

CHAPTER 9

PSYCHOLOGICAL GENDER, THE  
PERFECT POLITICIAN STEREOTYPE  
AND ASSESSMENT OF A FEMALE  
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

**Summary**

This assignment raises problematic aspects of assessment made by the female voters concerning a female presidential candidate. The research area encompasses an association between the assessment with the presented image of the candidate, psychological gender of the voters and the perfect politician stereotype.

Results of the performed studies have shown that the image of the candidate diversifies the female voters' assessment meaningfully. It would pertain to consider the candidate as trustworthy. Likewise, the gender transpired to be differentiating. The influence of the perfect politician stereotype functioning among female voters on the assessment of the candidate's image was not verified. In studies they used *Inwentarz do Oceny Płci Psychologicznej (Psychological Gender Assessment Inventory)* by Alicja Kuczyńska, which is an adaptation of SEX ROLE INVENTORY, the writings of Sandra Bem (1971) and authorial Questionnaire of the Perfect Politician Stereotype.

**Key words:** Political psychology, candidate's image, psychological gender, stereotype, perfect politician, woman

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## INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in politics has a relatively short history. An attitude towards politics and citizens' roles forms in the process of socialization (Liberska, 2009). Women in Poland obtained passive and active right to vote in 1918. However, before the Second World War women's participation in legislature and executive was nominal – they constituted merely 2% of the Parliament members and 5% of the Senate members (Cwalina, Falkowski, 2005). The situation is gradually improving. According to data from 2005, women took 20 % of the places in Polish Sejm. (Fuszara, 2006).

As a result of the last elections in Sejm, a record number of women was found in the history of the Polish parliamentarianism. Currently, Lower Chamber is composed of 27% of female representatives (127 out of 460 representatives). Moreover, 3 women out of 19 ministers fulfil cabinet posts in the new government and for the second time in the row and the third in Poland's history, it is steered by a female Prime Minister (Chełstowska, Druciarek, Niżyńska, Skoczyła, 2015).

Therefore, it seems women's position in politics has significantly improved. Assuredly, quota system had an impact on it. It ensures participation of 35% of women (in line with idea of gender equality) on lists in every general election in which proportional representation is in force (requiring lists of candidates). If this requirement is not complied with, the list will not be registered by National Electoral Commission (NKP).

In view of the changes in matters of women's presence in politics, reference to the perception of female candidates for government offices by women themselves, seems to be particularly interesting.

### **Perception of female candidates for government offices**

As it turns out, research focusing on the perception of female candidates by the representatives of the same sex was not conducted thus far. In literature regarding political psychology and sociology, studies concerning perception of candidates for government offices can be found (Siemieńska, 1996; Siemieńska, 2005; Norris, 2003; Raciborski, 2005). Nevertheless, they most often consist of a comparison between a group of potential female and male voters as well as their disparate preferences towards candidates (Borawska, 2001; Tomczak, 2004; Rosenwasser, 1987, in: Cwalina, Falkowski, 2005). Lack of studies which would focus on assessments phrased by women towards female candidates for government offices.

According to some research, sex of the candidate in the context of presidential election does not have a huge impact on electors' decision (Borawska, 2001;

Tomczak, 2004; in: Cwalina, Falkowski, 2005). Although, it cannot go unnoticed that applicants compare favourably in fields of duties considered as typical for both genders (Rosenwasser and Seale, 1988, in: Cwalina, Falkowski, 2005).

On the other hand, importance of particular realm of politics, which was assessed, shows that potential voters attribute greater importance to those presidential candidate's fields of the political activity which are socially perceived as typically male (Rosenwasser i Seale, 1988, in: Cwalina, Falkowski, 2005). It puts potential female candidates for president in quite uncomfortable situation. From the very beginning they seem to be doomed to failure. The only possibility to gain an advantage over a man is for the female candidate to confront her 'emasculate' rival (Rosenwasser and Seale, 1988, in: Cwalina, Falkowski, 2005).

Borawska's research enabled us to look at women's chances in politics more optimistically (2001, in: Cwalina, Falkowski, 2005). It showed that a female candidate has it easier to make a positive impression on the voters than a man. This accuracy appears particularly in case of having a good reputation as well as a well-respected agenda.

