

WOMEN AS MILITARY LEADERS
PROMISES AND PITFALLS

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INTRODUCTION

When President Nixon ended the draft in 1973 he inadvertently initiated a major policy experiment. Today, there are more women in uniform contributing through more occupational specialities than at any time in our history. Further, the United States is in the forefront among nations in its employment of women in military service. Even Israel, which drafts women, uses women less intensively. For example, Israeli women soldiers: (1) can go home to their family each night (2) serve shorter terms of duty (2 versus 3 years) and (3) receive little or no training (Thomas, 1978:302-303).

In the early 1960s females made up just over one percent of the enlisted ranks. By 1980 the proportion had jumped to almost 13 percent (Moskos, 1982:133). Furthermore, some scholars predict that the proportion may continue to grow. The male recruitment pool is shrinking. Beginning in 1979, the pool will decline until 1994. At that time, the 17-21 year old male cohort will be 8.2 million (24% below 1978 levels), and the demand for technically trained recruits will soar. If the U.S. does not resort to a draft, women will make up the shortfalls. Predictions for 1994 suggest that the proportion of women may be as high as 26 percent of new accessions.

There are several reasons why women find the military an attractive career alternative. The woman's movement has increased the awareness of

women toward the possibilities of non-traditional occupations. In addition, the current long run economic climate suggests that women will need to spend a substantial portion of their adult life as members of the labor force. Women need to prepare for this future by obtaining marketable training and skills. The armed forces offers both career opportunities and training in a variety of marketable skills. Finally, military pay is based on rank. Women and men of equal rank earn equal pay. Given the pay disparity between the sexes in the civilian sector, the military is relatively more attractive.

As the numbers of women increase so too do their roles and responsibilities. This paper will explore the critical role of military woman as leader. The purpose is to identify major promises and pitfalls facing military women as they move into positions of leadership. The methodology will be a blend of literature review and focus groups with military women. Focus groups were held at Fort Hood (Army), Lackland Air Force Base (Marine Detachment) and Kelly Air Force Base (Air Force).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Setting

Women have served in the armed forces since the American revolution. Early service, however, usually required that they disguise themselves as men. Much later, during World War I, women made significant inroads serving as both nurses and typewriter soldiers. In the male oriented, tradition bound military women exercising leadership faced an uphill battle. In fact, they were explicit policies which became almost insurmountable roadblocks.

For example, past policies permitted women in but a select few occupational specialities. In addition, women were required to quit if they married or became pregnant. Furthermore, enlistment caps and a host of other deliberate policies contributed to high attrition (Holms, 1982:184). Hence, what few women there were, for the most part, remained clustered in the lower officer and enlisted ranks. Young female soldiers had few women to use as leadership role models.

There were also many negative stereotypical images of women found throughout top military decision structure and in documents. For example, prior to WWII women were considered more costly (two women typists were calculated to be needed to replace one male typist. In fact, the reverse was true). Also, it was unquestionably maintained that women could not handle the grit and grime of field operations. Other factors which hampered utilization of women included the assumption that men would not take orders from women. Finally, and perhaps most frustrating to women in responsibility, there was a lack of consistent support from above (Holms, 1982:35 and 131).

The military also seemed to suffer from poor institutional memory where women were concerned. Hence, frustrating mistakes and ill found gender stereotypes prevailed in spite of evidence to the contrary.

American women have an honorable tradition of serving their country, particularly in time of war. Their presence provided critical support and allowed men to be freed for combat. In a telling assessment of our successful wartime utilization of women, Albert Speer, Hitler's Weapons Product Chief, claimed that the outcome of World War II might have been different had they

the foresight to use women as we did (Holms, 1982:100).

Leadership Concepts

Scholars have struggled with the leadership concept for decades (Stogdill, 1974). It is complex, multifaceted and difficult to measure. Most definitions include notions of motivating people to achieve organizational goals. Lois Hart defines leadership as "the process of influencing one or more people in a positive way so tasks determined by goals and objectives of organizations are accomplished" (Hart, 1980:16). Ivan Richardson and Sidney Baldwin describe a leader as one "who attempts to induce others to behave in a manner that will assist the organization in achieving goals" (Richardson and Baldwin, 1976:147).

