Chapter 2
Bisexuality: It is Complicated

We begin this chapter with a simple fact: bisexuality exists. Whatever the constellation of sexual and emotional desires and behaviors that constitutes it, scientifically and socially speaking, some people are bisexual (Rullo et al. 2014). Long before there was a cultural awareness that bisexuality exists as a non-pathological and stable orientation among a significant fraction of the population, sexologists were studying the phenomenon. Over a century ago, Freud wrote (1905: 261–262):

> It is well known that at all times there have been, as there still are, human beings who can take as their sexual objects persons of either sex without the one trend interfering with the other. We call these people "bisexual" and accept the fact of their existence without wondering too much about it. … But we have come to know that all human beings are bisexual in this sense and that their libido is distributed between objects of both sexes, either in a manifest or latent form.

While society now accepts that bisexuality exists, it is less clear, even among sexologists, what exactly it is. If a man generally has heterosexual desire, but has once had sexual thoughts for other men, does that make him bisexual? Is a person bisexual because they once, decades ago, masturbated to the thought of a different sex to their preferred one? Is a person bisexual if they are romantically attracted to males but sexually attracted to females? Or does one have to be equally attracted to men and women to be considered bisexual? The answers to these questions are rooted in social perception and social categorizing. There is no definitive answer.

The social perception of what constitutes bisexuality is also different cross-culturally (Carrillo 2002), as well as historically within any given culture. For example, two men kissing in Britain during the 1980s would have resulted in people thinking that they were gay. Yet research is starting to suggest that kissing between two young straight men in Britain today is not perceived as a gay act (see Anderson et al. 2012); instead, it is a common act of homosocial bonding among hetrosexual men in some contexts. In order to highlight the importance of social and historical context in defining sexuality, consider the following narrative.

Jake is 16. He lives with his mother and sister in a somewhat economically deprived area in England. Jake has a rich network of friends, both male and female. He grew up in the same neighborhood as his best friend, Tom. Jake frequently

E. Anderson and M. McCormack, *The Changing Dynamics of Bisexual Men's Lives*, Focus on Sexuality Research, DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-29412-4_2

expresses his love for Tom in a public manner. This is evident when seeing them interact socially, but the frequency of it is also quantifiable through examination of his Facebook posts, where Jake posts on Tom's wall with terms of love—expressions of endearment that Tom reciprocates.

During an interview for a different research project (Anderson 2011a), Jake said that he was preparing to go on a 13-day holiday to Spain with Tom. When he was questioned about whether he feared that they might fight, being together for that length of time, he answered, "No mate, we're too close for that." Highlighting their closeness, Jake added that he was spending Saturday night with Tom. After going out and drinking with friends, Jake and Tom would return to Jake's house, where they would share a bed and cuddle. They have spent many nights, both drunk and sober, in bed together. They regularly express their emotional bond privately as well. Just one example is the text Tom sent Jake after a week apart from each other: "Love you, this week has made me realise how weak I can be without you. And I don't like not being with you :."

At this point, many readers will think Jake is either gay or bisexual, or possibly closeted with same-sex desires. Indeed, the near-impossibility of proving a negative means that we cannot be certain that he does not harbor same-sex desires. But we can say that Jake publically identifies as heterosexual and that his peers perceive him as heterosexual. This is despite them having full knowledge of his intimacy with Tom. Furthermore, Jake is not much different than other heterosexual boys that we have researched in the UK (Anderson and McCormack 2014). He is a normal, typical heterosexual teenager in England. This includes having a girlfriend, Amy. When asked about Amy's views on his going on holiday with Tom, he responds, "She knows how close we are. She's gotta share me."

While Jake still lives in a heterosexist culture, the erosion of homohysteria offers him the opportunity to have the same level of emotional and physical intimacy with his best male friend as with his female partner. Jake does not fear discussing this type of emotional intimacy because there is less stigma about being thought gay. This is something that we have documented empirically; finding that sharing strong emotional bonds, which can manifest into physical affection, such as cuddling with a male friend in bed, is common practice for heterosexual male athletes in the UK (Anderson and McCormack 2014). While this had been the case in earlier times (see Ibson 2002), physical tactility between men had become stigmatized and heavily censured in the late 20th century (see Chap. 5 for a full discussion of this).

For those readers who have not experienced this social dynamic – those who are older, or who live in a setting where young men still emphatically avoid being socially perceived as gay – some element of homosexuality or bisexuality will likely be read into Jake's narrative. This illustrates the importance of cultural perspective in understanding behavior. Those having their adolescence in the 1980s will more likely find Jake's behaviors indicative of homosexuality, while those having their adolescence today, will see it as an acceptable way to express friendship.

