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A qualitative investigation into experiences of sexism among women in Dutch politics and influences on career-related outcomes

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BSc. Global Responsibility and Leadership

CFB063A10: Capstone Project

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10th of June 2022

Abstract

Despite tremendous progress, gender inequalities remain in politics in the 21st century. Women are often underrepresented as voters and decision-makers. This is also the case in the Netherlands, even though it has been one of the first countries to implement women's suffrage. Women are not equally represented due to barriers they face in the workplace that hinder their work advancement. The underlying mechanism of these barriers is often sexism as a system-justifying belief toward female politicians. The main barriers identified in the literature have been that 1) politics is a place for men, 2) women need to perform their job besides their (part-time) job as a caretaker for children and the household, 3) and the negative media portrayal of women. However, existing studies have not considered how various forms of sexism impact female politicians. This research addresses this gap by investigating *to what extent women in politics experience subtle or overt forms of sexism and how this influences their career-related outcomes*. Qualitative research with eight semi-structured interviews was conducted. Dutch female politicians were interviewed on disadvantages they experienced in politics based on their gender, the impacts on their career development, and the intentionality of sexist behaviour. The results have shown that women in politics are significantly affected by subtle forms of sexism concerning work promotion and evaluation. Hostile forms of sexism were rather present on social media channels and within stereotypical comments. The research has substantial implications for improving female politicians' support in the Netherlands, thereby reducing the impacts of sexism. This study contributes to current knowledge on sexism and gender equality within politics.

Keywords: ambivalent sexism theory, sexism, gender stereotype, modern sexism, gender and politics, women

Table of contents

Abstract	2
List of Figures	4
Acknowledgements	5
A qualitative investigation into experiences of sexism among women in Dutch politics and influences on career-related outcomes	6
Literature Review	7
Gender inequality in politics	7
What is sexism and what are its different forms?	8
Manifestation of sexism in political institutions	10
Sexism against female politicians in the media	12
The Present study	14
Methods	15
Study design	15
Participants	15
Data Collection	17
Procedure	17
Interview Scheme	18
Analysis	19
Results	20
Political environment	24
Sexism and gender bias in politics	25
Characteristics of sexism and gender bias	29
Consequences of gender biases	30
Other	32
Discussion	32
Policy implications	37
Strength, Limitations and Future Research	38
Conclusion	40
References	41
Appendices	48
Appendix A	48
Appendix B	50
Appendix C	51

List of Figures

Table 1: Participant demographics: Including age range, party affiliation, cultural background, party level, and range of years working in politics	16
Figure 2: Final code network	20
Table 3: Overview of final coding scheme: Consisting of the main code, the sub-codes, a brief definition of the code and an exemplary quote.	22

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank the entire staff of the University College Fryslan and all of my teachers throughout the last three years, as they have made me who I am and taught me all of the academic skills that enabled me to write this bachelor thesis. Furthermore, I would like to thank my supervisor Pelin Gül for her advice, patience and time. I could not have done this without you. Lastly, I would like to thank my parents and sister for their support throughout these three years and their belief in me and my abilities.

A qualitative investigation into experiences of sexism among women in Dutch politics and influences on career-related outcomes

In the Netherlands, more CEOs are currently named “Peter” than female CEOs. Even though the Netherlands has been an example of gender equality globally, no Dutch company has closed their gender pay gap. The overall number of women in leadership positions is deficient. Moreover, the gender pay gap is higher than the European average and lies at 14.7 % (OECD, 2018; Equileap, 2021). This phenomenon stretches further in the political context. Even after 100 years of women's suffrage, women are still not equally represented in politics. A sweeping sign: The Netherlands has never had a female prime minister. The Netherlands is currently ranked 42 in the world regarding the percentage of women in national parliaments, below Guyana and Zimbabwe. Men are overrepresented in almost all positions of power in politics and public administration. Yet after the last municipal elections, the share of female counsellors exceeded thirty per cent for the first time, and the new Rutte III cabinet had the highest proportion of women in the Dutch cabinet ever. However, to achieve full gender equality in Dutch politics, women's political barriers must be identified and more female-friendly policies implemented (Muegge et al., 2019).

One of the most commonly argued barriers is gender biases and sexism that female politicians face. Examples are gender stereotype-based evaluations, gender-focused portrayal in the media, psychological and physical harassment, disadvantage in the competition for higher ranking positions, and unequal work division (Barnes et al., 2018; Bolzendahl & Coffe, 2020; Fraser et al., 2015; Fulton, 2012; Bauer, 2015). However, to our knowledge, no existing research has investigated whether female politicians in the Netherlands encounter sexism and other gender-based disadvantages and, if they do, whether this negatively affects their career-related outcomes in politics. Career-related outcomes in this research broadly include a woman's work evaluation, task

allocation, promotion, motivation, satisfaction, and well-being within the job. Therefore, this research aims to investigate *to what extent women in politics experience subtle or overt forms of sexism and how this influences their career-related outcomes*. Given the gender-based inequalities based on sexism, the current study provides critical insights into how the barriers for women in politics are maintained by sexism and how it affects a women's career. Understanding whether the roots of gender equality in politics are due to sexism is fundamental to create a well-functioning democracy and a gender-equal society.

Literature Review

Gender inequality in politics

Despite the tremendous progress, gender inequalities still prevail in politics in the 21st century. From the local to the global level, women's participation in politics is restricted, and women are underrepresented as voters, decision-makers, and in other leading political positions (Lombardo & Meier, 2009). Due to this inequality, women in politics should be at the forefront of gender-related transformation, calling into question traditional gender norms by challenging the power structure of patriarchy. They are, therefore, a primary target of the forces resisting change (Falk, 2008).

However, the Netherlands has been a good example in the past regarding a high representation of women in politics. It was one of the first countries where women obtained the right to vote in 1919. By the 1990s, women composed one-third of the members of Parliament. At that point in time, this was an exceptional amount among European Union (EU) member states

(Lombardo & Meier, 2009). However, women are still not equally represented - even in Dutch politics - due to barriers they face in the workplace that hinders their career advancement.

The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance distinguishes three gender-specific barriers that female politicians face: 1) That politics is a place for men and that there is a lack of resources to change that, 2) women often need to perform their job besides their (part-time) job as a caretaker for children and the household, 3) women's portrayal in the media and its effect on women's ambition (Ballington et al., 2005).

The underlying mechanism of these barriers is often sexism as a system-justifying belief toward female politicians. Especially subtle forms of sexism prevail in modern politics and can lead to an unequal representation of men and women in politics (King et al., 2012).

What is sexism and what are its different forms?

The Ambivalent Sexism Theory by Glick and Fiske (1996) is the most widely used conceptualisation of sexism in social psychology. This theory suggests that sexism stems from simultaneously holding benevolent and hostile sexist beliefs. These two forms are differentiated to show sexism's multidimensional nature and explain men's ambivalence towards women (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

Hostile sexism (HS) is consistent with the conventional conception of sexism, such as chauvinism and prejudice toward women. HS seeks to justify male power, traditional gender roles, and men's exploitation of women as sexual objects through derogatory characterisations of women. Hostile sexists endorse statements such as "Women are generally not as smart as men" (Glick & Fiske, 1999; Barretto & Ellemers, 2005). In contrast, benevolent sexism (BS) is positive and courteous in tone. However, it reinforces traditional stereotypes and masculine dominance with often damaging consequences. It is often not perceived as sexism by the recipient. In contrast to HS,

BS is often socially accepted, and women are just as likely to hold benevolent sexist attitudes as men (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Examples of BS are comments concerning a woman's cute looks, fragility, and the need to be protected by men. These comments are often well-intended but can undermine a woman's professional perception (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Swim et al., 1995).

