

## Nowhere without It

### The Homosexual Ingredient in the Making of Straight White Men

**A**BOUT fifteen years ago, in the late 1990s, I was a young dyke who would occasionally date boring straight men, especially after a difficult queer breakup. I am not proud of this time in my life, but it is where this story begins. On one such date, one of these men sheepishly agreed to tell me some of the details of his experience in a fraternity at a Southern California university he had attended a few years prior. Looking for something—*anything*—to shift our conversation to my newfound queer feminist rage, I probed him for the most damning information about fraternity life at his notorious party school. I waited to hear contemptible stories of violations committed against drunken young women. I imagined that what he would tell me would offend my feminist sensibilities, that I would get angry, and that this would push me to stop seeing him and get back into the more personally meaningful and high-stakes terrain of queer life. I do not doubt that he had tales of women and Rohypnol to tell, but when asked for the most confidential details about fraternity life, his response surprised me. He offered instead a story about a fairly elaborate hazing ritual called the “elephant walk,” in which young men inserted their fingers into each other’s anuses. Participants in the elephant walk were required to strip naked and stand in a circular formation, with one thumb in their mouth and the other in the anus of the young, typically white, man in front



Figure 1.1. 1970s elephant walk, Indiana University (Roger Dorn, totalfrat-move.com, <http://totalfratmove.com/in-defense-of-the-elephant-walk/?page=0#comments>).

of them. Like circus elephants connected by tail and trunk, and ogled by human spectators, they walked slowly in a circle, linked thumb to anus, while older members of the fraternity watched and cheered.

At first I was a bit shocked, but then his story prompted me to recall another experience, one of watching a video in a senior seminar on Sexual Politics that I took while I, too, was an undergraduate in college. There were nine students in our course, and our final project was to produce a multimedia presentation that would creatively explore the complexities of “postmodern sexuality.” My presentation—basically a fanatical ode to Madonna—did not receive a warm reception from the graduate student teaching the seminar, but all of us *were* impressed by an ethnographic film submitted by the only male student in the course. The video, a compilation of chaotic footage he had shot exclusively inside the bedrooms and bathroom of his fraternity house, showed nude white boys laughing and holding down other white boys whom they mounted and “pretended” to fuck on top of a bunk bed. I recall the small frat-house bedroom packed wall to wall with shirtless young white men wearing baseball caps, screaming hysterically, playfully pushing and punching their way through the crowd of bodies to obtain a better view of the “unfortunate” boys underneath the pile of their naked fraternity brothers. The boys on top were laughing and calling those underneath fags; the boys

on the bottom were laughing, too, and calling the aggressors fags as they struggled to switch the scenario and get on top. None of these boys seemed like fags to me. The student who shot and edited the video, himself a member of this fraternity, had remarkably little to say about the meaning of these images. “We’re just fucking around. It’s a frat thing. . . . It’s hard to explain,” he told us.

As a young feminist, I was repelled by the heteromale culture of abjection and aggression in which these encounters were embedded, and I believed that this way of relating to sexuality was not unrelated to homophobia and misogyny. Both of these men—the date who reported to me about the elephant walk and my classmate who had filmed his fraternity brothers engaged in “pretend” sex—seemed to take for granted that these were scenes of power and humiliation, not sex. These encounters can be read as humiliating or disgusting precisely because they involve normal, heterosexual young men behaving like fags, or being subjected, ostensibly against their will, to homosexual contact. And yet, despite the homophobia of the participants, I was also captivated and excited by the existence of this kind of contact between straight men. The budding queer critic (and pervert) in me was impressed by the imagination required to manufacture these scenarios, the complex rules that structured them, and the



Figure 1.2. “Members of a fraternity displaying their new heart brands” (Wikimedia Commons, released into public domain October 2, 2006, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hearts.jpg>).

performative and ritualistic way that straight men touched one another's bodies or ordered others to do so.

I also sensed that the men involved believed they were doing something *productive*—something fundamentally *heterosexual*, *masculine*, and *white*—as they fingered each other's anuses. Consider, for instance, this quotation from a currently popular website by and for young men in fraternities (also known as “bros”), which explains the purpose of the elephant walk as follows:

The rule of thumb is the heavier the hazing, the stronger the bros [brothers]. By doing things like forcing your pledges/rooks to eat human shit or do an elephant walk you are basically saying, “Hey, by learning what your fellow bros’ shit tastes like you will be better bros,” and I have to say—I really respect that. . . . War builds amazing bonds. Hazing is basically war, only instead of freedom the end goal is getting hammered constantly with bros who are cool as shit and banging hot slam pieces [women]. It’s still up in the air which goal is more important, but one thing is for sure, bros would be nowhere without hazing.<sup>1</sup>

Is it possible that straight white men would really be nowhere without the opportunity for intimate contact with one another's anuses? Before I answer that question, I will say that what *is* clear is that when young white men grope one another, they believe they are getting work done. They are, as the straight dude quoted above suggests, engaged in something urgent and powerful—a form of bonding comparable to what soldiers experience during times of war, and a kind of relief and triumph comparable to freedom.

To the extent that sexual contact between straight white men is ever acknowledged, the cultural narratives that circulate around these practices typically suggest that they are *not gay* in their identitarian consequences, but are instead about building heterosexual men, strengthening hetero-masculine bonds, and strengthening the bonds of white manhood in particular. This

book does not argue against this premise. In fact, in the chapters that follow, I am going to amplify this premise by suggesting that homosexuality is an often invisible, but nonetheless vital ingredient—a constitutive element—of heterosexual masculinity. Taking sexual contact between straight white men as my point of departure, my aim is to offer a new way to think about heterosexual subjectivity—not as the opposite or absence of homosexuality, but as its own unique mode of engaging homosexual sex, a mode characterized by pretense, disidentification, and heteronormative investments. In particular, I am going to argue that when straight white men approach homosexual sex in the “right” way—when they make a show of enduring it, imposing it, and repudiating it—doing so functions to bolster not only their heterosexuality, but also their masculinity and whiteness.

Why focus on white men? All heterosexual practices—indeed, all sexual practices—are embedded within gendered and racialized circuits of meaning. For instance, as Chrys Ingraham demonstrates in the book *White Weddings*, the whiteness of weddings is not simply a matter of white bridal gowns, but a description of the white women who appear disproportionately in bridal magazines, the whiteness of Mattel’s bridal-themed Barbies, and the racial hierarchy of the wedding industry itself. Idealized white femininity is central to the construction of weddings as special and perfect, and the wedding industry in turn reinforces the normalcy and legitimacy of whiteness. Similarly, this book attends to what whiteness *does* for white heterosexual men as they come into homosexual contact, and what homosexual contact does for white hetero-masculinity. While much attention has been paid to the ways that race and culture crosscut the sex practices of men of color, including and especially straight men of color who have sex with men “on the down low,” the links between whiteness and male sexual fluidity are mostly unacknowledged. Most accounts of the down low suggest that straight-identified men of color who have sex with men are doing so because they are actually gay, but

cannot come out due to elevated levels of homophobia in their ethnoracial communities. I'll return to this story later, but for now I raise it to point out that, in contrast, the links between whiteness and white male sexual fluidity have been largely ignored, as if white men's sex practices have nothing to do with their racial and cultural location. By focusing on straight white men, I want to think about the ways that whiteness and masculinity—as a particular nexus of power—enable certain kinds of sexual contact, sexual mobility, and sexual border crossing that are not possible, or at least don't carry the same cultural meanings, when enacted by men of color.

I begin this book with the example of the elephant walk not because it is my most convincing piece of “data”; regrettably, I have never witnessed it (though it has been well documented by other scholars<sup>2</sup>). Instead, I begin here because it marks the beginning of my own journey into this terrain, one that started not with the media frenzy over “straight girls kissing” in the late 2000s, but a decade earlier, with images of straight white boys kissing in front of other cheering straight white boys. Hearing the story of the elephant walk first introduced me to an evolving cultural narrative about the circumstances in which straight dudes might, for various reasons, engage in homosexual sex. This story set in motion my curiosity about why so little attention is given to the sexual fluidity of straight white men, why this subject elicits so much denial, and what all of this reveals about the heterosexual/homosexual binary.

Research psychologists have long been concerned with the reasons that straight men engage in homosexual sex. The sheer number of terms invented by U.S. psychologists in the 1950s to describe such practices—“deprivational homosexuality,” “facultative homosexuality,” “functional homosexuality,” “situational homosexuality,” “opportunistic homosexuality,” and so forth<sup>3</sup>—provides a window into the amount of effort researchers have expended to distinguish “false” homosexualities from their authentic, or truly

gay, counterparts. A considerable body of twentieth-century psychological research on sex between straight men suggests that this sex most often results from desperate circumstances, such as in situations of heterosexual deprivation that occur in prisons and the military. According to this logic, a man with a heterosexual constitution may engage in homosexual sex acts (and presumably, vice versa), but if his homosexual encounters are *situational* (i.e., occurring only in prison, or while at sea, in military barracks, and so forth), these encounters are a blip on the otherwise static sexual radar screen. They signal nothing particularly meaningful about his sexuality.

Still today, the dominant mode of thinking within the disciplines of psychology and sexology—and arguably within the broader culture—is that the sexual content of male heterosexuality is fundamentally different from that of male homosexuality. When heterosexual men *do* engage in homosexual sex, and if they are not immediately presumed to be in the closet, these practices are treated as momentary aberrations, and a good deal of work goes into explaining why they occurred and why they are misrepresentative of, or discordant with, the true sexual orientation of participants.

