Introduction

My white straight younger brother, Gene, graduated from college and started living with a black gay male friend after graduation.[1] His friend was dark-skinned with dreadlocks, and had a jovial but conventionally masculine demeanor that most people, including my mother, took to be indicative of a straight identity. However, one day when I was on the phone with my mother, she expressed her surprise after Gene informed her that his roommate was gay. She had never before questioned his roommate's sexuality and assumed he was straight upon meeting him. I think the discovery that my straight brother was living with a gay roommate also made her worry—was her only other son "turning" gay? I think that my mother, like a lot of people, was surprised to learn that a masculine black male was gay; equally surprising was that he was living with a straight male.

This book is about straight individuals like my brother and mother. It is about how straight individuals like my brother let others know they're straight even though they might have close gay friends. And it is about how race and gender shape and change the meaning of being straight (and nonstraight) for black and white men and women today.[2]

Of course, not every straight guy would be willing to live with an openly gay male. And many straight men and women are still homophobic. America today, however, is not the America of 1980 (the year my brother was born). Between then and now, significant changes have occurred in the status of gay and lesbian lives, from the increasing enfranchisement of gay and lesbian legal rights on local, state,

and federal levels to the unprecedented proliferation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) images in popular culture. Heterosexuality itself has also changed significantly over the last three decades. Although straight identities are still normative, and the norm of heterosexuality remains structurally dominant in every institution—from the family and mass media to religion and the government—sexualities scholars nonetheless highlight the increasing visibility and growing inclusivity, although uneven and unequal, of gays and lesbians in everyday life and across the nation's major social institutions.

In post-closeted cultural contexts, straights can neither assume the invisibility of gays and lesbians, nor count on others to always assume their heterosexuality. In this context, straights also cannot assume that other straights are homophobic or intolerant of gays and lesbians. That is, gay and lesbian tolerance and acceptance are conditioned by the development and increasing growth of straights' antihomophobic practices.

Although I use my study to map a continuum of homophobic and antihomophobic practices, I claim that a post-closeted cultural dynamic, which I define as the presence of openly gay and lesbian individuals and representations of them, is increasingly common in core areas of social life. Utilizing candid in-depth interviews with sixty black and white straight men and women, I argue that a post-closeted cultural dynamic in the United States is shaping and changing black and white straight men's and women's identities, the normative status of heterosexuality, and homophobic practices today.

Consequently, I explore how straights fashion boundaries between heterosexuality and homosexuality in order to create and secure a privileged straight identity. Straight identities are socially constructed processes that each individual accomplishes through negotiating a diverse array of everyday social situations. For example, straight individuals might talk about individual men or women they find attractive. They might display pictures of their spouse and children on their desks at work; or they might wear wedding rings to signal their marital status, which, until the 2003 Massachusetts State Supreme Court case legalizing same-sex marriages, would have been a civil right reserved only for straights.

Sociologically, straight identity practices are significant to the extent that core parts of an individual's social life—work, family, and friendships—are organized by this master identity category. I argue that straight

masculinities and straight femininities are always and already refracted through a racial lens. We need to talk about the racial shaping of straight masculinities and femininities through sexual and gender identity practices, on one hand, and through practices of homophobic (and antihomophobic) social distance and exclusion that straights draw (or don't draw) between themselves and gays and lesbians, on the other. In short, I examine the social construction of black and white straight masculinities and femininities in the context of the rise of a post-closeted culture.

To understand the overall historical developments and social shifts in straight identities, I draw on two types of data. First, I analyze the historical research on the establishment of straight identities over the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Historians have documented how sexual identities became increasingly distinct from gender identities in America over the course of the twentieth century, but they have also observed the centrality of gender dynamics in the establishment of sexualities. Using this historical research, I sketch the social and historical conditions that gave rise to the Stonewall generation of out gay men and lesbians in the late 1960s and 1970s. This historical framework provides the basis for my understanding of the current period in heterosexual and homosexual relations and the beginning of the development of a post-closeted culture. Second, and more importantly, I have spoken to black and white straight men and women about their everyday sense of themselves as straight, asking them to define what their straight identities meant to them. Through a semistructured, in-depth interview schedule, I examined the following four key facets of straight identities in a post-closeted culture: (1) descriptions and stories of the everyday enactment of straight identity practices; (2) the relationship of their racial and gendered identities to their straight identity practices; (3) their thoughts on out and visible lesbian and gay people in their lives and in popular culture; and (4) changes and shifts in homophobic and antihomophobic practices during their lifetime. During the interviews, I used the terms "gay" and "homosexual" interchangeably as well as "heterosexual" and "straight" interchangeably, and I have maintained that usage throughout this book as well.

