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## Sexual Preference, Feminism, and Women's Perceptions of Their Parents

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*In an attempt to clarify the relation between parental variables, sexual preference, and sex-role attitudes, three groups of women were studied: lesbian feminists, heterosexual feminists, and heterosexual traditional women. The women were asked about their perceptions of their parents when they were in high school. The groups differed more from each other with respect to their perceptions of their fathers than their mothers. The perceived attitudes of the father were much more important in differentiating lesbian feminists from heterosexuals than in differentiating heterosexual feminists from heterosexual traditional women. Both the heterosexual groups (feminist and traditional) reported having a more affectionate and involved father who also encouraged them more in the expression of anger than the lesbian feminists reported. The results suggest women's father relationships must not be obscured in research and support Johnson's hypothesis that the father relationship is more central than the mother relationship in sex typing and especially in the specifically sexual aspects of sex typing.*

Many studies guided by psychoanalytic, social learning, or social role perspectives have stressed the importance of parental behavior and attitudes in the development of sex typing, including sex-role attitudes and sexuality.<sup>1</sup> (For a summary of various perspectives as they apply to sexuality see Acosta (1975) and as they apply to sex-role attitudes see Stockard (1974).) While earlier research indicates that the nature of an individual's relationship with his or her parents may be related to both sexuality and sex-role attitudes, there has been

<sup>1</sup>We use the term "sexuality" to refer to the lesbian-heterosexual distinction rather than "sex object choice" because the latter phrase has a heterosexual bias. Most lesbians see their lesbianism as involving a more complex set of attitudes than merely choice of sex object. We use "sexual preference" as a synonym for "sexuality" in the title for the sake of clarity but it should be understood to mean more than merely "choice of object."

little attempt to specify the possible differential relationship of parental variables to these two aspects of sex-role related behavior. It is the purpose of this study to investigate groups of women differentiated by their sex-role attitudes and their sexuality in order to clarify the relationship of their perceptions of their parents to both.

By studying lesbian feminists, heterosexual feminists, and heterosexual traditionals we hope to clarify the relation of perceived parental attitudes to these choices. While neither feminists nor lesbians have made a masculine gender identification — lesbians neither see themselves unconsciously as males (Armon, 1960) nor wish to be males (Wolff, 1971, p. 191) — both lesbians and feminists may be viewed as having rejected the traditional feminine role — lesbians have rejected the heterosexual expectations of femininity and feminists (both lesbian and heterosexual) have rejected at least some aspects of male dominance.

The basic hypothesis to be examined in this research is that these three groups of adult women will differ more in their reports of their fathers' attitudes and behavior than with respect to their mothers' attitudes and behavior. This hypothesis is based on an interpretation of psychoanalytic theory (Johnson, 1963, 1975) which suggests that the relationship with the father is more critical than the relationship with the mother in the encouragement of sex-typed behavior in both males and females. Using Parsons' (1970) "reciprocal role" perspective, Johnson suggests that fathers play a role vis-à-vis their daughters differing from the role they play vis-à-vis their sons in such a way as to reinforce "femininity" in the daughter and "masculinity" in the son. Essentially girls are reinforced in adopting the heterosexual aspects of femininity by interacting with their fathers in a way that mimics (within the limits of the incest taboo) adult heterosexual relationships, including the dominance of the male. The mother, on the other hand, because of her early power over children of both sexes, cannot play a complementary feminine (subordinate) role to her son in quite the same way a father can play a complementary masculine (dominant) role to his daughter. The boy, therefore, also tends to be reinforced in "masculinity" (and male dominance) in his relationship with his father more so than in his relationship with his mother. Johnson (1975) further specifies that it is the specifically sexual aspects of sex-typed behavior that the father relationship most affects. Thus, a second major hypothesis to be examined here is that lesbians will differ more from heterosexuals with respect to the father than heterosexual traditionals will differ from heterosexual feminists.

## PREVIOUS RESEARCH

### *Parental Relations and Sexuality*

A number of studies report a higher proportion of lesbians than heterosexuals indicating less close relationships with their parents, including a higher