In contrast, this book is based on the premise that homosexual contact is a ubiquitous feature of the culture of straight white men. Many other studies have demonstrated that straight men engage in acts of kissing, touching, jerking, licking, and penetrating men, typically in specific institutional environments and under particular circumstances. But little attention has been paid to the aggregate finding of these studies: namely, that white straight-identified men manufacture opportunities for sexual contact with other men in a remarkably wide range of settings, and that these activities appear to *thrive* in hyper-heterosexual environments, such as universities, where access to sex with women is anything but constrained. Additionally, studies of straight white men's homosexual activity all too often take these men's own un-

derstandings of their homosexual behavior at face value, viewing it as exceptional, circumstantial, or not sexual at all. While I agree that straight men's disidentification with homosexuality is at the heart of the matter, we need not accept that their homosexual encounters are *purely* about humiliation, institutional constraints, or whatever other presumably nonsexual force participants invoke to explain their behavior. To take these exceptionalizing accounts at face value misses an important opportunity to map the multiple and simultaneous meanings of straight white men's homosexual encounters.

The project at hand is an effort to catalogue a broad and diverse range of accounts of straight white men's sex with men. I examine how the homosexual encounters of straight white men are imagined, theorized, represented, and resolved by a broad array of actors—from psychologists to young men in fraternities, from sociologists to military officials, from filmmakers and other cultural producers to people who post personal ads online. Drawing on an eclectic archive of cultural materials and the tools of cultural sociology, this book investigates the stories people tell about why and how straight men might behave homosexually. Its chapters trace not only documented accounts of straight white men's actual homosexual behavior, but also how the homosexual encounters of heterosexual men appear in the realms of fantasy and cultural production. This approach requires a broad theoretical and methodological repertoire, a synthesis of queer studies, cultural studies, sociology, and feminist theory. Together, these approaches illuminate the multiple registers at which an ostensibly "incongruent" sex practice—straight men having sex with men—is simultaneously claimed and denied, and with what cultural and political effects.



## Fluid Subjects: The Generation, Gender, and Race of Sexual Fluidity

“Shit Happens”: The Heteroflexible Youth Generation

Regardless of how often the elephant walk or similar encounters actually occur in fraternities or elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> they are part of an increasingly familiar narrative about the sexual fluidity of a new generation of young heterosexuals. Consider, for instance, the most popular definition of “heteroflexible” that appears on the now iconic, youth-driven website [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com): “I’m straight, but shit happens.” This definition has received over 11,000 votes of approval by users of [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com). While fraternity members who engage in the elephant walk, for instance, probably do not identify as “heteroflexible”—this *identity*, as distinct from the practice, is reportedly more popular with young women—the term certainly captures the driving logic behind the elephant walk. The very concept of heteroflexibility, as defined on [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com) and elsewhere, communicates three popular notions about human sexuality, notions that form the theoretical basis now used to explain a broad range of homosexual encounters experienced by heterosexuals, including those of recent interest to the corporate media, such as “the phenomenon of straight girls kissing”:

1. Sexual *behaviors* are often random, accidental, and meaningless (“shit” can and does “happen”).
2. But, regardless of a person’s sexual *behavior*, it is possible to be certain about one’s fundamental sexual *constitution* (“I’m straight”), which is increasingly believed to be hardwired or biologically determined, a fact I will soon address.
3. And, *individuals are not to be blamed* for sexual behaviors that are in conflict with their sexual constitution, especially when various circumstances demand, or at least encourage, flexibility. (Consider, for instance, the sentence offered

on [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com) to illustrate how one would use the term “heteroflexible” in speech: “Dude, it’s not my fault. I was drunk and it was fun. What can I say? I’m heteroflexible.”)

A fourth “fact” about heteroflexibility, according to some sociologists,<sup>5</sup> is that it is a *new* phenomenon. That heterosexuals engage in homosexual sex is nothing new, they argue. But what *is* ostensibly new is the openness with which young people, especially girls who kiss girls, are approaching their sexual fluidity; in fact, they are so open about it that they have given it a name, an identity—heteroflexible—something heretofore unheard of. In fact, the existence of heterosexuals who cross the border into homosexual terrain is consistently viewed as a signal of the arrival of a new and surprising sexual order, one ushered in by young people with their new-fangled ideas about sex. For instance, sociologist Laurie Essig, blogging for Salon.com, describes her irritated reaction after first being introduced to the term “heteroflexible,” a reaction she explains primarily through the lens of a generational divide between her students and herself:

There is nothing like teaching college students to make a person feel hopelessly out-of-date. . . . What I’m talking about here is “heteroflexibility.” If you don’t know what that is, it’s time to admit that you’re as out of it as I am. Heteroflexibility is the newest permutation of sexual identity. . . . [It] means that the person has or intends to have a primarily heterosexual lifestyle, with a primary sexual and emotional attachment to someone of the opposite sex. But that person remains open to sexual encounters and even relationships with persons of the same sex. It is a rejection of bisexuality since the inevitable question that comes up in bisexuality is one of preference, and the preference of the heteroflexible is quite clear. Heteroflexible, I am told, is a lighthearted attempt to stick with heterosexual identification while still “getting in on the fun of homosexual pleasures.” . . . My reaction was predictable. . . . How

could these kids go and invent yet another identity when “we” solved that problem for them in the 1980s and ’90s? The word they were looking for was “queer” or even “bisexual,” damnit. I was angry that they would throw out the politics and the struggles of naming that had come before them. . . . And then my middle-aged rage mellowed enough to see the true genius behind this new term. Heteroflexibility—not homosexuality or bisexuality—would bring about an end to the hegemony of heterosexuality. . . . The opposite of heteroflexible is heterorigid. Imagine saying to anyone that you’re heterorigid. Sounds awful, right?<sup>6</sup>

Essig’s characterization of heteroflexibility as “the newest permutation of sexual identity” mirrors most commentary on the topic. *TIME* reporter Jeffrey Kluger describes girl–girl heteroflexibility as a youth-driven trend, one facilitated by alcohol, girls’ need for attention, and occasionally “genuine experimentation.”<sup>7</sup> Kluger draws heavily on the work of feminist scholars Leila Rupp and Verta Taylor, who offer a more nuanced analysis, yet one still largely focused on youth and the characterization of heteroflexibility as a new behavior. In their view, college-aged women “are engaging in new kinds of sexual behaviors,” namely “using the heterosexual hookup culture [of college] to experiment with or engage in same-sex sexual interactions.” They explain that “what young women call ‘heteroflexibility’ allows for behavior outside one’s claimed sexual identity, although the lines between lesbian and non-lesbian women, whether heterosexual or bisexual, remain firmly in place.”<sup>8</sup>

Conceptualizing sexual fluidity as trendy and isolated to young adults assists in the construction of “mature” sexuality as stable, exclusive, and less vulnerable to social influence. In the next chapter, I will dispute these arguments that heterosexual fluidity is new and experimental by drawing on queer historiography to demonstrate that almost all contemporary indicators of heteroflexibility can be traced back as far as the invention of the heterosexual/homo-

sexual binary itself—from transactional encounters between normal men and fairies to the rebellious homosexual stunts of straight boys gone wild; from “not gay” homosexual sex in the immigrant saloons of early twentieth century New York City to the “not gay” homosexual sex common in public bathrooms in the late twentieth century and beyond; from clever monikers for heterosexual men engaged in homosexual sex to elaborate theories designed to account for these men’s “discordant” homosexual behavior.

### The Gender of Sexual Fluidity

Commentary on heteroflexibility suggests that sexual fluidity is not only a youth trend, but a female one as well. Feminist sociologists point out that girls and women are given more room to explore gender and sexuality than boys, and are also influenced by a culture that both celebrates the sexual fluidity of female celebrities (Madonna, Britney Spears, Lady Gaga) and depicts lesbianism as an effective means of seducing men. Conversely, boys and men suffer greater gender regulation, have fewer models of male sexual fluidity, and are presumably unrewarded by women for any sexual fluidity they may express. As Rupp and Taylor explain, “men do not, at least in contemporary American culture, experience the same kind of fluidity. Although they may identify as straight *and* have sex with other men, they certainly don’t make out at parties for the pleasure of women.”<sup>9</sup>

Examinations of heteroflexibility also inevitably turn to the research findings of psychologists and human development scholars who believe that men’s sexual desire is less flexible than women’s for a variety of evolutionary reasons. Lisa Diamond, author of *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women’s Love and Desire*, argues that women’s sexual desires are more variable than men’s, and that sexual variability, in general, is both hormonal and situational. In Diamond’s view, female arousal is more easily triggered by situational factors and more linked to romantic love than men’s. This, she argues, is an outcome of the fact that women’s hormonal cycles

produce a relatively limited window of “proceptive” desire—the kind of intense, visceral, reproduction-oriented,<sup>10</sup> and lust-driven desire that emerges without any particular stimuli—as compared to men’s presumably near-constant experience of this state. In contrast with men, women spend more time experiencing “receptive arousal,” or sexual responsiveness to nonhormonal, social cues (e.g., watching a romantic movie, developing a strong emotional bond with someone, and so on). In this view, women have a biological leg up, so to speak, when it comes to sexual fluidity. If one accepts the premise of this research—women have more fluid sexual desires than men for reasons that are governed by hormonal cycles and generally beyond our control—it stands to reason that to find “heteroflexibility,” we should look to (young) women.

