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A COMPARISON OF SEX-ROLE ATTITUDES OF HEARING AND HEARING IMPAIRED WOMEN

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Because of the communication barrier, many deaf and hearing impaired women are not fully aware of the implications of such programs as Title IX, Equal Employment Opportunity, and other laws which directly affect the status of women. Deaf women continue to be placed in such traditional roles as housekeepers and keypunch operators. In order for these women to be able to expand into more nontraditional areas, they must become aware of their own and society's stereotypic attitudes not only toward the deaf woman and her role, but also toward women and women's roles in general. By becoming aware of stereotypic attitudes toward women and women's work, the deaf woman can also become more aware of vocational options that were previously closed to her.

In the past decade, much research has been conducted regarding the development of sex-role attitudes and their effect on the vocational aspirations and choices of women. Numerous studies have been done with elementary, junior high, and senior high students to determine their attitudes toward traditional "men's" and "women's" work, and how these attitudes affect their own career aspirations (Loft, 1975; Schlossberg & Goodman, 1972; Ulrich, Hechlek & Roeber, 1966). However, this is not true of the deaf population. Few studies have been conducted in this area using a deaf population. Therefore, very little literature is available on sex-role attitudes of deaf women and the implications for career choice. In one study it was found that stereotyped aspirations and notions of sex-typed occupational roles are typical of deaf subjects (Egelston-Dodd, 1978). In a similar study it was found that deaf men hold

more conservative and traditional views of sex roles and responsibilities than do their hearing peers (Kolvitz & Ouellette, 1980). Deaf women, because of their sex and their hearing impairment, are channeled into doubly stereotyped occupational roles (Egelston, 1975). Of 515 specific occupations for which deafness would not be an impediment, deaf women were found to hold only 27 varieties of jobs (Cook & Rossett, 1975). Female students enrolled at Gallaudet College and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf select fields of study traditionally appropriate for their sex (Cook & Rossett, 1975). In addition, traditional guidance programs have often tracked students into occupations stereotypically held to be appropriate for the deaf (Egelston, 1975). Consequently, if a woman feels that a particular job is inappropriate for a woman, she will not aspire to that job (Egelston, 1975). A deaf woman's vocational choice, therefore, is limited by her traditional sex-role perceptions. Deaf learners must be freed so they may choose a career that is based on individual potential and not on their stereotyped notions of what a deaf man or deaf woman "should do" (Egelston-Dodd, 1977).

Since the related literature seems to indicate that deaf women continue to be placed in traditional occupations, based on their own and society's sex-role perceptions, this study attempted to validate the following assumption: Deaf women have a more traditional view of their sex role than do their hearing peers.

Subjects

The subjects were 40 young women between the ages of 17 and 25. Twenty of the

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subjects had normal hearing and 20 were hearing impaired. In addition, the hearing impaired subjects had a documented hearing loss of 65 dB (ISO) or greater in the better ear. This indicates that these subjects do not rely primarily upon hearing for communication (Kolvitz & Ouellette, 1980). All subjects were volunteers and were enrolled in the General Office Practice program at St. Paul Technical Vocational Institute in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Method

This study was very similar to a study conducted by Kolvitz and Ouellette (1980). The subjects in their study, however, were men, whereas the subjects in this study were women. The same scale was used to determine sex-role attitudes in this study as was used in the Kolvitz and Ouellette study. This scale was developed by Kolvitz and Ouellette using items selected from *Sex-Role Attitude Items and Scales from U. S. Sample Surveys* (Mason, 1975). The scale covered such topics as marriage, family and domestic responsibilities, career and employment, and social mores; e.g., "Marriage should be more important for a woman than a career." "Raising the children is more the mother's responsibility than the father's responsibility." "Girls should have stricter hours than boys in a family."

The administration of the scale varied somewhat between the hearing and hearing impaired groups. The members of the hearing group read each statement and responded by marking each item "True" or "False", according to their attitude on the topic. With the hearing impaired subjects, both the instructions and statements were signed by a certified interpreter. It took approximately 10 minutes for the hearing subjects and 30 minutes for the hearing impaired subjects to complete the scale.