We hope this narrative has highlighted that personal frameworks for categorizing people by their behaviors into a sexual identity category are not necessarily accurate —our personal typologies of sexuality are dependent upon the culture we are born

in, the time in which we experienced our adolescence, and our own intellectual views of the social world. Individuals' perspectives are tied to cultural norms and social values. Sexualities are generational (Plummer 2010).

Jake's narrative also highlights that regardless of how we define sexual identity categories – be it gay, straight, bisexual or other – our definitions are dependent on a range of social factors, making our task of defining bisexuality all the harder. This highlights the complexity of bisexuality: It is much easier to define what it means to be exclusively gay or exclusively straight. This chapter therefore examines tough, slippery, and, for sociologists, highly contentious question of what, precisely, sexuality is.

Defining Sexuality

Sexuality is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. It is not easy to define, and this is exacerbated by the use of different terminologies across academic disciplines. The term *sexual orientation*, for example, has a different meaning in sociology and psychology. Sociologists generally use sexual orientation to describe sexual desires or attractions, regardless of whether those desires are expressed to other people or acted upon. Sexual orientation tends to indicate the gendered-direction of one's sexual desires, rather than other components such as age. Psychologists, however, often use orientation to describe a constellation of factors related to the total umbrella of sexuality. The American Psychological Association (APA: 2008) defines sexual orientation as

> an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions.

Accordingly, the psychological definition of orientation is muddled, containing a variety of conceptually distinct constructs. Given this, and our grounding as sociologists, we use a sociological definition of sexual orientation as referring to sexual desire. We think Bailey (2009: 44) describes it well by saying, "The term sexual orientation connotes a mechanism, analogous to a compass that directs our sexuality." We then use the term 'sexuality' to relate to our overarching understandings of the sexual: sexual behavior, public, and personal sexual identities.

Examining the Components of Sexuality

While *sexuality* is helpful as an umbrella term to discuss the sexual, it is not sufficient to understand the complexity of human desire. For example, the difference between *identity* and *orientation* is a simple yet fundamental component of

sexuality. Savin-Williams (1998: 3) describes it as a "distinction between an ever-present, invariant, biological and psychological truth (sexual orientation) and a historically and culturally located social construction (sexual identity)." Importantly, research shows that while the two are strongly correlated, there is a significant group of people that maintain same-sex sexual desires without identifying as a sexual minority (Savin-Williams 2001a).

The other key component is sexual *behaviors* which are the sexual acts people engage in. Again, while there is close correlation with identity and orientation, there can be significant differences between these—not least people who have taken virginity pledges, heterosexuals that are segregated from the opposite sex in prison or the army, or homosexuals who are in the closet.

There is a social awareness in the US and the UK about the potential differences between a person's sexual orientation, their social identity and the behaviors they engage in. For example, the 'down low' is a popular term that describes ostensibly heterosexual (closeted) men who seek same-sex sex in private (Boykin 2005), where there is a disjuncture between identity and orientation. While the conceptualization of behavior, identity, and orientation are helpful in exploring different aspects of sexuality, they also neglect other integral components—most significantly who one is emotionally, romantically, and even socially attracted to. We discuss these under the umbrella term of *emotional orientation*.

These neglected aspects are particularly important in the context of our research because their erasure also serves to marginalize bisexuality. If emotional, social, and romantic attraction were accounted for, it would increase the percentage of people that could potentially classify as bisexual and provide greater recognition of the complexity of sexuality—making a monosexist culture harder to legitimize. In Table 2.1, we provide a set of definitions that we use throughout the book.

In the following sections, we examine sexuality from a holistic perspective, developing a framework in which bisexuality can be fully realized and incorporated into understandings of human sexuality. We start with a more detailed examination of attraction, behavior, and identity before examining components of sexuality that receive less attention.

Table 2.1 Definitions

Sexuality is an umbrella term for all aspects of sexual direction, including one's attractions, behaviors, identities and emotional orientation.
Sexual orientation refers to the gendered direction of one's sexual attractions.
Sexual attraction refers to the sexual desires a person has. It is assumed to be consistent with one's masturbatory fantasies.
Sexual identity refers to how one views their own sexuality in light of cultural understandings of sexuality.
Sexual behavior refers to what consensual sexual acts one engages in.
Emotional orientation refers to the gendered-direction of one's desires for emotional intimacy.