Effective leadership involves a complex set of skills. The effective leader must master communications, human relations, counseling, supervision, management science, decision making and planning (Hart, 1980:20). Also, as an individual moves into positions of increasing responsibility, the mix and relative importance of these skills changes. For example, counseling is an important skill in first line supervision and rarely used at the executive level. The reverse is true with respect to planning (Hart, 1980:20). Hence, effective leaders cultivate a new and varied mix of skills as their place in the organization changes. It is clear, however, that skills in dealing with people are the foundation upon which good leadership rest (Foote, 1981:231).

No discussion of leadership would be complete without addressing major theoretical constructs which form the basis of current leadership theory. Two early theories of leadership were the "great man" and "trait theory"

(Stodgill, 1974:17). These theories were incomplete and failed to be used successfully in the selection of future leaders (Richardson and Baldwin, 1976:149). Hence, broader environmental or personal situational theories were advanced (Stodgill, 1974:18). Under these constructs, the situation or context were the key factors in explaining leadership success and selection. Key situational factors include, 1) organizational characteristics, 2) the external environment, 3) expectations and values of both leader and subordinate, and 4) the expert or professional knowledge required (Richardson and Baldwin, 1976:149).

It should be stressed that most leaders operating within modern complex organizations are in the middle. They must achieve a balance between loyalty to superiors and loyalty to subordinates. They must achieve goals laid out from above and make demands and consider the needs of those under them. Also, if there is lack of support, shifting goals or mixed messages from the top, effective leadership is truly difficult. As we will see, this has been a historical problem plaguing women in the military.

Another important aspect of leadership is "leadership style". A classification system for leadership style has been developed in the theoretical literature. Three basic leadership styles have been identified. They are authoritarian, democratic and laissez faire. The authoritarian leader tries to dominate the individual and group he/she leads. "By voice and iron hand," authoritarian leaders "make it unmistakably clear who is boss" (Williams, 1980:142).

The authoritarian leader is often associated with the military.

Tennyson's Charge of the Light Brigade describes the perspective well.

"Theirs not to make reply
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do or die."

The democratic leader, on the other hand, takes into account the needs and views of subordinates in the process of accomplishing objectives. The democratic leader is generally considered more effective than the authoritarian. The laissez faire style is considered least effective. In this instance, the leader does not take responsibility for achieving objectives or meeting the needs of subordinates. Careful analysis of the military leadership literature suggests that while the military organization structure is authoritarian, effective military leaders do not employ the strict authoritarian style. Some of its greatest heroes, in fact, employed something much closer to the democratic style (Stokesburg, 1981).

Another useful leadership framework was developed by the management science people at Ohio State (Fleishman, Harris and Burt, 1955). They developed a continuum which considered how much a leader "initiates structure" or helps to define goals, plan work processes and select means. The authoritarian and laissez faire leaders would be at opposite ends of this spectrum. Leader "consideration" was also identified as important to success. Consideration was conceptualized as improving interpersonal relations and giving support. Research findings consistently reveal the importance of consideration. There is, however, a point of diminishing returns where subordinates will lose respect for their boss (Williams, 1980:144).

Women and Leadership

Historically, men have been viewed as leaders and women as wives and

mothers. The "great man" theory is illustrative of this point (Stogdill, 1974:17). With the exception of a few women leaders such as Joan of Arc, Catherine the Great and Queens Elizabeth and Victoria history is dominated by male leaders. Female leadership roles are found primarily in female organizations such as convents. The emergence of significant numbers of women into roles of leadership throughout a variety of organizations is relatively new.

There are several problems women face as they move into leadership positions. A particularly difficult issue is gender stereotyping (Heller, 1982:10). This is a two sided problem. Gender stereotyping may lead superior and subordinate alike to question the advisability of women in such a position. And, consciously or unconsciously sabotage her leadership attempts. Finally, both men and women may find it difficult to take orders from a woman.

Women have long been excluded from positions of organizational leadership. Hence, they may fail to understand the complexities and unwritten rules in (male dominated) organizations (Hart, 1980:18). Harragan points out how important it is for women to understand military structure. "Regardless of how or why the military overtook the corporate structure, it is absolutely critical for aspiring women to understand that this is the primary layout to a variety of organizations other than the military" (Harragan, 1977:20). Most successful men have a clear notion of this structure and how to work within it.

