

Exploring non-verbal communication and body language in creating a meaningful life: Angela Merkel in psychobiography
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Abstract

Psychobiography is a well established methodological approach to explore the entire life course or specific events in the life of extraordinary individuals by using psychological theories. The theories often focus on mental models, the analysis of cognitive contributions or behavioural actions. Thereby, it has been shown that humans consciously or unconsciously aim at what they consider creating a meaningful life.

This study uses a new psychobiographical focus, exploring the interplay of personality, non-verbal communication and body-language to analyse the meaning of specific life events in the life of Angela Merkel, the contemporary German chancellor. It thereby contributes to political psychological psychobiography on global women leaders.

This psychobiography partly builds on the psychoanalytic theories of Wilhelm Reich and Alexander Lowen in the context of bioenergetic analysis. The article evaluates how Merkel uses non-verbal communication and body-language to establish herself as a meaningful chancellor.

Methodologically, it uses a hermeneutical research paradigm with Merkel being purposefully sampled as the subject of research. This study includes written accounts for analysis and interpretation on Merkel and refers to media scenario as a relevant methodological reference, exploring Merkel being in public as a politician.

It thereby, on the one hand contributes to expanding previously used theories in psychobiography, and on the other hand contributing to new and original research on Angela Merkel, as one of the women leaders in the world. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations for future research and practice are presented.

Keywords: non-verbal communication, personality, body language, psychobiography, woman leader, adult observation

*Always be more
than you appear and
never appear
to be more
than you are.*

Angela Merkel

1. Introduction

Psychobiographical studies have in the past often been based on psychoanalytical traditions and have taken psychological theories into account which evaluate the life or specific episodes of lives and their meaningfulness, based on psychological theories which take cognitive-emotional development into consideration (Schultz, 2005; Mayer & Kovary, 2019). Besides this focus, the research subjects have usually been male and anchored within Western contexts (Wegener, 2020). This focus on male, white and Western extraordinary people has been criticised previously (Niekerk & Fouché, 2010a, 2010b). As with regard to the aim of this book, this chapter contributes new and original insights in the meaning-making in life of an extraordinary woman leader.

This chapter aims at making a difference in the tradition of psychobiographical research: firstly, it uses a psychological theoretical background which is anchored in a psychoanalytic and at the same time bioenergetic-analytic (Lowen, 2008; Sollmann, 1984) tradition, expanding a pure psychoanalytic view often used in psychobiography. By using this theoretical foundation, this

psychobiographical account focuses on exploring the non-verbal communication and body language of an extraordinary person. It thereby expands previous psychobiographical research with regard to the use of theory. It further shifts the focus from the analysis of the lived experience and development of behaviour, attitudes, values or thought styles and description of life episodes towards the analysis of the non-verbal, non-spoken and medially represented image and behaviour patterns in a selected extraordinary person. Additionally, it analysis in particular the body language of the analysed subject and thereby expands the focus of traditional psychobiography which often takes verbal accounts into consideration of analysis towards the non-verbal accounts and expressions.

Secondly, this chapter focuses on a female extraordinary political leader, the German chancellor from 2005 to 2021, Dr. Angela Merkel. It thereby feeds into psychobiographical contemporary research on political leaders (Elovitz, 2016; McAdams, 2020). It is a psychobiographical work which contributes to political psychology (Kertzer & Tingley, 2018) and requires the psychobiographers to take a self-reflexive stand (Elovitz, 2016). This is the case since the psychobiographical view on contemporary political leaders is challenging (Elovitz, 2016).

The study, thirdly, ushes the boundaries of traditional management, leadership and psychobiographical research which has in the past focused on male leaders and which has left women leaders underrepresented on a global scale (Amaechi, 2020; Doubell &

Streuwig, 2014; Sueda et al., 2020). In previous years, researchers have called for increased women leadership in specific regions and on global levels (Hingston, 2016). Sharma (2016) has emphasized the need for psychobiography taking a closer look at itself in the context of globalization and cross-cultural contexts, supported by the expression of a growing need to explore the life of women leaders from psychobiographical perspectives across and beyond selected cultural contexts (Mayer & Kelley, 2021 submitted; Mayer, van Niekerk & Fouché, 2020; Prenter, 2015).