Sexual Attraction

Sexual attraction serves as the groundwork for defining all other aspects of sexuality (LeVay 2011). Sexual attraction is a fundamental component of one's sexual orientation. While a part of the body or a particular person may elicit sexual arousal, a central characteristic of the organization of sexuality is the gender of the person involved. For most people, whether we are attracted to men, women, or both is a central issue in these desires. Males who have sexual desire for males are described as having "same-sex" attractions and males who desire females have "opposite-sex" attraction.

Research surveying attraction normally asks about degrees of sexual attraction to one's own or the opposite sex. Sometimes these surveys are framed as "sexual feelings" or "sexual desires" and questions about sexual attraction are normally logged on a scale from "entirely heterosexual (attracted to persons of the opposite sex)" to "entirely homosexual (attracted to persons of the same sex)."

However, talk about the "same" sex or the "opposite" sex is problematic as it reproduces a sex binary that does not recognize the diversity of human bodies (Fausto-Sterling 2000). Indeed, Fausto-Sterling (1993) has argued that there are five sexes, taking account of various forms of intersex bodies. Diamond simply describes attraction as being person-based, rather than being a binary assessment (2009). Despite this, the use of same and opposite continues, partly because it is cumbersome to do otherwise. In this book, we try to avoid reproducing binaristic norms while recognizing the issue of readability. To this end, we use the vocabulary of "same," and "different," or "other," where possible, and "opposite" only when it refers to specific literature that uses the term.

We recognize that this approach is flawed by its focus on attraction to people with normative gender identities. That is, by focusing on attraction to men and women, attraction to trans people is not positioned as legitimate within the scientific literature (Weinrich 2014a). In a wide-ranging and insightful discussion of multidimensional ways to measure sexual orientation, Weinrich (2014b) discusses important new methodological approaches that can incorporate sexual desire for non-cisgendered people in ways that do not prove unwieldy in practice. Recognizing the limitations of the current context, he frames this as an ideal component of sexualities research: we had not encountered the methods Weinrich discusses when we collected data, and thus we use an adapted model of the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid. We discuss further the implications of using such approaches in the conclusion.

We also highlight that part of the centrality of sexual attraction is attributable to how humans have evolved. This explains why sexual attraction toward an individual is determined almost instantly. Research shows that it is possible to determine someone's gender, age, and race in milliseconds (Brewster et al. 2010). Attraction to the face occurs at a similar speed (Thornhill and Gangestad 1998), although it is extremely difficult to describe verbally what is found attractive in a face.

In order to understand the phenomenon of speed of facial attraction, scientists have focused on facial symmetry (Thornhill and Gangestad 1998; Gangestad and Simpson 2000). These studies find that not only are symmetrical faces more attractive, but that humans have a specialized subconscious mechanism for detecting symmetry (Penton-Voak et al. 2003). Supporting this, people find faces more attractive when they have been digitally manipulated to be more symmetrical (Rhodes et al. 2001; Perrett et al. 1999).

It might be argued that this is not due to an innate process, but is instead the result of social conditioning—that symmetry is culturally esteemed and we thus learn to understand symmetry as beautiful. However, evidence supporting the evolutionary base finds that these studies are valid across cultures (Rhodes et al. 2001). Studies have also found a preference for symmetry in newborns (Slater et al. 1998). Here, babies spent longer looking at the more symmetrical faces, regardless of the gender, race, or age of the face they were shown. This suggests that notions of human beauty are somewhat based on innate traits, that are then likely augmented by culture. Beauty may not therefore just reside in the eye of the beholder, it lies in the human condition.

Facial attractiveness is not, of course, solely the result of facial symmetry or self-representation alone. A host of other factors are considered in those milliseconds of initial judgment, including facial characteristics such as a small nose and high forehead, prominent cheekbones, and arched eyebrows (Cunningham 1986; Cunningham et al. 1990). It is possible that some of these characteristics are the result of social processes. Markers of age are also visible on a face, and these might be culturally sexualized or not—not least depending on the gender of the person.

Smell also plays a role in the determination of attractiveness. Although stronger in women, both sexes report that body scent has a significant influence on sexual interest in a person (Herz and Cahill 1997; Lübke and Pause 2015; Martins et al. 2015). Thornhill and Gangestad (1999) demonstrate the power of smell in sexual attraction in their renowned T-shirt experiments. In one experiment, men wore T-shirts for several days, without using scented products or washing. After a few days of wearing the shirts, women were asked to smell the shirts blindfolded, ranking the odor from most desirable to least. There was general agreement in how women ranked the smell from the T-shirts. Significantly, when the women were then asked to rank the men in order of physical attractiveness by looking at photos of the men, those that were rated highest for smell were also *independently* ranked as more attractive visually. Potentially an evolutionary mechanism to motivate mating with males who possess genes that increase offspring viability or other components of offspring fitness (Møller and Alatalo 1999), it seems that attractive people smell good.