The historical exclusion of women from positions of responsibility has

also resulted in a lack of female role models. Role models and/or mentors are important because individuals learn by doing and from watching others.

The study of women and leadership is in transition. Women are working in unprecedented numbers and, anti-discrimination policies and practices have grown over the past several decades opening new doors to women. Hence, women are enjoying positions of authority and responsibility as never before. As women become integrated into all levels of business and government problems in leadership will probably fade.

It should be noted that today's working women have a multitude of roles and responsibilities. The role of wife and, particularly, mother are very demanding. It is not clear how these many ties effect leadership. Nevertheless, to the extent working women sacrifice career opportunity in favor of children and family they reduce their leadership potential. All these factors make women and leadership issues difficult to assess. As we will see, this is also true for military women.

Armed Forces and Leadership

Situational and environmental theories of leadership may provide critical clues into understanding military leadership. Traditional notions of military leadership are tested in war and tied to success on the battlefield. Terms such as honor and glory are linked to military success. They are rarely found, however, in the larger leadership literature.

Traditional military leaders have a unique task. They must motivate followers to risk life and limb to achieve group goals. Larry Korb defines

leadership (in the book Military Leadership) as "the process by which social groups achieve collective goals through the subordination of individual goals" (Korb, 1981:263). The subordination of self interest (e.g. survival) depends upon transcendent values. Traditional military values such as "duty, honor, country", military ethos and esprit de corps all serve to provide the large framework for military leadership. The successful battlefield leader not only uses these transcendent values he also believes in them and identifies with higher values (Stokesbury, 1981:35)

The military is a model of authoritarian structure. It also demands that leaders make snap decisions and that troops respond quickly. The war environment is characterized by complete uncertainty. An authoritarian system can superimpose some order on a chaotic situation. During battle there is little room for a democratic leadership style. This does not imply, however, that outside the battlefield, authoritarian style is most effective.

Stokesbury, identifies loyalty as a key factor in military leadership. Loyalty is a two way street. Effective military leaders are loyal to their troops and receive loyalty in return (Stokesbury, 1981). In periods of calm and routine, loyalty is probably nurtured through democratic leadership styles. Hence, it is not surprising that empirical studies have found that the "men" rate qualities of a "democratic" leader most highly (Hollander, 1964: 50). Also, repeated studies have found that the troops value "consideration" (Stogdill, 1974:130).

When the draft was abolished, military planners anticipated that the leadership environment would be enhanced. Troops would be easier to motivate

because individuals entered voluntarily. Unfortunately, this did not turn out to be the case (Feris, 1981:154). Some scholars place the blame on market place or self interest values. These it is claimed were substituted for traditional military values. In other words, traditional military commitment weakened. It was eroded through a transition from military as vocation to military as occupation.

The Bureaucratic Military

The United States modern military is quite different from its predecessors. It relies on technology as never before. Furthermore, as the preeminent power of the West it maintains a large standing force. To cope with these changes, since about the early 1960s, the armed forces has been increasingly concerned with cost effectiveness and proper management of resources. This shift has had an impact on the kinds of leadership activities that have been rewarded (Korb, 1981:235). Lawrence Korb sees the leader as manager focus as inconsistent with traditional military values. He is particularly concerned with the merging of the management concept and the volunteer force.

Under the volunteer system, the military competes directly in the labor market. In the extreme the armed forces is seen as an occupation or job. The traditional notion of military as calling fades in importance. According to Korb the combination of management orientation and voluntary/labor market norms results in a system which rewards achievement of goals contrary to military tradition. The needs of the group are subordinated by needs of the individual.

In the long run, the military must come to terms with this seeming inconsistency. A modern effective military institution needs both effective managers and traditional military leaders. Clearly, for example, during peace time an administrator of a state side army hospital is not much different from other hospital administrators. He or she must be concerned with almost identical management problems. On the other hand, military hospital administrators must be doubly prepared to lead during a crisis.

METHODOLOGY

The perspectives on leadership of current women in the military were obtained using the focus group technique. Three focus groups were run for women in the Army, Marines and Air Force. The focus group technique allows for indepth analysis of the issues. It is also open ended and promotes interaction among participants.

