

## Perspectives from the Middle East on the Gender of Successful Managers

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### Abstract

*Drawing on evidence from business students in the Middle East we used Bem's Sex Role Inventory to determine if females agreed with males about the attributes needed for management success. Our findings suggest they did not agree with the combination of masculine and feminine attributes identified by males, and that females had a very limited perspective about the attributes needed for successful management. However, after partitioning the sample by gender we found broad agreement between males and females about attributes needed when management was success was characterized androgynous. We conclude that while there is an absence of evidence for 'think manager – think male' there is evidence for a gender-typed; "think (successful) manager, think androgynous manager".*

### 1. Introduction

We used Bem's Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974) to examine whether females in one of the Middle East's Gulf Coast Countries (GCC) agreed with males about the attributes needed for management success. Our research represents a response to calls to answer the question: is "think manager – think male" a global phenomenon (Powell, 2012; Rhee & Sigler, 2015; Schein et al., 1996 and others). It also extends research on gender issues that remains largely centered on the West (Balgiu, 2013; Koenig et al., 2011; Sharoni, 1997).

The issue is important because "stereotypes often are a potent barrier to women's advancement to positions in leadership" (Koenig et al., 2011, p.616). If the stereotypical characteristics considered necessary for successful management are masculine then females may be doubly disadvantaged (Broveman et al., 1972). They may not be selected for managerial roles on the basis of their sex (Cohen & Bunker, 1975). Then if hired they may be criticized and their performance undervalued if they adopt masculine characteristics considered necessary for success (Eagly & Karua, 2002; Heilman, 1983; Rudman & Glick, 2001).

We begin with a review of the status of women in the GCC. This is followed by an explanation of the concepts used in the research, a review of the literature, research method and hypotheses, findings and discussion.

### 2. The Status of Women in the GCC

Gulf States rank high in terms of GDP but low in gender equality and economic participation (Kelly, 2010; McKinsey & Company, 2014), Hausman et al.(2009) report the gender gap is "the widest in the world" (p. 24). Despite high levels of education female participation in the workforce is low and their unemployment is higher. They are significantly underrepresented on company boards and their earned income is estimated to range between 17% and 43% of that of males, compared to between 60% and 70% in the USA and Britain (Kelly, 2010; McKinsey & Company, 2014).

Among reasons cited for these inequalities are: patriarchal patterns of kinship, strong gender roles in Islamic culture tribal, social and cultural traditions, legalized discrimination, and ingrained male dominance (Metcalf & Rees, 2010; Sharoni, 1997; UNDP 2005; Zahidi and Ibarra, 2010). Dabbous-Sensenig (2002) refers the Arab Middle East being "mired in a predominant culture of religious patriarchy and conservatism" (p.4). Descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes likely play a part in constructing this gender inequality. For example, the view has been expressed that while women may be fit for positions such as teaching, they are not fit for leadership (Al-Suwaihel, 2009).

Furthermore, role socialization into femininity characterized as “being timid, obedient, silent and soft” in the Arab world likely provides a socio-cultural barrier to female participation in management by involving qualities not associated with the attributes of managers (Abu-Duhou, 2011).

Of course, gender inequality, stereotyping and discrimination in the workplace are not confined to the GCC (Rhee & Sigler, 2015). However, in the GCC these inequalities are “pervasive and persisting” and have “given reason for repeated regional and international calls for attention and action” (Karam & Jamali; 2013 p. 32). We subscribe to this view, and agree with Paris & Decker, (2102) that “Educators need to make a conscious choice to bring feminine managerial attributes and abilities into the discourse” (p.40). In addition to the ethical issue of denying equal opportunity, the failure to use “highly educated women curbs economic development and squanders important energies” (UNDP, 2005 p. 92).

### **3. Conceptualization of Sex, Gender and Stereotypes**

Sex describes the biological nature of a person, female or male (Vinnicombe and Singh, 2002), while gender is used to describe the “cultural, social and psychological traits of individuals, as masculine or feminine” (p. 122). We use the term stereotypes as “beliefs about the characteristics, attributes and behaviors of members of certain groups” (Hilton and von Hippel, 1996 p. 240). Stereotypes provide a quick basis for ‘knowing’ a person, and predicting behavior. Commonly held beliefs about how men and women differ include the view that males are “instrumental” implying the ability to accomplish tasks, while females are “expressive” (Koenig et al., 2011; Rhee & Sigler, 2015). These attributes may be used not only to describe femininity and masculinity, but also to prescribe appropriate behavior or gender roles for individuals of a specific sex.

