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The Lesbian Personality

By JUNE H. HOPKINS

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to fill the void in objective investigation into the personality factors of lesbians. Although the subject of male homosexuality has been investigated exhaustively, it was not until relatively recently that studies concerned with lesbianism have been published, beginning with Armon (1960), then Bene (1965), Kaye *et al.* (1967) and Kenyon's series of articles in 1968. These papers have all attempted to take the subject out of the myth and psychoanalytic theory stages and bring it into the light, to determine whether the many theories, which at times have been based upon knowledge gleaned from male homosexual studies, have any objective, quantifiable basis. For example, one view stated by Caprio (1957) 'that the vast majority of lesbians are emotionally unstable and neurotic . . .' is a view commonly held as true almost by definition in psychiatric circles. It might be that this type of observation has been too subjectively made, on the basis of psychiatric interviews of otherwise neurotic women, who also may have been homosexually inclined.

It is the purpose of this study to describe 'the lesbian personality' with more accuracy and objectivity than has been attempted hitherto.

This paper presents the hypothesis that there are no personality factors, either primary or second order factors as observed on Cattell's 16 P.F. Test, which will be statistically significantly different between the lesbian and heterosexual groups. This hypothesis is consistent with Simon and Gagnon's (1967) contention that '. . . in most cases the female homosexual follows conventional female patterns . . .' although they were not discussing personality factors when making this statement.

Material and Subjects

The Standard Progressive Matrices (SPM) was used as the intelligence test to hold intelligence constant as a factor. Raymond B. Cattell's 16 Personality Factor (16 PF) Questionnaire (1957) was selected as the primary instrument for this investigation because it was considered essential to use a multi-factor personality inventory to get as discrete and selective a differentiation between the two groups as possible.

The subjects for this study consisted of two groups of women, 24 lesbians and 24 heterosexual women. The heterosexual group was composed of one single, one divorced and 22 married women. The lesbian group consisted of two married, two divorced, and 20 single women.

Procedure

In an attempt to keep constant as many variables as possible involving the 48 women in this study, the women have been matched individually for age, intelligence and professional or educational background. The mean age of both groups is 31·8 years. The professional backgrounds have been matched whenever possible, if not perfectly, groupings have been made within professional status, e.g., a statistical clerk matched against a secretary-typist. In the event that one of the subjects was unemployed, her total number of years education was then matched by an individual of the same age and intelligence (as determined by the SPM) with an equal number of years of education.

The sexual orientation of each woman was determined by her own rating on the Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale (Kinsey *et al.* 1953). The women rating themselves between 0 and 2 were placed in the heterosexual group, while those rating themselves between 4 and 6 were placed in the homosexual group. Anyone rating herself as 3 (bisexual) was eliminated from this study.

All 48 women involved in this research were volunteer subjects and free from psychotic disorder at the time of assessment. The heterosexuals were selected at random from among women in church groups, schoolmasters' wives, hospital colleagues, etc., so that their age, education, and professional range would be as disparate as possible. The 24 lesbians

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were then selected individually by careful matching from a group of 105 lesbians, who had been tested at an earlier date. Twenty-three of the lesbians were members of the Minorities Research Group (MRG), but the last was not affiliated with any homophile group. The MRG is a lesbian organization particularly dedicated to participating in research; hence it is appreciated that these particular individuals may not be typical of lesbians generally. The same limitation of representation may be true of the heterosexual group as well, because people generally who volunteer to test for projects are not necessarily typical of the group they represent.

The women were tested in groups of at least two or more with similar testing procedures maintained for all subjects to assure standard administration. The subjects were given a battery of seven tests, including those used in this study, the 16PF and the SPM.

Results

Each subject was matched individually for intelligence, using the Standard Progressive Matrices score. The mean scores were 49·2 for the lesbian group and 49·5 for the heterosexual group. The means of both groups on the individual 16 PF scores are shown in Table 1. For a full, descriptive account of the 16 individual factors, see the 16 PF Handbook. (Cattell and Eber, 1957).

Factor A shows the lesbian group to be significantly more (·01) reserved, detached, critical and cool (Schizothymic) than the control group. Factor E shows the lesbian group to be significantly more (·01 level) dominant, assertive and progressive than the control group. Factor M shows the lesbian group to be significantly more (·01 level) careless of practical matters and more bohemian (autia) than the control group. Factor Q2 shows the lesbian group to be significantly more (·01 level) self-sufficient than the control group. It is of interest to note that Factor Q4 shows the control group to be significantly more (·05 level) tense and driven (High ergic tension) than the lesbian group.

Second Order Factors

Using Cattell's second order factors, which are undoubtedly more discriminating than the individual primary factors, the findings are listed in Table II.

