

# THE OVERLOOKED RELEVANCE OF THE GENDER-INFLUENCED PERCEPTION OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION CUES ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURIAL LEADERSHIP

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***Summary:** The communication process, due to its high complexity, is affected by a great number of external factors. This especially holds true for the nonverbal aspect of the communication process, in which the messages transmitted often get distorted through the interference of various elements one would not, at first, deem relevant to the process. Such is the case, among other things, with gender-stereotypical social norms. These norms are an important part of the overall socialization process, influencing the lives of all people throughout their lives. However, this also makes their effect exceptionally strong and visible, and not always in a positive way. The effects may be felt in the everyday life, but perhaps even more importantly in many business-related settings. Thus, the main topic addressed by this paper is that of the ways in which the influence of gender-stereotypical norms on the perception of nonverbal communication cues affects the effectiveness of women entrepreneurial leaders. In order to accomplish that, the paper first discusses the concept of entrepreneurial leadership; then, it examines the concept of nonverbal communication and its gendered perception; and finally, it addresses the relevance this gendered perception of nonverbal cues has on the effectiveness of women entrepreneurial leaders, and the corresponding lack of sufficient research and studies being done in this*

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*regard. Attention is drawn to the stereotypes associated with women, as well as their (in) congruence with the ideals of “good” entrepreneurial leadership, and the ways in which this relationship affects women’s success in roles of entrepreneurial leaders. The aim of the paper is to showcase a direction in which upcoming research in this field should move, if it is to properly address all the aspects of the topic at hand.*

**Keywords:** *nonverbal communication; entrepreneurial leadership, women entrepreneurship, gender stereotypes, women leadership*

## 1. Introduction

The role of a leader in the context of entrepreneurship is a complex and demanding one, no matter the person occupying the position. However, in the case where the entrepreneurial leader is a woman, the situation becomes even more specific, due to the unique challenges presented to women through the widely socially accepted gender-stereotypical norms.

The study presented in this paper focuses on the interrelation between gender norms and the perception of nonverbal communication cues of an entrepreneurial leader, when said leader is a woman. The study is comprised of two sections concerning the theoretical framework of the question, and a third section concerning the essential topic of the paper.

The first theoretical framework section deals with the concept of entrepreneurial leadership. The beginning subsection broadly describes the general principle of leadership, pointing out the specifics of the leadership process. Following this, the latter subsection addresses the unique characteristics of entrepreneurial leadership, as a subtype of leadership in general.

The second theoretical framework section discusses the relation between non-verbal communication, leadership and gender. In order to do so, it first addresses the general context of non-verbal communication. Then, it moves on to the issue of non-verbal communication in leadership generally. Finally, it concludes with an explanation of gendered perspectives on non-verbal communication cues.

Finally, the third section synthesizes the topics of the first two, addressing the title question of the effect gender-perception of nonverbal communication cues has on the effectiveness of women’s entrepreneurial leadership. Issues concerning assertiveness, risk-taking and general appearance are addressed,

drawing attention to the way the simple fact of womanhood being a part of an entrepreneurial leader's identity affects the results they get.

In the end, a conclusion is given, summarizing the points addressed throughout the study, and giving an overall opinion on the current situation. The comparison to the past is briefly addressed, as well as the outlook for the future, showcasing the possibilities for progress and improvement. Ultimately, it is emphasized that current research in this field is lacking in the assessment and study of the interrelations of gender, non-verbal communication, leadership and entrepreneurship in this sense, and that such a deficiency should be rectified, if the scholarly work on this topic is to be up-to-date with the times, and relevant to real-life situations.

## 2. Entrepreneurial leadership

Entrepreneurial leadership presents a highly significant aspect of the role of a person involved in the entrepreneurship-oriented context. Without highly developed leadership skills, the possibility of running a business in an effective, prosperous way is extremely low. The importance of such a skill is visible on two sides – both concerning the directing role reflected in the relationship with the employees, and the role had in relations with other participants of the business market.

In a way, the competence of a person engaging in entrepreneurial activity correlates to the usual standards of developed leadership skills; although, in certain aspects, there are unique demands put in place by the specificity of the entrepreneurial leadership role. The following section deals with those two aspects of the question – first the general dimension of leadership prowess, and later the ways in which entrepreneurial leadership differs from other form of leadership activity.

