HOMOSEXUALS' AND LESBIANS' PHILOSOPHIES OF HUMAN NATURE

LEONARD WELLER
MOTTI BENOZIO
Bar-Ilan University

The study compares 57 homosexuals and 45 lesbians on six dimensions of beliefs about human nature. On only one dimension, altruism-selfishness, was a significant difference found. While there are no similar studies of the comparison of attitudes and values, the findings are consistent with the few personality studies which likewise reported no differences between homosexuals and lesbians.

In this research we ask whether there are differences between homosexuals and lesbians in their philosophies of human nature. This is the first research which compares homosexuals and lesbians on their attitudes and values.

Indeed, in the psychological and sociopsychological literature there are but a few studies which have compared homosexuals to lesbians. For as Reiss (1980) has noted, most of the empirical psychological research on homosexuality has compared homosexuals with heterosexuals, in most instances the comparison being limited to male homosexuals with male heterosexuals. In a review of the application of Rorschach tests to the study of homosexuals, Reiss (1980) located sixteen studies. Only four of these concerned female homosexuals — who were compared with female heterosexuals — and not with male homosexuals. Numerous investigations have failed to show any consistent or clear-cut difference in terms of psychological adjustment between homosexuals and heterosexuals (Bell & Weinberg, 1978).

On the social level, a number of studies report that both lesbians and homosexuals feel lonely, unhappy and alienated while growing up and isolated from the heterosexual macroculture. They consequently turn to the homosexual microlulture for friends, emotional support and for the majority of social interaction (Albro and Tully, 1979). This we predict should lead to a greater similarity in values and philosophy of life among the homosexuals and lesbians. Also, similarity in philosophy of life would be expected to promote a higher degree of cohesiveness which would in turn enable them to better cope with the dominant heterosexual culture.

By examining the writings of philosophers, theologians and social scientists, Wrightsman (1964) concluded that there is general consensus that our beliefs about human nature consists of six basic dimensions.

Of particular interest for the study are sex differences on beliefs of human nature. Studies examining sex differences have consistently shown that women are more positive than men (Hochreich and Rotter, 1970; Wrightsman, 1964). Women also see human nature as more complex than men (Wrightsman, 1964).
METHOD

SUBJECTS

For obvious reasons there are inherent difficulties in obtaining a sample of homosexuals and lesbians. It is noted that the study was done in Israel, where attitudes towards homosexuality are less liberal than in the United States. The first attempt to obtain a sample was via an advertisement in one of the local papers:

"Research. Homosexuals and lesbians who are willing to participate in a pioneer sociological study (which requires answers to a questionnaire), please respond to post office box no. 27096, Tel-Aviv. The research is under the auspices of Bar-Ilan University and anonymity is, of course, guaranteed."

A second similar advertisement was placed in the same newspaper; this time, directed only to lesbians. One of the researchers (M.B.) became friendly with and was accepted by a number of homosexuals and lesbians (neither researcher is a homosexual). At a party in Tel-Aviv, in which a doctor from the Health Ministry examined the homosexuals for syphilis, 12 questionnaires were distributed and completed. In addition, a representative of the homosexual organization became interested in the study and helped distribute the questionnaire. All told, 57 questionnaires were completed by homosexuals and 45 by lesbians; a total of 102. This number does not include 18 questionnaires which were cancelled for various reasons.

The respondents answered the standard background questions. There is an age difference of less than three years, and both groups are almost identical in the degree of education, ethnic background and religiosity. Virtually all consider themselves not religious.

MEASURES

Wrightman (1964) constructed the Philosophies of Human Nature Scale, which measures one's beliefs about human nature according to the six dimensions. These can be divided into two subsets: the first three which relate to positive or negative beliefs about substantive characteristics of human nature and the latter three which indicate beliefs about the extent of individual differences in human nature. These six dimensions are: Trustworthiness and Optimism vs. Untrustworthiness and Cynicism, Strength of Will and Rationality vs. Lack of Will Power and Irrationality, Altruism vs. Selfishness, Variability vs. Similarity, Complexity vs. Simplicity, and Accuracy of First Impressions. It is a Likert-type scale, where subjects indicate their agreement or disagreement with each item by circling a number of +3 to -3. Wrightman's (1974) revised version of the Philosophies of Human Nature Scale was employed.

Table 1 presents the findings — the means scores for the two groups on each of the subscales of the Philosophies of Human Nature Scale, plus the results of the t test for each scale.

The means of the two groups are identical for four of the six comparisons. For the last subscale, there is a small, nonsignificant difference between the two groups. Only on one subscale, Altruism — Selfishness, is there a significant difference: A larger proportion of lesbians than homosexuals believe that people are basically good and altruistic.
TABLE 1: MEAN SCORES FOR HOMOSEXUALS AND LESBIANS ON THE SIX SUBSCALES OF THE PHILOSOPHIES OF HUMAN NATURE SCALE, AND THE RESULTS OF THE "T" TESTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Homosexuals</th>
<th>Lesbians</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness — Untrustworthiness</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strength of Will and Rationality —</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Will Power and Irrationality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altruism — Selfishness</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.30*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variability — Similarity</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity — Simplicity</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of First Impressions</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .01

DISCUSSION

One of three subscales on positive-negative beliefs about human nature proved to be significant: Lesbians see people as more altruistic and less selfish than do homosexuals. This is consistent with the American findings that women are more positive than men. On the other hand, there were no significant differences for the other two scales, Trustworthiness vs. Untrustworthiness, and Strength of Will Power and Rationality vs. Lack of Will Power and Irrationality, as well as on the other three subscales relating to beliefs in the extent of individual differences in human nature. Thus, taken as a whole, we find little differences between the homosexuals and lesbians in their attitudes toward people and the world.

Because this may be the only study which compared the beliefs of homosexuals with lesbians, a more comprehensive interpretation of the data is difficult. We believe that similar results would be found in other societies. This is because there is much social interaction between homosexuals and lesbians due to the limited meeting places available to them. The joint meetings, discussions and social activities might very well serve to increase their similarity in values and philosophies of life. Also from a functional point of view, greater cohesiveness as expressed by a similar philosophy of life would enable them to cope better with the outside world. Yet without evidence we cannot obviate the possibility that in more open societies than in Israel, the sexual differences found in a heterosexual population, viz., that women are more positive than men, might also be found for these two groups, so that lesbians would be more positive than homosexuals. In Israel where there is less toleration of homosexuality, the greater need for secretiveness may cause homosexuals and lesbians to meet each other more frequently than they would in San Francisco, and such meetings might serve to increase their similarity in values and in their philosophies of life.

REFERENCES


Requests for reprints should be sent to:

LEONARD WELLER,
Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
Bar-Ilan University,
52 100 Ramat Gan,
Israel.
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