

an older brother than heterosexuals; perhaps they were influenced towards more feminine traits by the fact that the conventionally masculine niche had already been occupied. Obviously, having an older brother does not in itself cause homosexuality, but as will be seen in Chapter 3, the way our parents related to us when we were children has far more influence on our sexuality than genes.

An example of how birth order is influential in general, and of how the firstborn child can be the vehicle for parental expectations and emotional problems in particular, is Prince Charles. Royal biographers have tended to suggest that he was born with an innate shyness, inhibition and lack of confidence. It is, however, far more likely that these traits derived from the treatment received at the hands of his father, Prince Philip – although, as will be explained in Chapter 3, Charles's early care from his mother and nanny were also influential. The journalist Jonathan Dimbleby, who was given full access to Charles and his personal papers in writing his biography, portrays the problem as a clash of innate personalities, with Charles as the shy, sensitive one and Philip as domineering and insensitive, if well-meaning. Whilst there is no doubt that both were like this, there is good reason to doubt that the causes were genetic.

Tommy Lascelles, a leading courtier, described Philip as 'rough, ill-mannered, uneducated and probably not faithful'. Effectively orphaned at the age of ten, Philip had a childhood of severe emotional deprivation, with separated parents, and he used his firstborn son as the prime carrier for this emotional legacy. There are innumerable well-documented examples of Philip's belittling, sometimes even cruel and hostile, attitude to his son from a young age, and it is highly probable that this contributed to a melancholic tinge to his psychology. Charles told Dimbleby that his father was 'unable or unwilling to proffer affection and appreciation', and the Queen bowed to all Philip's demands in regard to Charles's care and education. He regarded his son as over-sensitive and in need of toughening up before he could face the harsh realities of life, so he sent him to Cheam, the strict preparatory boarding school that he had attended, and subsequently to Gordonstoun, his harsh public school. Whilst all the princes were sent to these schools, it was particularly inappropriate to send Charles, who was known to be a fragile, shy boy. Philip explained his reasoning as follows: 'Children

may be indulged at home but school is expected to be a spartan and disciplined experience.' Quite how he perceived his own fierceness as indulgence, when his son was at home, is hard to imagine. Not satisfied with this, Philip had even gone to considerable lengths to sack the most loving figure in Charles's early life, his nanny Helen Lightbody, for being 'too indulgent'.

At Cheam, Charles suffered terribly from homesickness. He later recalled that 'it was not easy to make a large number of friends . . . I'm not a gregarious person so I've always had a horror of gangs . . . I've always preferred my own company or just a one to one'. According to Dimbleby, he tried to be friendly 'but an emotional and impetuous nature was severely constrained by an outward reserve and formality – behind which he also concealed his painful insecurity'. If Cheam was 'loathed . . . a misery to him', Dimbleby's words, Gordonstoun was torture. The Queen would have preferred him to go to Eton because it was near their home at Windsor, but this proximity was precisely Philip's reason for preferring Gordonstoun, in the wilds of Scotland. According to Philip, a boy with such a 'shy and reticent disposition' needed 'something that would draw him out and develop a little more self-assertiveness in him'. Only someone closed to the emotional needs of others could have imagined that the vicious environment then found at Gordonstoun would have this effect.

For vicious it was. Accounts of the school at that time, such as that by his contemporary William Boyd, the novelist, confirm that mental cruelty was the norm. A gang of thugs roamed Boyd's house, beating up small boys and extorting food and money. Charles's housemaster was an intimidating disciplinarian with a capricious temper. Dimbleby writes that the other boys picked on him 'maliciously, cruelly and without respite'. They developed a culture in which talking to the heir to the throne led to instant social excommunication. Socially unskilled to start with, Charles was up against a deliberate campaign to isolate him. This was carried over on to the rugger pitch, where it was a matter of honour for thugs to crush him. William Boyd recalled hearing boys boast to each other, 'We just punched the future King of England.' Writing home, Charles stated that 'I don't like it much here. I simply dread going to bed as I get hit all night long . . . I can't stand being hit on the head



by a pillow now.' His love of politeness and feeling for the spiritual side of life were deeply offended by the crude language and lack of sensibility of his fellow pupils. He sought consolation in pottery and music. It might be supposed that Philip, as a previous pupil at the school, would have realized that this would have happened to a future king – especially one with Charles's personality.

Charles's unique position as firstborn heir to the throne also wrote his part in the wider family script, that of a focus for mockery. Both Philip and his uncle, Lord Mountbatten, made Charles the constant object of banter and ridicule, while they doted on his immediate sibling, Princess Anne. A fanatical horse-lover, she rapidly acquired the language by which equestrian enthusiasts communicate and spent hours debating equine arcania with her parents. Time and again, Charles would be revealed as ignorant of the meaning of some highly technical term. At mealtimes he would be tested and found wanting, to general amusement and his humiliation.