### 2.1. The concept of leadership and leadership styles

The general concept of leadership is one which appears, at a first glance, to be nearly equal to *a priori* knowledge. The word itself evokes a number of associations in a person's mind, bringing about the sense of simply "knowing" its meaning and relevance. However, despite the initial familiarity, the term itself presents a difficult one to define, making it so that the number of definitions

given for it is nearly as high as the number of people who have attempted to do so (Stogdill, 1974). One may even go as far as to say that “defining leadership is an unfinished process [...] which still goes on” (Jovanović, 2017).

One of the most simple, yet thorough, definitions of the concept of leadership is given by Kotter, through his five basic characteristics of leadership – (i) the fact that leadership is a process; (ii) the fact that leadership consists of affecting or influencing others; (iii) the fact that leadership takes place in a group; (iv) the fact that it includes the achievement of certain goals; and (v) the fact that the goals achieved are shared by the leaders and their followers (Kotter, 2018).

While all five characteristics, or components, have significant importance for the concept of leadership, looking at the works of others who have observed this concept in a theoretical sense, it becomes evident that many of them, even when not aiming to provide such a detailed definition of the phenomenon, tend to draw attention to at least one of these aspects of it – the presence of a common goal (Chemers, 1997; Garis, Squires, Plecas, & Valley, 2018; Northouse, 2013; Yukl, 2013).

One of the issues relevant for the process of defining leadership is that of distinguishing this process from the related process of management. Put shortly, the difference between the two consists of the fact that leadership suggests making changes, while management deals with the sustaining of activity (Cuban, 1988). However, such a strict distinction may lead to wrong conclusions, making it appear as if the difference between the two is more serious than it is in reality. Therefore, it is prudent to consult somewhat more detailed accounts of the distinction, such as the one given by Leithwood. According to his analysis, the differences between the two concepts are as follows: “(i) management is about the *status quo* while leadership is about change; (ii) management focuses on the short term while leadership focuses on the longer term; (iii) management is about keeping “the ship” running smoothly while leadership is about disrupting the *status quo*; and (iv) management is about doing things right while leadership is about doing the right things” (Leithwood, 2012).

As can be seen, the main difference between these two processes, or the two roles a person in charge of them must fulfill, is centered mainly around the idea of the initiative-taking, innovative outlook a leader must have in order to ensure the progress and improvement of the group they’re leading and their success, as opposed to the managerial task of ensuring the already determined

tasks are executed in an orderly manner. In short, once again, it may be claimed that “[m]anagement is about coping with complexity [...] [while] [l]eadership [...] is about coping with change” (Kotter, 2001). Obviously, a leader often does need to devote their time and effort to tasks which would be considered management, according to this division – however, it is the rest of their activity, going beyond this, that makes them leaders, and their work leadership.

Part of the already mentioned improvement and progress of the group, associated with the leadership role, concerns the organization of the group, with the goal of making its joint activity more efficient and satisfying. This aspect of leadership is an important part of many theorists’ understandings of leadership (Jaques & Clement, 1999; Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003; Winston & Patterson, 2006), further proving the significance it has in the overall leadership process.

In accordance with the importance the leadership role has for the efficient functioning of a group, the various techniques and approaches to the leadership process have been the topic of numerous scientific works (Hussain, Abbas, Lei, Jamal Haider, & Akram, 2017; Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013; Wang, Liu, & Liu, 2019). Very often, these approaches are named “styles,” where a leadership style is a “behavioral nor[m] a leader uses to influence others” (Natsir, Ramli & Putra, 2024).

According to Goleman’s study, there are six different basic styles of leadership – the commanding style (demanding a high level of obedience from the followers); the visionary style (relying on the authority of the leader’s vision influencing the followers); the pacesetter style (founded on the principle of the leader showing the standards they demand through personal example); the affiliative style (relying on the integration of the followers and relationship development); the democratic style (the leader’s role is mainly the coordination of the joint decision making process, involving all participants/members of the group); and the coaching style (focused on letting the follower reach their own potential as much as possible) (Goleman, 2000). Obviously, each of the styles has its own merit, as well as certain shortcomings – however, depending on the relationship between the leader and their followers, the structure of the task which needs to be accomplished through leadership, and the power position of the leader themselves, a choice between the different styles should be made (Sydänmaanlakka, 2003).

