changing over time and whether it is conducive to scientific innovation.

Harkening to de Tocqueville, the authors note in their conclusion that the social and cultural environment in the United States—especially its recognition that individual achievement can have a social benefit—is ideal for science. But the current political environment, combined with rapid growth in one specific area of science (biomedical science) that seems particularly dependent upon political whims and morality, may not bode well for American science. Jason Owen-Smith’s (Scott, McCormick, and Owen-Smith 2010) research on controversial human embryonic stem cell legislation and its impact on scientists and their careers is exemplary in this regard.

Xie and Killgivan’s efforts have produced an authoritative and indispensable evaluation of American science in education and in the labor force. Their devotion to empiricism, especially in light of a (ungrounded) policy debate, is highly commendable. While it leaves open many avenues for future research on other aspects of science (funding, quality, and the like), it fails to proffer a theory, or at least explanations, for the trends it uncovera. Why is American science declining in some respects but thriving in others? Why are other countries doing better in some respects? Without answers, even tentative answers, to such “why” questions, the impact of this book may be unnecessarily limited.

**References**


science discourse about aging. They catalyzed the development of large-scale longitudinal data sets, prompted the founding of ASA’s special interest group on the Life Course, and expanded the agendas of other professional organizations devoted to aging.

I begin by reviewing this 40-year old series of events because one might think that, in the decades since, the sociology of age and the life course should have moved far beyond these original discoveries, and made great progress in deploying the sociological imagination to stake out new explanatory terrain for sociology. Overall, this has not happened. Instead, cohort differences and related ideas have often functioned as an inoculation against extending our understanding of how society shapes individual aging. The strong appeal of reductionist, individual-level approaches has often seemed to contain the explanatory potentials of social forces while continuing to privilege individual-level explanation (Dannefer 2011). Especially in North America, the functionalist perspective and early scholars inhibited the development of critical and structural perspectives on aging.

The traditional inclination to regard age-related phenomena as largely individual matters governed by the imperatives of biological aging on one hand and “agency” or choice-making on the other has not adequately accounted for the social factors that shape individual lives. In this case, the logic of this approach is quite limited in sociological terms, because it restricts consideration of the role of social forces in shaping individual lives and what happens to them manifests these signs of intellectual vibrancy in a book-length statement. As is often the case, several of these volumes are also relevant to the study of family, sociology, and aging. One of them, *Mortality*, heralds from beyond the bounds of the discipline of sociology. Yet these books also legitimate the claim of serving as excellent examples of what the field of aging and life course studies needs more of—sustained and careful treatments of key problems central to the task of developing a genuinely sociological approach to aging and the life course. Given space limitations, anthologies are excluded, though several recent quality collections are devoted to specialized and timely topics for age and life course studies, including diversity (Dantland and Biggs 2005); cumulative dis/advantage (Crain and Shea 2002); critical gerontology (Baars, Dannefer, Phillipson, and Walker 2006), and the transition to adulthood (Setzler and Massey 2008).

The initial excitement of life course studies described above was predicated in large part on the demonstration that the sociological context in which one grows up (e.g., Elder 1999 [1974]) decisively influences subsequent life course outcomes. This general “cause-effect” paradigm became a dominant theme of choice-making in the theory itself, the logic of this approach is quite limited in sociological terms, because it restricts consideration of the role of social forces in shaping individual lives to what happens at or before “Time 1,” and excludes from consideration the impact upon how individuals age and develop. In fact, older age and age-graded institutional structures that organize the adult life course—a practice which has been termed time-one (TI) encapsulation (e.g., Dannefer and Kelley-Moore 2005). TI encapsulation means that the explanatory power of context is restricted to effects that occurred earlier in the life course. I begin with two exemplary studies that demonstrate the power of institutions and other social forces operating in adulthood, making clear the explanatory costs of TI encapsulation.

