Sex with Men

142

I am what I am
I am my own special creation

Harvey Fierstein, _La Cage Aux Folles_, 1983

Introduction

‘I am what I am’, begins the rallying cry of the Gay Pride movement. But how come gay men are what they are? Further (a question less often asked), how come straight men are as _they_ are? For centuries after the establishment of the Christian church in the first century AD, homosexuality was seen in purely moral terms as sinful and an abomination. During the Reformation both Catholic and Protestant leaders increased the pressure to suppress male homosexuality (MacCulloch, 2009, pp. 685–686). Moral judgements towards homosexuality, although they did not disappear and indeed have not disappeared to this day (though in Western society they are seen as increasingly irrelevant), gave way to its medicalization in the mid-19th century (Gagnon & Greenblat, 2005). Until well into the second half of the 20th century, doctors referred to the ‘homosexual perversion’, one of the many ways the sexual instinct could reflect pathology or illness. Nowadays such medical terminology is obsolete. If we think of homosexuality as pervading the whole personality of the men who prefer sex with men, we might refer to ‘homosexual men’ or ‘gay men’. But if we see gender preference or orientation as but one aspect of personality, we are more likely to talk about ‘men who are homosexual’ or ‘men who are gay’. Widely used in Western society today are the two terms ‘sexual orientation’ and ‘sexual preference’. Whereas ‘orientation’ carries few inferences, ‘preference’ suggests the individual can choose whether to have sex with people of his own or the other gender. This is an important distinction. But how far _can_ we choose our sexual preferences? To what degree, in words more in tune with the approach taken in this book more generally, can men write their own
scripts in this respect and decide for themselves the gender choices they prefer to insert into their own stories for the future? To what extent, in the words of the *Cage aux Folles* song, can they become their ‘own special creation’?

**The Development of Preference for Sex with Men**

As we saw in Chapter 2, sexual preference for the same or the opposite sex usually develops at adrenarche, an early stage of puberty usually occurring between the ages of 9 and 11 years (Herdt & McClintock, 2000). Once developed, sexual preference is unlikely to change from mid-adolescence onwards (Savin-Williams et al., 2012), or in adulthood (Mock & Eibach, 2012). Despite this strongly fixed nature of sexual preference, some degree of variability of sexual preference does persist well into adult life. One study of heterosexual American University students revealed that about a quarter experienced some degree of same-sex attraction (Knight & Hope, 2012). All the same, most American men who see themselves as heterosexual report lifetime sex only with women, and most who see themselves as homosexual report lifetime sex only with men (Dodge et al., 2016). Survey evidence suggests that there are, however, different components of sexual preference that need to be considered separately in any discussion of its development and stability. Thus a study of Swedish late adolescents revealed that the frequency of a minority sexual identity (homosexuality or bisexuality) varied depending on the sexual attribute in question, whether it was same sex or bisexual emotional/sexual attraction; same sex or bisexual romantic attraction; or homosexual or bisexual behaviour (Priebe & Svedin, 2013). The relatively weak correlation between different aspects of sexual preference has been adduced as an argument for rejecting a binary view of orientation in favour of the idea of a continuous distribution (Savin-Williams, 2014). Further, the existence of a substantial minority of people who are bisexual or fluctuating in their orientation or who are only ‘mostly heterosexual’ (Vrangalova & Savin-Williams, 2014) argues for at least a significant modification of the binary position in relation to sexual preference, even if the binary position remains defensible in relation to certain aspects of sexual identity.

These findings from Britain and the United States confirm the view that, for most men who are exclusively or almost exclusively gay, homosexual activity can be seen as a choice only with difficulty – they are as fixed in their choice of gender as are heterosexual men. Indeed, a national sample of American men (Herik, Norton, Allen, & Sims, 2010) revealed that 88% of gay men reported feeling they had no choice at all.
about their sexual orientation, while another 7% reported only a small amount of choice. Only 5% of gay men felt they had a fair amount or a great deal of choice. Many men who have sex with both men and women, however, do feel they have a choice between same-sex and opposite-sex partners. The sexual scripts of these bisexual men are far from written in stone. This is well illustrated by the response of a bisexual man quoted in Robert Connell’s classic text *Masculinities* (1995, p. 150). In answer to a question about differences in having sex with men and women he responds: ‘In the traditional sense it’s been the same…. But I’ve *decided* [emphasis added] to think perhaps how much more exciting it is to be with a man…. I’m actually relating more…. I feel I can relate more to a man because his body’s the same as mine’. Clearly this man felt he had some control over the sexual script he wished to follow. Limitation of choice is also demonstrated by what happens to men who are mainly heterosexual when, through force of circumstance, they do not have the option of their preferred sexual activity because they are in single-sex institutions. This is the case in single-sex boarding schools, but men in prisons and many in the armed services are in a similar position.

Connell (1995, pp. 157–159) suggests that the exclusively gay man is likely to go through a characteristic progression in the way he ‘genders’ himself. In childhood and adolescence, he strongly identifies himself with ‘hegemonic masculinity’, the conventional image of a boy and then a man. He is, as we saw in Chapter 2, dominant and assertive with, although in more recent years to a diminishing degree, a sense of superiority over girls and women. At some point he becomes aware he is gay and experiences a ‘sense of closure’ or accepts his sexuality for what it is. He then begins to participate, and in the end wholeheartedly engages with the gay community. Such commitment would warrant the use of terms such as ‘homosexual men’ rather than ‘men who are homosexual’. Connell does not claim that all gay men fall into this category. Indeed, he points out that many gay men never enter a gay community. This is crucial. For many gay men who also have sexual relationships with women, as well as a large number of men who only have sexual relationships with men, their masculine identity is strongly maintained. To use Connell’s phrase, they are ‘very straight gays’ (1995, p. 143). Their preference for sex with men is detached or compartmentalized and felt as separate from their other identities, including their masculine identity. This does not mean they are denying their gay sexuality (though they may be) – merely that it does not pervade all aspects of their sense of themselves.

This sense of similarity with other men underlies the many ways in which men who are gay have the same aspirations, the same career pathways, the same desire to love and be loved and the same variety of
hobbies and interests as do men who are straight (see below). Because of the stigmatization of homosexuality, they may find the going harder than other men in all areas of their lives, but their needs, aspirations and goals are no different.