A broader analysis, focused more on the balance of decision-making power between the leader and the followers, recognizes three main approaches to leadership – the autocratic, democratic and participative approach (Larik & Lashari, 2022). Choosing which of these approaches to implement is essentially a challenge of measuring the relative values of having the possibility to make quick and easily enforceable decisions on the hand, and fostering a climate of valuing the input of all people involved in the process.

## 2.2. The specificity of entrepreneurial leadership

The process of leadership in general is usually seen as the relationship solely between the leader on one side, and their followers on the other side. However, a somewhat more nuanced understanding of it recognizes a third element as well – context (Nye, 2008).

The significance of context for the leadership process is greatly recognized in theoretical works concerning this topic. Oftentimes, context is linked to different professions, seeing as various professional environments present leaders (and their followers, to an extent) with different demands in order for the leadership process to function properly. Thus, a number of studies address the different forms of leadership necessary for different professions (Londoño-Proañó, 2021; Warren & Carnall, 2011; Wong, Bliese, & McGurk, 2003).

The relevance of this approach becomes even more apparent in studies like this one, which are focused on a single specific context in which leadership takes place. Therefore, the question of the specific nature of entrepreneurial leadership, and its *differentiae specificae* in relation to the general concept of leadership, must be addressed.

Entrepreneurial leadership, due to the complexity of the context in which it takes place, is sometimes defined as a new style of leadership in and of itself (Fernald, Solomon, & Tarabishy, 2005). Taking into account the demands the role of an entrepreneur places on a person, it is claimed that entrepreneurs are leaders *par excellence* (Leitch & Volery, 2017).

In line with the already mentioned, the process of entrepreneurial leadership is divided into three constitutive levels, each dealing with different aspects of the process – the individual level (establishing the business); the organizational level (making innovations); and the market level (taking advantage of opportunities) (Alvarez & Barney, 2002).

In order to answer the demands of the position, an entrepreneurial leader must possess certain qualities which are not as heavily emphasized as important in the general context of leadership. Firstly, an entrepreneurial leader must be creative (Sandybayev, 2019), as well as adaptive and ready to implement change when the situation demands it (Kuratko, 2007). In relation to that, it is necessary for them to be able to recognize opportunities and take advantage of them, handling the available resources in the most effective manner, while having the vision of the best way for progress (Ireland, Hitt, & Sirmon, 2003).

In accordance with the particularities of the entrepreneurial vocation, it is necessary for an entrepreneurial leader to be innovative, and in such a way that they are ready to take on a certain level of risk, in order to accomplish the desired results (Chen, 2007). This readiness to take risks ties in with the need for the ability to work despite uncertainty, and do so in a proactive way (Leitch & Volery, 2017).

Of course, in spite of all the need for an entrepreneurial leader to be ready to take risks, it is necessary for them to do so in a thought-out manner, weighing the amount of risk against the potential gains. Therefore, such a leader must be good at strategy (Esmer & Dayi, 2017), making it more probable that their decisions bring about the desired outcomes. This is further made possible through the leader being focused on the tasks they are dealing with, as well as them being economically oriented, while simultaneously ready to take on personal responsibility for their decisions (Lippitt, 1987).

Finally, it is necessary for an entrepreneurial leader to be capable of effective communication (Harrison, Paul, & Burnard, 2019). All the levels of entrepreneurial leadership mentioned at the beginning of this section – the individual, organizational and market level – require well-developed communication skills, though the level of their significance may vary. However, the overall importance communication has for the entrepreneurial leadership process is, among other reasons, a justification for it having a whole study such as this one devoted to its impact on the process and the results it yields.

### 3. Non-verbal communication between leadership and gender

#### 3.1. General context of non-verbal communication

The thought of the concept of communication usually brings forth the ideas of speaking, or writing, being used to convey messages between people. However, despite it not being the first association to this phenomenon, non-verbal communication has a highly important role in the general process of communicating. Its significance may even be said to surpass that of verbal communication, at least in certain situations. Still, it is often overlooked in analyses of the effectiveness of communication in certain contexts, and its impact on the results achieved.

Nonverbal communication, just as verbal communication as well, owes its name to the Latin word *verbum*, meaning *word, language* (Lewis, 2020). Consequently, the concept of nonverbal communication, in simplest terms, may be defined as those forms of communication which do not rely on words as the medium through which meaning is transferred.

