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Gender and Leadership: The Case of Presidential Election 2010

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Introduction

Research has shown that people perceive a good leader in terms of masculine characteristics (Butterfield and Grinnell, 1998; Powell and Butterfield, 2011; Powell, Butterfield, and Parent, 2002; van Engen and Willemsen, 2004). However, recent researchers and thought leaders argue that leaders and managers should be androgyny, a person who has strong masculine and feminine qualities (van Engen and Willemsen, 2004).

The main research questions this exploratory study addresses were what the young Sri Lanka voters consider as the ideal characteristics in their political leaders and whether their choice in the election matches the ideal characteristics. Whilst the image of the leader does play a part (Butterfield and Prasad, 1989), it should however be noted that factors such as campaign issues, campaign strategy, the opponent, and economy play a role in the determination of the election of a President (Butterfield and Prasad, 1989).

Methodology

This survey was carried out prior to the 2010 Presidential election on January 15, 2010. Four questionnaires were used. First questionnaire was to obtain the description of a "good president" (ideal) in terms of masculine and feminine characteristics. Second was to describe presidential candidate Mr. Mahinda Rajapakshe. Third was to describe Presidential candidate Mr. Sarath Fonseka. Fourth was to describe former President Ms. Chandrika B. Kumaratunga. The four types of questionnaires were mixed and distributed to students in the researcher's undergraduate class.

Bem's Sex Role Index (1981) consisting of 60 items was used to measure masculine and feminine characteristics. The 60 items in the four questionnaires were identical, only the preamble differed in each type of the questionnaire. Questionnaire consisted of 20 items to measure masculine characteristics, 20 items to measure feminine characteristics and 20 neutral items. Scale items were measured on a response scale ranging from 1 ("never or almost never true") to 7 ("always or almost true"). The 20 items for masculinity were averaged to create a single score ($\alpha = .77$) and similarly a single score was created for femininity ($\alpha = .83$).

Convenience sampling method was used. Each participant was given only one questionnaire. Sample size was 78 (a 100% response rate). The sample consisted of 10 males and 68 females of the age of 23 years.

Results

Paired samples and independent samples t-tests were used for analyses. The mean scores for each of the masculine and feminine characteristics for the two Presidential candidates, former President and the Good President are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Paired sample t-test was used to test if the masculine and feminine scores were statistically significantly different for each of the two Presidential candidates, former President and the

Good President. The results show that "Good President" was described in more masculine than in feminine characteristics (see Figure 1). Results also showed that each of the two Presidential candidates was scored higher in masculine than in feminine characteristics (see Figure 1). Further, Ms. Kumaratunga was described as being more masculine than feminine, although her scores for masculine characteristics were the lowest as compared to the main two Presidential candidates and the "Good President" (see Figure 1).

Independent samples t-tests were used to test if the masculine and feminine scores of the two Presidential candidates and the former preside were significantly different from the respective scores of the Good president and from each other. The score for feminine characteristics of Presidential candidate Mr. Sarath Fonseka were statistically significantly lower than the scores obtained for Good President and Mr. Mahinda Rajapakshe and not significantly different from Ms. Kumaratunga. His masculine score was not statistically significantly different from Good president and Mr. Rajapakshe but significantly higher than that of Ms. Kumaratunga (see Figure 1). Hence, Mr. Sarath Fonseka did not meet the expectations of a Good Presidents in terms of feminine characteristics. The expectations of a Good President were also not met by Ms. Kumaratunga (t-test results for both masculine and feminine scores were significantly lower). Another interesting finding was that the respondents perceived Ms. Kumaratunga, a female, as having lower feminine characteristics than Mr. Mahinda Rajapakshe, and similar to Mr. Sarath Fonseka (see Figures 1). However, the perceived masculine (5.29) and feminine (4.65) characteristics scores of Mr. Mahinda Rajapakshe were not statistically significantly different from the perception of a Good President (5.24 and 4.69 respectively). Hence, he matched the characteristics of a Good President in terms of masculine and feminine characteristics.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the study indicated that a good leader is described as being more masculine than feminine. Further, irrespective of gender, the former President and the two main presidential candidates were also described as more masculine than feminine. This study's results are similar to other study results in Western countries (e.g., Butterfield and colleagues). Even though researchers have put forth that leaders and managers should be androgyny, the perception of an androgyny person as a good leader has still not been accepted by the Sri Lankan voters. Interestingly, this study's results seemed to have predicted the choice of the people in the 2010 Presidential election correctly.