I used a series of open-ended questions to address these four facets in the interviews. The first explored the socially constructed character of straight identities. I asked questions to gauge how the interviewee decided whether someone he or she interacted with was straight or

gay, and what kinds of social cues the interviewee used to let others know his or her sexual identity. The next series of questions focused on how gender and race shaped straight identities. For example, I asked what kinds of sexual stereotypes black straight men and women have experienced in interacting with others. The third series looked at how the straight respondent has reacted to gays and lesbians coming out to him or her, and how he or she has responded to gay visibility in popular culture. The fourth series delved into how the individual perceived homophobic and antihomophobic practices in everyday life.

Although my small sample is not a cross-section of straight Americans, it includes straight men and women from diverse racial, class, occupational, and religious backgrounds. And as sociologists who make interviewing methods central to their empirical work note, in-depth interviews are good for capturing the breadth of identities and the range of an identity's social practices (Lamont 2000). Still, this study is based on a nonrandom sample and is limited by its lack of generalizability beyond the reported interviews (Burawoy et al. 1991; Charmaz 2007). Although these interviews emphasize conceptual themes over representativeness, I situate these themes within the quantitative social science research that examines trends of growing homosexual tolerance and acceptance and the broader social changes in gender arrangements, family pathways, and economic structures of the last half of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century (e.g., Laumann et al. 1994; Loftus 2001).

The straight individuals I interviewed shared a general set of understandings about their straight identities, so that toward the end of my research, I could often anticipate what they were going to say before they actually said it. This indicated that I had captured central themes in the social construction of black and white straight masculinities and femininities (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2007). Finally, the historical research I analyzed and the interview narratives I collected overlapped in their themes and patterns, indicating a good fit between my sociological study and the historiographical work.

Defining the Concept of a Post-Closeted Culture

The sociological value of the concept of a post-closeted culture needs to be understood in relation to the term that it seeks to qualify and bracket:

the closet. This notion, if it is to have more than rhetorical value, refers to a specific social-historical condition in which a regime of compulsory heterosexuality imposed patterns of passing and a double life upon the vast majority of individuals for whom same-sex desire was salient. Under conditions of the closet, same-sex desire was rendered a core, primary social identity of an oppressed minority, while other-sex desire assumed the taken-for-granted normative status of the vast majority of Americans. The rise of the closet as a national formation is often dated to the 1930s, and it continued to develop over the 1940s and 1950s (Chauncey 1994, 2004; D'Emilio 1983; Eskridge 1999; Faderman 1991; Seidman 2002). Ironically, scholars argue that the conditions of compulsory heterosexuality and the closet also gave birth to a collective, political gay and lesbian movement (Adam 1995; D'Emilio 1983; Epstein 1999; Faderman 1991). During the 1950s, the first homosexual or homophile organizations developed in some major urban centers in America. These organizations sought to "purify" the homosexual self by projecting an emphatic sense as a normal and highly conventional American (Adam 1995; D'Emilio 1983; Epstein 1999; Faderman 1991). In subsequent decades, state-sanctioned homosexual repression, along with medical and popular cultural politics, enforced compulsory heterosexuality and the closet, while also enforcing rigidly conventional masculine and feminine identities (Adam 1995; Bérubé 1990; Chauncey 1994; Eskridge 1999; Ehrenreich 1983; Faderman 1991; Rich [1980] 1993).

Following historians who argue that the decades from the 1960s to the 1990s witnessed the dismantling of the closet and many of the discriminatory measures put in place during the three previous decades (Chauncey 2004, 2008; D'Emilio 1983, 2002; D'Emilio and Freedman 2012), I suggest that there is a plausible case to be made for the declining significance of the closet in American life since at least the mid-1990s. To be sure, this declining significance is more evident in urban spaces and urbane circles, in the professions and in bureaucratic, globally oriented institutions, in formal public cultures, in some regions of the United States more than others, and so on (Barton 2012; Eskridge 1999; Gamson 2002; Ghaziani 2011; Raeburn 2004; Seidman 2002; Stein 2010; Walters 2001; Weeks 2007). Still, the notion of a post-closeted cultural dynamic aims to capture real shifts in American sexual and gender patterns, such as the institutional incorporation and cultural

legitimation of "normalized" gay men and lesbians and their expanded latitude in negotiating desire, gender, and identity. Normalization suggests an ambiguous process. On the one hand, it refers to the acquisition of a moral status as a person or ordinary human deserving of respect, rights, and integration. On the other hand, it reserves this moral status only for individuals who display decidedly culturally specific traits and behaviors such as gender normativity, economic individualism, a couple-centered, family-oriented intimacy, and conventional attitudes more generally.