It may be that Philip envied his son his role as heir to the throne, since he himself was sidelined as consort to the Queen. This would have made the humiliation satisfying to the father, but Charles's siblings joined in too. Where one's brother is given huge extra importance the desire to bring him down can be powerful – especially so if encouraged by one's father. Whilst Charles's brothers, too, were sent to Gordonstoun, he was the one upon whom Philip focused his emotional insecurities most strongly. Had Prince Andrew or Prince Edward been born first, they would have suffered the same fate and almost certainly have been very like Charles. Just as Anne managed to monopolize the family niche of horse-lover, Andrew adopted his father's Jack-the-lad attitudes to women and Edward, typical of the lastborn, was the most radical, deviating from the royal status quo with his career in theatre and television. Who knows, had their birth orders been reversed the thespian might have been Charles.

Of course, a special status is not conferred only because a child is firstborn. Physical beauty is another common peg for parental plotlines, especially in developed nations which are obsessed by looks. The beautiful reap a rich dividend from this. It should come as no surprise that newborns who have been independently rated as cute are held more by their mothers, who stare more into their eyes

and speak more baby-talk to them. Less attractive newborns get less of this kind of interaction and greater attention paid to physical needs, like burping and mouth wiping, and their mothers are more easily distracted from attending to them. When mothers of twins are observed, they give less attention to one of them if he or she is of low birth weight and looks slightly sickly. (Interestingly, both parents are more likely to claim that a newborn resembles the father than the mother, a fact that has been attributed to anxieties about paternity; this is no small matter, it would seem, because at least 10 per cent of children are not genetically related to the person they believe to be their biological father. This rises to one third in some low-income communities.) Preferential treatment continues into later childhood. For example, adults are more likely to give attractive seven-year-olds the benefit of the doubt after they have been naughty, saying that they doubt the child has done the wicked deed. They are less likely to believe the child will repeat the wickedness if it is attractive.

In adulthood, when shown pictures of models or average-looking women men are more likely to say they would help the beauty, whether it be in terms of lending money or something more extreme, like donating a kidney or jumping on a terrorist hand grenade. In the context of practically any positive quality you can think of, we tend to assume that good-looking people do it more, do it better and enjoy it more. Despite the Dumb Blonde stereotype, we expect attractive women as well as men to be intelligent. We assume they have more, better and more varied sex. If badly behaved, they are more likely to get away with it, whether it be shoplifting or cheating at exams – although, interestingly, the one crime they are more liable to be convicted of is fraud, because we assume that good-lookers are smooth-talking charmers. We are so in awe of them that, in experiments, when asked to stand next to strangers we will keep an average of 23 inches distance from attractive people compared to just 10 inches for the less attractive. We cut them more slack, and they are more assertive as a result. Asked by a researcher to wait in a room, attractive people only last three minutes before complaining whereas the less attractive wait nine.

Because we accord them such special status, the beautiful do in reality have a better time in most respects. As children we want them to be our friend, and as adults they are more popular with



that concern parents of infants. There is one study showing that infants sleep and feed better if the care is child-centred, but I know of none that have examined the long-term consequences of either kind of regime. The most widely used book, entitled *The Contented Little Baby Book*, should possibly be retitled *The Contented Little Parent Book*. But then, it could be that, in the end, it is better for the baby if its parents get their sleep because they are then able to meet its needs more calmly and empathically.

A particular problem for high-powered mothers is to allow the women who substitute for them to do a good job. A successful manager, for example, is used to ordering her subordinates to do her exact bidding and, if they do not, to getting rid of them. I know of several female executives who have sacked their nannies or childminders for not doing precisely as they were told – as if they were just another employee. These executives were totally unaware that, in doing so, they were seriously destabilizing their toddler, creating separation anxieties and insecurity. In some cases the executives were actually jealous of the minder's relationship with their child, fearing that it was 'too strong', and failing to grasp that this was precisely what their child needed if it was to be secure.

Overall, there is little doubt that being left in inadequate substitute care does create an increased risk of insecurity in toddlers. This is not quite as large a problem as one might expect in America and Britain. A surprisingly small 55 per cent of American mothers of a child under one do any paid work. In Britain (contrary to what one might imagine from reading the newspapers) astonishingly few under-three-year-olds have a working mother. Only 11 per cent have one who works full-time, and part-time work is done by a mere 27 per cent of mothers of under-threes: to put it the other way around, 66 per cent of toddlers have a mother who has no paid employment. Even where the mother does work, the majority place their children with relatives or friends who often provide excellent substitute care. The main problem is for that tiny minority of British toddlers who are left in day care with professionals, be they childminders or creches. The quality of at least half these set-ups is poor, making a good many children insecure. But there is another side to this coin.