Setting aside the feminist objections one might have to this characterization of women’s sexuality, one thing is clear: the now common perception that women are more sexually receptive and flexible, and that men by contrast are more sexually rigid, has rendered men’s sexual fluidity largely invisible. Straight men *do* make out at parties for the pleasure of women and engage in virtually the same teasing/kissing/sex-for-show behaviors that straight young women do, though research demonstrating this has received relatively little attention. Sociologist Eric Anderson’s research on young men and sports is a goldmine of information about straight male college athletes kissing, taking “body shots” off of one another, and “jacking each other off” during three-some’s with girls and male teammates.<sup>11</sup> In ways that are virtually indistinguishable from scenarios in which straight girls kiss or have sex for the pleasure of male spectators,<sup>12</sup> the straight college football players interviewed by Anderson describe a host of situations in which they have sexual contact with one another in order to please a female sex partner. One reported:

“I’m not attracted to them [men]. It’s just that there has to be something worth it. Like, this one girl said she’d fuck us if we both

made out. So the ends justified the means. We call it a good cause. There has to be a good cause.”<sup>13</sup>

Another explained:

“There has got to be a reward. If I have to kiss another guy in order to fuck a chick, then yeah it’s worth it. . . . Well, for the most part it would be about getting it on with her, but like we might do some stuff together too. It depends on what she wants.”<sup>14</sup>

In a different study Anderson conducted,<sup>15</sup> this one in the United Kingdom, he found that of the 145 male students he interviewed, 89 percent had kissed another male on the lips, and 37 percent had engaged in extended kissing with another man. In both cases, participants conceptualized kissing men as “a means of expressing platonic affection among heterosexual friends.” Here, men explain their same-sex contact in terms nearly identical to the familiar and century-old narrative about “romantic friendships” among women. Taking Anderson’s research alongside research on “straight girls kissing,” we discover that heterosexuals, both men and women, conceptualize kissing and other forms of sexual contact in a variety of ways, including as an extension of heterosexual friendship or as a means of heterosexual seduction.

Some accounts of straight men’s sex with men suggest that terms like “heteroflexible” might already be outdated, especially to the extent that being heteroflexible has been misinterpreted as a euphemism for bisexuality. In a 2010 article for the *Good Men Project*, developmental psychologist Ritch Savin-Williams describes his interviews with “securely” heterosexual young men who report that they occasionally experience attraction to other men. Savin-Williams explains that many of these men, such as a research participant named Dillon, are uncertain about how to characterize their “potential” for attraction to men:

Though [Dillon] wants to “fuck lots of girls” before graduation, he’s not entirely heterosexual. “I’m not sure there’s a name for what I am,” he says. . . . By his own admission, Dillon says he resides in the “Sexual Netherlands” (his words), a place that exists between heterosexuality and bisexuality. In previous generations, such individuals might have been described as “straight but not narrow,” “bending a little,” and “heteroflexible.” Dillon is part of a growing trend of young men who are secure in their heterosexuality and yet remain aware of their potential to experience far more—sexual attractions, sexual interactions, crushes, and, occasionally romantic relationships with other guys.<sup>16</sup>

Savin-Williams reports that 3 to 4 percent of male teenagers in the United States and Canada describe themselves as “mostly heterosexual” or “predominantly heterosexual,” even when given the choice to select the terms “heterosexual” or “bisexual.” These percentages increase among college-aged men, which, as Savin-Williams points out, suggests there are more young men who feel they are “mostly straight” than who say they are bisexual or gay. Other studies have yielded similar findings,<sup>17</sup> demonstrating that a good number of straight-identified men feel at least somewhat open to the possibility of a sexual interaction with another man and do not view this possibility as a challenge to their heterosexuality. While such reports are often imagined to be surprising, the same accounts of young straight women’s occasional desire for sex with women rarely produce the same puzzlement. As noted in the chapters to follow, constructions of female sexuality allow for “girl-on-girl” encounters to be fleeting, consistent with heterosexual identity, and even taken up for heterosexual ends. Research by Anderson, Savin-Williams, and others points to the need for a similar view of male heterosexuality, one that can more fully capture the ways that homosexual contact takes straight male forms.

Though homosexual contact is a feature of straight men's private lives and friendships, it also takes ritualized forms in the institutional environments in which straight men come into contact with one another's bodies. Avowedly heterosexual institutions, like the United States military, are sites in which sexual encounters between heterosexual men are integrated into the culture and practice of the institution. In his book *Sailors and Sexual Identity*, based on interviews with U.S. sailors and marines, Steven Zeeland explains that the boundaries between homosexual and heterosexual, sexual and nonsexual, are kept intentionally blurry in the military. Zeeland describes a range of intimate and sexual behaviors that are part of standard military practice and "known to the Joint Chiefs of Staff to be a natural part of military life." These are conveniently ambiguous in their meaning:

Navy initiation rituals involving cross-dressing, spanking, simulated oral and anal sex, simulated ejaculation, nipple piercing, and anal penetration with objects and fingers might be [perceived as] homosexual. An officer's love for his men might be homosexual. The intimate buddy relationships that form in barracks, aboard ship, and most especially in combat—often described as being a love greater than between a man and a woman—might be homosexual—whether or not penetration and ejaculation ever occur. The U.S. military does not want these things called homosexual. To maintain the illusion that these aspects of military life are heterosexually pure it is necessary to maintain the illusion that there is no homosexuality in the military.<sup>18</sup>

Zeeland points not only to the ubiquity and normalization of homosexual contact in the U.S. military, but also to the military's investment in conceptualizing homosexual contact as "heterosexually pure" in its meaning and motivation.

In this book, I take the position that indeed we *should* view straight men's homosexual contact as primarily heterosexual in



meaning. The problem, however, is that this perspective has been used as a way to elide the complexity of straight-identified men's sexuality. All too often a "boys will be boys" analysis of straight men's homosexual activity functions more to obscure rather than to illuminate the implications of these behaviors for our thinking about heterosexuality, and the sexual binary more broadly. We can and should be giving far greater attention to the ways that the construction of heterosexuality so thoroughly allows for, and in fact, requires, a remarkable amount of homosexual contact. As I explore in chapter 5, the U.S. military does not simply "look the other way" when it comes to the homosexual behavior of military men; instead, it imagines that intimate homosexual bonding, physical closeness, and tests of heterosexual resilience (which, ironically, take homosexual forms) are *necessary* to build strong men, to win wars, and to preserve national security.

Findings such as Anderson's, Savin-William's, and Zeeland's are hard to accept as they run so deeply counter to conventional wisdom about the rigidity of men's sexuality. Surely these are just exceptional cases, or only the behavior of men who are actually gay or bisexual, or who find themselves in the most extreme of circumstances? To break through this tendency to exceptionalize male sexuality, we need only look to research on *female* sexual fluidity as our guide. For instance, Lisa Diamond opens her aforementioned book *Sexual Fluidity* with the examples of actresses Anne Heche, Julie Cypher, and Cynthia Nixon, all of whom left their heterosexual lives and began lesbian relationships and, in Heche and Cypher's case, later returned to heterosexual relationships. Diamond argues that these women are not "confused"; instead, their cases illuminate the fact that fluidity is a core feature of female sexual orientation:

The reason such cases are so perplexing is that they flatly contradict prevailing assumptions about sexual orientation. These assumptions hold that an individual's sexual predisposition for

the same sex or other sex is an early-developing and stable trait that has a consistent effect on that person's attractions, fantasies, and romantic feelings over the lifespan. . . . Although this model of sexual orientation describes men fairly accurately, it does not apply so well to women. Historically, women who deviated from this model . . . were presumed few in number and exceptional in nature. In other words, they were just inconvenient noise cluttering up the real data on sexual orientation. Yet as research on female sexuality has increased over the years, these "exceptional" cases now appear to be more common than previously thought.<sup>19</sup>

Though Diamond's analysis reproduces the very error it describes by so easily discounting male sexual fluidity,<sup>20</sup> it offers a useful blueprint for thinking about the ways that men's fluidity, like women's, has been presumed rare, exceptional, or "just inconvenient noise."

There is no doubt that straight men's sexuality is structured differently from straight women's, but not with regard to their capacity for homosexual sex, desire, and even relationships. While attractive white heterosexual women like Nixon, Cypher, and Heche are forgiven, if not celebrated, for their forays into same-sex coupling, men are offered a different, far more limited set of possibilities. Perhaps Nixon's, Cypher's, and Heche's male counterparts are men like evangelical megachurch leader Ted Haggard, former Senator Larry Craig, and former Representative Bob Allen. Ted Haggard, a white male in his early sixties, had a three-year sexual relationship with a male massage therapist; he also identifies as heterosexual and has long been married to a woman. Haggard now reports that his homosexual desires have completely disappeared as a result of effective Christian counseling. Larry Craig and Bob Allen are also both heterosexual-identified, white married men. Both were also arrested in 2007 for homosexual prostitution in public restrooms. Both remain married to their wives.

What are the differences between the women whom Diamond offers up as examples of female sexual fluidity and men like Haggard, Craig, and Allen? For one, these women pursued long-term, romantic, loving, presumably monogamous, public relationships with other women, while the men's sexual relationships with men involved sex for money and were kept hidden from wives and the public. Nixon, Cypher, and Heche are all proponents of gay rights and have expressed no shame about or disidentification from their same-sex relationships. Haggard, Craig, and Allen are committed to their heterosexual marriages, are vocal opponents of gay rights, and wish for the public to view their homosexual behaviors as temporary and unfortunate symptoms of stress, addiction, trauma, and/or loss of faith. Surely, in light of these differences, we would be more inclined to view women like Nixon, Cypher, and Heche as the *real* bi- or homosexuals, while men like Haggard, Craig, and Allen are simply acting from a place of situational need or occasional curiosity. But this is the opposite of the way that commentators have interpreted such cases. Cypher and Heche have received a warm reception upon their return to heterosexual partnerships, their relationships with women imagined as an unusual but ultimately harmless detour in their otherwise heterosexual lives (Heche has since been cast in heterosexual roles, for instance). On the other hand, gays and straights alike have proclaimed Haggard, Craig, and Allen to be closeted gay men, religious or political hypocrites, and cowards who have duped their pitiable wives and children. Commentators seem unconcerned with how these men actually want to live their lives—in heterosexual marriages, in heterosexual communities, and invested in heteronormativity. Haggard, in particular, was thoroughly ridiculed by the American public for sexual hypocrisy, even as his explanation for his behavior was thoroughly consistent with the Christian logic that he, like all of us, is vulnerable to occasional sins of the flesh (a logic that allowed his followers back in Colorado Springs to forgive him).