Masculinity and femininity may be conceptualized either as bi-polar or, following Bem (1974), orthogonal. In the former a person is either feminine or masculine, in the latter a person’s gender is comprised of both masculine and feminine attributes. We argue in common with (Koenig et al., 2011) the orthogonal construct is consistent with: intuition and research (Helgesen, 1990; Kravetz, 1976); a change in management philosophy from the rational organizational man, Sargent (1993) and the denial of innate sex differences in either leadership style or aptitude made by Kanter (1993).

### **4. Literature Review**

Our review is conducted in two parts corresponding with studies using Schein’s 92 item Descriptive Index (SDI), and Bem’s 60 or 30 item Sex Role Inventory.

Two studies of managers in the U.S by Schein (1973, 1975) found a strongly held “think manager-think male” view. The topic was revisited by Brenner et al., (1989). They found management sex typed male by males but not by females. In 1992 attention turned to whether this issue might be a global phenomenon. The question was addressed by among others: Balgiu, (2013), Booyesen & Nkomo (2010), Orser (1994), Sauers et. al., (2002), Schein & Mueller (1992), and Schein et al., (1996), in such countries as Bulgaria, China and Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, the U.S. and the U.K. With the exception of females in the U.S. findings showed management sex typed as male. These studies have been complemented by over 30 others (Koenig, et al., 2011). However, with perhaps the exception of Booyesen & Nkomo (2010), findings appear consistent with the view expressed by Schein (2001) that globally, managerial sex typing exists. Nevertheless, Kark et al, (2012) suggested that “women and men interested in being perceived as effective leaders may be well advised to blend ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ behaviors” (p. 620).

In an early study Powell and Butterfield (1979) using the BSRI drew: (a) on evidence of changes in sex-role stereotypes (Kravetz, 1976), (b) changes in the conceptualization of sex-role stereotypes (Bem, 1974, 1976), and (c) assertions that there may be an association between androgyny and more effective managerial behavior (Helgesen, 1990; Kanter, 1993; Sargent, 1993) to hypothesize good managers would be perceived in terms of androgyny rather than masculinity. The hypothesis was rejected. In 1984 Powell and Butterfield sought to determine the characteristics of “bad” managers. Over 90% of the respondents sex typed the bad manager undifferentiated, the opposite of androgynous. However, the “good manager” was sex-typed androgynous by only 12% of the students.

In addition females rated the good manager higher on masculine than feminine attributes furthering evidence that females see themselves with qualities different to those needed to be good managers (Holt & Ellis, 1998).

Dennis and Kunkel (2004) found that, irrespective of assigned gender, males were rated more highly than females in characteristics equating to leadership potential. Powell (2012) reviewed methods used to approach the intersection of sex, gender and leadership. He concluded with respect to research on beliefs about leadership stereotypes that men are better managers, and better managers are masculine. But with respect to research on sex differences that female leaders are more effective.

### **5. Research Method and Hypotheses**

Following the work of Powell and Butterfield we used the 30 item BSRI to examine whether females agreed with males about the attributes needed for management success. The instrument has been used widely with Bem's 1974 article cited over 8,400 times [Google Search March 2015]. Campbell et al., (1999) reported the 30 item short form generally yielding reliable scores, and it has been validated outside the USA (Katsurada & Sugihara, 1999). Koenig et al., (2011) reported "internal consistency coefficients of 0.74 to 0.9 for the instrumental and 0.79 to 0.9 for the expressive scales" (p. 620) derived from studies collected for a meta-analysis.