Another conceptualisation of sexism by Swim et al. (1997) has been modern sexism (MS). MS is also a subtle form of sexism like BS. However, unlike BS, modern sexists' "may not hide their prejudice; instead, they do not perceive that certain beliefs or behaviours are indicative of prejudice" (Swim & Cohen, 1997, p.105). Modern sexists often deny that sexism exists and believe that others are too sensitive to sexism (Swim & Cohen, 1997). Thus, instead of indicating that a woman is not intelligent enough for the job, an employee can justify the lack of females in a company by the lack of fitting female candidates. When comparing it to HS, MS displays prejudice against women more subtly.

Furthermore, the different forms of sexism and sexist behaviour are not perceived equally in women's eyes. Potentially sexist behaviour can be identified differently concerning the person exhibiting that behaviour, their intent and perceived harm (Reimer et al., 2014; Swim et al., 2003). The study of Reimer and colleagues (2014) has shown that the content of the comment and the personal relationship with the woman affects a woman's perception of sexism. Comments made by boyfriends, for example, were rated as less sexist than those made by strangers or bosses. HS was generally perceived as more sexist than BS. Primarily, women who perceived that sexist behaviour was intended to harm them rated it as more sexist. Nonetheless, when individuals are uncertain about the intent of a perpetrator, they are less likely to classify it as sexist, which suggests that uncertainty about the actor's intent is one reason why people differentiate within their judgment of

sexism (Riemer et al., 2014; Swim et al., 2003). Therefore, in terms of severity, BS and MS might be classified as less sexist than HS.

Manifestation of sexism in political institutions

The primary barrier alludes to the marginalisation of women that is, in many cases, still integrated into traditional institutions inside the political domain. These “gendered institutions” are constructed to favour the men who created them. When women enter this “masculine territory”, they face an institution that was made to exclude them (Lovenduski, 2014).

For example, when women challenge the stance of male politicians, they are often met with HS, as any win by women is seen as one at the expense of a man (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Alexander, 2012). Women as competitors are seen as untrustworthy, manipulative and power-seeking (Glick, 2019; Glick & Fiske, 1996). Concrete resistance strategies are used to maintain the male norm within political institutions, such as avoiding women's promotion within politics (Alexander, 2012). In addition, research shows that when it comes to work evaluations and feedback, women are often held to different standards than their male counterparts. Because they reject traditional stoical norms by adopting non-traditional occupations in society, such as politicians, women are held to a higher standard, especially by hostile sexists. This effect exacerbates when women attain higher organisational or political positions (Eagly & Carlie, 2007; Masser & Abrams, 2004).

Furthermore, women are more likely than men to receive consistent negative feedback when engaging in political discussion (Mendelberg et al., 2014). They must work harder in developing political quality to achieve the same electoral results as men (Fulton, 2012). Thus, women's success is often attributed to luck or significant extra effort, while man's success is attributed to their capability. Conversely, women's failure is attributed to a lack of ability, while for men, it is

attributed to bad luck (Shastry et al., 2020). However, when a woman is directly exposed to HS, it elicits anger and increases the motivation to perform (Dardenne et al., 2007).

Another study which dismantled that women are held to a different moral standard than men was conducted by Barnes et al. (2017). They showed with the example of the presidential campaign in the US in 2016 that women involved in any sort of scandal elicit a more negative reaction than male politicians, building on the research of ambivalent sexism. Women are not intended to be in positions of power, according to hostile sexists, and may exploit their sexual power to climb the political ladder, casting doubt on their skills. On the other hand, BS would value women more, but they would be condemned if they did not correspond to a woman's stereotypical characteristics of being pure and morally superior. This different moral standard might explain inequalities in politics (Barnes et al., 2017; Barnes et al., 2018).

Furthermore, benevolent sexist ideas such as women should be protected and supported may provide the perception that women can be given less demanding tasks, limiting women's capacity to attain higher ranking positions. Thereby, women may exhibit that they are incapable of high performance due to this protective form of paternalism. This could result in underperformance and the manifestation of stereotypes. As a result, women may not acquire the essential skills and knowledge to be as well prepared for higher-ranking professions as their male colleagues. Moreover, self-doubt or preoccupation, including anxiety and reduced self-esteem, can also result from this form of BS (King et al., 2012). Parties may do it unintentionally, but they are setting women up to fail and perpetuating a cycle of gender inequality (Ohlott et al., 1994). Despite the decline of old-fashioned sexist attitudes, women continue to face these subtle forms of sexism, which accumulate over time and lead to an asymmetrical representation of men and women (Martell et al., 1996).

Another way that sexism presents itself in politics is by creating yet another obstacle for female politicians who are mothers. Women are often still responsible for acting as their children's primary caretakers, which can impair their ability to work as full-time politicians. In the Netherlands, women spend almost four hours a day on unpaid housework while men spend two. As the Netherlands lags behind in encouraging fathers to take more parental leave, women are expected to take care of the children. Extending good-quality child care is necessary to help mothers out and close the gender gap in labour force participation (OECD, 2018).

A study by Verniers and Vala (2017) has shown the relationship between sexism and the opposition to a mother's career. The belief that women are endowed with parenting abilities, and that employed mothers neglect their duty of caring for their children seeks to justify the unequal representation of men and women in the workplace. Furthermore, it has been noted that the unpaid work women take on hinders female career progression through less training, fewer opportunities for advancement and occupational segregation. Additionally and paradoxically, they have found that the more egalitarian a society is, the fewer people support gender equality at home, and the higher the amount of benevolent sexism is (Verniers & Vala, 2017). Although the study did not include the Netherlands, this finding may apply to the Netherlands and the experiences of mothers working in politics.

Sexism against female politicians in the media

The media plays an integral role in framing and shaping how candidates are perceived by the public and can even determine the quantity of representation according to a candidate (Falk, 2008). Citizens, in turn, rely almost exclusively on the media for information on political candidates (Kahn, 1994). Accordingly, systemic gender bias in the media representation of politicians can

shape the outcome of elections and reinforce the historical under-representation of women in politics (Aaldering, 2020). As a result, women politicians and their representation in the media is a critical battleground for gender-related transformation. Understanding the status quo is a key to making progress toward gender equality. The devaluation of women politicians can be characterised by the failure to be taken seriously. For example, Atkeson (2008) finds a significant shift toward coverage of candidates' personality traits, family, and appearance when a female is on the ballot. Ultimately, this shows that devaluation is manifest through a change in the nature of the coverage, which underlines the lack of viability, and suggests an undervaluation of women politicians. The devaluation of women can be ascribed to BS as it reinforces traditional gender roles.

