Fight, Flight, or Freeze the Glass Ceiling of Gendered Diplomacy: A Qualitative Research - Single Case Study of the Netherlands
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A Qualitative Research– Single Case Study of the Netherlands

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Abstract

Directly or indirectly, diplomacy affects us all, it is thus important to have diverse representation. However, this is not an easy feat. This research focuses on the reasons for the low percentage of women in senior diplomacy compared to the number of women in the field altogether. This was researched by conducting a case study in the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where 12 employees were interviewed. A literature review combined with in-depth interviewing showed three main obstacles that prevent equal representation in senior diplomacy. Diplomacy is still associated with men, who are associated with having hard skills. Women are associated with soft skills and thus less likely to be seen as suitable candidates for leadership. Moreover, women carry out gender specific actions that add pressure on top of their work, which can increase the likelihood of women leaving the field. Gender specific actions are related to dealing with misidentification, undervaluation, and the lack of access to old-boys' networks. Networking is essential in promotion rounds and as women are often kept out of these circles, levelling up becomes a challenge. In addition, the career of a women can differ from that of a man, around which diplomacy is structured, due to part time work related to family responsibilities or due to maternity leave. This takes a gap out of a woman's career path and can make it difficult for women to catch up to men and reach the senior levels. Based on the findings, research must be done to combat these challenges to create equal opportunities for women in diplomacy to reach the diplomatic top and break the glass ceiling.

Keywords: diplomacy, gender, traits, masculinity, femininity, soft skills, hard skills, leadership, senior ranks

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C1 – Problem Formulation

'For a man, it's no problem at all to wear a dark blue suit a hundred days in a row, but if I wear the same blazer four times within two weeks, the letters start pouring in.'

-

Angela Merkel (Hensel, 2019)

Just as Angela Merkel entered her last stages as chancellor, it once again became clear that in the field of diplomacy, gender plays a role. Women are expected to meet standards, that men are not required to meet. Many women in the political or diplomatic sphere, such as Angela Merkel, Hillary Clinton, and Theresa May, have discussed the added pressure of trying to meet sky-rocketing demands (e.g., from the so-called fashion police) (Daw, 2021).

This impact of gender in the world of international relations is not just of recent decades as parts of diplomacy predate historical documentation (Britannica, n.d.). Throughout the ages, diplomacy has changed, and only since the 1920s have women been allowed in the field (Aggestam & Towns, 2018). Thus, for a long-time diplomacy was one-gendered, leaving its mark on the field. For instance, when looking at the current situation, around the world few women are found in senior prestigious diplomatic positions.

Research is already present concerning diplomacy and gender; however, this research is sparse, and more needs to be done to understand this topic in various parts of the world (Branson, 2020; Dierikx, 2020; Fellegi et al., 2019; Niklasson, 2020; Towns, 2021; Towns & Niklasson, 2017). The existing data proposes some explanations for the lack of women at the top. For example, Eagly et al. (2020, discovered that women are perceived differently from men. Although stereotypes have decreased women are still often associated with supporting and domestic specializations, while male stereotypes focus on men's agency (Eagly et al., 2020). Others have discovered that women are expected to balance their career and home life, as opposed to men who are generally expected to focus on their professional ambitions. Wolfram & Gratton (2014), argue that even if women have the same character traits, these traits will still benefit a male leader. In a traditionally male-dominated field, a good diplomat is seen as having hard skills and being masculine, thus favouring men. The expectation is that all these aspects burden the female diplomat in such a manner that they will either not be chosen for a promotion or retire from the field much earlier compared to their male counterparts.

How gender influences promotion scores in diplomacy can be applied in different countries and Ministries of Foreign Affairs. This thesis will specifically consider the Netherlands, a country that is known for being the leading actor on the stage of equality and freedom and for their liberal philosophy (Richburg, 2000). The Dutch were the first to legalize same-sex marriage and euthanasia (Richburg, 2000; Wise, 2001) and in 2022, the Netherlands even proposed foreign policy on gender equality (Hoekstra & Schreinemacher, 2022). However, in their own Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) there is statistical gender inequality. (AGDA, 2021). When MFA Minister Hoekstra blocked the appointment of a female top diplomat for the position of Director General Political Affairs, a response was triggered, and 600 employees wrote a letter to the MFA (Brouwers, 2022). They argued that in the last placement round not a single woman was allocated to one of the prestigious positions. The workers demanded a structural policy transformation (Brouwers, 2022; Kusiak, 2022). The employees argue that in equal-competence situations the choice is almost always a man. There seems to be a contrariety for a country that experiences internal gender inequality and simultaneously exhibits liberal features and executes foreign feminist policy. Therefore, the following research question was formed:

Why has the number of women in senior diplomatic positions not risen equally alongside the rising number of female diplomats in the diplomatic workforce?

The research question will be answered through a qualitative analysis of interviews with Dutch diplomats, which will build upon previous studies. In the Netherlands circa 56% of the workforce in the diplomatic field is female, but this still falls short in senior functions where for instance 37% of the ambassadors are female (AGDA, 2021; Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). This case study aims to understand why this percentage is relatively low compared to the number of female employees in general. Similar research on the exclusion of women in significant positions has been done in several countries. For instance, Benešová, Fellegi and Kočí (2019), discussed the gender imbalance in the Czech Foreign Service. Here they confirmed that in the Czech Republic, few women reach the top and if they do, they are given less esteemed deployments. Furthermore, they concluded that the main reason for the gender discrepancy is linked to the difficulty of balancing private and professional obligations. Towns & Niklasson also published prominent research on gender and diplomacy and are the

current leading scholars in the field. They have written about the different expectations of men and women in the workforce and the added pressure on female diplomats (Niklasson, 2017; Niklasson, 2017; Towns & Niklasson, 2020; Towns, 2017; Towns, 2020). Niklasson (2020) did research amongst Swedish diplomats, which focused on the gender-based settings in which diplomatic personnel network, which influences their ability to perform at work.

The understanding of gendered diplomacy is what this research aims to do amongst Dutch diplomats. The Netherlands has been chosen as a case study due to the discrepancy of women in the field as opposed to those in senior positions (Donker, 2019). What makes the Dutch case even more relevant is their reframing of the statistics on female leadership, which makes it seem more equal than reality shows. According to the Dutch social report, 44% of MFA management positions are filled by women (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021). However, in this percentage managerial managers have been included, where one can find many women. Yet, when looking at table 1, scales 13 to 19 show much lower numbers of women, and in scale 19 there are no women are present. At first glance, the statistical gender inequality in the Netherlands seems relatively low, but when looking closer the statistical inequality becomes evident.

Table 1 – Gender of Postings in Scale Levels 12-19

2021	MALE	FEMALE	PERCENTAGE WOMEN
LEVEL 19	4	0	0%
LEVEL 18	6	3	33%
LEVEL 17	13	2	13%
LEVEL 16	38	15	26%
LEVEL 15	25	23	48%
LEVEL 14	17	5	22%
LEVEL 13	3	0	0%
TOTAL	106	48	31,17%

(Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022; Employees Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022)

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Furthermore, the paradoxical social norms between the liberal and informal culture, international stances and simultaneously rather conservative numbers make the Dutch a suitable case (Dierikx, 2020). This research is conducted in the Netherlands as gender and diplomacy in the NL are barely researched. Moreover, since the country has a significant influence on several countries across the world, such research is indeed required (Duyvendak, 2021). This research gap is addressed in this thesis. The added value of doing this research amongst Dutch diplomats will be to give insight into how different cultures experience the same phenomenon.

Answering this research question will also give insights into the core issue of the lack of women in top positions in diplomacy. Many diplomats work hard in the field of peace and conflict. Considering the state of affairs globally (e.g., the war between Ukraine vs. Russia, the Taliban's rule of Afghanistan, and the decade-long conflict in Gaza), the world needs the very best in diplomacy. Currently, those in a position of power are often male. Yet much research shows that women have a significant impact on preserving long-lasting peace pacts. Thus, having more women in the field of diplomacy is important, in particular amongst senior ranks, such as ambassadors who have a significant role in conflict resolution (Jönsson & Aggestam, 2009). Researching why there are few women in senior functions will consequently clear a path to create effective solutions. Furthermore, diversity in diplomacy at all levels will benefit the field altogether (European Commission, 2020).