I believe that the concept of a post-closeted culture is useful in exploring changes in sexual identities and relationships both between and among gay and straight Americans. Two historical periods stand out in the rise of a post-closeted dynamic as a national formation. First, the Stonewall riots of 1969 signal the rise of the politics of coming out of the closet and the development of large, visible gay and lesbian communities and institutions throughout the country (Armstrong 2002; Chauncey 2004; Epstein 1999). For example, in chronicling gay and lesbian movements in the United States at this time, historians have found a rapid proliferation of gay organizations, such as newspapers, crisis hotlines, and social clubs, which increased from just fifty in 1969 to more than a thousand in 1973 (Epstein 1999). The normalization of homosexuality and Americans' liberalization toward homosexuals are then social-historical developments conditioned by the subcultural growth signaled by the Stonewall riots of 1969 and the newly minted gay and lesbian politics of coming out to straight society, not just to other gays (D'Emilio 1983; Epstein 1999).

Second, the mid-1990s represent a period of newfound mass media visibility and significant social and political gains, from the development and spread of domestic partner benefits and antidiscrimination laws to significant attitudinal shifts among Americans toward tolerance and acceptance of gays as never seen before (Loftus 2001; Hicks and Lee 2006). Polling data confirm that the liberalizing of attitudes toward gays and lesbians is a clear trend among Americans over the last four decades. For instance, as shown in figure I.1, in 1999, 50 percent of Americans stated that lesbian and gay relationships between consenting adults should be legal, and by 2013 the percentage of support had increased by 14 percent to 64 percent (Gallup 1977–2013).[3]

Similarly, as shown in figure I.2, when Americans were asked whether lesbians' and gay men's marriages "should or should not be recognized by the law as valid," 27 percent of Americans supported same-sex marital rights in 1996. By 2013, support for same-sex marriages rose to 54 percent, the highest it has been in recent time, showing that a small majority of Americans now embrace the recognition of gay marital rights (Gallup 1996–2013). It is clear from the polling data that Americans in general have become increasingly supportive of lesbians' and gays' legal rights since the mid- to late 1990s.
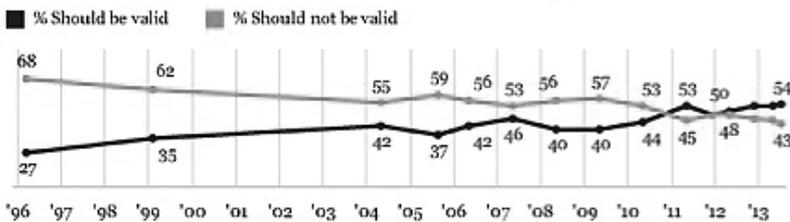
Do you think gay or lesbian relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?

■ % Should be legal   ■ % Should not be legal

1977–2008 wording: Do you think homosexual relations between consenting adults should or should not be legal?

Figure I.1. Source: Gallup polling data, 1977–2008. Copyright © 2013 Gallup, Inc. All rights reserved. The content is used with permission; however, Gallup retains all rights of republication.

Do you think marriages between same-sex couples should or should not be recognized by the law as valid, with the same rights as traditional marriages?

■ % Should be valid   ■ % Should not be valid

Note: Trend shown for polls in which same-sex marriage question followed questions on gay/lesbian rights and relations
1996–2005 wording: "Do you think marriages between homosexuals . . . "

Figure I.2. Source: Gallup polling data, 1996–2005. Copyright © 2013 Gallup, Inc. All rights reserved. The content is used with permission; however, Gallup retains all rights of republication.

Economic and Other Broad Social Changes in American Society

Alongside the rise of a post-closeted culture, we have seen broad changes in American society over the course of the last several decades, including the reorganization of the economy, the development of second-wave feminism, and the accompanying transformation of gender relations and women's social statuses, as well as dramatic changes in family life. Scholars now talk of living in a postmodern society, where economics, gender, and family relations are flexible and performative, involving a diversity of pathways and arrangements (Butler 1990; Castells 1996; Gerson 2010; Harvey 1990; Stacey 1996, 1998).

Before the industrial revolution in America, the economic existence of most men and women was based on the private family farm. With the rise of the industrial factory in the nineteenth century, the number of individuals working in agriculture dramatically declined while the number of workers in manufacturing industries rose in almost direct proportion. Mostly men worked in factories, and they were increasingly paid a "breadwinner" wage to support a wife and family. These male factory workers replaced the family farmers of the past who owned their own land and required the collective work of a wife and on average six to eight children to maintain it (Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith 2012; Hochschild and Machung [1989] 2012, 237).

