

The case of gender diversity in the Dutch workforce

From the perspective of women professionals

Student Name: Laura Reijm

Student Number: 454392

Supervisor: Dr. Vidhi A. Chaudhri

Master Media Studies, Media & Business

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Abstract

Women increasingly take part in the workforce, however the numbers of women in management and top positions lag behind. Several initiatives and solutions were presented in recent years, yet this has not proven to be successful. Therefore, in-depth interviews were held with female professionals from the Dutch workforce in order to get an understanding of their experience with gender diversity in the workforce. The interviewees, whose careers are high on their list of priorities, argued they do not feel restrained in making a career within the organization in which they work. They believe that the only thing that stops women from making a career is themselves, in which organisations and media only have a minor role to play. However previous research argues that gender diversity is dependent on the government, organisations or media, this study shows that all aspects are intertwined, together with the societal mind-set. The topic of gender diversity needs to be addressed from different sides and is not purely a women's or organizational issue and that is what makes the subject so challenging.

KEYWORDS: Corporate Social Responsibility; Dutch Workforce; Gender Diversity; Women Professionals; Work and Life Balance.

Acknowledgements

"Believe your own thought. Speak what is true for you, and it will almost always resonate in others." - SELF-RELIANCE by Ralph Waldo Emerson

I believe this quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson is applicable to the conclusion of this study regarding gender diversity in the Dutch workforce. When you convincingly go for your goal, you are invincible. Although there are still many people who are inhibited by the opinions and visions of others, which might hold their true selves back.

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1. Introduction

Until the sixties it was common for employed women, living in the Netherlands, to resign when they entered into marriage. As women married they had to dedicate themselves to the care of the household, their husband and their children (Rensman, 2003). In 1957 the incapacity for action of married women and the provision, which required married women to resign, was removed from civil servant law (Graaf & Keij, 2001). This however did not mean that it became generally accepted for married women to work, especially not when they had small children. Since the 1960's the employment of women has slowly increased. Twenty years later, in the early 1980's, three out of ten women participated in the workforce with an average of 12 hours per week (CBS, 2004). However, it remained common that in most families the husband was the primary income provider and the wife mainly took care of the children and the household. Therefore, the labour participation among women with children remained low (Graaf & Keij, 2001).

Today, the working hours between men and women remains unequal. In 2012, consultancy firm Mercer presented a study of women in top positions. According to Mercer, the Dutch part-time culture is disastrous for the flow of women (Ruijgrok, 2014). The data of CBS (2016) shows that of the top 1000 largest companies only 19% of the highest positions are being held by women. Van Mullingen (2016) stated that this number is logical given the fact that people in top positions are often older than 45 years old, higher educated and working full-time. Of all full-timers, currently only 23% are women, and of the full-timers over 45 years old, there are only 8% who are women. Since leadership is also about experience and education, plus nowadays women are more educated than men, the author of CBS expects more women in top positions (van Mullingen, 2016). Fascinating however, is that despite their education, women up to the age of 34 limit themselves to a job of a few days a week, which reduces their career opportunities (Schipper, 2016).

As mentioned, women are not only working less hours, they are underrepresented in managerial positions. The Global Gender Gap Report 2017 places the Netherlands 32nd (out of 144) in 2017, down from 16th in 2016 (World Economic Forum, 2017). This means that the gender equality in the Netherlands decreased in the past year, which is problematic given the country's progressive stance on equality and diversity (Studyinholland, 2018). For years, the Netherlands have been trying to get more women in management positions or in the boardroom. Currently, 10% of the top

managers are women, which is lower than the global average of 24% (Thornton, 2014).

Even in the media, women are underrepresented (Atria, 2017); despite the fact that gender diversity is a heavily discussed topic by journalists, politicians, and scholars. Often the issues most highlighted are the lack of diversity in the workforce, who is responsible for this issue and how we can improve it. Therefore, it would be interesting to gain an understanding of how women professionals perceive the case of gender diversity, in the workforce and in the media. Also, how they stand against the quote; “you can’t be what you can’t see” (VIDM, 2018), and how the media could play a role in the increase of gender diversity in challenging the status quo. Therefore, the following research questions are posed:

- RQ 1: How do women professionals frame the value of gender diversity in business?
- RQ2: What are the perceived barriers and facilitators to achieving gender diversity in the workforce?
- RQ3: How does the media shape perceptions of gender diversity in the workforce?

It is important to acknowledge that gender diversity is a multi-faceted, multi-layered phenomenon, and there are many different ways to study the case of gender diversity in the Dutch workforce. However, in defining the scope and focus of this research, a decision is made to highlight the perspectives of women professionals and how they frame the case of gender diversity in the Dutch workforce. The hypothesis is that in comparison to corporates or the government, the views of women professionals have an increased value since they are the ones necessary to help increase the Dutch workforce. Women’s real life experiences might differ from the corporate versions and/or government perspective, since theory can differ from practice. The research will give a voice to women professionals working in the Netherlands, how they perceive their place in the workforce as a woman, and how they perceive advancement across levels of an organisation.

For this research, interviews were held with women professionals across different levels, since gender diversity permeates every level of an organization. The

interviews were in-depth in order to gain comprehensive information about their experiences, views and opinions.

The proposed research is significant for a number of reasons. Although gender diversity is not a new topic of research, it has assumed greater importance in the contemporary business (and societal) context. As illustrated in the introduction, there are few, if any, substantive improvements in the state of diversity in business.

Furthermore, there is a need to highlight the different voices that are implicated in this debate, in particular, women professionals and how they make the case of diversity in business. In this regard, the perspectives of women, in a grounded manner, not only highlight the constraints but the possible solutions for facilitating the advancement of women within organizations.

In addition to highlighting the voices of women professionals, the focus on media influence in framing perceptions is an important contribution of this research, which will create an understanding of how media can play a role in the issue of gender diversity in the Dutch workforce with its barriers and facilitators. This is critical since the media is creating the idea that girls' and women's values lie in their youth, beauty, and sexuality and not in their capacity as leaders. Furthermore, male success is connected to dominance, power, and aggression (The Representation Project, 2018).

The societal relevance relates to the need for valuing people as equals and humans instead of gendered stereotypes. 51% of the Dutch population includes women (CBS, 2018), 58% are college graduates (The Representation Project, 2018) and only 10% of them are a top manager in the Netherlands (Thornton, 2014). Today we can still argue that women are "simply acting in ways consistent with socialization or in response to cultural expectations" (Frankel, 2014). Because of discouragement, social messages, or unawareness of alternatives women fail to develop their behaviour. Frankel (2014) argues that by living up to expected behaviour, instead of behaviour women choose for themselves will lead to living limited lives instead of fulfilment and self-actualization. It will create emotional maturity and control of their own destiny. The views of women professionals will highlight their experience on the impact of media and role models, and see what needs to be changed in order to create a balance and how women are able to grow within organisations. Also, it will create an understanding of the experienced representation of women in the media. Further elaboration on the academic and societal relevance is discussed throughout the report.

The next chapters outline the theoretical framework for this research, providing in-depth information about the concept of gender diversity. Furthermore, the barriers and facilitators of gender diversity in business are discussed, as well as the ways that the media shapes the perception of gender diversity. The methodology chapter discusses how the data for this research was gathered and analysed. Finally, the chapter outline discusses the content of the master's thesis and the timetable gives an overview of the research process.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter gives an overview of academic research in regards to the case of gender diversity. Before elaborating on the research, gender diversity is defined. Furthermore, the case of gender diversity is discussed together with possible solutions for increasing gender diversity in business. Lastly, how the media shapes the perception of gender diversity is debated.

2.1. Gender diversity

Before delving deeper, it is important to clarify related ideas and identify a definition of gender diversity that serves as a starting point for the study (see table 1). In looking at these definitions, it becomes clear that ‘gender’ is not solely women’s issue and equally affects men. However, as highlighted in the introduction and later in this chapter, the dismal state of diversity in business organizations compels additional research into the barriers and facilitators to balance the equation.

Table 1: Terms and definitions.

Term	Definition
Gender equality	“Equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men” (United Nations, 2018).
Gender parity	“The equal contribution of women and men to every dimension of life, whether private or public” (EIGE, 2018).
Gender diversity	“When a company is represented by a more equal proportion of men and women” (Lombardo, 2018).
Gender equity	“Gender Equity is the process of allocating resources, programs, and decision making fairly to both males and females without any discrimination on the basis of sex...and addressing any imbalances in the benefits available to males and females” (Caaws, 2018).

For this research the term gender diversity is used, which implies equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men, and an equal representation of men and women in the workforce.

2.2. The (business) case for diversity

As noted in the introduction, women are underrepresented in power- and decision-making roles. This is noteworthy, since research suggests that females perform better than males in school, and more women pursue higher education, which they finish more successfully and faster than men (CSP & CBS, 2016). Although the Netherlands has enacted laws and regulations to promote gender diversity, the number of women that have leading positions in businesses remains underrepresented (Appelbaum, Audet, & Miller, 2012).