The BSRI was administered to 425 undergraduate business students attending one of the many new Western Style universities in the GCC. Given a 7 point Likert scale to record their level of agreement students were asked to decide the extent to which each item described an attribute likely to be detrimental or beneficial to advancement and becoming a successful manager. Since sex-role stereotypes imply "extensive agreement among people as to the characteristic differences between men and women" (Broverman, et al., 1972, p.75), our analysis focused on items: (a) rated 5 and above, signifying the characteristic was beneficial for success, and (b) agreed by 75% or more of the respondents. A total of 381 usable responses were returned comprised of 177 females and 204 males.

The literature and social role theory (Diekmann & Eagly, 2000; Eagly & Karau, 2002) provided a framework to develop hypotheses. We commenced considering the respondent's sex by drawing on the 381 responses determine if female students agreed with males about the attributes perceived as characterizing success.

H<sub>1</sub>: Female students will identify at least 75% of the attributes, rated 5.0 and above, perceived necessary for success by male students.

We also sought to test whether females would rate masculine attributes higher than feminine attributes by comparing means.

H<sub>2</sub>: Female students will rate masculine attributes more highly than feminine attributes.

Then, in a manner similar to Dennis and Kunkel (2004), we partitioned the 381 responses to determine if there was agreement between the sexes when success was characterized feminine, masculine or androgynous respectively (H<sub>3</sub> through H<sub>5</sub> inclusive).

H<sub>3,4,5</sub>: Female students will identify at least 75% of the attributes feminine, masculine and androgynous respectively, rated 5.0 and above, perceived necessary for success by male students.

### **6. Findings**

Attribute means for the 381 respondents are ranked in Table 1, with ratings 5.0 agreed by 75% or more highlighted. Male students identified 5 masculine and 4 feminine attributes, akin to an androgynous perspective of requirements need for success. Females identified 1 masculine and 2 feminine attributes. We concluded this provides insufficient evidence to support the view that the females agree with males about the attributes needed for success.

**Table 1: Attribute Rankings: All Females and All Males (H1)**

Rank	All Females	Mean	All Males	Mean
	Attributes		Attributes	
1	F Loyal	5.61	M Leadership Abilities	5.77
2	M Assertive	5.38	M Defend Beliefs	5.70
3	F Understanding	5.28	M Independent	5.68
4	M Leadership Abilities	5.46	M Take a Stand	5.63
5	M Independent	5.38	M Assertive	5.57
6	F Cheerful	5.34	F Loyal	5.56
7	M Defend Beliefs	5.30	F Understanding	5.51
8	F Avoid Harsh Language	5.16	F Cheerful	5.42
9	M Take a Stand	5.15	F Sensitive	5.38
10	F Compassionate	5.09	M Strong Personality	5.07
11	F Sensitive	4.94	F Compassionate	5.02
12	F Warm	4.85	F Warm	5.00
13	M Strong Personality	4.82	F Sympathetic	4.90
14	F Sympathetic	4.79	F Avoid Harsh Language	4.74
15	M Willing to take risks	4.56	M Willing to take risks	4.74
16	M Forceful	4.32	M Forceful	4.51
17	F Gentle	4.15	F Gentle	4.50
18	F Sooth hurt feelings	3.95	M Aggressive	4.01
19	M Dominate	3.88	F Sooth hurt feelings	3.90
20	M Aggressive	3.71	M Dominate	3.77

A test of means conducted for H2 test failed to show that female respondents rated masculine attributes more highly than feminine attributes (Table 2).

**Table 2. H2 - Test of Means**

Sex 1=F 2=M			FEMAVE	MALAVE			
1	N	Valid	177	177			
	Mean		4.9169	4.7955			
2	N	Valid	204	204			
	Mean		4.9922	5.0407			
Sex 1=F 2=M		Test Value = 4.7955					
		t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
					Lower	Upper	
1	FEMAVE	2.662	176	.008	.12145	.0314	.2115

Then following procedure developed by Bem (1974, 1981) the 381 responses were partitioned to identify respondents perceiving success characterized by gender. Table 3 lists the attributes identified by students envisaging success gendered feminine. Males identified 6 feminine and 3 masculine attributes. Females identified 7 feminine attributes, 6 in common with the males. However, they identified no masculine attributes. We concluded that females only partially agree with males about the attributes needed for success when it is gendered feminine.