In addition, insights into how female career advancement is stagnated in the field of diplomacy extend to other fields. Results from this thesis will contribute to our wider understanding of gender disadvantages in other professional areas. Women in many fields, especially traditionally male-dominated ones (e.g., business, finance, engineering, politics) (Dayton, 2020; NDI, n.d.), report the presence of the glass ceiling, a near impossible route to reaching the top in their field. If the various reasons for gender inequality in the field of diplomacy can be identified, this could help explain it in other fields.

To answer the research question, this thesis will start with Chapter 2 Literature Review consisting of a conceptualization of diplomacy and gender, a conceptual model, and the literature basis for this research. Furthermore, Chapter 3, the methodology, will explain the research design, operationalization, sampling strategy, and ethical considerations. The methodology will be followed by a presentation of the findings in Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 where the results will be discussed concerning the theories and the research question. This

thesis will be finalized via Chapter 6, the conclusion where the findings will be summarized, the limitations addressed, and recommendations for future research will be added.

C2 – Literature Review

This literature review will focus on conceptualizing the idea of diplomacy and gender. As indicated in the introduction, for decades scholars have talked about the structural constraints within the field of diplomacy for women. This literature review will go into what scholars identify as the main structural constraints for women. By laying out the main arguments in the academic field, the foundation is laid to approach the research question of this thesis.

2.1 Diplomacy

As beforementioned, the field of diplomacy is an ancient art. Diplomatic traces date back to Egyptian times in the 14th century BC and the Inca empire (Britannica, n.d.). In these societies, women were utilised as envoys and tasked with peace processes. Millenia later, in 1626 in France, the very first contemporary foreign ministry was created by a cardinal named Richelieu. He looked at diplomacy as an ongoing course of negotiation (raison d'état) (Britannica, n.d.). Women continued playing a significant role in diplomacy, albeit in a more unofficial manner. Queens, duchesses, and other noble ladies assisted their husbands and the inclusion of women in places of decision-making and conflict resolution was important for peace-making and peacekeeping (Standfield, 2020).

From the creation of diplomacy, through all the centuries up until the 21st, the field has adapted, changed, and current diplomacy is different from those very first traces. A prominent difference between the early days and recent centuries is the use or lack thereof women as diplomats. Where in the beginning women played an important role, the recent field has been male-dominated for a long time, and women have been allowed entry for circa one century (Aggestam & Towns, 2018).

This long period of absence of women in diplomacy is felt across the ministries of foreign affairs globally. The image of a 'good' diplomat is often still a white hetero man, as such diplomacy is often associated with masculinity (Neumann, 2008). Nonetheless, the skills that are needed in a diplomat are varied and not bound to only masculinity (Towns, 2021). According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d., n.p.), a diplomat is defined as "*an official whose job is to represent one country in another".* According to Cornut (2015, p1), a diplomat abroad has the responsibilities of being a "*knowledge producer, representative of a government, and bureaucrat".* In addition, in a study conducted by Pike & Kinsey (2021), diplomats were asked what traits are most suitable to their work and which traits are not. The traits most

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representative were for a diplomat to be educated, analytical, observative, social, communicative, cultural, and have problem-solving skills. Skills that were not perceived as representative of a diplomat were unemotional, combative, transactional, detached, and too self-aware. The connection of traits connected to society's idea of gender will be discussed further in this literature review to understand its influence on promotional scores in diplomacy. Therefore, before this connection is analysed, the concept of gender must be explored.

2.2 Gender

It has been established by Drykadis et al. (2017) that the seniority of diplomatic personnel correlates with their gender, i.e., senior positions are often male-dominated. Gender is a social construct that has been developed over millennia (Lips, 2020). However, only in the 1970s did feminist academics actually allocate a different definition to gender and sex (Haig, 2004). The scholars defined sex as the physical components that identify a person as male or female. The term gender was described as how a person identifies themselves: either masculine or feminine. Nowadays this term extends beyond the binary of masculine and feminine. Gender also spreads out to the socially constructed, roles, characteristics conduct, and behaviour that society deems appropriate for men, women, or other (Haig, 2004). This paper will adhere to the aforementioned definition of gender as the psychological identification of oneself and the socially constructed ideas of gender (Haig, 2004).

In the field of diplomacy, the gender of a person correlates with the chances of reaching top-level careers (Branson, 2020). Scholars today centre on three main arguments that could explain this: gendered traits, different demands of male vs female diplomats, and the role of women in their private lives. These three arguments will be discussed in the following sections and are the main threads of argumentation this thesis will follow.

2.2.1 Gender traits

The first argument is by Lips (2020), according to gender theory the way gender is perceived has led to socially assigned gender traits. Regardless of one's personality, consciously or subconsciously, many people associate gender with certain attributes. As gender is still often seen as a binary concept, traits are divided into feminine and masculine. (Lips, 2020). Masculinity is associated with hard skills, such as rationality, strength, authority, and strategic thinking (Drykadis et al., 2017). Femininity is associated with soft skills, such as relational,

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communicative, emotional, and sensitivity (Drykadis et al., 2017). Thinking in binaries is problematic, not least because it often leads people to think in opposites and hierarchy (Derrida, Ronse & Bass, 1982). However, it will inform the interviews in the next chapter due to its role in current society, where still too often gender and gender traits are seen as a binary concept. When relating this to diplomacy, a male leader who exhibits emotional response can be seen as more feminine and less of a man (Lane, 2018). In contrast, a female leader who exhibits masculine traits is often labelled as bitchy and calculated (Taylor, 2016). There is also a hierarchical relationship between gender, leadership, and seniority (Lips, 2020). For example, men are traditionally more often credited with a high degree of intellect, dominance, and suitability as opposed to women who are expected to be more subservient (Lips, 2020). Thus, someone's gender can affect the way they are perceived and treated.

Eagly et al. (2020), state that perceived gender traits influence the way people look at work performance. Men have dominated the diplomatic field for a long time, as men are often associated with hard skills, this has led to the perceived image of a good diplomat as being masculine (Naurin et al., 2019). Not only the history of diplomacy but also personal history played a part in generating gender stereotypes. These belief systems have also been brought into the field by diplomats themselves as passed on to them by embedded prejudices in their upbringings. Mesman and Groenveld (2017) concluded that when a child is attributed to the male or female sex, some parents will exhibit gendered parenting, which highlights the societal gender stereotypes a person subconsciously creates (Chengady & Scheepers, 2017). Such stereotyping has consequences in all layers of society and all fields of work.

Not only how people look at others can be influenced by someone's upbringing, but also how people look at themselves. Research shows that parents' behaviour can change the way someone looks at their role and responsibility (Mesman and Groeneveld, 2017). The authors did ask themselves whether biology could play a role and determined that, yes, some biological factors are present, such as boys being more physically active. However, research also shows that parents deploy gender roles before a noticeable divergence is identifiable between girls and boys (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2017). In practice, this means that a girl who always saw their mother doing the housework will associate this with being a female task and will later expect herself to take on the same role. Boys who would see their father use physical control more often with boys in contrast to girls will more likely exhibit aggressive behaviour (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2017). This begs the question, do female diplomats expect specific

gendered stereotypical demeanour from themselves? If so, do they undervalue their abilities or put pressure on themselves to take on more tasks in terms of family and personal responsibilities?

Someone's upbringing is not limited to their childhood, but its effects can be seen in their adult life. When women enter these male-dominated fields, such as diplomacy, research shows that often men and women are differently perceived (Towns & Niklasson, 2016). Female diplomats are widely perceived to be more cooperative and amenable, as opposed to a threat. Female negotiators are also more likely to be seen as weak and vulnerable, potentially leading to the chivalry reaction (Naurin et al., 2019). When female negotiators show traditionally feminine skills, men are more likely to endorse women out of a sense of duty to protect. This can benefit the female diplomat short-term. However, in the long-term, this chivalry reaction reinforces the idea that women require assistance (Naurin et al., 2019). When female negotiators are given the space to take charge instead of being perceived as helpless, women can have meaningful impact on conflict resolutions. Women's participation in peace processes increases durability and implementation quality (Jönssen & Aggestam, 2009).