The purpose and contribution of this chapter to psychobiographical research is therefore multifold: it expands the theoretical background towards theories and practical concepts; it zooms into the non-verbal and body-language related aspects in a life, exploring the life of an extraordinary political woman leader. The aim of this chapter is to respond to the research questions: “How do the non-verbal aspects and the body language of Angela Merkel create meaning in her life across the life span?” “Which are the embodied patterns of (re-)action and behaviour activated under stress?”

In the following, the theoretical framework will be introduced, the research methodology clarified and findings presented and discussed. In the end, the authors emphasise conclusions and recommendations for future theory and practice.

2. Theories on non-verbal communication, body language and adult observation

Body, body language and nonverbal behavior are source, representation, regulation of communication and interaction (Trautmann-Voigt, 2009). People react unconsciously in and to these patterns of movement, expression and behavior without further (self-)reflection. Their reactions are therefore rather unconscious. However, studies have shown that experts are superior to non-experts in the accuracy of their judgments regarding human non-verbal behaviour patterns and adult observation. Bioenergetic analysts assign depicted or self-observed people to typical behavioral structures with relatively high agreement (Koemeda-Lutz, 2001).

The analysis of movement, expression, reaction, behavior patterns allows interactive access to the body image, which in turn allows conclusions about the subjective organization of experience, self-perception and orientation/behavior in the world. The practice and development of the concept of adult observation (Sollmann 2006, 2018) found its first application in an analysis of the media scenario of the relationship pattern of tennis player Steffi Graf and her father (Sollmann, 1995), describing the relationship of daughter and father in reference and analysis to their biographical background. Through this, the draft of an understanding of the specific and action-relevant meaning of this biographically shaped behavior pattern was achieved.

In 1999, all members of the then German Red-Green federal government were analyzed accordingly. The focus of the analyses was the interplay of biographically shaped behavioral and impact patterns and media scenario (Sollmann 1999).

This type of analysis was extended over time by differentiated practice concepts to advise public figures. This initiative was based on the clearly expressed interest and need of politics, business and media for a deeper understanding of behaviour of public individuals and their context. In the following years, politicians, such as Obama, Putin, Ma Yun, (Sollmann 2016) Wen Jiabao, Trump, of Merkel in dialogue with Xi Jinping were analysed.

Adult observation in politics focuses on the interaction of persons and their politics: Peron as a person had become a myth (iconography) (Prutsch, 2015). The former American president Reagan said himself that he was the best actor of a president. (Frey, 1999) Politics became entertainment through him. The English Prime Minister Blair was one of the first international politicians to give politics a "personal face" by opening up his private life. (Blair, 2010) The Austrian Haider used the political milieu to stage himself and his right-wing populist views in specific milieus (Ottomeyer, 2009). The former German chancellor Schröder, as media chancellor, helped the political person to make an impact through media presence. Politics are thus closely linked to the people who act. Politics includes four aspects party, program, person and political power (Sollmann, 1999) expressed through the "face" of

the politician who embodies this power and communicates the party's content.

Body experience and body expression combine in a person's outward effect and are part of the communicative event with the counterpart. Body language is characterized and shaped by photographic elements, the outward quality of effect, the dialogic potential and the response of the counterpart. It thus constitutes a central area of personal experience, of communicative events and of human development and acts like a consciously difficult to control interaction of general human characteristics, experience, personal peculiarities, behavioral patterns, etc.

Body language sounds like a language that has been unlearned, like a dialect that only a few still speak and understand, and yet it is mysteriously reflected in every breath of life in every reciprocal glance, in every step and in every conversation (Molcho, 1983).

Body expression shows how someone stands in the world, reacts to his circumstances, and has formed his personality. Therefore, in the personality structure, central biographical experiences and conflicts are, so to speak, preserved, engraved, embodied and become visible later in life. However, a personality model is not an image of a person, but a description of recurring experiences and patterns of action. Especially under stress, in conflicts and in crises, individuals unconsciously regress to early biographical experiences and

patterns. They then serve as the best possible pattern in the sense of a survival mechanism (Sollmann, 1997).

3. Women in leadership and psychobiography

With the ground-breaking work of Levinson (1996) in the 1990's, "The season's of a woman's life", an important foundation was built to take deeper insight into the meaning-making of women across their life-span, taking feelings, conflicts, dreams and psychological upheaval into account. Ball and Rutherford (2008) have over a decade later explored exceptional women's life and work from a psychobiographical perspective and highlighted the importance of psychological studies on women leaders.