### **Fields of women's social activity**

Based on general tendencies noticed by researchers, women are more likely to engage in activities which concern resolving problems rather than build institutions (Siemińska, 1996). What is more, as noticed by Curran and Ranzetti (2008), women are convinced that any changes in economics have a greater impact on their lives than men perceive it. They are, much more frequently, concerned about the level of the health care, childcare, education and problems such as poverty and homelessness. Therefore, greater women's support can be observed for social governmental programmes and intervention works (Pratto, 2002).

In point of fact, gender diversity also portrays an attitude towards international conflicts. Women, substantially, approve of peaceful dispute settlements (Ranzetti, Curran, 2005). They are distinctly supporters of devoting financial means to internal issues rather than to army development. They also more frequently express their concern about delinquency and drug abuse (Ranzetti, Curran, 2005). Not only do they engage in education process, social security for the poor, but also in ethnic minority issues (Rosenwasser, Dean, 1989; in: Cwalina, Falkowski, 2005). Hence, those are the fields perceived as typically female.



## Social perception

On the subject of features of social perception by women, it can be presumed, *imprimis*, that it stems from many researches of intersexual comparisons' nature. In Poland the research work concerning intersexual distinctions was done by Roźnowska (1987). She stated that women create more informative and diversified profiles. In case of the assessment of male representatives, women are more often focused on a description of social skills and character.

However, when describing representatives of the same gender, they paid attention to the qualities concerning their behaviour towards other people, character and emotional self-control. Qualities concerning their behaviour towards tasks and duties also appeared to be crucial (Roźnowska, 1987).

Furthermore, it is also worth to emphasize that on a general level, female image of the candidate earns more trust among potential female voters. One can rise it to the law of similarity (Hilgard, cf. Roźnowska, 1987) and reference to the internal perspective (Roźnowska, 1987). When women discern a 'female' candidate as similar to them, they consider her trustworthy.

The notion of stereotype refers to 'the pictures in our heads', which develop in an individual's mind and help to handle the complexity of surrounding reality by the aid of lifeworld's simplified prospect (Lippman, 2007, Sasińska-Klas, 2010). The individual, as Siemieńska (2005) emphasizes, owes this simplification to the process of socialization. For it chooses culturally formed stereotypes, suitable for given circumstances (Lippmann, 2007).

The issue of the perfect politician qualities were also discussed by Cwalina and Falkowski (2005). They analysed stability of the 'perfect' politician prototype for the president over the course of elections. Crucial qualities, which appeared in a description of the perfect president in 1995, were: honesty, credibility, abilities, professionalism, educational background, presence, attractiveness, intelligence, efficiency, strength, determination, openness to people and to the world.

## Sex as a construct

Relation with the sex perception as a socially structured phenomenon, have also theories concerning psychological gender (Curran, Ranzetti, 2008; Miluska, 2009). They address gender in categories of patterns organizing individual's perception (Kuczyńska, 1995) which can influence assessment of the candidate for the government office.

In this theory, it is presumed that each individual's personality consists of both, feminine and masculine elements (Bem, 1981). Psychological gender

depends on the exertion of each. Four main types of psychological gender are distinguished (Bem, 1981; Kuczyńska, 1992):

- People sex typed, characterised with mental qualities, suitable for their biological sex,
- Androgynous people, characterize to a large extent with both feminine and masculine qualities, notwithstanding their biological sex,
- People undifferentiated, who have remotely formed both feminine and masculine qualities (notwithstanding their biological sex)
- People cross-sex-typed, sex-reversed are characterised with qualities of the conversed sex to their biological one.

According to the Sara Bem's theory (1981) that sex is a deep-set pattern in culture, defined as affecting and cognitive structure. (por. Mandal, 2004). Most importantly, it is responsible for selection, organizing and directedness of individual information perception concerning genders and behaviours compatible with gender roles (Kuczyńska, 1992; Mandal, 2004).