The Army focus group was held December 12, 1984 in Ft. Hood Texas. Fort Hood is located outside Killeen Texas. It is one of the Army's largest training facilities. At times as many as 15 percent of all army personnel are located at Ft. Hood. The women interviewed ranged in age from the late 30s to the early 20s. Their ranks varied from private through captain. Although they represented many different occupations, a disproportionate number were military police. Both blacks and whites were represented.

The Marine focus group was held February 12, 1985 at the Marine Detachment, Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas. The Air Training Command is located at Lackland. The Marine mission was also one of training.

The 8 female Marines were very atypical. They were all young (18-24) and in training to become military police. Most had got out of boot camp just two days prior. Furthermore, they had just given blood and were somewhat lightheaded. As with the Army, both blacks and whites were represented.

Given their short tenure as Marines (2 days) the issues we dealt with in the focus group were somewhat different than those gone over with the Army and Air Force women. It was an excellent opportunity, however, to observe the initial impact of the rigorous Marine boot camp.

The Air Force focus group was held February 15, 1985 at Kelly Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas. Kelly Air Force Base is part of the Air Force Logistics Command. Like other bases that deal primarily in logistics, the majority of the people who work at Kelly are civilian. The 6 women interviewed were all in the enlisted rank. They ranged in age from their early 20s to the late 30s. They, like the army women, worked in a variety of occupational specialties. Both racial groups were represented.

Each focus group dealt with a multitude of topics and related questions. Leadership, leadership styles, life in the military, role models, gender stereotyping, attitudes of male co-workers, attitudes toward traditional military norms, why they joined the military, attitudes toward women in combat and personal issues such as marriage, family and pregnancy were all discussed. The topics were more limited in the Marine focus group. We concentrated on why they joined the military, the effects of basic training, and attitudes toward traditional military norms such as duty, honor, country.

Clearly, the women participating in the focus groups were not drawn from representative samples. It is impossible to rigorously test hypothesis using this method. At best, the outcome may confirm or disconfirm tentative, exploratory hypothesis. Additionally, the results are hypothesis generating. In this manner, the findings can help focus future research and add to the limited existing literature.

RESULTS¹

Introduction

In this section the results of the three focus groups will be summarized. In all three groups the women identified strongly with the armed forces. They expressed commitment to something that was more than a job. This was most strongly evident among the Army and Marines. The Air Force women, however, were more likely to relate to the job aspects. Several worked steady 8:00 to 4:15 five day a week shifts. They felt that if their Military Occupational Sepciality (MOS) had a clearly identifiable civilian counterpart that it seemed like a job. They also thought that life was better when you were out of the dorm and living off base. The military was "fine" but they didn't want to be around it 24 hours a day.

All the women were attracted to the military because it offered new and exciting challenges. They enjoyed the thought of seeing the world. The women viewed themselves apart and different from civilian women. The contrast seemed most clear when they discussed their high school friends. Despite the draw of an exciting life, a large part of their decision rested with their need to find employment, support themselves and enter the adult world.

For the most part the women seemed very patriotic. A tour in the Phillipines, Iceland or Western Europe left a strong impression. One Air Force woman felt that she appreciated what she had (here in America) much more after an overseas tour. As might be expected the Marines, just out of boot camp were the most enthusiastically patriotic. They all categorically believed in the transcendent values "God, Country, Corps". They had just survived boot camp and were now proud "WMs" (Women Marines) eager to serve their country as MPs (hopefully in some exotic country).

The women also seemed to appreciate the disciplined military environment. A few women almost appeared to find the discipline refreshing. The confusion and uncertainty of the civilian world was not for them at this time. In a sense the women embraced the authoritarian structure. The Army women, many of whom came in heavy combat boots and fatigues, gave the impression that they thought women in other services (especially the Air Force) had it easy. In light of these and other comments, it seemed as if the Army women appreciated the authoritarian system but thought at times it was carried to an extreme.

While the authoritarian structure was accepted, the women did not seem enthusiastic about the occasional authoritarian leadership style they encountered. It was accepted as part of military life. They would take what ever came along. I had speculated that authoritarian structure and style would be alien to women. I suspected it would become a pitfall to success. This hypothesis was not confirmed. I had to conclude that these women accepted both authoritarian and democratic leadership styles from their superiors. It seemed to neither help or hurt their own prospects for leadership.

