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Recruitment/selectors perceptions of male and female trainee managers?

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates whether those involved with recruitment/selection (RS) react differently towards male and female trainee managers.

Methodology: Measures of the perceptions towards trainee managers were collected from 440 managers and professionals involved in recruitment/selection (RS).

Findings: It was found males were seen to have more stereotype male management characteristics than females. Female (RS) perceived female management trainees as possessing more male management characteristics than did male (RS).

Practical implications: The stereotype of the management trainee held by male (RS), with its emphasis on 'male characteristics', would suggest females do face an unequal struggle in their careers. It is argued that male management characteristics, whilst possibly appropriate for organisations with a hierarchical structure, may not be as appropriate for the participatory organisational structure which is becoming more common. Suggestions are made to help develop management skills for both male and female trainees.

Keywords: age, gender, manager, perception, recruitment, stereotypes, training

Introduction

Purpose:

The present study investigates whether those actively involved with employee recruitment and selection (RS) perceive females as positively as they do males when it comes to employment. It goes further than previous studies by looking at the training implications of these perceptions in a changing organizational climate. Linehan (2002) notes female managers experience negative attitudes from males. Further, Bailyn (2003) cites recent evidence that, despite employment law, organisations are less responsive to females. This is unjustified as the academic achievement of girls has not, according to Agars (2004) been reflected in workplace attainment, nor in attitudes towards female employees. According to Mansell (2006a and 2006b) in British school and college examinations girls have consistently outperformed boys in their GCSE and 'A' level examinations.

Stereotypes and management abilities

Researchers such as Schein, Mueller and Jacobson (1989), and Schein, Muelier, Lituchy and Liu (1996) have found management students in many parts of the world view the characteristics of a manager as more similar to their stereotype of a man than a woman. Ample evidence exists (Reskin and McBrier 2000, Schein 2001, and Powell et al 2002) that managers, and undergraduate business students link management ability with being male and possessing masculine characteristics. Loden (1985) notes, 'masculine modes of management' are characterised by competitiveness, hierarchical authority and emphasis on control. These characteristics are commonly perceived as being synonymous with successful management, often referred to as 'instrumental' traits. Gallos (1989) argued, women focus more on attachment and affiliation than do men. More recently in support of this, Klenke (1996), outlined the stereotypical female management style as considerate or people-orientated. This is characterised by the nurturing of interpersonal relationships, frequently referred to as 'expressive' characteristics. Due Billing and Alvesson (1994) and Wilson (1995), point out, females are associated with concepts such as perceived lack of self-confidence, stereotype behaviour and underestimation. These characteristics, they argue, result in females being more perfectionist than males in what they do. According to Due Billing and Alvesson (1994), risk avoidance and lack of focussed career planning is often attributed to a lack of self-confidence. In addition to obvious family roles this contributes to the reasons why females do not follow the linear career path more typical of males.

An implication of this supposed link between gender stereotype and management ability creates problems for female managers. Linehan (2002), for example, reported that females managers are aware of, and have difficulties choosing between male and female management styles. The case for the superiority of male management characteristics is fundamentally flawed, however, for as Gill et al

(1987) stress, both male and female stereotypes can be active rather than passive approaches to achieving a goal. They point out expressiveness is as likely to be successful as is instrumentality, which does not in itself ensure success. They argue whilst these two characteristics may be linked with masculinity and femininity they are not necessarily linked with goal achieving. Indeed there is a growing awareness that, according to Eagly and Carli (2003), as organizations change and hierarchical structures are flattening. They note the participatory style of leadership, more commonly associated with females, is becoming more appropriate with this changing management structure.

Not all studies, however, provide support for traditional stereotype views. VanEngen et al (2001) with employees in department stores, found no gender differences in management style. This study does raise the point that certain occupations have traditionally different male/female orientations. This will be taken into account with the sample used in the present study. Even more marked were findings by Mukhtar (2002), with owner managers. There was an interesting gender difference in management style, with female owner managers having a more centralised style, and being much less willing to delegate than males. This occurred even when the business was quite large. This is contrary to the gender pattern generally observed in large organisations, when male managers opt more for an emphasis on control.

