

1 Introduction

Sexual love is but a mad craving for something which escapes us.

Michel de Montaigne, *Complete Essays* (1580/1987, p. 209)

The aim of this book is to describe and partially explain men's sexual behaviour. The following vignettes illustrate the variety of ways young men behave sexually. They demonstrate that, in the presence of such variety, even to provide a partial explanation will be a formidable task. (The vignettes that follow here and throughout this book are fictitious but derived in composite fashion from the author's professional and personal experience.)

Vignette 1.1

Jim is a 25-year-old designer. He was brought up by two parents who divorced when he was 15, his father having deserted to live with another woman. He lost his virginity around the age of 14 to an older girl. He has never had any sexual problems. Now Jim shares an apartment in a big city with another man of about the same age whom he met at art school. He is well paid and has no dependents. He has had brief relationships with women lasting a few months at the most but has never had a live-in arrangement. Most weekends he goes clubbing at a local venue. He is an attractive man and expects to 'pull' most evenings with the girl he makes out with, coming back to his flat or he going to hers. Usually he has breakfast with her, but sometimes they part in the small hours. He does not make any unusual demands and is generally very satisfied with the sex he experiences. About once a month he arranges to meet the girl again the following week, but the relationship rarely extends beyond three or four meetings. During the week Jim masturbates most nights. His fantasy is always of the same girl. She is someone he slept with about a year ago whose face and body he found especially attractive.

The story that Jim tells himself about sex (his sexual script) is that it is part of the reward he feels he deserves for working hard in a stressful job. He assumes, possibly correctly, that the women with whom he has sex have a very similar view to his.

2 Introduction

Vignette 1.2

Carl, an architectural assistant, also 25, lives with his parents nearby to Jim. His parents are teachers whose marriage has been stable, although they have had their ups and downs. Carl lost his virginity at the age of 19 when he slept with a girl he did not particularly care for. He has had several relationships with women, but it is only in the past year that he has had a relationship with a woman, Linda, with whom he believes he could spend the rest of his life. She is 21 years old. They have kissed, sometimes passionately, but have never had full sexual intercourse. Linda has resisted his attempts to have intercourse, saying she wants to wait until they are married, and if they do not marry, she will not have sex with him. Although she is not religious, she says she wants to be a virgin when she marries. He has accepted this, achieving some fulfilment by masturbating frequently while imagining he is having sex with her.

The story about sex that Carl tells himself (his sexual script) is that it is a highly desirable activity he desperately wants to enjoy, especially as he would see nothing wrong in sleeping with his girlfriend. His desire, however, is less important to him than his relationship with Linda.

Vignette 1.3

Sanjit is another 25-year-old man – a doctor waiting for his parents to work out the terms of his marriage to a young woman who lives in India. He lives with his parents around the corner from Jim and Carl. His parents are both first-generation immigrants from India. They are Hindu and go to the local temple regularly. They are dentists, and the parents of the girl he is to marry are also professionals. Although he has been shown a photograph of her and she looks attractive, he knows he will only actually meet this girl a few days before the marriage is arranged. He will have the opportunity to turn her down when he sees her, as she will him, but as the date of the wedding is already arranged, he knows it is unlikely that he will. He masturbates several times a week to images of Bollywood film stars.

For Sanjit, although he knows well that his case is far from that of most of his colleagues in the hospital where he works, sex is unthinkable outside marriage. His sexual script tells him that this is one of the ways in which he will express love for his wife when eventually he marries.

Vignette 1.4

Rick is in his mid-20s and also lives close by the others. He was brought up by loving parents whose own parents had been enthusiastic participants in the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Their parents had split up after a few years together, and they had both had disrupted and unhappy childhoods with many separations. When they married, they decided they were going to be less selfish, and their own two children were going to have a better life than they

had had. Rick developed normally in his loving home. He was an active boy, popular with other boys in the neighbourhood because he was good at all sports. When he was 11 years old he began to get erections and at 13 he started to masturbate. Even before he masturbated he realised he was sexually attracted to a boy in the class above him and that, quite unlike his friends, he had no sexual feelings for girls. He was terrified his friends would find out about his sexuality, as 'gay' was the worst insult in his school. At 16 he tried to make out with a girl but realised he was unable to have an erection with her. At 17 he had had his first real sexual experience with another man, and at 18 he had managed to tell his parents about his sexual preference. They had been very upset, and his relationship with them was now poor. At 24 he worked as a salesperson in a computer store and was beginning to make a reasonable living. After having had sex with many different men at college, he had now settled down in a relationship with another man living in another part of the city, with whom he had sex three times a week. He also masturbated on days they did not have sex. He and his partner enjoyed the same activities: playing and watching football and going to gay bars at weekends. They were thinking of moving in together.