Similarly, stereotypical traits such as self-confidence, assertiveness, toughness for men, and compassion, sensitivity, and emotionality for women have been perpetuated in the media coverage of women in politics (Lawless, 2004). This form of attack is incredibly potent regarding leadership characteristics. While men benefit from an overlap between stereotypical male traits and those associated with political leaders, there is a gap between those linked to women (Schneider, 2014; Kittilson, 2008). For example, in a large-scale analysis of Dutch national newspapers between 2006 and 2012, Aaldering (2020) found that male party leaders received more reporting on leadership traits such as political craftsmanship, vigorousness, and communicative skill than female leaders. To avoid obstacles when encountering stereotypes, female officeholders often show masculine qualities as they receive the most positive evaluations when they emphasise masculine instead of feminine attributes. This stems from a demand for masculinity among voters and a gendered candidate selection (Bauer, 2018).

Ultimately, stereotyping is manifest through perpetuating gender-related issues and traits derived from long-standing norms, which inherently constrain women by attacking their

competency as politicians. Moreover, not only within the public media but also on social media, women experience sexism. Studies have found that, especially within online communities, more hostility is shown towards women than men, which causes significant emotional distress for women (Fox et al., 2015). Furthermore, a study by Miner-Rubino and Cortina (2007) has shown that being surrounded by sexist attitudes and behaviour online is similar to direct harassment concerning the effects on women's psychological well-being. These comments are often intended in a joking manner and are not of a hostile nature. "Everyday sexism", including sexist humour online, can be as damaging as other forms of sexism (Swim et al., 2001).

In addition, research has shown that most violence towards women has appeared online, with online attacks of sexism and even death threats. Young females are especially attacked, which is alarming as this could be why women leave politics after a short period (Muegge et al., 2019).

The Present study

In the past, much research has been done on the various forms of sexism and how it affects women in the workplace and general gender equality (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Glick, 2019; Alexander, 2012; Eagly & Carlie, 2007; Masser & Abrams, 2004). However, there is little literature that highlights sexism within politics against women. In addition, most studies have looked at the effect of sexism on voter turnout in the United States but paid little attention to the general implications for a women's career in politics and her well-being. Furthermore, to our knowledge, no study was yet conducted within the Netherlands. Building on existing studies, this study uses semi-structured interviews to qualitatively examine if female politicians experience sexism, what forms and how it manifests, and how that influences their career-related outcomes. Obtaining extensive information regarding women's personal experiences with sexism in politics and how it impacts their job

motivation and well-being could help improve existing policies in the Netherlands to achieve gender equality and increase female participation in politics.

Methods

Study design

The current study used an empirical qualitative research approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with women currently working in a political setting who are above 18 years old. All interviews were conducted virtually. Beforehand, all participants were thoroughly informed about their rights and the aim of the study. Subsequently, participants were provided with an informed consent that was verbally offered. The study was ethically approved by the University of Groningen, Campus Fryslan.

Participants

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling. This sampling method was appropriate for this study as it allowed easy access to participants who were close to the experimental site, willing to participate, and could be recruited at low costs (Etikan et al., 2016). To find participants, the researcher looked at her immediate environment in the Netherlands to find participants. In addition, participants were recruited over social media platforms such as LinkedIn and Instagram. Moreover, the researcher contacted all female members of parliament in the Netherlands. Furthermore, a recruitment message was sent to professors, staff and students at Campus Fryslan. The recruitment message can be found in the appendix in an English version (Appendix A).

The participants needed to fulfil the following inclusion criteria to be part of the study: a) participants needed to be female, b) work in politics, c) has worked in politics for one year or more, d) are above 18 years old, d) speak English fluently. In total, 8 participants (N = 8) were recruited. Table 1 reports the relevant demographics for each participant: age range, party affiliation, cultural background (dutch/non-dutch), party level, and range of years working in politics. The participant's ages and years in politics were given in ranges for anonymity reasons. For the cultural background, Dutch was identified as having dutch parents and growing up in the Netherlands, non-dutch was identified as having non-dutch parents and not growing up in the Netherlands, and mixed was identified as having both parents from a different cultural background but growing up in the Netherlands. Aiming to obtain a holistic image of female politicians, the present study tried to incorporate a diverse range of female politicians belonging to various parties. However, politicians in parties from the right political spectrum were difficult to recruit (see Table 1).

Table 1
Demographics of the participants (N=8)

Participant	Age Range	Party	Party Spectrum	Nationality	Party Level	Years in Politics
1	40-50	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD)	Centre-right	non-dutch	All	5-10
2	30-40	Groen-Links (GL)	Left	dutch	Local	<1
3	40-50	D66	Centre	non-dutch	National	5-8
4	30-40	Groen-Links (GL)	Left	dutch	Local	5-8
5	50-60	D66	Centre	non-dutch	Local	8-10

6	30-40	Groen-Links (GL)	Left	dutch	Local	0-5
7	40-50	Stads Partij 100 % Groningen	Center-right	mixed	Local	0-5
8	40-50	Partij van de Arbeid (PvDA)	Centre-Left	mixed	National	<10

Note: The party spectrum for each party was identified by using the spectrum of the dutch company Kieskompas (please see Kieskompas, n.d. for further description).

Data Collection

Procedure

The data collection started on the 29th of April and ended on the 24 of May 2022. Before the interview, the participants were provided with information about the purpose and content of the study and the interview duration. Furthermore, participants received a consent form before the interview, including further details on the project. All participants were given a choice to meet online (using a platform of their choice) or to meet in person when possible.

At the start of the interview, the researcher explained the content of the study again and asked for consent (Appendix C). The confidentiality was stressed and the possibility of ending the interview when the participant did not feel comfortable. It was asked if the interview could be recorded, and verbal consent was given. The duration of up to 30 minutes was clarified. Only the participants and the researcher were present at the interview. After the interview, the researcher thanked the participant, providing room for questions. Participants were asked if their interviews could be used for data analysis, and participants consented.

Interview Scheme

The interview scheme (see Appendix B) was developed based on the literature review. It consists of 19 questions, including general demographic questions, questions concerning disadvantages (if any) that participants experience in politics based on their gender, impacts on their career development, and the perceived awareness and intentionality of sexist behaviour towards them.

First, four demographic questions were asked regarding age, current employment, party affiliation, and years engaged in politics. To get insights into participants' attitudes towards the political environment, the question *“Do you think the political work environment is fierce and competitive and one in which you need to be dominant and assertive in order to succeed?”* was asked. The interview scheme included the following questions to learn about the disadvantages women may experience in politics: *“How do you perceive being a woman in politics (interpersonal relationships/ within the institution?)”*. The question about interpersonal relationships was related to direct interaction with colleagues, and “within the institution” was related to gender bias found within the political institution. To further explore direct disadvantages that women may face in contrast to their male counterparts, questions regarding male behaviour, task allocation, offers of unsolicited help, and gender-stereotypical comments were asked. To identify the type of sexism (hostile, benevolent or other subtle expressions) women may have experienced, a question about the intentionality of sexism was asked (*“Do you think that people who make comments based on your gender or behave in a sexist manner are aware of it and is it intentional?”*). To find out how these experiences affect a woman's career development, questions such as *“Do you think that you need to put more effort than your male colleagues in order to receive a good work evaluation?”* and *“Do you think your general well-being/personal life is affected by these experiences?”* were added.

To further investigate differences in the behaviour of male candidates towards women, questions regarding differences in age and party affiliation were asked. Additionally, this explores how sexist behaviour can be influenced by different individual factors.

After these questions, the participants were thanked again for their time, and the interview ended.

