

# Gender stereotypes in political discourse

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**Gender stereotypes in political discourse:  
Analysing nonverbal dominance cues of female politicians**

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Master's Thesis

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## **Abstract**

Nonverbal behaviour is a major part of everyday communication that allows other people access to additional information on our thoughts, intentions, psychological states, likings, etc. It is also an important carrier of overt and covert messages and can be used to manipulate people and deepen the gap between genders encouraging stereotypical beliefs of men as dominant, aggressive, assertive, and ambitious individuals, and women as their subordinate, emotional and docile counterparts. Women are not only seen as such but are expected to behave in such manner. This paper covers this phenomenon by analysing the nonverbal dominant cues of female politicians and their male equivalents in order to answer the questions in what way female politicians engage in these stereotypical behaviours during interactions with male politicians, and how they differ in exhibition of their nonverbal dominant displays.

*Keywords:* nonverbal communication, dominance, gender, stereotypes, female politicians

## **Introduction**

Nonverbal behaviour is an important part of human communication as it provides supplementary information to meaning obtained from speech, but can also contain meaning within itself. It helps others to gain access to covert processes that happen during communicative scenes – people can consciously or unconsciously communicate information that can help to clarify other information, decode intentions, emotional states, or uncover their relations to others. Nonverbal behaviour can, furthermore, reveal one's status within society or communicate how much power an individual possesses. But for this paper, its role in creating stereotypical images of genders is the most important one. There are universally accepted ideas and beliefs of individuals formed according to which gender they belong to, and are bolstered by nonverbal displays. Men are seen as dominant, aggressive, and ambitious individuals that exhibit dominant nonverbal communication, while women are seen as their subordinate, sensitive and docile counterparts that exhibit minimalistic movements that lack in vigour and decisiveness. These stereotypes have penetrated all spheres of societies including the public sphere, where women have to adapt in order to succeed as leaders. The aim of this research is to address the issue of gender stereotyping present on the highest level of the political sphere by analysing nonverbal communication of female and male politicians. Due to socialization factors and the fact that the participation in the political domain was historically exclusively a male prerogative, the recent rise in number of female politicians is under the scrutiny of the public eye as well as their male colleagues. How female leaders engage (or not) in distribution of gender stereotypical behaviours is an important issue to address, especially considering that, with the advent of social networks and video-sharing platforms, the political sphere has gained the possibility to influence people more than ever. The research aims to analyse nonverbal behaviour of female politicians performing the highest political functions in order to answer the following questions: 1) In what way nonverbal communication of female state and government leaders confirms or refutes gender stereotypes in interaction with their male counterparts?

2) How female and male state and government leaders compare in their exhibition of dominant nonverbal displays?

## **Defining nonverbal communication**

Numerous nonverbal situations that are part of our everyday routine incorporate in some way behaviours that convey ideas, intentions, or simply help the recipients to decode psychological states of the persons addressing them. People can communicate a message with

their bodies that may or may not be intentional on their part and the “language” that is used in the process is called the nonverbal communication. According to Knapp, Hall, and Horgan (2014), nonverbal communication consists of six major areas – gestures, facial expression, posture, eye behaviour, vocal behaviour, and touch. There are many functions these behaviours can have: gestures can accompany speech or act as independent messages; posture can give information on status, involvement, or emotional state; touch may give away habitual behaviour or reveal the stage of interaction (handshakes); while eye behaviour can communicate interest in other person (pp. 12-3). Even though (or perhaps just because) communication takes up such a large part of human behaviour, agreeing on an adequate definition of nonverbal communication has proven to be a challenge among the scholars of the field of the nonverbal studies. Most scholars agree on nonverbal communication as any behaviour void of speech; however, this definition is overly simplistic as it excludes the sender-receiver component of the communication (Knapp et al., 2014; Matsumoto et al., 2013; Hall et al., 2019). Burgoon, Guerrero, and Floyd (2016) recognise that the problem lies in the interpretation of which behaviours are of communicative character (p. 16). According to them (Burgoon et al., 2016), the question arises as to who can decide which nonverbal behaviour should be interpreted as an intent of communication – a sender (encoder) of a message or its receiver (decoder). Orienting solely on the source and their definition of the message means taking into consideration only intentional part of the communication process; and vice versa – focusing on the other end of the communication channel entails that everything can be a message, and any behaviour, thus, is meant to be communicative. A middle path between the two states that there should be defined interpretations of unintentional behaviours that constitute as messages (p. 16). These behaviours should be those that senders themselves “routinely select when they want to encode an intentional message and ones that receivers routinely recognize as constituents of intentionally crafted messages” (Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 16). In other words, there should be a conscious mutual agreement on the meaning of an unintentional behaviour as long as the same behaviour emits the same message when performed intentionally. This implies not only that nonverbal communication needs not be intentional but that there is a frame for decoding nonverbal behaviour. Scholars agree that the interpretation of a behaviour as a communication act is entirely dependent on the contextual factors, and that the result of a decoding process of a behaviour observed outside of the context would be ill-founded (Birdwhistell, 1990, p. 16; Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 17; Hall et al., 2019, p. 272; Knapp et al., 2014, p. 5). This close connection of nonverbal behaviour to the contextual situation in which it is performed is the reason why Hall, Horgan, and Murphy (2019) agree with those who reject the possibility of a

nonverbal cue “vocabulary”. Even though they do not provide specific examples for this, they do claim that any nonverbal behaviour may alter its meaning as a result of internal and external factors, such as the environment, other people’s presence, or a change of the “encoders’ intentions” (p. 272). However, the definition of a context as “[t]hose features of a social encounter that provide key markers for the meaning of any given behavior [...]” (Knapp et al., 2014, p. 5) allows for the presumption that it is a guide to nonverbal behaviour in itself. Since each communicative situation contains a certain number of nonverbal cues, possessing the knowledge of contextual aspects would enable the receiver to select and decode the cues in accordance to those aspects. This, furthermore, presupposes that there is at least some basic “vocabulary” of nonverbal behaviour – it is merely restrained to a specific context.

### **Gender stereotyping**

LaFrance (1981) states that “[w]ithin any particular culture, females and males learn how to differentially hold their heads and hands and how to move their faces and features so as to be recognizably female or male” (p. 130). In other words, nonverbal behaviour of each sex is culturally predisposed, and men and women are taught male and female displays by default: women learn to sit with their legs closed, while men keep their legs wide apart; women keep their hands close to their body, whereas men are more likely to exhibit wide hand movements; women are slower in movements of the eye opening and closing, and men are faster (LaFrance, 1981, p. 130). Nonverbal gender displays have the purpose to “mark both the sex of the person and the social expectancies for that sex” (LaFrance, 1981, p. 130). This division presupposes certain predictability, and Birdwhistell claims that predictable behaviour is prerequisite for normal functioning of any organized system (Birdwhistell, 1970, p. 14). Numerous studies show various instances of acquiring specific nonverbal behaviours through socialization processes at an early age. For example, boys and girls develop different relationships to space through play: boys are more likely to receive toys that demand more space and which allow them to engage in play outside the house, while girls receive toys that require very little space (Knapp et al., 2014, p. 137). Another example shows how boys and girls are socialized differently to touch, which is directly connected with the division to feminine and masculine markers. From a very early age they are taught that touch is reserved for girls; they are the ones to receive it more and give it more, and it becomes a part of their nurturing behaviour (Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 276). Parents encourage this behaviour by engaging girls in a more physically intimate relationship. In such way, boys learn that touch is a feminine marker, moreover, they are discouraged from engaging in such behaviour (Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 276; Knapp et al.,

2014, p. 232). Older children of both sexes are likely to be discouraged from physical contact with their parents, as touch with aging is seen as inappropriate; nevertheless, this is still more pronounced with boys and their fathers (Knapp et al., 2014, p. 232). Nonverbal gender displays may be important for the functioning of the society as they are valuable source of information (LaFrance, 1981, p. 130), but they are also seen as very rigidly defined markers of biological makeup that lead to formation of stereotypical perceptions of genders. Stereotypes are oversimplified and generalized ideas and beliefs about characteristics of people that share common traits, and can be used to “justify discrimination against members of a given group” (Lindsey, 2016, p. 3). The process of stereotyping happens as a result of perceptual experience of outer stimuli in combination with internalized belief system about a particular group. It happens automatically, below the level of awareness, and beliefs of such origin are taken as implicit (Major, 1981, p. 43).