John Laub and Robert Sampson’s *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70* provides a superb example of life course research that studies the conjoint effects of early life experiences and subsequent opportunities. The study entails a re-interviewing of men who were studied as delinquents in the 1940s by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck, and follows on their earlier book also based on the Gluecks’ research, *Crime in the Making* (Sampson and Laub 1995). *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives* provides a thorough consideration of competing explanatory approaches to the outcome of interest (criminal offending in adulthood), reviewing both psychological and social explanatory models, and bringing into focus the contrast between sociological modes of explanation and the array of reductionist approaches that have tended to dominate the field.

Not only does the importance of opportunity structures and other social forces in early life shape individuals’ values, aspirations, and activities. Although such forces were at play in the childhoods of these men, Laub and Sampson’s detailed life histories also demonstrate that an adequate understanding of the factors shaping their lives in adulthood requires having detailed information on their circumstances in adulthood. Indeed, the analysis enables Laub and Sampson to offer a clarification and resolution to a longstanding debate concerning the extent of criminality, which has been dominated by developmental or other forms of “childhood determinism” (typically emphasizing individual temperament combined with early family-related or other social problems). Beyond the importance of childhood experience, Laub and Sampson demonstrate the power of social forces in adulthood to alter the course predicted by early disadvantage. Specifically, a stable marriage (typically in synergy with a stable job) makes more likely a shift away from associates and networks comprising risk factors for a return to crime. For some, the discipline and skills provided by experience in the military were also important. These findings, which are essential to understanding variation in adult desistance, point clearly to the empirical and theoretical inadequacies of childhood-focused approaches to explaining crime, as well as of conventional “turning points” approach which emphasizes standard, normative role transitions.

In the context of life course studies, this work clearly illustrates that a result of TI encapsulation is a diminished grasp of the actual causal processes involved.

Joseph Hermannovitz’s *Lines in Science: How Institutional Effect Academic Careers* similarly demonstrates the power of the institutional matrix of experience in adulthood to shape life-course outcomes, and it similarly demonstrates the value of longitudinal data. This volume is also a sequel; it is a 10-year follow-up of the author’s initial study of 59 academic physicists at different ages and “career stages” (Hermannovitz 1998); 55 of the original 59 respondents were reinterviewed for the follow-up. Hermannovitz sampled physicists from universities selected to represent the top, middle, and lower tiers of NRC rankings in order to explore the effects of different academic contexts of career experience. Despite the focus on a single profession, it may be surprising that investigating life course patterns in different types of institutional settings yields complex, albeit interrelated, differences in the patterning of life-course outcomes. Hermannovitz discovers through his interviews that these three tiers of universities represent three different types of social worlds (“elite,” “pluralist,” and “communitarian”) each tending to produce distinct life-course patterns with respect to work engagement, identity, and satisfaction, often in counter-intuitive ways. For example, his finding that late-career elite faculty are surprisingly disaffected and disengaged, reflecting quite a different trajectory from the less privileged groups, offers a lesson in the complex yet orderly connections between the structures of everyday life and life-course outcomes.

By following multiple cohorts over time and considering the differential impact of institutional location on the life-course patterns of each, *Lines in Science* offers a model of research that traces the long-term consequences in individual lives of specific forms of the institutionalized life course, and their intersections with age. It reveals complex dynamics of institutional stratification that are embedded within a set of structures that from a distance appear to be homogeneous, yet which determine life chances and patterns of change in individual
engagement and identity within a single profession.

While different in subject matter, these two studies make clear the impact of the age-graded system of adulthood on shaping subsequent outcomes in individual lives in ways that cannot be reduced to the experiences of youth. In both cases, earlier motivational and aspirational structures are shown in some instances to be reshaped, for better or worse, by the new opportunity structures of adulthood—whether in finding a stable job and marriage, or in dealing with the vagaries of academic institutions. While not without limitations, each of these studies thus yields fresh and important insights about how the institutions of adulthood shape the adult life course, and provide intriguing hypotheses for further exploration. They draw attention to key features of social reality that often go unappreciated: that the powerful and orderly effects of social forces on individuals are often difficult to discover because of unrecognized environmental variation (such as the differences in “ageing” evident in Hermanowicz’s three academic worlds) and because of the intricacy of the effects of different institutional contexts, especially when those effects are extended through time.