## **The survey methodology**

A presented survey lasted from February to April 2011. The study group (N=150) consisted of women at age 20 to 35 years old, viz in period of early adulthood engaging in various citizen roles or even fulfilling them. Female students (19-25 years old) preponderated in the study group, because IPP shows regularities occurring to students most accurately (Kuczyńska, 1992). Extending the team with older women, but classified as young adults, aimed at establishment the meaning of age for voters' decision. Over half of the surveyed lived in the cities populated with over 500 thousand people.

## **Questions and hypotheses**

There were three survey questions posed:

- Does the image of the candidate diversify potential voters' assessments?
- Does the voters' gender and stereotype of the perfect politician influence the assessment of the candidate for government office?
- Do the fields of politics, that candidate encompasses, diversify the influence?

At this point it is worth to remind that performed surveys have a pioneering character.

Overview of the source literature enabled to formulate following hypotheses:

**H1.** Image of the candidate diversifies voters' assessment.

- H2. Voters' psychological gender diversifies their assessments of the candidates for the government office.
- H3. The perfect politician stereotype ensuing in voters' awareness diversifies their assessments of the candidates for the government office.
- H4. A description of the candidate for the government office diversifies the influence on the candidate's assessment, considering both psychological gender and the perfect politician stereotype.

## Research of the variables

### Image of the female candidate

Main independent variable, that was researched and had influence on the assessment of the applicant for the president, was the image of the candidate. It was presented in the form of a press item which was supposed to induce the surveyed to use their own heuristics related to politics and gender.

In the common part, for both versions, they introduced a candidate as a 50-year-old person, married, mother of two children. It emphasized her ability to reconcile private life with the professional one. They also quoted her educational level and fulfilled hitherto on the political arena functions, which was supposed to aid perceiving the candidate as a competent person (Curran, Renzetti, 2008).

They used fields of politics, emphasized in the election program, as a differentiating factor in the descriptions. On the grounds of that, a female candidate representing 'male' fields of politics ('masculine' female candidate) and another one representing female fields of politics (feminine female candidate) were chosen. This element of candidate's image was created based on Renzetti's and Curran's adjudication (2008).

The surveyed women had to answer following questions, concerning the candidate:

- Would you be willing to vote for the presented candidate for the RP president?
- Does the presented candidate gain your trust?
- Would you be willing to vote for the presented candidate if she ran for a different office, for e.g. minister, senator?

### Psychological gender

Psychological gender, as the further independent variable, was determined on the basis of the results attained in *IPP – Psychological Gender Assessment*



*Inventory* (Kuczyńska, 1992). It allowed to classify the surveyed person as: sex typed, (feminine women) or androgynous, or undifferentiated, or cross-sex-typed (masculine women).

## The Perfect Politician Stereotype

The alternate independent variable is the perfect politician stereotype. It was measured with PPS Questionnaire, which is an authorial tool (Liberska, Jankowiak, 2010). On the basis of the answer, surveyed people were assigned to one of three groups, each of which represented a different stereotype: feminine, masculine and neutral (chart 1).

PPS Questionnaire was verified in terms of probity of the method test-retest. 30 women, aged 20-35 years old, participated in the pilot study. They filled up a questionnaire of the Perfect Politician twice – over a distance of one week.

Chart 1. Characteristics of the perfect politician stereotypes (SIP/PPS)

Female Stereotype	Male Stereotype	Neutral Stereotype
Empathy	Finality	Abilities
Creativity	Far-sightedness	Resourcefulness
Social conscience	Realism	Intelligence
Openness to other people	Strong-mindedness	Wisdom
Thoughtfulness	Confidence	Communicativeness Assertiveness

Source: own elaboration

Statistically significant distinction has not been obtained between two further surveys.

## Survey results

Survey results have corroborated differentiating influence of the candidate's for the RP president image on candidate's (H1) assessment, only in case of the question concerning gain of trust by the candidate among the female voters ( $Z=-2,355$ ,  $p=0,019$ ). Although, it only applies to the female candidate's assessment by the feminine women. It partially corroborates postulate assumed in H1, that the most favourably assessed by the voters are the candidates who work in the

fields subordinated to their biological sex. (research Roseneasswer, 1987, in: Cwalina, Falkowski, 2005).