Most felt the proper leadership style depended upon the MOS. Maintenance and Drill Instructors for example, used authoritarian styles. X-ray technicians, on the other hand, found the more relaxed democratic style most appropriate. Each was accepted because it fitted the task quite well. A few women discussed the leadership training they received through the armed forces. They felt it had more closely paralleled the democratic style.

In the next section the promises and pitfalls of women and military leadership will be developed. It should be noted that the results are not definitive, rather exploratory in nature. Its chief advantage is that it is very current and represents views held by some of today's military women.

Promises

The military offers challenging and rewarding experiences which stretch and develop the leadership capabilities of its women.

Over and over again the women confirmed this theme. The Army women referred to their ability to survive and perform in field exercises. The Army experience and these exercises in particular gave them the ability to "think on their feet". It also provided an "opportunity to test themselves". The younger women were particularly emphatic about this point. They had changed, compared to their attitudes and self concept in high school and during their brief experience with the civilian labor market. They were now confident that they could do about anything. They felt "soldier skills built self confidence." A strong self concept is fundamental to effective leadership (Hart, 1980:182-183). Obviously, these women felt that the

military had strengthened theirs. Interestingly, some of the career women who had been there 9 years or more discussed the opposite effect. They expressed some fear about leaving the security of the military and making it on the outside.

Key elements of leadership such as the "group" and the "goal" are well defined in the military.

As discussed earlier, leadership involves groups achieving goals. All the military women seemed to identify with the group or team concept. Not surprisingly, the new Marines were particularly certain about this. Boot camp set the tone and made these elements of Marine life very clear. Some so identified with the Marines that they felt they were Marines first and women second. Boot camp provided clear well specified goals as did certain MOSs such as maintenance. This enabled women both in their capacity as leader and subordinate to more easily get the job done.

The management focus of the modern technical military increases avenues of advancement for women.

Traditional notions of military leadership stress success in battle. Obviously, given current combat restrictions, the majority of today's women soldiers will contribute to war through their "support" efforts. In the traditional, relatively non technical, pre World War II military, support opportunities were limited. Given the new emphasis on management and the growth in the highly technical key support areas, however, there are many more avenues of advancement open to women. Air Force women felt that women were most comfortable in support functions. They were aided by the

management focus. Perhaps this did not come through so clearly in the other services because so many were MPs or in training to become MPs. The MP occupational speciality is one that probably uses fewer "managerial" skills

The military as an institution in transition has increasing avenues of advancement for women.

Prior to 1973 there was a 2 percent cap on female participation. In addition, the kinds of activities open to women were generally restricted to traditionally female dominated occupations such as clerical and nursing. The requirements of the all Volunteer Forces and the threat of the Equal Rights Amendment helped to change this. **Hence, the number and types of Military Occupational Specialities open to women have increased drastically over the past 10 years.** The results have been increased opportunity for women to exercise leadership skills. Women in the groups viewed the military as an institution ripe with opportunity.

A clear and fair promotion system
increase leadership potential.

As an individual moves up the career ladder, promotions usually carry with them increased potential for leadership. The Air Force women were very enthusiastic about their promotion system. They felt it was fair and well defined. The test instrument used did not distinguish between men and women. On the other hand, the women felt that female officers may still face some male bias in their promotion system.

PITFALLS

Gender stereotyping both from above and below reduces leadership effectiveness.

Gender stereotyping can reduce a leaders success because members of the "team" judge effectiveness on sex rather than performance. Lois Hart identifies gender stereotyping as a major obstacle for women. The Army and Air Force women put it bluntly, "The single biggest problem we have is men." Another left a challenging field in part because the men were "animals." They indicated that gender stereotyping was a bigger problem in non-traditional career fields (Air Craft maintenance, Military Police). The women felt that there was significant pressure to prove themselves to the men. One Air Force woman found it particularly trying because each time she was reassigned or worked with a new set of men she had to prove herself over again. The problem was most pronounced among the older male soldiers. "The guys our age are OK" they accept women. On the other hand, men in higher ranks were more apt to say "sweetie", "honey" or request a cup of coffee. Interestingly, women and poor occupational assignments (100 lb.woman assigned to lift 70 lb. boxes) often intensified this problem. It seemed that almost everyone had witnessed a woman get by with pulling less than her fair share. Although most women did not fit this description, the phenomina was sufficiently widespread to exasperate the already existing gender stereotyping.