For organizations, gender diversity has significant relevance; a study by Catalyst (2011) shows that gender diversity in boardrooms accounts for a higher return on investments, return on equity and return on investment capital (Dobbin & Jung, 2011). This argument is supported by Martins & Millikens (1996) who argue that diversity will contribute to an increase in turnover. Furthermore, Martins & Millikens (1996) argue that diversity contributes to a higher employee satisfaction and an increase in creativity (Millikens & Martins, 1996). Additionally, gender diversity improves innovation (Garcia, Moreno, & Martinez, 2011).

Despite these purported influences diversity has on business, women remain underrepresented in leading positions. Scholars note how women often refrain from applying for job descriptions unless they feel fully qualified whereas “the men will nominate themselves even if they do not meet all the requirements” (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013). Furthermore, by some, leadership is seen to be “biologically determined, behaviourally demonstrated and innate to the male species” (Appelbaum, Audet, & Miller, 2012, p. 44). Even though there is research that refutes this claim, women are still as less proficient leaders than men (Appelbaum, Audet, & Miller, 2012).

In order to tackle these issues in the Netherlands, there are recruitment companies that are focused on recruiting and placing talented women at corporations (Female Investments, 2018 & Topvrouwen, 2018), and there are companies that consult corporations about a more balanced diversity of gender within their business (Talent naar de Top, 2018). Furthermore, striving for gender diversity in the

workforce additionally supports the expansion of economic development (UN Global Compact, 2018). The following statement supports this argument: “Gender inequality is not only a pressing moral and social issue but also a critical economic challenge. If women—who account for half the world’s working-age population—do not achieve their full economic potential, the global economy will suffer” (McKinsey Global Institute, 2015).

Aside from business benefits, diversity also has far-reaching personal and societal advantages. When we look at the numbers, 51% of the Dutch population are women (CBS, 2018), and women are more educated than men (The Representation Project, 2018). However, the majority of women are working part-time in the Netherlands. The Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science argues that working full time will not only create financial independence, but also the enjoyment of making personal decisions and being able to develop oneself (van Engelshoven, 2017). Also, having a career creates an identity that has social value and status and creates a different social network (Volpe & Murphy, 2011). Frankel (2014) argues that by living up to behaviour that is expected, instead of behaviour women choose for themselves will lead to living limited lives instead of fulfilment and self-actualization. Having one’s own career will create emotional maturity and control of their own destiny. Other effects are financial independence, greater financial security, extra spending power and peace of mind (United Advisors, 2018). Compared to other countries, the percentage of women who are financially independent is relatively low, especially for a developed country such as the Netherlands. Wekker (2017) argues that besides the awareness among women, institutions should also make changes in order for women to take steps forward (Wekker, 2017).

It is clear then, that when discussing workplace diversity, the roots extend far wider and deeper, in the way gender roles are constructed and reinforced. As discussed in the introduction, until the sixties it was common for employed women, living in the Netherlands, to resign when they entered into marriage. As women married they had to dedicate themselves to the care of the household, their husband and their children (Rensman, 2003). However, today we can still argue that women are “simply acting in ways consistent with socialization or in response to cultural expectations” (Frankel, 2014). Because of discouragement, social messages, or unawareness of alternatives women fail to develop their behaviour. In her book *‘Nice girls don’t get the corner offices’* Frankel (2014) argues that:

From early childhood, girls are taught that their well being and ultimate success are contingent upon acting in certain stereotypical ways, such as being polite, soft-spoken, compliant, and relationship-orientated. This is reinforced through media, family and social messages. It is not that women consciously act in self-sabotaging ways; they simply act in ways consistent with their learning experiences.

Furthermore, the author argues that by living up to behaviour that is expected, instead of behaviour women choose for themselves will lead to living limited lives instead of fulfilment and self-actualization. It will create emotional maturity and control of their own destiny (Frankel, 2014).

2.3. Facilitators and barriers for gender diversity

Efforts have been made to address the dire state of diversity. These initiatives were multipronged and led by business, government, and society, with variable outcomes. It is important to see which efforts were made in order to understand how women professionals make the case of gender diversity in business and how they perceive the barriers and facilitators in achieving gender diversity in the workforce.

Research suggests that there are several effective ways for corporations to increase the number of women in management and board positions. Organizations can start by admitting and recognising that there is gender bias (Sandberg, Lean In, 2014), and start talking about the issue in the workplace by paying attention. More often, corporations make diversity inherent to the company's policy (Catalyst, 2017). Also, women can be assigned to mentorship- and sponsorship programs, which support and guide the participants in their career. Additionally, supportive managers, good working conditions, and advancement opportunities motivate women to stay and work at their current jobs (Volpe & Murphy, 2011). Sandberg (2014) supports these arguments by stating that companies can be more supportive to women who are pregnant, making this a motivator for women to come back after maternity leave (Sandberg, Lean In, 2014). It can be challenging for women to come back to work after their maternity leave, and some women start the 'mommy track'; "a career path that allows a mother flexible or reduced work hours but tends to slow or block advancement" (Merriam Webster, 2018). Organizations can support women to gradually reintegrate into the organizations after their absence.

PwC's US Chairman explained: "organizations need to change their policies, procedures or organizational construct to allow the people to do that they do really well, and make them equally ambitious and productive as possible". This is especially important for the Millennials. He argues that Millennials otherwise do not want to be part of the organizations, and that this is a way for both parties to achieve what they want (Moritz, 2013). Moreover, in the recruitment of employees, organisations should eliminate bias. This indicates that multiple resources should be introduced in order to find and consider various board candidates (Catalyst, 2017). Among others, this can be linked to phenomenon of the 'old boy's network', a circle of men in an organisation that keep the ranks closed for people outside their circle. In order to keep the circle closed they are known for backing each other up and discuss problems and make decisions in a small and closed circles, which makes it difficult for outsiders to step in (Management Impact, 2017).

Gender diversity is an issue the Dutch government addresses, and the Minister for Education, Culture and Science argues that the government invests in opportunities. Proposed ways to facilitate gender diversity are the expansion of paternity leave for fathers; currently this counts 2 days of maternity leave and 3 days of parental leave (Rijksoverheid, 2018). The government aims to increase the leave up to six weeks in 2020. This will give not only the women but also the men some time off from work in order to give the men an opportunity to take on the father role (van Engelshoven, 2017). Furthermore, the government aims to expand the day-care facilities and aims to offer a tax benefit; a financial advantage of working more hours. The government hopes to in this way reward women employees by providing them with more money to spend at the end of the month (van Engelshoven, 2017).

Currently the Netherlands maintains a target number of a minimum of 30% women and a minimum of 30% men in the management board and the supervisory board of large limited and private companies with limited liability (Rijksoverheid, 2016). This accounts for the 5000 companies that fall under the Administrative and Supervision Act. This target number is referred to as a women's quota, also a proposed facilitator for gender diversity in business. The definition of the women's quota is: "A legal requirement for the share of top women, especially in the political sphere and the business community" (Ensie, 2017). However, the Netherlands uses an advisory quota, which means that organisations do not need to maintain the quota by law. When the companies that were requested to maintain the target number do not

succeed, these companies are required to give an explanation in its annual report (Rijksoverheid, 2017).

Initially the Minister of Education, Culture and Science argued that hopefully it will not be necessary to make the women's quota legally required (Bussemaker, 2016). However, the number of women in management positions decline in 2017. This means that in 2017, 6 companies fulfilled the target number of 30% women on the Executive Board and the Supervisory Board (Financieel Management, 2017). Besides the Netherlands, European countries such as Norway, France (40%) (European Parliament, 2015), Sweden (40%), and Italy (40%) (European Parliament, 2014) have set a quota for diversity in management and board positions, though these quotas are generally not or almost not achieved. Additionally, in order to reach the gender diversity rule for Dutch listed corporations, Minister Bussemaker initiated the website Topvrouwen.nl. This website makes highly qualified, and board-ready women, women visible in the Netherlands in order to get companies and (non) executive search agencies to get in contact with each other (Topvrouwen, 2018). However, because of the decline in the number of women in management positions, this has not been proven to be effective. This could be due to the lack of incentives corporations have and due to the soft 'no-sanction' policy (Álvarez, 2016).

Men and women both have a role to play when it comes to diversity in the workforce. The main barriers and constraints of why women remain unequally represented in the workforce might be accounted to issues such as maternity leave, childcare, household duties (or organizing family life), and caring for parents. An equal or balanced division between the men and the women at home is not only important for diversity in the workforce, but also for the quality of the relationships within the family. The majority of women, over all generations, are doing the majority of the housework (Lean In, 2017). However, equally helping the children with homework and doing household duties increases the happiness and health level of children, and positively increases the relationship between couples (Sandberg, Lean In, 2014). Furthermore, Sandberg (2015) argues that women should take a seat at the table and negotiate more often when it comes to raises and promotions (Lean In, 2017). Also, it is important for women to believe in themselves and to believe in their own success (Sandberg, Lean In, 2015). Lastly, women should not "leave before they leave"; Sandberg (2015) argues that women are less motivated in their jobs, for example not taking up on promotions or new projects, once they decide to have

children. Furthermore, she states that women should be focussed on their jobs until the moment they actually leave, in order to get the best out of it (Sandberg, Lean In, 2015).