Bodies are important to sexual attraction as well. This explains how gay and bisexual men can find sexual partners on Grindr and other hook-up apps, being attracted to the physical body prior to meeting the person. The form this sexual attraction takes is likely a product of both biological and cultural conditioning (Frederick et al. 2005). For example, muscle definition, youthfulness, and hairless bodies are all esteemed in contemporary gay male culture, whereas muscles and a

hairy chest have been socially valued in prior decades (Coad 2008). Yet evolutionary psychologists also suggest that the shoulder-to-hip ratio is important in men's sexual attractiveness, theorizing it to serve as a cue of genetic and social fitness and arguing that women have evolved preference for muscularity (see Frederick and Haselton 2007). It is argued that evolutionary processes attach increased importance to particular body types (e.g. muscularity) which are then reproduced and emphasized by social processes (Frederick et al. 2005).

Collectively, these components of sexual desire suggest that a significant amount of rapid automatic processing of physical characteristics occurs when two people meet and that this is important in determining sexual attraction. Before we begin social and psychological interactions with another person, we are first attracted or repelled by their biology. It is normally this immediate sense of attraction that gets one 'in the door' to a romantic relationship, not 'how nice' someone is. It is thus this sexual attraction—rooted in deep-seated biology—which attracts us to a person and makes us want to engage in sexual behaviors.

Sexual Repulsion

While sexual attraction is vital to understanding sexuality, it may be just one component of what is important in sexual desire. There is an argument that while sexuality tends to be about *attraction to*, it is also influenced by *aversion from* particular sexual acts or bodies. This idea is currently being studied by Michael Bailey, who theorizes that sexual aversion can also play a role in people's sexuality. Smell might be an important component in this (Herz and Inzlicht 2002; Thornhill and Gangestad 1999).

The thesis of combining attraction to and aversion from has particular importance for thinking about bisexuality. Traditionally, bisexuality is conceived as *attraction to* both males and females. However, it might also be the case that some bisexuals have an attraction to one sex but rather than having a strong attraction to the other sex, they just lack an aversion to it. There might, then, be two forms of bisexuality: one with strong sexual desires directed at males and females, and another which is the latent effect of an absence of repulsion for one sex (Bailey 2011). While not being averse to one sex may not in itself be a sexual orientation, it nonetheless complicates how we study sexuality.

Supporting the notion that sexuality is in part about repulsion or lack of it, Stief et al. (2014) use online survey data to suggest that while sexual orientation is normally independent of personality factors, it might nonetheless play a role for bisexuals. They find that certain personalities seek sex with both sexes, despite only being sexually responsive to one. This is because they are thought to maintain personalities which seek sexual sensations and sexual excitability. Compared to heterosexual and homosexual participants, bisexual participants had higher levels of both sexual sensation seeking and sexual curiosity, particularly among bisexual women (see Lippa 2007). Similarly, Rieger et al. (2014) found that bisexual-identified men were higher

in "sexual curiosity" than other groups, and those high in sexual curiosity were more likely to show bisexual arousal patterns—likely attributable to a lack of repulsion. Together, these studies indicate that for some people bisexual behaviour might be a lack of repulsion alongside value placed in sexual novelty.

Sexual Behavior

Sexual behavior refers to the sexual acts one engages in. It is often framed as sexual contact, but this can be misleading as it does not have to include another person (e.g. masturbation). Similarly, we do not include non-consensual sex here as it is not sought by the victim involved. Sexual acts with another are complicated not just by whether that person consented but also by how those acts are interpreted. This is exemplified by kissing. Young straight male university students in the United Kingdom regularly kiss each other on the lips, and even use tongues on occasion (Anderson et al. 2012). While people normally understand prolonged kissing as a sexual act, these men interpret these behaviors as a form of nonsexual, humorus, social bonding. Thus, sexual behavior is not just about acts but about context, meaning and interpretation as well.