The responses of the subjects were scored according to how conservatively each item was answered. One point was given to each statement answered conservatively by the subject, as determined by the scoring key. Therefore, the most conservative score could

have been 25 and the most liberal score 0.

Results and Discussion

To determine if there is a significant difference in the sex-role attitudes of hearing and hearing impaired women, a one-way analysis of variance was performed. For the hearing group scores on the survey ranged from .000 to 14.0 with a mean of 3.6 and a standard deviation of 3.42. For the hearing impaired group scores ranged from 5.0 to 16.0 with a mean of 11.0 and a standard deviation of 3.13. Thus, results indicate that the sex-role attitudes of hearing impaired women are significantly more conservative than their hearing peers beyond the .05 level of significance.

An item analysis reveals that the hearing impaired group answered 13 of the 25 items on the survey significantly more conservatively than did the hearing group. For example, 90% of the hearing impaired group agreed with the statement, "Although many women have important jobs, their 'right' place is still at home," whereas 25% of the hearing group agreed with the statement. Similarly, 80% of the hearing impaired group agreed with the statement, "Only a wife should do the cooking and housekeeping and only the husband should earn money for the family," while only 5% of the hearing group agreed with that statement. In a similar statement 70% of the hearing impaired group agreed that only girls have to learn how to do housework and cooking while no one in the hearing group agreed with that. It is clear that the hearing impaired women hold more conservative views of women's roles than do hearing women.

Only one statement was answered more conservatively to a significant degree by the hearing women than by the hearing impaired women and that is: "A woman swearing is worse than a man swearing." Forty-five percent of the hearing group agreed with that statement as compared with 10% of the hearing impaired group.

It is interesting to compare the results of this study with the results of a similar study by Kolvitz and Ouellette (1980). They

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compared the sex-role attitudes of hearing and hearing impaired men, and they, too, found that the attitudes of the hearing impaired men were significantly more conservative than the hearing men. Table 1 shows the mean and the standard deviation of the groups in the present study and the groups in the Kolvitz and Ouellette study.

TABLE 1
A Comparison of the Results of the Present Study and the Kolvitz Ouellette Study

PRESENT STUDY			
GROUP	N	MEAN	SD
X 1	20	3.6	3.42
X 2	20	11.0	3.13
X : Hearing women			
X : Hearing impaired women			
KOLVITZ AND OUELLETTE STUDY			
GROUP	N	MEAN	SD
Y 1	24	3.46	2.24
Y 2	24	13.66	2.59
Y : Hearing men			
Y : Hearing impaired men			

In both studies it was found that the hearing impaired hold conservative, stereotypical attitudes toward men's and women's roles. These attitudes may prevent an individual from attaining personal and vocational fulfillment. They may result in acceptance of a role or a position in which one is neither comfortable nor content. In order for the hearing impaired to develop their personal and vocational potential, they should be exposed to information about the chang-

ing roles of men and women in our society today. Perhaps by becoming aware of the implications of such programs as Title IX, Equal Employment Opportunity Act, and other laws which affect the status of women, they may become aware of the nontraditional opportunities which are becoming available to women. These new opportunities, in turn, could help the hearing impaired attain personal and vocational fulfillment.

In order to expose the hearing impaired to these expanding personal and vocational opportunities for women, special emphasis must be given to the development of programs for this purpose. Cook and Rossett (1975) suggested that specific curricula be designed to change the deaf woman's attitudes toward her sex role in order to reach her vocational potential. Women's groups could be formed specifically for the hearing impaired for the express purpose of exposing them to the changing roles in women's personal lives and the expanding roles in their vocational lives. In addition, classes could be offered through community education programs to help parents and others who work with the hearing impaired understand how the perpetuation of sex-role stereotypes limits the personal and vocational choices of the hearing impaired and what they can do to help the hearing impaired become aware of and perhaps change these limiting attitudes toward their sex role. Finally, the television media could produce more "closed-captioned" versions of newscasts and other other programs so that the hearing impaired can be more readily exposed to the changes occurring in our society today.

Since so little research on sex-role attitudes and the hearing impaired is available, it is an area which needs considerably more study before full understanding can be achieved and sound helping programs instituted.

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