2.4. The perception of gender diversity shaped by the media

Another crucial factor that merits attention in the discussion of gender diversity is the media. As noted earlier, women are not only underrepresented in management and top functions in the workforce, but also in the media. The European representation of women in the traditional media (newspaper, TV, and radio), dropped from 30% in 2010 to 19% in 2015 (GMMP/WACC, 2015). In the Netherlands the commercial broadcasters (40%) have a higher number of women represented than the public broadcasters (35%), which is curious since the public broadcaster is expected to bring 50,5% women on television in order to give a representative image of composition of the Dutch society. This is a performance agreement the public broadcaster agreed with the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (Atria, 2017).

Of central concern to this research is the medias (ir)responsibility in gender (mis)representation. This is critical because “the media can promote and speed up the reforms in progress, or, on the contrary, it can hamper their implementation” (Davtyan-Gevorgyan, 2016). An example is the successful TV series ‘Mad Man’ in which a world is portrayed where “men are dominant and women are subordinate and sexualized” (O’Barr, 2011). Wood (1994) argues that the media is the most powerful influence on how we view men and women. Furthermore, she argues that there are three themes that describe how media represents gender.

First, women are underrepresented, which falsely implies that men are the cultural standard and women are unimportant or invisible. Second, men and women are portrayed in stereotypical ways that reflect and sustain socially endorsed views of gender. Third, depictions of relationships between men and women emphasize traditional roles and normalize violence against women (Wood, 1994, p. 31).

In the Netherlands, research by Nieuwsmonitor (2011) finds that especially in politics, male politicians were twice as often in the media than female politicians, confirming Wood’s (1994) argument about underrepresentation. When we look at the representatives as news source (politician, expert, spokesperson) in the media, men (78%) speak three to four times more often than women (22%) (Nederlandse

Nieuwsmonitor, 2011). Atria (2016) states that women appear more often as 'ordinary citizens', whereas men appear more often as experts and decision makers.

Furthermore, research shows that males are often framed in work situations and women are mainly positioned in private settings or related to 'beauty' or 'celebrity' (Atria, 2017).

Analysing how men and women are represented in the media makes it evident they fulfil role traps, which heavily influence the way we see female (and male) professionals. Invariably, men are seen as leaders and women as followers. Men and women have this unconscious bias, which is ingrained in the language we use to represent men and women. Baxter (2013) argues that we need to challenge the media representations, and create multifaceted leadership archetypes for both women and men. For instance, same-gender role models are essential to the professional ambitions and growth of women (Gilbert, 1985). Furthermore, research suggests that female students may seek to follow women who have successfully entered a career, which previously was not open to women, without sacrificing their femininity (Mack, Schultz, & Araki, 2002) and/or while balancing career and family responsibilities (Quimby & DeSantis, 2006). Having a role model has a positive influence on the self-esteem of college students (Mack, Schultz, & Araki, 2002), and is important for female students who want to pursue a professional career (Gilbert, 1985). However, 88% of the experts in the news are male, and women are positioned 6 times more often in a domestic environment than males (Women Inc., 2017). Nieuwsmonitor's conclusion is that "as long as the most important positions are held by men, these men will also receive more media attention than women" (Nederlandse Nieuwsmonitor, 2012, p.12). Representatives of the media usually say: "We are a reflection of reality, there are more top executives than top women". Gender experts state: "This reality is co-constructed by the media." (Atria, 2016, p. 12). Interviews have highlighted the views of women professionals related to; "you can't be what you can't see" (VIDM, 2018), and who can be held accountable.

2.5. Summary

As noted earlier, for the case of diversity, there is organizational and political involvement. However, for the establishment of gender diversity it is important to relate to the views and experiences of women professionals and how they frame the

case of gender diversity. Their views and experiences relate to their social environment, their place within organisations, and their vision towards the media. In order to study the case of gender diversity of female professionals in Dutch organizations, the following research question were placed.

- RQ 1: How do women professionals frame the value of gender diversity in business?
- RQ2: What are the perceived barriers and facilitators to achieving gender diversity in the workforce?
- RQ3: How does the media shape perceptions of gender diversity in the workforce?

3. Methodology

3.1. Qualitative research

For the study of gender diversity it is important to relate to the views and experiences of women professionals and how they frame the case of gender diversity. Therefore, a qualitative perspective is needed since it allows understanding of the lived experiences of female professionals.

This research employed a qualitative methodology to examine the aforementioned research questions. Specifically, women who are employed in the Dutch workforce were interviewed to understand how they make sense of and frame gender diversity in business. Furthermore, respondents' experience of (perceived) barriers and facilitators for gender diversity and opportunities for growth, if any, were examined in-depth. Also, women professionals were questioned about how the media shapes perceptions of gender diversity in the workforce.

In highlighting women professionals' voices, a sensemaking lens has been especially useful. Sensemaking permits: "looking for explanations and answers in terms of how people see things rather than structures or systems. Sensemaking suggests that organizational issues - 'strategies', 'breakdowns', 'change', 'goals', 'plans', 'tasks', 'teams', and so on are not things that one can find out in the world or that exist in an organization. Rather, their source is people's way of thinking" (Weick, 1995). In making sense of the value of diversity, interviewees were asked to reflect on the state of gender diversity in their organizations, how they experience gender diversity, and if gender diversity is a topic on the agenda of their organizations. Likewise, identifying and understanding the barriers and constraints is important not only to advance academic research but also to recommend the areas where improvements are most urgently needed. Previous research has already shed light on several challenges, for instance, unequal division in the home, and different ideals and enablers such as mentorships and sponsorships, flexible working hours, training in gender bias, and women's quota. Also, vacancy texts may be limited to diversity by attracting mostly men; therefore organizations can adjust their vacancy texts to attract men and women. However, one can assume contextual differences (i.e., in the Dutch context) and across organization types.

Finally, the literature review outlines the role of the media in shaping and reinforcing gender roles in ways that are especially unfavourable to women. This

often happens in a way where women are underrepresented, women are positioned stereotypically, and where violence against women is normalised. Specifically with regard to women in business, interviewees' sensemaking about the responsibility of institutional factors, such as the media, to correct misrepresentations and stereotypical frames are perceived to have important pragmatic implications. Even when these changes may not be directly within the control of women professionals, the ongoing #MeToo and #TimesUp movements have shown that women's voices can no longer be ignored and silenced.

3.2. Methods and procedure

3.2.1. Sampling and recruitment

The research was focused on women professionals in the Dutch workforce, across different levels of organizations, since gender diversity pertains to every level of an organization. Different types of organizations were included; small and large corporations, start-ups, and entrepreneurial ventures. The women professionals were at different stages in their careers, since it is fascinating to see if there is a difference in sensemaking and framing between the levels of employment between the interviewees. Therefore, the aim was to interview women who employ different types of positions within an organisation, for example; an employee's position, a management position, and a leadership position. The respondents varied when it came to age, sectors, life stages and (geographical) location within the Netherlands. Three women interviewees were pregnant at the time of the interview, and one respondent had given birth to her first-born 5 weeks ago. It is important to mention that the women who participated did not include older women who did not give birth to any child during her lifetime. This is a coincidence, however it would have been a valuable contribution to the study considering their perspectives on the case.

In all, 17 women professionals were interviewed. The interviews approximately took 40-60 minutes, with some exceptions of 35-100 minutes, and were recorded on audio (ESHCC, 2018). The interviews were conducted in Dutch and transcribed for the purpose of analysis and recordkeeping. The interviews were held in Dutch since both the interviewees and interviewers were more comfortable talking in their native language.

To recruit respondents, the non-probability sampling method of snowball sampling was used (Dudovskiy, 2017). Therefore, respondents who are women in the workforce were approached via chain referral. The starting point of this snowball sampling method was the personal network of the researcher. In order to avoid bias, by too many respondents coming from a particular network, exponential discriminative snowball sampling was used (Dudovskiy, 2017). The respondents that participated in the research are listed in the table below. The respondents were guaranteed anonymity; therefore, they were assigned with pseudonyms. Furthermore, their positions and companies are listed to give an overview of the diversity in the workforce.

Table 2: respondents.

Name (Pseudonym)	Current position	Sector
R1	Senior Site Manager	Pharmaceutics
R2	Marketing Manager	Retail
R3	Staff Advisor Policy & Innovation	Care
R4	Marketing Manager	Logistics
R5	Senior Online Marketing Manager	Non-profit
R6	Partner	Finance
R7	Head of Digital	Broadcaster
R8	Manager	Care
R9	Entrepreneur	Communication
R10	Entrepreneur	IT
R11	Marketing Manager	Logistics
R12	Business Development	Marketing
R13	Product Owner Channels	Banking
R14	Managing Director	Relocations
R15	Customer service	HORECA
R16	Communication advisor	Housing corporation
R17	Consultant	PR

3.2.2. Research design: Qualitative interviews

The interviews pertained to experiences that the women have had themselves during the duration of their careers, what they experienced as barriers for achieving higher positions and what they experienced as facilitators for reaching higher positions. In order to gain in-depth understanding of these motivations and opinions; in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews were semi-structured, this implies that there were pre-established questions that were asked of each respondent, however the order of these questions including the probing questions were depended on each interview structure, this gave more flexibility and created a more ‘natural’ conversation (Brennen, 2013).