It is lamentable that the sociology of aging and the life course does not have more such examples of research that contribute to specifying the linkages of the age-graded structures of adulthood and life-course outcomes. Clearly, as a field we have barely begun the task of understanding these dynamics. Yet when viewed with a broader sociological lens, it must also be recognized that these two exemplary studies share some important limitations.

In addition to inevitable methodological issues that accompany longitudinal research, these studies share a limited theoretical perspective. Except for some scattered allusions to cumulative disadvantage, neither of them offers much in the way of acknowledging the larger structural issues that form the macro-institutional context. What, for example, about the role of ideological factors (related, e.g., to credentialing and various forms of social capital) in sustaining and reifying the internally stratified academic system that Hermanowicz describes? Despite its arguable relevance, neither study has much to say about the role of gender. It is true that, except for a few gender-graded differences evident in both studies of males. Yet that hardly means that gender issues are irrelevant to the lives being studied. For example, in view of the exceptionally successful careers of at least some of Hermanowicz’s female respondents, could it not have been worth drawing on the extensive literature on gender dynamics in the workplace and its cultural context? Beyond noting that feminists might question “who benefits” from their respondents’ marriages, Laub and Sampson and give little attention to the likelihood that many of the men who have “gone straight” owe their “success” to the power of the ideology of domesticity. A similar issue arises with respect to their conceptualization of crime, where the focus is on these men’s “state in conformity,” while the theoretical problems involved in conventional views of concepts such as deviance, social legitimacy, and criminality remain largely ignored.

It is understandable, given the lifelong challenges faced by the men being studied and their often tenuous integration into mainstream society, that the authors do not explicitly address such problematic assumptions. To be sure, one cannot do everything in a single study. Yet the dynamics analyzed by Laub and Sampson and Hermanowicz are themselves shaped by larger structural forces, warrant attention. In the context of life-course studies, the lack of consideration of broader structural issues follows the too-familiar tendency toward microfication (Hagestad and Danner 2001), focusing on the impact of proximate contextual experiences while neglecting the role of larger structural forces in shaping the everyday dynamics within which lives are played out.

Such is not the case with Kathryn Newman’s A Different Shade of Gray: Midlife and Beyond in the Inner City. Primary data for Newman’s book consist of 100 intensive interviews conducted with a randomly chosen subsample of New Yorkers who participated in a survey (n=900) of minority urban dwellers conducted by the MacArthur Foundation’s MIDUS (Midlife in the United States) program. From the beginning, Newman places detailed accounts of her respondents’ lives in national and historical contexts, situating individual narratives within the larger visions of social structure as well as change, from the Great Migration to contemporary data on the role of ethnicity and gender in the distribution of resources nationally. This provides a broad context for the accounts of her respondents which, for many, cover experiences of migration earlier in their lives, as well as their experiences of racism and sexism along the way.

Although not explicitly formulated as a life-course study, A Different Shade of Gray addresses the widely-remarked need in aging and life course scholarship to capture the diversity of experiences of age and to understand its sources. The importance of doing so for the received wisdom of the field becomes immediately evident, as the experiences of Newman’s respondents quickly call into question some standard generalizations and assumptions of the sociology of aging and social policy. The life course has not declined among seniors, that “aging in place” and “age integration” are desirable conditions for older people, and the notions of an institutionalized, tripartite life course and an emergent “third age” of extended post-retirement health and prosperity. Even the study’s relatively successful Newman’s respondents give voice to a constant state of stress, often deriving from the immediate financial, caregiving, and other needs of children, grandchildren, and others. Such demands make painful incursions into efforts to care for oneself and one’s own future needs, leading many of these respondents to anticipate retirement with apprehension. Although added to such familial and interpersonal stresses are the deterioration of neighborhoods and attendant safety and quality-of-life concerns, a major theme running throughout Newman’s account is the inclination of her respondents to focus on individual agency—both in assigning responsibility to themselves and others for some of life’s difficulties, and also in the proactivity with which they approach difficult challenges.