Based on the pioneering research of Levinson, psychobiographies of men (e.g Fouché, du Plessis & van Niekerk, 2017) were published. However, also psychobiographical research on womens' lives and work increased during the past years, taking a focus on extraordinary women who were, for example, involved in political struggles in selected socio-cultural contexts (Baatjes, 2015; Harisuker, 2016; Panelatti, 2018). Other studies have focused on female actresses such as Charlize Theron (Prenter, 2015), or female writers as Maya Angelou (de Waal, 2020). However, only very few studies have taken women leaders in the global international political arena from a psychobiographical perspective into account. A few authors have focused on Hillary Clinton as a global woman leader (Elovitz, 2016; sharma, 2016; Mutuku, 2018), other global women leaders have, however, hardly been taken into account from psychobiographical

perspectives and researchers have called for a deeper focus in the area (Hingston, 2016; Sharma, 2016; Mayer, 2021). No psychobiographical studies are known so far which have focused on non-verbal or bodily-orientated theories and the use in the analysis of the individual.

Merkel has previously been described from psychobiographical perspectives with regard to her creativity (Mayer & van Niekerk, 2020), her wellness (Mayer, van Niekerk & Fouché, 2020), and her faith (Mayer, 2021). This chapter expands the previous psychobiographical accounts by taking the non-verbal and body language into consideration.

4. Research methodology

During the past decades, psychobiographical research, as a young discipline in psychological research traditions, has undergone drastic changes from rather psychoanalytical research approaches towards a multifold use of psychological theories (Mayer & Kovary, 2019).

In this study, the researchers used a hermeneutical single case study design to psychobiography (Fouché, du Plessis, & van Niekerk, 2017) with the particular aim to describe, analyse and interpret the non-verbal communication and body language of Angela Merkel with regard to selected episodes during her life time. This study is essentially grounded in identifying and understanding Merkel's patterns of reactions and behaviours. Based on the afore mentioned, the meaning in life of the subject of research is recreated to display

new and original findings in the light of psychobiographical theory (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010).

4.1 Sample

The sample of research is the German chancellor Angela Merkel, one of the global German, European and global leaders in contemporary times (Die Zeit, 2021). She was purposefully sampled (Musarrat Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019), based on the sampling criteria to analyse: a female political leader whose analysis contributes to explore women leaders from a psychobiographical perspective (Wegner, 2020) to provide insights from and guidance for female (future) leaders and respond to the question how to create a meaningful life from a specifically chosen theoretical perspective. This research study can therefore be used to enhance quality in life (in others) by providing an example of human development (Basson, 2020).

4.2 Data collection and analysis

Data on Angela Merkel were collected through primary sources (autobiographical accounts, images, interviews) and secondary sources (biographical accounts, magazine and newspaper articles, videos, biographies, images), as according to Allport's (1961) tradition. Previous psychobiographical research on Merkel (Mayer, 2021; Mayer & van Niekerk, 2020, Mayer, Fouché, & Niekerk, 2020) was taken into consideration. At the same time, previous

studies and analysis on her non-verbal communication and her body language were taken into account (Sollmann, 1997).

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Data were collected and analysed through adult observation and content analysis based on the five-step process of Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Kelly (2006) which involves familiarisation and immersion, inducing themes, coding, elaboration, and finally interpretation and checking. In detail, they are further observed, approved and acknowledged in the following ways:

- One project of opinion polling (Forsa, 2003)
- Circular feedback by the observed person in relation to the meaningfulness of the results of the analysis as well as as of the specific matching (Bauer 2002.)
- (indirect) endorsement by the charging clients and / or companies. If the specific approach would not fit or would not make sense, clients and companies usually don't pay for this.
- Specific self-statements of Angela Merkel in literature.
- The development and acceptance of the specific concept of adult observation (Sollmann, 2006, 2015, 2018)

The perspective described in terms of data analysis is based on the model of Lowen (2008) and Sollmann (1999), called bioenergetic analysis. It expresses the integration of experience, thinking, behavior and understanding of the world. Five central bioenergetic-

analytic aspects are: 1.) The person is the respective body; 2.) The individual dimensions of the personality act on each other as a unit; 3.) Life is essentially an excitation process; 4.) The "grounding" of the respective person reflects the essential expression of human life by integratively connecting the initially specific excitation process with the body, the experience, the behavior and the relation to the world: the better the "grounding" succeeds, the more secure is the contact to the surrounding reality, to the world and of course to one's own efficacy experienced as meaningful; and 5.) The ensemble of biographically acquired experiences acts like a character structure that appears structurally under stress. It is perceptible in the sense of a functional identity on all levels of the personality, as individually expressed by the person. These patterns are later in life very resistant to influences from the outside.