Prevalence of Men Who Have Sex with Men

Surveys have been carried out both in the United States (Laumann et al., 1994, pp. 292–297) and in Britain (Wellings et al., 1994, pp. 185–190; Mercer et al., 2013) that have provided reliable information on the frequency of sexual preference for men. As the authors of the American survey point out, it is not possible ‘to give a clear, definite answer to the gay numbers question … it turns out the answer is subtle and shaded with grey, and that the answer to the question of how many homosexuals there are depends very much on what you mean by “homosexual”’ (Michael, Gagnon, Laumann, & Kolata, 1994, p. 171). All the same, some answers do emerge, and they turn out to be very similar in both countries. In the United States, about 1 in 20 men have had a sexual experience with a male partner since the age of 18, and about half that number (about 2.5%) in the past year (Laumann et al., 1994, p. 294). The British survey provides much more detailed information. Again about 5% have ever had any homosexual experience involving genital contact. The numbers having a homosexual partner in the past 5 years is around 2.6% (Mercer et al., 2013). This study suggests that the findings of the prevalence of homosexuality will depend on the questions asked, a conclusion confirmed by data from the English Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (Hayes et al., 2012).

The markedly changing attitudes to homosexuality between the late 1960s and the early years of the 21st century might lead one to think that the prevalence with which men have sex with men would have significantly increased over this period. Interestingly, it appears it did not. Findings from the survey carried out in the United States by Alfred Kinsey (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948) suggest that the prevalence of men having sex with men was virtually identical to that obtained in the much later surveys cited earlier. This illustrates the importance of distinguishing between homosexuality as a social construct and homosexual behaviour. As the philosopher John Searle (1995, p. 1) has pointed out, ‘There are things that exist only because we believe them to exist…. Yet many facts regarding these things are “objective” facts in the sense that they are not a matter of your or my preferences, evaluations or moral attitudes’. Homosexuality is a social construction that exists because we believe it to exist. Whether a man has sex with another man, however,
is an ‘objective’ fact. The concept of homosexuality has been differently socially constructed by those taking a so-called essentialist view of the phenomenon (religious, biomedical, psychoanalytic) compared with those taking the view that whether men have sex with men is greatly influenced by social factors and by the choice of the men concerned. Note, however, that those with a biomedical perspective do not necessarily regard homosexual behaviour as unamenable to change or unaffected by preference. Many disorders appearing in the International Classification of Diseases (World Health Organisation, 2010), such as major depressive disorders and anorexia nervosa, are widely thought to be caused largely by social and interpersonal difficulties. The adoption of a biomedical perspective does not equate to a determinist approach to sexuality. John Gagnon (2004, p. 104) was surely right to claim that ‘the social construction of sexuality … is specific to the cultural and historical circumstances of a particular social order’. But his statement (Laumann & Gagnon, 1995, p. 212) that ‘no biological factor finds its way into the behaviour of an individual except through socio-cultural mediation’ is far more questionable. If this were the case, one would expect much greater differences in the prevalence of same-sex behaviour in the half century following the publication of the Kinsey Report (Kinsey et al., 1948) than is, in fact, the case. This does not mean that the social construction of homosexuality is in any way irrelevant to men who have sex with men. The descriptions below of the lives of two gay men (Michael Hess and Simon Russell-Beale), reveal just how important this is.

A significant number of men report having had some homosexual experience but no genital contact. These are most likely to have had one or two brief episodes involving other men. Further, most men who have a homosexual experience in adolescence do not go on to have stable gay relationships. This is especially the case for boys who go to boarding schools. Many of them have had homosexual experience, but they are no more likely than other men to have same-sex genital contact in later life (Wellings, Field, Johnson & Wadsworth, 1994, p. 206). Hence most such boys no longer follow gay scripts in their adult lives. There is no information on this topic, but it would not be surprising if boys who have sex with other boys in boarding schools have heterosexual fantasies while engaged in sexual activity.

Most striking, however, is the finding that among men who have had sex with other men, around 9 out of 10 also have or have had sex with women (Wellings, Field, Johnson & Wadsworth p. 210). More than half the men who have had a male sexual partner in the past 5 years have also had a female partner during this time period. The great majority of married men have not had a same-sex partner, but significantly more than 1%
of married men have had a male partner during this period (ibid., p. 212). Similar findings on the frequency of bisexual sex have been reported from the United States. Gay men have a reputation for promiscuity, but this is undeserved. The British investigators, after showing how complicated it is to examine the issue, conclude that ‘the general picture to emerge is not one of a homosexual appetite for a large number of partners, though this is undoubtedly the lifestyle chosen by a few’ (ibid., p. 217).

When it comes to homosexual practices, the stereotype that the preferred activity for gay men is anal sex is disproved. In fact, penetrative (anal) intercourse among gay men is much less common than is penetrative (vaginal) intercourse in the heterosexual population. Around two-thirds of gay men have never had penetrative or receptive anal sex (Wellings, Field, Johnson & Wadsworth, 1994, p. 223). Further, although the popular conception of gay couples is that one is more likely to play the active, penetrative partner and the other the receptive or passive partner, in the majority of couples these roles are much more frequently interchangeable. Oral sex is more common, especially in younger age groups as is the case with younger heterosexual couples.

**The Causes of Homosexuality**

*Genetic Influences*

We must first consider the possibility that our genes influence or even determine our sexual preferences. When homosexuality was considered an illness, it was assumed that the condition must be hereditary. The possible importance of inheritance has survived the demise of the idea that homosexuality is a psychiatric disorder, but the degree to which genes determine our sexual preferences remains highly controversial. Some believe that genes matter very little or not at all; others see genetic influence as paramount. Either view can be used to justify both tolerance and intolerance of homosexuality. When the science is cleaned of political prejudice, what is the evidence on this matter?

Behavioural genetic studies of twins have been illuminating. Three major twin studies looking at the heritability of homosexuality have been reported, one from the United States (Kendler, Thornton, Gilman, & Kessler, 2000), one from Australia (Bailey, Dunne & Martin., 2000) and the most recent and largest from Sweden (Långström, Rahman, Carlström, & Lichtenstein, 2010). The findings are rather similar, with around a third of the explanation for homosexuality thought to involve a genetic influence. If the reader has thought homosexuality to be largely inborn, this will sound rather a small influence, but readers who
previously considered genes an unlikely influence will see it as considerable. To give some perspective on this figure, it means that homosexuality is a little, but not much less heritable than intelligence. It is important to recognise, however, that heritability estimates only apply to the study population in question. Where tolerance of homosexuality is high, one might well expect the exercise of unconstrained choice to be more powerful than genetic effects and the influence of heritability to be lower. After all, the heritability of intelligence varies with socio-economic status (Turkheimer, Haley, Waldron, D’Onofrio, & Gottesman, 2003). Findings from molecular biological studies have not so far proved illuminating. It is clear from them that no single gene or even simple combination of genes is responsible for our sexuality. Publicity was given at one time to the finding of a link to a site on the X chromosome, Xq28, but this has not been consistently replicated (Wickelgren, 1999).