Analysis

The data were analysed using the thematic analysis (TA) approach by Braun and Clarke (2006), which is often used to analyse qualitative data. The thematic analysis approach is flexible; the researcher focuses on identifying, organising and forming patterns across the data. A mixture of inductive and deductive analyses was chosen to identify codes across the dataset. The deductive approach was applied to test identified barriers from the previous literature and investigate their relevance for female politicians in the Netherlands. Further, the inductive method aimed at exploring additional barriers and experiences.

The TA by Brown and Clarke (2006) offers six analysis phases, followed by the researcher. The first phase involved familiarising yourself with the data, doing an orthographic transcript and accounting for verbal utterances. First impressions were conserved by taking notes. In the second phase, the initial codes were created, and features of the data were written out. Using all answers as bases, a preliminary coding scheme was designed. The data were screened and deductively subdivided according to the predefined barriers. As it became apparent that not all data would fit within the deductive codes, the method was completed with an inductive approach. In phase three, the codes were reviewed again, and in phase four, these main codes were defined and named. The data were coded until no more codes emerged. Therefore, thematic saturation was achieved. In the final phase, the report was produced, and the final order of themes was identified.

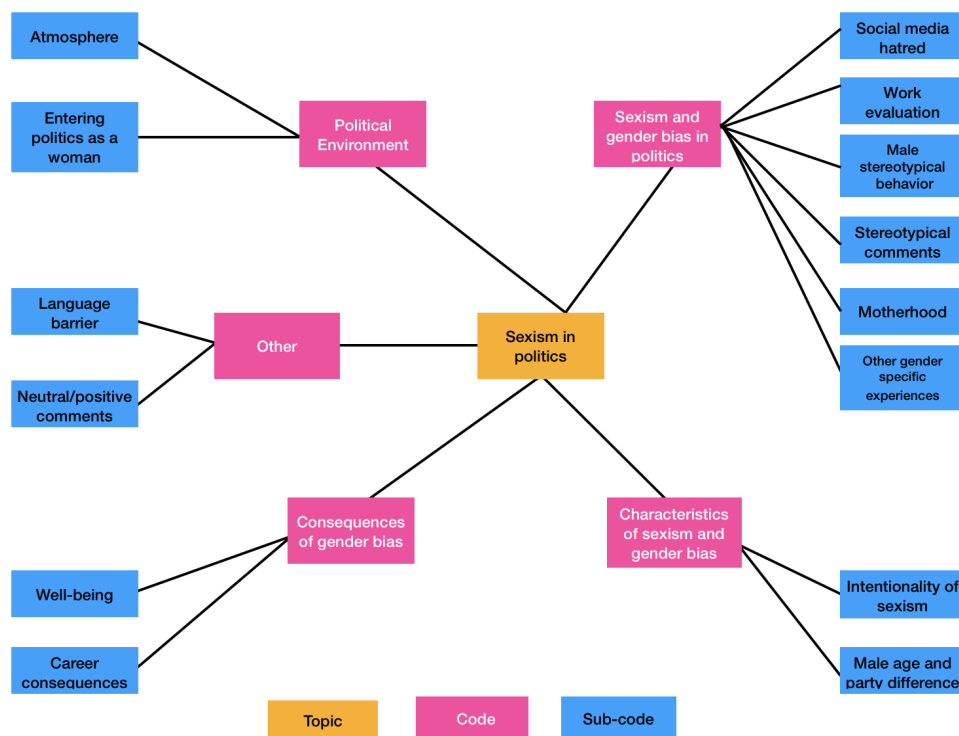
Throughout the analysis, the coding scheme was discussed within the research team (i.e., thesis supervisor) to increase the validity. For an extensive overview of the identified codes and example quotations, see Table 2.

Results

From the interviews, five main codes emerged. These main codes are identified as *political environment*, *sexism and gender bias in politics*, *characteristics of sexism and gender bias*, *consequences of gender biases* and *other*. As illustrated in Table 2, each code was defined and included 2 to 6 sub-codes.

Figure 2

Final code network



Note: The pink boxes indicate main codes while the blue codes show sub-codes. The lines show the interdependence between the two.

Starting with the aspects related to the work culture of politics that may create disadvantages for women, the code *Political environment* includes the two sub-codes *Atmosphere* and *Entering politics as a woman*. These two sub-codes describe women's perceptions of the political atmosphere and the characteristics and barriers they experienced or observed when entering the political arena. Diving deeper into the disadvantages women face in politics, the code *sexism and gender bias in politics* describes the various ways in which sexism appears in politics, such as on social media, through stereotypical comments or within male behaviour toward women. Six sub-codes were included (see Table 2). This encompasses women's experiences with hate comments on social media, perceived gender differences in work evaluations and experiences with gender-stereotypical behaviour. Moreover, gender bias in politics manifests, for example, through disadvantages that women as mothers and primary caretakers face. Next, the code *characteristics of sexism and gender bias* includes two sub-codes: *Intentionality of sexism* and *male age and party differences*. These sub-codes describe women's perceptions or views regarding whether the experienced or observed sexism in politics is intentional or unintentional, whether perpetrators are aware of the negative consequences, and if the age and party affiliation impact men's behaviour towards women. To further shed light on the effects of sexism within politics, the code *consequences of gender bias* include the two sub-codes *well-being* and *career consequences*. This code describes whether women have experienced negative impacts of gender bias or sexism on their well-being and career-related outcomes in politics. Lastly, the code *other* includes *language and culture barriers*. This code shows how language and culture can intersect with being a woman as a potential barrier in politics. Table 3 below presents an overview of the main codes, sub-codes, definitions, and example quotes from the interviews.

To explore the multi-faceted research question *whether women in Dutch politics experience subtle or overt forms of sexism, and how does this influence their career-related outcomes?* the results section is structured around the themes most mentioned by the participants and follows the general structure of the interview guide (Appendix A).

Table 3

Overview of final coding scheme

Code	Sub-code	Definition	Example Quote
Political Environment	Atmosphere	Perceived atmosphere and characteristics of the political environment	"I think it helps to be fierce and competitive. Because much of the work is in the public eye. Debates are public and it really helps if you are competitive because it is a zero-sum game."
	Entering politics as a women	Perceived barriers when entering politics as a woman	"(...)And that is actually what I was afraid of. When I candidate myself, I thought, this is an impossible thing to do. (as a woman)"
Sexism and gender bias in politics	Social Media hatred	Experiences with hate comments on social media	"And it's mostly different on Twitter actually, but also via email. I am receiving more comments about how I look than my male colleagues. Sometimes I get emails that my dress is not pretty or it's too boring or things like that, that concern me being me and not doing the work."
	Work evaluation	Perceived gender difference of work evaluations	"(...) men get selected based on their potential and women on what they've proven. So I definitely have experienced that."
	Male stereotypical behaviour	Experiences of male stereotypical behaviour such as being cut off, being heard less,	"Almost like taking the debate hostage right? (...) that was very male behaviour. I would say I would dare say that that's the case. "