This is all to say that when straight-identified women have sex with women, the broader culture waits in anticipation for them to return to what is likely their natural, heterosexual state; when straight-identified men have sex with men, the culture waits in anticipation for them to admit that they are gay. Though it may at first appear that women are offered a more nuanced, complex sexuality, it is perhaps more accurate to suggest that women are granted a longer suspension of judgment before their same-sex encounters and even their same-sex relationships are presumed to signal true lesbian subjectivity (and not a hetero-erotic “bi-curiousity”). Men, conversely, must manage their sexual fluidity within the context of a culture that they know will immediately equate male homosexual behavior with gay subjectivity. It should come as little surprise to us, then, that for the most part, straight men’s homosexual behaviors are marked by shame, secrecy, homophobia, and disavowal of queerness. In other words, the fact that the homosexual behaviors of heterosexual men and women take very different cultural forms is important and needs investigation, but it is hardly evidence that male sexuality is less fluid or receptive to cultural stimuli than women’s.<sup>21</sup>

The evidence of men’s sexual flexibility (and *all* people’s sexual flexibility) surrounds us, so this raises the question: Why this investment in telling a different story about women’s sexuality than we do about men’s? The main purpose of this book is not to dispute the notion that women are more sexually fluid than men, so I won’t belabor this point. However, the persistent refusal to recognize male sexual fluidity is important here to the extent that it is the primary reason I have chosen to focus my analysis on men. Over the past few years, students and some colleagues have reacted to early iterations of this book with outright denial. Many state that they simply cannot believe that straight men behave in such ways. Others can only assume that, whether I am aware of it or not, what I am truly studying is the experience of being in the closet. Heterosexual women, I have come to find out, are among

the most fervent deniers of male sexual fluidity. Many are only able to conclude that men who have had homosexual sex, even if only once, must be gay and closeted. And yet, they do not come to this same conclusion about straight women, for whom they imagine that circumstances mean everything, and “playing around” with other women ultimately means little. It is not a stretch to imagine that this view of women is the enduring legacy of the Victorian belief that what women do together sexually is simply not real sex, but a precursor to, or substitute for, heterosexual intercourse.<sup>22</sup> In light of these notions about the inherent fluidity and rigidity of female and male sexuality respectively, my goal in focusing on men is not to highlight male sexuality per se, but to add men and masculinity to our understanding of the permeability of heterosexuality.

#### The Race of Sexual Fluidity

This book is also limited to an analysis of *white* men. While some might wonder why straight white men would deserve any more attention than they already receive, my hope is to make a compelling case that investigating white male heterosexuality deepens our understanding of the racial construction of sexuality, particularly the ways that whiteness continues to function—even in an allegedly “post-racial” era—as a stand-in for normal sexuality. Straight white men, as I will show, can draw on the resources of white privilege—an “invisible package of unearned assets”<sup>23</sup>—to circumvent homophobic stigma and assign heterosexual meaning to homosexual activity. Among the many privileges of whiteness, the power to both normalize and exceptionalize one’s behavior, including one’s “discordant” sex practices, is central.<sup>24</sup> But as white supremacy and privilege “smooth over” any imagined inconsistencies in the sexual behavior of whites, especially white men, the sexual fluidity of men of color quickly falls subject to heightened surveillance and misrepresentation. Illustrating this, the last two decades have been marked by a media-fueled panic about the sexual fluidity of men of color, particularly black men.

Indeed, to the extent that the media has acknowledged that straight-identified men have sex with men, it has focused disproportionately on men of color “on the down low.” Like heteroflexible college women who have been the subject of media fascination—and who, significantly, are almost always white in these accounts—black and Latino men on the down low (DL) are reported to “live heterosexual lives”: we are often told that they have wives or girlfriends; that they are invested in heterosexual culture and appearances; and that they don’t identify as gay or bisexual. Though there are some parallels between this construction and the story of (white) girls “hooking up” with girls, men of color on the DL are not granted the sexual fluidity and complexity attributed to young white women. Instead, as C. Riley Snorton illuminates in the incisive book *Nobody Is Supposed to Know*, “the ‘down low’ has been one in myriad discursive practices that link black sexuality to duplicity,” thereby airing white “anxieties about the possibilities of refusing to comply with sexual identifications, of resisting being gay.”<sup>25</sup> In media coverage of the down low, black men have been repeatedly depicted as closeted and as fundamentally dishonest about their real lives and desires. Black men on the down low and Latino “men-who-have-sex-with-men” (an epidemiological category, typically abbreviated as MSMs) have been central figures in both scholarly and popular discussions regarding internalized homophobia, sexual repression, extreme religiosity, HIV/AIDS, the betrayal of unsuspecting wives and girlfriends, and the failure to come out of the closet.<sup>26</sup> To make sense of their sexual practices, analyses of men of color who have sex with men have drawn heavily on theories of the closet and its racialized underpinnings.<sup>27</sup> Black men on the DL, in particular, have been described as “a new subculture of gay men” for whom “masculinity . . . is so intertwined with hyper-heterosexuality [that it] renders an openly gay identity impossible.”<sup>28</sup> Similarly, Latino MSMs are implicitly characterized as closeted gay or bisexual men for whom cultural barriers, rigid

cultural ideas about gender, and strong ties to family and religion prevent public identification as gay or bisexual.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast with the media's sensationalized and panic-inducing representation of a dangerous black male sexual underworld, scholars working in black queer studies have described the discursive construction of the DL as the latest example of the hyper-surveillance of black men's sex practices. According to Jeffrey McCune, whites have long viewed black male sexuality as a spectacle, leaving black men with no closet to hide in, and hence nowhere from which to "come out." In contrast with the dominant white view of the DL as a tragic and dangerous consequence of black homophobia, McCune views the DL as a subversive practice of black sexual world-making, one that both adheres to the black politics of sexual discretion while also refusing to conform to the mainstream/white lesbian and gay movement's emphasis on sexual labeling and "coming out." The embrace of heteronormative hip-hop, masculine cool, sexual discretion, and other features of black heterosexual culture is not so much a denial of queer desire, argues McCune, but a mode of connecting with a broader black culture. He explains that when men on the DL go to black queer clubs, "they have arrived in a queer space that welcomes them, but does not require them to become official members. . . . The discursive demand that one must be 'out' to participate in gay activities ignores that all gay activity does not take place in actual public domain; neither does individual participation always guarantee membership."<sup>30</sup> C. Riley Snorton concurs that while the down low is ostensibly a secret practice, the media's fascination with it serves to expose the racist conditions of hyper-visibility in which black sexuality takes form.<sup>31</sup> Drawing on Eve Sedgwick's conceptualization of the "glass closet," a form of visible concealment maintained through silence, Snorton points to volumes of troubling media commentary on the down low, reading these texts not as accurate accounts of a hidden sex practice, but as

examples of the regulation and exposure of black sexuality more generally.

These critiques of the media's framing of the DL illuminate the racialized and gendered conditions of visibility and invisibility that shape how we understand the sexual fluidity of people of color and whites, women and men. Bringing together these critical analyses of DL discourse with feminist critiques of the objectification of women's bodies, we can begin to see why and how straight white men's sexual practices are those that are truly invisible and unmarked, while men of color and women are subject to narratives that reinforce their already subordinate position within hierarchies of normal sexuality. For women, the heteropatriarchal view that female sexuality is naturally receptive and flexible, more subdued or controllable than men's hydraulic sexuality, and a commodity to be exchanged among men is a perfect set-up to interpret "straight girls kissing girls" as a titillating spectacle of special interest to straight men and a nonthreatening extension of women's innate sensuality. For black men, the long-standing construction of black male sexuality as predatory and violent and of black culture as beholden to traditional gender and sexual formations is the context in which the homosexual contact of not-gay black men is offered up as a matter of considerable risk and urgency, a black secret—and in many accounts, a black *lie*—in need of exposure and management.<sup>32</sup> Women of color arguably sit at the intersection of these forces, often scrutinized, pathologized, and criminalized for any sexual practice that extends beyond dominant constructions of normative female sexuality.

The story is different for straight white men. When straight white men have sex with men, they are either presumed gay or their behavior is dismissed as inconsequential and nonsexual. Rarely, if ever, are their sexual practices racialized, or attributed to particular ethnoracial sexual norms within white culture. Blacks, Latinos, Muslims, and other non-white and non-Christian "cultures" become the repository for cultural difference, sexual



repression, homophobia, and hyper-religiosity, thereby masking the normative white Christian secularism that fuels white male homophobia and undergirds dominant U.S. discourse about the relationship between sexuality and subjectivity.<sup>33</sup> In contrast with this narrative about the rationality of whiteness (and maleness), I will show that white male privilege, rituals, anxieties, and delusions are central to the operation of homosexuality within straight white men's lives. While straight white men not only draw on many of the same logics used by women to account for their homosexual experiences (such as the football players in Anderson's study who engage in sex acts with men in order to seduce women), they also leverage white masculinity to assist in the preservation or recuperation of heterosexuality in the context of sex with men. This set of uniquely white hetero-masculine logics—namely, that sex with men is often necessary, patriotic, character-building, masculinity-enhancing, and paradoxically, a means of inoculating oneself against authentic gayness—forms the subjects of the chapters to follow.

The late sociologist Ruth Frankenberg explained that one of the truisms about whiteness is that it is an invisible or unmarked category, an empty container that white people themselves cannot describe. And yet, Frankenberg also asserted, the notion that whiteness is unmarked is also a white delusion, as whiteness has a clear history and set of forms, both past and present, and is certainly not unmarked in the eyes of people of color. "Whiteness" first emerged as a Western European colonial project, a self-made category used to justify the colonization of "Others"—people of African, Native American, Latin American, and Asian descent. Colonization was not only a process of violent occupation and theft of culture, land, and resources, but also a process whereby self-proclaimed white colonizers named themselves, named the Other, and then became "apparently invisible."<sup>34</sup> For Frankenberg, whiteness in the contemporary United States is "a place of advantage and privilege intersected by other social categories (gender,

class, sexuality, & ability); a position, an attitude or outlook from which to see ‘selves’ and others; a complex spectrum of cultural practices that are either seen as ‘normative’ or rational and not racial; and a culture whose character and identity have been shaped by history (e.g., colonialism).”<sup>35</sup> Drawing on Frankenberg’s definition of whiteness, this book attends to the ways that whiteness intersects with masculinity and sexuality, shaping the relationship between men’s homosexual sex and their sense of “self,” their status as “normal,” and their position within structural hierarchies. In making whiteness a central unit of analysis, along with masculinity and heteronormativity, my aim is to build on a growing body of work that racializes whiteness and unmasks its delusions.

