

A COMPARISON OF SEX-ROLE ATTITUDES OF HEARING AND DEAF YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN

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Abstract

Legislation in recent years has provided unparalleled opportunities for the vocational development of deaf persons. Previous studies conducted in the early 1980's indicated that deaf men and women hold much more traditional views of their sex roles than their hearing peers. The purpose of this study was to examine whether deaf adolescents still hold significantly more traditional sex-role attitudes than their hearing peers. A 25-item survey scale was administered to hearing and deaf high school students replicating studies conducted by Anderson and Krueger (1982) and Kolvitz and Ouellette (1980). Results indicated that deaf young men and women are still significantly more conservative than their hearing peers, with deaf males tending towards more liberal attitudes than in previous studies. Discussion is also offered regarding the implications of these findings for career awareness and vocational opportunities of young deaf adults.

Introduction

Legislation within the past 20 years (e.g. the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Equal Employment Act of 1965) has provided unparalleled opportunities for the vocational development, training and employment of deaf people served by rehabilitation programs. Many deaf men and women, however, may hold attitudes which greatly limit their vocational choices. Previous studies indicate that deaf females hold traditional views of their sex roles (Cook & Rossett, 1975; Anderson & Krueger, 1982), and exhibit high scores on sex stereotype scales and surveys (Farrugia, 1982; Moccia, 1981). When compared to hearing peers, deaf men and women tend to exhibit much more traditional views (Cook & Rossett, 1975; Kolvitz & Ouellette, 1980). These attitudes are established by high school (Moccia, 1981) with some evidence indicating their presence as early as junior high

school (Egelston-Dodd, 1977).

Regardless of one's hearing status, holding strongly traditional sex-role attitudes will severely curtail occupational opportunities, leaving men and women at risk vocationally. For example, traditional societal views of women held that a woman's place was in the home raising children. Although women have entered the work force in unprecedented numbers in recent years, many professions such as medicine and law are still under-represented by women. In contrast, helping professions such as nursing and teaching, which have traditionally been staffed by women, are still under-represented by men in the field today.

As noted above, deaf men and women may be at risk vocationally due to strongly held traditional sex-role attitudes. Deaf persons will not aspire to jobs they feel are inappropriate for their gender. To broaden their vocational opportunities, deaf men and women must become aware of the limitations imposed by accepting stereotypical sex-role models. They must further perceive the occupational limitations imposed by continuing to accept these models as valid.

As a result of research into the areas of deaf individuals' sex-role attitudes, a number of general recommendations have been made. For example, Cook and Rossett (1975) recommended that career education for deaf women should be altered or expanded to include visits to the school by deaf women in non-traditional occupations. They also recommended the inclusion of field trips, school clubs, and apprentice placements to encourage career exploration. If, indeed, career education for deaf high school students is being altered to reflect these concerns, it is hoped that these changes will have a positive effect on expanding deaf persons' attitudes toward sex-roles.

In the last nine years, two studies examined the sex-role attitudes of deaf men and women. Kolvitz and Ouellette (1980) conducted a study of young

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hearing and deaf men to compare their sex-role attitudes. Anderson and Krueger (1982) replicated this study with young hearing and deaf women. Results of both studies indicated that deaf young men and women appeared to hold more traditional, conservative sex-role attitudes than their hearing peers.

The purpose of this study was to see what changes, if any, have occurred in deaf adolescents' attitudes toward sex-roles in the past nine years. The studies conducted by Anderson and Krueger (1982) and Kolvitz and Ouellette (1980) were replicated to see what, if any, changes have occurred in the sex-role attitudes of deaf adolescents in comparison to their hearing peers.

Subjects

The subjects were 57 young men and women between the ages of 16 and 19. Twenty-one subjects were hearing females, 15 were hearing males, 10 were deaf females and 11 were deaf males. All hearing subjects were seniors at a public high school in Little Rock, Arkansas. All deaf subjects were juniors and seniors at the Arkansas School for the Deaf in Little Rock. All deaf students relied primarily on American Sign Language for communication.