proportion of death and divorce among their parents as well as less identification with parents (Chafetz, Beck, Sampson, West, & Jones, 1976; Gundlach & Riess, 1968; Kenyon, 1968; Poole, 1972). Among those studies in which the subjects' relation with both parents could be assessed, the majority give some indication that there are greater differences between lesbians and heterosexuals with respect to their relationship with their fathers than there is with respect to their mothers (Bene, 1965a; Kaye, Berl, Clare, Eleston, Gershwin, Gershwin, Kogan, Torda, & Wilbur, 1967; Kremer & Rifkin, 1969; Swanson, Loomis, Lukesh, Cronin, & Smith, 1972; Loney, 1973). Most of these studies report that lesbians had a less warm and stable relationship with their fathers than heterosexuals, while few found marked differences between the groups with regard to mothers. Bene's study (1965a), which is the best methodologically, supports this most clearly. She found that of the 68 items on the Anthony-Bene Family Relations Test concerning both positive and negative remembered childhood feelings about the father, 24 items showed significant differences between female homosexuals and female heterosexuals. Only four of the 68 items when applied to the mother showed differences. Although Bene attributed the lack of differences with measures regarding the mother to the fact that she studied nonpatient populations, later studies using patient populations of female homosexuals and heterosexuals (e.g., Kaye et al., 1967) have also found few differences between the groups on measures of reported relations with the mother.

The above studies, with the exception of Bene's, have some methodological difficulties, however. The Kaye study (1967) and the Swanson study (1972) used subjects who were patients and who therefore are unrepresentative of the general population of lesbians and heterosexuals. These studies also used psychiatrists' reports and case records of patients to assess parental relationships. It is possible that such procedures allow the psychiatrists' own biases to influence the findings. The Kremer and Rifkin (1969) study on a group of "problem" high school students also used atypical subjects and in addition did not employ a control group. Loney's (1973) research suffers from being based on a sample of only 11 lesbians and 12 control subjects.

The three studies which have purported to find homosexuality in females linked to a "disturbed" mother relationship were all done on nonpatient populations but have other methodological difficulties. While Wolff states that the mother's being "the strongest force in the development of lesbianism" is "clearly shown" in her statistical tables (1971, p. 145) this is not obvious from the statistics she presents, which are based on five or six dichotomous items, several of which involve comparison with siblings. Saghir and Robins (1973) support their conclusions concerning lesbians' "disorganized" mother relationship and "more intimate" father relationship with only two items. In one item "identification" with the mother and "positive relationship" with the mother are not separated, and in the other item the response categories of "identifying primarily with the father" and "identifying with neither parent" are combined (1973, p. 301). This is not a very firm basis for their conclusions. On the basis of responses to the Adjective Check List, Rosen concludes that maternal rejection

was important in over half of his 26 cases of nonpatient lesbians (1974, pp. 70-71). Rosen also gave his subjects questionnaires which included direct questions concerning parents but unfortunately did not employ a control group of heterosexuals.

#### *Parental Relations and Sex-Role Attitudes*

The research literature concerning parental relations, sex-role attitudes, and sex typing (as opposed to sexuality) is too extensive to be fully reviewed here. Although the evidence is not definitive, a number of studies suggest that "more feminine" women have had closer relationships with their fathers than "less feminine" women. These studies have been summarized by Johnson (1963, 1975) and Biller (1971). Less is known specifically about the relationship feminists have had with their parents. Jean Stockard (1980) found, however, using scores on a feminism scale (Acker, Grether, Ewart-Tonkinson, Naffziger, Peterson, Skold, Silveira, & Stockard, 1974) as her measure, that more feminist college women reported "worse" relations with their fathers in high school than did more traditional women. She also found that feminists reported less similarity to and less frequent associations with the mother than nonfeminists and that both parents had more nontraditional sex-role related attitudes than those reported by the more traditional young women in the sample. Like the studies on sexuality, however, many of the studies examining influences on sex-role attitudes do not allow one to compare the relationship with the mother and the father to sex-role related attitudes in the daughter.

#### SPECIFIC HYPOTHESES

As indicated earlier, the basic hypotheses we examined are that lesbian feminists, heterosexual feminists, and heterosexual traditionals would differ more in their reports of their parents' attitudes and behavior with respect to their fathers than with respect to their mothers and also that lesbians and heterosexuals would differ more with respect to their fathers than would feminists and traditionals who are heterosexual. We expected that heterosexuals would report more closeness and involvement on the part of their fathers than lesbians and that traditionals would report the closest relations of all.

In addition to considering only the closeness of subjects' relationship to their fathers, as did the studies reported above, we also expected to find differences among the three groups in their reports of other attitudes of their fathers: their protectiveness, encouragement of independence, and respect for the daughter. Previous work on parental influences on sex-role related attitudes of college students has suggested that women who are more traditional in their attitudes

have fathers who are seen not only as "close" to them (Stockard, 1974, 1980) but also as very protective of them, and who do not encourage their being independent and who do not take them very seriously or respect them (Johnson, 1955, 1963). In terms of the present study, we hypothesized that heterosexual traditional women would report more protection from their fathers and less independence granting and respect than would feminist women. It was difficult to predict how lesbian women would perceive their fathers in terms of these variables. To the extent that these variables are correlated with "closeness" one might expect lesbians to report the least amount of protection, the most independence granting and the least respect, since we predict they are not "close" to their fathers. On the other hand, there is some evidence that lesbians come from repressive homes (Chafetz et al., 1976). Thus, one might expect lesbians to see their fathers as not encouraging their independence.

