Inter(man)tional Assignments?

~ A Study Concerning Women’s Possibilities to Work Abroad ~
We would like to thank:

Our respondents for making this thesis possible

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Our supervisor; Professor Håkan Boter for his humble attitude and exemplary way of cooperating with students. He has provided us with useful guidance and significant opinions during our thesis process.
SUMMARY

Title: Inter(man)tional Assignments?
       – A Study Concerning Women’s Possibilities to Work Abroad

Problem: How do women perceive their possibilities to obtain an international assignment?

Purpose: The main purpose with this study is to create an understanding for women’s possibilities to obtain an international assignment. To be able to achieve this and to obtain a more faceted picture two types of sectors have been examined; larger Swedish corporations within the Swedish business world and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. We will further elucidate how women within the two sectors may perhaps learn from each other’s experiences, this to create new knowledge regarding women on international assignments.

Theory: In this study concepts linked to the fields of culture, management and international business are included; more specifically the areas of international assignments, gender based differences, female characteristics, the glass ceiling and networks. A second theory part has been added after the completion of the empirical data collection to create a better and broader foundation for our study. Dual-careers, male structures, male bonding and old boys’ networks are included in this part. The supplemented theories have been placed previous to our analysis.

Method: We have performed a qualitative study from a gender based perspective with a focus upon female expatriates. The study has an abductive approach and we relate to a hermeneutical epistemology. Telephone interviews have been performed with female respondents who currently possess and international assignment or previously been an expatriate.

Result: The result of our study shows that there is no clear-cut answer to how women perceive their possibilities to obtain a foreign assignment, since their experiences are complex and individual. However, the core of our answer to the research question distinguishes a few aspects which are common among the respondents. The major cause affecting women’s possibilities is the issue of dual-career couples. The spouse’s and family’s situation is the main reason for the lack of women in these assignments. Another aspect which appears to be of great importance is the lack of women in leading positions. More women are needed on each and every managerial level to allow more women to achieve higher positions. If this is accomplished there will be a larger pool of competent and skilled females to choose from when selecting expatriates. Even though we have studied two diverse sectors, the issues and problems for the women seem to be the same. Still, both sectors have something to learn from each other. First, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs should improve their recruitment process. Second, something the Swedish business world can learn from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is to support their expatriates in a better way before and during their assignment abroad.
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1. INTRODUCTION

We believe it is necessary to describe the background of the problem we have chosen to study, this to clarify why it is essential and of current interest. This chapter will introduce the reader to the subject and to our problem definition which will be presented in this section together with the purpose (which is twofold) of the study.

1.1 Choice of subject

We are two students attending the International Business and Economics Program at Umeå School of Business, Umeå University. This program has an international focus and gives the student the opportunity to perform an internship outside of Sweden and attend various exchange programs. Both of us have an interest in foreign countries and languages and have both completed studies abroad and one of the authors has been enrolled in an internship as well. A future career outside of Sweden is hence rather appealing and would be an exiting challenge.

Initially we discussed the general situation for women in the working life. Aspects we considered were for example the lower wage level and the under-representation in boards of directors and on executive positions, especially concerning corporations listed on the stock exchange\(^1\). Further, the fact that women take on most of the responsibility concerning their children and household were observed as well\(^2\). The ongoing debate in our society regarding equality within the working life is showing differences in possibilities and conditions for men and women when it comes to climbing the career ladder, according to us. We also believe this phenomenon describes women’s situation when it comes to attaining a foreign assignment. Hence, it may be difficult for females to get selected for these types of jobs. Due to the above stated, we would like to look into how women perceive their possibilities to obtain an international assignment.

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1.2 Problem background

The situation in the society and its development has during the last decades changed in a revolutionary way. Today’s society is getting increasingly global, which increases the requirements on organizations and its personnel. We believe that the globalization is an ongoing process and that the boundaries between nations will fade away. The movement of companies and their employees across boarders is increasing at the same time as the world is “shrinking”. According to a survey that the West Sweden Chamber of Commerce and Industry carried out in the year of 2005, 98 large industrial companies in Sweden are moving or are planning to move their business abroad. The reasons for moving are usually based on the economy and their wish to lower their costs. A combination of accurate competence among the employees and low prices are what the companies are striving for. In addition, corporations move on the basis of getting closer to the growing markets around the globe.

Due to industries continual globalization, organizations are searching worldwide for skilled people who can be of assistance for the survival of the company. Furthermore, they want these global employees to help them flourish in the extremely competitive atmosphere. A necessary proposition for this global business environment is hence to adopt an extensive strategy using an expatriate, which is a person who temporarily is living and working in a foreign country and culture, other than the legal or original residence. Managerial careers are representing inclusion of international assignments in a greater extent due to the global economy. Struggling with changing workforce demographics is something that is currently faced by organizations in economies around the globe. Further, attitudes and values, and incorporating and utilizing the rapid progresses in technology, are features organizations are grappling with as well. Augmented competitive pressures, outsourcing and off shoring, and a global workforce that places a higher premium on cross-cultural sensitivities and skills are globalization-related challenges dealt with in today’s society.

The key to success in the marketplace has its position within companies’ human resources. It is all about their aptitude in assemble the resources and utilize them in a talented way when formulating and implementing new global business strategies. This is also something that companies around the world are becoming aware of. Furthermore, many large companies transmit professionals overseas to achieve the gathering of human resources as well as make the most of them. However, male business expatriates in comparison to female ones are way beyond in numbers. Women are representing an unexploited source of human talent regarding expatriate assignments. Characteristics and competencies needed by global leaders and employees have been extensively examined. Generally, these characteristic are non-gender

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4 Peter Sandberg. “Två av tre företag vill flytta utomlands”, Dagens Nyheter, 24 February 2005, B04. (Translation: Two out of three corporations would like to move overseas)
specific. However, the fact is that women have often been excluded from appointments and/or promotions to such positions because they appear to lack one of the critical competencies identified, explicitly the possession of a global mindset. Women will continue to lack the opportunity to acquire one of the critical competencies required as long as they remain under-represented in international assignments. Extensive literature from the United States, Australia, and Europe show that women face obstacles in their careers which are not faced by their male counterparts.