By 1950, manufacturing jobs as a proportion of total private-sector jobs were 35 percent of the economy. Today, however, manufacturing employment constitutes less than 13 percent of the total jobs in the United States. Over roughly the last forty years, a postindustrial economy, based in new technologies (computers and electronic devices, the Internet, fiber optics, biotechnology, and cellular telephony) and knowledge (witnessed by the growing necessity and value of undergraduate and graduate credentials), along with an increasingly large service sector to attend to these new and old professions (e.g., teachers, doctors, and lawyers), has replaced the older manufacturing-based economy (Bourdieu 1984; Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith 2012, 186).

Women have been and are still at the center of the changes in the economy and society's shift from an industrial to a postindustrial organization. Since the 1950s women have been increasingly likely to work

outside the home, but significant increases in the number of college-educated women and the rise of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s made this trend permanent, and women's participation in the workforce surged to new levels in the following decades (Nicholson 1986, 2008). For example, in 1950, 30 percent of women were in the workforce. By 2011, 59 percent of women were engaged in paid work (Hochschild and Machung [1989] 2012, 2). However, the service sector jobs of many women, such as administrative positions, health aide roles, and day care staff, pay less but are more reliable forms of employment than those of their "male" blue-collar job counterparts (Eitzen, Zinn, and Smith 2012, 187; Hochschild and Machung [1989] 2012, 265).

Women's working has been a major shift in the postindustrial economy, but it has just as greatly changed the pathways and arrangements of family life. As more women started to work, they became less dependent on men's "breadwinner" wage in marriages. Moreover, if these women found themselves unhappy in their marriages, they could divorce, as their paid work conditioned their ability to support themselves and their children without their husbands' income. The family sociologist Andrew Cherlin (2009) notes that between 1960 and 1980, the divorce rate doubled. Over the last several decades, divorce rates have ranged between 40 and 50 percent. Still, even in this era of divorce, marriage rates remain high, with almost 90 percent of Americans projected to marry at some point (Cherlin 2009, 7, 4).

While marriage has declined as the predominant family arrangement, cohabitation has grown, and it was the "major source of change in living arrangements in the 1980s and 1990s" (Cherlin 2009, 98). Cohabitation in America, though, leads to either a marriage or a breakup. Unlike cohabitation in many European countries, cohabitation in the United States is not a patterned stepping-stone to a long-term relationship outside the institution of marriage. Although young Americans are still more likely to cohabit, cohabiting couples range from the college-educated to those without high school diplomas to couples living with and without children (Cherlin 2009).

Heterosexual men's roles as husbands and fathers have also nominally changed due to heterosexual women's economic advancements and the attendant demands by their wives that the men do more at home (Ridgeway 2011). Studies show that fathers are now more involved

with their children, but mothers still "spend about twice as many hours caring for children as men do," and although women do less housework than in past generations, they still do "twice the housework that men do" (Ridgeway 2011, 128).

Non–college-educated heterosexual men, though, face tougher economic and marital predicaments. These working-class men are hard-pressed to find jobs and potential wives in the current economy. Jobs as welders, machinists, or auto assembly linemen—highly desirable "male" blue-collar jobs—have been adversely impacted by offshoring, automation, and the Great Recession of 2008, making these jobs less reliable sources for long-term employment (Hochschild and Machung [1989] 2012, 265). On the marital front, then, as steady employment remains a mainstay of desirability for marriage, working-class men make less attractive marital partners, and cohabitation thus becomes a more likely prospect for anxious straight couples worried about financial stability. "A cohabiting relationship may be all a young man with a low-paying or temporary job can aspire to, or all that he can find a partner to agree to," notes Cherlin (2009, 98).

In this context of the decline of lifetime marriages and persistently high divorce rates, along with the increasing "preference" for cohabitation among straight men and women, it is important to remember that medical scientific developments (e.g., the birth control pill, in vitro fertilization, alternative insemination, and other pharmaceutical drugs like the "morning after" pill) in relation to the promulgation of the socio-legal concept of the right to privacy made it possible for women to separate and unlink their gender identities from their sex lives, marriages, and childbearing choices. For example, before the rise of the birth control pill in 1960, women who became pregnant generally ended up marrying the father of their child (Cherlin 2009, 185–86). However, as an individualistic culture of sex as a private matter developed in American culture, and with the backing of three watershed US Supreme Court cases on reproductive rights and sexual intimacy, rights to privacy as both the right "to be let alone" and the right to "decisional privacy" over one's personal and intimate identity and life choices are now protected (Cohen 2002, 25–26).

