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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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# ***TABLE OF CONTENTS***

	Page
Abstract	(ii)
Acknowledgements	(iii)
Table of Contents	(iv)
List of Tables	(vii)
List of Figures	(xi)
List of Appendices	(xii)
<b><i>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</i></b>	<b><i>1</i></b>
<b><i>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</i></b>	<b><i>5</i></b>
<b><i>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH AIMS AND MODEL</i></b>	<b><i>24</i></b>
3.1 Research Objectives	24
3.2 Research Model and Techniques	25
3.3 Sample Rationalisation	27
<b><i>CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHOD</i></b>	<b><i>29</i></b>

	Page
4.1 Development of the Scale	31
4.2 Questionnaire Design	35
4.3 Sample Selection and Survey Distribution	36
4.4 The Sample	38
<b>CHAPTER 5: RESULTS</b>	<b>41</b>
5.1 The Sample	41
5.2 Univariate Analysis	48
5.2.1 Summary of Univariate Analysis	53
5.3 Multivariate Analysis	55
5.3.1 Stepwise Discriminant Analysis	55
5.3.2 Summary of Stepwise Discriminant Analysis	64
5.3.3 Factor Analysis	67
5.3.4 Summary of Factor Analysis	75
<b>CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION</b>	<b>77</b>
6.1 Limitations	84
6.2 Future Research	86
<b>CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>89</b>

	Page
<i>REFERENCES</i>	92
<i>APPENDICES</i>	98
Appendix 4.1	99
Appendix 4.2	108
Appendix 4.3	111
Appendix 4.4	124
Appendix 4.5	135
Appendix 4.6	138
Appendix 5.1	141
Appendix 5.2	143
Appendix 5.3	150
Appendix 5.4	163
Appendix 5.5	167
Appendix 5.6	195
Appendix 5.7	205



## *LIST OF TABLES*

	Page
<b>Table 2.1:</b> A comparison of labour force participation rates between 1931 and 1981 for women aged 15-64 years	5
<b>Table 4.1:</b> A breakdown of sample composition by company size	38
<b>Table 4.2:</b> Forms returned as not reaching the sample	39
<b>Table 5.1:</b> A breakdown of responses received by company and gender	41
<b>Table 5.2:</b> Results of t-tests carried out on the length of time respondents had been working in real estate sales	42
<b>Table 5.3:</b> Property type dealt in	43

	Page
<b>Table 5.4:</b> Results of t-tests carried out on respondents' age	44
<b>Table 5.5:</b> Office location in rural/urban centres	44
<b>Table 5.6:</b> Ethnic composition of the sample	45
<b>Table 5.7:</b> Results of t-tests carried out on income earned by commission	46
<b>Table 5.8:</b> Means and levels of significance for perceptions of self as a real estate sales person	49
<b>Table 5.9:</b> Means and levels of significance for perceptions of a typical male real estate sales person	50
<b>Table 5.10:</b> Means and levels of significance for perceptions of a typical female real estate sales person	52

	Page
<b>Table 5.11:</b> Summary of stepwise discriminant analysis of perceptions of self using Wilks' Lambda and the partial F ratio	58
<b>Table 5.12:</b> Summary of overall statistics of stepwise discriminant analysis of perceptions of self as a real estate sales person	59
<b>Table 5.13:</b> Summary of stepwise discriminant analysis of perceptions of a typical male real estate sales person using Wilks' Lambda and the partial F ratio	60
<b>Table 5.14:</b> Summary of overall statistics of stepwise discriminant analysis of a typical male real estate sales person	61
<b>Table 5.15:</b> Summary of stepwise discriminant analysis of perceptions of a typical female real estate sales person using Wilks' Lambda and the partial F ratio	62

	Page
<b>Table 5.16:</b> Summary of overall statistics of stepwise discriminant analysis of a typical female real estate sales person	63
<b>Table 5.17:</b> The reliability coefficients for the perceptions scales of the sample as a whole	70
<b>Table 5.18:</b> The reliability coefficients for the perceptions scales for male respondents as an independent group	72
<b>Table 5.19:</b> The reliability coefficients for the perceptions scales for female respondents as an independent group	74

## *LIST OF FIGURES*

	Page
<b>Figure 2.1:</b> Breakdown of job classification by gender	6
<b>Figure 3.1:</b> Diagrammatic illustration of the research model	26
<b>Figure 4.1:</b> An example of the semantic differential scale employed by Rappaport and Hackett (1977)	32
<b>Figure 4.2:</b> The semantic differential scale employed in the present research	35

## *LIST OF APPENDICES*

	Page	
<b>Appendix 4.1:</b>	Questionnaire employed in the study	99
<b>Appendix 4.2:</b>	Examples of survey information included in company newsletters to inform staff of their role in participation	108
<b>Appendix 4.3:</b>	Letters sent to branch principals providing them with distribution instructions and an example of the package distributed to each fulltime sales person	111
<b>Appendix 4.4:</b>	Letter and package sent to all fulltime staff listed by Company 4	124
<b>Appendix 4.5:</b>	Follow up letters forwarded to branch principals (in the case of Companies 1, 2 & 3) and to all fulltime sales people employed by Company 4	135

	Page
<b>Appendix 4.6:</b>	Rate of return of responses 138
<b>Appendix 5.1:</b>	Results of t-tests applied to data supplied concerning respondents' age, length of time in real estate sales and the percentage of respondents' income earned by commission 141
<b>Appendix 5.2:</b>	Results of t-tests applied to respondents' perceptions of self, a typical male and a typical female real estate sales person on the 14 scale items appraised 143
<b>Appendix 5.3:</b>	150
Appendix 5.3.1:	Pooled within groups correlational matrices for the 14 scale items, respondents' age, length of time in real estate sales and percentage of income earned by commission 151
Appendix 5.3.2:	Group means and standard deviations for the 14 scale items, respondents' age, length of time in real estate sales and percentage of income earned by commission 154

		Page
Appendix 5.3.3:	Wilks' Lambda and the univariate F ratio for the 14 scale items, respondents' age, length of time in real estate sales and percentage of income earned by commission	160
<b>Appendix 5.4:</b>	Summary statistics for the stepwise discriminant analysis	163
<b>Appendix 5.5:</b>		167
5.5.1	Initial statistics, scree plots and final statistics for the sample as a whole	168
5.5.2	Initial statistics, scree plots and final statistics for male respondents as an independent group	177
5.5.3	Initial statistics, scree plots and final statistics for female respondents as an independent group	186



	Page
<b>APPENDIX 5.6</b>	195
Appendix 5.6.1: Rotated factor matrices and factor transformation matrices for principal axes factoring with varimax rotations applied to the sample as a whole	196
Appendix 5.6.2: Rotated factor matrices and factor transformation matrices for principal axes factoring with varimax rotations applied to male respondents as an independent group	199
Appendix 5.6.3 Rotated factor matrices and factor transformation matrices for principal axes factoring with varimax rotations applied to female respondents as an independent group	202
<b>APPENDIX 5.7</b>	205
Appendix 5.7.1: Rotated factor matrices and factor transformation matrices for principal axes factoring with quartimax rotations applied to the sample as a whole	206

	Page
Appendix 5.7.2:	
Rotated factor matrices and factor transformation matrices for principal axes factoring with quartimax rotations applied to male respondents as an independent group	209
Appendix 5.7.3	
Rotated factor matrices and factor transformation matrices for principal axes factoring with quartimax rotations applied to female respondents as an independent group	212

# *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.