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## A COMPARISON OF SEX-ROLE ATTITUDES OF HEARING AND HEARING IMPAIRED YOUNG MEN

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Marcia Kolvitz and Sue E. Ouellette, Ph. D.

### I. Introduction

In recent years, perceived attitudes toward sex-role stereotypes have become a popular and productive topic for research. The changing nature of sex-role stereotypes in our society has become a matter of increased attention, as evidenced by the large number of studies currently dealing with this concern (Yorburg, 1974; Tibbetts, 1975; Vanfossen, 1977).

Mirroring this general tendency, researchers in the field of deafness have begun to ask if hearing impaired persons have sex-role stereotypes similar to the general population, or if, in fact, the experience of deafness results in an altered perception of the roles of men and women. Research dealing with the sex-role stereotypes of hearing impaired college women (Cook and Rossett, 1975; Chaussey, 1977) has demonstrated that hearing impaired women tend to hold more traditional views of social behavior than do their hearing counterparts. Dodd (1977), studying male college students at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, noted that hearing impaired students tended to stereotype occupational choices by sex even when occupations presented in the survey were available to both sexes.

Similarly, Chaussey (1977) hypothesized that communication may be the vital factor in explaining the different sex-role attitudes held

by hearing and hearing impaired persons. She postulated that hearing subjects are able to hear and overhear a greater range of information from a greater variety of sources and, thus, may accept new ideas regarding sex-roles more readily. The language deficit which often accompanies a significant hearing loss results in an experiential lag which may limit the willingness of a hearing impaired person to accept non-traditional societal roles.

Although attitudes toward sex-roles are changing (Safilios-Rothschild, 1977; Harris and Lucas, 1976), the aforementioned research would seem to indicate that such change has not yet become apparent in the hearing impaired population. Therefore, this study was developed in order to further investigate the beliefs and stereotypes of male college students toward traditional sex-roles and to note any differences in such attitudes between hearing and hearing impaired subjects.

### II. Procedures

The subjects for this study consisted of forty-eight (48) men between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five. Twenty-four (24) of the subjects had, by self-report, normal hearing and were students enrolled in either a community college or a senior university.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup>The men with normal hearing were volunteers from students at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois; Waubensee Community College, Sugar Grove, Illinois; and William Rainey Harper College, Palatine, Illinois.

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twenty-four (24) additional subjects were hearing impaired men enrolled in post-secondary programs.<sup>2</sup> An additional criterion for the selection of hearing impaired subjects included a documented hearing loss of 65 dB (ISO) or greater in the better ear, indicating that these subjects do not rely primarily upon hearing for communication. All subjects were tested in two subgroups according to hearing ability.

A twenty-five (25) item survey was developed in an effort to determine the sex-role stereotypic attitudes of each subject. The items for the survey were selected from *Sex-Role Attitude Items and Scales from U.S. Sample Surveys* (Mason, 1975) and included topics such as marriage, family responsibilities, career and employment areas, domestic responsibilities, and social mores. Subjects were asked to mark each statement true or false in order to indicate the subject's personal attitudes on the topic. Several sample survey items may be found in Appendix I.

The administration of the scale varied somewhat between the hearing and hearing impaired subgroups. Hearing subjects were asked to read each statement and to respond by marking each item true or false. With the hearing impaired subjects, the investigator signed both the instructions and the statements. In order to eliminate any difficulties that the hearing impaired subjects might experience with the English language, instructions and statements were interpreted into American Sign Language.

The recorded responses of the subjects were scored by the degree of conservativeness reflected by the choice. One point was assigned to each statement answered conservatively by the subject, as determined by the scoring key. Thus, the most liberal score possible was zero (0) while the most conservative score possible was twenty-five (25).

A t-Test for Unrelated Measures was then conducted to determine if a significant difference was indeed evident between the scores of the two subgroups.

### III. Results and Discussion

Upon scoring the results of the survey, it was discovered that the normal hearing group produced a mean score of 3.46 with a standard deviation of 2.24. The hearing impaired subgroup, in contrast, produced a mean score of 13.66 with a standard deviation of 2.59.

In order to determine if a significant difference existed between the two subgroups, a t-Test for Unrelated Measures was performed. The t-Test revealed a significant difference at the .01 level of confidence. Thus, for this select group, there was indeed a significant difference between the hearing and hearing impaired subjects when viewed with regard to their attitudes toward sex-roles. A summary of the statistical analysis comparing the perception of sex-role attitudes of hearing and hearing impaired men is presented in Table 1.