Environmental Influences

Insofar as the behavioural genetic studies show that, at best, only a proportion of the explanation for a characteristic is genetic, there must be powerful non-genetic or environmental influences. What might these be? They could be related to the environment in the womb while the baby is developing, or with the environment in which the child grows up after birth. The most persuasive ‘inside the womb’ theory emerged from the observation that a man’s chances of becoming homosexual are greater for every older male brother to which his mother has given birth, perhaps because later-born boys have been sensitized by antibodies stimulated by earlier male pregnancies (Blanchard & Bogaert, 1996). It has been calculated, however, that being a later-born boy only accounts for about one in seven men who are homosexual (Cantor, Blanchard, Paterson, & Bogaert, 2002).

A more straightforward but less well-established ‘in the womb’ environmental theory is that babies who are exposed to higher levels of the mother’s male sex hormones or androgens are more likely to grow up to be gay. Because handedness is associated with levels of prenatal androgens, this theory has been linked to the fact that, statistically, although the differences are not great, men who are homosexual are a little more likely to be left-handed (Lalumière, Blanchard, & Zucker, 2000). Further, foetal exposure to high levels of testosterone appears to be related to the ratio of the length of the second and index fingers, which tends to be lower in homosexual men (Robinson & Manning, 2000). The prenatal androgen theory of homosexuality is less well worked out and less well established than the maternal immunization theory, but it might be relevant in a small number of cases.
Better known are the environmental theories that explain homosexuality on the basis of what happens in the mind of the individual man or in the family after birth. Sigmund Freud, writing in 1908, thought initially that homosexuality arose from what he regarded as the universally present male fantasy that all human beings had penises (Freud, 1977, p. 194). In most men, this fantasy is replaced by an acceptance that girls and women do not have a penis but are nevertheless normal. Freud wrote,

If this idea of a woman with a penis becomes fixated in an individual when he is a child, resisting all the influences of later life and making him as a man unable to do without a penis in his sexual object, then although in other respects he may lead a normal sexual life, he is bound to become a homosexual, and will seek his sexual object among men who, owing to some other physical and mental characteristics, remind him of women.

Freud, who revealed very sympathetic attitudes to homosexual men (Freud, 1951), later developed equally improbable theories of the cause of homosexuality that need not concern us.

Psychoanalysts after Freud have put much greater emphasis on the family background in which the child is reared. For example, in an influential psychoanalytic contribution, Bieber et al. (1962) suggested that ‘close-binding-intimate mothers’ were to blame. John Gagnon has suggested that later-born boys are more likely to be gay because by the time a woman has produced two or three boys she has become anti-male (Gagnon, personal communication, 2013). Social environmental theories have also considered the boy’s relationship to his father. It is claimed, although the evidence is thin, that fathers of male men who are homosexual are more often physically absent, and even if physically present are emotionally absent to their sons (Seutter & Rovers, 2004). There is no doubt that the early backgrounds of some gay men fit these stereotypes, but others come from families indistinguishable from those of straight men. The systematic evidence has thus largely failed to confirm the stereotype that Bieber proposed. There is some unconfirmed evidence that maltreatment in childhood may increase the likelihood of male homosexuality, but it is possible that maltreatment occurs as a result of suspicions of non-conformity in sexual preference rather than the other way round (Roberts, Glymar, & Koenen, 2013).

**Interactional Theories**

Most men who prefer sex with men probably owe their sexual orientation to an interaction between their genes and the environment, especially the biologically induced environmental factors such as maternal...
immunisation. In a minority, the relationship they have with their parents, including over-closeness to their mothers and absence of or rejection by their fathers may play a part. In a still smaller minority, a boy may be deliberately dressed and brought up to be more like a girl. Perhaps the parents have been disappointed that their child is a boy rather than the girl they really wanted. Most boys brought up in this way, however, grow up to have firmly heterosexual preferences. As we saw in Chapter 2, whatever the reasons, men who subsequently accept the fact that they are gay or have this label ascribed to them by others, have usually become aware of their physical attraction to other males as opposed to girls or women around the age of 10 years (Herdt & McClintock, 2000). This is towards the end of the period of adrenarche, occurring from around 9 to 11 years, during which time the levels of adrenal sex hormones, the precursors of testosterone, have begun to rise (see Chapter 2). At the time of gonadarche, when sexual feelings become intense and secondary sexual characteristics such as pubic hair appear, boys develop fantasies about the sexual relationships they would like to have, or the sexual scripts they write for themselves, and begin to masturbate with images of other boys or young men as partners. The fact that their stories include males is not of their choosing. But who in particular they want to have sex with, where, and what they would like to do when they have sex is, in contrast, very much their choice, just as it would be if they had heterosexual preference. They are reading from sexual scripts which they enact in their behaviour. Whatever the relative importance of genes and early environment in the gender of the sexually preferred partner, apart from their role in sexual arousal, hormones appear to have nothing to do with these aspects of their sexual scripts. Nor can the age at which they acknowledge to themselves they are gay (usually between 11 and 19 years) or the age when they publicly ‘come out’ as gay (on average in the United States around 21 years) (Hamer, Hu, Magnuson, Hu, & Pattatucci, 1993) have any relationship to their hormone levels.

In addition to their attraction to other boys, during their childhood and teen years some men, perhaps a minority, who later grow up to have a preference for sex with men, show characteristics more commonly seen in girls (Green, 1985; Zuger, 1988). They shun competition and are unassertive, less attracted to typically male sports and more interested in relationships. This is only a tendency; most boys who later grow up to be homosexual do not fit this stereotype at all and are in no way distinguishable from other boys. Further, most gay men never have any doubt during their childhood and adolescence that they are male and have no desire to be female. A small minority of boys do, however, wish they had been born girls, and, among these, there are some who are convinced they are not really male at all. Despite the presence of a penis they have
a fixed idea that they are really female and have a strong female identity. Such ‘transgender’ boys used to be regarded as having a psychological condition, so-called gender identity disorder. Now, in order to counter the charge of medical labelling, their predicament is described as ‘gender dysphoria’ or discomfort about gender (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

Vignette 7.1

Michael Hess, a successful American lawyer who worked for the Republican Party and became senior legal adviser to the first President Bush, died of AIDS in August 1995 at the age of 43 years. Improbably, Michael’s mother was an 18-year-old unmarried Irish girl, Philomena Lea, living in Dublin at the time of his birth in 1952. Her story is told in the fictionalised film Philomena, in which she is played by Judi Dench. She and her baby were taken into a convent where she worked in the laundry, only being allowed contact with her son for an hour a day. At the age of 3 years Michael was adopted by an American couple, Dr Hess, a rather patriarchal urologist, and his wife, living in St. Louis at the time. In the light of his later sexual orientation, the circumstances of his adoption are interesting. The Hesses had only intended to adopt a 2-year-old girl, Mary. When they arrived at the convent however, they discovered that Mary had an extremely close friendship with a slightly older boy, Anthony, who was very caring of her. The Hesses observed this friendship and, not wishing to separate them, decided to adopt both the children.