However, there are still spaces where women are not given a voice. Women are not only seen as harmless but they are also perceived to be a deviator from the norm. It is widely known that people will choose those similar to them, thus men will choose men (Erlandsson, 2019). What this means is that if there are already males present in senior functions, who in turn have the responsibility to hire others, their preferred candidate is often another man. As men have historically held senior functions in diplomacy, it is more difficult for women to climb their way up. In terms of the Netherlands, in an open letter, many female workers from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs showed that often they are passed over for a male candidate (Brouwers, 2022).

2.2.2 Demands and expectations

The second main line of argumentation follows Towns (2021), who stated that these gendered expectations of traits increase the pressures on female diplomats compared to men. Since women have been allowed into the force, they have been treated differently. For example, in many countries across Europe, until the 1970s female diplomats could not marry whilst in service (Aggestam & Towns, 2018). Significant strides have been made in the past decades, yet men and women are still not treated equally. Niklasson (2020) confirmed this with a range

of interviews conducted in the Swedish MFA. There she found that female diplomats often assimilated to a stereotypical gender role by radiating soft skills to not appear like an intruder. The female respondents seemed to experience gender-based difficulties at work, however, their testimonies are contradicting. The female interviewees stated that they could use their gender as an advantage. Using the stereotype of women as sweet and innocent to derive favourable information from male co-workers (Niklasson, 2020, p28). This contrast comes back various times in the study. Several women discuss how they must prove themselves as they recall being confused with wives and assistants of male diplomats (Niklasson, 2020). Contrastingly, many describe these experiences as valuable, giving them access to people their male-counterparts are refused to. However, this still does not explain why this advantage does not lead to more women in high places. Towns' (2021) study noted that female interviewees even said at first that diplomacy did not contain any gender-specific structures but when asking more specific questions about access to internal networking, work attire, and domestic life vs time in the office, she got very different answers. She noticed how a range of expected gender-based actions, for example, carefully picking out clothing (think Merkel), together generate a high strain for female diplomats. *"It's a burden they often don't put into words, probably because they don't want to undermine their own profession."* (Towns, 2021, para11).

In addition, Towns (2020) raises the point that whether being a woman can be used as an advantage does not matter as pressure increases either way. Women experience high visibility and pressure to assimilate to social expectations, and they need to think strategically about how to manoeuvre in a world made for men (Niklasson, 2020). These time-consuming tasks cause stress and lead to a higher turnover rate compared to men, consequently a lower possibility of a long career and accompanying promotions (Niklasson, 2020; Parker, 2015; Towns & Niklasson, 2017).

2.2.3 Family life

Aside from pressures at work, women also experience pressure at home. The third main argument for the lack of women in the diplomatic top is connected to this balance between work and family life (Sharma et al., 2021). Women are still more prone to change their careers for their families compared to men (Sharma et al., 2021). More women than men are willing or expected to change their agenda, concede to work part-time, take leaves, and care for family or housework. More women are expected to be '*playing the role of both wife and diplomat*'

(Niklasson, 2020, p36). All of which can hinder their career path, as women spend less time on their careers than their male colleagues.

In a survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre across the United States amongst at least 55,000 households (Parker, 2015), female respondents described how these interferences impacted their careers negatively. The same research showed how MERRIL's (2018) observations of women's family life concessions are confirmed by societal expectations. 43% of the respondents agreed that part-time work was ideal for mothers and 33% said the same about a stay-at-home mother (Parker, 2015). The same questions were asked about fathers, where 70% of respondents stated that it would be ideal for fathers to work full-time (Parker, 2015). These statistics show that there are still discrepancies between what the public expects of female parents compared to male parents.

This expected family-work balance also relates to diplomacy and thus women in the field. Diplomats are often sent to different countries to serve their nation (Niklasson, 2020). It is not a given for women, as it is for men, that their partners will accompany them, which can be an added burden. Furthermore, childcare is primarily taken on by women, so not surprisingly, female diplomats have stated that having young children affects their capacity for working (Niklasson, 2020). Women generally have less time to spend on either their career as a whole or on significant career-driven activities, such as networking. Once again, this brings female diplomats into a position where they are perceived as less attractive to promote.
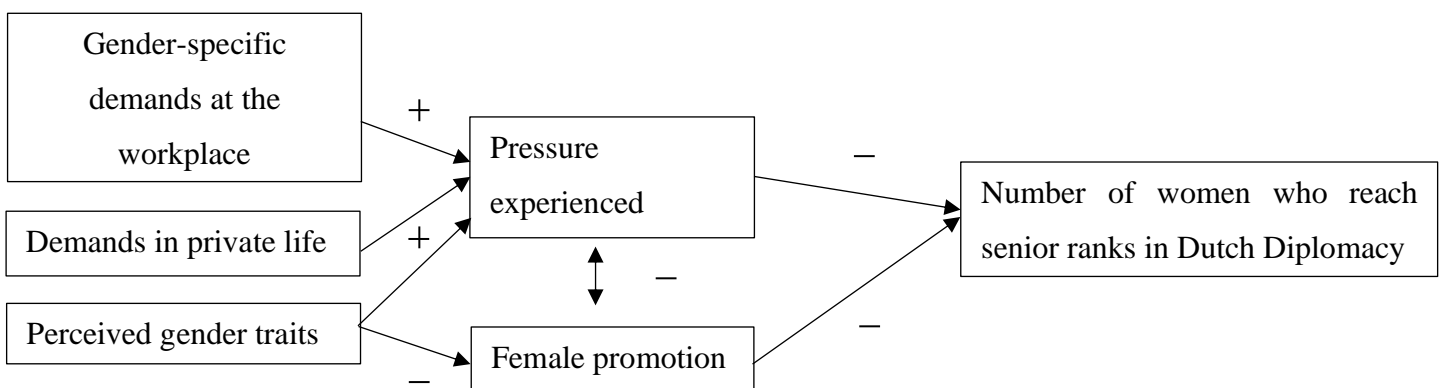
2.3 Summary

The conceptual model in figure 1 sums up the main thread throughout the three core arguments: gender traits, demands & expectations, and the role of women in their private life. The red thread is the focus on the perceived role of women in society in both their personal and professional lives. For women coming into diplomacy several obstacles are in the way (Towns & Niklasson, 2017). As diplomacy used to be (and perhaps still is) a men's world, a successful diplomat is often associated with hard skills, which are associated with men, thus women often must prove themselves. As figure 1 shows, this research thus expects there to be a positive relationship between perceived gender traits and female promotion, which in turn is expected to have a negative relationship with the number of women in top diplomacy.

Furthermore, a variety of expectations create extra tasks which create time pressure that can make women's work unbearable (Niklasson, 2020; Towns, 2021). The conceptual model

shows that this research expects there to be a negative relationship between pressure experienced and the percentage of female senior diplomats. Many women have stated that they change their behaviour and actions to access men's same resources. In addition, these same expectations that women feel are also present in their family life. They are expected to take on most of the housework and potential childcare (Parker, 2015). All these reasons make the pressure for female diplomats significantly higher than men. Consequently, more women than men reach the top.

Figure 1: Conceptual Model: Influencing Factors of Promotion Scores

Gender-specific demands at the workplace
+
Demands in private life
+
Perceived gender traits
−
Pressure experienced
−
Female promotion
−
−
Number of women who reach senior ranks in Dutch Diplomacy

This literature analysis showed that gender influences a woman's road to senior functions. In the following methodology, it will be explained in what ways in-depth qualitative research can give more insights into how and why.

C3 – Qualitative Research Methodology

This research focuses on the question of why there is a discrepancy between the number of female employees throughout the Dutch MFA compared to women in senior ranks. This methodology will talk the reader through how answers were found. The following part will delve deeper into the chosen case study and explain the reasoning for specific research design choices.

3.1 Case Study Overview

A case study was chosen to go in-depth into the practicalities of the arguments made in the literature review. A case study is a research type which helps study a complex and multi-faceted matter by using a real-life example (Crowe et al., 2011). The case study chosen in this research is the Netherlands for three reasons.