For Rick, sex is a highly enjoyable part of life, made more enjoyable by the fact that it has taken him what he regards as 8 wasted years to come to terms with his sexuality. It is only in the last two that he has accepted his sexual preference and found someone with whom he feels he can 'be himself'. He has only recently formulated a sexual script that meets his needs.

The Varieties of Sexual Experience

The sexual behaviour of men is indeed highly variable. Some, like Carl, engage in casual sex, sometimes as part of a hook-up culture (see Chapter 4). Generally, when a couple who live in Western liberal society meet, full sexual intercourse does not take place until the third or fourth meeting. The same pattern of courtship exists for men who sleep with other men. In contrast, those men who pay for sex with women or other men expect it within the first few minutes of the encounter. The historically more conventional pattern of courtship in which a couple sleep together after having established a friendship over several months or years exists in Western societies but is becoming much more unusual (Ansari & Klinenberg, 2016). There remain, however, many societies throughout the world where arranged marriage is the rule. Here, a groom will not even have met his bride until shortly before or even on the day of the wedding. He is then expected to have sex with her that very night or at least shortly thereafter (Jones, 2013).

Then there is the variety of men's preferences for the gender of their sexual partners, their sexual orientation. The idea that men can be

4 Introduction

divided into those who prefer women and those who prefer men for sex is simplistic. In many all-male boarding schools, boys engage readily in homosexual relationships while later in life they are entirely heterosexual in their orientation, sometimes indeed regarding homosexuality with abhorrence (Hyde, 1970). Most men prefer women of roughly their own age, but some prefer to sleep with older women, some with younger, and, most regrettably, some with children too young to engage in consensual sex. Many men who usually prefer sex with other men also engage at times in sex with women. Bisexuality is less common in men than it is in women, but it is still quite frequent. As books on so-called sexual perversions reveal, the range of animate and inanimate objects that men find sexually stimulating is also wide, stretching from virtually all species of animals to shoes and gloves and, perhaps more understandably, women's underwear. Some men can only achieve sexual fulfilment when inflicting pain; others cannot bear the thought of hurting the person they are having sex with, even in play.

Similarly, there is enormous variety in frequency of sexual activity. In the United States and Britain, by their seventeenth birthday about half the male population has experienced full sexual intercourse (Wellings, Field, Johnson, & Wadsworth, 1994, pp. 37–44), whereas the other half has not. Indeed, a significant number of men do not experience full sexual intercourse until they are well into their 20s. The latest American survey into sexual behaviour reveals that between a half and three-quarters of American men aged 18 to 60 have had full sexual intercourse during the past year; so between a quarter and one-half of men of this age have not had a full sexual experience at any time in the past year (Reece et al., 2010). Similarly between a half and three-quarters of men aged 18 to 60 have been given oral sex by a woman in the past year, which means between a quarter and one-half have not. Depending on their age, between 5% and 25% of men aged 18 to 70 have experienced anal sex in the past year, so between three-quarters and 95% have not.

Men vary greatly in the number of their sexual partners. The latest British national survey of sexual behaviour revealed that about one in five men aged 65 to 74 years had had sex with 10 or more female partners during their lives (Mercer et al., 2013). The same proportion, one in five, had had sex with only one female partner during their whole lifetime. So most men by the time they reach their late 60s and early 70s have had sex with more than 1 but fewer than 10 women. Thus the range of sexual experience in terms of number of partners is very wide. Similarly, some men who do have a sexual partner have sex once a month or less; others, especially in the early years of a sexual relationship have sex several times a week, sometimes several times a night. Variety in the sexual act is similarly variable.

Some men engage in sexual foreplay for periods of an hour or more; others penetrate their partners within seconds of beginning a sexual act (Corty & Guardini, 2008). The variation in sexual positions during intercourse is similarly wide. Although many fewer men engage in sexual acts with other men, both British and American survey evidence suggests the range of behaviour of those who do is equally varied (see Chapter 7).