**TABLE 1. Comparison of perception of sex-role attitudes of normal hearing men and hearing impaired men.**

Group	Number	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	t
X <sub>1</sub>	24	3.46	2.24	46	14.552
X <sub>2</sub>	24	13.66	2.59		

X<sub>1</sub>: Subjects with normal hearing

X<sub>2</sub>: Subjects with hearing impairments

It is evident from this study that the hearing impaired subjects hold more conservative and traditional views of sex-roles and responsibilities. It may well be that the experiential lag resulting from the inability to hear and over-hear a vast wealth of information may limit the willingness of some hearing impaired persons to accept the rapid changes which seem to be occurring in the definition of sex-roles.

Other factors may also exert a definite effect on the development of sex-role attitudes. In this initial survey, the subjects were not

<sup>2</sup>The hearing impaired men were volunteers from students in the Program for the Hearing Impaired (PHI) at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois; Waubensee Hearing Impaired Program (WHIP) at Waubensee Community College, Sugar Grove, Illinois; and the Hearing Impaired Program (HIP) at William Rainey Harper College, Palatine, Illinois.

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classified as to socio-economic backgrounds, religious preference, amount of parental education, or other areas suggested by Bayer (1975) as possible contributing factors. This research points to a definite need for further study to determine if the apparent difference in sex-role attitudes is a result of any of these additional factors, or if, indeed, it can be attributed to a lack of auditory information.

The results of this study strongly illustrate the difference in sex-role attitudes and beliefs of the two subgroups. Table 2 lists selected items from the surveying tool and the percentages of each subgroup responding to a particular item. Fifty-eight percent of the hearing impaired men agreed with the statement "Although many women have important jobs, their "right" place is still in the home." In response to the same statement, only 13% of the hearing men agreed. Clearly, the hearing

impaired men demonstrated strong traditional views of the role of women. These results are further reinforced with the responses to sample statement 4. Sixty-seven percent of the hearing impaired men agreed with the statement "Raising the children is more the mother's responsibility than the father's responsibility" while only 8% of the hearing men agreed. The hearing impaired men's view of men is also viewed as strongly traditional. Forty-two percent of the hearing impaired men agreed with the statement "A man who is really a man won't cry" while only 4% of the normal hearing men agreed. Generally, the men without hearing impairments expressed considerably more liberal and nontraditional beliefs.

Cook and Rossett (1975) stressed the importance of expanding the experiences of hearing impaired women to include the exposure to the changing and expanding opportunities that are available to women today. It was suggested that activities be incorporated into school experiences to provide the adolescent women with nontraditional vocational information. Instructional materials, as well as field trips and guest speakers, could be utilized in creating these experiences.

The research of this study illustrates the traditional views held by the hearing impaired men as a subgroup. Hearing impaired men, as well as hearing impaired women, need to experience a variety of activities and instruction that might help in expanding their sex-role perceptions. Since hearing and overhearing are such major ways in which a person with normal hearing receives information, special attention must be given to those who cannot hear. Increased exposure to non-traditional societal roles is necessary to increase the acceptance of changes.

### APPENDIX I. Sample survey statements.

1. A wife should not work unless they need the money.
2. Although many women have important jobs, their "right" place is still in the home.
3. A man who helps around the kitchen is doing more than should be expected.

**TABLE 2: Percentages of normal hearing subjects and hearing impaired subjects responding to sample survey items.**

Item Number*	Group	Responses
1	Normal Hearing	4% Agree
	Hearing Impaired	38% Agree
2	Normal Hearing	13% Agree
	Hearing Impaired	58% Agree
3	Normal Hearing	0% Agree
	Hearing Impaired	38% Agree
4	Normal Hearing	8% Agree
	Hearing Impaired	67% Agree
5	Normal Hearing	4% Disagree
	Hearing Impaired	20% Disagree
6	Normal Hearing	20% Agree
	Hearing Impaired	46% Agree
7	Normal Hearing	4% Agree
	Hearing Impaired	42% Agree

\*Item numbers refer to items listed in Appendix I.

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4. Raising the children is more the mother's responsibility than the father's responsibility.
5. The husband and wife should be equal partners in a marriage.
6. A man should not have a woman as his boss.
7. A man who is really a man won't cry.

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