The first ruling occurred in 1965. In *Griswold v. Connecticut*, the US Supreme Court struck down state laws that criminalized the use of

contraceptives by married couples, recognizing married couples' right to privacy in reproductive matters and, by extension, legitimizing non-procreative sex among them. In 1972, it extended this privacy protection to unmarried couples in *Eisenstadt v. Baird*. Then, in 1973, in *Roe v. Wade*, the Court ruled that abortion is constitutionally protected as part of a woman's fundamental "right to privacy" over decisions regarding her personal bodily integrity (Cohen 2002). These Supreme Court decisions, along with the availability of the pill, made women's socio-legal equality possible, conditioning women's ability to claim equality in their private lives as sexual partners and in their public lives as workers who now controlled their reproductive sexuality. In sum, American society no longer legally sanctioned reproductive sexuality and monogamous heterosexual marriages as vested state interests. Rather, the state now emphasized the sexual autonomy of the individual, and the law provided protections regarding sexual intimacy as part of the right to privacy.

This line of legal rulings, moreover, bore directly on sexuality as a form of personal liberty protected under privacy rights, and it shielded consensual adult sexual relationships from state interference. Lesbians and gay men were still outsiders to citizenship rights at this point, but gay rights lawyers and movement leaders saw an avenue to the legal enfranchisement of lesbians and gay men. The sociologist Steven Seidman (2002) observes, "Appealing to a constitutional right to privacy and equal treatment, state laws that criminalized sodomy were challenged. By 1983, twenty-five states had decriminalized consensual sodomy" (176).

Although the US Supreme Court upheld state sodomy laws as constitutional in 1986 with its *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision, viewing sodomy laws as rightly part of a "millennial of moral teaching," and thus dealing a huge blow to the gay rights movement of the time (Chauncey 2008, 27), the legal scholar William Eskridge (1999) makes the case that by 1981 states and cities throughout the country had put in place laws that protected lesbians and gay men from discrimination and violence as well as recognized gay couples and families through domestic partnerships and second parent adoptions. Eskridge argues that by the 1980s legal protections could be said to have afforded a "post-closeted regime where openly gay people could participate in the public culture"

(124). In 2003, the US Supreme Court overturned its 1986 *Bowers v. Hardwick* ruling. In *Lawrence v. Texas*, the Court made all remaining sodomy laws unconstitutional and extended the right to privacy and equal protection to gay individuals. Finally, in 2013, the Court ruled in *United States v. Windsor* that Congress's 1996 Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which denied federal benefits to same-sex couples who were married under state law, was unconstitutional. Extending the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment to lesbian and gay marriages, the justices noted that when states have recognized same-sex marriages, they have "conferred upon them a dignity and status of immense import" (Cole 2013, 28–29).

Returning to the concept of a post-closeted culture, then, this discussion of the rise of this dynamic of visibility and integration is meant to take stock of the considerable changes in the social status of gay men and lesbians in America. In a historically unprecedented manner, many gay men and lesbians live openly and are increasingly integrated into relationships with friends, family members, and coworkers. As a corollary development, straights are increasingly in contact with openly gay and lesbian friends, family members, and coworkers as well. Furthermore, this concept points to indications that no longer is the social isolation of closeted gays nor hard forms of straight homophobia necessarily the defining conditions of gay and straight life. While hard practices of homophobic discrimination, derision, and violence, although uneven across diverse populations and geographies, have weakened or declined, soft forms of homophobia or risk avoidance have replaced them (Yoshino 2006). Soft homophobia is established through two main social practices. First, straights deploy hyperconventional or hegemonic gender identity practices to perform and secure unimpeachable straight masculine and feminine identities. Second, straights variably construct strongly aversive, weak, or blurred boundaries of social distance from gay and lesbian individuals, symbols, and social spaces to signal, maintain, and enforce a clear straight masculine or feminine identity status.[4] In short, at the micro level, straight privilege and normativity continue to operate while the avoidance of publicly blatant homophobic and heterosexist acts variably increases. Indeed, as sexual desire is somewhat less fraught these days, gender seems to have stepped forward as the site of struggle

around the dominance of normative heterosexuality, while the boundaries between heterosexuals and homosexuals are saturated with gender politics.

The notions of the closet and post-closetedness are not immune to enormous variations reflecting varied social locations. Just as the closet is experienced in varied class-, gender-, and race-specific ways, the same is true of its weakening (Barton 2012; Gamson 1998; Gray 2009; Moore 2011; Ghaziani 2011; Seidman 2002; Stein 2010). In short, there are multiple experiences of a post-closeted cultural dynamic. The concept of a post-closeted culture should be understood as a social-historical pattern and trend in American society, but one that exists alongside other mixed and complicated patterns, including, sadly, a normative system of heterosexuality that is still compulsory in many towns, regions, institutions, and cultural practices.