		mansplaining, or unsolicited help	
	Stereotypical comments	Experiences with receiving gender-stereotypical comments and expectations	"Then people tell me if I should wear lipstick or not. Like that was something that I always hated because I thought who was gonna tell a guy what shoes to wear."
	Motherhood	Perceived disadvantages based on being a mother and a caretaker in combination with a political career	"And if you want to get out of the house and go to a board meeting, you need to have a caregiver at home, especially if you have small children. And that was very problematic for me, I always had to pay out of my own pocket in order to be present for a position that was on a volunteer basis."
	Other gender-specific experiences	General perceptions of working in politics as a women	"And I think that everywhere where women raise their voice, that can sometimes lead to a reaction. So in that sense, politics is no different."
Characteristics of sexism and gender bias	Intentionality of sexism	Perception on intentionality-unintentionality of sexist behavior	"Mainly they think it is a joke. They say you have to cope with it. You have to accept it because you are a woman and such things happen to you."
	Male age and party difference	Perceived effect of age and party of a male candidate when disregarding female politicians	"I think men of a certain age think that this is normal. (...) Because I think men like 60 plus, you know, in their ancient time, the world was different. Women were at home."
Consequences of gender biases	Well-Being	Perceived personal effects of sexism on well-being	"So it's not so much the work itself, but to combine it with the work at home."
	Career Consequences	Perceived impacts of sexist behaviour on career-related outcomes	"Well sometimes (...) it's direct (...) your kids are too small, too young. Sometimes it's indirect. Are you sure? Is it something that you would

Other	Language and culture barriers	How language/culture intersects with gender	want to do? And it's not because you're a woman. But because you're a mom."
			"I want to add to this element that as a woman being in a political party or in the general work domain, what has kept me back was not my gender, but my, for instance, my language skills."

Political environment

To answer the research question and see to what extent women in politics experience sexism, the political environment was examined first. The political environment was explored as literature shows that the marginalisation of women is often integrated into political institutions and that women are faced with hostility when entering politics (Lovenduski, 2014; Alexander, 2012). Therefore, it was investigated how female politicians experience and characterise the political environment, also when entering politics. As a result, it became apparent that the political environment is seen as a male-dominated field characterised by competition and dominance.

Atmosphere

When participants were asked about their perception of the political atmosphere within meetings and discussions, a general agreement among the eight participants was visible. Many women pointed out that it helps to be dominant, assertive and fierce in order to succeed. For example, one participant said that *"(...) when you are not that type of person, you are simply not heard"* (P7, 100% Groningen). Others reported on the importance of standing out, being alert that others don't steal one's ideas or finding your role in a male-dominated debate. Furthermore, the political arena was described as a *"zero-sum game"* (P6, GL) in which women have a disadvantage

because *"they are just softer and especially in politics there are more men than women"* (P6, GL). In addition, it was said that *"as a woman in politics, you can be threatening to other people"* (P8, PvdA). A few participants also mentioned a distinction between national and local politics when it comes to competitiveness within politics. Local politics within progressive medium-sized cities were said to be less competitive than national politics. *"(...)here in Groningen, it's local and it's not that heavy than if you compare it to national politics."* (P7, 100% Groningen).

Entering politics as a woman

In addition to the male-dominated atmosphere, several women reported feeling discouraged to enter the political arena as they didn't picture it being a place for women or being accepted as a woman. The following quotes resemble this: *"I was reluctant to go into politics"* (P2, GL) and *"When I was a candidate myself, I thought this is an impossible thing to do as a young mother"* (P3, D66). Some women described being underrepresented and therefore *"feeling alone"* (P5, D66) as there were few female role models and having *"a very difficult time"* (P5, D66) as a new woman in her fraction.

Sexism and gender bias in politics

In direct relation to the research question *"do women in politics in the Netherlands experience subtle or overt forms of sexism?"* the experiences and impacts of subtle and overt forms of sexism and gender bias in politics were investigated. Different sources and forms of sexism were identified. The primary source of sexism reported by interviewees were social media hatred comments. Often stereotypical comments were rather written on social media anonymously than face to face. In addition, being a mom and the main caretaker of children and the household was identified as another obstacle to a women's career in politics.

Social Media hatred

Participants generally reported receiving gender-stereotypical comments and hatred messages on social media and via email. In most cases, participants received these comments on the social media platform Twitter. The content of most comments was related to *“how I look”* (P3, D66), *“being a dumb woman”* (P4, GL), or *“you should not think that you have the right to have a say in matters”* (P6, GL). Many women conveyed that social media comments were primitive, aggressive, and sexist. Moreover, many women have received comments on their looks. There was a general agreement that men do not receive these types of comments but rather receive comments on their opinions and skills instead of them as a person. These types of comments can be conceptualised as HS. However, two participants said that they hadn’t received such comments *“that much”* (P8, PvdA) or not at all.

Work evaluation

Another eminent domain where sexism occurs was in women’s work evaluations. Women profusely pointed out that *“men get selected on their potential and women on what they have proven”* (P2, GL). Besides, it was mentioned that women must put more effort into getting a good work evaluation. As a result, some women reported being demotivated, while others said they *“get extra motivated”* (P7, 100% Groningen) to prove themselves. This can be identified as an institutional disadvantage that female politicians encounter and displays rather subtle *“hidden”* forms of sexism. However, also some reported that, especially within their party, they do not need to put more effort to receive a good work evaluation.

Male stereotypical behaviour

Different types of stereotypical male behaviour were identified by the participants, for example, men debating just to provoke others or talking over women. Others reported that *“men*

feel very threatened by you, and they want to make sure that you do not succeed, so they will pull everything out to piss you off to make sure that you fall” (P8, PvdA). However, all women pointed out that this behaviour is not generalisable among all men, but only appears among some. One participant pointed out that *“it's the individual who has this characteristic of being too loud and aggressive”*, while another mentioned that *“(…) definitely some men are prone not to listen to women. And I notice it everywhere these days.”* (P6, GL). Additionally, unsolicited help was indicated to appear sometimes but mostly unaware and well-intended. Therefore, it was instead received as a positive behaviour.

Stereotypical comments

Another sexist behaviour experienced by interviewees is gender-stereotypical comments. Women have reported that these comments often appear in a rather subtle manner and *“more digitally, not face to face.”* (P3, D66). Examples of some comments received by colleagues were: *“you should smile more”* (P4, GL), *“you're never happy”* (P4, GL), *“you should wear lipstick”* (P6, GL), and *“you women are all the same because you think you have to prove something”* (P7, 100% Groningen). The extent increased for some women with migrational backgrounds. Only one woman reported never having received these comments. *“I'm really thinking hard but no”* (P1, VVD).

Motherhood

A gender bias that all participants who were mothers conveyed was that being a mother creates barriers for them in pursuing their political career. In particular, mentioned barriers included bad rules for maternity leave in the Netherlands, late work meetings, challenges finding babysitters or stereotypical comments connected to being a mother and pursuing a career in politics. Furthermore, all mothers who did have a partner at home reported still functioning as the main

caretaker of the house and children. Often women expressed suffering under the stress that the combination of a job and children puts them under. An exemplary quote describing the struggle of handling both jobs simultaneously is: *“As the gender role of providing care for my children, it was very challenging to find babysitters, to find somebody who can take over my role as a mother, as a caregiver for my children to attend to events.”*(P1, VVD)

Other gender-specific experiences

Outside of the impacts mentioned above about sexism and gender bias in politics, women have issued other aspects in connection to being a woman in politics. A general theme of discomfort as a woman in politics arose. Examples are: *“I think everywhere where women raise their voice, it can lead to a reaction. (...)politics is no different”* (P2, GL), and *“ women in the public domain are more scrutinised”*(P2, GL). Moreover, men objectifying women while interacting with them was also expressed.