In sum, the pairing of homosexual sex with heterosexual life is not a new phenomenon; nor is it limited to young people, women, or Black, Latino, or other men of color. And yet, despite a good amount of evidence suggesting that homosexual contact is part of the basic fabric of human sexuality, and central even to the social organization of heterosexuality, it is of course difficult to chart homosexuality’s presence within cultural formations—like that of straight white American masculinity—that have defined themselves, in large part, by homosexuality’s absence. Hence, we must attend to the apparent paradox that homosexual encounters are both everywhere and nowhere within the lives and culture of straight white men. Doing so requires some attention to the cultural construction of the heterosexual/homosexual binary itself, the subject to which I now turn.

### **What Is Heterosexuality?**

When I think about the mood and flavor of straight men’s sex with men, I am reminded of the kind of sexual games my friends and I played as young girls (starting around seven or eight years old), before any of us knew what sex would later be. In the absence of a coherent and normative conceptualization of sex, we cobbled together the gendered and sexual tropes familiar to us as kids.

We crafted highly detailed narratives about ourselves (we were beautiful fairies, rebellious teenagers, wealthy movie stars, doctors and patients), and our circumstances (the various events that presumably resulted in the *need*—whether we liked it or not—to reveal/touch/kiss certain body parts). We knew we were playing. We invented scenes. They had to be negotiated. There were rules. People were bossy. Body parts were gross. But we touched each other anyway.

Homosexual encounters between adult heterosexuals constitute a unique erotic domain that is characterized by many of the features of childhood sexuality. This is not because it is a “childish” act for adult heterosexuals to have sex with one another, or because straight men in fraternities (or military barracks, prisons, and so forth) are less evolved or self-aware than men in other contexts, or for any other reasons that might stem from such a simplistic and moralizing reading of sexuality. Instead, it is because homosexual sex enacted by heterosexuals—like sex between children—occupies a liminal space within sexual relations, one that sits outside of the heterosexual/homosexual binary and is sometimes barely perceptible as sex. Like childhood sex, it goes by many other names: “experimentation,” “accident,” “friendship,” “joke,” “game,” and so on. Participants must painstakingly avoid being mistaken as sincere homosexuals by demonstrating that the sexual encounter is something other than sex, and in many cases, they do this by agreeing that the encounter was *compelled* by others (such as older fraternity brothers) or by circumstances that left them little choice (such as the apparently quite dire need to obtain access to a particular fraternity).

In the United States, where homosexual accidents make for great comedy, the identitarian context in which homosexuality takes place is of the utmost consequence. Two decades ago, in the mid-1990s, this was exemplified by the positive publicity given to sitcoms like *The Drew Carey Show* in which two heterosexual male characters were shown jokingly kissing, while a “sincere” kiss be-

tween gay or lesbian characters (such as appeared on the sitcom *Ellen*) could be shown only following a somber disclaimer about “adult content.” The actors on both shows performed virtually the same homosexual kiss, but the networks knew that these two same-sex kisses had fundamentally different meanings and cultural implications. Today, thankfully, two men accidentally kissing is no longer as funny, and though much of the commentary on heteroflexibility misses the mark, we have at least become more transparent about the fact that some television forms of homosexual contact—especially that which occurs between two young straight (or straight-appearing) women—are about ratings and not social progress, normalcy and not difference, heterosexual and not queer “ways of life.”

Part of what is said to distinguish heteroflexibility from gayness is that it involves engaging in same-sex sexuality while distancing oneself from the lesbian and gay movement, or, in Essig’s words, “throw[ing] out the politics and the struggles” associated with same-sex desire. But this characterization could use a bit more nuance, as many sexually fluid straight people *do* identify as allies to the LGBT movement, or even loosely as “queer.” This is not to mention that many self-identified gay men and lesbians couldn’t be less political about their sexuality, or more invested in assimilation and respectability. While some degree of insistence that one is “not gay” is generally part and parcel of heteroflexibility, a more significant distinction is that people who identify as heterosexual, unlike gay men and lesbians, are generally content with *straight culture*, or heteronormativity; they enjoy heterosexual sex, but more importantly for the purposes of this book, they enjoy heterosexual culture. Simply put, being sexually “normal” suits them. It feels good; it feels like home.

Unfortunately, the domain of culture is generally lost in popular discourses about sexual desire, which focus largely on whether homosexual activity is either “chosen” or “biological.” This entire framing is far too simplistic. People certainly have tendencies to-

ward particular objects of desire, including bodies defined in their time and place as “the same” or “the opposite” from their own. And yet, for the vast majority of us, these tendencies—whatever they may be—are shaped and experienced under the constraints of heteronormativity, or within cultures strongly invested in opposite-sex coupling. The amount of psychic and cultural labor expended to produce and enforce heterosexual identification and procreative sexuality suggests that heterosexuality, as we now know it, is hardly an automatic human effect. It is for this reason that scholars of heterosexuality have described it as a psychic and social accomplishment, an institution, and a cultural formation.<sup>36</sup>

Of course the traditional view of sexuality is that heterosexuality is nature’s design, the driving force behind human reproduction and the gendered division of labor that keeps societies running (i.e., the unpaid care work done by women to sustain children and male laborers). In the last several decades, this view has been slightly revised to account for the existence of the homosexual, who is now typically understood to result from a harmless hormonal or genetic aberration in nature’s plan.

But from a queer perspective, sexual desire is not determined by bio-evolutionary processes, but is instead fluid and culturally contingent. As first elaborated by Freud in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, nature may provide human infants with sexual desire, but this desire takes form as a polymorphous capacity to experience pleasure in response to a broad range of stimuli, including an array of one’s own bodily functions as well as various modes of contact with objects, animals, and humans of all types. It is only through disciplined conformity to societal norms, typically directed by parents, that young children’s sexual impulses are re-directed toward a sanctioned, and most often singular, object of desire (most often, a person of the “opposite” sex). Hence, from both psychoanalytic and social constructionist perspectives, the hetero/homo binary is not the essential order of things, but the product of cultural norms and political-economic imperatives.

And yet, sexual binaries often *feel* natural because they are internalized in early childhood, resulting in strong sexual (and gender) identifications. But central to the larger project at hand is the question of what happens to all of those polymorphous desires once they are repressed in the service of conformity to prevailing sexual norms. For Freud, the process of sublimating these desires in order to achieve heterosexuality and normative gender is not an easy one; instead it is tenuous, labored, and requires the disavowal and loss of original homosexual attachments. Moreover, this loss cannot be recognized or grieved, as doing so would expose the fragility and constructedness of heterosexuality. As the philosopher Judith Butler has argued, this bind produces a unique form of melancholy, a kind of repressed sadness that is generated as heteromascularity comes into being through the disavowed and unmourned loss of homosexual possibilities.<sup>37</sup>

Psychoanalytic accounts of sexuality provide us with some language for thinking about the psychic life of these repressed homosexual attachments, which take form in the fantasies and fetishes of heterosexuals. In Freud's original use, the fetish is an object or practice that substitutes for the phallus—specifically, the castrated phallus a child imagines has been taken from his mother. In the chapters to follow, I occasionally use the term “fetish,” which I deploy to more broadly describe the ways that heteronormativity (or the investment in sexual normalcy) and hetero-masculine scripts (adventure, male bonding, hazing, humiliation, national security, etc.) function to displace or mask homosexual attachments—even in the context of homosexual sex! In other words, as I argue in chapter 5, scenes and scripts that constitute “hazing” are not purely about initiation into male groups; homosexual contact is such a common feature of male hazing scenarios that we might question whether hazing itself is a hetero-masculine fetish, one that allows men access to homosexual activity without the stigma of gay identity. Hence, we might conceptualize straight men's not-gay homosexual activity

as a surfacing of polymorphous desires generally confined to the unconscious, the unacknowledged repository for all “unacceptable” thoughts and feelings. The conscious male subject disidentifies<sup>38</sup> with these desires, drawing on the power of heteronormative scripts in an effort to sustain the performance of his utterly normal sexuality—even and especially as his fingers, tongue, and/or penis find themselves in contact with other men.

Cultural theorist Sara Ahmed offers us yet another way to think about the reproduction of heterosexuality.<sup>39</sup> Ahmed emphasizes heterosexuality’s inherited quality, its offering as both obligation and “gift” by parents to their children. Required to follow the family line, the child’s entire social world is oriented toward heterosexuality while other object orientations are cleared away. Heterosexuality, as the intimately close, familiar, normalized, and celebrated couple formation, is the space in which the child lives and becomes the space in which the child feels “at home.” The child’s body itself, like bodies desiring familiar foods, gets shaped by its cultural context and begins to tend toward the familiar. The child learns to repeat the sensations, gestures, and practices that orient him or her toward heterosexuality—e.g., ways of relating and communicating that are premised on a gender binary in which “opposites attract.” This ongoing repetition is the very process that sustains heterosexual selfhood.

This way of understanding the formation of sexuality helps to explain the apparent paradox that homosexuality is a constitutive feature of hetero-masculinity. Because homosexual attachments are always present within the psychic structure of heterosexuality, boys and men, rather than mourning “the homosexuality that could not be,” arguably work out this loss via ongoing acts of homophobic repudiation, wherein they locate “the homosexual” outside of themselves and go to great and performative lengths to reject people and things associated with it. As I will soon make clear, this rejection of homosexual subjectivity sometimes occurs within and alongside straight men’s sexual activity with men. As

long as these activities are recast as nonsexual and the dividing line between gay and straight subjectivity is secured, homosexual contact can function as a powerful means of asserting heterosexual authenticity, or a “not gay” constitution.