Through my interviews with straight men and women, I explore how a post-closeted culture is shaping and altering the identities of black and white straight men and women. Holding in mind the changing character of straight identities, I examine the attending shifts and changes in normative heterosexuality and practices of homophobia and antihomophobia. I document how a post-closeted culture is making straight identities more deliberate and conscious and changing the interactions, and in some cases the relationships, straight people have with lesbian and gay male acquaintances, friends, kin, and fellow workers. With the decline of compulsory heterosexuality and the rise of pro-gay values, straight men's and women's interactions with gay men and lesbians are shifting and are now more varied, numerous, and complicated in post-closeted contexts. Today nonheterosexuals have more options regarding the association of sexual desire, behavior, and identity; and straights are often more deliberate, reflective, and defensive about establishing a heterosexual identity.

Methodology: Method, Data, and Research Site

Data for this research are based on sixty in-depth interviews with individuals who self-identify as black or white straight men or women. The interviews lasted from 1.5 to 2.5 hours on average. I conducted the interviews from 2004 to 2005 in "Orangetown," a city in the northeastern

United States. It is important to note that this region of the country is found to report less restrictive attitudes toward homosexuality than other regions like the South (Barton 2012; Hicks and Lee 2006). As is the standard practice to protect the real identities of one's respondents and their exact geographical location, all respondents' names, along with the city and names of the places mentioned in this book, have been changed in order to maintain confidentiality.[5]

Orangetown is part of a large tri-city metropolitan area with a population of over 800,000. Overall, it is a mixed working-class/middle-class city. In 2005 there were around 78,000 people living in Orangetown. The racial composition of the city was 60 percent white and 33 percent black (US Census Bureau 2005). The median household income from 2007 to 2011 was $38,394, more than $10,000 below the national average. Similarly, about 25 percent of Orangetown residents lived below the poverty line, almost double the national average of 14.3 percent. These differences are reflective of the large black population that makes up the city, which is much higher than the national average of 13.1 percent but is typical of northeastern cities that saw net black in-migration over the course of the twentieth century. For instance, the median household income for whites in Orangetown was $41,863; in contrast, for blacks it was $26,303. These differences persist across rates of college attendance, owner-occupied housing, and other economic characteristics (US Census Bureau 2010).

There were practical and sociohistorical reasons for choosing to study the racial shaping of straight identities by interviewing black and white individuals. The practical reason had to do with the racial demographics of the region where I was able to access respondents for the study. This region's racial demographics lent itself to comparing blacks and whites, as there were few Asian Americans or Latinos in the population as a whole. The sociohistorical rationale supported the practical one. Historically, black and white divisions in the northeastern and southern states of the United States have been and continue to be among the most pressing racial divisions and issues facing the nation (Collins 2004; Oliver and Shapiro 2006). Furthermore, the dynamics of racial formation in the United States often use a black and white dichotomy in categorizing other racial groups; for instance, Latino and Asian American individuals are, depending on factors such as skin color and

social class status, viewed as more racially like "whites" than "blacks" (Alba 1999).

In 2000, 1,806 same-sex couples reported living in the metropolitan area that includes Orangetown; their numbers grew to 2,978 by 2010. For comparison, 8,902 same-sex couples reported living in San Francisco in 2000, and that number rose to 10,461 by 2010 (US Census Bureau 2000, 2010). At the time of my interviews, only Massachusetts had passed legislation making marriage legal for lesbians and gays.

The research design purposefully sampled for race and gender to analytically compare them along the axis of heterosexuality. Still, these case studies of straight identities are based on a nonrandom, snowball sample and are limited by their lack of generalizability beyond the reported interviews (Burawoy et al. 1991). As qualitative interviews emphasize conceptual points over quantifiable data, I developed categories, such as homophobic or antihomophobic, through identifying the range of a phenomenon and focusing on individuals or groups where these social processes and phenomena are salient. Specifically, I used social distance theory in order to capture a diverse range of straight men's and women's accounts of their straight sexualities as well as their homophobic and antihomophobic stances. The subjects in this study ranged from those who have daily interaction with Orangetown's active and "out" lesbian and gay community (since they lived, worked, or socialized in mixed gay/straight neighborhoods) to those who had little daily interaction with gay and lesbian persons or the LGBTQ community. I initially contacted persons who worked at local establishments in Orangetown, such as gyms, bars, restaurants, K-12 schools, and colleges. As race was a key part of the research design, I sought out black organizations in the community and on college campuses, conducting initial interviews with their members.