The uniqueness of nonverbal communication, among other things, stems from its ability to use a greater number of channels for transferring messages, as opposed to only one disposable to verbal communication (Johnson, Ann O'Connor-Ledbetter, Kourtney Barrett, & Kathy Pine, 2016). In order to send a nonverbal message, a person may use their tone of voice, facial expression, movement or positioning of the body, direction of the look, arms/hands movement, manner of dress, touch etc. (O'Connell & Raje Airey, 2007; Tubbs & Moss, 2003).

The signals sent through nonverbal communication may be described, and consequently evaluated through certain dimensions. A theory concerning this envisions six such dimensions, through which a nonverbal cue may be observed: (i) depth (surface level information or deep communication); (ii) subjectivity/objectivity of expression; (iii) passiveness/activeness (how dynamic the movements of nonverbal communication are); (iv) continuity/discontinuity (whether all the nonverbal messages a communicator sends over the course of one conversation are congruent or not); (v) authenticity/inauthenticity (if the messages are genuine or "rehearsed"); and (vi) originality, uniqueness and creativity (Nenadović, 2010). Analyzing a nonverbal message through the

mentioned six dimensions provides the recipient with a framework for better understanding the meaning of the message, helping them make the entirety of the communication process more efficient.

The sending of nonverbal messages, as has already been mentioned previously, occurs through the use of a great number of different channels. Some of those – particularly the ones used in greater frequency – have been recognized through various studies. Such channels include facial expression, gesticular expression, spacial behavior, paralanguage and silence, clothes and general appearance, eye contact and communication, touch, artifactual communication, temporal communication (DeVito, 2019); proxemic communication, movement in space, environmental cues (Johnson et al., 2016); postural communication, rhythm, and scribbling, drawing and painting (Mandić, 2003). Of course, depending on the contextual specifics of the situation in which nonverbal communication is used, some of the mentioned channels may be extremely important or, at the other end of the spectrum, absolutely irrelevant for the communication process.

Finally, it is necessary to address the function of nonverbal communication at all, in more detail. While it has already been mentioned that nonverbal communication cues carry meaning relevant to the overall message being transferred during the communication process, there are certain nuances in the possible roles those cues have in different situations.

According to one theory, the roles of nonverbal communication are: (i) expression of emotions; (ii) expression of interpersonal opinions of persons in a communication interaction; (iii) expression of one's own personality traits; (iv) following, supporting and supplementing verbal messages; (v) replacement of verbal communication; and (vi) conventional expression of certain social activities (Rot, 2010). Depending on the context (Gordon, Daniel Druckman, Richard M. Rozelle, & James C. Baxter, 2006), up to 93% of communicated content can be conveyed through nonverbal communication (Mehrabian, 2000), be it purposefully or not (Cvetkovski & Cvetkovska-Ocokoljić, 2007)

However, when analyzing the concept of nonverbal communication, and its effect on the overall results of the communication process, a different overview of its functions – one showcasing its relation to verbal communication – may prove to be more beneficial. Thus, the functions of nonverbal communication may be summed up as follows: (i) emphasis (of a verbal message); (ii) com-

plementing (the verbal message); (iii) contradicting (the verbal message); (iv) control (of the interaction flow); (v) repetition (of the verbal message); and (vi) substitution (of a verbal message) (DeVito, 2008; DeVito, Clark, & Shimoni, 2001).

As can be deduced from the already shown, the significance of nonverbal communication cues can have a truly high level, at least in some situations. This is true when it comes to leadership as well.

### 3.2. Nonverbal communication in leadership

The relation between nonverbal communication and leadership is reflected in the abundance of messages sent to the followers by the leader, through nonverbal means, which improve the quality of the leadership relationship. When examining such factors, an especially useful approach may be found in the concept of charismatic leadership.

Charismatic leadership conception is founded upon the understanding of charisma as “a leadership vitamin that enables them to lead more effectively and improve organizational performance.” (Maran, 2024) The role of a leader is further developed through a somewhat difficult to define element of charisma or influence the leader has on the followers.

The theory of charismatic leadership is versatile, being “the only leadership theory that articulates a full range of values covering both the self-serving and prosocial ends of the spectrum.” (Hu & Dutta, 2022) Its focus is not on the objectives of the leader, or on the explicit approaches the leader uses in order to achieve the intended results. Rather, it is based on a more subtle effect the leader as a person has on the people following them.