Before having the interviews, an interview guide was designed for semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview guide is placed in Appendix I (Dutch version) and Appendix II (English version). The interview guide was essential since it supported the interviewer in covering all the topics and receiving the information that was needed (Magnusson & Mareck, 2015). Semi-structured interviews were used to uncover rich descriptive data on the personal experiences of participants (Balkissoon, 2018) and additional questions had emerged naturally during the conversation. By enhancing rich data, the interviewer used probing questions (Balkissoon, 2018). Furthermore, the researchers tried to avoid leading questions or imposing meaning and strive to create a natural conversation.

3.2.3. Method of analysis

The in-depth interviews were analysed according to the process of thematic analysis proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006) who define a theme as capturing “something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p 10).

- Step 1: familiarising yourself with data. Since the reasearcher coducted all interviews herself, she familiarised herself with the data and the subject. Nevertheless, before coding the data, the researcher readed the complete text in order to identify possible patterns while reading the text.

- Step 2: generating initial codes. After reading the text, initial codes from the data were listed. This is possible by systematically reading through the text and highlighting initial codes, writing notes or post-its.
- Step 3: searching for themes. Different types of codes were sorted, which were gathered from the initial coding into potential themes, by for example a mind map. This is the phase where the researcher started to look at links between codes and themes.
- Step 4: reviewing themes. The themes were redefined and minimalised. This phase finished with themes that tell the overall story of the data.
- Step 5: defining and naming themes. This included further redefinition, naming the themes, and presentation of themes with data.
- Step 6: producing the report. The process of writing a story that tells the data with fully worked out themes. The themes were used in combination with data. Beyond the description of the data connections were made with the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.3. Validity and reliability

Since the snowball sampling method might result in respondents from the same 'group', the researcher interviewed referenced respondents who stand furthest from the researcher herself. Also, the minimum number of respondents for the master's thesis are required to include 10-15 respondents. However, we can assume that this number of respondents will not lead to saturation. Therefore, the researcher aimed to interview until saturation was reached, due to the time limit given to the research 17 respondents were interviewed. Due to the fact that 17 respondents were interviewed, the in-depth interviews have provided rich information with multiple recurring themes. The number of interviews have provides a certain stage of saturation, however because of the number of female professionals that were interviewed, the results cannot be used for generalisation. The strength of the in-depth interviews is thanks to the intense face-to-face conversations and probing, underlying opinions, views and motivations that were gathered from the respondent, which may lead to rich information that is valuable to the research.

4. Results

This chapter provides the results that were gathered via the in-depth interviews with women professionals working in Dutch organisations. These female professionals have shared their views and experiences when it comes to gender diversity in the Dutch workforce and media landscape. Their positions within the workforce vary from entrepreneur, starter, senior, manager and managing director. The results of this research are presented by answering each of the three research questions divided into subsections.

4.1. The importance of gender diversity

According to the in-depth interviews it can be noted that all respondents see gender diversity of importance because of one main reason; men and women are different types of people and the combination of genders therefore makes a great team. Respondents believe that there is a fundamental difference between men and women in how they see and perceive aspects. For example, respondents argued that men are more rational and women are more emotional. Therefore, a combination of men and women ensures a balance within a team and provides better cooperation and better outcomes than a homogeneous group would provide. As respondents argued: “Women for the peace and the men for the tough negotiations” (R1), “The thinking of women is often different from that of men. Women act more radically, men act more fact based” (R6).

Since the interviewees believed that men and women tend to have a different take on things, it was noted that gender diversity also results in more interesting discussions. Therefore, it is also important to have diversity at the table in TV-shows, which will result in more thought-provoking conversations, compared to a conversation made by a homogeneous group: “Also at the table in a talk show; you have an interesting conversation when there are several different types of people sitting at the table, and not one kind of person, because then you quickly run out of content” (R7). In that respect gender diversity is beneficial for the viewer, the substantive level of the conversation and the TV-show itself.

Additional reasons interviewees have stated for the relevance of gender diversity were equal opportunities given to men and women. Several respondents have experienced that as young women who recently started working in the workforce, working in male dominated organisations, they felt the pressure that they

need to prove themselves more compared to men. They felt the pressure in a sense that they need to prove that they are *as good as men*. “Compared to my male colleagues, as a woman, you need more time to be taken seriously. I believe they soon think; what is she going to tell us now? They are more likely to accept something from a man.” (R4) The female respondents working in less male dominated organisations did not feel this pressure, suggesting that gender diversity is contextual, in this case, dependent on the type of organisation and/or business sector. Respondents experienced that the older generation is more traditionally oriented, often male dominated organisations with an ‘old boys network’: “I do notice that if it is an older man then he is less likely to take something from me compared to my male colleagues” (R6). Therefore several respondents had their hopes on the ‘young generation men’, since several respondents felt that men should emancipate: “Men must also see the benefits of women becoming part of their whole lives, not just their private life” (R6). Additionally, respondents argued that the work/life balance of certain positions was outbalanced. Either you have a successful job working 40 to 60 hours a week, or you work part-time on average 24 hours a week. The contrast is considered too large; people should not move towards a position working 60 hours a week, instead the position should shift to 32 hours a week for both men and women.

“I think it's bizarre how much people in top positions have to work and what they have to leave to be able to do that job. I also think that there should be a better balance in leisure/work time, they've lost balance. You can say we want more women, but then you also have to look at the division of work/private and seek a balance.” (R8)

4.1.1. The ambition of female professionals

According to the in-depth interviews, women can roughly be placed in clusters. One cluster where women find a partner and settle for the life they have and become a (working) mother in which they have the main role of caring partner and mother who provides care for her family. Another cluster where women are ambitious and around the time they give birth to a child this ambition changes and she takes over the role of a (working) mother in which they have a main part of the caring partner and mother who provides care for her family; “we wanted a third child and then I stopped working for 6 years” (R12). A third cluster where a woman is ambitious and after having a child finds balance between motherhood and having a

career since she values her career as an important factor in her life. Just like women who have not had a child and instead pursue a career only. “I studied and I have good job so I thought it was a big deal for me to work only 3 days. But from reliable sources I have learned that that idea completely changes when you have a child” (R4). As briefly noted earlier; by many it is considered to be a natural phenomenon for women to take care of the children and men to provide for their family by being the money maker. However, numerous women do not share this view and feel that men and women are equally responsible to take care of the children. This opinion is mainly formed by the third cluster of women who are ambitious and after having a child find balance between motherhood and having a career since she values her career as an important factor in her life, and the fourth cluster of women who did not have children (yet) and pursue a career:

“I have also completed a good education and I really like my work so if it would be a standard I would have to work for only 3 days and my husband can work for five days and can continue his own business, well that would not be fair” (R16).

Subsequently, the results of the research included divided opinions when it came to working part-time: where working part-time is empowerment for women and where working part-time is *no* empowerment for women. The respondents have also noted that women who start working part-time should know the consequences it could possibly bring not only to their career but also for their independence when it comes to their partners.

Important to note is that these are not exhaustive clusters, however it does indicate how women have shaped their perspective on gender diversity. To the questions of how we could get more female professionals into management positions one respondent answered: “But the *real* question is: do we want that ourselves? I know many colleagues who argue: first taking care of the children, maybe a career in five years” (R1). Clusters that see gender diversity from a different perspective have to do with the nature and nurture of people;

“At the kindergarten you already have the distinction between a doll's corner and a construction angle. Girls are supposed to play in the dolls corner and boys in the construction corner, here you already see difference and I think that the actions are unconsciously” (R6).

4.1.2. The influence of nature and nurture

An interesting point to take from the interviews is the influence of nature and nurture and the possible effects they may have on gender diversity within organisations. Despite the point that women see a positive movement in gender diversity in organisations, they believed that a larger impact will happen in the long term, perhaps even decades or centuries. Remarkably enough, no respondent believed that gender diversity will eventually grow towards a division of 50 percent men and 50 percent women in management and top positions. This train of thought has different reasons, however the main reason lies within the fact that the majority of the respondents believed it is in a women's nature to be more caring towards her children compared to men. Therefore, women tend to take the main part of the nurture of the children for their account, which results in working part-time or leaving the workforce. The interviewees experienced in their close environment that women more often work part-time after having children. Also, several respondents claimed that women have less or different ambitions than men. However, a small percentage of the respondents did not align with these thoughts. They argued that men and women are equally capable of taking care of the children and the household, and that it is not biologically determined that women are more willing to take this role.