Stereotypes as barriers to female career development:

As with all stereotypes, what is important are the interpretations made. Traditional gender stereotypes can have a negative influence on the career profile of young women. They may influence their self esteem, and have a direct, and very real impact on the career options open to them. The perception of female managers has a number of implications. Baldwin, Butler and Johnson (2001), pointed out where men exhibit distaste for working under female managers, the distribution of female managers tends to be based on the percentage of female employees in lower occupations. Fischlmayr (2002) when comparing female with male managers found clear evidence of traditional gender stereotype self perceptions. This was attributed, in part, to the socialisation processes. Furthermore, Fischlmayr has shown how gender stereotyping, is a contributory factor in preventing female managers from being represented in the international commercial scene. Kottke and Agars (2005) point out that stereotypical perceptions tend today to be covert, but still form a barrier to female career advancement. They argue that there are a wide range of factors which create these barriers. These include changes to the organizational culture which may adversely affect men, family friendly policies which may be regarded as unfair and the costs of policy implementation.

Evidence for gender differences in skills

Looking beyond the study of stereotypes there is some research evidence based on young people and students that males and females do actually perform differently with certain skills or tasks. For example in school Brophy and Good (1974) and Sadker and Sadker (1994) found, at all levels and in all subjects, females interacted less with teachers than did males. Carli (1990) found when mixed and same sex pairs were discussing a subject about which there was disagreement, females in mixed pairs spoke more tentatively than males. Midwinter (1992) found males tended to be more direct than females, who tended to try to establish rapport before pursuing their intentions. More recently, Baxter (2002) noted in her study that boys interrupt and take over the conversation from girls. Kniveton (2006) found girls self confidence increased when they worked with boys rather than when they worked with other girls. Studies like these conducted on students cannot necessarily be applied to behaviour in the place of work. These findings, however, provide support for preconceptions often held which can influence our perceptions.

On the basis of this previous research which outlines stereotypes about gender differences four hypotheses concerning perceptions those actually involved with recruitment/selection (RS) hold of trainee managers are examined. The purpose is to determine whether gender stereotypes as outlined previously are actually held by those responsible for recruitment/selection.

1. Recruitment/selectors (RS) will perceive male trainee managers as having more male management characteristics than they will female trainee managers (following Loden 1985).
2. Male (RS) will perceive male trainee managers as more masculine than will female (RS) (following Klenke 1996).
3. Male (RS) will perceive female trainee managers as less masculine than will female (RS) (following Gallos 1989).
4. Older male (RS) will perceive female trainee managers as having more male characteristics than will younger male (RS) (following Schein 1974).

Method:

Design of the study

The study was based on the 'first impressions' experimental design, used in the middle of the last century, by Kelley (1950). In this scenario participants are given descriptive words about a person, with usually one factor being varied. Asch (1952) developed the procedure, but with an imaginary person, and again found fairly comprehensive responses were made about the supposed characteristics of this 'paper person'. It was this procedure which was adopted in this present study and the factor which was varied in the description was gender. The words used to describe the character were: 22 years old, a graduate, a trainee manager (the sex of the character was varied, either a man or a woman) unmarried, enjoys films.

The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire about the imaginary or 'paper person'. This concerned what they thought the person was like. The single questionnaire comprised two scales. One concerned gender related characteristics, which had been linked with management attributes. The second contained gender related characteristics, which were not related to management attributes. This was included to provide a control, to ensure respondents were not simply responding in a socially desirable manner. According to Bem (1974) if no gender differences were noted on the second scale it could be an indication of this occurring. The two scales (detailed in the section below headed 'the Questionnaire') consisted of characteristics, presented as polar terms at either end of a five point scale. For example:

Is self confident ---- ---- ---- ---- ---- Is not self confident.

Justification for the use of the 'paper person' experimental design

The use of 'paper people' in this manner to examine specific variables when comparing people has, according to Gorman, Glover and Doherty (1978), been shown to be an extremely useful research tool as it enables specific variables to be isolated. In the present study gender was the variable to be examined. The same paradigm has been modified and used by many researchers. Most recently Glick et al (2005), used a film as the stimulus. This was not considered appropriate for the present study, for when examining the Glick research, it is evident that study providing too much visual stimulus has the effect of concentrating the perceptions of those taking part on characteristics such as clothing. This was specifically not the aim of the present study, particularly as, according to Glick, in the employment context the significance of clothing is disproportionately greater for females than for males.