For that matters, hypothesis H4 gained only a partial corroboration. They noticed the diversity of the women's assessments, depending on the type of psychological gender concerning willingness to advocate the candidate representing the fields adjudged in politics as male. However, in this case we can only speak about statistical tendency ( $p=0,082$ ).

It emerged that feminine women are a group of the highest willingness to vote for the masculine female candidate. Inconsistent as it sounds, it does not agree with the expected dependency that feminine women should support female candidate. Hence, the survey results did not corroborate the meaning of the law of similarity (Hilgard, por. Roźnowska, 1987) and reference to internal perspective (Roźnowska, 1987) for a declaration of the female voters' endorsement for the candidate.

In case of the candidate's assessment as trustworthy, the assumed dependents were also corroborated partially. On level of statistical salience ( $p=0,002$ ), it was stated that feminine women assessed the female candidate, who was active in the female fields of politics as trustworthy. Notwithstanding, the association between gender and confidence to the candidate representing male fields of politics was not corroborated ( $p=0,136$ ).

The analysis of the association between voters' psychological gender and willingness to vote for the candidate, now if she aspired for a different office than the presidential one, did not prove the salience (only a statistical tendency in case of assessments concerning masculine female candidate was noted,  $p=0,063$ ). A group that was gave the best assessment of the masculine candidate turned out to be feminine women, not the masculine ones. Also in this case, an importance of the mentioned law of similarity and reference to the internal perspective was not corroborated.

It emerged that the description of the candidate for the president (as masculine or feminine) differentiates an influence, both involving psychological gender as well as the perfect politician stereotype, on the assessment of the candidate.

Attained results, on the level of statistical salience ( $p=0,010$ ), showed that feminine women expressed willingness to support the female candidate, now if she aspired for a different office than the presidential one – in accordance with the hypothesis H4.

In this case, feminine women's assessment within a range of detailed assessments was positive. However, diversity of masculine women's answers, attests to the fact that they carry out more positive assessments than feminine women.



Results of the analysis enabled to verify hypothesis H4 in the part concerning the influence of the perfect politician stereotype on the candidate's assessment only when the candidate for the president is qualified based on her description as the 'female candidate' ( $p=0,019$ ).

It is partly corroborated with the expected association. For it was supposed that women with the female stereotype will assess the female candidate more favourably (mentioned the law of similarity and reference to internal perspective). Attained results enabled to corroborate the hypothesis H2 ( $p<0,03$ ).

As expected, depending on the represented psychological gender, surveyed in disparate way carried out the assessment of the candidate for the RP president who was presented to them. A group that assessed the candidate for the president most favourably turned out to be women with psychological gender described as feminine women.

In case of perceiving the candidate as trustworthy, feminine women constituted a group that gave the most positive assessments. Likewise, feminine women's answers were formed in the context of their willingness to vote when the presented candidate aspired for a different office than a presidential one. The group deferred in assessment towards women with androgynous gender (higher amt. of ranks= 4067 at  $N=49$  in comparison to 3995,5 at  $N=50$ ), only in terms of willingness to vote for the candidate in presidential election.

A group assessing the candidate the least favourably consisted of women with an undifferentiated gender. The assessments which predominated were average attesting a neutral assessment of the candidate (val. 3 on the answer scale); higher assessments were not noted.

The hypothesis H3 was not corroborated: electors' perfect politician stereotype did not turn out to be a differentiating factor, when assessing candidate for the presidential office ( $p<0,05$ ).

Demographic variables that could affect assessment of the candidate are also worth mentioning. Attained results from the survey indicated the relevant statistical tendency (chi-square = 9,02,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0,011$ ) in a subgroup of women aged 19-24 years old: potential voters in indicated age range put trust in the candidate representing female fields of politics. On the other hand, potential voters from the oldest age group (31-35 years old) expressed willingness to vote for the presidential candidate (chi-square = 6,349,  $df=2$ ,  $p=0,04$ ), when she declared activities in male fields of politics.