Concerning the previously mentioned issue of women being marginalised in politics because men are the norm in political institutions, one participant said: *“People say they want more female leaders and more diversity in politics, but the norms, implicit and explicit, are not helping to get that diversity. Not just women but basically everyone who is not fitting the normal male standard.”* (P6, GL). Another general theme was that many women pointed out their strong personality, outstanding skills or their active avoidance of sexist comments when asked if they experienced any disadvantages as a woman in politics. Example reasons why participants did not experience disadvantages as a woman or receive sexist comments were: *“I didn't because I am an engineer”* (P3, D66), *“Because I'm too dominant, I suppose”* (P7, 100% Groningen), and *“It's in my character, to want to work hard. Trying to be as good as I can.”* (P8, PvdA).

Characteristics of sexism and gender bias

The characteristics of gender bias were investigated to learn more about the nature of various forms of sexism and gender bias. Besides, the perception of the intentionality and awareness of sexism was explored, as well as the impact of a male's age and party affiliation on the severity of sexist behaviour.

The intentionality of sexism

The general perceptions of the intentionality of sexism in politics differed significantly among the interviewees. The participants who indicated that sexist behaviour was intentional referred to apparent blatant behaviour. “ (...) *it's a way to influence someone. Politics is a game most of the time, and people are using lots of things to play that game.*”(P7,100% Groningen). However, sexist behaviour mainly was identified as unintentional and subtle. It was classified as “*more of a grey area*”(P2, GL). Often men were described as being unaware of the impact of their behaviour, as this quote illustrates: “*Mainly they think it is a joke. They say you have to cope with it. You have to accept it because you are a woman and such things happen to you.*” (P5, D66)

Two major reasons explain the intentionality of sexism: people's cultural norms and a male-dominated society. “*I think it is deep within the DNA of our culture to do this, but also for women. There's still a long way for us to go. (...) I think that our entire society is still based on male perspective and male norms, and we need to shake things up a little bit more.*” (P6, GL) This quote further explains the idea that the male norm for politicians is deeply ingrained in our society, even among women, and that sexism is often unintentional toward female politicians. It illustrates another example of subtle forms of sexism that women in politics encounter.

Male age and party difference

Participants profusely pointed out that especially the age of a male candidate when disregarding women impacts the severeness of the expressed sexism. A reason for this behaviour was that they are not used to women holding influential positions in politics and that older men can feel more “threatened” by women in power positions. This effect intensified the younger a female politician was and if she had a migrational background or not.

Moreover, participants expressed the assumption that *“it’s more difficult as a woman to operate in certain parties.”* (P2, GL), thus expressing a discrepancy between party attitudes towards women operating in their party. Additionally, male politicians from conservative parties were mentioned to be more disregarding towards women than others. One participant said, *“I think the conservative ones are really disregarding women.”* (P3, D66). These parties stand in contrast to *“green and left parties that are more used to female leadership”*. (P6, GL).

Consequences of gender biases

Different areas of implications of gender bias were looked into. The two areas identified were well-being and career consequences which directly links to the second part of the research question that aims to determine if sexism among Dutch female politicians influences their career-related outcomes.

Well-Being

The interviewees indicated that the sexist behaviour they have experienced affected their well-being profoundly. The two most significant impacts on a female's well-being were finding a good work-life balance and experiencing an unwelcoming work environment. Often, women expressed that different forms of sexism affect them but that they just try to ignore it for their personal well-being. For example, one woman said, *“I have to take a step away otherwise I will get*

a burnout.” (P5, D66) Others said, *“it's not so much the work itself, but to combine it with the work at home”* (P6, GL). To maintain better well-being, some women advised that *“it's important to find the right balance between everything”* (P7, 100% Groningen) and *“when you are a mother and have to take care of the house besides being a politician, you have to take good care of yourself”* (P7, 100% Groningen).

Career consequences

Different forms of sexism can have an impact on the career of female politicians. Some interviewees directly reported on having effects on their careers. These were generally related to being a mother and others not taking them seriously. Questions that they were faced with by colleagues were *“Can you do this because you have a young family?”* (P2, GL) *“Do you want to take on this work?”* (P2, GL), or *“Your kids are too young.”* (P3, D66) This illustrates that female politicians' careers were mainly impacted when they were mothers as they received less challenging tasks or were promoted less. Moreover, as aforementioned, women need to work harder to prove themselves and gain trust, which was highlighted to affect their career negatively during the interviews.

Nonetheless, some female politicians also reported on advantages based on their gender for their career advancement as political parties strive to become more diverse. For example, within green parties, *“it was an advantage”* (P6, GL) to be a woman or that it was *“very positive to be a woman and to have a multicultural background because you're different. That's what I like in the Netherlands. They do like diversity within politics.”* (G8, PvdA). This displays a positive development within Dutch politics towards inclusiveness and diversity.

Other

In this code, themes and comments are summarized, which could not be defined under the other codes. The sub-code *language and culture barriers* can help to illustrate further how gender and culture/language intersect with the experience of sexism for women with a migrational background in politics.

Language and culture barrier

As many interviewees had a non-Dutch background, the issue of language and culture as a potential barrier was expressed. Three out of five participants with a different cultural background reported this. They mentioned that language and being a woman created a combined disadvantage. Moreover, an increased number of interruptions while talking, as well as comments on the language skills, were mainly identified. Examples were *“I’m not leading any group, not because I’m a woman, but because I don’t have the basic skills, which is the language.”* (P1, VVD) or *“I need to work harder as a female with another background”* (P8, PvdA). Yet, it was highlighted that this can also be an advantage and can bring a different perspective to the table. As women from various backgrounds often have different perspectives and experiences, they can represent a more diverse part of society.

Discussion

The effects of overt and subtle forms of sexism on career-related outcomes of female politicians in the Netherlands were investigated in this qualitative study. The exploratory research question sought to determine 1) the extent to which female politicians experience sexism and 2) how sexism affects their career-related outcomes, such as a woman's work evaluation, task allocation, promotion, motivation, and well-being at work. The most widely used conceptualisation

of sexism, the ambivalent sexism theory by Glick and Fiske (1996), was employed to display the multidimensional nature of sexism. The theory suggests that sexism stems from simultaneously holding hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes. Hostile sexism is consistent with conventional conceptions of sexism, while benevolent sexism is relatively positive and chivalrous in tone. Moreover, modern sexism, defined by Swim et al. (1997), adds to this, as it is subtle but neglects the existence of sexism. Some of the main barriers found in the literature in connection to sexism for women in politics have been male-dominated institutions, being the primary caretaker and the often negative portrayal of female politicians in the media (Ballington et al., 2005). Similarly, the findings of the interviews have confirmed these barriers while further elaborating on the impacts of sexism on female politicians' well-being and their perception of the intentionality of sexist behaviour in politics. Additionally, the intersection of gender and language/culture was identified as intensifying sexist behaviour towards women. Not only culture and language but also age and party affiliation of men were shown to affect sexist behaviour towards women.