### **Women in politics and stereotyping**

Historically, the public sphere was perceived as men’s domain; in Ancient Greece it was reserved for full-fledged citizens with high social status and wealth, leaving specific members of male population to indulge the opportunity to discuss matters of the state. Women were not considered citizens, and therefore had no legal basis for entering the political life. For centuries on, generations of one gender have been experiencing censorship by another; not deemed suitable for leaders, women had been restrained to the private sphere. As voters they were considered a liability, since they were dependent on their fathers or husbands, and were not believed to have the “right temperament to vote” (Hoogensen & Solheim, 2006, p. 4). Much has changed in the last century in this regard. The turn to the 20<sup>th</sup> century has marked a shift in political participation of women around the world. With feminism gaining momentum, many countries have opened their public spheres to women. Today, not only do women have the right to participate in the electoral process, but they firmly hold the positions as some of the most influential people of the world. They are politicians and leaders, and no longer regarded as dependent. Today, they stand “shoulder to shoulder” to men in politics. Actually, do they? Firstly, consulting the numbers, one can see that genders are still not equally represented: according to the IPU<sup>1</sup> (Inter-Parliamentary Union), which collects the data on female representation from the 193 parliaments, female gender is underrepresented in parliaments of nearly every country of the world. It varies, however, between regions, so one can see

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<sup>1</sup> <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=5&year=2020>

differences between developed European countries of the north (43,9%), Western Europe (33,4%), and Central and Eastern Europe (23,3%), which is below the global average (25%). North America is at 36,2%; however, in the United States female representatives equal the global average with 25% for the Upper chamber, and 23,8% for the Lower chamber. The data for Croatia falls well under the average, with 19,2% of women in the national legislature. Furthermore, only 19 out of the 193 countries<sup>2</sup> have female either head of state or government. Considering the numbers which some of the leading countries of the world exhibit in these reports, it comes as no surprise that there was the need to issue the quotes for minimal number of women in parliamentary seats in order to increase their participation in politics (Hoogensen & Solheim, 2006, p. 24). Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the fact that number of women in political life is somewhat higher than it was 20 years ago; for example, Hoogensen and Solheim (2006) note that in the year 2000 there was only 12 female state leaders, whether head of state or government, and most of the countries had fewer number of female legislators than they do today (pp. 24-5). In general, this is not considered a big leap, yet it reveals a positive trend. Furthermore, the statistics on women heading minister's departments show that over 50% of them is concerned with health, education, welfare, and consumer affairs, known as traditionally female areas of concern. Women in the economy department were underrepresented with only 15% (Jensen, 2007, p. 7; Hoogensen & Solheim, 2006, p. 24). Some argue (Jensen, 2007) the reason for the low representativeness of women in politics involves discordance of the requirements of political and private sphere (p. 7). This leads to the second point. According to Jensen (2007), "women have been socialized to see politics as outside their area of concern" and those "who do enter the political realm must win the approval of their predominantly male colleagues" (pp. 8-9). In other words, society holds expectations of women that are stereotypically related to their gender, which includes following their traditional fields of interest, and even within the "political realm" the need to prove themselves to men as equally capable is still relatively high. They are expected to possess leaderlike qualities, however, they are rarely perceived that they do. Qualities expected from an effective leader include all the qualities that are stereotypically (and traditionally) attributed to men: dominance, assertiveness, ambitiousness, competitiveness, and decisiveness. This is the opposite of emotional, affectionate, and sensitive personality which is being ascribed to women (Herrera et al., 2012, p. 38; Jensen, 2007, p. 9; Porter and Geis, 1981, p. 39). Traditionally, women have been seen as more considerate, helpful, kind, and soft-spoken, which are not the qualities searched for in

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/article/womens-power-index>

public sphere, that being the politics or any other male-dominated environment. To penetrate men's business world, it is necessary for a woman to acquire not only the skills but the personality traits connected to effective leadership as well. This presents, however, a very slippery area for women, as women who acquire men-like qualities necessary to succeed in men's domain are likely to be perceived as too dominating (Herrera et al., 2012, p. 38). Perception and recognition, Porter and Geis (1981) claim, is as important as women's abilities: "If a woman's evidence of leadership is not as recognizable as the same evidence presented by a man, this would diminish women's leadership opportunities, since leadership advancement depends on social recognition" (p. 39). For women in politics, and especially the electoral candidates who run for office, this would imply the reliance on their perception of their voters as being suitable position upholders. To say it differently, appearance goes a long way, which is why female politicians need to show significant level of balance in their approach to leadership. Susan Carroll and Richard Fox (2006) used interesting term to describe this: female politicians must "negotiate masculinity" (15). Since politics is "strongly associated with men" on all its levels, and particularly the highest ones, the imposing solution to add more women to the equation is not also the ultimate solution. Instead, one must search to solve the problem and change the idea of masculinity (Carroll & Fox, 2006, p. 15) (even though Carroll and Fox do not explicitly say it, one must presume that changing the idea of femininity as well is implied).

### **Defining power and dominance**

Burgoon, Guerrero, and Floyd (2016) state that to define power, it is necessary first to recognize that power is not a physical unit that can be measured objectively – it is merely a perception to which a person acts accordingly. It relies on the complete control of one's own actions, capability of exerting influence upon others, but also the ability to defend oneself from external influences. However, power being a perception or not, it is rather clear that powerful people are the ones who possess resources, being in form of economic, cultural, or social capital (p. 334), and with these resources they have the ability to influence others, which scholars find as the ultimate outcome of power relations (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, p. 280). Power is expressed as the vertical dimension, which, according to Nancy Henley (1977), is "signalled by our spatial metaphor of "higher-ups", "underlings", "being over", and "looking up to" others" (p. 2). Dominance is another aspect of vertical dimension and just like power, to which is closely related, adds to the disbalance within an interaction. There are several definitions of dominance: for Teun van Dijk (2008) dominance is a power trait of a social group expressed in controlling other, non-dominant, group(s) (p. 18); Burgoon, Guerrero, and Floyd (2016) focus more on the

communicational dimension with their definition of dominance as a “communication style” whose ultimate goal is to have influential effect on other communicators (p. 346); while Schmid Mast and Cousin (2013) see it as power-exerting or power-seeking behaviour (p. 614). On an individual level, dominance is manifested through nonverbal communication cues that can be received by a communicating partner, a third-party observer, or expressed through “self-reports”. Unlike dominance, power needs not be expressed openly (overt) to be recognized as one can “maintain control without ever having to initiate any control attempts” (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, p. 284). Power is expressed with a belief in the prerogative to act accordingly to one’s wishes and operationalized through one’s perception as being powerful (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, pp. 281,9).