Definitional issues persist in many areas of sexual behavior. Everyone agrees that having intercourse with another person is a sexual behavior, yet what does intercourse entail? While it is generally accepted that penile-vaginal or penile-anal penetration is sexual intercourse, there is less consensus for other behaviors. In a study of 599 undergraduate students, Sanders and Reinisch (1999) reported that 60% of respondents would not class oral-genital contact as "having sex." Is it a sexual act if two men masturbate alongside each other without touching? What if they masturbate each other for a short period of time? Highlighting the diversity of definitions of "having sex," Pitts and Rahman (2001) found that 6% of their participants regarded touching breasts and nipples as having constituted sex.

These issues are made more complex in the digital world. In Anderson's (2012) study on monogamy, he found that young men had no clear agreement on what it meant to behave sexually because they disagreed over the relevance of online sexual activities. There was no agreement as to whether masturbating to porn counted as a sexual behavior, nor whether masturbating with another person on webcam did. There was just as much debate as to whether sexting is a sexual behavior. These digital forms of interaction make even this most basic label of sexual behavior a slippery definitional category. Digital technologies call the nature of reality into question (Waskul 2003), merging fantasy and behavior in ways that trouble the discrete categorization of these components of sexuality.

It is also important to recognize that consensual sexual behaviors are not necessarily indicative of sexual orientation, either. One need only consider porn stars to recognize that the doing of sexual acts does not necessarily connote the preferred sexual experiences of the actors. For example, it is well known that mainstream gay

porn star, Jeff Striker, is heterosexual, and by having gay sex on camera he is doing what is commonly called "gay for pay." Levy (2006) calls this performative bisexuality, arguing that an increase in bisexuality in porn does not mean that bisexuality itself is becoming more socially acceptable.

Sexual Identity

Sexual identity refers to our personal conception of our sexual selves. It is a crucial component of sexuality because it is the way by which we make sense of our desires and behaviors. While many people develop an understanding of their sexual identity through the process of having sex (Herdt and Boxer 1993; Sears 1991), Dubé (2000) highlights that many sexual minority males arrive at a gay identity without engaging in sexual intercourse. Sexual identities are complex, and incorporate a range of feelings and behaviors related to sex, emotional attachments, and romance.

People have deep, emotional attachments to their sexual identity, as it helps people understand their personal, emotional, and erotic lives (Plummer 1995). While sexual identities are socially constructed and dependent on the historical period in which we live, most people do not feel that they choose their identity. Appiah (2005: 69) observes:

> … if all there is to an identity is a conventional set of behaviours, and you are capable of them, then you can choose whether to adopt the identity. But when the criteria for ascribing a certain identity include things over which you have no control – as in the case with gender, race and sexual orientation – then whether you identify with that identity, whether, for example, you think of yourself as gay and act sometimes as a gay person, is not only up to you.

While we make behavioral choices, it is culture which determines the possible identity labels available to us; and it is culture which determines how we are perceived and thus treated for that identity. As Rust (1992: 366) argues, "the consequences of identity are both social and political."

The significance of identity is highlighted by its use in most research on sexual orientation, including routine monitoring forms and government and other social survey questions. In the UK, the Office for National Statistics (ONS 2009) defines sexual identity in the following way:

> Self-perceived sexual identity is a subjective view of oneself. Essentially, it is about what a person is, not what they do. It is about the inner sense of self, and perhaps sharing a collective social identity with a group of other people. The question on sexual identity is asked as an opinion question … it is up to respondents to decide how they define themselves.

Identities can also change. A relatively recent example of this is the emergence of the notion of asexuality (Bogaert 2012). Today, many individuals identify with this label and are asexual not just through absence of sexual desire, but by identity.

However, before the cultural adoption of this label they were more likely to consider themselves heterosexual with a low (or non-existent) sex drive.

There is a central problem with identity labels in that they can easily consume all other aspects of a person's sexuality. We readily assume that if, for example, one identifies as heterosexual, it means that they only have sex with members of the opposite sex; that they only fall in love with members of the opposite sex; and that they relate to members of the opposite sex more intensely. How much this is attributable to living in a monosexist culture is debatable—what is key is that none of these assumptions necessarily follow a sexual identity label.

Romantic Love

While it is undoubtedly possible for sexual activity to occur without emotional attachment, modern understandings of sexuality are deeply entwined with love (Giddens 1992). Defining love, however, proves more challenging than defining all other aspects of sexuality.

Highlighting its complexity, the Ancient Greeks had four different types of love: *philía*, *éros, agápe,* and *storgē*. Although precise meanings are hard to interpret because these terms are contextualized according to our current culture, our understanding is that *philía* refers to the love of a friend; *éros* refers to sexual passion; *agápe* refers to the romantic love of one's partner; and *storgē* refers to the love of a child.