Survey results show a significant association between assessment of the candidates and respondents' level of education ( $p=0,021$ ). Image of the 'feminine' candidate was considered as trustworthy by women with secondary education. More respondents expressed lack of trust towards presented image of the 'masculine' candidate (assessment 1), than towards 'feminine' candidate.

Analysis of the attained results also indicated a meaning of voters' place of residence. In case of the citizens from cities with a population of over 500 thousand, there was noticed a tendency of willingness to support the presidential candidate, representing female fields of politics (chi-square = 5,08, df =2,  $p < 0,079$ ) and tendency to perceive the candidate running for presidential office representing female fields of politics – as trustworthy (chi-square = 0,061, df=2,  $p < 0,08$ ).

In the group of women resident in urban areas with a population of under 100 thousand citizens, one can therefore speak about significantly stronger trust to the candidate representing female fields of politics than to the candidate representing male fields of politics (chi-square=6,002, df=2,  $p < 0,05$ ).

Accordingly, it emerged that age and a place of residence explain, to some extent, assessments of the candidate for the president.

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

To sum up, it ought to be stated that women generally assess the presented candidate for the president positively. It is corroborated with the mentioned observations from the source literature (Sanbonmatsu, 2000, in: Cwalina, Falkowski, 2005). What is more, in this case one can acknowledge the biological sex as a central characteristic in politics, or at least in explored areas of political life. However, a women's tendency to express extreme positive assessment has not found a confirmation (Shapiro, Tagiuri; Warr, Knapper; cf. Rożnowska, 1987).

It was also proved that a relevant conditioning of assessing women running for the presidential office is psychological gender. Based on the survey results, one can presume candidates for the president can expect endorsement primarily from androgynous women. Feminine women put trust and are willing to vote for women aspiring for different political offices than the presidential one. A group that was the least enthusiastic about women's aspiration for the presidential office, consists of undifferentiated women. Although, the psychological gender theory does not have a general character (Bem, 1981, Kuczyńska, 1992, 2002), the attained results enable to apply it to forecast results of both presidential and parliamentary election. Based on it, one can also speak about an image that the candidate should create to gain female voters' endorsement.

In order to gain the largest endorsement among young adult women – a woman running for the presidential office ought to enhance male fields of politics in her program. For feminine women expressed willingness to vote for such a candidate's profile. However, a candidate representing female fields of politics is considered the most trustworthy. Also, in case of a 'feminine' female candidate one may expect a bigger endorsement among feminine women

– regardless of the fact if she runs for a place in Sejm or Senate. Does this mean that in such election biological sex takes a status of a central characteristic (Skarżyńska, 1981) and a candidate's election program does not matter – only the fact of being a woman? It necessitates a corroboration in further surveys.

Male fields of politics seem to be more significant in case of the presidential office. It is corroborated with a stance presented by Rosenwasser and Seale (1988, in: Cwalina, Falkowski, 2005.)

A salience of the perfect politician stereotype, functioning among voters' when assessing a candidate, was not noted. Although, there is a probability that women's attitude towards politics cannot be fully explained with stereotypes or maybe an aspiration to abolish them. However, in case of the candidate representing female fields of politics, the perfect politician stereotype has got some meaning – women with the mixed neutral-feminine stereotype declared willingness to vote for the 'feminine' candidate. One should point out that groups of electors disclosing various perfect politician stereotypes were not equinumerous.

It is also primary that generally a female candidate's image gains more trust among potential voters. One may refer it – what has already been done here repeatedly – to the law of similarity (Hilgard, cf. Rożnowska, 1987) and reference to an internal perspective (Rożnowska, 1987). When women see a 'female' candidate as similar to themselves, they consider her trustworthy. Similar associations in case of willingness to vote were not noticed. Therefore, one can assume that recognising woman as trustworthy does not guarantee voting for her in election.

Hereinabove, the issue of strength of the subgroups compared in terms of gender and the perfect politician stereotype has been already indicated. One cannot expect that results would be different, if groups of psychological gender and the perfect politician stereotype were equinumerous. Although, obtainment of equinumerous groups can necessitate a nonprobability sampling, which does not have to render a distribution of the surveyed variables in population. To sum up, survey results, attained in such model may not provide the basis to forecast the election results in given population.

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