Firstly, the phenomenon researched is the discrepancy between women in the field compared to the top, of which the Netherlands is the prime example. Since the 1980s the MFA have had a hiring policy of 50-50 men and women (Donker, 2019). Yet the number of female senior diplomats contradicts the regional category the Dutch are often put into. In terms of social norms, the Netherlands is generally put into the same category as the Scandinavian countries. However, where the Netherlands has, for example, circa 37% female ambassadors, Norway rounds up to 45% and Sweden even to 50% (AGDA, 2021).

Secondly, the Dutch were also selected due to their role on the world stage of diplomacy (Duyvendak, 2021). Their history as a colonial power as well as a trading state, ensured their rampage in the affairs of many countries, such as Suriname, Indonesia, and the Caribbean (Oostindie, 2008). These ties exist up until this day, albeit in a different format. The Netherlands also involves itself internationally by implementing foreign feminist policy. (Hoekstra & Schreinemacher, 2022). Furthermore, the Netherlands is also involved in United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping, for example, in 2016 the Dutch send 450 troops to Mali (Van Willigen, 2016). In 2018, there were 240 peacekeepers stationed across five UN missions, and the Netherlands even participated in the first women only foot patrol (UN News, 2018). As research shows, women in decision-making in conflict areas increases the chances of a positive outcome (Jönsson & Aggestam, 2009). A country with conflict involvement, yet with little conducted research on the lack of women in top ranks, was thus selected as a case study.

Thirdly, other than the Dutch trading culture, the Dutch have a liberal country, with early litigation for the allowance of same-sex marriage and euthanasia (Richburg, 2000; Wise, 2001). This is also reflected in their work, according to several authors (Wielers & Raven, 2013; HIC, n.d.) the working culture is relatively informal, direct, anti-hierarchical, and a well-balanced work and private life (e.g., high level of parttime workers). This perceived atmosphere would seemingly create a workplace where people can talk about their struggles. Namely, why women are not attaining high positions in diplomacy. This dynamic is therefore also asked about during the interviews and its influence on the results.

3.2 – Research Design

This thesis focuses on the understanding of the lack of women in Dutch diplomatic senior ranks. An understanding that is based on the experiences of Dutch diplomats within structural barriers. Thus, the main research method of in-depth interviews was selected. Interviewing is a useful method as it allows for the comprehensive analysis of subjects' (such as MFA employees) experiences and perceptions of research subjects (Crowe et al., 2011). The research was conducted using an interpretivism research philosophy, where the perspective is that the researcher has an observing role, and thus reality is subjectively beheld (Ryan, 2018). The interviews were performed by the researcher and participants, their perception on reality has a leading role.

The conducted interviews together with the reviewed literature were used to identify potential reasoning for the lack of women in the diplomatic senior positions. Thus, largely a deductive research approach was used (Kim, 2021). The research started with literature out of which the initial questions are formed for the interviews. However, due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the follow up questions were inductive, which will be discussed in the coming sections.

3.3 – Sampling Strategy

When discussing the time period of the interviews, the sampling strategy must be discussed. Respondents were needed from various levels in Dutch diplomacy, as using solely people from one rank in diplomacy would limit the results and the ability to generalize the findings. There was a purposive sampling for people with specific requirements were approached. (Bhardwaj, 2019). The preference was to find both male and female interviewees to analyse their

perceptions and experiences. Participants were selected through various channels. However, ultimately, LinkedIn was the most used platform to get into contact with potential respondents. When initial contact was established, a snowballing strategy was applied to find more interviewees (Parker et al., 2019, p3). The interviewees do not represent the entire field of Dutch diplomacy, however, given the nature of the study it was the most suitable strategy to find participants and answer the research.

The selection of respondents, alongside their demographics are pictured in table 2. The sample consisted of 12 Dutch participants from the MFA. 4 interviewees from beginning to mid-career were interviewed. As they had not (yet) reached the senior ranks in diplomacy, their insights into promotions and how they perceive the path to seniority in diplomacy were discussed. They were able to explain if they felt confident in their career path or whether they have encountered any obstacles. 8 participants were employees in senior functions, they have had significant experience in diplomacy and know the details of what it takes to raise to senior ranks.

Table 2 - Participants from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs

PARTICIPANT NUMBER	GENDER	POSITION
1	Female	Diplomat
2	Female	Diplomat and former ambassador
3	Female	Diplomat and former ambassador
4	Male	Ambassador
5	Female	Deputy head of mission
6	Female	Diplomat
7	Male	Former ambassador
8	Male	Diplomat
9	Female	Deputy ambassador
10	Female	Diplomat
11	Female	Former ambassador
12	Female	Former diplomat

3.4 – Data Collection

Before the interviews were conducted, a topic list was made to ensure a guide for the interview (Appendix). The topics were chosen based on the literature review. The covered themes were professional life, personal life, work-life balance, workplace environment, gender-oriented tasks, and MFA's activities surrounding gender. These topics were picked out to dive into the various arguments laid out in the literature review. The core topics of the interviewing process were pressures at work and at home. Two example questions connected to these topics are: *'How do you balance your personal and professional life?' 'What is the influence of your work attire on the behaviour of the people around you?'*

In previous research (Towns, 2021), some interviewees at first did not perceive any gender inequality on the work floor. However, when asking questions regarding gender based pressures and demands, many interviewees noted considerable pressures due to their gender. Thus, in the conducted interviews, questions in the beginning would not explicitly mention gender ask other work-related questions. *'What are the traits of a good diplomat?' 'Describe the role and manner in which you network?'*

Before the interview itself started a prelude was made known to the interviewees (Appendix). In this interview protocol, information was shared concerning the research topic, privacy measures, data use, and the conceptualization of gender. This was put into place, to give the participants a feeling of safety and trust. Then a semi-structured interview was used to provide an environment where the topic list guided the interview so that all interviews covered the same themes (Boeije, 2014). At the same time this structure provided the space for interviewees to discuss topics in a different order and expand on what they found important. Furthermore, it gave the researcher the space to dive into their experiences and perspectives when applicable (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

All the interviews were performed online due to the international nature of many of the participants. Various platforms were used based on the preference of the interviewees: Zoom, Teams, WhatsApp, and an audio telephone call. To ensure personal connection and a comfortable atmosphere most interviews were done with a video call. The length of the interviews ranged from 40 to 75 minutes. All these interviews were recorded with permission and the audio files were safely stored, where only the researcher had access to it, with a password protection.

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3.5 Data Analysis

After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed. The collected interviews and subsequent transcriptions were then analysed via coding performed in ATLAS.ti. This program provided both structural and extensive support (Rambaree, 2014). The coding was done using a thematic analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A TA focuses on identifying a variety of themes in collected interviews. This method of analysis is flexible and suitable for deductive and inductive studies. This means that codes can be made either based on the collected theory (in Chapter 2) or afterwards based on the collected data. In addition, a mix between the two can be applied. This means that pre-existing codes are made before the interviews, and afterwards additional codes are created to ensure full compliance of both literature and interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This saves time and enhances reliability of the results, as the codes are consistently applied. The code list is available at request.

3.6 – Ethical Considerations and Reflexivity

An interview is a personal process, in which it is important to build trust (Van Zeeland et al., 2021). Thus, in initial contact with the participants the consent form was sent along with all the necessary information to provide clarity. The participants were all ensured of their anonymity, aside from the researcher, no one was made aware of their identities. All interviewees signed the consent form that was carefully set up to be in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation of Leiden University (Leiden University, n.d., a). The consent form explained how the participant's identity would be protected throughout the process. On the record respondents were again asked whether they would grant permission for the recording. The researcher also provided them with information on the structure of the interview, notifying them they were not obliged to answer anything they did not want to.

The interviews were all performed online, which was inevitable, but not preferred. Most interviewees lived abroad, or at a significant travelling distance. Online calls can be impersonal and impractical, through which confusion can be caused due to technical interruptions, misunderstanding of speaking delays, and self-consciousness because one's own visibility on the screen (Van Zeeland et al., 2021). However, the arena of online video calls has increased significantly since COVID-19 (Van Zeeland et al., 2021) and despite the downsides, interviewing online can destroy certain obstacles, such as time, money, and travelling issues. Therefore, online platforms were chosen in this study. Furthermore, out of the 12 interviews,

one was performed with solely an audio call. In this instance, video did not work, and audio was necessary to proceed with the interview.