It is interesting to note that these do not map neatly onto a definition of emotional attraction. For some, the emotional attraction that is linked to sexuality will necessarily conflate *eros* and *agape*; yet for others, sexual passion soon dissipates while romantic love for a partner endures. Sexual attraction is likely to over-inflate notions of romantic love: sexual desires are likely to influence people to think they love someone, when they simply want to have sex with them (Anderson 2012). Engaging in sexual behavior may lead a "drug-like state," but it is not in-and-of itself a form of romantic love.

Whatever romantic love is, the importance and centrality of love in our social lives is clear. This is evidenced not only by the intensity of joy felt when 'falling' in love with a person, but also by the extreme emotional jealousy and pain felt when that attachment is threatened or taken from us. Indeed, research shows that when one's long-term love partner dies, the chances of the surviving partner dying dramatically rise (Martikainen and Valkonen 1996), something known as the widowhood effect. The worth of love is measured not just by the joy it provides, but also the intense sorrow experienced when romantic relationships are lost or taken away.

Sociologists of health describe loving relationships as vital to well-being. Kontula and Haavio-Manila (2004: 81) highlight the social necessity of these relationships, writing:

> The implication of not having a long term romantic relationship is loneliness. The lack of alternative outlets for emotional expression and affective attachments has increased the personal stakes of not only finding a partner but also choosing one who will provide a continuing source of emotional fulfillment.

Overstating the importance of romantic relationships above other forms of intimacy, a clearer statement is that romantic love is a dynamic emotional state, constantly changing in type, intensity, and meaning. Love includes evolutionary, social and historical factors that compel people to be with one another in meaningful and semi-enduring ways. So, notwithstanding the complexity discussed above, our working definition of romantic love is that it is in general a relationship between consenting adults, in which goods, services, emotions and needs are exchanged and met. It is a form of relationship that is personally, socially and sometimes legally privileged above other equally valid types of love. It normally occurs with sexual activity, at least at the outset, but sexual activity is not required, and quite often, long-term romantic love lacks a sexual component after the initial few months or years. It also tends to be correlated with the person's sexual orientation.

Distinguishing Romance from Bromance

Whereas the concept of romance indicates both sexual and emotional attraction, emotional infatuations without any sexual desire have occurred across cultures and historical time periods (see Diamond 2003; Jensen 1999; Nardi 1999). Diamond (2003) argues persuasively that sexual intercourse and emotional attachment are "functionally independent"—just as it is possible to engage in sexual intercourse without developing feelings for a person, so too can love develop in the absence of sex. Diamond highlights that while emotional infatuation will manifest differently according to cultural context, it emerged as an evolutionary product of bonding:

> Research has demonstrated that the distinct behaviors and intense feelings associated with affectional bonds are governed not only by culture and socialization but also by evolved, neurochemically mediated processes that are a fundamental legacy of humans' mammalian heritage…Just as sexual desire is a species-typical phenomenon with both social and biological underpinnings, so too is emotional affection (Diamond 2003: 173).

Klein (1993) recognized the independence of emotional attraction from sexual attraction by providing a measure of "emotional preference" alongside "sexual preference" in his scale of sexuality (see Chap. 3). This recognizes that individuals will have their emotional attractions oriented toward either men, women or both. We call this an *emotional orientation*—defining it as the gendered-direction of one's desires for emotional intimacy (see also Savin-Williams 2014).

Whether emotional orientation is seen as an aspect of sexuality is a question of definition. If sexuality refers to sexual desires, than one's emotional orientation is excluded. But given that most people seek a partner that they are both emotionally

and sexually attracted to, it might be reasonable to consider emotional orientation as an aspect of sexual orientation. Indeed, there is evidence that the one's romantic partner being one's primary attachment has evolutionary benefits (see Fisher 2000). From a sociological perspective, the value of emotional orientation will be heightened in contemporary culture where romantic partnerships are privileged as the ideal form of relationship; where one's sexual partner is also deemed to be one's primary attachment and "best friend" (Giddens 1992).

This association was reinforced by the social censure of close male friendships throughout the latter half of the 20th century. In this context, men were prevented from having open and honest emotional relationships with other men. As a consequence of fearing homosexualization or being socially perceived as unmasculine, American males have been discouraged from discussing love, fear and values with friends (Komarovsky 1974; Pleck 1975). Morin and Garfinkle (1978) suggested that the fear of being labeled homosexual—what we call homohysteria—interferes with the development of intimacy between men: that men have not known what it means to love and care for a friend without "the shadow of some guilt and fear of peer ridicule" (Lewis 1978: 108). Indeed, men have been so alienated from each other that Jourard (1971) showed that self-disclosure, a vital component of emotional intimacy, was utterly lacking between males. Instead, young men knew that they had a friendship with another male when they "did stuff" together. Conversely, women's friendships are defined by sharing emotions and secrets.