The neighborhood in figure I.3 labeled "Center City" was the location of the five mostly gay male bars in Orangetown. In addition to these primarily gay establishments, there was a cluster of bars, restaurants, and shops patronized by mixed crowds of straight and lesbian and gay people along the main streets of this commercial and residential neighborhood. Although this concentration of gay life is nowhere near as dense as San Francisco's Castro District or New York's Chelsea neighborhood, it was a clearly demarcated geographical area that all of

my straight respondents knew of as Orangetown's "gay" neighborhood. Many had patronized the various establishments at some point, or regularly socialized there, with some respondents calling the neighborhood home as they rented apartments or owned homes in the area. The two mainly black neighborhoods were in close proximity, and I have labeled them "North Town" and "South Village." I interviewed straight respondents who lived or worked in all three of these neighborhoods, among other neighborhoods in and outside the city limits of Orangetown as well (see figure I.3).

Based on the snowball sampling technique, I obtained my sample through the social networks of my respondents while also employing purposeful sampling to capture a wide range of straight identity practices. For example, I interviewed straight men and women who worked with a number of gay men or lesbians in their workplace, such as an HIV/AIDS drop-in center or restaurants and bars with large gay clienteles. Further, this strategy dovetails with my argument that social interaction with gays and lesbians creates a stronger sense of straight identity, constituting the practices through which straights understand themselves, sexual others, and the larger social world.

I initially contacted respondents through my own personal contacts or those of colleagues and friends. For example, I worked out at a local gym in Orangetown and I was acquainted with several black and white straight men and women who used the facilities there. I asked these respondents whether they would be willing to be interviewed, and if so, I then asked them to refer me to others who would be willing to be respondents. I tried to sample a range of workplaces from educational settings and government employment to manual labor job sites and nonprofit organizations, some of which focused on providing HIV and AIDS services to this metropolitan area in general and its African American community in particular. My general aim was to capture as diverse a range of straight identities as possible given the constraints of time, money, and location.

The interviews were typically conducted in person and at a place convenient to the interviewee, such as their workplace, my workplace, or their home or mine. Some interviews were done over the phone for the convenience of the interviewee and also to avoid having the interviewee react to my identity as a gay male. The interviews were recorded

Figure I.3. Map of Orangetown.

and transcribed by me or by a trained research assistant to protect the identity of the respondent. Analysis involved transcribing and coding the interview data into over thirty-five thematic memos (Charmaz 2007). Themes were dictated by the concepts that emerged as I coded the data. A conceptual map was developed from these concepts, showing how the concepts related to one another.

Regarding the demographics, I refer the reader to tables A.1 and A.2 in the appendix, but I will also describe characteristics of the sample here. The black male respondents' ages range from twenty-one to fifty-six, while the white male respondents' ages range from twenty-two to fifty-six. Eight of the black men are single; four are divorced; three are married. Ten of the white men are single; four are married; and one is divorced and single. One-third of the white men come from a working-class background, just over half from a middle-class background, and the remaining from the upper class, while three-fifths of the black straight men identified as having a working poor or working-class background and the other two-fifths as middle-class. However, the

majority of the white and black male respondents have a college degree, and higher educational attainment has been found to positively influence attitudes toward homosexuality (Loftus 2001). Black men's modal religious affiliation was Protestant, ranging from Assembly of God and Baptist to Episcopalian and Pentecostal; other religious identifications among them included Catholic, Masonic Order, Muslim, Christian, atheist, or no affiliation. White men's modal religious affiliation was no religious affiliation; they were also agnostic, Greek Orthodox, Presbyterian, Catholic, and Jewish. Table A.1 provides the aforementioned information on each male respondent, including his educational attainment, occupational status, and position on the continuum of social distance.

The black female respondents' ages range from nineteen to sixty-eight, while the white female respondents' ages range from twenty to sixty-one. Among the black women, ten are single; three are married; two are divorced and single. Five of the white women are single; four are married; four are divorced and currently single; two are currently married but divorced from a previous marriage.

Over half of the black women come from a working-class and the rest from middle-class backgrounds. Just under half of the white women come from working-class backgrounds and the other just under a half from middle-class ones, with one from the upper class. Like the men, the majority of the white and black female respondents have a college degree, and they also most likely have more accepting attitudes toward gays and lesbians partly due to their higher educational attainment. Black women's modal religious affiliation was Protestant, composed of denominations such as Baptist, Episcopalian, and Methodist; others were nonreligious, spiritual, Catholic, and Christian. The modal religious affiliation for white female respondents was Catholic and no affiliation; others were spiritual, Jewish, Methodist, and Episcopalian. Table A.2 provides the aforementioned information on each female respondent, including her educational attainment, occupational status, and position on the continuum.