With regard to similarity, previous work (Stockard, 1974, 1980) has shown that although more nontraditional women have rated themselves as less like their fathers, when the closeness of the father-daughter relationship is controlled this association reverses so that the more nontraditional women rate themselves as more like the father. We anticipated that in this study when we hold the quality of the relationship constant, in a multivariate analysis, lesbians would report themselves most similar to their fathers, feminists next most similar, and traditionals least similar to their fathers. We anticipated that lesbian feminists would see themselves as more similar to their fathers not because we assume them to be male-identified but simply on the grounds that feminist women who are not heterosexual are likely to be self-supporting and independent and hence might view themselves as playing a role more like that of their fathers.

#### METHODOLOGY

##### *The Sample*

The lesbian women who completed our questionnaire were all acquaintances of one of the authors, who was at the time a graduate student in an interdisciplinary studies program at the University of Oregon. In most cases, the questionnaires were distributed to the lesbian women by this researcher with the explanation that she was conducting research comparing the socialization experiences of lesbians and nonlesbians as part of her degree program and needed their help. She also pointed out that it would be an interesting questionnaire to take. Most of the lesbian subjects became quite involved with the questions and many wrote extensive comments in the space provided at the end of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was anonymous, and the subjects' names were not attached to the questionnaires. The questionnaire itself did not ask about sexual orienta-

tion, but the researcher knew personally that the women identified themselves as lesbians. Some of the women were attending college, and those who were not in school were employed or seeking employment. Subjects were assigned to "feminist" and "traditional" categories on the basis of their responses to a feminism scale (Acker et al., 1974) included in the questionnaire.

We had thought originally that we might find enough lesbians who were not feminists to make a four-way comparison between lesbian feminists, lesbian traditionals, heterosexual feminists, and heterosexual traditionals. As it turned out, none of the lesbians who responded to our questionnaire could properly be classified as "traditional." Eight lesbians did not respond as those labeled "feminist" did, but they were only marginally nonfeminist. A comparison of their responses on our measure of feminist attitudes to the responses of the traditional heterosexuals showed significant differences ( $t = 2.58$ ;  $df = 34$ ;  $p = .014$ ). Thus since these women could not properly be labeled "traditionals" or "feminists" they were excluded from further analysis.

The heterosexual subjects in our sample consisted mainly of women living in one of two married university student housing projects in the town. Not all the women living in married student housing were living with their husbands; some were divorced with children. Questionnaires were distributed during the day by simply knocking on doors in these projects and asking women if they would fill out a questionnaire concerning their current attitudes and their family backgrounds. The questionnaires were left with those who agreed to fill them out and were picked up later (usually the same day) by the researcher. Preliminary examination of the responses of these subjects to the feminism scale suggested that more heterosexual feminists were needed if we were to have enough subjects in this category, and therefore some graduate students in sociology who were heterosexuals and feminists but who did not live in either project were also asked to fill out questionnaires. Our final sample then consisted of 46 lesbian feminists, 29 heterosexual feminists, and 35 heterosexual traditionals.

Since we did not ask the married women in the housing projects explicitly about their sexual orientation, we may have some lesbian women in this group. This, however, would work against, rather than for, our finding any significant differences among the groups. In other words, if there were lesbians in the heterosexual groups and they responded as did the known lesbians the chance of our finding significant differences between the lesbian group and the "heterosexuals" would be lessened. There were also women among the lesbians who had had considerable heterosexual experience, but we considered them to be lesbians because they considered themselves to be lesbians.

Although we made no attempt to match our three groups systematically, they are roughly comparable with respect to most of the variables listed in Table I. The mean age of the group was 25 years, with a range of from 20 to 30. There was not a higher incidence of death or divorce in the families of the lesbian

Table I. Comparison of Groups on Age and Family Background Variables

	Lesbian feminists ( <i>N</i> = 46) (%)	Heterosexual feminists ( <i>N</i> = 29) (%)	Heterosexual traditionals ( <i>N</i> = 35) (%)
Age (mean)	25	26	25
Father living	91	100	87
Mother living	98	90	100
Parents divorced	22	17	23
Mother a housewife	44	50	46
Father an owner/mgr. or professional	41	45	38
Father blue collar	18	31	31
Father attended college	65	64	30
Mother attended college	61	56	43

group than in the families of the control group. Approximately four-fifths of the parents of all three groups were still married to each other. Approximately the same proportion (slightly less than half) of all the groups had mothers who were housewives. There were no differences between the groups in the kinds of jobs the remaining mothers held. Judging from their parents' education and occupation, most of our subjects were from lower middle class to upper middle class families. There was a slight trend for our sample of heterosexual traditionals to come from a somewhat lower class background than either the lesbian or the heterosexual feminists. A smaller proportion of traditionals have college-educated parents. We take these status differences into account when we present our findings.