### **Nonverbal displays of dominant and submissive behaviour**

According to Burgoon and Dunbar (2006), the most easily recognized dominance displays are those that indicate threat. Threat displays such as a persistent stare, violations of personal zone, or even silence are meant to intimidate and elicit submissive fright displays in a receiver (p. 287). Dominant individuals are more likely to have high sense of the territorial ownership and to exhibit control over their personal space, but also to violate other’s personal space. Since human body and the zone around it are marked as primary territory with limited access and are highly guarded against unwanted intruders (Knapp et al., 2014, p. 128; Henley, 1977, p. 27), violation of the zone will be met with the evaluation of that breach; if the violation is evaluated as negative, the person will try to compensate for the action. For example, if a person experiences a territorial breach in form of a threatening stare, they might avert the eyes in order to avoid it, or if a stranger violates another person’s primary zone by decreasing the distance between them, the submissive person might take a step back to compensate for the lost space (Knapp et al., 2014, pp. 125-8). Size and strength are also clear dominance displays that are exhibited via “rapid gait, erect postures, firm stances, animated gesturing, [...] and clothing or hair styles that create a bulky appearance” (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, p. 288). Firm, tall postures, bulky physical presentation, and vivid gesturing presuppose that dominant behaviours acquire more physical space. Dominant individuals tend to exhibit open body stance, use gestures that require more space, and pose with arms bent in the elbows with hands placed on the sides of the body (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, p. 289; Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 351). They obtain (but are also given) more interpersonal space, and they control distance in interactions (they usually interact at smaller distances (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, p. 290)). In seating arrangements they are more likely to occupy the head position, showing the control over not

only a larger territory but more desirable one as well (Henley, 1977, pp. 32-34; Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 351; Knapp et al., 2014, pp. 143-144; Porter & Geis, 1981, p. 40; Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, p. 290). By taking the central position, dominant people ensure they are protected from potential “threats on the perimeter of the group” but, more importantly, they manage to exert power and influence over people in their proximity (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, p. 290). During interaction, furthermore, individuals with higher verticality tend to maintain longer gaze on their non-dominant interlocutors while they speak, whereas they are more likely to avert gaze as they listen (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, p. 290; Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 351; Schmid Mast & Cousin, 2013, p. 616); they are also more likely to interrupt other speakers, moderate conversational turns, speak more, and they do not feel obliged to respond to another’s smile with a similarly polite facial expression or gesture. Other cues that dominant individuals exert include “variable facial expressions, head shaking and nodding, frequent gestures, wide smiles peppy, not sluggish or lethargic movement, [...], vertical sitting posture, vigorous behaviors, heavy step, legs wide apart, hands away from body, [...], and more coordinated nonverbal behavior” (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, p. 288). Dyadic power theory claims that there is a correlation between the perception of one’s “legitimate authority” and capital, and the use of dominant behavioural cues that exert influence. The more power a person believes they possess, the greater are the chances that they will exert dominance cues in their nonverbal communication. However, a test conducted by Dunbar and Burgoon (in Burgoon and Dunbar (2006)) shows that individuals with most power and influence need not exhibit dominance cues, and that people with high facial and gestural expressiveness, relaxed movements, and low nonverbal dominant cues are those with most influence, and thus power (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, p. 284).

### **Gender differences in nonverbal behaviour**

Studies of nonverbal behaviours of touching, smiling, eye contact, body positions and movements have all found significant differences between the genders: Martha Davis and Shirley Weitz (1981), in their article *Sex Differences in Body Movements and Positions*, present the results of two studies on nonverbal behaviour. Based on unstructured interaction between forty-eight men and women who were arranged to communicate in dyadic pairs, they have come to conclusion that women are more tentative of men’s behaviour than that it is vice versa. In the first study, the researchers have noticed women exhibiting monitoring behaviour and adjusting their own behaviour to that of men’s. Davis and Weitz state that the reason behind women’s focus on men’s nonverbal behaviour is an attempt to achieve “[...] equilibrium in the

interaction which would result in maximum interpersonal comfort (especially for the male) [...]” (Davis & Weitz, 1981, p. 84). This submissive behaviour, interestingly, was exhibited only with males who showed dominant characteristics. The results of the second study, which observed body movements, showed males exhibiting open body posture more often than women (legs wide apart, arms away from the body), and more self-touching gestures. Women were noticed to use their hands and fingers for gesturing, while they kept their arms with elbows to the body. They also smiled more during the communication (Davis & Weitz, 1981, pp. 84-6). Gender differences in touch were also noticeable. Major (1981) reports a study conducted by Henley (1973) on touching behaviour between adults in uncontrolled outdoor setting showing that men were more inclined to initiate touch than vice versa. This study was then replicated on a large sample in 1980 by Major and Williams, only to come to similar conclusions; not only that men again exhibited the tendency to initiate touch, but the rate of men touching women was higher than women touching men (pp. 19-20). Visual attentiveness study conducted by Exline (reported in Henley (1977)) included observing students of both sexes during an interview with either a male or a female experimenter, who were told to maintain a steady gaze at their subjects during the entire course of the interview. In this way, if the eye contact was to be achieved, it would be solely by the effort of the subject. The results of the study showed higher gaze rate of female than of male students, with all the following parameters included: looking while speaking, looking during silent moments, during the interviewer speaking, and in the informal discussions after the interview. The explanation for this behaviour was seen in women’s dependency on men, in their search for approval, or the need to monitor the other’s nonverbal cues (pp. 161-2). There are many other studies that show similar results – women using less space and being more susceptible to invasion of their personal space by both sexes (in which case they tend to choose the more pacifying approach and assume greater distance) (Henley, 1977, p. 39; Knapp et al., 2014, p. 137); they further exhibit circumspect demeanour, tense posture, greater emotional expressivity, closed body stance, gaze aversion, and they smile more (Henley, 1977, p. 181). Burgoon and Dunbar join these statements by referencing other research which add to these results; they state that not only do women exhibit previously mentioned nonverbal cues more often than men but they also nod more, use more direct body orientation, they are less relaxed posturally but also exhibit less shifting of body and feet, have more speech errors, and give more back-channel responses. They continue by stating that nonverbal behaviour of women also communicates “docility and openness to others” (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, p. 285).