For many women, staying at home with a small baby is deeply depressing. This creates just as much of a risk of insecurity – in fact,

a greater one. If we have the best interests of the child at heart, it is better for him or her to be in good substitute care than for the mother to stay at home and get depressed.

In Chapter 2, I described how the family script of Prince Charles made him the recipient of unwanted emotions, especially those of his father. His childhood also provides a fine illustration of the potential advantages of not being cared for by your mother. There is reason to suppose that Princess Elizabeth, as she then was, would not have been very responsive; instead, he was fortunate enough to have had more than adequate substitutes. The experience of separation from his working mother for most of his childhood during the daytime, and when she was away on affairs of state, probably did him no harm at all. It might actually have been worse for his wellbeing if she *had* been his full-time mother.

Writing to a friend soon after his birth on 14 November 1948, Elizabeth commented that 'I still find it difficult to believe I have a firstborn of my own.' Her subsequent behaviour suggests this incredulity continued because she spent very little time mothering him, doubtless encouraged by a husband who was not present at six of the first eight of Charles's birthdays. Elizabeth only saw her son for half an hour at 10a.m., and for bathing and bedtime in the evening. It should come as no surprise to learn that his first word was Nana – his name for his nanny, Helen Lightbody.

Even these brief daily encounters were curtailed by frequent absences. In November 1950, a week after Charles's second birthday, Elizabeth flew to Malta to join her husband where he was stationed as a naval officer. She was there until late December, during which time Charles stayed with his grandparents. Her perception of Charles's importance in her life at this time is powerfully illustrated by what happened when she returned. Her biographer, Sarah Bradford, states that the separation from her son had not caused 'any obvious consternation' and therefore she did not 'find it necessary to rush back to him'. Accordingly, she spent time at their home in London catching up on her correspondence and other administration. She also went with her mother to watch one of her horses compete in a race. Only after four days had passed did she finally visit her two-year-old son. Although upper class mothers at that time often played a minimal role in caring for their children,



few mothers would be so cool about seeing their toddler after a two-month gap, suggesting that she was not emotionally engaged, not longing to find out how he was developing or herself eager to enjoy the love that comes from a small child.

Although both his parents were in Britain on Charles's fifth birthday, neither made the journey to celebrate it with him at Windsor, where he was staying with his grandparents. This suggests how out of touch both parents must have been with what matters to a small child, and soon after his birthday they departed for a six-month tour of the Commonwealth. At its end their son was flown out to North Africa to be reunited with them on the deck of their yacht. Instead of approaching his mother, he joined a line of dignitaries who were waiting to shake her hand.

In terms of a crude reading of Bowlby's Attachment Theory, this sounds like a prescription for insecurity. But had Elizabeth been present more of the time there is good reason to believe that she would not have made a very responsive mother. As a small girl she had symptoms of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). Marion Crawford ('Crawfie'), her governess from the age of five, described a night-time ritual involving thirty toy horses, one foot high, on wheels at the end of her bed. Crawfie wrote that 'Stable routine was strictly observed. Each horse had its saddle removed nightly and was duly fed and watered.' The preoccupation went far beyond a normal child's craze, lasting the whole of her childhood. There were many other signs of OCD. At night she placed her shoes exactly under her chair at a particular angle with her clothes carefully folded on it, leaping out of bed to check the alignment. She had an obsessive way of lining up the brown coffee sugar granules given to her as a treat after meals.

Elizabeth only saw her parents for brief daily snatches and these obsessions were probably the result of the regime of her nanny, Alah Knight (who had also nurtured the Queen Mother). Named after the Islamic God, Alah was harsh. Crawfie said of her reign that 'the nursery was a State within a State. The Head of the State was Nanny.' She saw her task as to suppress and channel the unruly instincts of the child. Crying babies were not to be indulged, hungry babies must learn to adapt to regular, externally defined feeding times. Potties must be introduced as soon as possible and

regularly, always after breakfast. Given this obsessive regime, it is hardly surprising the princess had obsessions.

Her most personal relationships were with animals. She told Crawfie, 'If I am ever Queen I shall make a law that there must be no riding on Sundays. Horses should have a rest too.' She may have sought animal company because she was lonely. Crawfie recalls she 'was a very neat, serious, perhaps unusually good child. Until I came, she had never been allowed to get dirty . . . other children always had an enormous fascination, like mystic beings from a different world, and the little girls [Elizabeth and Margaret] used to smile shyly at those they liked the look of. They would have loved to speak to them and make friends but this was never encouraged. I often have thought it a pity.' Repression of emotion was the norm within the family. Lord Harewood, her uncle, said, 'It was a tradition not to discuss anything awkward', and the Queen Mother 'always swept the awkward things of life under the carpet'.