After arrival in the States, Anthony’s name was changed to Michael. He had only dim recollections of his mother and was not sure he could remember her face. His character development was somewhat unusual for a boy. His adoptive mother noticed that he was unusually ‘good’ and had a deep desire to please. He didn’t argue with his parents and always gave way in clashes with other boys. Mary, his adoptive sister, recollected later in life that when she was worried about being abandoned or being returned to Ireland, he tried to reassure her. ‘It’s all right, Mary, I’ll be here for you. I’ll always look after you. I won’t let them send us away’. Once he went to school he excelled academically and, in his teens turned out to be a gifted schoolboy actor. But he showed little interest in sport. His adoptive mother said he ‘wasn’t cut out for sport’.

Round about the age of 17 years he became aware that he was sexually attracted to boys but not to girls. In the school play he had the leading role, starring opposite a very attractive blonde, who fell for him. It was assumed they would get together. On their first real date, Charlotte came to his house to pick him up in a car driven by her older brother, Marius. As he sat in the back of the car, Mike noticed with pleasure that Marius ‘had the same Saxon beauty as his sister – the same blond hair, the same lithe elegance. Sitting behind him, Mike gazed at the slim curve of his neck above the whiteness of his T-shirt, delicate shoulder blades rising and falling as he manipulated the heavy steering wheel and he was shocked by the intensity of his admiration. An overwhelming longing came over him to reach out and touch the gleaming skin that glowed only feet away from his own face’.
After high school in 1970 at the age of 18, Mike went to Notre Dame University, which was then an all-male Catholic institution with ‘a testosterone-charged reputation fuelled by exploits and a deliberately fostered image of aggressive masculinity’. He did not play football and made friends with men with similar intellectual interests. He paid his way through law school partly by working as a popular DJ on a local radio station. Towards the end of his first year he began to explore gay relationships. At first he was troubled by deep religious guilt and confessed to an unsympathetic priest. But by his second year he was going to gay clubs, picking up and being picked up by other gay men. He occasionally engaged in brief sado-masochistic sexual activity, but increasingly formed stable relationships. After leaving Notre Dame he went to George Washington University in Washington, D.C., to read law and subsequently had a remarkably successful career as an increasingly senior adviser at first in the legal department of the leader of the Republican party and then, when Ronald Reagan took office, as senior legal adviser to two successive Republican presidents. Given the influence of the religious right, or moral majority in the party, represented by Pat Buchanan and Jerry Falwell, it is amazing that he managed to avoid being ‘outed’, but he did. He contracted AIDS about 2 years before he died, having probably caught the virus during one of his breakouts into casual sex, but he had been in a steady, deeply loving relationship for 15 years before his death.

I have described Michael Hess’ life in such detail because not only has it been extremely well documented by Martin Sixsmith (2013), the journalist who undertook to help Philomena Lea, his birth mother, trace her son, but also because it reflects so many of the characteristic features often, but by no means always, found in the lives of gay men. He had no father for the first 3 years of his life which were spent in a convent, surrounded entirely by nuns. Once he was adopted he did have a male figure with whom to identify, but Michael’s relationship with his adoptive father, the unsympathetic, bullying Dr Hess was at best ambivalent, and, once he reached adolescence, frankly hostile. Michael, in his early years, was an unusually compliant, caring little boy, again characteristic of the early development of gay men. He lacked interest in competitive sport, and was so lacking in aggression that he had no interest in fighting or standing up for himself. He was a gifted boy actor. Although there are many heterosexual actors, both successful and unsuccessful, it is notable how many are gay. Indeed, the four most outstanding actors on the British stage in the years after the Second World War, John Gielgud, Laurence Olivier, Alec Guinness and Michael Redgrave, were all either gay or bisexual. Later, we shall discuss why it seems to be the case that gay men are attracted to what might be called ‘appearance’ occupations in which they are engaged in presenting themselves or others in ways that involve some degree of disguise.
Once he reached his mid-teens, Michael’s awareness of his attraction to boys and young men became apparent to him for the first time. As is common, he was deeply troubled by feelings of guilt and tried to deny his sexual orientation. Once he acknowledged the direction of his sexual feelings, life became easier for him, but it took him another decade before he found a partner to love and cherish. Throughout his life, at high school, university, law school and finally in employment, he managed to hide his sexuality and so avoided the negative discrimination he would certainly have suffered if he had come ‘out of the closet’.

**Vignette 7.2**

Simon Russell Beale is, in the second decade of the 21st century, widely regarded as the leading male actor on the British stage. He was born to a middle-class medical family (both his parents are doctors) and attended a public (independent) school. He played female parts in school plays, first Hippolyta in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and then Desdemona in *Othello*. He was, however, playing the title role in *King Lear* before he left school. Referring to his homosexuality in an interview published in *The Evening Standard*, he claimed his sexuality was never an issue or a problem: ‘I’ve always been openly gay. My brothers and sisters twigged from day one. Probably my parents too. *The Observer* was the first newspaper to print, in bold capitals: SIMON RUSSELL BEALE IS GAY. The next day my dad rang up and just said, “marvellous interview”. I’ve been a very lucky man in that respect’ (*Evening Standard* 10 August 2010).

Russell Beale has been remarkably open about his attitude to his own body. He has said ‘I hate my body. I hate it. I hate my looks. I hate my voice. So much of what I do on stage is really saying “Love me, despite the fact that I am ugly”’. For long periods he has not had a partner. Again he has been open about his feelings about this. He has said of his private life that it used to hurt not having a partner, but he has ‘sort of given up on it. It’s not a worry’ (Lister, 2008).

