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***GENDER AND REAL ESTATE SALES PEOPLE:  
PERCEPTIONS OF SELF AND OTHERS  
IN THE REAL ESTATE PROFESSION***

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of  
Master of Business Studies at Massey University

Esther Mary Livingston

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## *ABSTRACT*

This research was a preliminary investigation. It set out to explore the effect of gender on the way in which men and women working in the real estate industry perceived themselves, a typical male and a typical female real estate sales person.

Data were collected using a questionnaire which was mailed to approximately 2195 full time real estate sales people working for the four largest real estate companies in New Zealand.

A 14 item semantic differential scale was employed to assess these perceptions and a number of themes emerged. Gender was an important factor when people appraised themselves, a typical male and a typical female real estate sales person. Results suggested that sex role stereotypes were influential when these perceptions were considered.

Multivariate procedures indicated that while the scale had internally consistent properties, it could discriminate between male and female respondents by a moderate amount only.

Directions for future research are discussed, particularly the measurement of outcome variables and the impact of gender related perceptions on these, and the need to redefine and redevelop the scale.

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# *CHAPTER 1*

## *INTRODUCTION*

The twentieth century has witnessed some fundamental changes in the nature of work. These developments include changes in work related attitudes and values and the composition of the labour force. The increasing number of women participating in paid employment (Horsfield, 1988) and the issues associated with this is one of the most debated change areas.

A body of literature documents the history of women at work (Horsfield, 1988; Hunt, 1988; Harriman, 1985; Sinclair-Deckard, 1979; O'Leary, 1974). A variety of disciplines have contributed to this, such as economics, psychology and sociology. Despite the diverse disciplinary roots of this body of research, there is a dominant and recurring theme which asserts that women, in general, have very different work experiences and expectations from men. These disparate work experiences stem from the interaction of a myriad of economic, sociological, psycho-social, technological and political factors.

Early researchers produced evidence to support the notion that inherent sex based diversity explained the differential work experiences of men and women (Hoffman and Maier, 1961 cited Beakham, Carbonell and Gustafson, 1988). These propositions were supported by cultural norms and socialisation processes.

The resurgence of the women's movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s focussed attention on the issues associated with women at work. A plethora of research investigating sex based differences emerged (Maccoby and Jacklyn, 1974; Deaux, 1985).

While results produced conflicting evidence, the overall conclusion was that gender differences had been greatly exaggerated. Sex was not found to be an important determinant of individual behaviour; research findings suggested that greater differences could be found within rather than between the sexes (Harriman, 1985).

These findings were reinforced by research conducted in work settings. A growing body of literature documented similarities in the way in which men and women approached employment (Harriman, 1985; Brief and Oliver, 1976). For example, Donnell and Hall (1980) demonstrated that gender differences were largely insignificant when attitudes to work, managerial decision making, leadership and motivation were considered.

The consequence of much of this research was the emergence of a new research focus. The literature became centred on the tenet that the differential work experiences of men and women could no longer be rationalised by assuming that inherent gender diversity resulted in distinct male and female behaviours and attitudes, thus justifying traditional patterns of work and employment (Terborg, Peters, Ilgen and Smith, 1977).

Alternative explanations focussed on sex as a social category. These explanations were based on the premise that society divided men and women into specific gender related categories and that there were certain behaviours and attributes associated with these social categories. These expectations formed common assumptions about the appropriate behaviour of men and women and were termed sex role stereotypes.

Research has demonstrated that sex role stereotypes (or sex stereotypes) are widely held, very pervasive and resistant to change (Myers, 1983).

Sex role stereotypes portray women as passive, dependent, submissive and emotional beings who lack the aggressiveness, leadership ability and rationality believed to be a central part of managerial positions and professional occupations (Schein, 1978; Bass, Kruskal and Alexander, 1971). Stereotypes modify judgements about a person's suitability and aptitude to a certain occupation or profession. For example, a common stereotype presumes that all women want to have children and do not aspire to management roles and/or positions of responsibility. This can lead a prospective employer to assume that a young woman will leave the organisation before a young man employed at the same time. In turn, this can have the effect of making an employer reluctant to promote a woman to positions of responsibility as the employer believes she is more likely to leave than her male counterparts, thus negating training and expertise invested in her as a promotion prospect. Tied in with this are attitudes to work carried out by women. For example, women work to supplement the income of the main breadwinner.

The effect of stereotypical thinking on employment and career development is documented by a large body of literature (Schein, 1973 and 1975; Rappaport and Hackett, 1977; Rosen and Jerdee, 1978). A number of researchers, for example Furotan and Wyer (1986); Rosen and Jerdee (1978); Schein (1978) have investigated the way in which men and women are perceived at work and how stereotyping influences these perceptions. Research in this area covers a broad range of topics such as the masculinity and femininity of occupations, career choice and development, promotion decisions, performance appraisal and employability.

The present study is concerned with how male and female real estate sales people perceived themselves, a typical male salesperson and a typical female salesperson.

The aim of the present research is to explore the effect of gender on perceptions of self and others working in the industry.

This thesis incorporates the following sections.

- (a) Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature
- (b) Chapter 3 presents the aims of this research and a summary of the research model.
- (c) Chapter 4 describes the research methodology.
- (d) The results of this study are presented in Chapter 5.
- (e) These results are discussed in Chapter 6.
- (f) Conclusions are drawn in Chapter 7.

A number of factors are beyond the scope of this research. These include the way in which sex role stereotypes are formed and developed, the cognitive processes involved in stereotype functioning, the influence of broader social environmental and cultural issues in cultivating sex stereotyping, the role of occupational sex typing in promoting sex role expectations in the work place and the effect of traditional research designs in creating sex biases.