Viewing sexuality as Freud, Butler, and Ahmed do allows us to see that, indeed, people often feel in their bodies the pull toward particular sex acts. But the way these urges get “oriented” both internally and in social space is a psychic and cultural process, not a genetic or hormonal one. It should come as little surprise that heterosexual orientation, in particular, is often experienced as fixed and innate, as a bodily orientation largely outside one’s control. This is because our bodies have, in fact, been oriented toward straightness. Most of us have been required to inhabit heterosexuality from early childhood, even if we’ve never engaged in heterosexual sex.

But how then, do we make sense of homosexual desire, a force presumably so strong as to overcome what the late lesbian feminist poet and theorist Adrienne Rich so aptly called “compulsory heterosexuality”? Ahmed’s account is again useful here, as she argues that an initial pull or tendency toward bodies of the same sex does not in itself constitute being or becoming lesbian or gay. Indeed, as I argue in this book, an urge toward homosexual activity may well be one of the more common features of human sexuality, one flexible enough to be oriented toward the very category that presumably excludes it (heterosexuality). This is possible in part because, under the conditions of heteronormativity, to actually *become a gay or lesbian person*, one must also do a good amount of work to reorient oneself away from heteronormativity. For instance, Ahmed explains:

Even lesbians who feel they were “always that way,” still have to “become lesbians,” which means *gathering such tendencies into specific social and sexual forms*. Such a gathering requires a habit-change, to borrow a term from Teresa de Lauretis . . . : it requires



a reorientation of one's body such that other objects, those that are not reachable on the vertical and horizontal lines of straight culture, can be reached.<sup>40</sup>

Crucial to Ahmed's analysis is that straightness and queerness are not simply matters of sexual object choice; they also carry a vast array of cultural requirements and implications that, in turn, shape how people orient their bodies and move through space. Because heterosexuality is the default sexual orientation, reorienting oneself in the direction of public queer legibility takes some significant effort. As queer theorist David Halperin puts it, being gay is a resistant cultural practice that gays must learn from one another.<sup>41</sup>

I read Ahmed's argument to suggest that straightness and queerness are differentiated not by early tendencies toward same- or opposite-sex desire, but by the way these tendencies are "gathered into specific social and sexual forms." In this vein, my analysis moves away from the question of who has homosexual impulses and why, presuming instead that most people do, even as most people are, for the reasons outlined above, "at home" within the culture and structures of heterosexuality. The question at the center of my analysis is, then: How do straight white men gather homosexual tendencies into heterosexual forms? What kinds of "work" are required to engage in homosexual sex while staying oriented toward heterosexuality?

Many social scientists have attempted to elaborate the difference between sexual orientation (most often defined as the quantity and duration of one's same-sex or other-sex desires, often believed to be hardwired), sexual identity (how one identifies oneself—as straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc.), and actual sexual behavior. In this book, I take the less popular position that the question of "sexual orientation"—as it is conventionally understood—is not a very interesting one. I am not concerned with whether the men I describe in this book are "really" straight or

gay, and I am not arguing that they (or that all men) are really homosexual or bisexual in their orientation. Instead, what I am arguing is that homosexual sex plays a remarkably central role in the institutions and rituals that produce heterosexual subjectivity, as well as in the broader culture's imagination of what it means for "boys to be boys." To my mind, the nearly obsessive focus on whether individual people are born gay or straight functions as a bizarre distraction from the greater cultural significance of homosexuality, both historically and at present.

In this book I conceptualize straightness and queerness primarily as cultural domains. I recognize that people have real bodies and real sexual responses to other bodies, but I also contend that bodies do not respond only to the "raw facts" of other people's genitals or other sexed body parts. Instead, our bodies desire other bodies and particular sex acts *in their social context*; we desire what those body parts *represent*. We desire particular bodies and particular sex acts and particular erotic scenes and cultural spheres in large part because they have significant cultural and erotically charged meanings. As Judith Butler's work has made clear, sexual desire itself operates under the conditions of a heterosexual matrix, in which sex (femaleness and maleness), gender (femininity and masculinity), and heterosexual desire are imagined and required to follow logically from one another. Bodies that fall outside this matrix are rendered abject and unintelligible. That our desires are subject to these enduring cultural prescriptions does not make them any less embodied, but it does indicate that our bodies respond to a social field already characterized by narrow gender and sexual binaries to which much cultural significance has been assigned. In other words, to call oneself "gay" or "straight" is to take on the cultural baggage associated with these categories, and whether or not this baggage is appealing is a separate matter altogether from the appeal of homosexual or heterosexual sex.

As I will show, whether a man thinks of himself and his homosexual behavior as “gay” or “straight” makes all the difference with regard to how he will make sexual contact with men: how he will set the scene, the narratives he will use to describe what it is happening and why, the time and place the sex occurs, and whether it will be possible to imagine that the sex was never actually “sexual” at all. Let me be more concrete. Some men like to have sex with men in backrooms of gay bars after dancing to techno music; others like to have sex with men while watching straight porn and talking about “banging bitches” (see chapter 4). Some women like to have sex with women in the woods at feminist music festivals or while cohabitating in the suburbs; others, as sociologist Laura Hamilton’s research explores, like to “hook up” with women on couches at fraternity parties in front of cheering male spectators.<sup>42</sup> These temporal, spatial, and cultural factors are not inconsequential; they are precisely what make sex “hot” for participants, *and* they are the details that people take as evidence of their heterosexual and homosexual orientations. It is for this reason that I conceptualize heterosexual subjectivity as constituted not by a lack of homosexual sex or desire, but by an enduring investment in heteronormativity, or in the forces that construct heterosexuality as natural, normal, and right and that disavow association with abnormal, or queer, sexual expressions. This investment in heteronormativity is itself a *bodily desire*; in fact, I believe it is *the* embodied heterosexual desire, more powerful than, say, a woman’s yearning for male torsos or penises or a man’s longing for vaginas or breasts. It is the desire to be sexually unmarked and normatively gendered. It is the desire not simply for heterosexual sex and partnership, but for all of its concomitant cultural rewards. It is a desire that people may well feel within their genitals. In sum, this book works from the premise that heterosexuality is, in part, a fetishization of the normal.<sup>43</sup>

There is no doubt that many, and perhaps most, gay and lesbian people also want to be “normal.” But even those who might wish for complete homonormative<sup>44</sup> assimilation (with regard to their political, employment, or economic standing) often find themselves unable or unwilling to achieve gender normativity or to conform to heteronormative dictates for appropriate sexuality. In other words, they find themselves generally not “at home” within, and sometimes repelled by, heterosexual ways of life. Conversely, the straight men who are the subjects of this book find heteronormativity attractive and compelling. They desire it; they are aroused by it. It calls to them; it feels like home. In this way, I do not discount the possibility of a mind/body connection or of the interplay between nature and nurture in shaping our desire. Instead I want to suggest that what we are desiring may not be body parts or people who fall within particular sex and gender categories, but the far broader experiences of sexual and gender normalcy and difference. Some of us, for understandable reasons, are very invested in sexual and gender normalcy; others, for less well-known reasons (which need hardly be innate), desire rebellion, difference, or outsiderness—a desire that may have been present for as long as we can remember. Some of us—who typically go by the names “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” or “queer”—want our same-sex desires to be taken seriously, viewed as meaningful and sometimes political features of our lives. Others—who typically go by the names “heterosexual” or “straight”—want our same-sex attractions and encounters to be viewed in opposite terms, as accidental, temporary, meaningless, and decidedly apolitical.

Sara Ahmed describes the cultural material of sexuality as that which “sticks” to us when we become oriented one way or the other. We know, because we have learned, that our sex practices mean something not only about who we are (straight or gay), but also about who our friends will be, where we will live and be employed, how we will dress and what we will buy, which institutions will grant or deny us access, and all the other cultural and

structural factors that have solidified around straight and gay identities. While the triad of orientation/identity/behavior is the dominant model within most research on human sexuality, it is one that has largely overlooked that we do not simply desire bodies and sex acts; we desire everything that those bodies represent.

### **A Note on Key Terms**

In this book I use the term “homosexual” as a technical description of same-sex sexual behavior and desire, but not to describe *people* who identify as gay or queer, nor to describe gay or queer culture. You will notice that I use the term “heterosexual” more broadly, to describe other-sex sexual behaviors and desires *and* to describe people who identify as heterosexual. The reason for this inconsistency is that the term “heterosexual” carries no cultural stigma and is commonly used by straight people to describe themselves, while the term “homosexual” has a long association with medical pathology, and consequently, it is a term rarely used by gay men or lesbians. I often use the terms “heterosexual,” “hetero-erotic,” “hetero-cultural,” “hetero-masculine,” and “heteronormative” to describe sex between straight men, which I do as a way of signaling the *culture of heterosexuality* shaping these homosexual encounters. I use the term “gay” to describe men who self-identify with that term or to describe mainstream gay culture and politics. In some cases, I have used the terms “gay” and “queer” interchangeably, though I have tried to reserve my use of the term “queer” for instances in which I am describing what some might call “the gay left,” or the movement to resist gay assimilation and celebrate sexual and gender non-normativity.

I want to acknowledge that in some cases I have used the term “sex” to describe behaviors that participants themselves understand as something else, something nonsexual. For straight men, calling homosexual sex by many other names—an “experiment,” “male bonding,” a “game,” a “joke,” a “performance,” an “accident,” a “hazing ritual,” “dominance,” “aggression,” “boys will be boys,” “des-

peration,” “deprivation,” “toughening each other up,” and so on—is the very way that homosexual sex becomes possible, by which I mean, that it *becomes heterosexual*. If I were to trust straight men to point me in the direction of homosexual sex, I would perhaps be sitting in a gay bar all day, missing an entire universe of heterosexual homosexuality.