A recurring topic is numerous interviewees perceived female and male 'values' and 'characteristics'. An example is negotiation; males are perceived as better negotiators than females, which is also biologically determined according to several respondents. Men are perceived as more confident, able to bluff, arrogant, direct, able to stand up for themselves, and better at presenting themselves. Also, interviewees believed that men, at an earlier stage, have the feeling that they are entitled to something and dare to pursue it. Women are described as overthinking and taking longer to make a decision: "women act more from emotion and men act more from ego" (R6). As a respondent explained: "We find very different things important, such as social contacts. It is generally known that we cannot negotiate as well, or because we think it is important to be liked instead of that €100,- more." (R1) Negotiation is also referred to biological traits:

"The men were the hunters and the women were the caretakers. We also have other hormones than men and hormones do a lot with your mind. Men have

more testosterone and that makes you a cockerel, and that's why men also play a lot more bluff poker. So you have a piece of physical, your hormone and you have a lot of environment, how did you get raised, what did you get, where do you live, who are your friends.” (R5)

However, this is not true for all women. This research implies that certain women hide behind these traits instead of upselling themselves and stepping outside of their comfort zones. “Sometimes it is also easy to be a woman. And some people think that’s fine like that, because her husband is the breadwinner.” (R3)

When you are a woman and you do not measure up to the expected ‘characteristics’ you should have as a woman, instead you are thought of as a “bitch” (R6) or “too masculine” (R6), whereas men are more often portrayed as a ‘good worker’. The respondents that participated in this research did not only see this in their own experience, but also around them and in the media.

During the in-depth interviews the women had noted that the awareness of female and male ‘roles’ are being taught to babies and from primary school on. It starts at a very young age where children are taught how to behave as a boy or a girl. To change the gender mentality at that age, broad support is needed. Besides the influence of the youth, respondents believed that you can lean your entire life;

“It is still an ongoing belief people have, that many things are not learnable. So if you never stood up for yourself as a child, you cannot learn that now. I do not agree with that belief. I think people can learn anything, but you have to be open to it. If you are not open to it, it will be difficult.” (R3)

Additionally, it is noted that most females believed that women should be in management and top positions because they want to themselves and not because they are feeling obligated. Therefore, many do not support using tools such as quota in reaching gender diversity; they believed women should be in these positions because of intrinsic motivation. Interviewees believed that men and women have equal chances and opportunities within Dutch organisations and while applying for jobs, but it is the woman herself who want to take care of the children. Several respondents believed that others can inspire women, however the intrinsic motivation to work on their career must start with themselves. When asked how women can be intrinsically motivated, the women of the study noted that only they alone could do that. They noted that they alone should choose what makes them happy and that they should

believe in their inner strength. But also, when you really want to, you can just say so. The things that hold women back are the women themselves.

“Maybe a bit naive, but I really think that if you want a fifty-fifty care division and stay focussing on your career as a woman and you have a good (equal) relationship, then can’t you just say that? If you really want it .. So do they actually really want it? Do they not secretly enjoy it to work less?” (R1)

The women, who participated in the research and decided to also work fulltime after having children, are very respectful to women who work part-time or who stopped working. They argue it is everyone’s own decision to do what makes them happy. However, what they would like to see different, is for the women who do decide to stay working on their career, to not have to unfairly justify themselves for that decision.

Also, it seems to be become increasingly more normal among women, in the Netherlands, not to start working fulltime after their study; “females start their career working 3 or 4 days a week instead of a fulltime position” (R8).

“I did not study myself, but I spoke to a girl who studied history and wants to work for three days a week and then I think that’s really a shame. I wish I could do such a good education, then I had really done everything to make it a success.” (R15)

In summary, it is possible that nature and nurture influence women’s beliefs and shape their perceptions of gender diversity. This translates into their ambitions, which often do not resonate into a career, since women are likely to take upon the care of their children.

4.2. Perceived barriers and facilitators in achieving gender diversity

Research question 2 concerns the perceived barriers and facilitators which women professionals experienced while working in the Dutch workforce.

Interestingly, the majority of the respondents experienced a few barriers in their career when it came to being a woman working within a Dutch organisation. From an organizational perspective, they did not have any additional needs aside from cheaper child day-care and/or flexibility in child day-care. The majority of the interviewed women did not prefer bringing their children to child day-care 5 days a

week. Therefore, flexible working hours are also perceived as sources of opportunity for women. For example, some women can start working earlier and therefore leave the office early in order to pick up their children from day care, or continue working from home.

4.2.1. Barriers

Initially the interviewees had argued limited barriers in their careers, however after probing questions there were several barriers revealed that women professionals face. The main barriers were socially, having to do with the stigma around pregnancy and children, social perception and prejudice.

4.2.1.1. Stigma around pregnancy and children

To start, the respondents perceived issues around their pregnancy and the stigma surrounding it. For example, a respondent hesitated to ask for a raise while being pregnant, since she was afraid her pregnancy would influence the outcome. In practice this turned out to not be the case for her; her colleagues responded positively to the news. Another pregnant respondent shared her story about informing her colleagues about her pregnancy to which one colleague replied; “Oh, okay, and are you going to stop working now? And by the way; congratulations.” Also, an interviewee had been hesitant to discuss her pregnancy with the organisation she worked in as she was afraid, working in a traditional mind-set organisation, that she would not be able to work less than five days a week. “I always had a little trouble with that stigma around pregnancy. As women, I think we keep that stigma also very much in place.” (R3) The respondent was referring to sickness during pregnancy and part-time work after having the child. These three examples are not entirely unfounded as this research indicates that during the application process women around the age of 30 are thought soon to give birth and will be out of the workforce for several months resulting in working part-time. Therefore, there are organisations that prefer hiring a man; “If they have two CV’s that are equally good then they prefer to go for the man” (R6).

Being a mother, women receive different types of questions than men do. For example, a conversation when a woman leaves work early. Colleague: “Oh, do you need to go home to cook?” or “Do you need to get your children from day-care?”. Woman; “No, I need to attend a meeting of school because I am in the board”. (R4)

Other questions women are asked relate to the number of days they will work after giving birth, assuming that women are the ones that will provide the care for the child and therefore reduce their working days. The main societal assumption is that women will take upon the care of the children and the partner will continue working fulltime as being the main provider. In recent years men have started to work part-time in order to have more time for leisure, a private business, or taking care of their children (R7), this is not perceived by all respondents. Mainly in traditional (male dominated) organisations, the case tends to be that within the same organisation women are able to work part-time whereas men are not. Furthermore, for men it can be perceived as 'loss of face' when working part-time and taking care of their children, relating to social perception as a constraint. Respondents who did experience men working less in order to take care of their children mainly worked in non-profit or governmental organisations.

4.2.1.2. Social perception as a constraint

Social perception influences the stage of gender diversity by several components. As it was not been relatively long ago that women were unable to work after marriages or childbirth (1960's), there remains to be a traditional division of roles in the mind-set of society. The majority of the respondents agreed that society 'expects' the women to work less when having children. The main reason is that, the majority of the respondents believed 'women are more caring by nature compared to men'. Therefore, it would be logical that women will have a larger part in household duties and the care of the children because they 'love' doing that and it's in their nature. However, few respondents believed that men could also take upon that part. These respondents experienced prejudice when it came to having children and the expectation people have; for example, the society expects them to focus less on their career and more on their children. The respondents who wanted to combine their career with family life experienced these prejudices as negative.

Social perception also relates to the elderly and/or traditional generation, which is still present in organisations and families. Hence, respondents working in logistics argued that within her organisation it was possible for women to work part-time because for women this is considered 'normal', however the men are not allowed to work part-time, despite the flexibility of their position and their preference to work less hours. In the elderly generation, it remains uncommon for men and women to

(equally) divide the home/work balance. In addition, they also seem to have more difficulties in flexibility when it comes to working from home. Colleague: “Oh, you work a day at home, so you are off?” Woman: “No, I'm working at home.” (R4) This can also be seen nowadays in professions where mainly men work;

“If you are in the technical sector or at a construction company then it is actually unthinkable that you say that you will work 4 days because you are going to take care of the children one day a week. I think that is because it is a huge men culture and that it is not yet ‘accepted’ there. In the financial sector there are relatively more women and it is therefore ‘accepted’.” (R6)

Respondents believed that generally men and women are likely to be sensitive to the opinion of their social environment. They argued women feel like society wants them to choose between their careers and their family and men feel compelled to be the breadwinner of the family. Therefore, the interviewees argue that, when experiencing social pressure, women might be inclined to choose working part-time. The women that were interviewed who work fulltime have respect for women who work part-time, however they complain it is strange and unfair that women who choose for their career have to justify themselves.