One of the main changes in the structuring of the employees in recent years is the increased female contribution in the workforce. Additional, this trend will predictably continue. The participation rates of women in global management remains low across the world regardless of these growing figures of women in senior domestic management roles. Global management has in general been a masculine privilege within Europe and European female expatriation has been rather imperceptible for researchers. Females are a somewhat unexploited resource for international assignments and according to Fischlmayr, women are realistically under-represented in global management.

Regardless of the increasing change in legislation, including the European Union’s social protocol to enforce issues related to equal opportunities such as equal pay and sex discrimination, women’s progress to senior management positions within Europe has been very slow. There is still job segregation based on gender in all the European Union countries, and over half of the females are employed in the service sector which includes health care, trade, education, clerical duties, and retail. Women are not advancing to senior executive positions, according to existing research, in comparison to the rates of their male counterparts. Women working within the countries included in the European Union, do not in general attain the same pay, job conditions, status, and career opportunities as their male counterparts. There is still a continuing difference in wages among men and women, according to statistics of the earnings within Europe.

Female expatriates working abroad are rare; twenty years ago there were approximately three percent. Furthermore, even a smaller amount of studies regarding their experience of working abroad. The situation has changed significantly the last two decades, nowadays; females totaled approximately 15 percent of the expatriates. The changing nature of the environment due to the globalization is allowing women to enter global leadership positions in a greater extent.

We believe it is important to study females within diverse sectors, not only to overcome inequalities but also to develop knowledge about and safeguard for example different styles of leadership. Women are needed within the field of management for several reasons; we believe that they, for example, practice a different type of management. Further, women might coach their employees differently in comparison to men, they might handle conflicts in another way

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10 Tung, “Female Expatriates”, 243.
12 Ibid., 433.
14 Linehan and Scullion, “Towards an understanding of the female expatriate in Europe”, 433-434.
15 Ibid., 438.
and may use a more soft and sensitive attitude. We are of the opinion that these characteristics are needed and essential to look after as well.

The United Nations has ranked Sweden as one of the best countries for women to live in, according to their Gender and Development Index, and issues concerning gender equality have been a part of the political agenda in Sweden for years.\footnote{Paula Mählck, \textit{Mapping Gender in Academic Workplaces: Ways of Reproducing Gender Inequalities within the Discourse of Equality}, (Umeå: Doctoral theses at the Department of Sociology/Umeå University, 2003), 2-3.} When it comes to achieving true equality between men and women, Sweden is internationally regarded as one of the leading countries in the world. Nevertheless, the separation of work between men and women is still rather traditional. Therefore, one important political goal in Sweden is men’s and women’s equal rights and obligations regarding involvement in both employment and family life. One of the incentives for this goal is the changes that took place in the Swedish labor market starting in the 1970’s.\footnote{Nordenmark, “Multiple Social Roles”, 125-126.}

Women’s choice to enter and remain in employment and to achieve individual social rights is influenced by welfare policies\footnote{Eva Sundström, \textit{Gender Regimes Family Policies and Attitudes to Female Employment: A Comparison of Germany, Italy and Sweden}, (Umeå: Doctoral theses at the Department of Sociology/Umeå University, 2003), 2.} and the comprehensive extension of the public welfare system in Sweden raised the labor force participation of women from 60 percent to 80 percent between 1970 and 1990. Furthermore, the share of women in highly-qualified jobs in leading positions has increased. Men and women have hence multiple social roles since they often are employed, parents, and household workers. However, women still have the main responsibility for housework and care of children, at the same time as they in a greater extent also have a paid job outside the home.\footnote{Nordenmark, “Multiple Social Roles”, 126.}

Even though Sweden has come a long way regarding equality between men and women, statistics show that there is more work ahead and that inequalities still exist. Statistics Sweden and their recent publication about men, women and equality show that:\footnote{Statistiska Centralbyrån. \textit{På tal om kvinnor och män}, 57-102.}

- The average wage within the ten largest occupations in Sweden differs between men and women, from 500 SEK up to 8 000 SEK, depending on what profession one is considering.
- Within the Government Offices 45 percent of the Ministers, 34 percent of the Parliamentary Undersecretaries, and 36 percent of the Administrative Executives are women.
- Only 18 percent of the members of board committees in Swedish companies listed on the Swedish Stock Exchange are women.
- Only five out of 291 of the Swedish companies listed on the Swedish Stock Exchange have female Managing Directors.
- 52 percent of all employed women in a family with two children, with the youngest child in the age of 3-6 years, worked full time compared to 94 percent of all men.
- Within the private sector only 22 percent of the executives are women. Further, females’ possess 35 percent of the executive positions within the government administration.
There are numerous examples of organizations in Sweden which have female employees assigned abroad. Within a large financial company, hereinafter called Financo, approximately 24 percent of the expatriates are women. Further, within a large manufacturing company and a large appliance company, hereinafter called Tecno and Applico, approximately ten percent of the expatriates are females. When looking at the Swedish Government offices and specifically the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the situation is similar. At this Ministry 55 percent of the expatriates are women, however, this figure includes all females working abroad in all levels of the organization. For example, this number includes administrative staff such as assistants who usually are women. Since we are interested in looking at women possessing higher positions (Second Secretary or higher), we are of the opinion that the figure of female expatriates possessing these positions would be considerably lower. We have e-mailed the Ministry for Foreign Affairs three times asking them if they have any statistics regarding the number of female expatriates at these levels but has not received any answer. We believe this clearly shows the under-representation of women in international assignments and for this reason: it would be interesting to explore how women within larger Swedish corporations and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs perceive their possibilities to obtain such assignments.