#### Measures

In addition to standard background questions, the questionnaire we constructed contained a series of 51 statements about fathers and the same 51 statements repeated with reference to mothers. (The father statements were ordered first for half of the questionnaires and the mother statements first for the other half.) Subjects were asked to place a check on a 6-point scale ranging from "always true" to "never true" to indicate how true the statement was about the parent when the subject was living at home with them during high school ("around the 10th grade"). Generally these questions concerned the woman's perceptions of the degree to which her parent encouraged independence, the degree to which her parent was protective, the degree of respect and the degree of affection the parent had for the daughter and the degree to which the daughter felt similar to the parent.

At the end of the questionnaire a Feminism Scale was included which has established norms on a large college student population (Acker et al., 1974). Subjects who gave a "feminist" response to eight or nine of the nine items were considered feminists, and those who gave a "feminist" response to seven or less were considered traditionalists.

In order to test the hypotheses discussed above, scales were developed to measure subjects' perceptions of their parents' protectiveness, respect, encouragement of independence, affection and involvement, and the degree of similarity perceived by the subject between herself and each parent. Items were initially assigned to scales by three judges, and item analyses were performed on the basis of the total sample's response to them. For each item subjects responded to a 6-point scale ranging from "always true" to "never true," indicating how well they felt the item described each parent's behavior when they were living at home during high school. Item scores were summed to yield scale scores. Items correlating .45 or less with a given scale score were discarded. One item, originally included on the Encouragement of Independence scale but deleted because of a low item-scale correlation, was retained as a separate item for analysis. This item involved the parent's reaction to the subject's expression of anger. Sample items for each final scale are listed in Table II. The data obtained from the scales were analyzed using two-way analysis of variance and discriminant analysis.

Table II. Sample Items from Parent Behavior and Attitudes Scales

Scale	When I was in high school my mother (father):
1. Expression of Anger (1 item)	1. Encouraged me to express my anger.
2. Protectiveness (6 items)	1. Tried to protect me from unpleasant events. 2. Would not let me go places and do things by myself.
3. Affection and involvement (8 items)	1. Sometimes acted as if I were invisible. <sup>a</sup> 2. Was interested in my activities.
4. Encouragement of independence (8 items)	1. Encouraged me to make my own decisions. 2. Encouraged me to express my point of view.
5. Respect (8 items)	1. Respected my judgment. 2. Did not think my ideas could be very important <sup>a</sup>
6. Perceived similarity (4 items)	1. Tended to react to things the same way I did. 2. Had life goals that were similar to mine.

<sup>a</sup>Scores of this item were reversed in forming the scales.

## RESULTS

Because the traditional heterosexuals were from a somewhat lower class background, scores for each scale were subjected to an analysis of variance with father's occupation, father's education, and mother's education treated as independent variables. The results showed that only with respect to the father's education were there significant differences. These occurred on only three of the 12 scale scores. In families in which the father had at least attended college, the daughter reported him to grant more independence ( $p < .007$ ), reported receiving slightly more respect from her mother ( $p < .04$ ), and reported being more similar to the father ( $p < .05$ ). Since these differences are relatively minor, we will present our results for the total sample and then specify them in terms of two separate analyses of variance in which the subjects are matched on level of father's education. Following this we do a discriminant analysis on the total sample.

### Analysis of Variance

Scores for each scale were subjected to two-way analyses of variance with sexuality/sex-role attitudes of subject and sex of parent as factors. The results are summarized in Table III. Results indicated considerable agreement between lesbian feminists, heterosexual feminists, and heterosexual traditional women

Table III. Means and Standard Deviations for Parent Behavior and Attitudes Scales<sup>a</sup>