It should be noted that the Army women demonstrated their own kind of gender stereotyping. Some felt men were "natural leaders" where women

were not. "Men don't like to take orders from women". There was general agreement with another woman who said she would rather take orders from a man. The Air Force women felt they needed to prove themselves, nevertheless, they did not indicate that they thought men were "natural leaders" vis a vis women. Also, one training instructor indicated she had no problem leading men. She felt groups of women were more trouble because they were more apt to be petty.

The traditions of the "male oriented"
armed forces results in resistance
to female leadership.

Obviously the military has a long tradition as an exclusively male institution. Hence it is not surprising that many individuals have actively resisted the widespread involvement of women in the armed forces. Jeanne Holms in her historical account of women in the American Armed Forces illustrated this theme repeatedly. Male traditions and the resistance to women made it difficult to make decisions in a leadership capacity. This was a problem referred to in the literature but not particularly apparent among the women in the focus groups. Perhaps, compared to the Armed Forces of the 40s, 60s and 70s, the modern military tradition has more or less included women. Hence, the women of the 1980s do not view the traditions as a major roadblock.

Past policies discouraging female
participation has left very few
women role models in the higher
ranks.

In the past, women could be separated from the armed forces because of marriage or pregnancy. Policies such as these have left very few career women throughout the upper ranks. As a result, today's military women do not have very many women they can look to for guidance. Most women in the groups recognized the problem.

The responsibilities associated with other roles (wife, mother) make leadership more difficult.

The conflict between career and family is not new. Modern women in the labor market face it everyday. The demands of the armed forces, however, are greater than those of civilian life. An Air Force woman said it well, "you have to be ready 24 hours a day." In addition, throughout their career, military personnel are often shifted from one location to another. Traditionally, much of the child care and details of the family move were left to the military wife. Military women feel they still have a disproportional share of these duties. One Army woman complained of getting home from 3 months in Honduras and finding the house a mess. Her husband's knowledge of cleaning was superficial at best. These conflicts may result in enhanced organizational skills. On the other hand, there was general agreement among the Army and Air Force women that they knew women who left because of the conflicts. One woman mentioned a particular concern. In the recent past the military made every attempt to assign military couples to the same base or location. As the numbers of military couples has grown this has become more difficult. When children are involved these separations are very difficult. An Air Force woman remarked, "given a choice between the military and loved ones, loved ones win out." Obviously, not all women leave because

of these conflicts. However, enough do such that on balance, it represents a leadership pitfall to women.

I did detect an interesting trend among single parents in the Air Force. They felt that the institution "took care of its own" and that it was a good environment for them to raise kids. The base was safe, they had free medical and on base daycare made life easier. The Air Force women, with their regular hours, seemed to feel that family was well integrated into military life. The women at Ft. Hood, did not have on base daycare, nor regular hours. The conflict between family and military was, hence, more pronounced.

Combat restrictions make avenues
of advancement more limited.

Although combat restrictions have been eased tremendously they still represent a barrier to full integration of women into positions of leadership. The Army women felt that these restrictions were artificial. They were fairly certain that a war would find them fighting. The Air Force women, on the other hand, seemed to be glad that they were excluded from that role. After all, they support capacity was key to success during war.

CONCLUSION

A review of the literature and the focus groups revealed the following promises and pitfalls to military leadership for women.

Promises

1. The military offers challenging and rewarding experiences which stretch and develop the leadership capabilities of its women.
2. Key elements of leadership such as the "group" and the "goal" are well defined in the military.
3. The management focus of the modern military increases avenues of advancement for women.
4. The military as an institution in transition has increasing avenues of advancement for women.
5. A clear and fair promotion system increases leadership potential.

Pitfalls

1. Gender stereotyping both from above and below reduces leadership effectiveness.
2. The traditions of the "male oriented" armed forces results in resistance to female leadership.
3. Past policies discouraging female participation has left very few women role models in the higher ranks.
4. The responsibilities associated with other life roles (wife, mother) make leadership more difficult.
5. Combat restrictions make avenues of advancement more limited.

Clearly, the results do not touch on all aspects of leadership. They do, however, represent exploratory hypothesis that could be tested in a larger study.

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