1.3 Problem definition
With this problem background our research question goes:

*How do women perceive their possibilities to obtain an international assignment?*

1.4 Purpose
The main purpose with this study is to create an understanding for women’s possibilities to obtain an international assignment. To be able to get a better understanding for women’s situation and obtain a more faceted picture we will examine two types of sectors; larger Swedish corporations within the Swedish business world and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. In addition to our main purpose, we will also elucidate how women within the two sectors may perhaps learn from each other’s experiences, this to create new knowledge regarding women on international assignments. Further, we would like this research to become a source of inspiration for future studies regarding female expatriates.

1.5 Demarcations
This study is limited to regard larger Swedish corporations listed on the Swedish stock exchange and to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs within the Government Offices of Sweden. According to us, larger Swedish corporations are characterized by being listed on the Swedish stock exchange. Further, they are supposed to have more than 10,000 employees and be represented in more than 20 countries. We believe that within the larger corporations, expatriates are more common in comparison to small and medium organizations since they are established in many countries to a greater extent. Therefore, female expatriates should presumably be better represented in these corporations. Our decision to focus on the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is assignable to the fact that it is the Government Office which has the
largest amount of personnel working abroad\textsuperscript{23}. We will only regard Swedish women sent on an international assignment from their Swedish employer. We will have a shorter reasoning regarding the criterion for the recruitment of expatriates since this is something we find interesting for the study. However, the focal point of the research is the women’s personal experiences and individual knowledge about their foreign assignment. We do not specifically consider the organizations’ recruitment process and the recruiter any further.

\section*{1.6 Disposition}

In this chapter we have introduced the reader to the background of the problem and stated the problem definition and the purpose with this research. A short description of how our thesis will be disposed will follow below.

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textbf{Scientific Method:} This chapter is the foundation of our thesis. This foundation affects the result of the study and is therefore important for the reader to understand and become aware of. We will for example describe our preconceptions, view of knowledge, and our chosen perspective.
\item \textbf{Literature review:} We present the theories considered relevant and necessary for the study to facilitate a comprehensive analysis and understanding of the research question. These theories are important to have knowledge about when discussing female expatriates.
\item \textbf{Practical Method:} We will present and motive the procedure when collecting and processing our empirical data and the chapter contains a description of how the thesis has been created.
\item \textbf{Presentation of our study objects:} A short overview of our study objects, Financo, Tecno, Applico and the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs will be given.
\item \textbf{Empirical study:} Our data collected from the reality in which female expatriates work is described.
\item \textbf{Analysis:} To be able to create a better and broader foundation for our analysis we will add interesting aspects which appeared important to our respondents during our empirical data collection. The empirical data will be interpreted and compared with the literature review. The structure of the analysis follows the same structure as the collected empirical data to facilitate the reading. In addition, we will
\item \textbf{Conclusions:} In this chapter we will present our conclusions and show that our problem definition is answered and our purpose is achieved.
\item \textbf{The quality of our research:} We will discuss the truth criterions validity, practical applicability, and intersubjectivity. Further we suggest areas for future studies.
\end{enumerate}

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2. SCIENTIFIC METHOD

The chapter will discuss the scientific method, which is the foundation of our study. It is important to communicate and let the reader become aware of the scientific method, since it will influence the result of the study. We will portray how our problem definition jointly with our epistemology have affected the decisions we have taken into consideration throughout the thesis work.

2.1 What is in the authors’ “backpacks”?

Important issues to elucidate are the preconceptions; a researcher reasonably brings his or her former experiences into the field which intends to be studied.24 These former experiences will establish boundaries regarding the creation of our thesis. In order to facilitate the understanding for what issues that may have affected the research we would like to give the reader information concerning the backgrounds and prior experiences of the authors appropriate to the study.

The preconceptions that are of major relevance for the study are primarily received from our education here at Umeå School of Business (USBE). Studies within the area of Management at USBE, as well as Hawai’i Pacific University and Dalhousie University, are elements that have given us further awareness within our area of specialization.

As mentioned earlier the movement of companies and their employees across borders is increasing at the same time as the world is “shrinking”, which increases the requirements on organizations and its personnel. This global business environment sometimes demands a necessity of using an expatriate. How we interpret and discuss the subject of women and international assignments is certainly something that will be affected by our theoretical and personal backgrounds. This is something that we are aware of; still it is rather difficult to tell in what way our preconceived concepts have influenced this study’s character. There might for instance be a possibility of us failing to interpret the empirical data from some approaches. This since we forecast to be given certain responds to our questions. For example, prior to this research and during its development we believed that stereotypes regarding the sexes might be a reason for the lack of females on international assignments. Due to our unconscious choice to focus on certain aspects we believe that our preconceptions also might have an influence on the analysis. We have tried to have the possible preconceived concepts in mind while working with the thesis. Additional, we strove towards objectivity throughout the whole process of

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24 Karin Widerberg, Kvalitativ forskning i praktiken. (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2002), 178-179. (Translation: Qualitative research in practise)
completing the thesis. Further, during our previous education we have never discussed or got in touch with female expatriates.

Practical experience of international assignments is something we both are lacking. However, one of the authors did an internship at one of the Permanent Missions of Sweden in Europe, which is an authority within the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Here she met both men and women from Sweden working in a foreign country. The other author has a male relative who worked and lived with his family in the United States during four years and has been away for shorter periods to other countries as well. This is something that most certainly has had an influencing effect on our appraisals and ways of looking at the expatriation. Even though we do not have practical experience of expatriation, nevertheless we do have experiences of living abroad. Living in the United States and Canada, as well as two other countries within Europe, are supplementary elements that might have affected the research further. Still, we believe that we have had the possibility to complement each other’s opinions and perspectives. As mentioned in the previous chapter both authors are aiming for an international career. Either it will be in a multicultural corporation in Sweden, working abroad, or as an expatriate from Sweden. The fact that we are women are beyond doubt influencing how we see the world and in this case look at the circumstances. Further, we are of the opinion that there should be more female expatriates and that is also why we came across this interesting subject and initiated to enter deeper into it.