Such variety gives the lie to the myth of the rampant out-of-control phallus. Men, claims this myth which remains widespread in Western society, are always ready for sex. For them, the only sort of *real* sexual behaviour is sexual intercourse. Proof is claimed to be found in studies which show, for example, that men think about sex roughly 19 times a day, or, on average, at least once per waking hour, every day of the week (Fisher, Moore, & Pittenger, 2012). Driven by their testosterone levels, men, it is suggested, want to have sex with women the first time they meet them. They are really only interested in the looks of a prospective partner; intelligence and personality are of little significance. Men see sex as a performance with the curtain always ready to go up. So, the ‘rampant phallus’ theory goes, for men sex is a reflex activity carried on with little, if any reference to what is going on in their minds. The wide range of male sexual behaviour makes it clear that such behaviour cannot be explained purely as a response to a ‘natural’ instinct or drive. Most of us know this perfectly well. As psychologists Susan Walen and David Roth (1987, p. 338) put it, ‘It is common knowledge that our most significant sex organ is not located between our legs but between our ears’. Nevertheless, the idea of a rampant phallus has persisted down the ages to our own day when an unlikely chorus of blue joke comedians, religious believers and journalists looking for an easy headline, all give it voice.

Explanatory Theories

The theoretical basis on which this book is based, a modified form of sexual script theory (SST), was formulated in the mid-1970s by John Gagnon and William Simon (1973). This theory has been and continues to be widely applied in both sociological and psychological research into sexual behaviour. Before providing a detailed account of SST, a number of other theories of sexual behaviour that retain some contemporary significance are very briefly and superficially outlined.

Pre-Scientific Theories of Sexual Behaviour

Numerous explanations have been proposed to explain men’s sexual behaviour (Geer and O’Donohue, 1987; Bullough, 1994; Toates, 2014,

pp. 68–94). There is no clear point at which the study of sexuality became scientific. If the scientific approach is defined as characterised by the testing of falsifiable theory (Popper, 1959), then the publication of *The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin in 1859 (Darwin, 1998) and, more particularly, *The Descent of Man* in 1871 (Darwin, 2013) may be regarded as the starting point. Much of great relevance to current understanding of male sexuality was written well before the mid-19 century, however. Peakman (2014) has edited a six-volume account of the cultural history of sexuality from classical Greece and Rome to the modern era. Plato discussed the tension between sexual desire and sexual restraint (2003, p. 147) in the fifth century BC. The idea of priapic man (the man with a permanent erection goes back at least to classical Greek times when Priapus, the son of Aphrodite and Dionysus, was regarded as a minor god or spirit. Priapus, with his grotesquely large penis, was featured in many Greek and Roman dramas, launching into Western culture the idea of man as sexually insatiable (Friedman, 2001, pp. 25–30). Judaism and then (with much greater influence on Western ideas relating to sexuality) Christianity, introduced the concept of sexual activity as immoral or sinful. For Christians, the story of the Fall described in chapters 2 and 3 of the Book of Genes is of the Holy Bible (St. James version, 1957) is the central myth that explained the origins of sexual desire. The fact that the disobedience in the Garden of Eden and the consequent curse of sexual lust was Eve's responsibility led to the view that women were the naturally lustful sex whom it was men's moral duty to resist. The result of the teaching of St. Paul and then St. Augustine was that, during the Middle Ages, it was chastity not sex within marriage that was the ideal (Evans, 2014, p. 5). Further, during this period, in a striking reversal of current attitudes to the gender balance of sexual desire 'whereas modern heteronormativity valorizes sexual promiscuity in men as an index of masculinity, mediaeval culture associated rampant sexual desires and practices with femininity and therefore the same man who today be regarded positively as a womanizer [*sic*] might have been viewed as effeminacy in the Middle Ages' (Lochrie, p. 43).