To answer the first part of the research question, the political environment and its atmosphere were examined to build on existing research claiming that political institutions are constructed to favour men and that women face hostile sexist attitudes when attempting to challenge the male norm within political institutions (Martell et al., 1996). Most participants expressed that they need to be dominant and assertive to be heard, which can be a result of trying to counter the hostility they are faced with. As women need to stand out to be heard, many women reported having difficulties and feared entering the political arena. This issue demonstrates institutionalised sexism and falls under the category of modern sexism.

When further exploring the direct impacts of subtle and overt forms of sexism, different sources such as social media hatred, stereotypical male behaviour, stereotypical comments and

sexism towards politicians that are mothers were probed. Most interviewed female politicians have received sexist comments on social media and have been negatively affected by them. The interviewees have indicated that the comments are mainly gender-stereotypical, regarding their gender and looks and not their political opinions in contrast to their male colleagues who receive comments on their public views. Sexist comments were explicitly placed on the social media platform Twitter. Agreeingly, research by Fox et al. (2015) highlighted that women face more hostility within online platforms than men and that this causes significant emotional distress for women. Additionally, Miner-Rubino & Cortina (2007) show that sexism on social media severely affects women's well-being, which this study has also confirmed. Often, these comments are primitive and aggressive, resembling hostile sexism. That hostile sexism is more prevalent on social media can be reasoned by the anonymous character of social media platforms.

In addition, women reported receiving gender-stereotypical comments from colleagues on their looks and behaviour. These comments often referred to a women's supposedly cute and happy charisma. While research shows that stereotypical traits of men, such as toughness and self-confidence, align with that of politicians, stereotypical characteristics such as sensitivity and compassion create disadvantages for women (Schneider, 2014; Kittilson, 2008). Moreover, participants often reasoned their lack of disadvantages on their outstanding education, character or dominance. This result aligns with the research by Bauer (2018) that women often emphasise stereotypical masculine qualities such as dominance to receive more positive evaluations and avoid encountering stereotypes. This behaviour stems from a demand for masculinity among voters and a gendered candidate selection. Stereotypical comments can be seen as a rather subtle form of sexism.

Besides stereotypical comments, stereotypical male behaviour was also identified as a source of sexism. The findings show that some men in politics show stereotypical behaviour in

provoking women or actively talking over them. However, this behaviour was only noticed among some men and was not generalisable. This finding only partly resembles results by other scholars who underline the hostile sexism women are faced with in politics (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Alexander, 2012).

Moreover, the results display a discrepancy between the standards that women and men are evaluated on in politics. Interviewees have pointed out that men get selected on their potential and women on what they have proven. As a result, some women found themselves demotivated while others got extra motivated. This finding is partly acknowledged by the research of Dardenne et al. (2007), who have found that female politicians' motivation to perform increased when faced with direct hostile sexism. In addition, the results build on findings from Fulton (2012), who display evidence of different standards for men and women to achieve the same electoral results. Additionally, Shastry et al. (2020) have proven that a woman's abilities are measured by her luck or extra effort while a man's abilities are measured by his abilities. The results from this study have shown that this effect especially applies to a woman's work evaluation, where women reported needing to put more effort than men.

Another result highlighted was the barrier “motherhood” and being the main caretaker for children and the household poses for politicians. Many interviews have highlighted the issue of good maternity leave in the Netherlands and the struggle of finding a babysitter to attend meetings in the evening or during weekends which are not uncommon in politics. These findings are emphasised by the report of the OECD (2018) that shows that the Netherlands is lagging behind in terms of parental leave and encouraging mothers in their full-time jobs. Further, the results demonstrated that a woman's ability to perform her position was often questioned by her status as a mother. This aligns with the study of Verniers and Vala (2017), who show the relationship between

sexism and the opposition to a mother's career. They illustrated that employed mothers supposedly neglect their parenting responsibilities which seek to justify an unequal representation of men and women in the workplace. Furthermore, as women spend more time taking on unpaid work, women are hindered in their career progression. This shows signs of benevolent sexism by trying to reinforce traditional gender roles and assigning women to domestic roles. Furthermore, the results revealed that the struggle to create a work-life balance highly impacted the well-being of female politicians. Research acknowledges that this could lead to underperformance and stereotype manifestation among women (Ohlott et al., 1994).

Furthermore, the results helped to gain a deeper understanding of the role of intent and harm when female politicians identify sexist behaviour and its impacts. Most interviewees identified sexist behaviour within politics as unintentional and said that men are not aware of the effects their actions have. The main reasons for this were the internalised cultural norms and a male-dominated society. However, opinions diverged concerning the intentionality of sexism. This finding is in line with the literature on the intent and perceived harm of sexism by Riemer et al. (2014). They state that when individuals are uncertain about a perpetrator's intent, they are less likely to classify it as sexist (Gul et al., 2022). Furthermore, participants might be reluctant to label specific behaviour or comments as sexist based on their relationship with the men.

Additionally, the data contributes to a clearer understanding of how gender intersects with having a different cultural background as female politicians. The results showed that language could pose a significant barrier and a fruitful ground for benevolent sexist comments. Moreover, the results demonstrate a connection between a man's age and the severity of sexist behaviour towards female politicians. Participants expressed that this is due to men not being used to women working in politics. Moreover, the same connection was noticed for more conservative parties. Future

research could further investigate this connection. However, my research did not investigate this effect further as it doesn't directly link to the research question.

Concludingly, the results have shown that overt and subtle forms of sexism impact the career-related outcomes of Dutch female politicians in various aspects. Hostile sexism has mostly been identified on social media, while benevolent sexism appears within work evaluations, stereotypical comments, the political atmosphere and sexism towards working mothers. Modern sexism was identified as gender bias within the political institution. It can be concluded that these forms of sexism have an impact on a women's well-being and career-related outcomes.

Policy implications

The current study investigated the impacts of sexism on a Dutch female politician's career. Hereby it became apparent that political institutions are of great relevance when it comes to supporting female politicians and mitigating sexism. Practical implementations could therefore put focus on empowering female politicians and reducing their barriers to entering the political arena, and enforcing gender equality within politics. For example, this could be through integrating better maternity leave rules, providing financial support for childcare for single mothers or providing childcare facilities within the political institution. The study's findings indicate that this might improve women's well-being and stress levels and ultimately eradicate gender-specific barriers that negatively influence female politicians' careers. Therefore political institutions could, for example, reach out to their female politicians and ask how they could be best supported as mothers.

Furthermore, the European Union is currently working on fighting sexism against women in politics. Several efforts and campaigns have already been implemented in the last years, such as an initiative launched in 2018 to end sexist behaviour in national parliaments. The EU invites its member states to take a strong stand as political leaders against sexist attacks and use all

communication platforms to defend these positions. Besides, parliaments are advised to take appropriate action to fight sexism and prejudice against sexist gender roles, including their practices and attitudes. Lastly, they commend revising or introducing codes of conduct prohibiting sexist speech and sexual harassment in local, regional and national councils and assemblies and organising training on sexism that men and women alike are involved in to fight gender-based violence and inequalities (Council of Europe, 2020). The recommendations made by the EU reflect the urgency that the results of this study imply to reduce sexism in politics.

Besides, political parties play a significant role in shaping the extent and quality of women's political participation, as the results have shown. Political parties and party elites control the selection and admission processes, limiting women's opportunities to rise to leadership positions. This recommendation is underlined by the finding that conservative party members are more disregarding toward women than green parties. Thus, women's opportunities might be limited in conservative parties to attain higher positions. To implement gender-equal electoral lists for all parties, binding or voluntary quotas could be enforced. Research has shown that this significantly increases the average number of female politicians in parliaments (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.).