Adult observation (Sollmann, 2006) as a research methodology in the political arena is a concept and an instrument for systematically recording the interplay between the person and political behavior/behavioral patterns, analyzing it in a process-like manner, relating it to the respective context, and identifying implications for change. It deals with the interplay of non-verbal effect, body language, personality and behavioral patterns in a specific context. Movement, posture, facial expressions and gestures in the media presentation of politicians.

In adult observation, movement means life, interaction with others - and also recognition by others. Movement sequences contain

information about the identity of the actor, his age and gender, about intentions and state of mind or health. The human perceptual system is excellently equipped to recognize these complex motion sequences. Movement patterns play a central role in recognition and a few characteristic, distinctive points are enough and the brain conveys the identity of the person (Lischke, 2002).

The analysis of movement, reaction and behavior patterns allows an interactive access to the body image, which in turn allows conclusions to be drawn about the subjective organization of experience, self-perception and orientation/behavior in the world.

The procedure of adult observation via media analysis takes the following aspects into consideration:

- arbitrary beginning / phenomenological approach
- relative fuzziness in the observation
- peripheral perception
- sensed perception
- irritations / repetitions / breaks etc.
- observation and context
- interaction of the person with others
- knowledge: situation in public is always stress
- first and "second" impression
- focus on one perspective and then broadening of perspectives
- search for functional correspondences
- feedback with other levels

- process of meaning / difference
- interplay of intuition ("expert") and other (body language) perspectives
- partial identification of the media (with one dimension of the personality of the public person at a time)
- hermeneutic-circular finding of meaning
- "inner" dialogue and "outer" dialogue with the other
- inductive feedback in media / public as a responding, sound process

4.5 Quality criteria, ethical considerations and limitations

Quality criteria in qualitative research were applied to ensure rigor and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and data were reported in a qualitative reportin style (Yin, 2018).

The researchers followed ethical considerations to conduct research in an ethical, empathetic, accountable, respectful and benevolent manner with regard to the subject of research, her friends and family (Elms, 1994; Ponterotto, 2017). No private data sets were accessed not to violate any private boundaries (Ponterotto, 2015).

The study is limited to the in-depth analysis of Angela Merkel from a selected theoretical and methodological standpoint and provides in-depth, but no generisable findings.

5. Findings and discussion

The analysis of the biography, behavioral patterns, impact and political behavior of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel is based on a large amount of data analysed over a period of more than 20 years, as described above.

Findings show Angela Merkel's body language behavior on the political stage divided into three phases. 1.) In the beginning, she appeared uncertain on the political stage. 2.) This is followed by a phase of emphasized, calm and unspectacular self-assurance or self-assertion. 3.) The period since 2009 is particularly characterized by Merkel's specific hand gesture. This gesture, often described and symbolized as Merkel's "rhombus", reflects Merkel's sovereignty in global political affairs (Hamburger Abendblatt, 2009).

In the following, selected scenarios will be presented and interpreted.

5.1 "One mistake is to treat people too confidentially" (Angela Merkel)

In the 1990s, shortly after the fall of communism, Merkel appeared uncertain, awkward and almost like a girl in her spontaneous expression on the political stage. Her clothes, her haircut, as well as her behavior were atypical for the political arena. Her clothes resembled the clothes of a "country girl". Her haircut really did not correspond to the fashion of that time. Under stress, for example at a press conference, she did not seem to know where and how to stand, sit or where to go. When someone, such as then-Chancellor Kohl or

Minister Blüm, wanted to take her to a certain place, it seemed as if these men pushed her back and forth without Merkel being able to move on her own or on her own initiative. Merkel smiled kindly but also embarrassedly and let it wash over her. Her cheeks were reddened in the process (Sollmann 2002).

She clapped her hands as children do when they sing the song "backe, backe Kuchen, der Bäcker hat gerufen." Adults clap differently, in such a way that the slightly rounded palms touch each other as they clap with a more muffled sound. The fingers are curled as they do so. Merkel's fingers, on the other hand, remain spread and extended, while the whole palms clap against each other with a different sound.