**Table 3: Management Success Envisioned as Feminine (H3)**

Rank	FEMALE		MALE	
	Attributes	Mean	Attributes	Mean
1	F Cheerful	5.86	F Cheerful	5.83
2	F Avoid Harsh Language	5.81	F Loyal	5.78
3	F Compassionate	5.81	F Understanding	5.53
4	F Loyal	5.81	F Sympathetic	5.47
5	F Sympathetic	5.69	F Compassionate	5.42
6	F Understanding	5.69	F Warm	5.22
7	F Warm	5.38	M Assertive	5.17
8	F Sensitive	5.14	M Leadership Abilities	5.11
9	M Assertive	4.98	M Take a Stand	5.08
10	M Defend Beliefs	4.83	F Sensitive	5.42
11	M Leadership Abilities	4.74	M Defend Beliefs	5.41
12	F Gentle	4.74	F Avoid Harsh Language	5.14
13	M Take a Stand	4.62	M Independent	5.03
14	F Sooth hurt feelings	4.45	F Gentle	4.81
15	M Independent	4.40	F Sooth hurt feelings	4.58
16	M Strong Personality	4.43	M Strong Personality	4.47
17	M Forceful	4.19	M Willing to take risks	4.36
18	M Willing to take risks	4.02	M Forceful	3.81
19	M Dominant	3.43	M Aggressive	3.25
20	M Aggressive	2.95	M Dominant	3.06

Table 4 lists the attributes identified by students envisaging success gendered as masculine. Males identified 5 masculine and 1 feminine attribute. Females identified the same 6 but added “risk taking”, “strong personality” and “loyalty”. We concluded there is partial to good agreement.

**Table 4: Management Success Envisioned as Masculine (H4)**

Rank	FEMALE		MALE	
	Attributes	Mean	Attributes	Mean
1	M Leadership Abilities	6.59	M Leadership Abilities	6.22
2	M Independent	6.31	M Independent	6.11
3	M Assertive	5.92	M Take a Stand	6.00
4	M Defend Beliefs	5.72	M Assertive	5.84
5	M Take a Stand	5.67	M Defend Beliefs	5.84
6	F Loyal	5.49	F Understanding	5.14
7	M Willing to take risks	5.26	M Strong Personality	5.38
8	M Strong Personality	5.05	F Sensitive	5.19
9	F Understanding	4.79	F Loyal	5.14
10	F Cheerful	5.10	F Cheerful	4.92
11	F Sensitive to others	4.67	M Willing to take risks	4.92
12	M Dominant	4.62	M Forceful	4.78
13	M Aggressive	4.56	M Aggressive	4.70
14	F Warm	4.46	F Avoid Harsh Language	4.14
15	M Forceful	4.46	F Warm	4.43
16	F Avoid Harsh Language	4.59	F Sympathetic	4.05
17	F Compassionate	4.28	F Compassionate	4.03
18	F Sympathetic	3.79	M Dominant	4.03
19	F Gentle	3.49	F Gentle	3.92
20	F Soothe hurt feelings	3.08	F Sooth hurt feelings	3.19

Table 5 lists the attributes identified by students envisaging success gendered as androgynous. Females identified 15 attributes and the males 14, and with the exception of the feminine attribute, “the need to avoid harsh language”, there is complete agreement between females and males as to the attributes needed for success. Both envision the importance of a combination of feminine and masculine characteristics.

We concluded females see management success in male terms when management success is perceived as androgynous.

**Table 5: Management Success Envisioned as Androgynous (H5)**

Rank	FEMALE		MALE	
	Attributes	Mean	Attributes	Mean
1	M Assertive	6.23	M Leadership Abilities	6.39
2	M Leadership Abilities	6.23	M Independent	6.22
3	F Loyal	6.23	M Take a Stand	6.22
4	M Defend Beliefs	6.21	M Defend Beliefs	6.20
5	M Independent	6.17	F Loyal	6.04
6	M Take a Stand	6.09	F Understanding	6.04
7	F Understanding	5.91	M Assertive	6.00
8	F Cheerful	5.87	F Sensitive	5.95
9	F Sensitive to others	5.70	F Cheerful	5.93
10	M Strong Personality	5.60	F Compassionate	5.66
11	F Avoid Harsh Language	5.53	M Strong Personality	5.62
12	F Compassionate	5.51	F Warm	5.51
13	F Sympathetic	5.30	F Sympathetic	5.40
14	F Warm	5.13	M Willing to take risks	5.34
15	M Willing to take risks	5.13	F Avoid Harsh Language	5.27
16	M Forceful	4.57	M Forceful	5.07
17	F Gentle	4.30	F Gentle	4.89
18	F Sooth hurt feelings	4.17	M Aggressive	4.41
19	M Dominant	4.19	F Sooth hurt feelings	4.12
20	M Aggressive	4.11	M Dominant	4.07

