Stereotyping of the deaf student and Klineberg's "kernal of truth" hypothesis

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STEREOTYPING OF THE DEAF STUDENT AND KLINEBERG'S "KERNEL OF TRUTH" HYPOTHESIS

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MAJOR PURPOSE

Investigation of stereotyping has generally taken place either well after the process has occurred or within laboratory situations. The recent formation of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) within the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) offered a rare opportunity to investigate what occurs when a stigmatizable minority group is introduced into a majority culture.

The deaf in general are readily distinguishable from the hearing due to their inability to easily follow verbal communications, wearing of hearing aids, use of manual communication involving gestures in addition to or in place of sounds, and other observable behavior.

Klineberg (1950) proposed a "kernel of truth" hypothesis with regard to a group stereotype. He stated that there should be found to be more than a random correspondence between a stereotype of a group and an objective measure of the group's characteristics. Harding et al (1969) point out that there have been few tests of this hypothesis.

This research then is directed toward two hypotheses:

(I) A stereotype of the "deaf student" has been formed on the RIT campus; and

(2) This stereotype will correspond with an objective measure to the personality of the deaf.

SUBJECTS

The subjects used were 18 male and 7 female deaf students enrolled at NTID, and 17 male and 8 female hearing students enrolled
at RIT. The Ss were randomly selected and had not previously been tested on any of the instruments. Their mean age was 21.6 years.

The administrators of the tests were one deaf NTID student and one hearing RIT student, each testing only members of his own group.

PROCEDURE

Each S was approached by the administrator and given a 300 word Adjective Check List (ACL). He was requested to check all those adjectives that he believed described deaf or hearing-people in general. Each S completed two ACL's; first targeted on the opposite group, then on his own.

One week later, the Ss were re-contacted and asked to complete a 16 Primary Factor Questionnaire Form E (16 PF) and objective personality tests that yields 16 orthogonal primary personality factors (Cattell, Eber, and Tatsuoka 1970). Form E is a low-literacy questionnaire for adults, and was utilized in an attempt to avoid complications which might arise due to a generally lower verbal comprehension level of the deaf students.

At this time, the Crowne-Marlowe Social Desirability test was also administered (Marlowe and Crowne, 1961).

Two days later, two Machiavellianism scales (Mach IV and V) were given to the Ss (Christie and Geis, 1970).

RESULTS

The frequency rankings for the highest 5% of the adjectives checked on the ACL for each of the four groups (deaf targeted on deaf, deaf on hearing, hearing on deaf, and hearing on hearing) reveals that in three of the four groups there are definite clusterings based upon similarity in meaning.

The deaf characterized the deaf as ARGUMENTATIVE, EMOTIONAL, and IMMATURE; the hearing characterized the deaf as AGGRESSIVE, EMOTIONAL, and IMMATURE; the deaf characterize the hearing as FRIENDLY, INTELLIGENT, and MATURE; and there does not appear to be any clustering for the hearing on the hearing.
On the 16 PF questionnaire, the most significant difference within the scales between the deaf and the hearing was found in group dependency versus self-sufficiency, where the deaf are more group dependent than the hearing. The other significant scales reveal that the deaf are more emotionally stable, out-going, and controlled (socially precise), happy-go-lucky, and conscientious (moralistic, rule-bound) than the hearing.

The Crowne-Marlowe scale supported the results of the 16 PF questionnaire, showing the deaf to be more socially conforming than the hearing. The two Machiavellianism scales also supported the 16 PF results, with the deaf being less Machiavellian than the hearing (and hence more moralistic and rule bound, and less expedient).

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Hypothesis I, that there exists a stereotype of the "deaf student" on the RIT campus, was strongly supported. This stereotype is held by both the hearing and the deaf, and could be summarized as a "naughty child" image. The deaf seem to hold the counterpart 'kindly parent" image of the hearing; the hearing do not hold any stereotype of the hearing, probably because the ability to hear is not normally a salient characteristic for the formation of a reference group for normal individuals.

Hypothesis 2, that this stereotype will correspond to an objective measure of the personality of the deaf, was not supported. The joint stereotype of the deaf student as argumentative, aggressive, emotional and immature did not correspond to the objective measures obtained. These show the deaf group to be no more argumentative or aggressive than the hearing, more rather than less emotionally stable, and more conforming to rules (which might be taken as a measure of maturity). There does not seem to be even a "kernel of truth" in the stereotype of the deaf student at RIT.

How, when, and why this negative image of the deaf student has been formed by both groups, and what methods might best be utilized to bring this image into a greater correspondence with the actual character of the deaf, is currently being investigated.
REFERENCES