To explain in plain words exactly how our “backpacks” have influenced the study is easier said than done. We have indeed shaped the study with our values, our knowledge, and our previous experiences, this is a known fact. Still, in what extent we do not know. Hence, we have made an effort to make these characteristics and qualities visible to the reader. A reason for this is to offer the reader the possibility to create their own understanding of how it might have affected the study in some direction.

2.2 Our vision of the world

It is important to clarify how the researcher relates to the environment that will be examined, in this case women on international assignments. There are numerous epistemologies one can relate to and the foundation of the research will hence depend on the view one associates with.25

Our ambition with this study is to gather data from female respondents within the Swedish business world and within the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs who have been on one or several international assignments. One can early on, in the introduction, distinguish that we relate to a hermeneutical view. As women on international assignments are reviewed, we would like to create an understanding for women’s possibilities to obtain an international assignment. We are studying a rather complex phenomenon due to the fact that we are trying to identify the backgrounds and experiences of the respondents. This in order to understand what they consider being of importance concerning their international assignment. In other words, we are trying to interpret the received information supplied by the respondents and to put ourselves in their shoes. Further, to find the heart of their reasoning, their opinions, and personal experiences is something we believe is important and consequently like to put forward.

25 Ulf Lundahl and Per-Hugo Skärvad, Utredningsmetodik för samhällsvetare och ekonomer, (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1999), 44. (Translation: Research method for social science and business students)
Furthermore, we are aware of the fact that the study cannot simplify and generalize all female expatriates and this is neither our aim. Instead, we seek to create a deeper understanding regarding a narrow selection of respondents. In addition, we are trying to reproduce the reality from our respondents’ point of views. The prior experiences of a person will affect them according to us; hence to ignore the experiences is nearly impossible. Further, everyone has their own subjective view of the reality which in turn means that the reality is not objective, hence no view can be considered as right or wrong.

**2.3 From a female point of view**

A way of looking at the surrounding is, within the area of research, a good description of someone’s perspective, and a fundamental part of the study is the researcher’s choice of this perspective. All the consisting elements of the study, from choice of subjects to conclusion, will be affected by the researchers’ perceptions of the reality.⁵⁻⁶

We find it interesting to study female expatriates since there is limited research within this area. Therefore, our focus is primarily on the woman and we will approach the problem from a gender based perspective with a focus upon female expatriates. Further, we find a personal value in our choice of perspective, since we have an interest of working abroad in the future, possibly as an expatriate. International assignments and women are hence the target for our study since we want to gain a deeper understanding of their opinions and experiences of their foreign assignments.

The Swedish parliament has appointed Umeå University as the host University for conducting research regarding how the concept of gender affects our lives and the world of science. Gender research started in the 1970’s and has developed into a special research area as well as a perspective within several other areas of research, for example business. Today gender research is a growing field of study and there is an ongoing debate in the society concerning gender. Depending on what theoretical starting point a scientist has, the problem definition, the delimitations, and the concepts varies. Perceptions of gender are recovered in all areas of human life; symbolically, individually, and as a collective. The concept is also present within the established sciences as well.⁷

During the research process, the researcher can choose to be or not to be involved in the studied environment. If the researcher is not involved he or she tries not to affect the research. On the other hand, participating in the environment means that the researcher takes an active part in the surrounding, which he or she observes at the same time.⁸ Since our aim is not to affect the empirical data, we have chosen to take the role as a “spectator”. To achieve total objectivity one should possibly choose to perform the study through questionnaires to reduce the risk of subjective interpretation. However, a questionnaire with a limited amount of questions would not allow us to get a balanced picture of the area since the answers often tend to be quite brief and less faceted. Subjective interpretations will take place, however according to Lundahl and Skärvad, this is acceptable as long as the researcher clearly motivates and discusses his or her perspective and assumptions.⁹

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⁵ Lars Torsten Eriksson and Finn Wiedersheim-Paul, *Att utreda, forska och rapportera* (Malmö: Liber ekonomi, 2001), 56-57. (*Translation: To investigate, research, and report*)

⁶ http://www.umu.se/genusforskning/programforklaring1.pdf


⁸ Lundahl and Skärvad, *Utredningsmetodik för samhällsvetare och ekonomer*, 75.
2.4 Approach
To choose an ideal approach is sometimes easier said than done. The boundaries between the two main approaches, induction and deduction, are to some extent vague and overlap each other\(^\text{30}\). The starting point of this thesis concerned the choice of subject. Our interest and curiosity in working abroad in addition to the desire of getting a deeper understanding of female expatriates made the final choice. Our previous knowledge within the studied area expatriation is fairly restricted. By reason of this the continuation resulted in gathering sources which discussed the topic further. We found appropriate theories which made the foundation of our literature review. The purpose with this part is also to provide the reader with information and give him or her theoretical understanding for the chosen subject. On the basis of the selected theories we conducted our interview manual (see Appendix 1). Additional, the reason for starting with gathering theories is to be able to improve the interpretation of our empirical data. Differences and similarities might be visible in the analysis when reconnecting between the literature review and the empirical framework. Furthermore, our ambition has been to collect empirical data which creates new knowledge. On the other hand, if our approach were authentically inductive no theoretical preconception would have existed at all. After completion of the interviews we compiled the information and found that there were some interesting aspects discussed which did not exist in our literature review. Hence, we supplemented these aspects initially in Chapter 7 to create a better and broader foundation for our study. In the analysis we compare the empirical material with our literature review and vice versa. This is carried out to create a deeper understanding for the problem and not to reject the theories. We are not using a pure inductive approach, neither a deductive one. Instead we are using a mix of the two of them. Below the reader will find a model describing our way of approaching the selected problem, figure 2:1.

![Figure 2:1 A model regarding our approach](image)

Source: Created by the authors

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2.5 Choice of theories
Initially we have selected theories, which will contribute to the understanding of our chosen problem. At a first glance the concepts in the literature review might appear to be separated from the research field of traditional business. However, the review considers areas which we believe are clearly linked to the fields of culture, management, and international business. Within these well established fields of business we have more specifically regarded the areas of international assignments, gender based differences, female characteristics, the glass ceiling, and networks. The notion of international assignments, also known as expatriation, provides the reader with an understanding for the phenomenon. Gender based differences, female characteristics, and the glass ceiling are essential concepts worth including given that we have chosen a gender based perspective with a focus upon female expatriates.