When she stands at the lectern, delivering an engaging speech whose meaning she wants to support with her gestures, she surprisingly moves only her forearms and her hands, gesticulating strongly. She remains slightly bent forward. Her upper arms remain attached to her torso. Her shoulders hold back possible far sufficient movements, unlike many other people. The intensity of the movement of her forearms, however, mirrors an intense impulsiveness within Merkel's body. Merkel, however, does not express it with her whole body. She holds herself back internally, and this is clearly visible externally.

If she was very engaged and concentrated and did not think herself under observation, she played with her lips. These made a sucking movement, as children often do. You could sort of see the pressure, the tension she was under at that moment. Of course she was highly concentrated in such a moment.

5.2 "I am a movement idiot" (Angela Merkel)

From the early 2000s, Merkel speaks more emphatically. Her movements, when standing at the lectern, are just as energetic as before, and yet she now clearly began to support, to reinforce what she said with an energetic nod of the head. She showed far more initiative and it seemed as if she was putting an end to the time when "she let herself be done with everything", "when others did with her what they wanted".

Merkel visibly changed her hairstyle and the style of her clothes. Her growing self-confidence made Merkel choose striking blazer colors that immediately caught the eye like a highlighter. She began to approach people in a clearly visible, self-confident, purposeful, spontaneous, "normal" way.

Her gait, on the other hand, seems clumsy, awkward and unsteady. One could almost get the impression that she had a walking defect. Later she says in an interview that she is a "movement idiot". (Kölbl 1999) When handing over a bouquet of flowers, when handed over to her, she tilts her head and upper body slightly forward, as if she were hiding.

But there is also the "other Merkel." If she doesn't feel like she's being watched, or if the camera's gaze catches her by surprise, one discovers a smiling, radiant, almost flirtatious Merkel. Through her charming smile, she shows something of herself that one would not expect from her at all. Then she is very lively spontaneous mischievous smiling and shines in the direct dialogical exchange with your counterpart. Her quick wittedness, humor and wit then spontaneously inspire the entire auditorium.

5.3 "Everyone notices when I'm not myself" (Angela Merkel).

In 2009, another phase of body language behavior begins. This is primarily and obviously characterized by a certain hand gesture. Merkel's gesture, also known as the Merkel rhombus, appears spontaneously every time the chancellor enters a public space, when journalists address her or when the cameras are pointed at her. She then, as if of her own accord, puts the tips of her fingertips together in such a way that the touching index fingers and thumbs create a rhombus-like structure. She does this almost with elegance and ease, as naturally as if this had always been written on her body.

For a long time, people puzzled over how this gesture came about. A suitable explanation is the following: a physiotherapist had recommended this gesture to Merkel in order to be able to concentrate and collect herself better in times of tension and stress. This certainly makes sense. One thinks, for example, of the effect of certain eastern meditation gestures. But there is another structural explanation, which refers to the experience in her childhood or to

typical behavior and reaction patterns that developed there. Just as in childhood, Merkel seeks and needs structure, namely something that gives her support and security. By holding her hands, she gives herself this support and security, especially under stress. As you can see, with success.

In 2005 and 2009, there was an interactive Internet project (www.charismakurve.de) in which Merkel and the respective opposing candidate were observed, analyzed and evaluated in terms of their nonverbal effect and their body language, as if under a burning glass. Discussions with the involved top political photographers from Berlin confirmed a typical reaction pattern of Merkel, which she expressed to the photographers. Regarding a photo session, the photographers had to say beforehand exactly how, when, where and in which pose they wanted to shoot Mrs. Merkel. If the photographers wanted to change something on the spot due to spontaneous changes in light, this was not allowed. Everything had to be done as previously agreed. The previously agreed structure of the procedure had to be adhered to at all costs. Otherwise Merkel quit the shooting at once.

On the relationship level, Dr. Merkel shows a similar tendency, namely to feel emotionally safer in rather clear and / or fixed structures, in order to conduct political business from there, and supported by them. Thus, she has gathered around her in the chancellor's office very few trusted people who, once they have gained Merkel's trust, remain in that position for a very long time.

Indeed, there are few people in Merkel's immediate circle whom she trusts unwaveringly.

5.4 "In politics, I prefer to seek cooperation rather than confrontation" (Angela Merkel).