## **Gender politics hypothesis**

For Nancy Henley (1977) nonverbal behaviour is a large part of human relationships as it serves important function in understanding of overt and covert interpersonal messages in everyday communication. It is also an efficient way to manipulate other people and to establish vertical inequality between individuals, deepen the gap between powerful and powerless or simply keep the status quo, maintaining the passivity and docility of subordinate groups or individuals. Henley sees nonverbal behaviour as a form of micromanagement of power relations that are being sustained within the “macropolitical structure” (p. 179). Power in itself is not a negative characteristic, as van Dijk (2008) explains, since entire society is underlain with power relations; what presents the problem for him is the power abuse, or what he calls “the illegitimate forms of power”, which means exercising domination over social group and ultimately creating unequal power relations (pp. 17-8). Power differences between men and women are expressed through stereotyping and dominating behaviours, with the evident inclination towards the male domination. As it is previously presented from the existing research on nonverbal behaviour of the gender, men are indeed those who express more control over spatial dimension, physical contact, and interaction; they exhibit open body posture with arms away from the body, they sit with legs wide apart, and are more likely to initiate touch. Women are seen as more sensitive to nonverbal dominance displays, which is justified as their need to be synchronized with men’s nonverbal communication. In addition to their visual attentiveness, they exhibit closed body stance, obtain less space, hold their arms close to the body, smile more, receive more touch, etc. According to Burgoon, Guerrero, and Floyd (2016), men also use dominant gestures of pointing, while women are more likely to use palms-up gestures, which reveals “uncertainty or hesitancy” (p. 273). As seen, nonverbal communication of men and women exhibits cues that overlap with those of dominant and submissive behaviours, respectively. Henley was one of the first to address these similarities by stating that “[t]he same behaviours exhibited by superior to subordinate are those exhibited by men to women [...]” (Henley, 1977, pp. 180-1). This approach is named the gender politics hypothesis, and presupposes that men, as those with power, use nonverbal behaviour to control and dominate (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, p. 284).

## **Refuting research**

On the other hand, there are more and more studies that disprove these results; a meta-analysis provided by Hall et al. in 2005 argues closer spatial proximity, arms and legs further

away from body, interrupting, and speaking more loudly as the only four behaviours related to dominance, status, and power (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, p. 285; Schmid Mast & Cousin, 2013, p. 616). The analysis does not show any difference in smiling and gazing rate, or any differences in raised vs. lowered eyebrows, nodding, self-touch, hand and arm gestures, postural relaxation, overlaps, pausing and latency to speak, back-channel responses, laughter, speech errors, and rate of speech (Schmid Mast & Cousin, 2013, p. 616; Burgoon et al., 2016, p. 350). The results of further analyses have indicated the lack of uniformity (consistency) and inability to draw a parallel between nonverbal gender differences and verticality, allowing for scholars to conclude that there are no significant dissimilarities between the genders in displaying nonverbal dominant cues nor does it mean that found differences are the result of women showing subordinate behaviour; the conclusion is that perception of women exhibiting subordinate cues is the result of stereotyping (Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006, p. 285). When trying to decide whether certain behaviour elicits dominant cues or not, people usually choose from formerly internalized stereotypical knowledge of what typical dominant behaviour looks like and add corresponding cues to their analysis of actual behaviour. This is called the Brunswikian lens model, which is prominently used to assess the vertical dimensions in dyad relations and is the reason why certain scholars consider many of the previous researches with dominant-subordinate/powerful-powerless categories untrustworthy (Schmid Mast & Cousin, 2013, pp. 615-6). The Brunswikian lens model stresses the importance of defining covert processes behind the encoding of the message and contemplating the same during the process of decoding; however, being under the subjective analysis, the process cannot show objective results (Kappas et al., 2013, p. 150). For example, when confronted with a potential dominant/high-power or subordinate/low-power behaviour one will assess the situation searching for stereotypical cues (for example, higher/lower speech rate, initiating touch, longer/shorter gaze time, open/closed body stance, higher/lower smile rate, etc.) and label their interpretation to it, which then might or might not correspond to an actual cue of an intended communicative behaviour due to the lack of objective indicators.

## **The study**

The purposeful sampling<sup>3</sup> was chosen as the best approach to selecting a sample that would provide useful answers to the following research questions:

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<sup>3</sup> Purposeful sampling is a sampling strategy in qualitative research that allows selecting into the sample individuals which hold most valuable information for the research (Palinkas et al., 2015). It was favoured sampling

- In what way does nonverbal communication of female state and government leaders confirm or refute gender stereotypes during interaction with their male counterparts?
- How do female and male state and government leaders compare in their exhibition of dominant nonverbal displays?

The sample consists of videos of eight stateswomen currently holding or that have, in the last twenty years, held one of the two highest state offices – the Presidential and the Prime Minister’s Office, and videos of six of their male counterparts, which had to fulfil the same criteria. A total of 23 audiovisual materials was analysed.

### **Methods**

The main principle of data collection was to collect a minimum of two audiovisual materials for each of the stateswomen (the upper limit was not set); one material would provide data for the analysis of the nonverbal communication of the stateswomen in interaction with their male counterparts, and the other material would provide data of their nonverbal behaviour during an interview or a speech. Data collection for the male politicians consisted solely of the materials with interviews or speeches. The sample was gathered from the online video-sharing platform, YouTube.

### **Data analysis**

For the analysis of the data gathered from the sample, previously presented literature on nonverbal communication was consulted. From this literature a list of the nonverbal dominant displays was extracted and used as a framework during the analysis. The framework consists of the following displays:

- threat displays (persistent stare, violations of a personal zone, silence, pointing);
- interaction displays (closer spatial proximity, control of the distance in interaction, initiating physical contact);
- gestures (animated gesturing, gestures that require more space, frequent gestures, arms away from the body);

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technique for this research since it enabled to identify female and male politicians with specific displays of nonverbal communication.

- body positions and movements (rapid gait, erect postures, firm stances, open body stance, head shaking and head nodding, peppy movements, vertical sitting posture, vigorous behaviours, heavy step, legs wide apart);
- conversational displays (moderating conversational turns, interrupting, louder speaking);
- variable facial expressions

## **Findings**

Findings that emerged from the data collected and analysed using the framework described in the methods will be presented here. The collected data are divided in two main segments – the analysis of nonverbal communication of female politicians and the analysis of nonverbal communication of male politicians.

### ***The analysis of nonverbal communication of female politicians***

Helen Clark<sup>4</sup> – the former Prime Minister of New Zealand

In the video *Interview with Helen Clark*, the former Prime Minister of New Zealand exhibits restrained nonverbal communication; she shows upright body position with no arm movements and limited head and torso movements. Her hand gestures require very little space as they are performed mainly in front of her torso, with slight forearm raises in the level of the abdomen. Her body stance is closed, and exhibits very stiff movements, particularly in hand gesturing. Her facial expressions do not show large variability, but interchange between serious and smiling.

The analysis of the second video, *New Zealand PM Helen Clark meeting French President Chirac*, where former prime minister Clark visits the former French president Jacques Chirac shows nonverbal dominant displays exhibited by the President that were met with submissive displays from the Prime Minister. At the beginning of the video and during the first two handshakes, Helen Clark shows very little dominant displays such as an erect body posture and firm stance. However, it is questionable to what degree these displays could even be regarded as dominant, considering the lack of other supporting dominant displays and unhesitating acceptance of president Chirac's dominance cues. From the start of the meeting, the President shows control of the distance and physical contact (hand kissing; holding hand

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeAovmR-80g&t=83s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAAIZSA5V6I>

with both hands; prolonged hand holding; initiation of hand shaking; extending the arm of the Prime Minister by holding her hand to his torso; holding the upper arm and guiding her up the stairs; during the farewell handshake leaning slightly towards the Prime Minister), moderating the conversational turns (speaking but avoiding the conversation by guiding to the next phase of the meeting), and vigorous behaviour (energetic hand shaking, moving swiftly up the stairs). The Prime Minister accepts this behaviour with accordingly submissive displays (smiling; lowering the head; breaking the eye contact; looking down while simultaneously smiling and breaking the direct body position by tilting the torso away from the President, while still maintaining the handshake position).