The story of Russell Beale is illuminating, mainly because it illustrates some of the classical features of men who grow up to be gay, including the fact that his sexual preference was obvious to all from a very early age. His dislike of his own body is also consistent with findings that this is common among young men who have sex with men (Siconolfi et al., 2016). Further, the extent to which it has been possible for him to come out without fear of prejudice and with the approval of his family represents a marked contrast to attitudes to homosexuality in well-known actors in earlier generations. Michael Redgrave, who was a leading actor of comparable stature from the 1940s to the 1960s, was bisexual but led a grievously tortured inner life because of fear of public exposure and his own inability to accept his sexual preferences (Strachan, 2004, pp. 204–205).
Changes in the law and, probably at least as importantly, progressive changes in societal attitudes towards homosexuality during the last two decades of the 20th and into the 21st century have made gay sex and bisexual sex much less stigmatized. Of course, there are still men who feel tortured by the fact that they are sexually attracted to men, but at least they are considerably – although, as we shall see, by no means entirely – released from the public stigmatisation they would have experienced half a century ago. There is systematically gathered evidence from the United States of changes from 1973 to 2014, showing both greater acceptance of same-sex sexual behaviour and a greater willingness to engage in it (Twenge, Sherman, & Wells, 2015), although, as we saw in Chapter 4, public attitudes have been slow to change and legal reform has been correspondingly delayed.

Social and Occupational Features of Gay Men

Both the British and American surveys described earlier make it clear that gay men are proportionately more likely to come from the upper social classes and are better educated than are straight men (Herek et al., 2010; Mercer et al., 2013). The differences are not great, but they are quite clear. There is no particular reason for thinking that the social classes differ in their genes or in the other biological factors such as maternal immunization. Nor is there any reason to think that higher social class mothers are likely to be more intrusive or over-protective. The most likely explanation for the social class difference is that the tolerance of homosexuality is greater among the more highly educated (Mercer et al., 2013, Figure 1), so that more advantaged men find it easier both to come out and to admit in a survey that they are gay. Put in the sexual script framework, better educated men find it easier to accept a homosexual narrative for themselves.

Given the relatively low prevalence in the general population and, until recently, the stigmatisation of homosexuality, it is not all that surprising that there have been no American presidents or British prime ministers who have been openly gay. Bloch (2015) has documented the significant presence of gay men in prominent positions in British politics since the late 18th century. Peter Mandelson, who served in a number of Cabinet positions between 1997 and 2010, is the most prominent gay man in British politics, but Chris Smith was the first openly gay Member of Parliament, ‘coming out’ in 1984 and the first gay Cabinet minister. American gay men have had great difficulty in achieving high public office. Harvey Milk was the first openly gay man to be elected to a public office at any level; he was elected in 1977 to be a city supervisor in San
Francisco. No openly American gay man has been appointed to senior office in the state administration, but since Gerry Studds, a member of the House of Representatives, was outed in 1987, a number of gay men have served in this capacity. There have also been a number of gay mayors in the United States, including Sam Adams, the mayor of Portland, Oregon. Interestingly, there seem to be fewer gay men among leaders of industry, but this is probably because such positions attract less media attention. The highest profile gay chief executives are Tim Cook, CEO of Apple, and John Browne, who headed BP from 1995 to 2006. His homosexuality was not revealed until after he resigned his post. Until recently, homosexual scripts have been kept secret by those who are ambitious to climb career ladders to the top. This is not surprising given the more conservative attitudes and greater significance of religion in American public life.

It is widely believed that gay men are attracted to work in occupations that involve the creation of appearance, whether it be the appearance of others such as fashion, hairdressing, makeup, and design, or the creation of different appearances for themselves in professions such as acting on stage, screen or television. It is uncertain whether this is indeed the case and, of course, most gay men work in occupations unrelated to these fields. For a minority, however, this attraction to ‘appearance’ occupations may be related either to an enhanced degree of creativity or to a feminine identification. For others it may emerge from a hidden or overt desire to present a mask to the world that hides one particular feature of their ‘real’ identity, about which they have ambivalent feelings.

**Patterns of Relationships of Gay Men**

Aside from the choice of a minority of gay men for an ‘appearance’ occupation, once their social class is taken into account, their career aspirations and achievements are very much the same as heterosexual men. Does the same hold for the aspirations for personal relationships? The stereotype of a gay male is that he is single or briefly attached to another man, and that he is often involved on a promiscuous basis in one-night stands and group sex. It is certainly the case that, like heterosexual men, single gay men become passionately involved in romantic relationships, some brief, some longer lasting, all having the potential for the experience of happiness and joy as well as disappointment, jealousy and despair. This is surely confirmed by the fact that so many eternally popular romantic lyrics were written by gay men such as Cole Porter and Noel Coward. The songs that heterosexual couples have danced to for over half a century celebrating the pleasures and pains of romantic love (‘I
Get a Kick Out of You’, ‘I’ve Got You under My Skin’, ‘Night and Day’, ‘I’ll Follow My Secret Heart’, ‘The Party’s Over Now’) were written by men who were probably fantasizing about their male lovers when they wrote them. In fact, gay men have only slightly higher numbers of sexual partners than is the case in the heterosexual, sexually active population (Laumann et al., 1994, p. 314).

Systematic research also provides a picture of the relationships of gay men which suggests that, although in many ways they are the same as heterosexual men, there are differences. These are often dictated by restricted opportunities rather than by aspiration. Heaphy, Donovan, and Weeks (2004, p. 168) suggest that gay couples, as a result of social constraints placed on them, are more creative and diverse in their pattern of relationships. The lack of specific scripts for young gay men to initiate relationships means that they need to develop their own codes of conduct, although these are often based on the codes used by heterosexual couples (Klinkenberg & Rose, 1994). On American college campuses, gay students do have a higher proportion of casual (hook-up) sexual relationships compared to romantic relationships than do straight students. But most gay students have a strong desire for more permanent sexual relationships; they are limited by lack of social opportunities. To meet other gay men, they cannot rely on casual social meeting and have to resort to the internet or newspaper ads (Barrios & Lundquist, 2012). Just like heterosexual men, however, they engage in searches for partners to whom they can be committed and from whom they can rely on commitment. In choosing such a partner, they value affection, dependability, shared interests, similarity of religious beliefs and, of course, physical attractiveness. Some idea of the success gay men have in finding such qualities in a partner can be found in the number who have taken legal steps to cement their relationship. In the UK, it became possible to enter into a civil partnership in 2005. By 2012, about 66,000 men had taken this step (Office of National Statistics, 2015). This is a relatively small proportion of the total number of exclusively gay men of ‘marriageable’ age, approximately 20%. We do not know how many men in the UK who are in stable partnerships have chosen not to enter into a civil partnership. In March 2014, it became possible for same-sex couples to enter into a state of marriage, and since then several hundreds have taken this step each year.