Merkel has come across as likeable, unspectacular, simple and with the attributed qualities of a physicist ever since she entered the political arena. She had caused great surprise by her convincing and courageous dissociation from former Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Kohl had previously been very supportive of Merkel's political career, always referring to Merkel as "my girl." Until her emphatic breach and break from Kohl, she had also seemed more like a "girl." Now, however, she clearly set herself apart from Kohl and appeared particularly rich in contrast and with her own profile. Her behavior, as it was often described in the media, was tantamount to a liberating blow.

When Merkel was elected leader of the CDU in 2000, the party was heavily divided and threatened to break up. During this time, Merkel attended various regional conferences of the CDU and appeared quite unexciting and unspectacular to the media public. Surprisingly, after a year, the CDU as a party stood stronger and more unified than before. Instead of asking in detail about Merkel's recipe for success, the media began to take an interest in her communication and integration skills.

5.5 "I only slowly learned to play poker" (Angela Merkel).

In the 2005 Bundestag election campaign, which she won in a neck-and-neck race against her predecessor, she appeared rhetorically and factually confident as well as self-assured, especially in the TV duel when addressed directly. In the (nonverbal) confrontation with then-Chancellor Schröder, however, you could clearly see her discomfort. Not only could she not cope with the stress of the situation at the time, she was also unable to hide her emotions in this regard.

After her election as chancellor in 2005, she did not appear assertive or powerful in the conventional sense to many people, especially the media, during the first few years. She was compared to her male predecessors. Unlike Kohl and Schröder, Merkel came across as more communicative, relationship-building, restrained self-control and a rather sober "reality check." She could listen to people. She was able to communicate and felt open to and interested in the respective dialog. Personally and emotionally, she appeared reserved. In this respect, she was often compared to the qualities of a physicist. After all, physicists were said to be sober, unemotional, fact-oriented, controlled, oriented to scientific logic, and so on. Her language was simple, unpretentious and too sober. As the first female politician in the country, she came across as rather bland, without any special trappings. As an unspectacular power politician, she was therefore not "taken seriously enough" by many.

5.6 "I can only rely on myself" (Angela Merkel).

Behind the scenes, however, almost in silence, she appeared as a successful, strategically level-headed and successful power politician. She did not show her cards and worked through facts, decisions and results. Here is a significant example: in the years before, a group of powerful male politicians who had joined together in the so-called "Anden Pact" (Merz, Koch, Öttinger and others) had tried to make a concerted effort to oppose Merkel. Without engaging in a vociferous public power struggle, Merkel defeated these politicians from her immediate circle in 2002. From then until now, these politicians have been unable to threaten her again.

Merkel is a proven, steadfast, successful, strategic and smart politician with enormous "silent" staying power. This seems to be a special talent of Merkel's in negotiations, as well as in dealing with international conflicts and crises. Thus, after days of extremely tough negotiations, as often happens at the EU level, she can continue to appear competent the next morning, after only a few hours of sleep. At the same time, she remains calm and wait-and-see. Many other politicians, even if they are very experienced in this respect, would either not be able to hold out against such a marathon of negotiations or their exhaustion would be clearly visible. So she can cope with great stress and can be relied upon to do so.

5.7 "Contact / matching (Passung) is vital" (Angela Merkel).

Merkel is not only highly esteemed internationally and accepted as a overall respected negotiating partner, but is also able to adjust

transculturally to her respective counterpart sensitively enough and specifically related to the culture. In doing so, she is a master at keeping her own opinion and corresponding points of view emphatically in play without appearing ostentatiously politically "pushy".

Here's an example: She has now met Chinese President Xi Jinping very often. As a rule, Merkel travels to China with various tasks and assignments in her luggage. There is always an additional task demanded by the media and other parties, namely to address right at the beginning, and emphatically, the human rights violations in China.... Merkel, on the other hand, does this in her own different way. For example, she visited China again a few years ago. She spent the first day shopping for food in the market with a famous TV chef. She paid with her own money, from her own wallet. Later, in front of a running TV camera, she prepared Mao Tse-tung's favorite dish together with the chef.

The following days, she held important political talks behind closed doors, finally giving a speech to students at one of the best universities in China on the last day. This speech was broadcast live on the Internet. In this speech, she clearly, critically, plainly, and understandably addressed, among other things, the human rights situation in China. So she masters her political business, only she does it differently than expected of her. After all, she is intent on an unspectacular as well as political-communicative matching (Passung).