In accordance with this, it is often understood that “the authority wielded by charismatic leaders is based solely upon followers’ recognition of some form of extraordinary quality or trait in their leader that is not accessible to the average person.” (Hofmann, 2023) However, that is not to say that charisma is a mystic quality, the nature of which cannot be understood at all.

On the contrary, charisma can be understood as a signaling process (Maran, 2024). It has been defined as “a values-based, symbolic, and emotion-laden leader signaling.” (Antonakis et al., 2016) Inevitably, such an approach yields powerful results in relation to the followers of a charismatic leader.

A study done by Maran operationalizes charisma into nine tactics – essentially, communication skills. Out of the nine, four belong to the category of non-verbal communication skills – gaze behavior, smiling, gestures and facial expressiveness. (Maran, 2024)

### 3.3. The gendered perception of nonverbal communication cues

Even when the relevance of nonverbal communication is analyzed in a general sense, there is often a lack of consideration given to the gendered perception of it. Due to the many cultural norms and biases tied to the concept of gender, the results of nonverbal communication and the interpretation of nonverbal communication cues vary greatly. The following section first provides an overview of the general concept of nonverbal communication and its aspects, and then delves into the question of the gendered perception of nonverbal communication cues.

However, the way those cues are interpreted depends not only on the cues themselves, but also on the person using them. One aspect of such interaction between the communication cues and the communicator using them, in terms of generating the meaning perceived by the recipient of the message, is the gendered perception of nonverbal cues, which is the focus of the following section.

Nonverbal communication, as has already been shown, is an unavoidable and indispensable aspect of the general communication process. Used in an appropriate, correct way, it helps everyone, no matter their gender, perform their job responsibilities in a more efficient manner (Spangler, 1995). However, it is necessary to examine the specifics of this process, depending on the gender of the nonverbal communication cues transmitter.

Research shows that men and women show different nonverbal communication patterns (Zand, Baradaran, Najafi, Maleki, & Golbazi Mahdipour, 2020). In fact, the significance of those differences is such that separate languages of the masculine and feminine subcultures have been recognized in certain theoretical works (Pearson, 1987), showcasing the conclusion that men and women do not communicate in identical ways – especially when it comes to nonverbal communication.

Numerous studies have attempted to provide a comprehensive comparison between the patterns of nonverbal communication used by men and women (Gamble & Gamble, 2021; Gray, 2014; Lakoff, 1990; Pearson, Turner, &

West, 1995; Stewart, Cooper, Stewart, & Friedley, 2002; Tannen, 1994, 2013; Trethewey, 1999), going as far as to compare their gait patterns (Hall, Horgan, & Murphy, 2019). The differences are recognized both in cases of the communicator telling the truth, and in cases of them lying (Eakins & Eakins, 1978), making it helpful to know the gender of the communicator when trying to deduce if they are being truthful or not (Cody & O’Hair, 1983).

The differences between genders stem from the traditional gender role expectations, folk wisdom, and stereotypes (Eagly, 1987), making for different social-learning environments (Hall, Carter, & Horgan, 2000). The long-established notions of masculine and feminine roles in society make certain behaviors tolerable, or even desirable, in people of one gender, while simultaneously making them undesirable, or unacceptable at all, in those of another gender. The double standards are present in many cases, such as that of dominance (being regarded as “good” in men, but not women) and submissiveness (being regarded as predestined for women, but unwanted in men) (Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995).

When it comes to nonverbal communication in women (as opposed to that in men), it is often said that women are more nonverbally expressive, as well as more responsive to the nonverbal cues sent by others (Briton & Hall, 1995). The preconceptions concerning them stems from the way women are generally seen in the society – the typical woman is considered to be kind, caring, sensitive, empathic and emotional (LaFrance & Vial, 2016), making it expected of her to be perceptive and expressive. In a way, the stereotypes focused on women (and the corresponding stereotypes concerning men as well) make it so that women are regarded as more socially oriented and caring, while men are seen as more oriented towards power and self-promotion (Bakan, 1966; Eagly & Wood, 1999).