#### Angela Merkel<sup>5</sup> – the Chancellor of Germany

Angela Merkel is the Chancellor of Germany and one of the most influential politicians today. Her nonverbal communication in formal situations exudes poise and self-control, firm stance, very little facial expression, and limited gesturing.

In the video *Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany*, the Chancellor stands erect and firm, exhibiting a serious facial expression with particular tension in the eyebrows and the eye muscles, accompanying the serious tone of the discourse. For the most part of the video she exhibits a dominant gesture of the hand steeple<sup>6</sup>, which is widely known as her “go-to” gesture. The very beginning of her speech shows a sudden shift from the relaxed position of the hands close to her body to the hand steeple, which might indicate her familiarity with the importance of the hand gestures in nonverbal communication. She exhibits no other dominant displays during the speech since other gestures she uses throughout the video are of illustrative character, and serve mainly to accompany the speech as the stresses of the discourse.

The second video, *LIVE: Nordic country PMs and Merkel hold joint press conference in Iceland*, shows the Chancellor exhibiting dominant interaction displays in form of a momentary control over the discourse (this, perhaps, could also be interpreted as a form of interrupting) between the Prime Minister of Finland and the press (making a significant eye contact with a high and slow head nod to the Prime Minister to which he replies with the

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPeQGDHPiZM>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YpoRAft7so&t=1079s>

<sup>6</sup> The hand steeple is a dominant gesture performed in such a manner where fingertips of both hands are touching, forming a shape of a church steeple. It is favoured by leaders as it is used to express power and confidence (Navarro, 2018, number 269). The source of this comes from a book *The Dictionary of Body Language: A Field Guide to Human Behaviour* written by Joe Navarro, which is used to complement the framework with a more specific set of information not present in the scholarly literature. However, being a book written from a perspective of a former FBI Special Agent and intended for public consumption, it is followed loosely, maintaining a certain degree of caution and sound practical judgement.

acknowledging smile and a mimicking nodding gesture). The display although being very brief and seemingly insignificant shows, nevertheless, her power and control over the discourse by making the prime minister of Finland shift his focus from the question to her. Furthermore, she exhibits the control over physical contact (the initiation of handshake with Prime Ministers at the end of the press conference) and allows herself not to engage in eye contact (during the handshakes with the Prime Ministers of Denmark and Sweden). She further exhibits conversational displays of dominance (interrupting the member of the press when he asked more than one question; moderating conversational turns by forwarding a question to the Norwegian Prime Minister to answer), variable facial expressions, and broad gestures.

Katrín Jakobsdóttir<sup>7</sup> – the Prime Minister of Iceland

Katrín Jakobsdóttir is the current prime minister of Iceland. In *Q&A with Iceland PM Katrín Jakobsdóttir & Finland PM Antti Rinne - Full Session 2019* video, her nonverbal communication exhibits a number of dominant displays: relaxed and open body posture; rapid gait and wide and frequent hand gestures that require plenty of space; variable facial expressions; and vertical sitting posture, with arms away from the body.

Her control of the interaction is best exhibited during the handshake instance at the press conference with the Nordic prime ministers and Angela Merkel, in the video *LIVE: Nordic country PMs and Merkel hold joint press conference in Iceland*<sup>8</sup>. The handshake with the prime ministers is an interesting illustration of power relations, where chancellor Merkel exhibits her power and dominance in initiating the interaction, controlling the duration, and then not establishing the eye contact. While other prime ministers readily accepted her hand, the Prime Minister of Iceland made no effort in accepting the same. As a host, she exerts her right to control the situation with words: “Yeah, I’m going to...you know” and making a fast jerk with her index finger in the direction behind the Chancellor to indicate they are going to the same place, without participating in the eye contact and maintaining a serious facial expression. Prime minister Jakobsdóttir exhibits animated gesturing, using wide, peppy gestures with arms away from the body, relaxed and erect posture, open body stance, vigorous movements, and facial gesticulation with fast and sudden shifts of various expressions (almost instant change

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzyrxL2DcZA&t=95s>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YpoRAft7so&t=1079s>

<sup>8</sup> This video serves an interactive purpose of a research due to the lack of a more suitable video material containing an interaction with a male politician. The reason behind this decision lies in the fact that Angela Merkel is a politician (though female) with objectively higher level of power, and relationship between the two female politicians was expected not to be equal. In this case, Angela Merkel was considered a more dominant individual.

from smiling and relaxed face to confused, serious, and smiling again, without any external stimuli for actually experiencing those emotions, leaving for the conclusion that it is done in a playful manner).

Theresa May<sup>9</sup> – the Prime Minister of United Kingdom

Unlike the previous two stateswomen, nonverbal communication of Britain's former prime minister, Theresa May, shows her effort to appear poised and in control, however, her stiff body stance portrays unease in communication seen in the *May and Putin meet on sidelines of G20* video. Engaging in handshakes with Russian ministers, she repeatedly lowers her upper body in a quick, shallow bow, with accompanied quick and rigid head bow. Trying to meet the eye level of each minister, the Prime Minister shrinks her body, making herself smaller. In between the handshakes her facial expression becomes tense and her focus shifts from the eyes of a minister to the hand in expectation of the upcoming handshake. This observing behaviour gives impression that the Prime Minister lacks the control over physical contact, and not only does not initiate the contact but waits for the other party to engage first.

The lack of dominant cues is further evident at the G20 press conference with the American president Donald Trump. The video *G20: Bilateral talks – Donald Trump and Theresa May [07.07.2017]* shows Prime Minister sitting in an armchair with her torso hidden behind the armrest and her head lowered below the president Trump's eye level, having to look at him from below. Her body posture is closed, holding hands as a barrier between them. She shows small range of hand gestures in both videos; her hand gestures do not require much space as arms are kept close to the torso, moving only hands and forearms. She exhibits very little facial variability, with expression either neutral or smiling.

In the video *Theresa May's first PMQs: 20 July 2016*, she shows very little body movement, and very little facial expressions. She does exhibit frequent gestures, however, they are performed with arms close to her body and take up very little space.

Julia Gillard<sup>10</sup> – the former Prime Minister of Australia

Nonverbal communication of Julia Gillard exhibits relaxed movements with open and erect body posture. The analysis of her displays during the *Barack Obama greeted by Australian*

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQ1ry1EySvI&t=6s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FR9gYFp3WvY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAYGk4XP23M>

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufoE\\_v88KKA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufoE_v88KKA)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCNuPcf8L00&t=275s>

*PM Julia Gillard on arrival in Australia* video shows dominant interaction displays in form of initiating (touching his upper arm with both of her hands) and prolonging a physical contact (Gillard resting her left hand on his right forearm during greeting) and closer spatial proximity (upon the initial greeting she remains in his personal space resulting in president Obama taking half a step back). Although there are very little gestures exhibited in the video, those exhibited include forearms away from the body, requiring more space. Not many facial expressions were noted during their greeting except for smiling and general relaxedness of facial muscles.

Facial expressions during the *Julia Gillard misogyny speech voted most unforgettable Australian TV moment* video, on the other hand, are more versatile, corresponding to emotions of disgust, disbelief, anger, surprise, and contempt. In this video she exhibits wide gestures that require a lot of space, but also animated gesturing (gestures involving entire body) with parodic behaviour (raising hands in the air in vigorous and dramatic way with broad swaying motions) and aggressive hand gestures (sharp hand movements and finger pointing). Her body posture during the speech is erect with open stance and rapid and vigorous movements.