Pilot study

This involved twenty participants from the same employed population as the main sample, but those twenty were not included in the actual study. During the pilot study it became clear participants were only willing to complete a small number of questions about the 'paper person'. The exercise ceased to be credible if the number of questions was too great. Trials with varying numbers of questions found sixteen was the maximum number completed by all members of the pilot sample. When more were included they claimed the questions were inappropriate on the basis of their knowledge of the 'paper person'! In addition to this, various questions were rejected by the pilot sample as being outside their knowledge on the basis of the information given! These two factors determined the format and content of the questionnaire used in the study. This meant that established questionnaires, could not be used in their full form.

The Questionnaire

This was created within the limiting framework described above. Ten of the characteristics were derived from gender stereotype management characteristics noted in the research literature (eg. Fischlmayr 2002, Gallos 1989, Klenke 1996, Loden 1985, and Reskin and McBrier 2000). Five items were selected with a female orientation and five with a male orientation. This idea of selecting a balance of items was encouraged by Bem (1979), with her gender questionnaire (Bem 1974). She conceded that selecting only desirable characteristics from both the male and female scales was a good idea, which would reduce the tendency to respond to the questions in a socially acceptable manner. To determine whether items were attributable to either male or female held stereotypes they were allocated by individual members of the Pilot sample independently to either sex. Only items were included where no more than five per cent. of the sample disagreed as to the allocation. The management related characteristics were:

Male Instrumental characteristics:

1. Ambitious, 2. in control 3. assume leadership in groups, 4. self confident, 5. a good mixer.

Female Expressive characteristics:

1. Express emotions, 2. helpful, 3. aware of feelings of others 4. intuitive 5. humanitarian values.

The remaining six characteristics were based on the second order characteristics of Cattell's 16PF. (Cattell 1974). This was intended to ensure a range of characteristics not directly related to management skills were included. This provided an opportunity to test whether perceptions made were based solely on generalised gender stereotype or on perception of management skills. Within this framework characteristics were selected following the above procedure with the Pilot sample from Bem's (1974) list of sex role stereotypes. Those included were not related to management and included the following:

Male characteristics: 1. athletic, 2. forceful, 3. individualistic.

Female characteristics: 1. cheerful, 2. flatterable, 3. tender.

Data analysis

Two scores were thus obtained. One by combining the responses on the ten scales to produce a 'gender management characteristics score' and a second by combining responses on the six scales to produce a 'gender characteristics score'. These were not commonly related to management attributes (Schein 1974). The higher score on both scales indicates a male orientation the lower a female orientation. In the analysis and interpretation in this paper the direction of the scoring for these two scales does not indicate any suggestion of success, superiority etc. T-test comparisons were used throughout.

Participants:

As has already been mentioned some of the studies previously cited are based on data obtained from young people or management students. This is important for many researchers are content to examine the perceptions of students and treat their findings as though they can be related to how experienced managers would react. The validity of assumptions of this sort are suspect. The views of individuals with management experience are of far greater significance. To take this criticism of the literature into account all participants in the present study were managers, supervisors or members of Human Resource departments or units. Every one included had, during the previous twelve months, been involved in employee recruitment or selection. This experience ranged from being responsible for staff recruitment, to assessing candidates for short listing, to being consulted about required aptitude profiles for candidates for posts.

A total of 440 recruitment/selectors (RS) took part in the study. A further 48 declined to do so. Pressure of work was the almost universal reason given for this. The sample comprised 220 males average age 35.55 years, with a standard deviation of 11.35 years, and 220 females average age 35.23 years, also with a standard deviation of 11.35 years. The sample was further divided into younger and older subgroups. The younger 24-30 years sample of 195, had a mean age of 26.96 years. The older 31-64 years sample of 245 had a mean age of 44.52 years.

Sampling requirements:

All participants were of managerial or professional status and were currently in full time employment. None were currently undergoing any educational programme or training. According to Campbell et al (1980), adults who return to education later in life, tend to do so as a result of dissatisfaction with their lives. It was felt that including individuals who might be experiencing this sort of feeling might influence their behaviour making them possibly unrepresentative.