Although many believe that Merkel is not a typical power politician, although one would like her to be more assertive and decisive in public, she has always been the most popular politician in Germany for many years. In the meantime for 16 years. People like her, people appreciate her. People vote for her. The last election campaign (2017) was therefore also called "Mutti election campaign" by many people. Experienced yet by very many people in Germany Merkel like a "political mother". They feel a close emotional bond. They feel safe, secure and understood with her. After all, they know that Merkel cares about them. One of the central messages in the election campaign was therefore the motto "Keep it up." Merkel's party endeavored to cash in on this popularity during the election campaign.

5.8 "My day has to have a structure...otherwise I get panicky because I can't get things together"

The Corona pandemic shaped the chancellor's final year in office, particularly the 2020-2021 transition. In the initial lockdown, Merkel underscored her approach with the words "we're driving on sight" despite all the opposition and hostility, signaling a sense of confidence in the face of great adversity. From the fall of 2020, on the one hand, the pandemic worsened sharply and uncontrollably. The country leaders behaved more and more uncontrollably, almost in a panic. The political situation in Germany almost took on features of structurelessness, fatigue, attrition and despair, but also of erratic rebellion.

Merkel seems rather withdrawn, powerless, less opinionated and lonely. Dynamics, events and, above all, the unpredictable, bizarre atmosphere in Germany characterize the social and political milieu. Nerves seem to be on edge. Merkel's, too. While some are offensively taking flight, Merkel seems rather powerless and lacking in energy. Merkel knows this very personal behavior pattern all too well from her own life. If she loses the necessary energy to master crises, it is through a securing and confidence-building structure that surrounds her. This structure is currently lacking in Germany.

Another dynamic makes it difficult for Merkel to gain new strength and old vigor. Triggered by the political erratic turmoil in Germany, people as well as the media are showering Merkel with accusations, charges and accusations that seem less substantively based and more know-it-all, egotistical and devaluing.

Both social and media dynamics certainly reactivate Merkel's old fears of panicking precisely when structure is lost.

Merkel's patterns of experience / behavior are biographically shaped and characterized. They come into effect especially under high stress and deep conflicts crisis. These patterns are characterized by the following features, among others:

- Merkel can communicate, connect people through this, listen and moderate a group of people.

- Merkel proceeds in small steps, is solution-oriented, but not hastily interested in a hurried pace or decision.
- Merkel is able to respond to emotions, moods, fluctuations, individual characteristics, subliminal difficulties and tensions in such a way that trust, togetherness and coherence become or remain possible.
- Merkel is able to endure tensions, differences and ambivalences without rushing to break them over her knee with all her might and force.
- Merkel values and needs secure, reliable, clear structures in which she lives and operates politically.
- Merkel can develop sufficient energy, drive and assertiveness on the basis of communication, trust and, in particular, the supporting structures.
- Merkel essentially needs a small circle of very familiar and reliable people who are not only taken very seriously by her but are also clearly valued by her personally (microstructure).
- Merkel also needs continuity, reliability and fundamental acceptance in the larger circle of people with whom she has to deal politically (macrostructure)
- Merkel can be personally very reserved. You could call her a second-tier politician. She does not depend on or even strive to be viewed, applauded or even cheered in public.

- Merkel acts and decides very spontaneously, directly, decisively and strongly enforces when her core values are affected. (For example, refugee crisis, Fukushima, pandemic).

The development and imprinting of these patterns go back to Angela Merkel's early childhood. She expresses herself in detail differentiated and vivid in numerous very personal interviews with Herlinde Kölbl which she conducted over ten years in the nineties. On the one hand, she describes experiences with regard to her body and physical development. On the other hand, conclusions can be drawn from other descriptions about her physical effect. Merkel's self-descriptions help to analyze and understand the emergence of these patterns and (also) to apply them to Merkel's political behavior. Here are some examples:

- she has been in the playpen for a long time and continuously and has developed her physicality over a long period of time, constrained by the limiting, clear structure of the same. This had, as one can see later, and as Merkel herself characterizes it, a lasting and visible influence on the physical movement and expression functions. She herself says that she is like a movement idiot.
- She had also acquired a clear communication competence in the playpen at that time. She was able to regularly send her brother, who was three years younger, to fetch her

something. She was enthroned in the playpen without having to move. At the same time, her communicative efforts were successful

Later, her parents themselves were surprised at how difficult it was for Merkel as a child to walk up and down an inclined plane like a mountain. At the hand of her parents she succeeded much better. Merkel herself says she first had to mentally imagine how to move and then practice it.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations for theory and practice

The study thereby fulfils the aim to contribute to new and original insights in the meaning-making in the life of an extraordinary woman leader. It further contributes to expanding the psychobiographical theories and foci used, the expand on the diversity criteria in psychobiographies (here gender) and to expand the focus of research from verbal to non-verbal and body language accounts.