Kolinda Grabar Kitarović<sup>11</sup> – the former President of Croatia

Nonverbal communication of the former Croatian president, Kolinda Grabar Kitarović, exhibits erect posture with no other visible dominant displays.

In the video *Croatia's contributions to trans-Atlantic bonds and solidarity: Punching above its weight*, she shows small spatial range of hand gestures since her arms remain close to her torso (with exceptions: exhibiting forward hand motions from the sides of her body as if pushing something away; and stretching her hands in front of her torso with palms faced up while uttering: “delivered”), very little facial expressions (smiling, neutral), and soft speaking.

In the video *Tomislav Nikolić poljubio Kolindu Grabar-Kitarović tri puta*, where she meets Serbian president, Tomislav Nikolić, president Grabar-Kitarović exhibits the lack of control over the discourse. Namely, formal greeting between the two turns into a forceful display of power when, during the greeting, president Nikolić leans towards the Croatian president for the third kiss. Even though the nonverbal communication of president Grabar-Kitarović had unmistakably shown that, after the second kiss, she was no longer engaged in the custom, by drawing her by her right upper arm with one hand and holding her hand with the other, and straining his neck to reach her, president Nikolić manages to keep his position to elicit the third kiss. This can be seen as a highly dominant act as it exhibits a violation of a

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpICLrYK6sc>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5c7pxvqP0hU&t=1206s>

personal zone by controlling the contact. Croatian president accepted this behaviour, and responded to the incident with a long nervous laughter followed by a smiling facial expression.

Jacinda Ardern<sup>12</sup> – the Prime Minister of New Zealand

The current Prime Minister of New Zealand shows conflicting subordinate and dominant displays. She exhibits relaxed and open body stance but not erect posture as she tends to slouch her body, which is most notable during her farewell with the Fijian Prime Minister (*Fijian Prime Minister farewells New Zealand Prime Minister* video), where she lowers her upper body to meet the eyes of Fijian statesmen during conversation. Her hand gestures are performed with arms away from the body, taking up more space. She exhibits dominant interaction displays by initiating and controlling the physical contact (she “swoops” for the Fijian Prime Minister’s hand for the handshake; holds his hand with both hands) and controlling the spatial proximity (reducing the distance by slightly leaning her torso towards the Prime Minister during a conversation). She has highly expressive facial features and in general exhibits nonverbal behaviour that appears relaxed and spontaneous.

However, in the video with Canadian prime minister (*Trudeau meets with New Zealand prime minister in Paris*), Justin Trudeau, during a seated meeting she holds her hands on her knees under the table during his part of the speech (while during her speech her hands are on the table with elbows further away from the body, using frequent gestures).

In the video *Question 1 - Hon Simon Bridges to the Prime Minister* she displays dominance by exhibiting vigorous behaviour (fast and rhythmical enumeration accompanied by correspondingly rhythmical illustrative gestures; hitting the podium with the clenched fist; finger jabbing at podium; dynamic head nodding for emphasizing points in the speech), wide gestures that require plenty of space with arms away from the body, various facial expressions, and louder speaking.

Erna Solberg<sup>13</sup> – the Prime Minister of Norway

Nonverbal communication of the Prime Minister of Norway in *LIVE: Nordic country PMs and Merkel hold joint press conference in Iceland* video shows very little dominant

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObI4aG0LQBC&t=30s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nql--2ENcAU&t=44s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwDIREe3qeE>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vm37DPSFnj0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFPcn0F23vQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YpoRAft7so&t=505s>

displays; Erna Solberg shows erect posture, open body stance, relaxed movements, and frequent gestures. Her nonverbal communication does not include rapid gait, vigorous behaviour, or animated gestures. Her facial expression is either neutral or smiling, without showing further variation, and she exhibits no interactional displays of dominance.

However, in videos *Erna Solberg Norway PM Attends Ceremonial Reception At President House* and *Erna Solberg | ICC Global Goals Insights* she performs the hand steepling, which, as seen with the Chancellor of Germany, is a high-power gesture expressing confidence. It is interesting to note that in the former video, at the beginning of the addressing to the Prime Minister of India, she exhibits a finger holding<sup>14</sup> gesture. The sign in itself needs not signify much, however, the switch from this gesture to the steeple was an instant move and characterizes the beginning of a more formal and diplomatic speech. This switch might indicate the intention of the Prime Minister to show the viewers her commitment and the gravity of her speech, thus recognizing the importance of the gesture.

### ***The analysis of nonverbal communication of male politicians***

Boris Johnson<sup>15</sup> - the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

Nonverbal behaviour of the prime minister Johnson in the video *Boris Johnson confirms UK will change extradition treaty with Hong Kong* shows erect posture, open body stance, and fast and animated body and hand movements (quick toe rises with head and torso leaning forward, in a bouncy manner; energetic finger pointing to the ground while uttering “And people here...”; quick hands gesture as if pushing something aside; fast hand motions with open palms facing the torso, revolving one around the other). His main body position exhibits holding his hands behind his back, and breaking it occasionally with emblems and illustrators that emphasize his points in discourse. He exhibits wide gestures with arms away from the body. Facial features of the Prime Minister show greater expressivity with constant tension in the eyebrows and alternating serious, smiling, and neutral expression.

Donald Trump<sup>16</sup> – the president of United States

Throughout the video *Trump appears to ignore requests for a handshake with Angela Merkel*, Donald Trump sits in silence next to chancellor Merkel. His nonverbal communication

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<sup>14</sup> Holding the fingers together of one hand with another hand, according to Navarro (2018), is a sign of a possible insecurity and is categorized as a self-soothing behaviour (number 277).

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gk2MT5yfSMI>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLfukuEutIU>

shows the intentional lack of effort in engaging in conversation and physical contact with the Chancellor. By ignoring her presence and her statement that the press wants to see the handshake, President Trump seems to exhibit a threat display by a “silence treatment” in a highly formal situation. His facial expression is serious, with a tension in the eyebrows, he is blocking the eye contact by turning the head away from the Chancellor, and keeps his lips pressed together. At one point he exclaims to the press: “Send a good picture back to Germany, please. Make sure”, thus verbalizing the threat. The aim of this gesture is presumably to dominate the discourse; however, his nonverbal communication shows the lack of dominant cues. He exhibits closed body stance (sitting in a position where his upper body is leaned forward, with forearms resting on his legs, hands pressed together, and keeping his arms close to the torso) and shrinking posture (lowering his body to the same height of the Chancellor). President Trump shows no other gestures than the hand steeple; however, the steeple is different to those exhibiting by the Chancellor and the Norwegian Prime Minister. Fingers are pressed together, the ridges of the palms are touching, thumbs are lowered<sup>17</sup>, and he exhibits finger fidgeting. He takes the chance, however, to exhibit the control over physical contact by ignoring Angela Merkel’s statement that the press wants to see the handshake. The Chancellor responds to this with closed body behaviour, not showing other displays of subordination.