Participants were drawn almost equally distributed from a range of occupational groupings including education; finance and legal professions; food outlets and hotels; food processing, leisure/sport; manufacturing; National Health Service and Retail. No more than five were taken from any single unit (eg one branch of a retail outlet/hotel etc) and no more than fifteen from a single organization (eg. A bank chain, individual NHS Trust, or hotel chain). Including participants from a range of employment was considered essential, according to VanEngen et al (2001), to ensure findings were not an artefact of one particular occupation. All participants in the study were employees, located through their places of work, and were interviewed and given the task by the author, in towns in central UK.

Perceptions of others can be influenced, according to Schein (1974), by our age. This is an important variable when linked with recruitment and selection as personnel involved can be considerably older than the trainees they are recruiting. Increasing age means, for most people, they may well have a greater variety of experiences than those much younger. Schein (1974) noted older male managers,

held less stereotypical perceptions of female managers, and attributes this to their longer experience of working and living with females. In the present study this finding, noted over thirty years ago, will be re-examined in the context of current socio-economic conditions.

The Interviews:

After they had completed the ‘paper person’ study all 440 participants were interviewed individually by the researcher to provide a framework of their views of management and their employment. Two issues derived from material noted in the literature outlined in the introduction to this article were investigated.

1. Management characteristics and management quality

Loden (1985) reported a link between male management characteristics and successful management. In order to determine whether the current sample holds this view, in an interview all participants were individually asked to rank the management characteristics in terms of those which contribute most to an individual’s managerial quality. This was carried out by presenting cards laid out randomly on the table. Each of the ten contained one of the following management characteristics: A good mixer (m); Ambitious (m); Assume leadership in group (m); Aware of feelings of others (f); Express emotions (f); Helpful (f); Humanitarian values (f); In control (m); Intuitive (f); Self confident (m). The gender allocation of the characteristic is indicated by m/f.

They were then asked to: ‘Place the characteristics in order, the first to be the one which you feel contributes most to an individual’s managerial quality, then the second and so on’.

2. Participant’s views of organisational structure

Eagly and Carli (2003) noted a tendency for organizational structures to become less hierarchical and more participatory. In order to determine how far this was reflected in the sample included in the present study participants were asked to describe the structure of their organization. Responses were categorised subsequently by the researcher into the following five groupings: Did not know as had only been employed a short time; Simply did not know; Felt organization had become more hierarchical; Felt had been no change; Felt structure was more participatory.

Results:

Hypothesis 1. Recruitment/selectors (RS) will perceive male trainee managers as has having more male management characteristics than they will female trainee managers.

The t-test results can be seen in table 1. This hypothesis is supported as there is a significant difference in the perception of male and female trainee managers. As can be seen in table I male, more than female trainees are seen, by the total sample (male and female RS combined), as being more orientated towards male management characteristics (mean score 30.76) than female (mean score 27.88) as well as male characteristics not linked with management.

Table I
Showing total sample’s view (male and female RS combined. N=440) of the ‘paper’ male and female trainee managers. High score indicates ‘male’ orientation.

Measures	Trainee		t score	Df prob
	Male	female		
	Means with std in brackets			
Gender management characteristics	30.76 (4.31)	27.88 (5.33)	6.25	438 .000*
Gender characteristics	20.09 (2.52)	17.92 (3.32)	7.71	438 .000*

Hypothesis 2: Male (RS) will perceive male trainee managers as more masculine than will female (RS).

Both male and female (RS) view male managers management characteristics similarly as can be seen in table II. With regard to their gender related, non management linked characteristics the hypothesis is supported for the male (RS) see the male trainee managers as being more masculine. This comparison was included primarily as a test to determine whether male and female (RS) in the sample were merely differing in how appropriate they saw male management characteristics to be. That they perceived male trainees management characteristics similarly but saw male personal characteristics differently does indicate their view of the management characteristics is not simply a ‘socially desirable’ response to maleness.

Table II
Showing perception of the 'paper' male trainee. High score indicates 'male' orientation.

Measures	Perceiver		t score	Df prob
	Male (RS) N=110 Means with std in brackets	Female (RS) N=110 Means with std in brackets		
Gender management characteristics	31.12 (4.30)	30.42 (4.30)	1.21	218 .229
Gender characteristics	20.73 (2.42)	19.45 (2.47)	3.88	218 .000*

Hypothesis 3: Male (RS) will perceive female trainee managers as less masculine than will female (RS).