Newman’s portrayal of these often-daunting everyday struggles offers compelling evidence of how the effects of social stratification are amplified with age: “Education, employment, income, family formation and health all point in one direction: poor minorities start out with many strikes against them, and they can build up over time” (p. 53). Her respondents provide vivid examples of aging as a process of cumulative disadvantage, sometimes with litany life-altering consequences. “What is the most telling marker of inequalities between middle-aged and elderly Americans of different racial and ethnic groups? The answer has to be health” (p. 51). The chapter “Old Before Our Time” documents graphically the scope of premature encounters with health issues typically associated with aging, including cardiovascular problems, diabetes, arthritis, and cancer. A Different Shade of Gray makes clear the necessity of making race, gender, and economic stratification integral to an understanding of aging, and powerfully depicts, as numbers cannot do, what this means in the daily lives and struggles of individuals who face these challenges.

A macro-level approach to both social theory and social policy analysis is the starting point for Carroll Estes and associates’ Social Policy and Aging: A Critical Perspective. “A new level of ugly and unforgiving parsimony over the past decade has engrossed social policy on aging as reflected in extremely intense political struggles over the bedrock entitlement programs for the elderly—Social Security and Medicare,” Estes writes (p. 231). What is most striking is how apt this assertion seems in 2013—even more than when Social Policy and Aging was published in 2001. This volume remains significant, because it considers age from an explicitly articulated political economy framework, applying this perspective to age, the life course, demographic trends, and related policy domains including not only health care and pensions but the non-profit sector. Estes rightly notes the neglect of both gender and macro-level forces in a wide array of theoretical approaches popular in life-course scholarship, including activity and disengagement theories, age stratification, constructivism, and recently developed notions of successful and productive aging. Although political economy and
related theoretical perspectives are treated quite briefly. Estes makes the case for more systematic attention to the genderedness of aging, as well as the health implications of social policy to impact individual aging.

Market Friendly or Family Friendly?: The State and Gender Inequality in Old Age, by Madonna Harrington Myer and Pamela Herd, builds on the work of Estes and associates as well as others in the political economy tradition, documenting in detail the extent and scope of the gendered basis of inequality among older people. While the book is important for this analysis alone, it is presented only as background for the principal arguments, which concern (a) how observed inequalities are regulated by policy, and (b) the impact of changing public policy on households. Though the authors advocate for both right and left (hence, “market friendly vs. family friendly”) retirement choices, they are interested in the distribution of resources, and especially with respect to inequality.

Such problems are inevitably moving targets, shifting with demographic change as well as the vagaries of politics and policy formulation. One popular and upbeat retreat to such a bleak picture is that improvements in female work status and earnings will make that women’s current economic disadvantage will not extend into the future. Harrington Myer and Herd offer serious doubts on this optimism, demonstrating that the prosperity of some high-earning women has been offset by low and even declining earnings opportunities for a large subpopulation of women at the bottom of the income distribution, with regressive policy proposals threatening to add further disadvantage.

While both Newman and Estes and associates note the role of marital status in late-life gender inequalities, Harrington Myer and Herd give it special prominence—pointing out that elders living alone are more than four times more likely than married women to be in poverty, and detailing how the societal distribution of resources that regulates this condition is anchored in social policies. They propose specific policy changes, such as restructuring Social Security to recognize unpaid labor and (more controversially) eliminating spouse/widow benefits. The specificity of their proposals, and of their analysis of the likely effects, are a reminder that individual lives cannot be understood adequately in terms of daily experience, family relationships, or individual decision-making alone. While such micro-level realities are always important, they are situated within parameters of possibility defined by macro-level forces.