The two previous studies used subjects between the ages of 17 and 25. In contrast, 16-19-year-olds were chosen for this study for a specific purpose. These students were finishing their high school education and, presumably, had gained maximum benefit from career awareness education programs in their schools. Because it is hoped that these programs impacted deaf students' sex-role attitudes this age group was determined to be the most appropriate.

Materials

This study used the same 25-item survey scale used by Kolvitz and Ouellette (1980) and Anderson and Krueger (1982). This scale was developed by Kolvitz and Ouellette using items selected from the Sex Role Attitude Items and Scales from U.S. Sample Surveys (Mason, 1975). Topics covered included marriage, career and family responsibilities, employment and social mores (see Appendix I).

Procedure

The administration of the 25-item scale varied somewhat between the two groups. The hearing subjects were asked to read the instructions at the

top of the scale, read each statement and respond by marking each one true or false. To ensure comprehension by the deaf subjects, both the instructions and survey statements were signed in American Sign Language by the primary investigator, an R.I.D. certified interpreter. The hearing students took approximately 10 minutes to complete the scale with all hearing subjects surveyed at one sitting. The deaf subjects were surveyed in four groups of approximately six students each. Each group took approximately 25 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Subjects were scored according to how conservatively each item was answered. One point was given for each item answered conservatively by the subjects as determined by the scoring key (see Appendix II). Therefore, the most conservative score would have been 25 and the most liberal score 0.

Results

A 2 (Gender: male vs. female) X 2 (Hearing Status: deaf vs. hearing) Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to assess potential differences in the sex-role attitudes between hearing and deaf young men and women. The results indicated a highly significant main effect for hearing status ($p < .001$), but not for gender (see Table 1). No significant interaction was obtained. The sex role attitudes of deaf young men and women are still significantly more conservative than are those of their hearing peers. Post hoc analyses indicated no significant difference between hearing males and hearing females in the present study, as well as no significant difference between deaf males and deaf females.

To further investigate differences between subgroups, an item analysis was performed. Some of the responses indicated strong differences in sex-role attitudes among the four groups. For example, on item 2: "A married woman's most important job in life should be taking care of her husband and children," 86% of the hearing females and 93% of the hearing males disagreed while only 20% of the deaf females and 18% of the deaf males disagreed. In this case, deaf males and females think similarly while hearing males and females think similarly. However, on item 25: "It is more important for a girl to learn to cook than to fix a car," 91% of the deaf males disagreed while only 20% of the deaf females disagreed. On some items such as item 14: "The husband and wife should be equal partners in a marriage," all four groups generally agreed

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**TABLE 1
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE OF SEX-ROLE ATTITUDES
BY SEX AND HEARING STATUS**

Source	SS	DF	MS	F
sex	3.12	1	3.12	.34
hearing status	1396.25	1	1396.25	150.69*
sex X hearing status	8.14	1	8.14	.88
error	491.07	53	9.27	

*p < .001

**MEAN SCORES ON SEX-ROLE ATTITUDES
BY SEX AND HEARING STATUS**

	N	MEAN	SD
male, deaf	11	12.00	3.13
male, hearing	15	2.47	3.48
female, deaf	10	12.30	4.08
female, hearing	21	1.19	1.91

(hearing females—100%; hearing males—93%; deaf females—90%; deaf males—100%).

A second analysis was conducted to evaluate whether attitudes have changed over time. Specifically, did the hearing or deaf students in the present study espouse more liberal or conservative sex-role attitudes than their cohorts in the previous studies? T-tests were performed for each category (deaf males, hearing males, deaf females, hearing females). Results indicated a significant difference

between the previous and current groups of hearing females ($p < .01$) with current females significantly more liberal than their previous counterparts. While none of the other three groups showed significant differences, among deaf males there appears to be a trend toward more liberal attitudes with current deaf males scoring somewhat more liberal than in the previous Kolvitz and Ouellette (1980) study (see Table 2).