However, the relationship between gender and nonverbal communication should not be reduced to the effect gender has on the perception of nonverbal communication cues. At the same time, it can be claimed that nonverbal communication – or body language – is a significant aspect of gender communication (Eunson, 2016). This is closely related to the so-called pregendering of nonverbal behavior, where some nonverbal behavior is understood *a priori* to be masculine or feminine (LaFrance & Vial, 2016). In fact, the relevance of nonverbal communication cues to the expression of a person’s gender and/or sex is

sometimes regarded as so great that Birdwhistell describes gender-typical non-verbal communication cues as “tertiary sex characteristics” (Birdwhistell, 1970).

In light of such social norms focused on nonverbal communication, engaging in the “appropriate” repertoire of nonverbal behavior, associated with one’s gender, is considered a part of “doing gender” well (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Consequently, a person defying the expectations put upon them by those norms, using the nonverbal cues “reserved” for the opposite gender, is adding another meaning to those cues – the level of their wish (or lack thereof) to conform to the expectations of others (Hall et al., 2000).

However, it should be noted that, as detailed as the social norms concerning nonverbal communication behavior may appear to be, certain cases of incongruence may be observed. For example, one of the most well-known theories concerning the topic of gendered perception of nonverbal communication is the subordination hypothesis, which claims that nonverbal behaviors exhibited more by women than men are indicative of women’s lower power (Henley, 1977). Seeing as the hypothesis dates back decades, it comes as less of a surprise that the presumption of women’s lower power is not even elaborated on, being seen as a given. However, even without taking into account the controversiality of this aspect of the theory, the issue remains that certain nonverbal behaviors which are considered indicative of high power – such as closer interpersonal distance, facial expressiveness, expression of emotions through nonverbal cues, and interpersonal accuracy – are, in fact, more pronounced in women (Mast & Sczesny, 2010), making the whole issue of the gendered perception of nonverbal communication even more complex.

#### **4. Nonverbal communication cues interpretation and women’s entrepreneurial leadership effectiveness**

The relevance and importance of communication for the general process of entrepreneurship is well known, and has been proven in scientific works as well (Janevski & Zafirovska, 2015). Moreover, it may be considered crucial in the achieving of integration and coordination of the activities of specialized units at different levels in organizations (Radovic-Markovic, 2011). In the midst of the broad meaning of communication’s role in the entrepreneurship process, it is perhaps even more important to mention – especially in the light of the topic of this paper – the relevance of nonverbal communication, which may also be

considered a highly impactful aspect of the activities concerning entrepreneurship (Peleckis, Peleckienė, Peleckis, & Polajeva, 2016).

The role of nonverbal communication in the world of entrepreneurship is similar to the role it has in the general context of communication and human interaction, which has been addressed in previous sections. Over the course of an interactive relation between people, nonverbal communication cues assist in the transfer of messages, making it easier for the participants of the communication process to understand each other and reach a rapport. The possible downside of nonverbal messages lies in their potential of being misinterpreted; however, provided that there are shared beliefs of all the participants, and the chances of misunderstandings are low, they can prove to be highly beneficial in the company running context (Radović Marković & Salamzadeh, 2018). Therefore, the relevance of the topic of the effect of nonverbal communication on the efficacy of entrepreneurial leadership is indisputable.

The topic is further complexified by the gendered perspective introduced through the question of the efficacy of female entrepreneurial leadership depending on nonverbal communication. Even though, at least formally speaking, the role of an entrepreneur should not be influenced by the gender of the person fulfilling it, in reality, being an entrepreneur does involve playing a gender role (Moult & Anderson, 2005). Therefore, a woman in the position of an entrepreneur does the job in a manner different from the one a man would, and is faced with different challenges and obstacles.

Firstly, the difference may already be seen in the general approach to communication women apply to entrepreneurial activity. According to certain studies, women leaders strive to construct a communication style reflecting the ethic of care (Fine, 2009; Reaves, 2008). This may be tied to the previously mentioned stereotypical characteristics of women, being oriented towards the emotional, empathetic and caring aspects of activity – that is, the communal behavior associated with femininity (Bakan, 1966; Eagly & Wood, 1999).

Such an approach to communication, along with many other ways the female approach to entrepreneurship differs from the male one, may bring about results of the same, or even higher quality, than the male approach does. However, there are certain aspects of entrepreneurial activity in which women are fairly disadvantaged, due to the social gender norms and the socialization differences between genders.