Sociological concepts may also help us to understand why it is hard to become aware of barriers that have been keeping women from higher professional positions and more high-status fields in management. For example, the unspoken use of gender stereotypes may result in an allocation of individuals based on gender within certain positions and gendered hierarchies. Further, the theory regarding networks is an entrenched field within business, and also a matter of course to be able to understand how to get access to the international assignments. We believe that the above mentioned fields are to a large extent neglected within the education at Umeå School of Business and we have not come across them during our studies abroad either. Therefore we believe it is important to include these notions within the educations at USBE to get a broader knowledge and awareness about concepts we find clearly related to the field of business. The education and the research area of management at USBE focus mainly upon project management and organizations.

The reason for adding some unforeseen aspects and circumstances that came to our attention during or after the interviews is to support the empirical findings. Aspects we did not predicted in advance or could have noticed previous to the implemented interviews were dual-careers, male structures, and male bonding and “old boys’” networks.

We are aware of the fact that a small amount of the sources used in the literature review are not recently published. Despite this fact, we believe they are helpful when illuminating the findings of observable facts in the empirical data. Further, “pure theories” are not represented in the thesis. Instead we include an explanation of several concepts we find important, this to create an understanding of the chosen area which is a basic condition for an inductive approach. One can look at it as a conceptual framework; however we have chosen to call it literature review.

2.6 Secondary sources
Secondary sources need to be used with caution since they have limitations. These sources consist of writings of professionals who have studied prime sources during an extended period of time. Before we started the compilation of our empirical framework we wanted to create a deeper understanding of the chosen problem, this with help of the secondary sources. The starting point of our thesis project had its base in the searching of literature and scientific articles related to the chosen topic. This took place at the University Library at Umeå University, mainly in ALBUM, EBSCO (for example Business Source Premier and

31 W. Lawrence Neuman, Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), 397.
ArtikelSök) and SSCI (Social Sciences Citation Index). These databases supplied us with a great amount of secondary sources, which later developed into the foundation of our literature review. Search words in both English and Swedish were used independently or in various combinations to limit the findings in the databases. These were:

- Executive
- Expatriate
- Female expatriates
- Foreign assignment
- Gender
- Glass ceiling
- Homosociality
- Host country
- International assignment
- Leading position
- Networks
- Recruitment
- Risk taking
- Self-esteem
- Self-perception
- Social psychology
- Stereotypes
- Women

When searching for secondary sources in different databases one usually gets several thousands of hits when using a specific search word or combinations of words. It may be difficult to know which sources one can rely upon and what quality the scientific articles have. Nevertheless, there exist numerous quality lists which rank various journals within specific areas and give one an indication of the most recognized ones. To enhance the quality of this study we believe it is important to make use of scientific articles found in journals represented in ranking lists or cited in Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). In the SSCI one can find multidisciplinary literature regarding social sciences. The database covers more than 1,700 journals across 50 social sciences disciplines, as well as individually selected items from over 3,300 of the world’s leading scientific and technical journals. Most of the articles we have used can be found in various lists and in SSCI.

We got further ideas of where to find additional sources after reviewing literature found in ALBUM and their lists of references. Some literature regarding theoretical and practical method was already at our disposal; beside these books we got access to other ones through ALBUM. We have certainly endeavored to find as recent sources as possible, especially concerning scientific articles. Our aim has been to work with articles not published earlier than the year of 2002. On the other hand, due to restricted research within the area of female expatriates, some of these articles are dated earlier than this. When it comes to the usefulness of certain sources in our research, the topicality is an important aspect concerning the choice of scientific articles. By reason of this argument we have thoroughly examined if the articles will provide our study with something useful and if it is recently published.

32 http://portal.isiknowledge.com/portal.cgi/wos?Init=Yes&SID=Z2OjON7bIacDP93bpK4
2.7 Criticism of secondary sources

When declaring to the reader what possible shortages our sources might have it is important to discuss potential disadvantages with using secondary sources. In accordance with Ejvegård, there exist four aspects one has to take into consideration when using these types of sources:

- **Authenticity** – One has to regard the requirement for authenticity. Is there a risk for falsification?
- **Independency** – It is essential to trace the origin of the source, and this is something the scientist should reflect upon. Generally, primary sources are more reliable in comparison to secondary sources.
- **Recently published** – The most recent books and articles should contain the latest facts and newest observations. That is why one should, in the first place, turn to these more updated sources instead of older ones.
- **Contemporary sources** – Due to the fact that people tend to forget over time, literature dealing with specific historical events may be more accurate the more contemporary it is. In other words, it should be published close to the event.

We have throughout our research process evaluated our sources and made use of the most accurate ones. We have strived for tracing the information back to the original source, however at times this has not been beneficial. The reason for this is due to the workload of finding the original source would exceed the value of it. With reference to authenticity we have concluded that the literature and the scientific articles are authentic given that we have used the renowned databases as mentioned earlier. Thus, every article evidently has to be evaluated separately. As previous pointed out, we have tried to find as topical sources as possible. Certain theories, however, are printed in the late 1990’s. Still they are recognized and hence we have chosen to refer to them. The issue of contemporary sources is not applicable to this research, however we believe it is an important part to take into consideration when looking at historical events.

Further, Internet sources are in deed secondary sources worth to be assessed. One has to critically evaluate all information’s trustworthiness and its origin, in particular when using the Internet. We have not used the Internet in any greater extent; only a few times we refer to it. For example regarding the official homepages of the chosen companies included in the thesis and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. We will discuss this study’s quality in detail in Chapter 9.