**TABLE 2
A COMPARISON OF THE RESULTS OF THE PRESENT STUDY
WITH THE KOLVITZ & OUELLETTE AND ANDERSON & KRUEGER STUDIES**

	N	MEAN	SD
Hearing Females			
Stauffer & Long (1990)	21	1.19	1.91
Anderson & Krueger (1982)	20	3.6*	3.42
Deaf Females			
Stauffer & Long (1990)	10	12.30	4.08
Anderson & Krueger (1982)	20	11.0	3.13
Hearing Males			
Stauffer & Long (1990)	15	2.47	3.48
Kolvitz & Ouellette (1980)	24	3.46	2.24
Deaf Males			
Stauffer & Long (1990)	11	12.00	3.13
Kolvitz & Ouellette (1980)	24	13.66	2.59

*p < .01

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Discussion

It is clear that deaf young men and women graduating from high school still hold substantially more conservative attitudes toward sex-roles than do their hearing peers. This finding is consistent with prior comparisons between these groups. In looking at change over time, only one group, hearing females, showed significantly more liberal attitudes than their earlier counterparts.

In the intervening 7-9 years since the Anderson & Krueger and Kolvitz & Ouellette studies, it appears that social changes and opportunities for women have contributed to young hearing women possessing more liberal attitudes toward sex-roles. The disturbing news is that these changes appear to have made little or no significant difference on the attitudes of young deaf men and women. Despite advances in technology and communication (e.g. TDD's and television decoders), limitations

imposed by a hearing impairment may still reduce the amount of information available to deaf students on the expanding role of men and women.

The results of this study illustrate the need for more attention to be given to expanding career awareness and opportunities for young men and women in schools for deaf students. Information needs to be systematically introduced to counteract the loss of information normally gained through the auditory channel. By maintaining overly conservative sex-role attitudes, deaf young adults will miss many opportunities available to them. It is essential that deaf young men and women expand their attitudes toward sex-roles and move closer to their hearing peers. Increased attention to this problem by parents and school personnel is necessary as is further research into what curriculum materials can best accomplish this goal.

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Appendix I

Sex Role Attitude Survey

Directions: I'm conducting a survey and I would appreciate your help in filling out this survey. Please read each statement carefully and if you agree with it, mark it "True." If you disagree with it, mark it "False." Please don't discuss your answers with anyone until after everyone has completed it. Thank you.

Age _____ Male _____ Female _____

Please answer each *true* or *false*.

1. Marriage should be more important for a woman than a career.
2. A married woman's most important job in life should be taking care of her husband and children.
3. It's ok if a married woman works even if her husband has a job.
4. A wife should not work unless they need the money.
5. A woman swearing is worse than a man swearing.
6. A woman who works can't be as good a mother as a woman who stays at home all day with her children.
7. A married man's most important responsibility should be his job.
8. Although many women have important jobs, their right place is still at home.
9. A man who helps around the kitchen is doing more than should be expected.
10. Women are more responsible to make a marriage happy.
11. Only a wife should do the cooking and house-keeping and only the husband should earn money for the family.
12. Raising the children is more the mother's responsibility than the father's responsibility.
13. When a wife works, the husband should help with the housework.
14. The husband and wife should be equal partners in a marriage.
15. The husband should make all the big decisions.
16. Parents should encourage independence in both sons and daughters.
17. Girls should have stricter hours than boys in a family.
18. Only girls have to learn how to do housework and cooking.
19. A man should not have a woman as his boss.
20. It's fair that men get paid more than women for doing the same job.
21. A woman should always wait for the man to call for a date.
22. Women are as smart as men.
23. Women should have all the responsibility of birth control.
24. A man who is really a man won't cry.
25. It is more important for a girl to learn to cook than to fix a car.

THANKS!

Appendix II

Survey Scoring Key

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| 1. False | 14. True |
| 2. False | 15. False |
| 3. True | 16. True |
| 4. False | 17. False |
| 5. False | 18. False |
| 6. False | 19. False |
| 7. False | 20. False |
| 8. False | 21. False |
| 9. False | 22. True |
| 10. False | 23. False |
| 11. False | 24. False |
| 12. False | 25. False |
| 13. True | |

One point is given for each statement answered different from this key.