As a-forementioned, the sampling strategy was purposive, and the sample size is not completely representative of the whole MFA. However, due to the time constraint of the thesis it was not possible to get a large sample to sustain this. Therefore, a conscious choice was made to interview both men and women, from different ages, with different experiences and expertise, to ensure a sense of generalizability.

It must be acknowledged, as Burr (2015) does, that the researcher plays a part in accumulating data and signification. This constructivist approach should be considered. To understand the researcher's role, their background, experiences, and potential partialities on the research should be reflected upon. The researcher is female student from the Netherlands. Growing up the researcher had various perspectives around her on the notion of gender and gender stereotypes. Some of which were conservative, whereas others more liberal. This led to an increased interest in the topic of gender. The researcher has conducted several research on the notion of gender in various contexts: e.g., within religious settings and within public leadership roles. While the various perspectives on gender around her could lead to a bias, the researcher tried to mitigate this by constructing an interview outline based on the literature review. By interviewing people from different seniority levels, ages, and gender, the researcher tried to look at the topic from various points of view.

The various categories and themes that have been discussed in this section, will be explained more in-depth in the next chapter, supported by interview quotes.

C4 – Findings

The twelve conducted interviews showed several insights into female promotional trends in the field of Dutch diplomacy. To give some background to determine the consistency of the Dutch case with the literature, the participants were asked to share their perception on the working culture and Dutch culture. According to 5 participants, in comparison to other Dutch ministries the MFA is more formal and hierarchical. However, when asked to compare it to other countries, the participants described the Dutch as much more informal, direct, pragmatic, and down to earth. Other traits they mentioned were blunt, organizational, sanctimonious, sharp, and anti-hierarchical.

Other than these cultural traits, gained data relayed the theories gathered in the literature review. The following results section is divided similarly to chapter 2, in the following sections: gender traits, demands and expectations, family life, career path, and recommendations. These sections will demonstrate the gathered data. Afterwards, chapter 5 will expand and contextualize the findings.

4.1 Gender Traits

During the interviews, it became clear that the traditional image of a diplomat used to be a white, rich man who lived a luxurious lifestyle, drinking champagne, flying first class, and attending glamorous events. Most agreed that this image had shifted, as described by participant 7: "*There is of course the old-fashioned idea that you go from reception to reception and play tennis with important people and then over a gin tonic, that is b******s*". That this image had changed all agreed with, however, three women argued that the Netherlands still maintains a semi-traditional image of a diplomat, as being a man. One diplomat even said that in various other countries woman is thought of when describing the ideal diplomat.

All the interviewees were then asked to describe what traits they thought were suitable for the work of a diplomat nowadays. Participant 3 said: "*So really the best diplomats are those that are sensitive to other people's positions and interests and concerns and can listen with an open mind without filtering too much.*" Other participants added the traits: educated, networking skills, cultural and intellectual preparation, honesty, listening, control, open-mindedness, and civility. As is evident, the answers to this question were diverse, but an overall trend was identifiable. The most named traits were the networking, communication skills, and sensitivity to your environment.

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Despite the variety of named traits, most female participants also said that male traits are still favoured. This is demonstrated by the answer of participant 2:

> *As soon as somebody says I just want the best person for the job, really what they mean is they want the best man for the … because the job has mostly been held and is still mostly held by men, they always have a picture of a man and probably a white heterosexual CIS man in their head.*

Hard skills are still revered, such as rationality, authority, and strategic thinking. According to six female interviewees, and less described by the men, people appreciate what they see most of. This means that if a field is male-dominated, people will favour male associated traits. This was translated to promotional structures. Masculine traits are valued and favoured, which means men get promoted quicker. To climb up the career ladder some women adopt masculine traits to blend in the male-dominated sector. The following quote shows this sentiment, participant 9 said:

> *I think that because masculine skills are still more valued. Men are faster promoted, that's what the numbers show. They get double promotions faster that you go from* (scale) *12 to 14, for example, ... So, we have quite a bit of headwind.*

4.2 Demands and Expectations

Gendered traits, as explained above, can create certain expectations that provide structural obstacles in a women's career path. Gender specific demands and expectations can also provide hurdles for women according to the accumulated interview data. Due to the masculine identity of diplomacy, many of the female participants expressed the feeling they had to alter their behaviour to fit it and to prove themselves. These demands and expectations will be discussed in this section.

Various female participants noted that they were often underestimated and seen as harmless. Female diplomats shared they would make the best out of this difficult situation. For example, participant 3 said:

> *Because being underestimated also means you're not a threatening person. So for instance, you have much better access … You get more information*

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and in negotiations sometimes you can go much further because they don't
feel threatened or offended or as I said they underestimate you.

Participants had different viewpoints on how to deal with being underestimated. Besides using it to their advantage, several women described altering their behaviour to be seen and not be underestimated, whereas others refused to.

Another behaviour alteration method, as stated in the section on gender traits, is for some female diplomats to adopt masculine traits to be able to reach senior ranks, for example participant 6 said: "*If the leader is predominantly male, then as a female you either need to become very male or you are not seen or not considered good enough to actually be in the field.*" However, according to three participants, even when assimilating to a masculine environment, women can never fully fit in. When some women the traditionally male skills, men were praised, yet women were shamed. It is a constant balance of not being enough or being too much, not being seen or perceived as dominating. Several women said they were tired and frustrated for having to check their behavioural output all the time and having to prove themselves. When comparing this to the male interviewees, some shared they also at times felt they had to alter their behaviour to fit the situation they were in but did not link this to gendered expectations.

Altering their behaviour was not only connected to masculine traits or underestimation, but also to misidentification. Aside from one participant, all females expressed having been misidentified. The women shared they had been mistaken for being the support staff, coffee lady, ambassador's wife, secretary, or the number two of an ambassador. This even happened when the female in question was the ambassador. When in meetings with males lower in rank than her, the counterparts would immediately go up to the men, assuming the woman was the assistant or intern. When misidentification would happen to participant 10, she described refusing to work with someone. "*No way I was gonna work with him… People automatically assume it's the man, that's the diplomat.*" She said she will always speak up when this happens and make sure she is noticed. Other women dealt with misidentification by very clearly letting their counterparts know who they are. Female interviewees not only experienced this themselves, but also described seeing misidentification happen to the women around them, as did the male participants, although more so in the past, of whom participant 4 said: "*Outside Europe it may be different, but in Europe, I think mistakes are not really made anymore. But*

there are cases also where I witnessed that the women sometimes even chairing the meeting was actually considered as the one that would bring in the coffee." For the men personally, only one participant had been misidentified as being the ambassador's son. This ties into the concept of intersectionality, as highlighted by three additional respondents, where not only gender influences a diplomat's chances to reach senior positions, but age, religion, and race, to name a few.

As women are more often than men misidentified three of the participants altered their behaviour based on these interactions. Other gender specific actions can be related to working attire. However, only two participants, male and female, said this took up some of the time. Three stated they enjoyed this, whilst most noted not caring about it. However, most agreed that the way a diplomat dresses does influence how someone is perceived and even treated. An interviewee said she is often frowned upon when wearing sneakers. Two other female participants noted getting dressed in colourful clothes when needing some confidence or when feeling uncomfortable. As such attire is not highly linked to experienced pressure according to the participants, but only in the sense that looking appropriate was just a necessity in diplomacy.

Another necessity in the work of a diplomat is the ability to network according to all interviewees. In Middle Eastern and African countries women had an advantage as they were able to network with both local men and women, whereas the male diplomats at times would only be able to network with other local men. This type of networking is externally, however, internal networking worked the other way around. Eight of the female participants stated that there still is an old-boys network, which perhaps does not look like it used to, but still is very much present. As participant 12 said: "*You would see a small group of people, mostly men, move around the same positions and also knowing each other informally… people will say that's a conspiracy, but everybody sees it, everybody who is not part of the group".* Seven female participants expressed not being able to enter the elite networks of male diplomats. The two who did express having partial access to it at times, said they were never truly accepted, or comfortable in these circles, for example, participant 6 said: "*I do think the comradery that is amongst men. You can have access to it, but you will never be part of it."* Other than feeling excluded, some women felt as though men in these networks wanted to take care of their (often-times male) friends and make sure they were in prestigious positions. Several participants

stated that knowing the right people was integral in getting promoted. This meant their future depended on others, their ability to access these elite networks, which was difficult as women.

