

4-20-2001

Leader in Love: A Political Psychological Perspective

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Recommended Citation

Editor (2001) "Leader in Love: A Political Psychological Perspective," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 14 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol10/iss14/2>

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International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Leader in Love: A Political Psychological Perspective

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Volume: 10

Issue: 14

Date: 2001-04-20

Keywords: Leadership, Love, Lust

Abstract. This article describes some possible political consequences of a national leader in love or experiencing lust as love.

What characteristics of a national leader are crucial in assessing that leader's ability and motivation to exploit opportunities, resolve conflict, and set an agenda that is both strategically and inspirationally sound? Often cited as crucial are intelligence, knowledge, charisma, communication skills, "street savvy," and the same characteristics for members of the leader's elite organization. Also cited are various dynamics between and among the leader and organizational members. If the above characteristics are, indeed, crucial to leadership and are exhibited appropriately by the leader and organization, then the respective political entity and its populace might be in for a golden era save for the luck, accident, and vagaries of fortune and history that seem to be beyond human control.

One such uncontrollable factor might be the leader being in or falling in or out of love. Sometimes the love factor engenders scandal because of the leader's marital status or the ethnic, age, or class characteristics of the love object. The scandal can become the burning issue of the political entity's agenda, impede governance, and often injure the credibility of the political entity in the eyes of allies, neutrals, and adversaries. Sometimes the love factor may be said to energize the leader with a new appreciation of the beauty and excitement of life. This might lead to a recommitment to engage all the opportunities, conflicts, and agendas of the political entity at an even higher plane. The love factor also might strengthen the image of power possessed by the leader in the eyes of allies, neutrals, and adversaries who harbor belief systems valuing love/lust as a sign of vitality, while weakening the image among those harboring belief systems valuing love enmeshment as extraneous, sinful, or unbecoming.

Based solely on reason and unsystematic observation, one might even posit that the love factor might lead the leader to a suboptimal set for attending to, remembering, and processing information. Even to be a fool in love. And there is some biopsychological support for this possibility.

For example, the Deutsche Presse-Agentur recently reported on a study carried out at University College, London, by a Swiss researcher that purportedly supports the contention that people in love face "a reduction in the ability to think." The study covered subjects from 11 countries and appraised magnetic resonance images of brain activity while the subjects were being shown photographs of their true loves. Blood flow increased to only four small regions of the brain--those regions stimulated by drugs and leading to deficits in certain types of memory and concentration. Blood flow also decreased to brain regions causing depression and fear. These people, then, might be considered to have greater than warranted well-being and less than optimal memory and concentration to handle that which can affect well-being. Would this not be a recipe for precipitous overextension and overreaching in governance?

Assuming robust findings were available firmly establishing a negative correlation between love and certain types of memory and concentration as well as a positive correlation between love and unrealistic, emotional well-being, one might desire a leader engaged in neither extramarital nor marital bliss. Therefore, successful politicians may be on to something, given that a close look may often find

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

them as bereft of such loves as they are, perhaps, beloved by the People. (See A fool in love? German study shows love affects mental faculties. (April 13, 2001). PsycPORT; Bartels, A., & Zeki, S. (2000). The neural basis of romantic love. *Neuroreport: For Rapid Communication of Neuroscience Research*, 11, 3829-3834; Cell, C. P. (1974). Charismatic heads of state: The social context. *Behavior Science Research*, 9, 255-305; Leckman, J.F., & Mayes, L.C. (1999). Preoccupations and behaviors associated with romantic and parental love: Perspectives on the origin of obsessive-compulsive disorder. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 8, 635-665; Weierter, S. J. M. (1997). Who wants to play "follow the leader?" A theory of charismatic relationships based on routinized charisma and follower characteristics. *Leadership Quarterly*, 8, 171-193; Wijeratne, C., Hickie, I., & Schwartz, R. (1997). Erotomania associated with temporal lobe abnormalities following radiotherapy. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 31, 765-768.) (Keywords: Leadership, Love, Lust.)