Firstly, as has already been mentioned, women are usually associated with communal, while men are associated with agentic behavior (Bakan, 1966; Eagly & Wood, 1999). This often translates into differences between their upbringing, enforcing such divisions right from the start, through the early socialization process. Boys are, following this, taught to take risks and be dominant; on the other hand, girls are being taught that submissiveness and a cautious approach are the best way to behave (Fogarty & Zheng, 2018).

Seeing as the right attitude towards risk-taking is considered to be of great importance for the success of an entrepreneur (Ekpe, Norsiah Binti Mat, & Razli Che Razak, 2010), it becomes evident that the socialization process carried out in accordance with the previously mentioned social norms puts women at a great disadvantage. Obviously, having been brought up to avoid risks and “play it safe,” it does not come naturally to them to take risks in their business endeavors, even in situations when it may be beneficial to them. In the meantime, their male colleagues are more prone to taking risks, due to their different upbringing, giving them a head start of a sort on the market.

However, the disadvantages women face do not stop there. When communicating with others – employees, colleagues, other actors on the market – they are operating under a different “regime” than the men, following a separate set of social rules. When interacting with other women, they may not feel those disadvantages quite as acutely; however, when engaging in relations with men, the differences become much more visible.

As has already been discussed earlier, women acting in accordance with the gender-stereotypical sets of nonverbal communication cues, transmit through those cues the messages of the gender stereotypes tied to femininity – such as the previously mentioned cautiousness and reluctance to take risks. Of course, being aware of the incongruence between those messages and the “ideal” entrepreneur qualities, women may choose to stray from the nonverbal cues repertoire assigned to their gender – however, not even then does the message transmitted become the same as if it were a man sending it. On the contrary, the meaning of defying social norms and being culturally rebellious are added, distorting the original meaning of the nonverbal cues.

Women are also faced with difficulties when it comes to their appearance in the workplace. The message perceived from their manner of dress can often be different from the intended one, thus preventing them from making the

professional impression they are looking for. Further on, women are often faced with ageism in the entrepreneurial context, no matter what their age – they are either too young and inexperienced, too old and lacking fresh ideas, or too middle-aged and prone to being oriented towards family (Diehl, Dzubinski, & Stephenson, 2023).

Practically speaking, the situation they are in puts women in a no-win situation. No matter how they act, they often cannot avoid the specific gendered perception of their behavior. While in some cases this does not cause any issues, in other situations it may cause them to be perceived as lacking in credibility – in the eyes of their employees, customers, suppliers and even financial institutions (Baines, Wheelock, & Gelder, 2003; Bell & La Valle, 2003; Marlow, Carter, & Shaw, 2008). Consequently, even though they may objectively be great at the work they do as entrepreneurs, their performance suffers, perpetuating the stereotypes and making it difficult for them and other, future female entrepreneurs, to succeed in their business activities.

This is further visible from the analysis of the previously mentioned concept of charismatic leadership, and the elements through which it is defined. When it comes to the four outlined non-verbal skills relevant to the charisma phenomenon – gaze behavior, smiling, gestures and facial expressiveness (Maran, 2024) – there is no clear advantage present in regards to men as compared to women.

When it comes to gaze behavior, it is well known that women gaze at interaction partners more than men do. (Hall & Gunnery, 2013) They also smile more than the opposite gender (LaFrance, Hecht & Paluck, 2003), nod and gesticulate more when communicating with other people (Wasike, 2018), and have a higher level of facial expressiveness (Fischer & LaFrance, 2014).

## 5. Conclusion

Women entrepreneurial leadership is a specific type of the general leadership process, set apart by both the context in which it takes place – the entrepreneurial activity – and the gendered perspective brought by the leader being a woman. As such, the effect nonverbal communication, as a greatly important pillar of the general communication process, has on its efficiency and success, is a highly complex and nuanced question.

Nonverbal communication, much more than its verbal counterpart, falls victim to the various social norms enforced through the socialization process. This, of course, includes the numerous norms about gender roles and stereotypical standards of masculinity and femininity. Therefore, the meaning of nonverbal communication cues, depending on the gender of the person transmitting them, differs greatly.

The issues women entrepreneurs are most often faced with concern their difficulty in asserting authority and credibility in the professional setting. From the perspective of nonverbal communication, this effect is the result of the established gender-appropriate repertoire of nonverbal communication cues. Whether the “rules” of the repertoire are observed or defied, the message perceived by others remains tinted by the gender perspective.