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3. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter we will give an account of the theories considered relevant and necessary for the study to facilitate a comprehensive analysis and understanding of the research question. Some of the concepts used are: expatriation, stereotypes, networks, the glass ceiling, risk taking, and homosociality. The theories will later on be linked to our empirical data and afterwards lead to the analysis. This chapter is imperative to have knowledge about when discussing women’s possibilities to obtain an international assignment.

3.1 Introduction to our literature review

We have included a number of concepts in our literature review which we believe may affect women’s possibilities to obtain an international assignment. To begin with we will give the reader a background to the field of expatriation and the growing importance of international assignments. This is a critical part of international human resource management due to the rapid globalization which is taking place. We will also give an account of the expatriate cycle to better understand what issues an organization carefully needs to consider to successfully managing an expatriate. It is essential to take advantage of the international assignments to be able to create an international mindset in an organization and spread the new obtained knowledge to other employees. These parts are closely related to the research area of business and international business.

Further, we have included concepts related to culture and organizational culture; gender based stereotypes and host country stereotypes, the role of the woman at home, and the idea of homosociality. This is to increase the understanding of why people act in, and perceive situations in distinguished ways which in turn might have an affect on female expatriates. In addition we believe that women sometimes might hinder themselves in their careers due to personal barriers one has to overcome, and has therefore included theories regarding women’s self-esteem and women and risk taking.

Since the fields of leadership and management also are central when discussing business and international business and theories concerning networks, the Glass Ceiling, and the lack of women in leading positions have therefore been incorporated in the review. We will highlight ways in which leaders and organizations might help or hinder women from obtaining international assignments during their career.
3.2 Expatriates and the international assignment

The word ‘expatriate’ conjures up images of colonial outposts, gin and tonics at the club and lavish benefits for pioneering men bringing enlightenment to far flung corners of empire. Whilst there may be some lucky expatriates still enjoying a luxury lifestyle, the world of expatriation is changing dramatically and permanently.  

To view the management of expatriates as a critical part of an international human resource management strategy is essential for both the private and public sector to achieve competitive advantage in an increasingly global economy. To consider who to send abroad, why expatriates are sent and how this fits into the global strategy of the organization is very important. Employing an expatriate is approximately three to four times more expensive than hiring the same employee at home. Times have changed and an expatriate assignment does no longer automatically lead to a promotion when returning. To ensure a future career expatriates need to network and be proactive. Organizations also move towards balancing terms and conditions between expatriates and locals, thus beneficial financial conditions are also slowly disappearing.

To get recruited to the highest positions, international experience is often a requirement. Expatriation is still the preferred way of creating a global mindset amongst managers even though this experience can be achieved from working in cross-border teams and international projects. However, an expatriate needs to posses new knowledge and skills and organizations need to plan and monitor these assignments carefully.

This is the result of three key factors. First, a rapidly increasing amount of joint ventures and alliances across national boundaries change the nature of international organizations. This requires expatriates with high levels of interpersonal and cross-cultural skills. Further, small and medium-sized organizations have come forward as key players in global trade. Second, a decline in the proportion of expatriates going from developed countries to the developing countries has changed the main host locations. Extensive European, Japanese, and US foreign direct investment have increased the number of assignments between developed countries instead. Trends show that the most popular regional destinations for expatriates are Asia (33%), Western Europe (26%) and the United States (16%). Finally, the nature of the expatriates themselves has changed. Women still represent only a small proportion of international assignees; however, the traditional profile of the male, married, career expatriate is giving way to other well-educated managers.

European multinational enterprises were the first to internationalize and European countries have a long history of moving managers around the world due to their relatively small domestic markets. As a result of the rapid growth of internationalization, and the amplified global competition, the amount of European based multinational organizations has increased significantly the last decades. International economic activities are getting more and more important which in turn demands higher mobility of human resources. The quality of an organization’s human resources, and how effectively they are managed and developed, is critical factors for international success. The interest in expatriate human resource


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.
management has therefore grown substantially within Europe the last decade and extensive research has been undertaken regarding the concept of expatriation.\textsuperscript{38}

The development of the European Union has most certainly affected the growth of internationalization. Goods, capital, and people enjoy free movement within the Union and legal and administrative requirement for foreign workers do not apply to transfers within Europe. In comparison to other free trade areas this has resulted in a strong growth of expatriation between European countries. There are other reasons as well for increasing expatriation within Europe, for example the rapid growth of small and medium sized enterprises who have internationalized their operations and the collapse of the Communism in the central and eastern European states which has increased the foreign direct investment in these countries. Further, the amount of highly industrialized countries within a small geographic area gives international organizations several interesting opportunities when locating parts of their business activities in Europe.\textsuperscript{39}

3.3 Expatriate Cycle

To successfully manage an expatriate, an organization must consider the entire expatriate cycle. The first stage of the cycle is \textit{strategic planning}. There are several reasons for sending an expatriate abroad, for example control and co-ordination of operations, transfer of skills and knowledge, or managerial development. The organization has to consider if an expatriate is the best and most cost-effective choice for an international assignment or if a local employee should fill the position; this depends on the type of assignment. There is a large risk that organizations will lose a valuable source of competitive advantage if they send people on expatriate assignments without carefully considering how this fits into the strategic plan.\textsuperscript{40}

When a decision has been made to send an expatriate abroad the next step in the cycle begins; the \textit{selection}. Research often emphasizes “soft” skills such as intercultural empathy, emotional stability, self-awareness, flexibility and interpersonal skills. Nevertheless, a key determinant of eligibility for international assignments, for most organizations, is technical competence. The third stage of the cycle is the \textit{preparation} or \textit{pre-departure training}. To avoid cultural shocks and to help an expatriate and his or her family to swiftly adjust to the new environment, effective preparation is needed. It is important to assess the nature and extent of the pre-departure preparation for each individual expatriate. These preparations may include cross-cultural, language, and local business training.\textsuperscript{41}

\textit{Performance measurement} is also an important part of the expatriate cycle. This requires that the organization has an understanding for the variables that influence an expatriate’s success or failure abroad. The three most critical variables to look at are the environment (the culture for example), personality characteristics, and the job requirements. The fifth and final stage of the cycle is the \textit{repatriation} stage. This is often a problematic part for both organizations and expatriates. For many expatriates the repatriation is far more stressful than moving abroad. They are supposed to be proactive during their time abroad and perform an extensive networking to ensure that a position is available when they return. However, the entry level usually depends on what positions are available at that time. There are two main reasons for


\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., 348-350.