This hypothesis is supported for male and female (RS) view the female trainees very differently as can be seen in table III. The female management trainee, is seen by male (RS), as possessing less male management characteristics and male characteristics.

Table III
Showing perception of the 'paper' female trainee manager. High score indicates 'male' orientation.

Measures	Perceiver		t score	Df prob
	Male (RS) n= 110 Means with std in brackets	Female (RS) n=110 Means with std in brackets		
Gender management characteristics	26.22 (5.85)	29.55 (4.16)	4.86	218 .000*
Gender characteristics	16.55 (3.24)	19.29 (2.81)	6.72	218 .000*

Hypothesis 4: Older male (RS) will perceive female trainee managers as having more male characteristics than will younger male (RS).

As can be seen in table IV, in support of the hypothesis, it is noticeable older male (RS) see females as possessing more male orientated management characteristics, and more male orientated characteristics than do younger males.

Table IV
Showing perception of the 'paper' female trainee manager. High score indicates 'male' orientation.

Measures	Perceiver		t score	Df prob
	Young Male (RS) N= 49 Means with std in brackets	Young female (RS) n=49 Means with std in brackets		
Gender management characteristics	24.61 (6.11)	29.29 (3.29)	4.71	96 .000*
Gender characteristics	15.75 (3.06)	19.29 (1.80)	6.96	96 .000*
	Older male (RS) N= 61	older female (RS) n=61		
Gender management characteristics	27.51 (5.33)	29.75 (4.76)	2.45	120 .016*
Gender characteristics	17.18 (3.27)	19.29 (3.42)	3.49	120 .001*

	Younger female (RS) N= 49	older female (RS) n=61		
Gender management characteristics	29.29 (3.29)	29.75 (4.76)	.585	108 .56
Gender characteristics	19.28 (1.80)	19.30(3.422)	.017	108 .936
	Younger male (RS) N= 49	older male (RS) n=61		
Gender management characteristics	24.61 (6.11)	27.51 (5.33)	2.65	108 .009*
Gender characteristics	15.76 (3.06)	17.18 (3.27)	2.34	108 .02*

As can be seen in table V with the perception of male trainees no groups differ in perceptions of gender management characteristics, but with gender characteristics younger male (RS) see them as more male than do younger female (RS).

Table V
Showing perception of the 'paper' male trainee. High score indicates 'male' orientation.

Measures	Perceiver Young Male (RS) N=48	Young female (RS) n=49	t score	Df prob
Gender management characteristics	31.19 (3.11)	31.06 (3.33)	.19	95 .847
Gender characteristics	21.25 (1.69)	18.98 (1.98)	6.05	95 .000*
	Older male (RS) N=62	older female (RS) n=60		
Gender management characteristics	31.06 (5.07)	29.93 (4.95)	1.25	120 .215
Gender characteristics	20.32 (2.81)	19.78 (2.77)	1.07	120 .288
	Younger female (RS) N=49	older female (RS) n=60		
Gender management characteristics	31.06 (3.33)	29.93 (4.94)	1.364	107 .176
Gender characteristics	18.97 (1.98)	19.78 (2.77)	1.71	107 .091
	Younger male (RS) N=48	older male (RS) n=62		
Gender management characteristics	31.19 (3.11)	31.06 (2.81)	.148	108 .883
Gender characteristics	21.25 (1.69)	20.32 (2.81)	2.02	108 .034*

Management characteristics and management quality

The ranking of management characteristics in terms of those which contribute most to an individual's managerial quality indicate, as shown in table VI, male characteristics are listed in five of the first six places (top three for each) as ranked by both males and females.

Table VI

Showing rank order of characteristics on the basis of contribution to managerial quality. m/ f indicates gender category of characteristic. Low mean indicates higher ranking.