References

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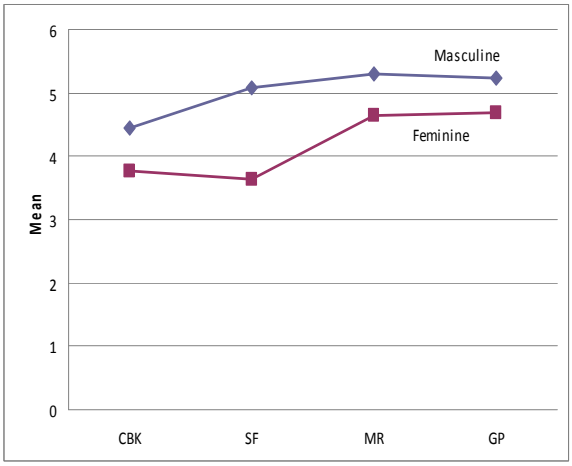
Figure 1. Comparison of profiles



Note: CBK: Ms. Chandrika B. Kumaratunga; SF: Mr. Sarath Fonseka; MR: Mr. Mahinda Rajapakshe; GP: Good President

Table 1. Masculine characteristics

Characteristics	CBK	SF	MR	GP
Self reliant	4.00	4.35	5.86	5.35
Defends own beliefs	4.55	4.50	4.52	4.35
Independent	4.00	4.95	5.19	5.65
Athletic	3.25	5.50	5.29	4.12
Assertive	4.65	4.25	4.90	4.76
Strong personality	5.40	5.75	6.10	6.94
Forceful	4.55	4.95	4.33	3.56
Analytical	3.85	4.25	5.29	5.62
Leadership ability	5.05	6.00	6.29	6.59
Willing to take risks	4.50	5.85	6.24	6.29
Makes decisions easily	4.05	5.00	5.43	5.12
Self sufficient	3.60	4.85	5.14	5.94
Dominant	4.50	4.55	5.10	4.75
Masculine	4.60	5.65	5.38	5.12
Willing to take a stand	4.55	5.10	5.52	5.76
Aggressive	4.80	4.55	3.67	3.53
Act as a leader	5.00	6.20	5.95	6.12
Individualistic	5.10	4.30	4.00	3.47
Competitive	4.40	5.75	5.71	5.50
Ambitious	4.65	5.15	6.05	6.24

Note: CBK: Ms. Chandrika B. Kumaratunga; SF: Mr. Sarath Fonseka; MR: Mr. Mahinda Rajapakshe; GP: Good President

Table 2. Feminine characteristics

Characteristics	CBK	SF	MR	GP
Yielding	3.45	3.65	4.19	3.88
Cheerful	4.00	4.40	5.71	4.88
Shy	3.00	2.30	1.95	2.00
Affectionate	3.90	4.05	6.00	4.44
Flatterable	4.50	3.35	4.48	3.12
Loyal	3.50	4.55	5.57	6.24
Feminine	4.35	2.00	3.14	3.71
Sympathetic	3.85	3.70	4.76	5.35
Sensitive	3.05	3.95	5.43	6.53
Understanding	3.70	4.55	5.25	6.71
Compassionate	3.95	4.21	4.52	5.47
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	3.90	3.80	4.71	4.53
Soft spoken	3.30	3.25	4.19	4.41
Warm	4.15	4.10	4.71	4.59
Tender	3.65	3.60	4.38	4.82
Gullible	3.60	3.05	3.00	2.18
Childlike	3.65	2.40	4.62	3.38
Does not use harsh language	4.10	3.75	5.00	5.35
Loves children	4.30	3.95	6.43	5.82
Gentle	3.50	4.37	5.05	6.24

Note: CBK: Ms. Chandrika B. Kumaratunga; SF: Mr. Sarath Fonseka; MR: Mr. Mahinda Rajapakshe; GP: Good President