Biological and Biomedical Approaches

Evolutionary Theory and Evolutionary Psychology

Religious belief largely survived the Renaissance, the placing of humankind at the centre of the universe (Wells, 2010, p. 13), as well as the Enlightenment with its emphasis on rational thought (Porter, 2000, pp. 96–129). Then in the mid-19th century, slowly but inexorably, it became

clear first to most of the educated classes and then to many others, including religious believers such as Darwin himself (Barlow, 1958, pp. 84–92), that geological evidence disproved the biblical story. Although for most Christians it did continue to have powerful mythical and allegorical significance, it could not possibly be literally true. Over the second half of the 19th century, with what many – but by no means everyone – saw as scientific disproof of the story of the Creation, men and women were gradually released from obedience to laws, including sexual prohibitions, that had hitherto been regarded as God-given but were now increasingly seen to be human-made.

As far as the relationships between men and women were concerned, divine law was replaced by laws, sometimes misleading but crucially disprovable, that were derived from the theory of evolution. For example, Charles Darwin himself, in *The Descent of Man*, published in 1871, perpetuated the religious myth of the mental inferiority of women (Darwin, 2013, p. 211). He further claimed that what he believed to be the lesser sexual drive shown by the females of all species was biologically adaptive. He wrote that ‘the female, with the rarest exceptions is less eager than the male ... she is coy, and may often be seen endeavouring for a long time to escape.’ A century later, inspired by evolutionary theory, the still relatively new science of evolutionary psychology was born. Combining concepts from evolutionary theory with knowledge more recently gained about the lives led by our hunter-gatherer ancestors, evolutionary psychologists produced explanations for the (false) belief that men are naturally and inevitably promiscuous.

The idea that, emotionally, modern man has a Stone Age mind in a 21st-century skull and that the ‘past explains the present’ (Tooby & Cosmides, 1990) has been elaborated by evolutionary psychologists. The view of men as born to be promiscuous and women to be sexually reluctant was given fresh impetus by the theories proposed by the biologist Angus Bateman on the basis of his work on *Drosophila*, the common fruit fly (Tang-Martínez, 2016). According to Bateman and, more recently by evolutionary psychologists, men’s sexual behaviour remains dominated by their innate desire to propagate their own genes (Thornhill & Palmer, 2000). The most effective way for them to do this is to impregnate as many women as possible. So, some evolutionary biologists and psychologists claim, supporting the views of a small minority of 1970s feminists (Brownmiller, 1986, p. 12), all men are rapists or potential rapists.

There are significant deficiencies in the views of evolutionary psychologists. First, we have no reliable evidence regarding the sexual behaviour of Stone Age man. In fact, the family groupings that occurred at that time suggest a high level of fidelity (Richards, 1999). Even if men were

8 Introduction

as promiscuous as evolutionary psychologists suggest, their ideas seem to have little relevance to the very different world in which we live today. Procreation is now a rather infrequent reason for sexual activity. Rape, as we shall see in Chapter 10, usually has little to do with sexual pleasure or reproduction. It is much more about the exercise of power. The idea that men's capacity to reproduce their own genes depends on their success in having sex with as many women as possible is clearly mistaken in the modern world. The children of divorced parents do less well socially, academically and emotionally than those of the non-divorced (Amato & Keith, 1991) and are therefore less likely to provide stable care for their own children later in life. Comparing the childhoods of promiscuous men with those who are faithful suggests there are many better ways of explaining the differences between them than referencing our Stone Age ancestors.

It is true that in today's world many men are 'turned on' merely by the appearance of a sexually attractive woman. A man does not have to know a woman to feel he wants to sleep with her. Evolutionary biologists and psychologists suggest that this is the inescapable, although not necessarily disagreeable fate of men, determined by the need to spread their seed as widely as possible. The problem lies with the word 'inescapable'. Most men who find large numbers of women sexually attractive do not attempt to sleep with them. Men experience a sense of choice, of freedom of will. To suggest promiscuity is inescapable ignores the human capacity to choose between courses of action. Evolutionary science may explain some of the differences between men and women in their sexual behaviour; for example, in the characteristics that attract them to potential mates (Buss, 1989), but it cannot explain the choice of large numbers of men to remain faithful to partners to whom they have committed themselves. In today's social world, the promiscuity of some men has more to do with the way they are brought up with a sense of entitlement to get what they want, to their opportunities for making sexual contacts in the workplace and their access to money and power than it does to their Stone Age inheritance (see Chapter 4).