There are many similarities between gay and heterosexual men in the pattern of their romantic relationships. They both tend to meet up with partners through friends, at work, at a bar, at a social event (Bryant & Demian, 1994) or, more recently through web sites on the internet or social media. Gay men in the United States will know the whereabouts of
the gay communities, especially in New York and San Francisco, where it is going to be easy to find men with the same sexual orientation. In the UK, such communities do not exist, but there are well-known venues, for example, Soho and Vauxhall in London and Canal Street in Manchester, where contact with potential partners can be made. The internet and social media are increasing as means of linking up. All ‘heart search’ advertisements in newspapers now have a ‘Men Meeting Men’ section.

Gay couples tend to have sex at about the same frequency as straight couples of the same age who have been together for the same amount of time (Wall, Stephenson, & Sullivan, 2013). Sexual satisfaction is closely related to frequency of sexual activity, as it is in heterosexual couples. Like heterosexual couples, gay couples have disagreements and arguments, sometimes violent arguments, and rarely, as the story of Joe Orton reveals, even murderous arguments (Lahr, 1978). Couple violence certainly occurs, but it is not known if it is any more or less frequent than in heterosexual couples. In all types of partnership, violence is less likely if those involved have good problem-solving strategies when disagreements emerge.

As well as these similarities, there are a number of quite striking differences between committed gay and committed straight couples (Peplau & Fingerhut, 2007). Gay couples tend to have a more equal power balance. Decision-making is more likely to be shared equally, and dominance of one partner over another is much less usual. If there is a power imbalance, then the older, perhaps wealthier partner is likely to be dominant, but this is not a common pattern. Attitudes to fidelity in gay couples are more relaxed. Only a third of American gay men think that is important to remain monogamous compared to three-quarters of heterosexual husbands. Similarly, about four out of five gay men in permanent relationships report having recently had a sexual relationship with someone other than their partner, whereas only about a quarter of husbands report a recent extra-marital relationship. This is perhaps the reason why, over a 5-year period the break-up rate of ‘permanent’ or apparently stable, long-established gay couples is significantly greater than that of heterosexual couples, even after controlling for childlessness (Strohm, 2012). Further, sexual satisfaction is not particularly related to fidelity in gay couples where friendship is often of greater significance than it is in heterosexual couples (Heaphy, Donovan and Weeks, 2004).

One quite marked difference between gay and straight couples is their attitude to friendship with a former partner (Nardi, 2007). On the one hand, in the great majority of cases, although there are many exceptions, when marriages or stable heterosexual cohabitations break up the couple generally do not wish to see each other again, let alone remain friends.
On the other hand, gay men very frequently remain friends after their sexual relationship has broken down, and they may even continue to have occasional sex even though they are now in another relationship. Sexual jealousy generally seems less of a problem for gay men than for others (Frederick & Fales, 2016), although there are notorious examples of murderous jealousy between gay men.

**Stigmatisation of Gay Men**

One stress that straight and especially married couples do not have to face is stigma and discrimination on account of their sexual orientation. Most gay couples report that they have had to face social exclusion by married or cohabiting straight couples (Meyer, 2003). In some neighbourhoods it is not merely social exclusion but vicious hostility that the pair have to confront. This can put a strain on the relationship, especially if one partner is more inclined to hide the nature of their relationship than the other.

It is not, of course, only gay couples who are subjected to ‘gay-bashing’. Such abuse begins in primary and elementary schools, where ‘gay’ has become a commonly bandied insult, as revealed by a survey carried out among gay school students in Britain by Stonewall (2012). The Stonewall survey reveals the extent of the problem. Younger children have little idea about sexual orientation and the term is used generically to label anyone whose behaviour or appearance is regarded as objectionable. Thus, in addition to those whose manner appears effeminate, boys who seem too interested in schoolwork or who are fat or facially disfigured or in any other way ‘different’ may be labelled as gay. Three in five gay pupils who experience homophobic bullying say that teachers who witness the bullying never intervene. Only half of gay pupils report that their schools say homophobic bullying is wrong, even fewer do in faith schools (37%). Homophobic bullying has a profoundly damaging impact on young people’s school experience. One in three (32%) gay pupils experiencing bullying change their future educational plans because of it, and three in five say it impacts directly on their schoolwork. Such homophobic bullying is now expressed as often on the internet via social media as it is face-to-face. An American survey revealed that 71% of middle/junior high school students aged 11 to 18 years who identified as gay or lesbian, had been victims of cyberbullying. Depression and a poor self-image were the most common effects (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012). It has become the most common form of bullying in schools and has long overtaken racist bullying, which in many schools, especially those in which it has been targeted, has almost disappeared. Exposure to such stigmatisation naturally
influences decisions of gay students whether to disclose their sexual preference. Evidence from American middle/high schools suggests that the least desirable course to take in terms of exposure to harassment is partial disclosure: openness to some but not to others, for example, to peers but not to family (Watson, Wheldon, & Russell, 2015). Stigmatisation in the school setting is likely to continue later into adult life. It is therefore not surprising that the homosexual scripts of many men are still kept secret, sometimes throughout the whole of their lives.

In the United States, hate crime incidents related to sexual orientation are greater than those focusing on racial or religious differences (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999). A high proportion of sexual hate crime incidents involve assault or attempted assault. Hate literature is also common and, although vandalism and setting fire to property belonging to people thought to be gay are much less frequent, they do occur. Such anti-gay crime shows no sign of abating in the United States; indeed, it increased in the final 20 years of the 20th century. Taking a global perspective, homosexual behaviour is illegal in around 76 countries throughout the world (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011). The situation is not improving. In Uganda in 2012, a government-backed draft law proposed to make homosexual behaviour punishable by death. The Uganda Anti-Homosexuality Act 2014 reduced the penalty but only to life imprisonment. The Russian government passed a law in 2013 prohibiting any positive mention, including online mention, of homosexuality in the presence of minors. The execution of men who are homosexual by ISIS, the so-called Islamic state, has been well publicised.

The risk of infection, sometimes fatal infection, is a further stress affecting gay men to a greater degree than people in the general population. In African countries and in some other parts of the world HIV infection with AIDS as its dreaded sequel, is widely spread throughout the whole population, but it is much more prevalent among gay men, as it is in Western Europe and North America (Smith, Tapsoba, Peshu, Sanders, & Jaffe, 2009). The cohesion of gay communities in these parts of the world can be seen as a defensive response to increased health risks as well as to social stigmatisation.