As a countermeasure, several female and one male respondent said women created their own networks, for example, to warn each other of female unfriendly male diplomats, who not to work with, or to give each other career advice. Three (deputy) ambassadors mentioned another countermeasure; at their embassy they would refuse to attend male only events and use this to combat the male exclusivity circles. Despite some counter measures, the female diplomats still experienced exclusion of entering circles in which people help each other with promotions.

4.3 Family Life

Structural limitations are not only present at work, as described in the previous paragraphs, but also in a diplomat's family life. A third reason for the increased pressure for female diplomats is connected to the balance of domestic life versus time in the office. According to the participants, the way someone's family life affected their work and vice versa depended very much on the interviewee's family composition, preferences, and boundaries. There were however similarities in the stories of the women compared to those of men.

Nine of the interviewees stated that for the partner accompanying the diplomat life is more difficult. However, most also agreed that in a hetero sexual relationship, often the male partner is less willing or able to accompany his diplomat wife. This is illustrated by participant 4, who said: "*The problem is that men still find it quite difficult in many cases to follow their female partner to a job abroad. That creates uncertainty for their own career*". It can be difficult for women to go abroad and work on their career if they have a partner who is not willing to follow them. When asking whether it is difficult combining work and family women talked about how it affected them personally. The men on the other hand stated it was difficult for their wives and children but did not mention themselves, for example participant 7 said: "*It's not that I found it difficult, but my family found it very difficult*". There was a clear differentiation between how men and women experienced the pressures of family responsibilities.

Aside from the influence of a partner, children also increase the pressure experienced by diplomats. Several interviewees stated that the world is changing and that is has gotten easier for women with a partner and children. Some women stated that it was not hard on them, they

were able to prioritize and set boundaries to balance work life balance. Others had altered their career for their family, by not taking some job opportunities as it did not work with their family responsibilities. Some women experienced working hours too high to combine with taking care of their family. They were not alone in making specific career choices for their family, two men stated they temporarily had taken a position in The Netherlands to allow their partners to stay in the Netherlands or to let their children go to school at home.

Relating to childcare, several respondents had seen that even in their network that the female diplomats often still took on more family responsibilities than their accompanying partner, which would add pressure. For single mothers such pressure increased. Two respondents noted the that for instance that a partner is compensated but children are not. As a single parent it can therefore be financially straining. Furthermore, as a single parent diplomats have to miss important working events or family events due to the inflexibility of their job responsibilities or financial strains of childcare.

4.5 Career Path

The timeline of a woman can differentiate from that of the perceived standard timeline of a man. Having children often takes away a few years where women either work part time or exit the workforce for a period. Two women saw jobs being given to men and when these female diplomats re-entered their options were limited. A diplomat's career can span over 40 years and when having children, women lose career time between the ages 30 to 40, which are important years in the career of a diplomat. Participant 7 said:

> *10 years later when kids are a bit older and a bit more in the require less care, so to speak, then they want to come back into the profession. Um, well, but then in that case, in in diplomacy, you've lost. If you've lost ten years, that's 1/3 of a career and you will never recuperate it because you can't make up in five years the experience that someone else has done in 10 or 15 years.*

This gap in a woman's career path can ensure that she is never able to reach the highest scale. This career set-back was echoed by most interviewees, both men and women. A woman's career is not only impacted by having children, but also impacts how you are looked at. Three women described being seen as a risk factor and described male leadership who have asked

whether a potential female employee was planning to become a mother. As such, women felt unfairly treated and not always given opportunities. Moreover, participant 12 said she felt pressure coming to work soon after having children: *"I felt very much pressured in not taking too long of a maternity leave"*.

Another reason for a different career timeline is related to the perception of gender, as discussed in the paragraph on gender traits. Several diplomats explicitly aid that they think women must work harder than their male colleagues. As participant 5 said it: *"As women we get less the benefit of the doubt. So you really have to prove yourself"*. This is especially visible mid-career where along scale 12/13 out of the 19 something happens, a bottleneck is created, and the higher women climb the career ladder the harder it becomes. Men are sooner given the opportunity to prove themselves and women must prove themselves and then get opportunity, which is discouraging for women: *"You see that structurally high-ranking women are benched in favour of men who's uhh uhh whose term wasn't up yet or who were actually lower within the organization, and they passed a woman on the right-hand side"* (P2).

Even if they feel like women are accepted into higher ranks, such as ambassadorial positions, it is the feeling that they are placed in countries where they cannot make a real difference, but where they can be included in those statistics to prove that The Netherlands is gender equal. In contrast, four female participants have noted that men are often posted at traditionally prestigious positions. According to the female interviewees, when treated unfairly, women leave. When feeling treated unfairly, women leave, as stated by participant 1: *"I've seen a lot of women around my age leaving the organisation. A lot. There is a bit exodus at some level"*. There were five who confirmed this by stating they had considered leaving their diplomatic careers. Four women even left the field, either permanently or temporarily. They shared various explanations as to why they left. These reasons were connected, but not limited, to mistreatment, not feeling appreciated, not given opportunities, curtailing ambitions, and an out-dated form of diplomacy.

In these interviews time and time again, it came up that a women's' career path differentiates from that of a man. As men are seen as the norm, this differentiation can lead to problems along the way. Women who speak up about the structural obstacles set out above are scared that it will affect their career. One woman described it as being eliminated in a sense, knowing your ceiling is defined.

In the following chapter, the data from these interviews will be compared to the theories from the literature review and the Dutch case will be contextualized within a wider context. Furthermore, the significance of the results within diplomacy and the wider ranging conflict areas will be discussed in the conclusion.

C5 – Discussion

Researching why there are few women in the senior ranks of diplomacy has been done in several cases. This study tried to find out why there are less women in the top yet more women in the rest of the lower levels in the case study of the Netherlands. This research question was answered by interviewing 12 (former) employees of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, all working in various countries, department, and layers within the organisation. The results show that various reasons contribute to the lack of women in high scales of diplomacy in the Netherlands. It is not a single source issue, it is not easy as a woman navigating the world of diplomacy, as indicated by the interviews. Several structural obstacles are in the way. The following section will showcase the theoretical and practical implications. Afterwards the theoretical contribution, limitations, and recommendations will be discussed, in the conclusion.

5.1 Gender Traits

Regarding gender traits a paradox was identifiable in the interview data, where the preferred traits did not match with the celebrated traits. Just like research by Pike & Kinsey (2021), all participants named several traits they believed suitable for the work of a diplomat. Despite the variety of mentioned skills, they were predominantly soft skills. Towns (2020) also confirms this by describing diplomacy as a feminine art. One would think that this would mean that femininity would be celebrated in diplomacy. However, several of the female diplomats stated that masculinity and consequently hard skills are still favoured and that they saw men being promoted quicker. This is in line with Lips (2020) who showed that often someone's gender corresponds with stereotypical gender traits and Eagly et al. (2020) who say how gender traits influence the way people look at someone's work performance. This phenomenon is especially visible in male-dominated fields such as diplomacy. As confirmed by the accumulated interview data, the fact that women have only been allowed in the field since the 20th century has left its mark. The traditional image is, although somewhat changed, still that of a man. Men get promoted quicker because they are seen as masculine and thus a good diplomat. Once more this confirms the study done by Naurin et al. (2019). Erlandsson (2019) discusses how people will choose those similar to them. For a field that has been dominated by men for so long, women are seen as a deviator from the norm (men). Therefore, the most obvious candidate in promotion settings is generally a man. Several interviews confirmed this by saying they would consistently see men being chosen over equally or more competent women.