In Mexican New York: Transnational Lives of New Immigrants, Robert Courtney Smith employs a life-course approach to understanding the dynamics of migration. While the issues faced by immigrants have been a focus of research on aging and the life course elsewhere (e.g., Phillipson, Ahmed, and Latimer 2003), Smith’s study is unique in several ways relevant to the life course. Most notably, it is a study that spans 15 years, making an intersection with life-course issues in the lives of his respondents avoidable. The 15-year time period of the study reveals the importance of life-course transitions and changes in a way that more typical, short-term studies could not (see Blau, 1985, for another example of the potential life-course relevance of long-term ethnographic work).

The focus of Smith’s work is, as his title suggests, not migration per se but transnational lives. His respondents have institutionalized a pattern of regularly spending time both in the various sites of inheritance, the environment experienced during development and the environment now being “faced.” (p. 190). This statement recognizes the importance of both the crucial events of the early life course, as well as an individual’s subsequent and present experience. For sociologists, the significance of this book is its deliberateness in importing social forces into the biology of development and aging. It offers a provocative view of epigenetics as a domain within which social and environmental characteristics can influence gene expression, with decisive implications for health outcomes. A featured example involves a Barker-like effect of nutritional deprivation in infancy, which permanently sets metabolic parameters to survive in a food-scarce environment. When followed by exposure to abundant cheap calories in the teenage years and early adulthood, this is hypothesized to be a prescription for obesity. For sociologists, the correctness of this specific argument (which despite supporting evidence remains controversial) is less significant than is the causal logic of offers. In sharp contrast to the dominant view of the burgeoning social science literature on gene-environment interactions, they point to the importance of social forces as a constantly operative influence on gene expression, which opens a potential new horizon of potential for sociological explanation of life course outcomes. A second important point is their argument that the long-term significance of events in early childhood (nutrition in this case) is contingent upon later life events. Thus, understanding age and life course outcomes should not pit childhood against effects of social structure in adulthood, but rather requires an understanding of the interaction of the two. In this, they simultaneously avoid the emasculation and inflate its costs. While these authors are not alone among biologists offering this important and challenging suggestion to the social sciences, their “life-course biology” offers a clear and systematic statement elaborating its potential implications for the sociology of aging and the life course.

The books discussed here are indicative not only of the range of substantive topics, but also of the multiple levels of problem framing and analysis that coexist within the sociology of aging and the life course. As suggested by the kinds of interdisciplinary potentials represented in Mismatch, it is a field poised to explore conceptual possibilities and heretofore unrecognized modes of social causation. At the same time, it is a field beginning to expand and enrich understanding of the broader effects of social structure on the organization of the life course, and as well as upon the institutionalized life course itself. In one way or another, the volumes discussed here stand as examples of advancing knowledge along one or more of the intellectual pathways in need of exploration.

References


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The Normal Science of Queerness: LGBT Sociology Books in the Twenty-First Century

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Generic human time is admittedly catching up to me, but gay sociology is on such a sped-up clock that just a few years after I was a wippersnapper I found myself a veteran. It's not just me. Given the rapidity with which lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) statuses, communities, and politics have changed, works that captured a new phenomenon in their time—for instance, my own 1993 study of LGBT populations and images within tabloid television talk shows—often become historical snapshots shortly after they are published. The field, like the populations on which it focuses, has grown and changed at sometimes dizzying speed.

When I entered the academy in the 1980s and 1990s, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender-focused sociology was just past its infancy and in a big growth spurt. These were critical years for the field in a double sense: developmentally crucial and driven by critique. The activism of the 1960s and 1970s helped to generate political ideas and a culture of outness that found its way into the academy, often in the person of openly lesbian and gay sociologists. The study of homosexuality had been effectively pushed beyond the field of "deviance," where it had long been boxed. As feminist, ethnic-, and racial-studies scholars had been doing in a variety of arenas (including sociology), these folks pointed out blind spots, distortions, and holes in various sociological subfields. They began to redirect the relative invisibility within sociology—and outright misrepresentation—of sexuality-based communities, identities,

1 By LGBT sociology, I mean here scholarship on LGBT-related topics by sociologists. Plenty of non-sociologists have done and are doing sociologically relevant work on LGBT topics, but for the sake of clarity I'm restricting myself to those trained in this discipline.