\textsuperscript{40}http://www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/news/manfocus/downloads/expatriates.doc

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid.
organizations to handle this stage of the cycle very carefully. First, loosing someone who is dissatisfied with his or her position when returning is expensive, both in terms of money but also in terms of investment in human capital. More important is that an expatriate assignment is a crucial tool when creating a transnational mindset in the organization. To become a global operator it is essential that the organization successfully spread the learning gained from expatriates on foreign assignments to other employees.42

The reason for including this section concerning expatriates and international assignments is to give the reader a background to the concept of expatriation. We believe it is essential to understand why expatriates have become a vital issue for international and multinational organizations. This is why we have considered this area worth exploring further. Our focal point is female expatriates since they still are underrepresented in these assignments. The sections below reflect our ideas of what might affect women’s possibilities for obtaining a foreign assignment. Further, it is important to distinguish between an expatriate who is hired in Sweden under Swedish working conditions, and a Swede who is working abroad under local conditions in the host country. An expatriate has an assignment with a limited timeframe and is supposed to go back to the home country after completion of the assignment, this to enrich the company with the gained knowledge and experience.

3.4 Stereotypes in host countries
The hostile perception that some cultures have against women in work environments is one of the reasons why the number of female expatriates are few. According to Sinangil and Ones, there is evidence from surveys that approximately 70 percent of multinationals do not send female expatriates abroad based on foreigner prejudice. Besides the foreign prejudice, in general 50 percent of the multinationals simply hesitate to select women.44 However, they do not give any reasons for this hesitation in the article. Further, cultural values in a few countries, such as traditions, laws, religion, and leaders can in fact turn a professional stay in a country into a very difficult, or even impossible, assignment for women.45 Assumptions based

43 Ibid.
45 Fischlmayr, ”Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 775.
on myths tend to be a reason for the undersized amount of female expatriates. In comparison to male expatriates female ones tend to be negatively stereotyped by host nationals particularly in countries which do not value women as professionals, some host countries refuse to transact with women.\textsuperscript{46} Further, many host nationals believe that “If a woman was sent by a company, then she must be exceptionally competent”\textsuperscript{47}; this is a common label for women on international assignments.

According to Tung, international assignments are indeed something that women are willing to undertake. Further, studies show that women are as successful as men with their assignments, as well as in countries with low participation of women in the workforce.\textsuperscript{48} Statistics show that female expatriates, in general, are less willing to accept an international assignment where they are to settle with lower social status or where female managers are rare. Females would reject an international assignment to the Middle East in a greater extent than men, and vice versa for men on an assignment to Africa. Hence, harsh environmental conditions are something women are willing to comply with. Tung is of the opinion that women are prepared for the fact that they may encounter hardships and are enthusiastic when it comes to challenges. This, as long as these challenges and hardships are in agreement with the activities and functions women are allowed to engage in back home. Having a conversation or doing business with a client of the opposite gender, or driving a car are examples of such activities and functions. Some Middle East countries do not allow activities like this; the Islamic traditions are strictly adhering to that women engage in certain activities. However, Tung says that there was no significant difference between the genders for assignments in other geographical areas.\textsuperscript{49}

Tung mentions adjustment problems for females on assignments in countries which have an under-representation of women in professional and managerial positions. She believes the adjustment problems have to do with the above mentioned.\textsuperscript{50} This is also in agreement with the argumentation of Selmar and Leung regarding host national attitudes and that these attitudes may affect female expatriates and their international adjustment.\textsuperscript{51} Nonetheless, regardless of the “problems” the women’s performance was equally effective in comparison to their male counterparts. According to Tung, albeit the women allocated to countries with differing degrees of female involvement in the workforce, the women prevail the problems and performed according to expectations. One can say that with time these adjustment problems decreased. The longer the women stayed in the country the fewer problems they encountered. In some of the countries which have different views of gender and about women in the workforce, one makes distinctions between foreign and local females. “Expatriate women tend to be perceived first and foremost as professionals with lesser importance placed on their gender.”\textsuperscript{52} To put it differently, women on international assignments are regarded as “third gender members”. Female expatriates in comparison to the local women were accorded a different role.\textsuperscript{53} In accordance with Tung “there is a general assumption by many host

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 765.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 244.
\textsuperscript{49} Tung, “Female Expatriates”, 244.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 245.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Selmar and Leung, “International adjustment of female vs male business expatriates”, 1118.
\textsuperscript{53} Tung, “Female Expatriates”, 245.
country nationals that female expatriates must be exceptionally well-qualified before their company would appoint them to the position”. 54

3.5 Gender based stereotypes

As said by Powell and Graves, gender differences are visible by stereotypes, discrimination, and prejudice.55 “By using gender symbols and stereotypes, individuals establish identity. Working life is full of such symbols, and therefore the gender of a job is potentially an important means for identifying work, providing that the job supports the individual’s proper gender.”56 Gender biases and insular views are part of many societies around the globe. Sinangil and Ones argues that low-level work and domestic duties are connected to women’s traditional roles.57