As a countermeasure women can adapt their behaviour to be considered for leadership positions. When looking at the literature review, Niklasson (2020) discusses stereotype assimilation. In the Swedish MFA female respondents described how they would assimilate to their expected stereotype by exhibiting soft skills, using people's biases to gain an advantage, and get favourable information from male counterparts (Niklasson, 2020). This was partly visible in the interviews amongst the Dutch MFA. The difference is that although women would use the way people look at females to their advantage, they did not say they would purposely radiate soft skills. Contrastingly, some women would alter their behaviour to be noticed and not be viewed through the chivalry reaction or traditional female lens (Naurin et a., 2019). Rudman & Phelan (2008), describe masculine assimilation in their research as well. Here they discuss how women try to show masculine behaviour to not be overlooked for leadership positions. Yet they face backlash and get punished because they disregarded the gender norms for women (Rudman & Phelan, 2008), as confirmed by the participants who saw women being shamed for this. In these outcomes, The Netherlands is comparable to other countries in which similar research has been conducted. For instance, similar research in Sweden by Niklasson (2020), shows the same outcomes and influences, where they briefly discuss the influence of how different ways to deal with femininity.

There are mixed signals from male and female participants on the influence of gender traits on female promotional structures. Women did not explicitly discuss the pressure perceived gender traits put on them but did witness men being structurally overvalued and promoted. As such they directly witnessed the disadvantage of being associated with femininity. There are no hard conclusive results on the relationship between gender traits and female promotion as showed in the conceptual model. Nonetheless, it can be argued that these gender traits lead to a lower chance of being promoted and instead enhancing the pressure put on women in diplomacy, which are both reasons why there are less women in senior positions.

Where there are more clear results, is on the influence of expected behaviour, including traits, on how much pressure someone experiences. This phenomenon will be explained in the following section.

5.2 Demands and Expectations

Literature shows that there are perceived differences between men and women (Towns & Niklasson, 2016). Based on societies binary idea of gender and gender traits men and women

are put in specific boxes with the demands and expectations that come alongside it (Naurin et al., 2019). In the following paragraphs the gender specific actions will be highlighted and contextualized within the wider literature and international spheres.

The first gender related demand in the workplace according to the interviews of female diplomats is that women are regularly underestimated, not seen as a threat, and therefore either assimilate to their feminine stereotype to gain advantage or alter their behaviour to stand out. This line of argumentation builds upon the previous argument that is made on how people perceive gender traits. The women who experienced underestimation all noted that at some point in their career they found this frustrating, tiring, and discouraging. What was even more discouraging is seeing men dominate prestigious positions (Towns & Niklasson, 2017), without having to put in the same work as them. The Dutch case is here similar to the Czech Republic (Benešová, Fellegi & Kočí, 2019). Relating this again to the existing literature, this behaviour alteration - either to combat the stereotypical expectations or to assimilate to them - can bring added pressure. In turn, this can make the work life of a female diplomat harder in comparison to men, and therefore more likely for women to leave the field. There have been several interviewees who stated that due to lack of appreciation for individuality or mistreatment they left or had considered leaving.

Closely linked to underestimation is whether employees will be given career opportunities. Underestimating women can make them less noticeable to leadership when thinking of hiring people for senior levels. Several female diplomats stated that women have to prove themselves and then are given opportunities, for men it is the other way around. Men are more often given the benefit of the doubt. This was not a highly discussed topic in the literature review. However, Niklasson (2020), does discuss how women experience more time-consuming tasks based on their gender, which can increase pressure. Having to prove yourself can take away time and energy. In this, the Dutch case in similar to other studies (Niklasson, 2020).

The second gender specific experience is misidentification, which, according to the accumulated interview data, came up in every interview. This was witnessed both by male and female diplomats, but only happened to women. Some said it happened many years ago, whereas others described seeing it happen to this very day. There were different responses to misidentification, some retaliated, others found it frustrating but moved on. Misidentification was discussed by Niklasson (2020), who described how in interviews with female diplomats,

women described these experiences as valuable. This was not something that the Dutch female diplomats agreed with. Misidentification was never seen as an advantage, in contrast to the abovementioned underestimation, which was sometimes seen as valuable. Why there is a difference in responses could be various reasons. An explanation could be related to culture. Interviewees described the Dutch as being honest and direct, which is where the difference in answers can lie. In interviews the Dutch might be more likely to not directly discuss the effects. Misidentification is not something that can be held off and influences female diplomats in some way, albeit frustration, behaviour alteration, or something else. It can enhance the pressure experienced by women and can decrease the number of women who remain in the field.

The third added pressure according to literature is the demands of specific work attire. Towns (2021) describes how gender specific structures are present and can strain female diplomats. One of them is working attire. However, most of the diplomats did not experience choosing the right clothing for work as a burden or time consuming. It was rather similar between the men and women. This seemingly did not add to the pressure experienced by women, nor contribute to answering the research question

Lastly, lack of access to specific networks gives women a disadvantage. Networking and knowing the right people are extremely important in gaining promotions. For women infiltrating these networks it can be nearly impossible. As confirmed by the literature, for such circles people are required to fit a certain picture and people who deviate from this norm are often excluded (Towns, 2021). Knowing the right people will increase someone's chances of being promoted to the next scale. Entering these male-dominated informal influential circles, for women proves to be a nearly impossible venture.

5.3 Family life

As stated by several interviewees a male partner is more inflexible than a female partner in terms of accompanying their diplomat partner abroad. A statement very similar to the research by Niklasson (2020). It can be a strain for female diplomats. Although in the female diplomats interviewed this did not seem to be a trend. Most participants had seen this happen too women in their networks but did not experience this themselves. The male diplomats interviewed also confirmed this. Moreover, both men and women alter their career for their families by for example staying longer in The Netherlands to let their children go to school. However, women seemed to alter their career for more various reasons, such as too many hours and job

inflexibility. This confirms the theory by Sharma et al. (2021), who argue that women are more likely to make different career choices for their family. These choices can make women refuse certain job positions that would launch them into higher ranking positions. Such decisions are even more difficult for single mothers, as discussed in the interviews. Something that was not discussed in the literature review. Nowadays, more single mothers are also diplomats. However, diplomacy

If a female diplomat chooses to have children, it can significantly impact her career path. Taking maternity leave and afterwards, when the children are young, working more part time. This gap can ensure that a woman never reaches the highest levels as they will not be able to spend as much time on their career as their male colleagues. As such a non-linear line deviates from the perceived norm and enlarges the difficulty of having enough time to rearch the diplomatic top. In addition, women in the respondents' network would also often take on a larger childcare responsibility. This confirms the literature from Niklasson (2020), who discusses that women often must take on many different roles, as diplomat, wife, and mother. Once again, this creates a larger form of pressure on someone. Both observations of having children as well as altering one's career for family, confirms the expected positive relationship between the demands in a female's private life and the pressure experienced, which in turn negatively influences the number of women who reach senior ranks (conceptual model).

5.4 What Now?

There is a difference in how the respondents viewed the changes in the last decades. Some state that a lot has changed, specifically the male interviewees. Contrastingly, several of the females stated that very little has changed and that they still had a long fight ahead and argued that people deflect. As participant 6 shows: "*You cannot look me in the eye and say it's unconscious bias. If we have been talking about unconscious bias for the past 15 years*". Three female respondents added that people should stop blaming women for the lack of senior female diplomats, as opposed to saying women are not ambitious enough, have children, and do not apply for positions. Instead, as all participants agreed with, the focus should be on what can be done to remove the structural obstacles.

Throughout the 12 interviews it became clear that although the ministry is aware of the structural obstacles that lay in a woman's career path, that not enough is being done. Every participant agreed that explicit and conscious actions must be taken.

Because with terms such as steering on target figures or investing lower in line with whether we aim for this or our ambition, I say that means zero point zero. There is no action from that. ... if you want to improve the male-female ratio, that means that concrete action must be attached to it, because you can't. I think Einstein said that. If you do what you did, you get what you got.
– Participant 9

Due to their personal experiences and expertise in diplomacy the participants named several solutions. Women should be encouraged to apply for positions and quotas, forced promotion, and active scouting must be in place to attract women internally into higher ranks. In addition, unconscious bias training must be taught to those selecting personnel for high diplomatic levels. Several participants also recommended more financial compensation for people with children, to give them more flexibility and assistance. Overall, the sentiment was that women should not be blamed for the obstacles that are put in their path, but instead should be given equal opportunities as their male-counterparts.