“Everyone tell a woman that she should work less, including her parents, her husband, her friends, everyone. If you say that you continue to work for 5 days you have to explain it. And if you say you are going to work for 3 days, nobody asks a question.” (R7)

Another barrier women face in their career is a ‘battle’ against prejudice. This relates to the aspects of sexual intimidation; “it has happened that one of my directors put his hands in my neck” (R11). This seems to occur in male dominated and traditional organisations, and derogatory statements women have to deal with; “I have seen women in the management team with us, and male colleagues have been talking condescending about her” (R11). This respondent argued that some organisations might not suit everyone since you need to be a person who can handle situations of sexual harassment/intimidation. It has also been indicated that when having an interview, women around their thirties are at a disadvantage because of their age. Interviewees of this age could feel the employer might make assumption about having children and working part-time. “Organizations have a standard assumption, or you

have to say that you have no children (yet) and you want to go fully for your career” (R6).

4.2.2. Facilitators

Main facilitators that were named by the respondents relate to women and men themselves, and not specifically the organisations they work for. For example, a facilitator would be *awareness* among men and women. Besides flexibility, workshops and awareness among their own employers, respondents argued that organisations cannot specifically enhance large contributions to these developments. Furthermore, respondents have noted that they believed it is a good development that there are more women in the workforce, top positions and in the media and that they are stimulated to take on these positions. However, they believed this should occur naturally instead of being forced upon by society.

4.2.2.1. The role of organisations in gender diversity

The initial responses of the interviewees were that organizations could not contribute to gender diversity with any facilitators. However after probing, more information was gathered about aspects in which organizations can be a part of gender diversity. This pertains to their flexibility, workshops and awareness among own employees/ employers. For employees with children it would be of interest to work flexible hours, to be able to work from home, and have a day-care within the organisation. When employees can bring their children to a day-care at work they will be more flexible and it will save them time. Additionally, when providing the man with a longer paternity leave, it will close the gap between men and women and the absence during pregnancy/childbirth. Furthermore, organisations could be more conscious in giving workshops in order to keep their employees happy with their jobs, but also in how to deal with the people you work with. For example, as a woman; how do you deal with working with men and vice versa. Workshops could also be given in the form of discovering the prejudice of people and how to change these prejudices into something positive. Finally, women would like to see more openness about salaries to see if there is a difference in salaries between co-workers.

4.2.2.2. The influence of the social environment

Besides organisations, the social environment of people is very important when it comes to a decision-making process or choosing a specific path. It is often mentioned that peers influence people. It is therefore important that people consciously choose the path they want to take and do whatever they believe makes them happy, instead of allowing themselves to be guided by the opinion of others. When your social environment, family/friends/partner, tells you to start working part-time it sometimes takes confidence to stand your ground. Therefore, when your social environment is open to your wishes and when your partner is open for dialogue about the division of work/life balance it brings opportunities. However, these situations sometimes have to be enforced by those who do not want to play the same tune.

4.2.2.3. Women inspiring women

According to the in-depth interviews, women agreed on the fact that when you see something, the rest will follow. As a Dutch saying: “see buying, does buying” (R11). Therefore, women find it important that other women are visible in the workforce, politics, and in the media in order to inspire others. For example, when an organisation has female managers and directors, women are more likely to perceive the organisation as ‘female friendly’ and they see that these types of roles might also be possible for themselves. At first glance, the interviewees were not comfortable to speak about their own achievements in public. They perceived it as being arrogant and bragging about their work and they saw themselves as more modest. “Very awkward; I am just a person of flesh and blood. And there is nothing more special about me than about you. So I think that's very special but I get a bit uncomfortable when I feel that way.” (R6) They believed men are more likely to speak about these aspects than women are. However, after a few more questions and arguments explaining that it could inspire other women and contribute to their ambition; they positively changed their views. “Yes, I would really like to motivate people, absolutely” (R6).

Therefore, it is remarkable to see that women at first sight are not willing to set themselves in the spotlight. This could be perceived as a barrier, which could be transformed into a facilitator; being open minded about inspiring other women. Furthermore, according to the respondents, women should more often seek their limit

and show themselves in public, despite the fact that it might feel uncomfortable at first.

4.2.2.4. The key to success

When asking the respondents how they have made it into successful careers they explained that they had made their success themselves, for example, by regularly discussing the salary negotiations, showing perseverance, and taking on tasks in which you continue to develop and enhance your resume. Also, the interviewees consciously make decisions between their work/life balance, since they find both aspects important. They are aware of the fact that certain positions cannot be performed when working 3 days a week. Additionally, these women have decided to go for the thing they aspire and love to do and have found their inner strength to realize this. Several respondents refer their success to their nurture and their characters. But most of all, these few interviewees choose to do what they love most and they have a partner who supports them. Also, they told that one needs to act self confident for more success potential. Expressing that you have the ambition to perform certain tasks should be possible within the private sphere and at work to your manager.

“For me it was really about what makes it that I like my work? And on which aspects would I like to develop further and as soon as I found out that I wanted to develop in the leading way, I was very transparent to my employer and fortunately they saw that as potential and that opportunity was also offered. So I did not feel obstructed except in my personal interests.” (R5)

In addition, some women from the survey do work 4 days (part-time) and this offers them the opportunity to find the right balance between work and private life, while still continue working on their careers.

4.3. The role of the media in gender diversity

Research question 3 relates to the shaped perception of gender diversity in the workforce by the media. Remarkably, after conducting 17 interviews, the conclusion must be drawn that (most) respondents did not have a clear understanding of how gender diversity is represented in the media. This is because they did not always read, listened, or saw the media consciously, or paid attention to gender diversity.

However, the women did notice that gender diversity developed positively compared to several years ago by seeing more women taken stage in the media.

4.3.1. Role models and peers as sources of inspiration

The majority of the respondents did not have a role model (in the media) that they can identify with. A few interviewees named someone from their family, such as their mother, who they look up to. A number of respondents argued that the media does not provide realistic role models that other women can identify themselves with, such as 'regular' women with average jobs and families they can relate to, or even the less fortunate women:

“You see an (unknown) woman on television who has a top job at a law firm, is 35 years old and has three children. Is this realistic? We all know such top lawyers at the top desk earn a lot of money, so you can guess that the money provides hiring a nanny, cleaner, and gardener. That is not realistic. People who are living in a student room and were able to buy a house with a lot of difficulty and then become pregnant, that is realistic. These women, who look around themselves, then see their own peers stop working too.” (R7)

This is of importance, since the respondents believed that peers have a very important influence on the decision of a woman. Therefore, respondents suggested showing more women in the media who are in a similar situation and who show their way of balancing home, work, children and could be telling others; I managed to do it this way and it is also possible for you. Inspiring women in a way that normally their peer do by being another peer. On the contrary, several respondents argued that it was inspiring for them to sometimes read or see something about the accomplishments of a person. This can be a woman in a higher position that shows that it can be done, but also a young woman who managed to set-up and start her own successful organisation. “I find it inspiring when women achieve great things, whether young girls, or older ladies, or 50 years ago” (R12). Thus, both peer like women and successful women can inspire others by their presence in the media.

4.3.2. Responsibility of gender diversity

Regarding the question who is responsible for the visibility of gender diversity in organisations, most respondents noted that it is the main responsibility of the individuals themselves and a few respondents mentioned that the politics could play

an increasing role to integrate gender diversity. For example, one politician who currently takes place in the Dutch House of Representatives works four days a week since he has one ‘daddy-day’ to be with his children. Also, the Dutch news broadcaster (NOS) tries to include diversity in the items they produce, by seeking diversity within their team and when approaching respondents (R7). The head of digital (R7) argues that this is possible by approaching people who do not look like yourself, or who exist out of your own (social) barriers. She furthermore argues that the news does not have a long-term perspective; it focuses on the news of that day and then moves on towards the following day. Therefore, when organisations provide content about diversity the broadcaster can include in their news.

Around the definitions of (gender) diversity and feminism, some respondents argue that it has grown to be perceived as negative for which a new term has increasingly been used; inclusiveness. Respondents argued that the media mainly show die-hard feminists who claim women do not need men in their lives and this is not seen as a positive development. However, this can be tied to traditional male and female roles to which it is also strived for letting go of the stereotype. Ideally a balance between the two would occur. The same can be vouched for these stereotype feminists. This will be difficult to change, however, as respondents argued that something ‘special’ will receive more media attention than something ‘ordinary’.

4.3.3. The mind-set of society

In the interviews, respondents have stated that it is the mind-set of (the Dutch) society that needs to be changed. To change the traditional mind-set of society, it is important to challenge the mind-set of both men (the ones hiring women), and women. The respondents argued that the government could initiate campaigns, which would start a movement. This also occurred via a campaign initiated by the government about under aged drinking: ‘NIX18’. “As of 1 January 2014, no alcohol or tobacco can be sold to young people under the age of 18” (NIX, 2017). The campaign is initiated to change the mind-set to not start drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco until at least 18 years old instead of 16 years old. Respondents argued that a similar campaign could be initiated for gender diversity (in the workforce). Another option would be a TV-series, where women are portrayed in their situation. For example, women who have always been financially dependent on their (male) partner and were divorced which resulted in financial problems. What is their situation and

how do they cope with their situation? Also, it can be outlined what it means or what it has meant for women and their careers, who started working part-time or stopped working when starting a family. These initiatives were mentioned by respondents while they believe it is also important for women to be educated in the consequences the decisions might have, since they have the idea that women do not always oversee their choices and their consequences. But also, as a woman, you have to stand firm if you want to take another direction than your (social) environment has determined for you.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Conceptual implications

Previous research argues gender that diversity is dependent on the government, organisations or media. This study shows that all aspects are intertwined, together with the societal mind-set. Topics need to be addressed from different sides, it is not purely a women's issue or an organisational issue, which is what makes the case of gender diversity very challenging. However this study intended on mainly focussing on the business aspect of gender diversity, the main aspect has occurred to be socially.