**Mental Health Problems**

Given these increased stresses, it is not surprising that gay men are more at risk of mental health problems than those in the general population. A British study comparing more than 600 gay with about 500 heterosexual men found that the gay group was more likely to score highly on a measure of psychological distress (King et al., 2003). More gay men
were found to have harmed themselves. American studies have come up with similar findings. In one investigation, nearly 3,000 men who had sex with men were interviewed to find out how many had made plans to attempt suicide and how many had actually made suicidal attempts (Paul et al. 2002). More than 1 in 5 had made suicidal plans and 1 in 10 had made a suicide attempt. These figures are roughly three times as high as those found in the general male population of the United States. The risk was found to be highest in gay men under the age of 25 who had been exposed to anti-gay harassment. The period of life immediately after coming out presented a particular risk, perhaps because family members might then drop their emotional support for the man before he had been able to find supportive figures in the gay community.

Despite the high rates of mental health problems among gay men, it should be noted that most do not suffer in this way. These men are likely to have developed protective mechanisms and show resilience in the face of stigmatisation. Ability to see the positive advantages of being gay – or, as is often the case with gay men, bisexual – can be achieved by, for example, noting that being gay releases a man from having to be traditionally masculine with the stresses this can bring. Being gay allows greater flexibility of gender identity. Further, it allows men to access support groups that are often both highly enjoyable and supportive (Harper, Brodsky, & Bruce, 2012). Use of the internet has been shown to protect against homophobia by providing access to friendships and support, and gay people use it for this purpose. They are more adventurous than others in meeting new people online and, although this exposes them to danger, it also has the potential to provide additional support (Hillier, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2012).

For some men with a homosexual preference, particularly those who have a strong religious affiliation, their homosexuality posed and indeed still poses very difficult moral problems. They struggle to reconcile their religious beliefs that tell them their sexual desire for men is sinful with their homosexual fantasies and behaviour, over which they feel they have little or no control. Even those without such religious beliefs may be conscious of what they perceive as the other disadvantages of having a homosexual orientation, especially the social stigma, the impossibility of a physical union with a woman and the incapacity to have children that are biologically their own. Until as late as the 1970s, the fact that homosexuality was labelled a medical condition inevitably led doctors and psychologists to offer treatment to such men in the hope this would change their orientation. It only became clear round about this time that all the treatments offered were either completely or almost completely ineffective. Psychoanalysis, behaviour...
therapy and countless other psychological and physical interventions were all useless in producing the desired change. At this point, in 1973, homosexuality was removed from the diagnoses listed in DSM III, the *American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*. There is now a proposal that all disease categories relating to sexual orientation should be declassified (Cochran et al., 2014).

There was a variety of other reasons why the pressure to change sexual orientation rapidly declined in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The passage of legislation in Britain and North America decriminalising homosexuality resulted in a reduction, though by no means the disappearance of social stigma; the gradual increase in the availability of options such as artificial insemination by sperm donation and adoption allowing gay men to have children of their own; and the growth of gay communities encouraging gay men to think that there were places where they could feel supported all contributed to this decline in pressure to change. All the same, there remain a significant number of gay men, particularly those with faith, who would really like to change their sexual orientation.

Such men were given hope in the early years of the 21st century by a publication authored by prominent American psychiatrist Robert Spitzer (2003). His paper was entitled ‘Can Some Gay Men and Lesbians Change Their Sexual Orientation? 200 Participants Reporting a Change from Homosexual to Heterosexual Orientation’. The paper described a telephone survey of 200 gay and lesbian volunteers who, it was claimed, had, one way or another, effected a change in their sexual orientation. The paper was subjected to devastating criticism. It was pointed out that most of the volunteers had strong religious faith and had a bias towards anything that could make it seem that homosexuality was not innate. The changes in orientation they reported were often very small – a move of 10 points from 70 to 60 on a 100-point scale of sexual orientation counted as a significant change. Although Spitzer called the ‘successful’ treatment ‘reparative therapy’, the reasons why change had occurred were not made clear. By 2006, Spitzer had recanted and indeed apologised to the homosexual community for contributing to the social stigma they suffered (Drescher & Zucker, 2006). At least temporarily the ineffectiveness of therapy to change sexual orientation has been established. Although therapy for change is useless, affirmative talking therapies appear to help gay men to normalise their everyday experiences and cope better with the specific issues facing them which they bring to the therapist (King, Semlyen, Killaspy, Nazareth, & Osborn, 2007).

So far in this chapter, we have largely addressed men who have a definite masculine identity. They may only be sexually attracted to men or
be bisexual and be sexually attracted to both men and women, but their masculine identity is not in doubt. So the story they tell themselves, the sexual script which they follow, whether they are homosexual or bisexual, is accompanied by a clear sense of being a man. But what sort of man? A gay man may well see himself as essentially different from a woman in his sense of physical superiority, in being more assertive, brave, decisive and dominant. Alternatively, a gay, like a straight man may see himself as sharing many of the characteristics generally thought to be more part of a feminine nature – caring, sensitive and interested in clothes, appearance, cooking and child care. Having these characteristics does not conflict in any way with how they see themselves as male; it is just that they do not fit the ‘macho’ male stereotype. Many gay men retain a strong masculine identity while wishing to be fathers bringing up and caring for children (Miller, 2004, pp. 285–286).

**Fatherhood and Gay Sexual Preference**

The distinction between heterosexual desire and the desire to be a father is well illustrated by the experience of gay men. Many gay men who, from an early age have felt strong sexual desire for boys their own age and no desire at all, or even an aversion to, sexual activity with the opposite sex, nevertheless have a wish to father and bring up children with an intensity no different from their heterosexual peers (Berkowitz & Marsiglio, 2007). In one study of 50 American gay men, 22, or 50%, revealed a passionate commitment to parenthood, and only two completely rejected the idea of parenthood (Stacey, 2006). As we shall see in Chapter 9, there is a similar strong dissociation in heterosexual men between fatherhood scripts and sexual scripts. They are remarkably separately developed.

Gay men may become fathers in a variety of ways, including adoption, fostering and surrogacy. The largest group, however, are those who marry or cohabit and have children but then come out as gay, sometimes long after their children have been born (Golombok & Tasker, 2010, p. 321). In most of these cases the father’s sexual preference is kept hidden, sometimes even from his wife. Such marriages have, for obvious reasons, been little studied, but we do have some information about the various different forms they take. In some cases the wife has known that her husband has a sexual preference for men from the start, but this has not deterred her from wanting to marry him and bring up his children. Sometimes in these circumstances the woman herself is lesbian, but more often she is not. With other couples, the man’s homosexual preference only surfaces after he has fathered children, sometimes when these children are in their
teen years (Buxton, 1994). This may occur when a married man falls in love with another man (Golombok & Tasker, 2010, p. 323).