5.5 Main Takeaways

What can be concluded from the discussion? This research studied why there are less women in the senior levels of diplomacy as opposed to the number of women in the field altogether. It can be said that several structural obstacles prevent women from bringing equal numbers in the diplomatic top. In the conceptual model several predictions were made of these obstacles. Almost all the predictions were identifiable in the interviews. Namely, that there is a positive relation between the gender specific actions at the workplace, the demands in a women's private life, and the pressure experienced. The only prediction that was not evident was the influence of work attire on experienced pressure as most diplomats, male and female, did not see this as time consuming, only as a requirement to appear appropriate at the workplace. What was confirmed was the negative relationship between perceived gender traits of women and female promotional structures. An inconclusive result was the relation between gender traits and pressure experienced, as there were different takes on this. Nevertheless, it was clear that there is a positive relation between perception and those seen as suitable for promotion.

All things considered, the pressure and demands influenced the number of women who left the field and thus never reached the highest levels. Furthermore, women were less likely to be hired for specific positions than men were. Men occupy the standardized end of the gender binary, whereas women are the deviators from this norm. Moreover, women's non-linear career timelines are considered as a hinderance, and thus treated as such by passing women for men. This career path is often halted mid-career, for the higher you get as a woman the more obstacles come along. Around scales 13 and 14 a bottleneck is created, if when women are not consistently promoted on every level. Destroying these structural obstacles to create a path for female promotion is difficult as this would mean looking at the Dutch society in general: "*culture eats structure for breakfast*" (Drucker, 2006, as cited in Engel, 2018).

C6 – Conclusion

The research question '*Why has the number of women in senior diplomatic positions not risen equally alongside the rising number of female diplomats in the diplomatic workforce?*' was answered in the context of the Netherlands, specifically the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where 12 diplomats were interviewed. The interviews focused on the experiences within structural obstacles to promotion scores of women. The findings show that there are three main reasons for this gender discrepancy: perceived gender traits, the demands and expectations that come alongside that in the workplace, and the responsibilities in a diplomat's family life.

The first reason is related to gender traits and the traditional idea people have of a suitable diplomat. In the Dutch MFA, female participants saw that women were less likely to be hired for prestigious and high-ranking positions. Women often work harder to be seen, heard, or accepted as potential candidates for senior positions as they are seen as the deviator from the male norm. Female diplomats deal with this, albeit by assimilating to masculine traits, refusing to give in, or by using underestimation and misidentification to their own benefit. Alongside this behaviour alteration, gender-based actions put pressure on women. For example, female participants had to choose how to respond to underestimation, misidentification, and lack of access to internal networks. Once again, they experience a lower visibility in terms of being seen as a potential candidate. Contrastingly, they regularly saw men being promoted based on potential, whereas women must prove themselves. Furthermore, diplomats who are mothers were often seen taking on a larger caretaker role for their children compared to men, once more putting extra pressure on female diplomats. This can either induce an exit for women or cause women to refuse certain job possibilities that would bring them in higher positions. According to the participants, having children can also take away valuable career time and create a non-linear path. The ministry is still structured around the masculine timeline, therefore, there is little space for these women to catch up. So, in sum, the reasons why there are few women in senior diplomacy is due to the gender stereotypes of men as suitable diplomats, added pressure on women, curtailing women's ambitions, the lack of career advancement women are offered, and the lack of flexibility to the (at times) non-linear career of female diplomats.

As in any research, there are several limitations identifiable. Firstly, there was a limited set of 12 interviews. This means that the results are not completely generalizable for the whole Dutch ministry. However, the findings were in line with the existing literature and do provide additional confirmation. Future research could give more extensive knowledge and a larger

generalizability on the MFA. In addition, fewer men (3) in comparison to women (9) participated. This means that more women were able to weigh in on their experiences of gender and diplomacy. Once more, this limits the generalizability of the findings, however, this does not negate the given answers. This research has given significant insights into the experiences of Dutch diplomats, but to make the results more generalizable quantitative research with a more equal input of men and women and more extensive interviewing could support the findings from this research. Moreover, this research has focused on the influence of gender on promotion scores, but gender is not the only factor. As evident in the interviews, the concept of intersectionality plays an additional role in diplomatic career paths. Herein is another avenue to explore, e.g., the role of religion, ethnicity, and age in relation to promotion scores in the Dutch MFA.

This study aimed to look at gender and diplomacy in the case of the Netherlands. More research comparing cases could show where the differences and similarities come from that were identified in this research. The findings of this study are the foundation of further research on how to break the glass ceiling of diplomacy. Knowing the complications as well as the solutions can help bring women in the same levels as men. Diversity at places of significant decision-making and peacekeeping in diplomacy can provide longer lasting benefits, in for example war zones, and must be achieved.

Investigating how and why the pathway is blocked for female diplomats to reach equal numbers in senior diplomacy, contributes to our wider understanding of gender in male-dominated fields. This research has added to the existing literature and gives context on how different countries and cultures suffer from gender inequality in diplomacy. Not only does this research contribute to the theoretical field, but it also has implications for possible policy and societal ventures. The respondents shared based on their own knowledge and expertise ways in which to break the glass ceiling for women. Solutions included female mentorship, encouragement for female applicants, quotas, unconscious bias training, scouting, and more. As something happens mid-career, the flow must be improved. Future research should investigate these solutions, its effectiveness, and how to turn theory into practice. Most importantly, research should focus on making women's voices be heard to make this change.

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Appendix – Topic List & Interview Outline

Prelude

Introduction: Personal & Thesis

- My name is Sanne Swart, I'm currently working on finalizing my Master of Arts International Relations at Leiden University in the Netherlands.

- To finalize my degree, I'm working on a thesis focused on the dynamics of gender in the field of diplomacy. In the research I have conducted so far, various arguments have been laid out on potential reasons as to why there are few female diplomats in the top of diplomacy. In these interviews I want to dive deeper into this reasoning.

Interviewee Selection

- I want to thank you for participating in my research. I approached you for an interview due to your experience in the field of diplomacy and the valuable insights you can provide.

Interview Material

- The information you provide today will solely be used for academic purposes

- Successful theses are stored in the University Library and open to anyone with library access

- The protection of your identity is assured, you will remain an anonymous interviewee, as such I will only write your identity on paper and not save a digital document

- In the thesis I will refer to you as a participant with a specific number and your title as (deputy) ambassador / or diplomat

- Do you give permission for this interview to be recorded on audio?

- If at any point you feel uncomfortable or do not wish to answer something, this is completely okay, and you please let me know

Interview Conceptualization

- When I talk about gender is this interview, I refer to the following definition: gender is the psychological identification of oneself; how you identify yourself

Questions

<u>Introduction Interviewee</u>

- What gender do you identify as?

- For how long have you worked as a diplomat?

- You are currently *insert job title*, what path did you take to get there?

<u>Professional Life</u>

- In a few sentences could you give a general description of your current job responsibilities?

- According to you, what types of traits should a diplomat exhibit?

<u>Work-Related questions</u>

- What is appropriate work attire?

  o How much of your time does this take up?

- How does the way you present yourself influence how people perceive you as a professional?

- How would you describe the Dutch diplomatic working culture in comparison to other countries?

- Have you ever felt the need to assimilate or change your behaviour at work?

  o If so, how?

- Have you ever felt undervalued?

  o If so, in what way?

- Have you ever been confused for being someone's partner?

  o If so, in what wat?

  o Have you seen this happen to others around you?

- To what kind of networks do you have access?

  o Are they the same as your colleagues?

<u>Personal vs. Professional Life</u>

- How do you balance your personal and professional life?

  o How do your colleagues balance this?

Questions for Employees of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- What do you believe are the reasons the number of female ambassadors in the Netherlands is around 30%?
- What do you think is the role of networking in the ministry in reaching senior functions?
- The turnover rate in diplomacy has risen, why do you think that is?
- In 2025, Minister Hoekstra set the goal to have 50/50 ambassadors, this is in 3 years, how do you think they are working towards this?

Conclusion
- Is there anything you want to add?
- Do you have any questions for me?
- Can you recommend me any other interview partners?
- Thank you so much for your valuable contribution to my research