		Lesbian feminists		Heterosexual traditionalists		Heterosexual feminists	
		Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
1. Not encouraging expression of anger	<i>M</i>	4.40	5.07	4.53	4.47	4.17	4.14
	<i>SD</i>	(.91)	(.81)	(.94)	(1.07)	(.98)	(1.11)
2. Showing less protectiveness	<i>M</i>	20.49	22.56	20.10	20.12	21.42	22.48
	<i>SD</i>	(4.08)	(4.01)	(5.08)	(4.88)	(5.08)	(4.31)
3. Showing less affection	<i>M</i>	20.87	27.14	21.79	24.15	18.74	24.63
	<i>SD</i>	(6.59)	(6.22)	(7.60)	(9.84)	(7.60)	(7.22)
4. Not encouraging independence	<i>M</i>	18.81	20.99	18.41	17.96	17.48	17.57
	<i>SD</i>	(4.59)	(5.01)	(7.63)	(6.56)	(5.28)	(4.92)
5. Showing less respect	<i>M</i>	22.23	24.90	21.77	21.70	21.63	18.69
	<i>SD</i>	(7.09)	(6.97)	(8.01)	(8.31)	(6.68)	(6.43)
6. Showing less similarity	<i>M</i>	15.66	15.95	13.96	13.50	14.28	14.80
	<i>SD</i>	(2.91)	(3.62)	(3.55)	(4.03)	(4.40)	(3.83)

<sup>a</sup>We use *F* levels to allow us to make inferences within the sample, but caution must be used in generalizing these findings.

concerning differences between their mothers and fathers when they were growing up. Mothers were seen as showing them more respect than fathers ( $F = 6.31$ ,  $df = 1/94$ ,  $p < .02$ ). Mothers were also seen as being more protective ( $F = 8.01$ ,  $df = 1/95$ ,  $p < .01$ ), more affectionate and involved ( $F = 34.03$ ,  $df = 1/89$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and more accepting of expression of anger than fathers ( $F = 5.55$ ,  $p < .03$ ), although a significant interaction on the anger variable indicates that this difference was mainly contributed by lesbian subjects. No differences were seen between parents in the extent of their daughter's perceived similarity to them or in their granting of independence.

On three of the six variables, differences were found in how lesbians, feminists, and traditional subjects<sup>2</sup> saw *both* their parents: A trend was indicated on the respect variable ( $F = 2.39$ ,  $df = 2/94$ ,  $p < .10$ ) with the direction of means indicating greatest parental respect seen by feminists, less by traditionals, and still less by lesbians. In two-way comparisons only the differences in scores of the feminists and traditionals approached significant ( $t = 1.96$ ,  $df = 65$ ,  $p < .10$ ). On the expression of anger there was a significant difference ( $F = 3.71$ ,  $df = 2/100$ ,  $p < .03$ ), with the direction of means indicating that feminists saw their parents as allowing most expression of anger, traditionals less, and lesbians least. However, a significant interaction ( $F = 10.42$ ,  $df = 2/100$ ,  $p < .001$ ) suggests that this finding was mainly contributed by lesbian reports of their fathers' encouraging little expression of anger. Finally, a difference was found on the variable of perceived similarity ( $F = 5.93$ ,  $df = 2/95$ ,  $p < .01$ ), with traditionals seeing themselves as most similar, feminists moderately similar, and lesbians least similar to both of their parents. No differences were found for the groups on their perceptions of parental granting of independence, parental protectiveness, or parental affection.

Significant interaction effects indicate that for half of the variables there were differences among lesbian, feminist, and traditional groups in the differences they perceived between their parents. This effect was most marked in the report of parent encouragement of the expression of anger ( $F = 10.42$ ,  $df = 2/100$ ,  $p < .001$ ), where lesbians reported much less encouragement of expression of anger by fathers than by mothers ( $t = 6.06$ ,  $df = 44$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while no differences were found for feminist or traditional subjects. Interaction effects of borderline significance were also found for the variables of granting of independence ( $F = 2.80$ ,  $df = 2/90$ ,  $p < .07$ ) and protectiveness ( $F = 2.78$ ,  $df = 2/95$ ,  $p < .07$ ). Lesbians reported their fathers to be less likely to grant independence than their mothers ( $t = 2.99$ ,  $df = 38$ ,  $p < .01$ ), while no differences in granting of inde-

<sup>2</sup>For ease of presentation we sometimes refer to lesbians, feminists, and traditionals. It must be understood that these specifically refer to lesbian feminists, heterosexual feminists, and heterosexual traditionals, respectively.

pendence were reported by feminists or traditionals. Lesbians also reported more protectiveness from their mothers than from their fathers ( $t = 3.82$ ,  $df = 39$ ,  $p < .001$ ), while feminists and traditionals reported no differences between their parents.