## 7. Discussion

Drawing on data collected from undergraduate business students we sought to address the question is “think manager – think male” a global phenomenon? GCC business students were asked to rate the extent to which the 30 BSRI personality characteristics are needed for success in management. We first sought to determine if female students agreed with males about the attributes perceived as characterizing success ( $H_1$  and  $H_2$ ), and then if females agreed with males when the sample was partitioned into three subsets corresponding to success being characterized masculine, or feminine or androgynous respectively ( $H_{3,4}$  & 5).

We concluded there was insufficient evidence to support the view that the 177 females saw management success as do the males requiring a combination of masculine and feminine attributes akin to androgyny. Our conclusion is in line with the findings of Schein (1988) with undergraduate student subjects in the USA, and Brenner (1989) with practicing managers in the USA. However, it is different to many studies conducted outside the USA where management was sex-typed male; Schein and Mueller (1992), and Schein et al., (1996) with subjects in the UK and Germany and China and Japan respectively. Given limited female role models in business the finding was unexpected. A possible explanation is that female students drew on female role models in the teaching and government sector, areas deemed appropriate for women.

The test of means failed to provide evidence to support the view that female students rated the feminine attributes less highly than masculine attributes. The higher mean on all female attributes is perhaps linked to female students drawing on female role models for their images of successful managers. Alternatively, culture may account for the difference. Nonetheless, the means fall into the ranges found in many other studies.

Partitioning revealed that both sexes perceived success to be comprised of different combinations of feminine and masculine attributes. There was only partial evidence of agreement about the attributes needed when management success was gendered feminine or masculine. However, there was evidence of agreement about the attributes needed for success when management is gendered androgynous and we suggest that partitioning revealed a “think successful manager-think androgynous manager” perspective.

This finding is similar to that of Boyce and Herd (2003) with respect to “successful female cadet leaders perceiving successful officers as having characteristics commonly ascribed to both women and men” (p. 365). It is also consistent with the findings of (Hegelsen, 1990).

We have also shown that as a body in the pool of 381 respondents female students appear to have a perspective of success substantially at variance with that of the males. If carried into a patriarchal work place this would likely undermine their success, suggesting a role for educators (Paris & Decker, 2012). In addition, we have shown that not all females perceive success in the same way. Some will agree with males but may be discriminated against in hiring on the basis of descriptive stereotypes, and in the work place on the basis of prescriptive stereotypes. But the issue is not simple to resolve. How are recruiters and managers to identify females with difference perspectives? The issue becomes even more problematic if perspectives are updated after entry to the workplace (Diekmann & Eagly 2000; Powell et al., 2002). Moreover, whose perspective should be given priority?

Turning finally to limitations of our research and possible avenues for future investigation we note that research using students may be criticized on the basis that they are an unrepresentative subset of society. However, our population was comprised of business students with senior standing likely to envision themselves as future managers. In addition, our use of students provides comparability with existing research in the field, and it extends knowledge of the phenomenon in an economically important and previously under researched geographic region. Second, mindful of criticisms leveled by Coder & Spiller (2013), we suggest that items identified by Zhang et al., (2001), Ballard-Reisch and Elton (1992) could be added to the short BSRI, and its structure investigated. Research could also supplement the use of the BSRI with self-appraisal of gender by respondents. Finally, the use of stimulus texts to elicit narratives as conducted by Gherardi & Murgia (2013) appears intriguing.

### **Acknowledgement**

The authors thank Professor Marcelline Fusilier for her numerous insightful comments.

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