Frank-Walter Steinmeier<sup>18</sup> – the President of Germany

*German President Steinmeier: Coronavirus a 'test of our humanity' | DW News* video shows very little variation in nonverbal behaviour of the president of Germany: there is no variability in his facial gesticulation (his face shows a constant and serious expression with tension in the eyebrows); his sitting posture is vertical, with occasional back and front shifts (the President tries to lean on the backrest but immediately leans forward). He shows different positions of the hands (resting on the table in front of him, folded one on top of the other with palms facing down; one hand resting in (sometimes on) the other) that are occasionally broken by gestures (spreading hands to the opposite sides, palms facing each other; slight raise of a single hand with the forearm remaining on the table). Gestures that the President uses, however, do not require much space since he keeps his arms next to his torso. His nonverbal communication shows no dominant displays.

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<sup>17</sup> According to Navarro (2018), thumb displays are crucial in displaying how confident the person is; if a person is trying to hide the thumbs by pressing them to the index fingers, they exhibit the lack of confidence and they might feel threatened or insecure (number 288).

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wpaiUK9j6RM>

Tony Abbott<sup>19</sup> – the former Prime Minister of Australia

Tony Abbott, in *Tony Abbott says Liberal National Party is 'smashing the glass ceiling' for women*, exhibits erect posture, open body stance, and energetic and vigorous behaviour (hitting the podium with the palm several times; punching the air with the clenched fist as a gesture of triumph; the body is active and turning from side to side; exhibiting energetic jerks). He is using broad and frequent gestures that require a lot of space, raising arms away from the body (thrusting the hands in the air). Hand gestures are dynamic and accompany the speech, marking his stresses, and head nods are exhibited with the same purpose. The Prime Minister, furthermore, exhibits conversational displays of dominance (speaking very loudly, to the point of yelling but in a mocking manner) and threat displays (pointing finger at the leader of the Opposition). His smiling facial expression accompanies the mocking tone of his speech.

John Key<sup>20</sup> – the former Prime Minister of New Zealand

In the video *22.09.15 - Question 11 - Jacinda Ardern to the Prime Minister* the former Prime Minister exhibits dominance over the discourse by refusing to answer Jacinda Ardern's questions (the leader of the Opposition at that time), exhibiting instead dismissive behaviour through mocking and humorous quips. His nonverbal communication shows relaxed, erect, and open body posture, with fast head and body movements (quick rising up from his seat; quickly sitting down; quick head forward movements), vertical sitting posture, conversational display of dominance (loud speaking), and wide and frequent gestures with arms away from the body (raising hands above the head simulating waving the flag). His facial expression shows smiling face with mouth open wide, and raised eyebrows, in agreement with mocking tone of his speech.

Andrej Plenković<sup>21</sup> - the Prime Minister of Croatia

With prime minister Andrej Plenković, the main focus of his nonverbal communication revolves around his hands and eyes. In the video *Premijer Andrej Plenković: Povjerenstvo dovelo sebe do apsurdna, 11.10.2019.*, the Prime Minister exhibits frequent hand gestures, and in one instance uses the hand steeple. At the beginning of the video, his gestures are limited to the width of his torso; however, towards the middle of the video he starts using wider gestures that require more space and are exhibited with arms away from the body. Facial features of the

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9I32hpoOeo>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sgykM4dCQo8&t=66s>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSPXXm6xGkQ&t=1418s>

Prime Minister are either neutral or serious, with tension around the eyes (stares with high eyebrow raises as a means to emphasize points in speech).

## **Discussion**

### ***Question 1***

To answer how do female and male state and government leaders compare in their exhibition of dominant nonverbal displays it was necessary to focus on body position and movements, gestures, and facial expressions. As it was previously seen, nonverbal communication of dominant<sup>22</sup> individuals acquires more physical space. Their body postures defy gravity; they exhibit firm stances and tall, erect postures with open body pose and vertical sitting. They also exhibit vigorous behaviour and rapid movements. The analysis of the nonverbal behaviour of female and male politicians through these displays shows that both exhibit the majority of these displays. Of female politicians, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Angela Merkel, Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, Erna Solberg, and Julia Gillard show tall and erect postures and open body stance. Katrín Jakobsdóttir and Julia Gillard, furthermore, exhibit vigorous behaviour, seen in their quick and energetic hand and body movements. Theresa May and Jacinda Ardern, on the other hand, do not exhibit erect posture, as they tend to slouch their bodies making themselves smaller, standing and sitting; however, of the two, Jacinda Ardern exhibits open and relaxed body stance, as well as vigorous behaviour (it is important to note that Gillard and Ardern exhibit the latter display as they respond to an external stimulus, while with Jakobsdóttir this appears to be a permanent characteristic of her nonverbal communication). Helen Clark is the only politician who of those displays exhibits solely erect body posture. Of the male politicians, Tony Abbot, Boris Johnson, John Key, and Andrej Plenković all show erect posture and open body pose. Donald Trump, on the other hand, shows slouching body while sitting, while Frank-Walter Steinmeier's sitting position is vertical, however, in several instances he shows a tendency to lean back but at the same time forcing himself to maintain erect posture. Tony Abbot, Boris Johnson, and John Key engage in vigorous behaviour by exhibiting energetic and quick body movements, while Andrej Plenković, Donald Trump and Frank-Walter Steinmeier exhibit steady and minimalistic movements. Apart from these displays, gestures are also seen as an important part of dominant nonverbal communication. Individuals exhibiting animated gesturing, frequent gestures, and gestures that

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<sup>22</sup> Dominance is not referred to as a permanent characteristic of individuals, as there is no fixed behaviour that is characteristic specifically of either men or women. It is highly dependent on a context of an interaction, and in this research dominant nonverbal behaviour is analysed within the given frames of the same.

require more space performed with arms away from the body are considered dominant. Previous studies (e.g. in Burgoon & Dunbar, 2006) have shown that women are more likely those to perform gestures with only hands and fingers, while men take up more space by exhibiting wide and animated gestures. The analysis of nonverbal behaviour of Helen Clark, Theresa May, and Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović supports these results, while there is no overlapping with Julia Gillard, Jacinda Ardern, and Katrín Jakobsdóttir's nonverbal communication. Angela Merkel and Erna Solberg exhibit frequent gestures, but their delivery of wider gestures with arms away from the torso seems to depend on formality of the situation (they both refrain from exhibiting wider gestures in more formal situations). Furthermore, it was interesting to note with these two stateswomen that they both engaged in the hand steeping gesture, also known as a power gesture, showing their commitment and the importance of the discourse. As for male politicians, Boris Johnson, Tony Abbott, Andrej Plenković, and John Key use wide and frequent gestures, while Frank-Walter Steinmeier keeps his arms to his torso gesturing occasionally, only with his hands. Donald Trump remaining in one pose throughout the entire video does not exhibit variation in his gestures. He does, nevertheless, exhibit the hand steeping, like Merkel and Solberg; however, his steeple, as it was seen, is performed in a different manner and is not regarded here as a dominant display. Variable facial expression is another cue characteristic of dominant individuals, and it appears that male politicians are more static in that regard. Of male politicians, Boris Johnson and John Key are the only ones that show facial expressivity, and of female politicians Jacinda Ardern, Julia Gillard, Angela Merkel (in the video *LIVE: Nordic country PMs and Merkel hold joint press conference in Iceland*), and Katrín Jakobsdóttir exhibit certain variability. What all these findings show is a variation between both female and male politicians in exhibiting their dominant displays, but they also reveal that women parry men in displays of body movements and gesturing, and exceed in facial expressivity. What is interesting to see is how Angela Merkel, as one of the more powerful politicians on the list, exhibits very little body movements and gesturing, especially considering the dyadic power theory's claims that those with more power are more likely to exert dominance cues. It is possible, however, as Burgoon and Dunbar (2006) have shown, that individuals with most power need not engage in open dominance displays. The power gesture that the Chancellor exhibits appears the only dominant display intended to openly influence others. Erna Solberg also relies on the steeple to emit her message to others, and similarly to chancellor Merkel, uses it as her main dominant gesture. Katrín Jakobsdóttir is a politician who stands out from the average and exceeds the male politicians in her dominant displays, of which facial expressiveness, relaxed body posture, and energetic behaviour could be singled out as her most