In general these results held within groups when we broke the sample down into two groups based on whether or not the father had attended college. The only exceptions involved the variables of independence and respect. The borderline interaction effect of encouraging independence noted above was significant only among those subjects with highly educated fathers ( $F = 4.25$ ,  $df = 2/46$ ,  $p = .020$ ). Within this group, lesbian feminists reported their fathers as encouraging independence less than their mothers ( $t = 2.12$ ,  $df = 23$ ,  $p = .045$ ); but the two heterosexual groups reported their fathers encouraging independence as much as or more than their mothers ( $t = -.58$ ,  $df = 15$ ,  $p = .570$  for heterosexual feminists;  $t = -2.18$ ,  $df = 8$ ,  $p = .061$  for heterosexual traditionals). A borderline interaction effect also appeared with giving respect for the subjects with highly educated fathers ( $F = 2.63$ ,  $df = 2/47$ ,  $p = .083$ ). Fathers were reported to give less respect than mothers, but this was only significant for the lesbian feminists ( $t = 2.49$ ,  $df = 25$ ,  $p = .020$ ). With regard to protection, the interaction effect noted above was no longer significant. However, the same pattern of differences between mothers and fathers occurred within each education group ( $t = 2.42$ ,  $df = 25$ ,  $p = .023$  among subjects with college educated fathers;  $t = 3.17$ ,  $df = 13$ ,  $p = .007$  among subjects whose fathers did not go to college).

#### Discriminant Analysis

Because the various scales are intercorrelated and thus not statistically independent, the probability of getting significant differences among the groups in a series of  $F$  tests is increased if there are significant  $F$ s. To counter this problem we used discriminant analysis<sup>3</sup> (see Morrison, 1974; Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner, & Bent, 1975, pp. 434-467). Because the scales measuring independence and respect were highly correlated ( $r = .77$  for the mother score;  $r = .83$  for the father score) the scales were combined in the discriminant analysis.

<sup>3</sup>Discriminant analysis is a technique that is part of the general linear model and is used to determine the pattern of variables that most differentiates members of discrete groups. In many ways equations for the discriminant functions may be interpreted analogously to multiple regression equations. Coefficients in standardized discriminant equations are proportional to coefficients in standardized multiple regression equations with the dependent variable in the discriminant functions essentially being the differences between the groups. Thus a coefficient that is higher in absolute value indicates that a variable is more important in discriminating the groups. When only two groups are differentiated one may simply see the dependent variable as a dummy variable of two values. When  $k$  groups are involved, then up to  $k-1$  equations may be needed to define fully the differences among the groups (Morrison, 1974).

Table IV. Results of the Discriminant Analysis<sup>a</sup>

	Three-way comparison LF-HF-HT		Pairwise comparisons		
	$D_1$	$D_2$	LF-HF,	LF-HT,	HF-HT,
			$D_a$	$D_b$	$D_c$
Not encouraging expression of anger					
Mother	.84	.39	.85	.93	.73
Father	-1.04	.49	-1.15	-1.07	
Showing less protectiveness					
Mother	.32	.27			
Father	-.36	-.78		-.19	-.60
Showing less affection					
Mother				.75	
Father				-.40	
Not encouraging Independence and showing less respect					
Mother			-.36	-.46	
Father					
Showing less similarity					
Mother	-.36	.04	-.33	-.30	
Father			.32	.37	
Average scores (standardized)					
Lesbians	-.68	.04	-.52	-.58	
Het. Feminists	.37	-.35	.69		-.30
Het. Traditionals	.58	.32		.84	.33
Canonical correlation	.579	.258	.600	.704	.315
Chi square, degrees of $f$	34.796,10	5.042,4	23.007,5	32.831,8	4.483,2
alpha	< .001	.283	< .001	< .001	.106
Wilks' Lambda	.6209	.9333	.640	.500	.901

<sup>a</sup>Number in the body of the table are the standardized discriminant coefficients for each function. Key: F = feminist, H = heterosexual, L = lesbian, T = traditional.

A discriminant analysis was done using all three groups and with each pair of groups. The results from all the analyses are summarized in Table IV. In the three-way comparison, only  $D_1$ , the dimension on which the heterosexuals of both types are sharply differentiated from the lesbians, is significant.  $D_2$ , which differentiates the heterosexual feminists most clearly from the heterosexual traditionals, has an associated chi-square value that could have occurred by chance. Similarly,  $D_c$ , the pairwise discriminant function between the heterosexual feminists and heterosexual traditionals, was not significant. Because the parental scale scores are not effective in distinguishing the two groups of heterosexuals, our discussion below will focus mainly on the dimensions  $D_1$ ,  $D_a$  (the pairwise discriminant function between lesbian feminists and heterosexual feminists), and  $D_b$  (the pairwise discriminant function between lesbian feminists and heterosexual traditionals). All of these functions were significant

and explained at least one-third of the variation between the homosexual and heterosexual groups in each analysis. Because only variables that effectively distinguished between the two groups are included in the discriminant functions, each of the variables should be considered a "statistically significant" influence, with those with larger coefficients being more important.

