

Suggested responses: *Man Alive*

1. In the panel show discussion that followed these two reports, it was claimed that the report interviewers 'made no judgments and passed no opinions'. Find two quotes from the programme to prove or disprove this claim.

'Men who choose to love other men' – the use of the word 'choose' implies that some people in society still have the opinion that homosexuality is a choice.

'For many of us this is revolting' – this comment shows an obvious judgement, made by the report, that homosexuality is wrong.

2. In the panel show discussion, it was emphasised that homosexuals were able to speak for themselves in the two reports, without 'expert' analysis on homosexuality. How does this suggest that the BBC saw its role in these clips?

This suggests that the BBC saw its role as a reporter of people's experiences rather than in a role that analyses and makes judgements about the experiences of others. In this way, the report used the words of homosexuals to accurately portray their lives. This is in contrast to the panel show discussion, where 'experts' were brought in to make judgements about what was included in the earlier footage.

3. What have you learnt from the report/s about the treatment of and attitudes towards homosexuality in 1960s society?

Homosexuals were often shunned and treated as second-class citizens. Many people chose to live a secret life, such as the man whose wife was interviewed at the beginning of the first episode. He married a woman to appear heterosexual, but later took his own life to avoid facing a court case where his real sexuality would be revealed. However, others were able to live as openly homosexual, such as the male hairdresser interviewed in the first programme. Some men, like the doctor, talked about their experiences of being accepted by their friends and colleagues. Yet he also mentioned that some people had the opinion that seeing a homosexual doctor was dangerous for young boys, suggesting damaging attitudes towards homosexuals as being potential criminals. Episode two revealed similar experiences, with the one of the first interviewees revealing that they were born a female but preferred to be known as a male, which had resulted in the estrangement of their family. Furthermore, a group of women in this programme spoke of how they felt safer in a private club, away from the unwanted advances of men.

4. If you watched both reports, how did this treatment and attitude differ when referring to male and female homosexuality?

Both reports featured people who spoke about how their sexuality had been accepted by their friends and colleagues and people who had been ostracised because of their sexuality. The fundamental difference between the two was that male homosexuality was illegal until 1967, whereas female homosexuality had not been included in the law.

5. Do the reports support or oppose the suggestion that 1960s Britain was a 'permissive' and more liberal society? Explain your answer with reference to your own knowledge of 1960s culture and society.

The reports offer experiences supporting the idea that Britain had become more liberal, as some homosexuals were able to enjoy a life where they did not feel the need to hide their sexuality. However, this was not a universal experience and many of the attitudes described by the interviewees point to the limits of 'permissiveness' in sixties Britain.

6. To discuss in class: How does the fact that these are BBC documentaries affect their usefulness to you in analysing 1960s society?

The documentary nature means that people's lived experiences were told in their own words, meaning that this is a very useful method of learning about the treatment of and attitude towards homosexual people in Britain at this time. However, there were a limited number of interviews in each film, something that was later discussed in the panel show, limiting the scope of representation. Therefore, it is unclear how far these experiences reflect those of wider homosexual society.

7. Following the reports, an 'expert' panel was interviewed about the contents. How do the attitudes of the panel add to your understanding of how people responded to homosexuality in the 1960s?

Most of the panel appeared to be supporters of homosexual rights; however, as they discussed the ideas further, it appeared that some negative attitudes were ingrained and unnoticeable to the panellists. For example, the doctor used the term 'normal boys' to describe non-homosexuals. This suggests that there were many such attitudes, like the comments by the narrator of the documentaries, which were considered non-judgemental but actually revealed negative attitudes.

8. The BBC dedicated two programmes to report on the experiences of homosexuals and then constructed an 'expert' panel to analyse this in further detail. What does this suggest about how broadcasters viewed their role in society?

It suggests that broadcasters saw it as their role to report on and critique matters of current affairs and public interest, sometimes offering judgement on such issues.