Male participants N= 220	Mean rank. Std. in brackets	Female participants N= 220	Mean rank. Std. in brackets
Assume leadership in group (m)	1.52 (0.71)	Assume leadership in group (m)	1.41 (0.69)
In control (m)	2.71 (1.49)	Self confident (m)	2.57 (1.43)
Ambitious (m)	3.70 (1.42)	Aware of feelings of others (f)	3.91 (1.52)
Aware of feelings of others (f)	4.56 (1.58)	Intuitive (f)	4.36 (1.57)
Helpful (f)	5.40 (1.65)	Helpful (f)	5.10 (1.73)
Self confident (m)	5.97 (1.52)	In control (m)	5.72 (1.42)
Intuitive (f)	7.14 (1.05)	Ambitious (m)	6.80 (1.23)
A good mixer (m)	7.80 (1.93)	A good mixer (m)	7.64 (1.84)
Express emotions (f)	8.26 (1.55)	Humanitarian values (f)	7.71 (1.42)
Humanitarian values (f)	9.21 (1.32)	Express emotions (f)	9.43 (0.84)

Participant's views of organisational structure

The participants responses regarding the structure of their organization provided some support for the view that organizational changes are taking place as can be seen in table VII . A total of 41% of the sample reported a move in their organization towards greater participation in management.

Table VII

Number of responses	Response
81 (18.4%)	Did not know as had only been employed a short time
63 (14.3%)	Simply did not know
36 (8.6%)	Felt organization had become more hierarchical
78 (17.7%)	Felt had been no change
182 (41.3%)	Felt structure was more participatory

Discussion

In this particular study it needs to be emphasised that the participants were all managers or professionals who had recently taken part in the recruitment and selection process. This is important for they are the very people who are currently instrumental in employing management trainees. It would appear from the findings of this study that females may well face an unequal struggle in the job stakes. They are perceived, as shown by hypothesis one, which supports earlier studies (Loden 1985) that those involved with recruitment and selection (RS) as having less male management characteristics than their male contemporaries. From the point of view of career opportunities for the individual trainee and in terms of appropriate skills for the workplace it is unfortunate that traditional gender stereotype attitudes are still present in the working environment today. This is in spite of legislative efforts since the 1970s to change the situation. The difference in perception of female trainee managers, seems to be affected by age. Older male (RS), as indicated in hypothesis four, in line with the much earlier findings of Schein (1974), perceive more male orientated management characteristics and more masculine characteristics in female trainees. The older male (RS) regard them as positively, and arguably, as a consequence of their implied seniority, it is a good thing they do.

The belief in a link between male characteristics and good management identified by many previous researchers (Reskin and McBrier 2000, Schein 2001 and Powell et al 2002) would seem to be present as noted in the interviews conducted as part of the present study. This is important for again, it needs to be recognised that, the participants were not students but were all active in recruitment/selection. This emphasis on male characteristics and successful management can be a major hurdle to females being successful in the career stakes.

It has, however, been suggested by Eagly and Carli (2003) that organisation structures are changing and there is a greater emphasis on participation. There is evidence from the interviews conducted in the present study that a significant percentage of the participants reported their organisations were changing and becoming more participatory in their structure. The implication of this is that 'female management characteristics' may well be more appropriate skills for all trainees.

The implications of the findings of this study can be related to two areas where action can be taken to improve the opportunities for both male and female management trainees. Surprisingly male trainees may well also find themselves at a skill disadvantage if the changes towards a more participatory structure in organisations observed in this study and reported elsewhere do occur.

The first concerns the training process itself. As has been mentioned there are some management skills which females appear to be lacking. According to research such as that by Brophy and Good 1974, Carli (1990), Midwinter (1992), Sadker and Sadker (1994), Baxter (2002) and Kniveton (2006), females lack certain skills loosely categorized under the heading assertiveness. There is clearly room for the process of management training to include special attention to this area. For males the stereotype would suggest they lack some of the more 'female characteristics', including such things as facilitating and supportive leadership skills. These are more appropriate when participatory organizational structures are in place.

The second area for action concerns the workplace itself and what employers can do to fully develop their management trainees. Kottke and Agars (2005) question whether mentoring in the workplace 'for women by women' is as appropriate as it seems. There are certainly management skills which many women possess which can be honed and developed in other women by this means, but equally male mentors have skills they can encourage women to develop. Similarly with the changes in the organisational structure with an increasing emphasis on participation male trainees have much they can learn from a female mentor.

The findings of this study would suggest traditional gender stereotypes are still present in those who recruit and select management trainees. This potentially harmful for the career development of both males and females. In addition it does not help organizations as changes to their structure would appear to demand management skills which involve the more traditional 'female characteristics' which encourage participation and supportive involvement.

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