With this in mind, I have used gay/queer definitions of what “counts” as sex as my guide. I asked myself, “Would a queer couple, perhaps on a first date, be likely to define this behavior as ‘sex’ or ‘sexual’ if they participated in it?” and if the answer was yes, I referred to the behavior as “sex” or “sexual.” In this vein, I include all forms of anal penetration, hand jobs, blowjobs, and mutual masturbation. For instance, I believe it is likely that if a gay male couple were on a date that at some point included one man penetrating the other man’s anus with his fingers, they would likely perceive that they had been sexual with one another. In contrast, the straight men, and perhaps to a lesser degree the gay men, who engage in this same form of digital anal penetration as part of fraternity or military initiation rituals may perceive that the act is not strictly sexual or even sexual at all.

Of course I understand that context is everything, and therefore I have been especially attentive to questions of *intent*. I do not, for instance, believe that prostate exams are intended to be sexual experiences (even if some men are aroused by them), and therefore I would not classify them as sexual. Hazing rituals involving anal penetration or anilingus, on the other hand, are extreme, exciting, humiliating, and effective at building cohesion and establishing hierarchy among men precisely *because* the participants know that these acts have sexual meaning. They are designed to occupy or evoke the fine line between sex and humiliation or submission. During the prostate exam, no one is assessing whether you are a fag (or having a fag’s response), but this possibility is always looming in the contexts in which straight men make sexual contact with men.

## The Birth of the Congenital Heterosexual

Another key piece of the story this book tells about heterosexuality is that straightness always takes form in relation to its Other—or to queerness—with the latter serving as the former’s mirror and foil. To the extent that straight people think about what it means to be heterosexual, and to be part of a heterosexual culture with particular norms and practices, they often do so by imagining themselves through the eyes of queers. As Jonathan Ned Katz explains in *The Invention of Heterosexuality*, the budding visibility of gay culture in the 1960s produced what we might call a “heterosexual looking-glass self,” in which the more visible gay men and lesbians became, the more possible it became for heterosexuals to compare themselves to their “homosexual” counterparts. Katz cites, for example, a 1963 *New York Times* article in which a heterosexual reporter attempts to describe gay subculture for the paper’s presumably heterosexual readership, and in so doing, speculates that homosexuals “probably derive secret amusement” from coopting innocent heterosexual words (like the word “gay” itself). According to Katz, “the image of two gay people laughing together secretly over the unknowing language of straights marks the emergence in *The New York Times* of heterosexuals as a majority newly nervous about the critical gaze of The Homo-Other.”<sup>45</sup>

Today, over fifty years after the publication of this article, the relationship between straight culture and gay culture is more interconnected than ever, especially as the latter—in the form of queer style, queer music, queer imagery, queer political discourse—has demonstrated its appeal and profitability within mainstream culture. The influence of mediated, mainstream gay culture on straight people’s lives has consequences not only for how straight people consume or fashion themselves, but also for how they have sex. Many commentators believe that the increasing visibility and acceptance of gay and lesbian people has given heterosexuals permission to explore same-sex desire without

fear of devastating stigma. And yet, if heterosexuals' erotic possibilities are broadened by a gay rights movement that celebrates the fluidity of sexual *behavior*, what about the effect of the movement's stance on the immutability of sexual *orientation*? The percentage of Americans who believe in the biological foundations of sexual orientation has steadily increased over the last four decades, from 13 percent in 1977, to 31 percent in 1998, to 52 percent in 2010.<sup>46</sup> Many gay-friendly heterosexuals have been taught, primarily by proponents of gay rights, that gay people—and, by extension, straight people—have a fundamental sexual constitution, one already determined by nature. If sexual orientation cannot be changed, acceptance of gay people becomes the compassionate heterosexual's best option.

Scientific efforts to prove that sexual orientation is innate are not new; they are rooted in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century sexology. In fact, research aimed at identifying body parts that might hold the tell-tale signs of homosexuality—from bad blood, beady eyes, and angular facial features, to finger length and brain structure—have persisted since the very advent of heterosexual and homosexual categories in the nineteenth century.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, it is only in the last two decades that the notion that homosexuals are “born this way” has gained widespread public acceptance in the United States, including (and especially) among lesbians and gay men. Though numerous feminist and queer scholars have been critical of biological determinism and the concomitant depoliticization of queer difference, little attention has been paid to the effects of the “biological turn” on *heterosexuality*. How has over forty years of a visible lesbian and gay identity movement—increasingly articulated in sociobiological terms<sup>48</sup>—influenced the way that heterosexuals understand *their* sexuality?

According to Lisa Diamond, proponents of the argument that sexual orientation is hardwired have steered clear of the subject of sexual fluidity, fearing that fluidity might appear to suggest that



sexual orientation can be chosen or learned. In response to the question “does fluidity mean that sexual orientation is a matter of choice?,” Diamond offers some apparently reassuring words: “No. Even when women undergo significant shifts in their patterns of erotic response, they typically report that such changes are unexpected and beyond their control. In some cases, they actively resist these changes, to no avail.”<sup>49</sup> Diamond’s defense of sexual fluidity as consistent with immutability represents what is soon likely to become the prevailing sexual logic of our time. Diamond, like other sexologists and psychologists I discuss at length in chapter 3, believes that people are born with a core sexual orientation that remains the same regardless of periodic and/or situational attractions and desires that fall outside of its boundaries. Sexual fluidity is not a challenge to the fixity of sexual orientation; in many ways, the opposite is true. When we know we are born straight or gay, this knowledge enables us to experiment, to stray, to act out, and to let “shit happen” without fear that we have somehow hidden or misrecognized or damaged our true sexual constitution. More importantly, knowing that our sexual orientation was present at birth allows us to make sense of our discordant behaviors as exceptional, not bound to the same identitarian consequences experienced by true homosexuals (or heterosexuals).

Returning, then, to the question about the consequences of the biological turn for heterosexuals, we see that like the homosexual-at-birth, the heterosexual-at-birth can do nothing to change his or her innate sexual constitution. Compassionate heterosexuals accept this biological imperative as it reportedly determines the sexual subjectivities of their gay friends, and now, too, they accept the way it determines their own. No amount of homosexual sex or desire can change nature’s heterosexual design. If one knows one is not born gay, then one’s homosexual desires and behaviors simply cannot be gay, regardless of their content or frequency. So accepted now is the idea of sexual hardwiring—and so central now is this idea to most thinking about “heteroflexibility,” “situ-

ational homosexuality,” and all other homosexual behaviors of heterosexuals—that it is no longer possible to investigate straight men’s sex with men (or straight women’s sex with women) without starting from this foundation.

To be very clear, I agree with the contention that when straight-identified people participate in homosexual behavior, they are still best understood as straight. In fact, as I hope is clear at this point, this is a basic premise of this book. What I take issue with here, however, is the need to explain the sexual desires we experience and the sexual cultures we inhabit as forces purely outside of our control and buried within our bodies. This explanation leaves little room to consider the ways that sexual desires are culturally embedded and performative, or the ways our desires direct us not simply towards bodies with particular “parts,” but towards the complete cultural experience that those bodies represent and make possible. The biological hypothesis treats heteronormativity, for instance, as an unfortunate byproduct of a neutral, clinically descriptive sexual orientation called “heterosexuality.” In contrast, from a more critical and queer perspective, attraction to the culture and privileges of heteronormativity is inseparable from the sensation of “straightness.” It is in this way that the original construction of heterosexuality, or its historical *invention* to use Jonathan Ned Katz’s term, provides a crucial backdrop for this project, and an essential counterpoint to the now nearly hegemonic narrative about the congenital nature of sexual orientation. The next chapter provides precisely this backdrop, tracing the persistent present-absence of homosexuality (and the homosexual) within the project of building heterosexual men.

### **Heteronormative Violence and the Demand for Sincere Queers**

I find sexual practices interesting in their own right, but I come to this book not simply out of interest in the details of the sex that straight people are having. In this project, as elsewhere, my

investment is in the work of resisting heteronormativity, particularly the violent ways that state and cultural institutions punish gender and sexual non-normativity. On its surface, the sexual fluidity of heterosexuals—especially when represented by young women playfully kissing one another at parties—appears to have little to do with heteronormative violence. If anything, it appears to be a progressive development, one marked by the expansion of acceptable ways to be heterosexual men and women.

And yet, when straight men have sex with men, it is frequently—though certainly not always—bound up with violence. The line between straight men having sex with men and “actual” homosexuality is under constant scrutiny, and for straight men, violence is a key element that imbues homosexuality with heterosexual meaning, or untangles hetero-erotic forms of homosexuality from the affective, political, and romantic associations with gay and lesbian life. Sometimes this violence takes the form of humiliation or physical force enacted by one straight man as he makes sexual contact with another; in other cases, it may take the form of two men fantasizing about sexual violence against women. In many cases, violence is a central part of the work of reframing homosexual sex as an act that men do to build one another’s strength, or to build what I call “anal resilience,” thereby inoculating one another against what they imagine are the sincere expressions of gay selfhood.

Following the lead of feminists who argue that “rape is about violence, not about sex,” some have argued that the sexual hazing men experience in fraternities and the military is better understood as violence than as sex.<sup>50</sup> But here I take a different position—namely, that this kind of sex is fairly normal by straight male standards *and* that it is violent. Within the circuits of heteromascularity in the United States, violence and sex are mutually constituted, a fact most evident among adolescent boys, who hardly know how to think or talk about sex with girls without drawing on themes of abjection and violence.<sup>51</sup> The language of

heterosexual sex—banging, nailing, “hitting that,” and so forth—is the language of violence. Characterizing an activity like the Navy’s “crossing the line ceremony,” in which seasoned sailors anally penetrate newer sailors (typically with hands and objects), as a purely traumatic and nonconsensual act of sexual violence ultimately diminishes its erotic and self-perpetuating quality. More, it fails to account for the reasons that these sorts of boy-on-boy games and rituals appear in both straight and gay pornography noncoercively consumed by straight and gay men (see chapter 5), as well as in personal ads posted online by people who wish to voluntarily enact similar scenes (see chapter 4).