When a woman uses only the cues from “the women’s repertoire,” she is perceived through the gender stereotypes focused on women. The difficulties arising from this stem from the incongruence between the stereotypical woman, and the ideal of a good entrepreneurial leader. The idealized traits of a dominant, assertive, risk-taking entrepreneurial leader, capable of running the business in an efficient and prosperous way, are in stark difference to the social norms of submissiveness, cautiousness and soft-spoken approach to communication, which are pushed onto women from a young age.

On the other hand, a woman defying the gender-appropriate nonverbal cues repertoire is perceived as rebellious and aggressive, and usually regarded with antipathy. The demands placed on her by the ideal of a good entrepreneurial leader are satisfied; however, her behavior is considered “over the top,” and even inappropriate in some cases. In any case, it is impossible for her to convey the message of professional capability and credibility in this way, without a plethora of added meaning being tied to her actions, even when she does not intend it to be so. Of course, there is room for improvement, and the situation is already better than it was at earlier periods. The number of women proving themselves to be competent entrepreneurial leaders is growing, weakening the perception of the position as one most suited to the stereotypical man. At the same time, the defying of gender-stereotypical nonverbal cues repertoires is more frequent than before, forcing the stereotypes themselves to change and become more inclusive and flexible. Therefore, even though the gendered perspective on nonverbal communication still has great effect on the success of

women entrepreneurial leaders, progress is present and, with enough time and effort, the obstacles women face today can be overcome.

Still, taking into consideration all the outlined factors, it must be concluded that women taking up entrepreneurial leadership roles are faced with more challenges than men are and that, even though a significant body of research attempted to operationalize the criteria in accordance with which the success of a leader is determined, such approaches are often blind to gender differences. Through analyzing this disparity in the present paper, we wish to make the issue more visible, and showcase the urgent need for research in this field to take into account the gender perspective when examining issues of leadership in general, and especially in the context of entrepreneurial activity.

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## ZANEMARENI ZNAČAJ RODNO OBOJENE PERCEPCIJE NEVERBALNIH KOMUNIKACIONIH ZNAKOVA NA EFEKTIVNOST ŽENSKOG PREDUZETNIČKOG LIDERSTVA

**Sažetak:** *Komunikacioni proces, usled svoje visoke kompleksnosti, pod uticajem je značajnog broja eksternih faktora. Navedeno je posebno primenljivo na neverbalni aspekt komunikacionog procesa, u kojem se poslate poruke često iskrivljene usled interferencije raznih elemenata koji, na prvi pogled, ni ne deluju relevantno za sam proces. Ovo je slučaj, između ostalog, sa rodno-stereotipnim društvenim normama. Ove norme su značajan deo celokupnog procesa socijalizacije, utičući na živote svih ljudi tokom njihovih života. Međutim, ovo takođe čini njihove efekte posebno snažnim i upadljivim, i to ne uvek na pozitivan način. Efekti se mogu osetiti u svakodnevnom životu, ali možda još značajnije u mnogim poslovnim kontekstima. Shodno tome, osnovna tema kojom se ovaj rad bavi jesu efekti koje uticaj rodno-stereotipnih normi na percepciju neverbalnih znakova ima na efektivnost žena preduzetničkih lidera. U tom cilju, rad najpre razmatra koncept preduzetničkog liderstva; zatim, proučava koncept neverbalne komunikacije i njegovu rodno obojenu percepciju; i konačno, bavi se značajem koji ova rodno obojena percepcija neverbalnih znakova ima na efektivnost žena preduzetničkih lidera, kao i nedostatkom dovoljnog istraživanja i rada na ovim pitanjima. Ukazuje se na stereotipe koji se vezuju za žene, kao i na njihovu (in)kongruenciju sa idealima „dobrog“ preduzetničkog liderstva, i na načine na koje navedeno utiče na uspešnost žena na pozicijama preduzetničkih lidera. Cilj rada je da se ukaže na pravac u kojem bi dalja istraživanja u ovoj oblasti trebalo da se kreću, kako bi se na prikladan način adresirali svi aspekti ove teme.*

**Ključne reči:** *neverbalna komunikacija, preduzetničko liderstvo, žensko preduzetništvo, rodni stereotipi, žensko liderstvo*