Sexual intercourse resulting in the fathering of a child must involve orgasm and ejaculation. How do men with a homosexual orientation manage this? Some such men are bisexual, with sexual desire for both men and women, with sexual preference becoming exclusively homosexual in middle life. Men who come out in middle age not infrequently say that they have thoroughly enjoyed the sex they have experienced with their female partners (Buxton, 1994). Some with more exclusive homosexual desire must fantasise men while they are having intercourse with their female partners. After all, many men and women fantasise other people when they are having sex, so it is highly likely that some homosexual men achieve orgasm with their female partners in this way. Thus fathering a child by penetrative sexual intercourse with a woman is compatible both with a bisexual and a homosexual script.

As we have already seen earlier in this chapter, when a long-lasting homosexual relationship breaks down, this commonly takes place amiably with the two men remaining friends even if they no longer live together. Although there are examples to the contrary, in which women who have unknowingly lived with a gay man are furious and bitter when the true state of affairs emerges, it is more common for the breakdown of a marriage occurring because the man wishes to live in a more openly gay lifestyle to be amicable, the couple remaining friends subsequently.

In the Western world gay men have had to struggle for the right to foster and adopt children. To some degree they have been successful, although in many developed countries it would still be unthinkable they should be able to do so. In the United States, there are probably around 220,000 children being raised by couples living in gay or lesbian partnerships, of which a significant number are male (Gates, 2013). This is a tiny fraction of the total number of American children, perhaps 1 in 500, but it is not insignificant. In the United Kingdom, approximately 60 male couples a year adopt a child (Mellish, Jennings, Tasker, Lamb, & Golombok, 2013). Gay men are also often happy to provide specimens of their sperm when it is needed for successful in vitro fertilisation. This scenario is especially likely to arise when a lesbian couple are looking for a sperm donor to help them fulfil their wish to become parents (Stonewall, 2009).

Although again there are doubtless exceptions, most gay fathers are deeply loving of their children. Foster and adoptive placements made to gay couples are at least as successful as those made to heterosexual couples (Mellish et al., 2013). Although there is far more evidence regarding lesbian parents, it is clear from a more limited number of studies that
the great majority of children raised by two gay men grow up to achieve
good academic results, to be well-adjusted and, as they move into ado-
lescence, to have sexual preferences no different from those of other chil-
dren (Wainright, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). There is, however, some
evidence that the rate of homosexuality among the children is a little
higher than in the children of heterosexual couples (Golombok & Tasker,
2010, p. 332).

Successful parenting depends far more on the emotional climate in the
home and on the stability of the parental relationship than it does on the
sexual preferences of parents, as the following two examples illustrate:

Vignette 7.3

When Charles, now aged 50, had married June, she had known he was sexually
attracted to men. When they first met at work 30 years ago, he told her that he
had had a number of affairs, mostly brief but often intense, with other men. She
and Charles found each other very good company. They both enjoyed hill walk-
ing and went on a number of hiking holidays together. During these holidays they
shared a bed and, after two or three false starts, began to have sex. Feeling guilty
about it, Charles nearly always fantasised about men while he was making love to
June. She did not know about this.

After a couple of years June engineered a pregnancy without telling Charles
she was off the pill. It turned out he was quite pleased. They married and had
two more children. Their children are now aged between 12 and 16 years. About
a year ago, Charles met a man, Henry, at his work to whom he was immensely
attracted. Henry was also gay and they began to have an affair. Charles’s sex
life with June, which in any case had virtually petered out, stopped completely.
Charles wanted to live with Henry, but he was deeply affectionate to his children
who, in turn, were greatly attached to him. They still enjoyed family holidays
together, mainly going on canal boats. Charles and his children became expert
on the English canal system.

When eventually Charles told June about Henry, she was initially angry and
disappointed but eventually accepted he would have to continue his affair. She
pleaded with him not to leave home. He had no problem agreeing to this. He
told Henry he would have to stop seeing him if this meant he would have to
give up his children. Charles managed to keep his homosexuality secret from
his children. Occasionally they would make homophobic remarks. June became
protective of him, and their relationship eventually improved again. Charles’s
fatherhood script remained a powerful influence on his life and behaviour.

Vignette 7.4

Evan, a bisexual but mainly gay man, living in the northwest of England, was
40 years old when his wife, Jennifer, left him for a man with whom she had
fallen in love. They had two boys aged 10 and 12. Although he had fathered
two children, Evan had never had much interest in having sex with Jennifer, and she felt the time had come for her to lead a more fulfilled sex life. Jennifer had a high-powered, well-paid job in a bank where she had met her new lover. Evan had been a nurse until the children were born and had then given up his job to look after the children. This made sense, as Jennifer earned far more than he did, and if they had paid for child care, Evan’s salary would hardly have met the cost. Evan loved his sons; he had imbued them with a strong sense of loyalty to Liverpool United Football Club, whose ground was close to where they lived.

The boys were devastated when their mother told them she was leaving the home. Their distress was heightened when it became clear that she and her new partner were going to live in London. She told them she would visit every other weekend and stay overnight, but this did not make them feel better about the new arrangement. Evan felt slightly relieved about the arrangement as it meant he could more easily and with a lighter conscience pursue an affair he had been secretly having for the last 5 years with another man.

Life without their mother turned out to be no hardship for the boys. After a few months, her arrival every other weekend turned out to be more of an embarrassment to them than anything else, as they felt they could not make any other arrangements with their friends. Evan noticed this, of course, and felt slightly pleased that his sons were so exclusively devoted to him. His affair with the other man became no more than a mild diversion as he settled into a life in which fatherhood was his main occupation. The only concern was financial, but as Jennifer and her new partner were both high earners, she was able to continue to support her family financially without any hardship to herself.

For many gay men, being a father is an essential part of being a man. Indeed, in their hierarchy of needs, the fulfilment of sexual desire often takes second place to their need for friendship and companionship with a partner of either sex as well as for fatherhood. As with many straight men, but perhaps, as we have seen, to a slightly greater extent, friendship and companionship scripts take precedence over sexual scripts.

In Summary

- The reasons why some men prefer to have sexual relationships with other men have been intensively investigated with no conclusive results. There are probably significant genetic influences, but environmental factors are likely to be of importance in most men.
- The changing prevalence of male homosexuality and bisexuality is described.
- The largely unexceptional social and occupational characteristics of gay men are considered.
• Changes in public attitudes to homosexuality during the second half of the 20th century have done much to reduce stigmatization, but this still exists to a significant degree.
• This may account for the high rate of mental health problems shown by men who prefer to have sex with men.
• The great majority of men who have sex with men have a strong masculine identity and stereotypically male interests and attitudes.
• Many gay men wish to become fathers and are increasingly achieving this ambition, mainly by adoption. Compared to children in the general population, their children develop normally in all respects.