While these findings were true for the latter half of the twentieth century (e.g. Kimmel 1994), the transformation of intimacy in US and UK cultures means that this is no longer the case. Decreasing homophobia in the 21st century (Clements and Field 2014; Keleher and Smith 2012) has resulted in many men, particularly younger men, no longer caring if engaging in emotional conversations or other feminized activities render them gay in other people's eyes (McCormack and Anderson 2014). This has provided the intellectual space for men to develop profound emotional bonds with male friends, and the social dynamic to express their feelings. These feelings can include confusion about sexual desires, greater willingness to be open about sexually permissive attitudes, and the opportunity to discuss sexuality as a complex matrix rather than a simplistic binary (Anderson and Adams 2011).

The increasing importance of male bonds is also the result of other social changes. Contemporary society is currently witnessing the breakdown of long-term monogamy, with increasing numbers of people either living alone or marrying later in life (Arnett 2004). In this context, close friendship bonds become more important and people have more time to nurture these emotional connections. Without the responsibilities of early marriage and fatherhood in emerging adulthood, and the boundaries of men's friendships far less policed, men have the physical, social, and psychological space to develop profound friendships with other men.

The initial stages of friendship are relatively easy for millennial youth—doing "stuff" together, like sports, video games, drinking, exercising, shopping, and eating out, facilitates the possibilities of making new friends. However, they also have the opportunity to form strong, deep emotional relationships based on emotional

disclosure with one another. This intimacy between heterosexual young men, documented extensively in our own research in the US and the UK, is often self-labeled a bromance (Anderson 2014). These relationships can be as emotionally deep as they are with their sexual partners – sometimes even deeper. It is this type of emotional intimacy that 16-year old Jake had with his best friend Tom, profiled in the introduction to this chapter. At the time of writing it is difficult to discuss prevalence of such behaviors as there is a dearth of research examining such friendships. There is evidence that these behaviors may be less pronounced in the US (see Way 2011), and we are aware of research currently under development that finds bromances increasingly embedded in the UK culture.

Naming these friendships as bromances permits one to step outside gendered boundaries (Anderson 2014). Young men in bromances say that they can express fear and other emotions as well as love, without worrying about social stigma. These relationships also enable physical tactility, often surpassing the physical closeness they engage in with women. Highlighting this, when we conducted forty interviews with heterosexual male undergraduate athletes at a British university about their homosocial practices, we found that these men could share beds, cuddle and even spoon—all without risking their socially perceived heterosexual identity (Anderson and McCormack 2014). This occurred in particular friendship circles, and tended to be a sign of group inclusion within a friendship network.

When we lecture on the topic we propose to our students that homosocial bromances frequently eclipse heterosexual romances. We ask the women in our classes how many of them find that they are often the second choice compared to their boyfriend's bromance—many women raise their hands. In one of these recent classes a female student was asked, "If he had to choose you or him, who do you think he'd choose?" "Him," she said, "without a doubt." In work not yet published, this topic is being examined by Stefan Robinson and Eric Anderson among heterosexual male athletes who unanimously report that the love they maintain for their bromance can be as strong and even eclipse the love they feel for their female romantic partners.

The love that young men show for one another today extends beyond their own private conversations, too. Social media, particularly Facebook, is bursting with florid expressions of emotions by young straight men (see Scoats 2015). It is common for these men to list themselves as "in a relationship" with their best male friend. Others show their love by listing their friends on Facebook as family members. Here, they either put down that their friends are "brothers" or they designate them with some other relationship label. Many more post hearts ("<3"), kisses ("xx") and touching emotional statements to each other. These messages are visible to all of their hundreds of Facebook friends. These men express intimacy for others in ways their forefathers were not permitted (Anderson 2014), resulting in open discussion and complex understanding of sexual behaviors and identities that were once erased or stigmatized.