prominent ones. The findings for her nonverbal behaviour do not overlap with the stereotypical conceptions as dominant displays are exerted as elements of her natural communication. Jacinda Ardern also shows dominant displays but in somewhat subtler form than prime minister Jakobsdóttir; however, like her, Jacinda's relaxed body posture and movements and her wide gestures are also characteristics of her natural nonverbal communication. Finally, Julia Gillard is the only female politician who exhibits threat display by finger pointing at her male colleague, and engages in parodic behaviour (however, it is necessary to note that this parodic behaviour differs from those of John Key and Tony Abbott as is not done in a belittling manner but in a form of criticizing her male colleague).

### *Question 2*

The second part of the discussion aims to answer the question in what way the nonverbal communication of female politicians supports (or not) gender stereotypes, with emphasis on interaction. In order to do so, interactional, conversational, and threat displays are analysed. When exhibiting these displays, an individual has greater possibility to exert power or influence other people. Closer spatial proximity, control of the distance, initiation of a physical contact but also persistent stare, silence, or interrupting are all potential violations of a personal territory. Studies have shown (Knapp et al., 2014, p. 137; Henley, 1977, p. 39) that dominant individuals tend to exhibit these kinds of behaviours, in which women are more likely to be those to endure the violations. The videos of Helen Clark and Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, but also Donald Trump, support the premise that men are more likely to engage in violating behaviour. Presidents Jacques Chirac and Tomislav Nikolić exhibit physical control by exerting their will through physical contact, and they also show control of the distance and duration of the contact. During the meetings, Helen Clark and Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović exhibit subordinate displays as a response to the violating behaviour. Donald Trump, on the other hand, exhibits silence as a dominant display of threat, however, not supported with other dominant displays. His behaviour was met with Angela Merkel's closed body posture, and no other subordinate cues. Of female politicians, Angela Merkel, Julia Gillard, Jacinda Ardern, and Katrín Jakobsdóttir exhibit some of these displays. The analysis of nonverbal communication of Angela Merkel shows initiation of contact, interrupting, and moderating conversational turns. Moreover, along the recognized displays, she also exhibits the lack of engagement in eye contact during handshakes. Katrín Jakobsdóttir exhibits control over contact by ignoring the hand of Angela Merkel, while Julia Gillard and Jacinda Ardern show initiation of a physical contact and tendency to engage in interaction at closer spatial proximity. Kolinda Grabar-

Kitarović, Theresa May, Helen Clark, and Erna Solberg show no interactional, conversational, or threat displays. John Key does not engage these displays either, but exhibits instead a dismissive and disrespectful behaviour by scoffing at questions received. When considering these findings in view of female/male relations, the most distinct difference between the genders, when it comes to interactive behaviour, is the intensity of displays. Nonverbal communication of presidents Chirac, Nikolić, and Trump, as well as New Zealand prime minister John Key shows how open and direct these displays can be. The first two succeed in their aim to establish the dominance over the interaction by eliciting the subordinate displays from the female interactants. Croatian's president Grabar-Kitarović succumbing to the third kiss and nervously laughing the situation off allows for the behaviour of president Nikolić to become the legitimate exertion of dominance (it is necessary, however, to take into consideration the context of a highly formal situation in which this happens, and the question of the appropriate response to such behaviour). On the other hand, not all dominance displays are met with accepting behaviour, as is the case with chancellor Merkel and president Trump. Donald Trump in his attempt to establish the dominance over the discourse not only fails to elicit subordinate cues from the Chancellor but exhibits the lack of power. His threat displays appear void of the actual dominant cues, allowing for the impression that they serve merely as a decoy and a compensation for the lack of influence. Merkel's calm and poised posture only adds to this disbalance of power display. What may appear problematic in this relationship (beside the fact that exerting forceful dominance in formal environment legitimises this behaviour) is a potential misrepresentation of the power relations between the interactants; threat display (much as any other forceful display of dominance), being a highly conspicuous behaviour, may lead to misperceiving persons on its receiving end (in this case female politicians) as those with less power, thus supporting the ingrained stereotypical beliefs of women (but also men). As seen from the Brunswikian lens model, this is done in a subconscious manner, which makes it difficult to refer to.

This research shows that female politicians resort to dominance displays in interaction; however, dominance is exhibited in somewhat subtler form and intensity than of their male counterparts, which is why their dominant behaviour may remain unrecognized when met with more open dominance displays. Even though this phenomenon does confirm the view stated in Burgoon and Dunbar (2006) that there are no greater dissimilarities between the genders since they both exhibit dominance cues, it opens the question whether those existing differences in the intensity of the displays are related to stereotypical expectations of women to be less assertive. As seen, the female politicians do not resort to employing threat displays (except for

finger pointing of Julia Gillard, which was done in an affective behaviour) or try to exert power by exhibiting physical control – they are more likely to engage in less straightforward displays of dominance such as initiating physical contact, controlling the distance, or moderating conversational turns. Their nonverbal communication relies on low nonverbal dominant displays, facial and gestural expressiveness, and relaxed body posture, which is what Burgoon and Dunbar (2006) identified as the nonverbal behaviours that elicit most influence and power. Male politicians, on the other hand, are seen to exhibit threat displays and personal zone violations, which agrees with the presumption of the gender politics hypothesis that men use nonverbal behaviour to control and dominate.

To follow the presumption that true leadership must be contained in an open display of power and dominance in order to be affirmed is to ignore the power that is embedded in the subtlety of the interaction, and to support stereotypical cultural conceptions which subordinate women to men. However, the question arises whether low dominance cues will be recognized as a legitimate exertion of power in a field that allows the existence of this strong division. After all, as Porter and Geis (1981) state, leadership relies on perception and social recognition and if such behaviour is not recognized as dominant it will not, also, be valued as such.

## **Conclusion**

The conclusion that follows from this research is that women leaders, for the most part, match male politicians in their nonverbal communication and that they largely refrain from engaging in stereotypical displays. It is shown that the female politicians who exhibited dominance cues in their non-interactive displays also exhibited dominance cues in interaction with male politicians; however, their dominant displays differed from those of their male counterparts in intensity and form. Even though both genders exhibit dominant displays, male politicians were more likely to resort to forceful behaviour, whereas women relied on low nonverbal dominant cues. This might lead to thinking that political sphere supports this division, perpetuating gender inequality within its highest level. As it was seen, nonverbal communication is a strong medium for conveying internal states and intentions of individuals, both in overt and covert manner. A person can communicate the amount of power they have through their nonverbal communication, use it as a means of denoting a status, or perpetuate a social gap. Being an important factor in everyday human communication that people rely on to provide additional information, its role in interactions should not be accepted uncritically.

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