The discriminant function for the three-way comparison shows that to obtain the average discriminant score for the lesbians in the sample the following combination of variables would be needed: a father not allowing the expression of anger while the mother is more likely to do so, the father showing a lack of protectiveness while the mother is more likely to be protective, and the respondents reporting a lack of similarity to the mother. In the three-way comparison the following combination of variables would yield a positive score that typifies the average heterosexual in the sample: the father encouraging the expression of anger more than the mother, the father more likely to show protectiveness than the mother, and the respondent reporting more similarity to the mother. The variables regarding anger are most important in distinguishing the three groups.

In the two-way comparison between lesbian feminists and heterosexual feminists the following combination of variables would yield the average score for the lesbians: the father not allowing the expression of anger, but the mother allowing more, the mother tending to deny independence and respect, and the respondent reporting more similarity to the father and less to the mother. Again the anger variables were most important in distinguishing the two groups. In the two-way comparison between lesbian feminists and heterosexual traditional women the combination of variables that would produce the average score for the lesbians includes again the father not allowing the expression of anger and the mother allowing more, the father not showing affection while the mother shows more affection, the respondent reporting less encouragement of independence and less respect from the mother, less protectiveness from the father, and less similarity to the mother and more to the father. In the comparison the anger and protection variables were most important. Opposite scores on the variables would yield the average score for the heterosexuals in each comparison.

The differentiation of traditional women and feminist women when sexual preference is added to the analysis is complex. On the second dimension ( $D_2$ ) in the three-way discriminant analysis the lesbian feminists had average scores midway between those of the heterosexual feminists and heterosexual traditionals. In contrast, on  $D_1$ , the major dimension separating the three groups in the three-way discriminant analysis, the average scale scores for the heterosexual feminists were midway between the scores of the heterosexual traditionals and the lesbian feminists, although the major break in scores was between the heterosexual and homosexual women. A replication of this study that included lesbians with traditional attitudes toward the role of women would be necessary to clarify these findings.

*Combining Findings from Scale Scores, Analysis of Variance,  
and Discriminant Analysis*

It is important to note that it was the perceived difference between the mother and father in allowance of anger, protectiveness, and affection that appeared as most important in the discriminant analysis and that it was the outlying values of the scales for the fathers on the lesbians that contributed to the interactions noted in the two-way analyses of variance. From an inspection of the mean scores in Table III it can be seen that while the mothers of the women in the three groups are ranked similarly on each of these scales, the fathers of the lesbians are generally ranked differently. The major exception is the protectiveness scale, on which the fathers of lesbians and feminists are ranked similarly. The fathers of traditional women were seen as much more protective, equaling the protectiveness scores of the mothers.

The scales measuring "felt similarity" to the parents showed a different pattern than the variables regarding perceptions of parental actions. The discriminant analyses usually suggested that less involvement or respect of the father and greater involvement of the mother contributed to the lesbian scale scores; however these analyses also suggested that less similarity to the mother and greater reported similarity to the father contributed to the discriminant scores of the lesbians. This reverses the pattern found in the analysis of variance, where the mean scores indicated that the lesbians reported themselves as less like both their parents than the other women did. The nature of these results may be understood by examining the intercorrelations among the various scales. Because there was a positive association between the father's encouragement of anger and related similarity to him ( $r = .30$  for the total group), when in the multivariate analysis the impact of the father's encouragement of anger is controlled, the influence of the rated similarity to the father on the distinction between the lesbians and heterosexuals reversed so that lesbians were predicted to rate themselves as like the father.

## SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

### *Problems with Retrospective Studies*

In this research we asked young adult subjects including lesbian feminists, heterosexual feminists, and heterosexual traditionals to answer retrospective questions concerning their parents when the subjects were in high school. There is a problem with the use of this procedure in assessing perceived parental attitudes and behavior in the past. It may be that the subjects' own attitudes and sexual orientation in the present account for their perceptions of their parents'

## Women's Perceptions of Their Parents

behavior in the past. Perhaps both lesbian and heterosexual feminists perceive their parents in the light of their current feminism and evaluate them accordingly, or perhaps lesbians who have rejected sexual relations with men may then view their relationship with their parents in this light. There is no real way to meet this objection other than to point out that it would be difficult to predict what the specific attitudes might be from knowing the subject's present orientation. For example, some might predict that lesbians would perceive their mothers as rejecting or even perhaps excessively loving and their fathers as ordinary. More importantly, even if lesbians reconstructed their biography in the light of their lesbianism we now know that they did not reconstruct them in such a way as to relate lesbianism to the mother in any special way, positively or negatively. Thus, even in the unlikely event that memory is totally in the service of present attitudes, it remains important that it is the father who is perceived so differently by lesbian women.