The significance of bromances for our understandings of bisexuality can be seen by considering Klein's (1993) model of bisexuality. His model recognizes the importance of romantic relationships in any sexual identity, so heterosexual men's

engagement in loving same-sex platonic relationships can impact upon the recognition of bisexual identities. Evidencing this, Anderson and Adams (2011) find that men who engage in these bromances discuss the legitimacy of bisexuality as a sexual identity, and even see some component of bisexuality in their own lives. Most of the men in this research understood bisexuality to encompass a spectrum of variables, and perhaps this is why nearly all of the men interviewed recognized some bisexuality in themselves. "I think we're all bisexual to some degree," Sean said. "I mean, I don't think it's purely a physical thing, I think it's an emotional thing, too." When asked to expand upon this idea of bisexuality being a universal sexuality, he said (p. 13), "All I'm saying is it's more complicated than just the physical."

These relationships are about love and desire, just not of a sexual kind. While it can be paired with sexual desires, some straight men feel jealousy that gay men are able to relate to each other with ease and perhaps more homogeneity than opposite-sex couples can. While this is likely one of the least important variables to describe as a constituent of one's sexuality, this may well relate to sexual drive—with those with lower sexual drives valuing emotional orientation more highly than those who have strong sexual desires. Even so, understanding the differences between romances and bromances needs further research, particularly regarding how they intersect with bisexuality. For example, little is known about whether bisexuals face difficulties in navigating such friendships, and how differences between the forms of relationship are experienced.

Types of Bisexuality

As the preceding section exemplifies, defining sexuality is a difficult and complex task. Because of these complexities, there are multiple types of bisexuality (see Yoshino 2000), where each variation is based on the aspects of sexuality discussed above, but with different components maintaining varying levels of importance across the definitions. Highlighting this, one study identified 34 different conceptualizations of bisexuality (Rullo 2010, cited in Rullo et al. 2014).

The most commonplace understanding of bisexuality is where someone maintains desires for men and women and publicly identifies as bisexual, yet people both call themselves and are called bisexual for reasons other than where their sexual attractions lie. For example, one form of bisexuality comes from gay men calling themselves bisexual in order to avoid the further stigma of being totally homosexual. This labeling of bisexuality privileges self-identity over attraction or behavior (Guittar 2013). Another comes from Latin American cultures which permit men to maintain a heterosexual label if they penetrate, but are not penetrated by other men (Lancaster 1986). These men could be labeled bisexual, but this would require the privileging of behavior over other components.

Bisexuality can also be seen in ritual behaviors of various cultures. Ritual bisexuality occurs with the Sambia of Papua-New Guinea (Herdt 1981), a

pseudonym given by Herdt. Here, younger males fellate older men in order to ingest their "masculinizing" semen, where performing the act is the way to enter adulthood and achieve a position in the tribe. While Classical Greece and Rome are often cited for similar patterns, Trumbach (1998) argues that this also characterized pre-modern England. To label this behavior as bisexual would require only considering the behavior component, ignoring identity and attraction as well as the social context.

Situational bisexuality is another form that bisexuality can take. Here, individuals have sex with same-sex partners in prisons or other single-sex total-institutions (Kunzel 2002), like same-sex boarding schools. Situational bisexuality highlights the difference between actively desiring same-sex partners and seeking them out when opposite-sex partners are available, versus having sex with partners of the same-sex because opposite-sex partners are not available. To label situational bisexuality as plain bisexuality would be to privilege behavior over self-identity or attraction.

There are also those who engage in same-sex behavior because of financial need. These individuals are sometimes known as being "gay for pay." Then, there are labels which privilege self-identity over behaviors or attraction, one might consider the term bi-curious or questioning among these types of identity-privileging labels.

Yet there are also men who engage in the behaviors but reject identity labels. Savin-Williams (2005) contends that this is an increasingly common occurrence among sexual minority youth, and it has also been documented in other sexual minority populations. For example, Boykin (2005) discusses African-American men who have sex with same-sex partners while maintaining a heterosexual identify, describing themselves as "on the down low." These men clearly privilege their sexual identity over their sexual behaviors (see Carrillo in press).

Defining bisexuality is thus complex for a whole host of reasons. First, the complexity of sexuality more generally problematizes any simplistic understanding of bisexuality. Bisexuality is also difficult to define in relation to homo or heterosexuality, particularly as these relationships vary significantly according to the levels of homohysteria and the generational understandings of sexuality (Plummer 2010). Furthermore, any definition of bisexuality is dependent on what component of sexuality is given greater significance. This definitional slippage makes measuring bisexuality in the individual or population a rather difficult task.

http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-29411-7

The Changing Dynamics of Bisexual Men's Lives
Social Research Perspectives
Anderson, E.; McCormack, M.
2016, XV, 193 p. 6 illus., Hardcover
ISBN: 978-3-319-29411-7