Just as Elizabeth was to leave her son frequently when he was small, so she had been left. When she was nine months old her parents disappeared on a state visit to the Antipodes. When they returned six months later, she did not recognize them. This need not have mattered had the substitute care been equivalent to that of a mother, but all she had was the tyranny of Alah. That her son had a very different experience when she, in turn, kept disappearing was totally due to the warmth and responsiveness of his substitute carers.

His nanny, Helen Lightbody, was in her early thirties when Charles passed into her care. She was passionate about him, and as expressively maternal as his mother was repressed. Despite all the disturbing experiences which followed, as described in Chapter 2, his infancy was probably a good one. One strong piece of evidence that Lightbody was nurturant and loving is that Prince Philip was against her. When it came to childcare, whatever he was against was almost certainly very good news for the mental health of a child. Jonathan Dimbleby, Charles's official biographer, sums up Philip's attitude to Lightbody as follows: 'From his well-meaning but unimaginative perspective, the Duke detected in Helen Lightbody, the Prince's nurse, an impediment to his son's proper development, an inclination on her part to favour his son over his daughter, indulging



the boy's "softness". Luckily for Charles, Philip did not arrange to get rid of Lightbody until he was old enough to withstand the loss, after the age of three. By then he had developed a relationship with an adequate substitute, Mabel Anderson, who had been Lightbody's junior since Charles's birth. After Lightbody's departure, Anderson became 'a haven of security, the great haven . . . a surrogate mother', according to Dimbleby. Charles remained very close to Anderson in adulthood.

Thus, if a physically absent mother may be one potential cause of insecurity, a loving, consistent substitute can not only compensate for the absence but may actually be better for the child than the original. Indeed, one study showed that children who had been made insecure by disturbing mothers were more likely to prosper if they were subsequently cared for during the day by substitutes. Another study found that infants of depressed mothers were less likely to be insecure if their mothers were out at work than those cared for full-time by a depressed mother. This is in accord with Bowlby's second prediction regarding the causes of insecurity, unresponsiveness. Being at home with a depressed or distracted mother is every bit as bad for a child as being cared for by a substitute, and may even be worse.

### *Insecurity in toddlers with full-time mothers*

There are many reasons why a mother may not be very well attuned to the world of infants and toddlers. She may find it hard to communicate without using words, and may be easily bored by the lack of intellectual activity or competition. Perhaps her own childhood has left her with only limited capacity to empathize with people of all ages, as well as babies. Drugs, alcohol, neurosis, depression or a disordered personality may make her very preoccupied with herself and unable to see life from another's standpoint, whatever the age, let alone being able to tune into an infantile world dominated by sensation rather than thought.

The unresponsive carer is liable to be intrusive, imposing meanings on the infant which he does not feel, telling him when he is hungry or sleepy or in need of a cuddle, instead of offering these in

response to his signals; at other times the carer may simply ignore communications altogether, or not recognize them for what they are. Such parents are liable to equate being responsive with 'giving in' to infant demands, believing that such 'indulgence' only serves to make them even more demanding (the doctrine of Poisonous Pedagogy, described in Chapter 3), an equation emphatically rejected by Bowlby. According to him, it is the infant whose needs are met who will be the undemanding one – not needy because she is satisfied. The clingy, angry, greedy child is like that not because she has been over-indulged but because she has been deprived and always left wanting more. Bowlby argues that you cannot spoil an infant and that it is only as she becomes older, after the early months, that the long hard slog of disciplining and denial of the child's instincts should begin – the demanding, as well as responsive, authoritative parenting in later childhood, which makes for a benign conscience.

There is a rhythm between responsive carers and their infants. They knit together their emotions with each other's behaviour, like ballroom dancers in time with each other and with the music. Unresponsive carers cannot manage the reciprocity, the open-ended give-and-take involved. But if a dancer is ignored by his partner, no lasting harm is done; the same is not true of an unresponsive carer and an infant.

Babies whose full-time mothers are unresponsive in early infancy are more likely to be insecure at twelve or eighteen months. Some sixty studies show that, on average, 62 per cent of infants with unresponsive mothers are subsequently insecure. Even more significant, the impact of early unresponsiveness on security is still present decades later. One study measured responsiveness of care at one, eight and twenty-four months for infants who were then followed up into adulthood. The degree of earliest responsiveness predicted whether that infant would be an insecure adult fully eighteen years later, despite a huge number of intervening events.

Studies like this suggest that about two-thirds of people's patterns stay the same between infancy and early adulthood, and if the pattern changes there is usually a clear reason. In a sample of people followed from infancy to twenty years, 78 per cent of those who had had no major problems in their lives, like divorcing