I support people’s right to integrate consensual violence into their sex practices. The problem I see here is the way that heteronormative violence gets ramped up, not only for purposes of pleasure, but for the purpose of recuperating heterosexuality (though the latter arguably constitutes its own pleasure). As I discuss in the chapters to follow, the use of violence to police the borders of hetero-erotic homosexuality, on the one hand, and of perverse/sincere queerness, on the other, can be traced through multiple sites ranging from white men’s living rooms to fraternity houses to military institutions. Policing this border not only involves homophobic disidentification with gay men and misogynistic narratives about women, but also avoidance of cross-racial desire and the potentially queering presence of men of color, particularly black men, in the spaces of “white male bonding.”

Much of this book admittedly focuses on what might be interpreted as extreme or unusual examples of homosexual contact between straight white men, such as the kind that occurs in biker gangs, or rest-stop bathrooms, or within military hazing. These realms are clearly not environments in which all white men circulate. And yet, attention to the psychic and cultural accomplishment of heterosexuality sheds light on the way that all straight men—including average straight guys who have never experienced a sexualized humiliation ritual or sought out a hand job

from another dude—inhabit a heterosexuality that is constituted, at least in part, through a disavowal of homosexuality, or through the ongoing accomplishment of being “not gay.” As I demonstrate in chapter 3, the rigid constraints of masculinity and the often violent policing of intimacy between men, especially white men in United States who are trained at early ages to fear the ever-looming specter of the fag, means that many of the same hetero-authenticating narratives deployed in prisons and military barracks also surface in men’s everyday friendships, in bromance films, and other contexts where intimacy and tenderness between men is carefully monitored. In other words, investigations into the way that straight men “keep it straight” have implications for all men, including those who have never engaged in homosexual sex (however they might define this term).

In addition to investigating the racist, misogynistic, and homophobic effects of the production of heteronormative homosexualities, this project is concerned with the homonormative effects of “sexual fluidity” discourses on queer politics. At issue here is the mainstreaming and containment of queer life, accomplished primarily by the gay and lesbian movement’s push to normalize itself by promoting images of happily married lesbians, patriotic gay male soldiers, and the like. These widely circulated images of normal—and presumably homosexual at birth—gay and lesbian Americans are fast becoming the standard against which “heteroflexibles” can be measured and contrasted. If *real* gays have sex for love, if they aspire to monogamous marriage with people of the same sex, and if they have always known that they were gay, then certainly frat boys seeking only to climb atop a pile of other naked boys are not gay. While I do not dispute this conclusion (indeed, most in that pile of boys will go on to live straight lives), I am concerned with the way this comparison works to elide the casual, performative, and antidomestic forms that queer sex takes. As I discuss at length in chapter 6, this demand for the sincere gay subject—the real gays and lesbians against whom straights can be

contrasted—does not come without costs for queer history, politics, and subculture.

In attending to the mutual construction of heterosexuality and queerness, my analysis pushes back against the notion of an essential sexual binary in which heterosexuality and homosexuality are oppositional sexual orientations determined by nature. And yet, my arguments also rest on the premise that straightness and queerness are distinct cultural domains that differently conceptualize homosexual encounters—a premise that may appear to reinforce a hetero/homo binary. To argue, as I do, that straightness relates to homosexual sex in unique ways raises the question: “Unique from what?” The answer is complex because the subject positions and sexual and political orientations that fall under the banner of “straightness” and “gayness” are themselves complex and multiple. Many queer scholars have noted that the radical queer relationship to homosexual sex departs from the mainstream gay relationship to homosexual sex, with the former ironically sharing in common some of the insincerity and “meaninglessness” I have attributed to most straight engagements with homosexual sex, and the latter sharing in common with straightness the claim to “being normal.” Heterosexuals who have disinvested in sexual normalcy—through engagement with kink, non-monogamy, and other marginalized sex practices—are queered via these practices, and hence, differently arranged vis-à-vis homosexuality. In sum, and as I explore in the concluding chapter, the relation between straightness and queerness is more a complex network than a linear dualism.

### **Organization of the Book**

This chapter has laid out the intellectual stakes of rethinking the way we understand the homosexual activity of straight white men. The next chapter moves back in time, exploring the evolving ways that straight white men have engaged in homosexual behavior since the late nineteenth century, and concomitantly,

the ways that Americans have understood these sexual practices and their local and contextual meanings. Here I draw on historical evidence of the homosexual encounters of “normal” white men dating back to the early twentieth century, with focus on the sociocultural and institutional sites in which white men have had sex with men. From saloons and tenement houses, to military barracks and fraternal clubs, and to truck stops and bathrooms, “normal” (heterosexual) white men have long found ways to have hetero-masculine sex with one another. To elucidate the forces that gave rise to the contemporary “white dude” and his “meaningless” homosexual sex, chapter 2 examines the mutually constitutive production of modern masculinity, heterosexuality, and whiteness, alongside the concurrent evolution of the sociobiology of gender, sexuality, and race.

Moving into the contemporary period, chapter 3 examines the ways that various experts—psychologists, sociologists, sexologists—are making sense of straight white men who have sex with men and attempting to educate the public about a new menu of heterosexual options. Gay? Straight? Hetero-flexible? Fauxmosexual? Metrosexual? Telling the truth or lying? How are wives, parents and other inquiring stakeholders to know the difference? Chapter 3 examines the rapidly multiplying and often bizarre techniques used by contemporary experts to distinguish the “truly gay” from the “merely heteroflexible.” The chapter centers on the three primary explanatory discourses offered by popular experts: (1) Homosexuality is sometimes circumstantially *necessary*; (2) homosexuality is sometimes a feature of *homosociality*, or an extension of (white) male bonds; and (3) homosexuality is sometimes *accidental*, unexpected, and out of one’s control. White fear of men of color, paired with the imagined necessity of white male bonds and the strong desire for access to white male space, runs through each of these narratives, imbuing them with additional normative power. These explanations function to simultaneously exceptionalize and normalize the homosexuality

of straight white men, treating as surprising and meaningless what seems to be a fairly predictable and significant feature of white heterosexual men's lives. I conclude the chapter by suggesting that, in attempting to elaborate the reasons that people don't always behave in accordance with their "true nature," such approaches lend support to the notion of fixed sexual personage, a concept at odds with queer resistance.

Chapter 4 proceeds with a deeper investigation of the relationship between heteromascularity and whiteness. Here I consider examples from contemporary popular culture that link homosexual sex with straight white male rebellion and adventure-seeking. The chapter takes a particularly close look at the 2009 independent film *Humpday*, in which two straight white dudes decide to have sex with one another for the sake of "radical art." In *Humpday*, white male hipsterism and its celebration of edgy, exotic, and memorable experiences are what propel the narrative forward as the protagonists dare themselves to be cool enough to "bone" each other. I then move to a close reading of personal ads posted on craigslist.com by posters claiming to be "white straight dudes" seeking one another for "not gay" sex. Reading the ads alongside themes in *Humpday* and other examples from popular culture, I examine how the ads draw on whiteness as a rhetorical resource for establishing hetero-masculine realness. Both *Humpday* and the craigslist ads represent texts in which fantasies about straight white male sexual fluidity are exchanged, and in which both white and heterosexual "authentication" takes center stage.

Chapter 5 examines the cultural function and effects of homosexuality in the hazing rituals of the United States military. The chapter analyzes these military hazing practices alongside the representation of homosexual hazing in the widely popular series of "reality" internet porn, HazeHim.com. Drawing on sociological and media accounts of high-profile military hazing events, I consider how male-male anal penetration is framed by the military as a practice of hetero-masculine resilience, one to be suffered



with repulsion and endurance. While the spectacle of homophobic repulsion is often offered as evidence of the nonsexual nature of the hazing experience, a reading of gay hazing porn—wherein flaccid penises, expressions of disgust and repulsion, and homophobic outbursts take on erotic currency as signals of authentic heterosexuality—illuminates a more harmonious relationship between hetero-masculine repulsion and homosexual desire. In both examples, the hazing undertaken by the U.S. military and the hazing eroticized in gay porn, the whiteness of participants is central to the homosocial narrative, wherein average white boys—utterly normal and undoubtedly American—are offered the opportunity to inoculate themselves against sincere homosexuality and enemy perversion and to demonstrate their allegiance to a white brotherhood.

Chapter 6 concludes the book by examining the implications of “sexual fluidity” for queer politics. Here I argue that queer scholars may wish to pay close attention to how narratives about fluidity rely on the existence of romantic gay love and sincere gay subjects, both of which are increasingly compelled into being as congenital heterosexuals distinguish their frivolous and politically inconsequential homosexual experiments and accidents from the romantic, affected, and homonormative conditions of an essentialized gay life. The book concludes by showing that the discourse surrounding heterosexual fluidity feeds into the production of the homonormative homosexual, who in contrast with lascivious butch dykes, sadistic leather daddies, and other fear-invoking queer figures, is motivated by a complex of sincere gay feelings—namely, the desire to fall in gay love, to have a gay family, to be out and proud. In an unexpected turn, “heteroflexibles” co-opt much of what is “naughty” about homosexual sex, casting heterosexuality as the domain of the masculine, the virile, the erotic, the unfettered, and even the forbidden, while homonormativity and genetics converge to redefine “gay” in affective, domestic, and sexless terms. But we need not be complicit. Chapter

6 ends with some considerations of how queers might resist this co-optation.

This book aims to illuminate the cultural underpinnings of straightness and its relationship to queerness. I offer this close examination of the cultural contours of the sexual binary not simply to expand awareness of the sex practices that fall under the banner of white male heterosexuality, but more importantly, to redirect our attention away from soothing tales of sociobiology and toward the more complex, intersectional, and culturally embedded human strivings for straight and queer ways of life.