Medical/Classificatory Approaches

Although from Hippocrates in the fifth century onwards physicians had pronounced on different aspects of sexual behaviour, it was only in the mid-19th century, especially in relation to masturbation (see Chapter 4) that medical opinion began to exert a major influence on this area of life. Then, in the mid- to late 19 century, physicians such as William Acton, Richard Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, reflecting the reduction of

religious and moral influence on views of sexuality and a corresponding increase in the importance given to medical and biological approaches, entered the field. The medicalization of sexuality which resulted persisted until the last third of the 20th century when it gave way to social and psychological perspectives. The main interest of the physicians was in what they saw as the extremes of sexual behaviour, which were associated with social impairment, reducing the quality of their patients' lives. William Acton inveighed against the dangers of masturbation (see Chapter 4). Richard Krafft-Ebing, whose textbook *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1903) ran to 12 editions, was primarily interested in what he saw as perversions of the sexual instinct. These included homosexuality, fetishism, sadism and masochism. Krafft-Ebing shared Acton's views on masturbation as a pathological entity. He considered homosexuality as a genetically determined manifestation of a brain disorder. Havelock Ellis (2015), writing on what he called 'sexual inversion', mainly in the early years of the 20th century, was particularly interested in what he called sexual ambivalence or what we would now call bisexuality. He saw himself as a social reformer who, by bringing understanding to the subject of homosexuality and bisexuality, would encourage a more tolerant approach in society to those whom he saw as afflicted individuals. Following the medicalizing and pathologizing views of these and many other physicians, when the first edition of the *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD) to include morbidity as well as mortality was published in 1948, it classified homosexuality as a sexual deviation. Similarly, the first edition of the *American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM) classified homosexuality as a 'sociopathic personality disturbance'. It was not until 1973 that, reflecting the increasing influence of social and psychological views on homosexuality, the term was removed from the DSM classification. It took until 1990 for ICD to follow suit. There is now a proposal that all disease categories relating to sexual orientation should be removed from future ICD classifications (Cochran et al., 2014).

Behavioural Physiological Approaches

While students of animal sexual behaviour had been investigating the associations between sexual behaviour and physiological changes for many years previously, it was only in the 1960s and 1970s that William Masters and Virginia Johnson (1966) applied this approach to human subjects (Maier, 2009). Their findings dominated explanations of sexual behaviour at that time and greatly influenced therapeutic interventions for many decades subsequently. In their laboratory, Masters and Johnson observed thousands of acts of copulation between men and

women naked but with pillow cases over their heads so they would not recognise each other. Hooked up to recording devices measuring their heart and breathing rates with cameras inserted into their vaginas or trained on their penises, the behaviour of these couples was the basis on which Masters and Johnson formulated their theory explaining how men and women come together and couple sexually. Their model of a Human Sexual Response Cycle (Masters & Johnson, 1966) consisted of four phases – sexual excitement stimulated by attraction was followed by a plateau phase. This soon led to orgasm, after which came resolution when the penis became flaccid and, for a time, unresponsive to further stimulation.

Although the findings of Masters and Johnson led to useful advances in interventions for some forms of sexual dysfunction (Kaplan, 1974), it was immediately apparent that the human response cycle, while representing a real advance in the science of human sexual physiology, could only provide a very partial understanding of human sexual behaviour. The context in which Masters and Johnson's subjects came together for sexual intercourse bore no relationship to the social circumstances which give meaning to the act in couples outside the laboratory; it is this context which defines their relationship rather than their physiological responses.

More recent behavioural physiological approaches have approached sexual responsiveness through linking questionnaire responses to hormonal levels. Thus, John Bancroft and Erick Janssen (2000), leading researchers in the field, investigating erectile dysfunction or impotence (see Chapter 6), have developed a theoretical model of dual control of male sexual response. This is based on the balancing of central excitation and inhibition with individuals varying in their propensity for both sexual excitation and inhibition of sexual response.

Neurophysiological/Hormonal Approaches

All explanations of sexual behaviour must begin with biology: with anatomy, physiology and brain science. Without a built-in sexual apparatus, there would be no sexual desire and no sexual behaviour. In medical, nursing and biology textbooks the chapter relevant to sexual behaviour is usually given the title 'The Reproductive System'. As most sexual behaviour does not take place to produce babies, it would be more realistic if these textbook chapters were given the title 'The Recreational and Reproductive Sexual System'. Certainly this would be more meaningful to the teenage, medical and nursing students who have to study and learn about it.