Factors I and II show no significant differences on the low vs. high anxiety or the introversion vs. extraversion clusters respectively. Factor III shows a statistically significant difference ($p < \cdot 02$), which indicates the lesbian group to be higher on alert poise cluster than the heterosexual group, as well as higher ($p < \cdot 01$) on the independence cluster.

Discussion

As is apparent from the data presented in Tables I and II, the basic hypothesis that there

Table I

Using sign rank test of differences

Factor	Les. mean	Hetero. mean	Level of significance
*A	3·54	5·25	·01
B	8·12	8·01	N.S.
C	4·95	5·45	N.S.
*E	6·70	5·00	·01
F	5·04	5·41	N.S.
G	4·58	5·33	N.S.
H	5·16	5·29	N.S.
I	4·54	5·33	N.S.
L	5·87	4·91	N.S.
*M	7·20	6·04	·01
N	5·33	4·75	N.S.
O	5·41	6·50	N.S.
Q1	7·95	7·29	N.S.
*Q2	7·16	5·00	·01
Q3	5·83	4·50	N.S.
*Q4	5·08	6·41	·05

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TABLE II

Factor I	Factor II
Low vs high anxiety	Introversion vs extraversion
Lesbians 5·35	Lesbians 4·48
Heterosexuals 6·25	Heterosexuals 5·17
Not significantly different	Not significantly different
Factor III	Factor IV
Tenderminded vs alert, poise	Subduedness vs independence
Lesbians 6·57	Lesbians 8·82
Heterosexuals 5·30	Heterosexuals 6·12
$p < \cdot 02$	$p < \cdot 01$

would be no differentiating main or second order factors on the 16 PF between the lesbian and the heterosexual groups was not confirmed on five of the main factors and on two of the second order factors.

Because it is appreciated that these small samples of women are undoubtedly not random samples of the population, it is felt particularly essential to reiterate in the discussion that each of these women was paired individually with another, who matched her in age, intelligence and either profession or educational background. The differences between the scores on the 16 PF Questionnaire may or may not be attributable to sexual orientation, per se, but in any case, it is felt that the statistically significant differences found are extremely interesting and could be useful in the description of lesbians generally.

Using the personality factors which Cattell (1957) has suggested to be indicative of neurotic profiles, C—Ego Weakness, F—Disurgency, G—lower in overt super-ego strength, O—higher in Guilt Proneness and higher on Q_4 Ergic Tension, the data from this study indicate the lesbian group to be lower on C, F, and G than the heterosexual group, though not significantly so, and the heterosexual group are higher on O and Q_4, though not significantly so. It appears, then, that while neither of the two groups is overtly neurotic, each has inclinations towards some of the personality factors which combine to form the 'neurotic' cluster. It is of interest that West (1968) refers briefly to a similar-sounding, yet so far unpublished, finding of Kenyon's using the Maudsley Personality Inventory. Kenyon, in a recently published paper (1968), found a significant difference between lesbians and controls reporting 'nervous breakdown', and further suggests that his investigation reveals 'personality problems and neurotic manifestations'. It would appear, then, that the question of the label 'neurotic' as applied to lesbians as a group is still somewhat in question, though not necessarily appropriate.

The finding of major significance in this study is considered to be concerned with Factor IV Independence, (Cattell and Eber, 1962). Since this particular factor is basically composed of three factors, Dominance (E), Bohemianism (M) and Self-Sufficiency (Q_2), all of which differentiated the lesbian and heterosexual groups at the ·01 level, plus being appropriately, consistently lower on the factors to be subtracted, Reserved (A) and Expedient (G) though not significantly lower, it would appear that there is little question as to the validity of this particular finding. Therefore, a good, descriptive generic term for the average lesbian would be 'independent'.

Furthermore, the scores show lesbians to be more reserved, more dominant, more bohemian and more self-sufficient. The fact that the lesbian group is significantly different on Factor III, alert poise, which is suggestive of a resilient personality, is considered another finding of importance, again one which suggests a less vulnerable personality that the traditional 'neurotic' label might have suggested. Inasmuch as the specific components making up Factor III were not all significantly different, except in the case of A, E and M, which have been discussed earlier, it is felt that a further subdivision of descriptive factors is not appropriate.

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Summary

With the data gathered from this investigation of a group of 24 lesbians and 24 heterosexual women, matched individually for age, intelligence and professional or educational background, an objective description of the lesbian personality as measured on the 16 PF test has been made, with no attempt to account for the differences noted between the two groups.

In light of the present findings, it is suggested that the traditionally applied 'neurotic' label is not necessarily applicable. The following terms are suggested as appropriately descriptive of the lesbian personality in comparison to her heterosexual female counterpart:

1. More independent.
2. More resilient.
3. More reserved
4. More dominant.
5. More bohemian.
6. More self-sufficient.
7. More composed.

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