a growing, assertive insistence that the sociological study of sexuality is necessary not simply to understand those realms of life already designated as “sexual.” Instead, echoing the queer theory claim that sexuality infuses many realms of life not conventionally thought of as sexual, scholars have begun to premise that studying sexuality sheds light on social processes, realms, experiences, and institutions that seem quite remote from, say, sexual intercourse or gay “ghettos.” As this assertion is more widely accepted, we can see the influence of sexuality studies on various subfields of sociology—a sort of field-bridging phenomenon that we expect and hope to see continue in the coming decades.

Perhaps the clearest example of this impact is in the area of social movements, where sociologists of social movements have used sexuality-based movements to reconsider how identity-based movements operate (**M. Bernstein 1997**, **Gamson 1995**, **Taylor & Whittier 1992**), the movement-based generation and redefinition of “expertise” (**Epstein 1996a**), the place of emotions in mobilizing people to take political action (**Gould 2001, 2002**; **Stein 2001a**), and the definition of what constitutes a social movement and what “counts” as a social change effort (**Armstrong 2003**, **Rupp & Taylor 2003**). But other fields have also begun to build queer bridges. When **Meeks (2001)**, for instance, analyzes normalization and antinormalization arguments in gay men's debates about gay bathhouses, his aim is retheorizing the liberal underpinnings of civil society; when **Terry (1999)** analyzes medical texts on homosexuality throughout the twentieth century, she explores American cultural anxieties over social order in areas as broad-ranging as citizenship, normalcy, childrearing, and

governance. In a sense, the success of the field in the future rests on this continued movement into fields that have not yet fully considered the relevance of sexuality. If the last decade is a reliable guide, thinking about sexuality is not only quite pleasurable but also productive of unexpected intellectual revelations.

It is easy—and risky—to overstate the case, however, just as it is easy to overstate the degree to which, having achieved cultural prominence over the past thirty years, sexual “deviants” are now full and equal citizens of the world. Queer theory, intersectional analysis, political economy perspectives, and globalization studies have all pushed sociologists of sexuality into crucial new zones of inquiry; by drawing from these perspectives, sexuality studies scholars have the potential to push sociologists of all kinds into new zones, in return. Those inquiries mean little if the demarcated social realm of the “sexual” does not fully inform them. Sexuality as sexuality, for itself and on its own terms, is interesting and important, and no less so because it is socially constructed. As the sociology of sexuality moves outward, it will do so best by bringing its old, raw, ever-present concerns wherever it goes: the sorts of things people like to do with their bodies and with whom, the fantasies of physical intimacy they create, the micropolitics of sexual encounters and taboos, the macropolitics of sexual regulation and controversy, the sexual images people produce and absorb, the money people spend to get or imagine sex, and most of all, and always, the suffering and joy in the name of sexuality.

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