Strength, Limitations and Future Research

Firstly, a strength of this study was its qualitative nature, wherein participants shared their individual experiences working as women in Dutch politics. As all questions were asked in a semi-structured style, participants had the freedom to direct the course of the interview. Additionally, the participants were able to share further topics that they perceived relevant to share. Another strength was that the study focused on one geographical location, the Netherlands, as well as women from various cultural backgrounds, ages and political affiliations. Therefore, it was

possible to investigate the phenomenon holistically by analysing all of the aforementioned components and their interactions within politics.

However, as this is a qualitative study, only eight politicians were interviewed and hence the findings are not applicable to all female politicians in the Netherlands. Therefore, it is important that future studies build up on these findings and further investigate how sexism affects female politicians within the Netherlands, for example, through a qualitative study with empirical/quantitative data using representative sampling from the entire nation and all political parties. This can be further extended to other countries and cultures. Another limitation was that the majority of the participants were affiliated with centre/left parties and therefore, the study could not show what impact party affiliation has on the experiences of sexism. Furthermore, two participants stated that their experiences were influenced by the fact that they had begun working in politics during the Covid-19 outbreak. In addition, the majority of politicians worked on the local level and not on the national one. Therefore the differences between the two were hard to identify; however, future research could look at the difference in sexism at different political levels.

Building on this study, it is recommended to especially focus on sexism via social media and its effects on the well-being of female politicians. Hereby, it would be interesting to observe how sexism can be reduced to increase the well-being of female politicians. Furthermore, research should investigate how the burden on working mothers in politics can be lifted and diminished.

Conclusion

In sum, this study found that Dutch female politicians are affected by overt and subtle forms of sexism. Overt forms were mainly present on social media, while subtle forms of sexism were found within institutional gender bias, work evaluations, the political atmosphere and sexism towards politicians who are mothers. This affected their career-related outcomes by impacting their

well-being and their ability to get promoted. In addition, women were identified to be held to different standards in politics than men and need to put more effort to receive good feedback. The results recommend that female politicians need to be supported more by the Dutch parliament to maintain women's well-being and reduce the impacts of sexism. Such support could consist of providing free childcare, increasing awareness about sexism and implementing binding or voluntary quotas within parties, so that female politicians feel more seen and encouraged. Future research can focus on how sexism impacts female politicians' general well-being in various cultural contexts, parties and political levels.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Guide

General Questions

Okay, I would like to start with some general questions.

1. Demographic Questions

A) How old are you?

B) What kind of cultural background do you have?

C) What is your employment? (Where do you currently work: country/cite/political party? Where have you previously worked? How long have you been in politics?)

Questions concerning disadvantages

- Do you think the political work environment is fierce and competitive and in which you need to be dominant and assertive in order to succeed?

- How do you perceive being a woman in politics? (Give context to historical disadvantages)

- Are there any disadvantages you experience based on your gender in the workplace (interpersonal relationships)?(work meeting)

This can either be based on the institution you are in or found in direct interactions.

- Do you receive less challenging tasks than your male counterparts or have you ever felt like you receive less challenging tasks (awareness and intention question)?

-Do you think that your male colleagues sometimes cut you off, act more assertively, or generally get heard more?

-Do you receive gender stereotypical comments in your daily life? (Day care, work life balance, clothing expectations)

-Do you sometimes receive unsolicited help from your male co-workers? (this is BS) (technical help, jumping in, help for certain topics, mansplaining)

Career Development

- Do you think that you need to put more effort than your male colleagues in order to get promoted?

- Do you think that you need to put more effort than your male colleagues in order to receive a good work evaluation?

-Do you think you are less encouraged than men to take on leadership roles?

- Do you think your work motivation is hampered through these experiences?

- Do you think your general well-being/personal life is affected by these experiences?

Awareness (step in when participant discusses about a “sexist” experience, a comment or a behavior or smth.)

-Do you think this person is making this comment or behaviour, are they aware of it or intentional?

-Do you think sexism within politics is mostly intentional or not?

-Are there differences between parties where male candidates are more disregarding towards women?

-Are there differences between ages of male candidates in disregarding towards women? —> why do you think?

The Ending

Thank you very much for your participation! If there is anything left, you would like to ask or discuss we can do this now. On the informed consent you will find my contact information in case you have some questions later on. As discussed, the data will be anonymized and deleted after being transcribed. So, thank you again and have a nice day. Goodbye!

Appendix B

Dear Ms.,

My name is Alina Ruge and I am a student studying “Global Responsibility and Leadership” at the University of Groningen. I am currently conducting research for my bachelor thesis investigating if women in politics experience disadvantages based on their gender and if that impairs their career related outcomes. In order to conduct my research I am looking for YOU.

I invite you to participate in an interview study where you will answer questions concerning your profession and your daily experiences in politics as a woman. These questions will include information about your demographics, your profession in general, experiences within the profession, and future aspiration. Your participation is voluntary, and you can opt-out at any time. The interview will take place in an online platform of your choice and will take a maximum of 30 min.

If you would like to participate please contact me!

With kind regards,

Alina Ruge

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Investigator: Alina Ruge

Contact Person: Alina Ruge (a.ruge@student.rug.nl)

Dear participant,

I would like to invite you to participate in an interview study. If you agree to take part, you will have to answer questions regarding your profession in the political realm. These questions will include information about your demographics, your profession in general, experiences within the profession, and future aspiration. The information which you provide serves as data for a bachelor thesis of a student of the University of Groningen, Campus Fryslan.

The goal of the interview is to find out how women in a political profession are treated and how their future aspirations are impaired by their gender.

I do not believe that any personal threats, discomforts or harm arise from participating in this study. However, since the topic concerns personal experiences connected to ones profession, there might arise aspects which are difficult to talk about. Your participation is voluntary, and you can opt-out at any time. You do not have to give a reason for that. Your data will be processed confidentially which means that all personal information such as names, birth dates or places will be anonymized. Your data will only be used for the research purpose of a bachelor thesis. It is important that you make sure you understood every instruction with regard to the study. If you have any questions about the study, you can contact the researcher by using the contact details.

The researcher will provide you with a copy of this document for your own records. Also, the researcher herself will keep a copy in context with the study records. By agreeing to participate in this study you allow the researchers to keep audio records of the interview for the purposes of this study. These records will be transcribed, and anonymized quotes will be used.

Your participation in this study will have the advantage of informing existing research with new findings. No disadvantages should arise by your participation.

‘I hereby declare that I have been informed in a manner which is clear to me about the nature and method of the research. My questions have been answered. I agree of my own free will to participate in this research. I reserve the right to withdraw this consent without the need to give any reason. Additionally, I am aware that I may withdraw from the experiment at any time. If my research results are to be used in scientific publications, they will be made completely anonymous. My personal data will not be disclosed to third parties without my permission. If I request further information about the research, now or in the future, I may contact the contact the researcher of the study.’

.....

Date, Name subject Signature

I - the researcher - have provided explanatory notes about the research. I declare myself willing to answer to the best of my ability any questions which may still arise about the research.’

.....

Date, Name researcher Signature