Overview of the Book

Chapter 1 draws on research in sexualities, gender, and race studies to explore the multiple patterns of black and white straight masculinities

and femininities. First, I define the concept of heterosexual identities and theoretically situate my study within a Foucauldian and Butlerian framework. Further, I go on to make the case for the rise of a post-closeted culture as a growing pattern in American society by examining some of the sociological literature on gay and lesbian life. Situating the study within the new sociology of critical heterosexual studies, I start from the standpoint that heterosexualities are multiple, variable, and not reducible in any simple way to the norm of heterosexuality or heterosexism. I therefore question studies of masculinity that conflate heterosexual masculinity as automatically entailing homophobic stances, and I develop theories to sketch the multiplicity of straight femininities. Drawing on race theorizing, I argue for the need to make clear the racially specific meanings of heterosexuality by analyzing how race (whiteness and blackness) refracts and alters the meanings of straight identity through white privilege and black racial stigma.

Analyzing the historical rise of heterosexual identities in the United States, chapter 2 synthesizes the extant historical research on heterosexualities in order to show the origins of straight supremacy. Prior to the twentieth century, heterosexual identities were submerged within the gender identities of "normal" men and women and can be said to not exist as we know them today. The establishment of heterosexual identity is a twentieth-century phenomenon and is the result of the human sciences' discursive construction and discovery of the homosexual as a species or human type (Foucault 1978; Katz 1996). With the pathologizing of the homosexual, the heterosexual was born as his or her opposite. The heterosexual came to define and embody psychological health, social normality, and the ideals of good citizenship.

Drawing on the interview data with black and white straight men, in chapter 3, I explore shifts in the role of homophobia in the construction of straight masculinities. Using a continuum to map a variety of heterosexual masculinities, I chart a range of identity practices from homophobic heterosexual masculinities to antihomophobic ones. The chapter shows that straight men who construct homophobic practices that define homosexuality as socially inferior to heterosexuality establish strongly aversive boundaries of social distance from gay individuals, spaces, and symbols in order to project an unpolluted straight masculinity. Then, I use the analytical continuum to map a range of

antihomophobic practices by straight men, moving from men who establish weak normative boundaries of social distance to those who blur them. These straight men's pro-gay stances trade on the prestige of being tolerant of gays, with black men's antihomophobias drawing on their experiences with racism.

Chapter 4 continues the discussion started in the previous chapter but presents case studies of straight femininities. Aspects of the lives of straight women are sketched with the purpose of illustrating a series of positions on a continuum. This continuum, like that in the last chapter, uses the homophobic and antihomophobic practices that straight women draw on in establishing boundaries of social distance from lesbian and gay individuals, identity symbols, and social spaces as the basis of its organization. I show how race shapes and frames black and white straight women's homophobic and antihomophobic stances. The analysis divides straight femininities into three sections, exploring homophobic straight femininities, which are often based in Christian religious beliefs that condemn homosexuality; straight femininities that contest compulsory heterosexuality and aim to be gay-affirmative; and an activist-like group of straight women who blur boundaries between lesbian and straight identity statuses through their acts of sexual intimacy with other women and who refuse to claim straight status and privilege at times. These straight women actively aim to transform the homophobic stances of other straight individuals and challenge sexual and gender norms, static conceptions of sexual identities, and the institutional formations that enforce straight supremacy.

Revisiting select respondents from chapters 3 and 4, in chapter 5 I highlight queered and nonnormative heterosexualities among the black and white straight men and women. Bringing a queer studies perspective to bear on the narratives of the straight interviewees, I analyze the nonnormative practices of some straight men by focusing on the emergence of metrosexual identifications among them. Metrosexual men negotiate gay identity codes while identifying as straight and antihomophobic. Queered straight identifications, in contrast, are a development exclusively found among the women in my sample. These women told me about their sexual experiences with other women, which ranged from same-sex desires and fantasies to sexual encounters with bisexual women, lesbians, and other straight women as well. Queered straight

identifications show us the limit of binary thinking in that it misses the complexity of sexual identifications in post-closeted contexts, where some women define themselves as straight but have same-sex desires and experiences that complicate simple binary understandings of people as either heterosexual or homosexual.

In the concluding chapter, I reflect on the theories and patterns discussed in the previous chapters by arguing that a post-closeted cultural dynamic has refashioned sexual identity practices, normative heterosexuality, and homophobias. I also explore the limits of the concept of a post-closeted dynamic by acknowledging that it better captures the micro-sociological phenomena taking place than the structural dynamics that persist in many social institutions, regions, and places. Lastly, I summarize the analytical continuum that documents straight identity practices and the way race shapes each respondent's position on it. Table 6.2 in this chapter details the continuum and summarizes the main points of the book.