This chapter reponds to the research questions: : “How do the non-verbal aspects and the body language of Angela Merkel create meaning in her life across the life span?”

”Which are the embodied patterns of (re-)action and behaviour activated under stress?”

In conclusion, this study presents the following responses to the two research questions

Putting together what can be analyzed “from outside” (Fremdbild) and what is heard “from inside” by Dr. Merkel herself (Selbstbild) there is a convincing matching and congruence. This congruence mirrors Merkel’s embodied life: from early childhood experience up to her specific behavior patterns as a politician. So to say this can be regarded as a proof of what might be called “meaning in her life”.

There are some basic patterns of feeling, behavior and expression which are activated especially under stress (life as a politician is stress). These patterns appear spontaneously in very difficult situations (stress). Some of the basic patterns are:

- Dr. Merkel needs structure and looks for structure, which offer personal safety and security in the sense of protection. Being aware of this structure helps her to feel trust and energy for what she has to do.
- Dr. Merkel has developed a specific talent for communication. This includes the competence to communicate, the perseverance in specific situations, the openness to other opinions and the resoluteness for finding a mutual decision.
- Dr. Merkel has a sense for aesthetics and a more “silent” humour. She can bring things to a point and relies on her intuition when she is in a small group or safe context.

Then she touches people by her conviction. She also shows up with her conviction when some of her basic values are involved. Then she states her opinion and decision without letting anyone doubt in this.

Future research should focus on further in depth analysis of non-verbal behaviour and patterns in contextualized psychobiographic perspectives, focusing on extraordinary individuals. Thereby, the interaction and interrelationship of verbal and non-verbal behaviour should be explored, especially also in the here and now, in the moment when the individual expresses him- / herself. Social and cultural aspects of psychobiographies should be taken into consideration when analysing the development of the individuals analysed. This of course demands three different cultural approaches: the inter-, multi- and transcultural approach. Especially the latter enriches the observation and analysis under the perspective of countertransference aspects. (Sollmann 2018)

Further, verbal and non-verbal behaviour in the context of gender, publicity and politics could be taken into consideration and successful leadership behaviour and body language and expression of movement could be explored further. Psychobiographies need to open up in future to integrate verbal and non-verbal aspects of analysis, exploring adequate theoretical and methodological approaches from different psychological theory stances. Verbal and non-verbal behaviour should be focused in future studies for

psychobiographies to become more holistic approaches of individual analysis and interpretation over the life span. This also helps to relate to a better understanding and integration of the findings, the herewith related circular feedback by the individual by him- / herself and the contextual fit (Passung).

In future, then also comparative analysis of politicians and their verbal and non-verbal behaviour should be used to understand these patterns in specific socio-cultural contexts and cross-culturally, for analytical and practical reason This could support an improved understanding of meaning in life and political behaviour across cultures, also under stress.

The concept of adult observation seems to be an appropriate concept of understanding and application. It also helps to evaluate such a process. In the future it will be necessary and enriching to develop a more intensive dialogue between the more academic like research and clinical research on embodiment (Altmann 2021, Lausberg 2021, Tschacher 2011, 2021) and the field related, explorative research. (Sollmann 2006, 2015, 2017)

The study, finally, does not only contribute on theoretical levels, but also aims at providing practical insights. This is in particular the case in this study, since it provides valuable information for (future) women leaders and their possibility to deal with non-verbal and body language in (public) life. It provides ideas on how non-verbal aspects might provide insight into the construction and making of meaning across the life span in public figures. The study can be of practical value for public figures, politicians and in particular

women leaders to become are of their non-verbal and behavioural patterns, their body image and expressions of body movements, mimics and gestures. It can contribute to creating awareness and a conscious managing of the physical, the psychological and mental aspects of the personality in public figures and leaders for further self-development and individual growth. Practical insight then means both: better understanding of the practical behavior and reaction in the here and now, as well as a better practical approach by coaching or consulting.

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