From this study three main findings can be argued. Firstly, the mind-set of the Dutch society; though it is becoming slightly more normal for men and women to take an equal amount of care and responsibilities, the division remains quite traditional where the male is the main provider and the female is the care-taker of the family. Surprisingly, most interviewees argued that women are naturally and biologically more willing to take up the care of their children and household, pointing to the evolution 3.000 years ago where women were the care givers and men were the hunters. Few respondents did not agree with these statements and believed men and women are equally capable of taking care of the children and the financial income. Looking at these outcomes and translating this to the current workforce it might be noted that it is representative, since there is a small number of a woman working fulltime and employed in management and top positions.

Secondly, a noteworthy finding is that 16 out of 17 respondents did not believe that organizations are holding them back in relation to their career. Therefore, minimal facilitators by organisations have been proposed. Additionally, the interviewees did not believe that the gender diversity would grow towards a division of 50 percent men and 50 percent women in management and/or top functions. Therefore, it can be noted that there is a gap between the perceived urgency for gender diversity by organisations, the government, and others, and how women professionals actually view the case of gender diversity. A noteworthy insight, since this relates to the total number of respondents, is that the respondents believed that gender diversity is of importance since it provides a balance within a team, which leads to better solutions and better outcomes. This is a remarkable insight given the number of different reasons for gender diversity provided in the theoretical

framework, and all respondents perceived 'balance' for importance of gender diversity.

Thirdly, taking into account the aspect of media, the majority of the respondents did not have a role model and does not consciously engage with the media when it comes to gender diversity in organisations. However, the majority of the respondents did believe that an increase in women in similar and/or higher positions could influence the mind-set of society. This might change the views of women who do not have peers that challenge them. However, it is noted by the respondents that media are likely to present extreme and unusual situations and therefore women are hesitant about the fact that media will ever shape a representative image of gender diversity. Additionally, the women professionals who participated to this study believed that the aspect of gender diversity is often negatively highlighted in the media. They believed it would be more helpful and motivating when the positive aspects would be emphasized. This could contribute to a more positive framework for the concept of gender diversity; since part of the respondents experienced that the topic is often being perceived as annoying and uninteresting. This is a contradicting effect of what believers of gender diversity hope to accomplish.

There is a strong relation between the societal mind-set and its traditional gender roles, and the perceived urgency of gender diversity in the Dutch workforce. Looking at previous research and talking to people in the field, it can be reasoned that the views on gender diversity do not coincide with each other. The perceived urgency of gender diversity within the Dutch workforce does not align with most of the actual women professionals. The initiatives made, in order to have more women in top management positions, are at odds with the fact that the majority of the interviewees have the ambition to take care of their children and place their career lower on their list of priorities. The interviewees, whose career is high on the list of priorities, do not feel restrained in making a career within the organization they work for. They believed that the only thing that stops women making a career is themselves, and organisations and the media only play a minor role. This could support the delicate statement where women are their own worst enemy. This insight can be held by the argument interviewees gave for gender diversity; a balance within the teams which results in better outcomes. Reason such as equal abilities or chances, or other arguments, has rarely been discussed. By all means, for further research it needs to be

taken into account that the understanding and deep beliefs of the Dutch society, in which nature and nurture play an important role, cannot easily be changed.

5.2. Pragmatic implications

As noted earlier, it can be reasoned that the perceived urgency of gender diversity within Dutch workforce did not align with most of the interviewees. The initiatives made by the government and organisations gaining more women in top management positions is at odds with the fact that the majority of the interviewees align their ambition taking care of their children, their career is not high on their list of priorities. The interviewees whose careers are high on their list of priorities did not feel restrained in making a career within the organization in which they work. They believed that the only thing that stops women from making a career is she herself in which organisations and media only have a minor role to play. Therefore, this means that in the future we can focus on reasoning the urgency of gender diversity. Teaching young people to think outside of the traditional gender roles and start thinking about their role and professional that fits their personality can contribute to this. Furthermore, society can be informed about the benefits of choosing a role and professional that fits their personality best. Also, people can be informed about the opportunities and consequences their decisions might have relating their career. These initiatives may have a positive contribution to the current initiatives relating gender diversity.

5.3. Limitations & Strengths

The research includes in-depth interviews with 17 women professionals employed in the Dutch workforce. Due to the small and specific scope of women who were interviewed it is not possible to generalise the insights for women professionals in the Dutch workforce. However, the research does give insights in how a group of women professionals mainly tends to have a homogeneous view on gender diversity in the Dutch workforce. To be able to make generalizing statements more women should be interviewed via in-depth interviews. Besides that, the sample size of the female professionals should be more diverse in terms of low-placed and high-placed women. Furthermore, before using the results of this study, it should be considered that the results came from females working in the Netherlands. This research did not include men or people from different nationalities. Also, it must be considered that the

theoretical framework includes studies from which are not conducted in the Netherlands, therefore the (work) culture may slightly deviate. Finally, it should be considered that the interviewer, despite not being aware of this, could have shown her own vision in the interviews questions, which might have influenced the interviewees.

This study has highlighted the views and experiences of female professionals in Dutch organizations. Compared to the research included in the theoretical framework, these interviews highlighted the views and understandings of women relating gender diversity. This has resulted in new insights, which can be used for the development of gender diversity. Furthermore, this research points out specific insights that are stimulating for further research and discussion. In that respect, the study contributes to the current research of gender diversity in organisations, especially in the Netherlands.

5.4. Directions for further research

Based on the results, it would be interesting to expand the research by conducting a survey among women professionals employed in Dutch organisations. Questioning women at a large scale in order to see if the insights align would make it possible interpreting the results more generally. For example, women could be questioned about the insights this study provided; what they believe is the main reason for gender diversity, if they believe taking care of their children a biological trait of the women, etc.

Furthermore, several statements were made by the respondents, which are fascinating to ask men and how they view these statements. For example, the respondents argued that the main reason for diversity is the balance between men and women within a team, and the solutions and outcomes that result from it. It would be interesting to study whether men share this view or if they look at this from a different point of view. Furthermore, a respondent noted that;

“A man somewhere high in the top, someone who actually has to hire/ include women in his team, has a wife at home who works two or three days a week and takes care of their children. Therefore, this man has a certain image of women comparable to his own wife. The biggest chance to break through this is if that man gets a daughter, about 20 years old, who is studying and is ambitious. Then the man thinks; “oh s ***, my daughter must actually have carrier”. Sometimes there are suddenly men present in a diversity event; they

are telling on the stage that their organization has to become diverse, and usually they tell the story about their daughter.” (R7)

However, is this a direct solution or has this situation occurred a few times and has it been stretched too much? Therefore, research could highlight the views and experiences of men and how perceive gender diversity. Additionally, it would be interesting to examine the vision of males and females within the same organisation, working within the same department/function, in order to investigate whether there is a difference in their vision relating to the opportunities within their department. Lastly, in future research, men and women (less and more ambitious) could be interviewed in order to incorporate their vision into the research.

New questions arise as a result of this study as there is a strong link between the Dutch workforce and the Dutch culture (traditional roles of men and women).

- To which extent are women in the Dutch workforce willing to pursue their career performing on management and top management level in combination with motherhood?
- To what extent remains the traditional working climate and division of gender roles present in the Dutch society?
- To what extent can nature and nurture be distinguished from each other relating to gender roles in work and private life?

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Appendix

Appendix A – Interview Guide Dutch version

Introductie

Allereerst bedankt voor het nemen van de tijd voor dit interview. Ik zal je eerst uitleggen waarom ik aan dit onderzoek begon: ik ben aan dit onderzoek begonnen om inzicht te krijgen in hoe vrouwelijke professionals het geval van genderdiversiteit ervaren, in het personeel en in de media. Ook hoe ze tegen het citaat staan; "Je kunt niet zijn wat je niet kunt zien". In organisaties blijven vrouwen ondervertegenwoordigd in management en topfuncties. Zelfs in de media zijn vrouwen ondervertegenwoordigd (Atria, 2016). Vertegenwoordigers van de media zeggen meestal: "We zijn een weerspiegeling van de realiteit, er zijn meer topfunctionarissen dan topvrouwen." Geslachtsspecialist: "Deze realiteit is mede geconstrueerd door de media. Gender diversiteit is een zwaar besproken onderwerp door journalisten, politici en wetenschappers. Kwesties worden vaak benadrukt als het gebrek aan diversiteit in de beroepsbevolking, die verantwoordelijk is voor deze kwestie en hoe we het kunnen verbeteren, daarom zou ik graag het perspectief van vrouwen willen horen, ik geloof dat de opvattingen van vrouwelijke professionals een grotere waarde hebben, omdat vrouwelijke professionals degenen zijn die we willen vergroten in het personeelsbestand. ervaring, die kan verschillen van het zakelijke en overheidsperspectief, omdat de theorie kan verschillen van de praktijk.