Conceivably one might argue that this outcome actually could have been predicted on the simple basis that lesbians do not like men and therefore would not like their fathers. We suggest that this post hoc explanation may be too simplistic. Certainly it would not apply in the case of males. The prediction that homosexual men who do not like women would also not like their mother is not supported by the empirical evidence. In fact homosexual men, like homosexual women, tend to dislike their *fathers* (Bieber, Dain, Dince, Drellich, Grand, Gundlach, Kremer, Rifkin, Wilbur, & Bieber, 1962; Evans, 1969; Bene, 1965b.)

The logical arguments presented above, however, cannot take the place of a longitudinal observational study on a large sample. So far no such studies have been done concerning sexual preference or sex-role attitudes. It is hoped that the findings of the present study can be checked later in a longitudinal design, for only in this way can this and other issues related to "causality" be resolved. Until such resolutions can be made we have attempted to avoid "causal" language as much as possible in this paper.

### *Summary and Theoretical Implications of Findings*

While we have focused on differences among the three groups in this paper, it needs to be stressed that they were remarkably similar in background characteristics and in many of their perceptions of their parents. These similarities among the three groups are consistent with findings which suggest that lesbians are not characterized by any unique psychological "syndrome" apart from sexuality (Riess, 1974, p. 84). The respondents in each subgroup generally reported that their mothers had more respect for them, were more protective, were more affectionate, and allowed more expression of anger than their fathers did. Thus mothers were perceived by all three groups as being the more supportive parent.



On the other hand, it is clear that lesbian feminists and heterosexuals do differ more from each other in their reports of parental behavior than do heterosexual feminists and traditionalists. The lesbians reported receiving the least respect from their parents, the least allowance of expression of anger, and being the least similar to their parents. Lesbian feminists seem to have perceived the greatest amount of "repression" and heterosexuals the least.<sup>4</sup>

Our findings tend to confirm the hypotheses stated earlier. Generally it is the constellation of variables regarding the father that is most important in differentiating the three groups. Lesbians describe their fathers as less likely than other fathers to show affection, to respect them, to protect them, to encourage their being independent, or to allow them to express anger. Thus lesbians reported a less solidary relation with their fathers and more repressive fathers than heterosexuals. While the feminist heterosexuals also reported that their fathers were not very protective, they sharply contrasted with the feminist lesbians in seeing their fathers as showing them affection, respecting them, encouraging their independence, and allowing them to express anger. We suggest that this more solidary relation with their fathers on the part of heterosexual feminists may have been related to their heterosexuality while the lack of protection was related to their feminism. The greater protection that the traditional women experienced (this relationship was by far the strongest in the group whose fathers had been to college), along with much the same solidarity that the feminist heterosexuals experienced, was likely related to their greater retention of the traditional feminine role. We suspect that the measure of independence may not have differentiated the traditional and feminist women as we had hypothesized largely because it was correlated with the encouragement of anger and with respect and reflected a general solidary relationship.

When similarity to the parent was examined in the multivariate analysis with the variables which indicated the extent to which the parental relationship was solidary being controlled, we found that lesbians were more likely than heterosexuals to see themselves as similar to their fathers. This might be expected on the basis that women who are not "traditional" women might view themselves as being more "masculine" and hence more similar to the father. Because the solidarity of the father-daughter relationship tends to be associated positively with rated similarity, the association of similarity to the father with lesbians only becomes apparent when the impact of the solidarity variables is removed. No other variables showed this reversal in the discriminant analysis.

<sup>4</sup> Interestingly enough, while for the total sample it appeared that heterosexual feminists reported more respect and more allowance for anger than heterosexual traditionalists, when we break the sample down by father's education, we find that this holds only among subjects whose fathers have *not* been to college. Within the group with college educated fathers, heterosexual traditional women reported more respect and allowance for anger than heterosexual feminists. On the other hand, within both father education groups, lesbian feminists reported the least respect and allowance for anger of all three groups.

A very important aspect of parental relationships relating to lesbianism is the greater perceived repressiveness of the fathers of lesbians as seen in their daughters' perception that they did not encourage the expression of anger. The father's low tolerance for anger proved to be a very important parental variable, different from the variables indicating "encouragement of independence." We had not anticipated the importance of the item concerning anger at the beginning of the study and it is hoped that future research may clarify its meaning.

In contrast to the lesbian group, both heterosexual groups had experienced a solidary relationship with the father. The lack of solidarity with the father then seems to be a key aspect of parental relations relating to lesbianism. This finding supports Johnson's (1975) hypothesis that the father relationship is central in sex typing and especially in the specifically sexual aspects of sex typing. The relatively similar mother relationship reported by all three groups suggests that studies of sex-role development focusing on just the mother relationship or on an undifferentiated "parental" relationship may reveal no differences, not because parental relationships are not important in the development of sex typing but because they have ignored the relationship with the father.

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