Interview onderwerpen

1. Inleiding

- Waarom denk je dat we nog steeds praten over genderdiversiteit?
- Wat zijn de grote veranderingen die je in Nederland hebt gezien als je denkt aan je carrière (toen en nu)?
 - Gelieve uit te leggen ..
 - Organisatie ter ondersteuning van vrouwen
 - Familie ondersteuning
 - Vrouwen worden ambitieuzer
- Wat is uw functie binnen het bedrijf?

- Wat is uw gezinspositie?
- Heeft uw familie steun gehad voor uw carrière?
- Carrière / ambitie:
 - Welke acties heb je ondernomen om de carrière te verbeteren?
 - Waar wil je naartoe in je carrière / wat is je ambitie?

2. Genderdiversiteit op de werkplek

- In Nederland hebben we veel aandacht besteed aan genderdiversiteit in organisaties, en steeds meer bedrijven neigen ernaar dit probleem aan te pakken, hoe vindt u dat?
- Veel debat in Nederland over de keuze om in deeltijd te werken, wordt als empowerment gezien. Wat betekent dit voor vrouwen met ambities?
- In de jaren zestig was het gebruikelijk dat vrouwen hun baan na het huwelijk neerlegden om voor hun gezin en het huishouden te zorgen. Tegenwoordig zien we een verschuiving en mannen en vrouwen hebben gelijke kansen om naar school te gaan en dezelfde opleiding te genieten. In hoeverre vindt u dat vrouwen vrij zijn in hun beslissing om te kiezen voor een (fulltime) 'carrière'? (Betreffende de kwestie van vrouwen die hun eigen beslissing nemen, rekening houdend met het feit dat er sociale druk is enz. Die de 'vrije wil' van vrouwen onderdrukt.)
 - Houd je rekening met de 'vrije wil' van vrouwen, sociale druk, opleidingsmogelijkheden, enz.?
 - Stelt uw organisatie zich op ten aanzien van genderdiversiteit?
 - Welke maatregelen hebben zij genomen om genderdiversiteit te bevorderen?
 - Wat zijn organisatorische facilitators om genderdiversiteit binnen uw organisatie te bevorderen?
 - Heb je facilitators ervaren voor genderdiversiteit in je carrière?
 - Wat zijn uitdagingen voor jou in je carrière?
 - ongelijke verdeling in het huis
 - verschillende idealen en mogelijkheden, zoals mentor- en sponsorschappen
 - flexibele werkuren

- training in gendervooroordelen
- vrouwenquota
- vacatureteksten
- Wat heeft u geholpen bij en gefixeerd in uw groei wanneer u nadenkt over uw eigen carrière?
 - Kun je voorbeelden delen?
 - Wat zou volgens jou de grootste uitdagingen zijn waarmee je in je carrière bent geconfronteerd (of hebt moeten onderhandelen)?
 - Kun je voorbeelden delen?
- Wat kan bijdragen aan genderdiversiteit in je eigen carrière?
 - Bewust acties om de loopbaan te verbeteren
- Lever jij een bijdrage aan de genderdiversiteit binnen jouw organisatie?
 - Vouching voor andere vrouwen
- Welke verbeteringen zijn nodig binnen organisaties?
- Welke verbeteringen zijn onnodig doorgevoerd?
- Rolmodel
 - Heb je een rolmodel?
 - Heb je een rolmodel in de media?
 - Hoe heeft dit uw loopbaan / ambitie beïnvloed?
- Er zijn mensen die zich soms afvragen wat er zo belangrijk is aan genderdiversiteit op de werkplek. Wat zou je de belangrijkste reden voor genderdiversiteit noemen?

3. Rol van media met betrekking tot genderrepresentatie

- Hoe zie je de vertegenwoordiging van mannen en vrouwen in de media?
- Wat is volgens u het belang van gendervertegenwoordiging in de media?
- Wie is er verantwoordelijk voor, een eventuele, onjuiste voorstellingen van gender in de media?
- In de media worden vrouwen vaak in stereotiepe rollen afgebeeld, zijn ze ondervertegenwoordigd en in de media wordt geweld tegen vrouwen genormaliseerd. Welke invloed denkt u dat dit heeft op genderdiversiteit in organisaties?
- Wie denk je dat zijn rolmodellen in de media?

- Wat is volgens u het belang van het gebruik van rolmodellen in de media?
- Er is een citaat te zeggen; "Je kunt niet zijn wat je niet kunt zien". Wat is jouw mening hierover?

Afronding

- Zijn er nog andere vragen of opmerkingen die u zou willen stellen?
- Zou je een of twee andere kandidaten aanbevelen voor mijn studie?

Heel erg bedankt voor het meedoen. Uw deelname heeft een grote bijdrage geleverd aan mijn studie.

Appendix B – Interview Guide English version

Introduction

First of all, thank you for taking the time for this interview. I will first explain you why I started this research: I have started this research to gain an understanding of how women professionals perceive the case of gender diversity, in the workforce and in the media. Also, how they stand against the quote; “you can’t be what you can’t see”. In organisations, women remain to be underrepresented in management and top functions. Even in the media, women are underrepresented (Atria, 2017). Representatives of the media usually say: "We are a reflection of reality, there are more top executives than top women." Gender expert’s state: "This reality is co-constructed by the media. Gender diversity is a heavily discussed topic by journalists, politicians, and scholars. Often issues are highlighted as the lack of diversity in the workforce, who is responsible for this issue and how we can improve it. Therefore, I would like to hear the perspective of women. I believe the views of women professionals have an increased value since women professionals are the ones we aim for to increase in the workforce. They might also share their personal experience, which might differentiate from the corporate and government perspective, since theory can differ from practice.

Interview topics

1. Introduction

- Why do you think we are still talking about gender diversity?
- Do you think gender diversity is important? If so, why do you think it is important?
- When you think about your career (then and now), what are the big changes you have seen in the Netherlands?
 - Please explain..
 - Organization supporting women
 - Family support
 - Women getting more ambitious
- What is your position within the company?
 - What is your family position?

- Has your family been supportive about your career?
- Career/ ambition:
 - What actions have you taken to improve career?
 - Where do you want to go within your career/ what is your ambition?

2. Gender diversity at the workplace

- In the Netherlands we have focussed much attention to gender diversity in organisation, and more and more companies tend to address this problem, how do you feel about that?
- A lot of debate in Netherlands about the choice to work part-time is seen as empowering. How does this mean for women who have ambitions?
- In the sixties it was common for women to resign their job after marriage to take care of their family and the household. Nowadays we see a shift and men and women have equal opportunities to go to school and enjoy the same education. To what extent do you feel that women are free in their decision to choose for a (fulltime) ‘career’? (Regarding the issue of women who make their own decision, taking into account that there is social pressure etc. suppressing the ‘free will’ of women.)
 - Do you believe in the ‘free will’ of women, taken social pressure, education possibilities, etc. into account?
- Facilitators
 - Does your organization take a stand on gender diversity?
 - What measures have they taken in order to promote gender diversity?
 - What are organizational facilitators to promote gender diversity within your organization?
 - Have you experienced facilitators for gender diversity within your career?
- What are challenges for you in your career?
 - unequal division in the home
 - different ideals and enablers such as mentor-and sponsorships
 - flexible working hours
 - training in gender bias

- women's quota
- vacancy texts
- When reflecting on your own career journey, what has helped and hindered you in your growth?
 - Can you share examples?
 - What would you say are the biggest challenges that you have confronted (or had to negotiate) in your career?
 - Can you share examples?
- What could contribute to gender diversity within your own career?
 - Consciously actions for improving career
- Do you contribute to gender diversity within your organization?
 - Vouching for other women
- What improvements are needed within organizations?
- Which improvements that have been taken are unnecessarily?
- Role model
 - Do you have a role model?
 - Do you have a role model in the media?
 - How has this influenced your career/ambition?
- There are people out there that sometimes wonder what is so important about gender diversity in the workplace. What would you name to be the main reason for gender diversity?

3. Role of media regarding gender representation

- How do you see the representation of women in the media?
- What do you think is the importance of gender representation in the media?
- Who is responsible for misrepresentation of gender in the media?
- In the media women are often portrayed in stereotypical roles, they are underrepresented and in the media violence against women is normalised. What influence do you think this has on gender diversity in organisations?
- Who do you think are role models in media?
- What do you think is the importance of having role models in the media?
- There is a quote saying; “you can't be what you can't see”. What is your opinion about that?

Wind-up

- Are there any other questions or comments that you would like to raise?
- Would you recommend one or two other candidates for my study?

Thank you very much for participating. Your participation has been a great contribution to my study.