The primarily motive for not sending women abroad is the old-fashioned mindsets and the stereotypical attitudes.58 Sometimes gender is the only “characteristic” people use to make their opinions upon others.59 “Usually, women are found to be less favorably evaluated than men. Very often, there is no real causality underlying these assumptions.”60 These stereotypically assumptions might be converted into an entirely upside-down picture of reality and at the same time it can show the way to misbehavior and lead to wrong decisions. Further, the stereotypically assumptions might lead to consequences for the organization, such as capable and suitable women are not being selected for the assignment, or for that matter regarded or rewarded equally to men. In addition, Fischlmayr argues that discrimination is an outcome when co-workers and/or superiors are actively hindering women in their career paths. Another outcome can be reflected in a bias against women, they may possibly not be promoted or the bias might be related to development or supervision. Stereotypes play an important role in the selection if the candidate’s profile is weak or the information on the task is poor. The gender-typed attitude of a male married to a trailing spouse is assumed to be the typically scenario for an expatriate manager. Besides, there is a possible risk of the fact that selectors might look for candidates who are similar to themselves. That can be one out of many reasons for the male dominance within the area of expatriation. Furthermore, according to Fischlmayr male dominance also has to do with the classification of “in- and out groups”. Male selectors classify women as an “out group” and men as an “in group” which in turn often results in that “in group” people are promoted and favored. Every now and then situational factors influence the selection process, this since the low percentage of women in the total pool of potential candidates affects the selection.61

Regarding female candidates’ potential to succeed on foreign assignments, unfavorable perceptions at headquarters seem to be one of the most restricting factors that are limiting the number of female expatriates. Selmar and Leung argue that the pool of potential candidates is restricted due to this type of gender stereotyping. Further, it makes women’s careers abroad problematic. However, these unfavorable perceptions are not in agreement with the proven

54 Tung, “Female Expatriates”, 246.
57 Sinangil and Ones, “Gender Differences in Expatriate Job Performance”, 463.
58 Fischlmayr, ”Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 781.
59 Ibid., 775.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
fact that most women on foreign assignments are successful, as said by Selmar and Leung. According to Selmar and Leung, literature has extensively been discussing the dissimilarities in values between women and men. Females emphasize more on interdependence and cooperation; these are feminine qualities that women possess. Practically women are on the whole more self-aware, relationship oriented, and nurturing in comparison to men. Men put emphasis on the masculine role while women prefer to highlight feminine or relationship roles. These differences affect the line of actions for men and women. They interact with people outside work in a distinct way due to these values.

### 3.6 Networks

“A network can be seen as a pattern of continuous social relations between diverse actors”. Several people use the word network when they are talking about their “net” of contacts and connections. According to Drake and Solberg, men and women use networks in different ways. Nowadays networks are created by women for their own sake. Networking contributes to receiving and giving support, and also to create an important circle of acquaintance. These networks are helping women within organizations, for example to lift the “glass ceiling”. New networks are established by women to fulfill goals, promote and facilitate interests, to create new ideas, and to make one’s dreams come true.

Nowadays success and performance are not enough any longer, something else is required at higher management levels, such as support from others; this is what Napier and Sully call an “informal on-the-job training”. The importance of networks is something that men have recognized and according to Drake and Solberg, the awareness among men is more extended when it comes to using networks. Women think circular of the situation as a whole, while men think more rational and goal oriented. Fischlmayr argues that networking is well known among men and that their strong internal groups are an issue they easily know how to establish. A certain level of friendship is required and lots of informal meetings are necessary when using and establishing networks. Further, the author says that women are educated in a certain way and that is also why they do not “phone a man or ask for a date” since this easily can be misunderstood. “The main reason for this behaviour is due to internationalized socialization (‘what would others think about you if you…?’).”

According to Fischlmayr, the formal selection process is of the same kind as the underlying informal selection. The selection of an appropriate candidate is in a great extent related to women’s loose networks. Both domestically and internationally these loose networks have an essential role when choosing a suitable candidate. Since women have been excluded from these informal networks for a long time, a natural affect is that they have not had any access to these either. Further, Fischlmayr says that women were not considered as potential candidates for promotion and top management and that this was the reason why they were not

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63 Ibid., 1119-1120.
64 Irmelin Drake and Anne Grethe Solberg, Kvinnor och ledarskap, (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1996), 177. (Translation: Women and leadership)
65 Drake and Solberg, Kvinnor och ledarskap, 174-177.
66 Fischlmayr, “Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 780.
68 Drake and Solberg, Kvinnor och ledarskap, 183.
69 Fischlmayr, “Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 780.
70 Ibid.
In accordance with Linehan and Walsh, the seclusion from formal and informal networks also known as “male clubs” compounds women’s professional isolation. No availability of support detriments women, on the contrary the access to networks benefits males on an ongoing basis. The possible support received from networking could have benefited female expatriates’ careers. However, home and family commitments give women less time to use for activities such as “male clubbing”, said by Linehan and Walsh.

Mayrhofer and Scullion stress that female managers feel excluded from the networks. This male bonding often takes place after work hours, during different events etcetera. Further, disadvantageous effects of these barriers are for example lower salaries, blocked promotions, occupational stress, blocked career developments, and discrimination. The exclusion of women from the appropriate informal and formal networks and from informal organizational systems was regarded as a major barrier to women’s progress to the senior management ranks from which the expatriate cadre was mainly selected.

3.7 The role of the woman at home

The idea of the woman’s role as wife and mother are stereotypes that often come from the host nation. However, according to Fischlmayr, countries that have an overall good acceptance of women in the workforce open up possibilities for female expatriates. They are more likely to be successful in these countries.

According to both Mayrhofer and Scullion and Fischlmayr, a main factor for not accepting international assignments is the dual-career issue. However, this is not just a female problem, men are affected too. Still, a few companies do not select women for the reason that men are traditionally considered as the breadwinner and women as household keepers. “The trailing husband may find himself bored or lost among a group of non-working wives.” Linehan and Walsh are of the same opinion as Fischlmayr, they say that people in the new neighborhood in the host country looked at “househusband” as “oddies”, generally it is not socially acceptable. Further, Linehan and Walsh argue that “it is more difficult for the male partner to adjust to the secondary careerist role, as this role is still more socially acceptable for females.” Fischlmayr claims this to be a reason why some companies do not find the same solutions for female employees as the company does for the male employees. Furthermore, the author says that it is difficult and complicated having two careers abroad to follow.

Women highlight children as an obstacle for their career, child bearing and nursing are not included in the traditional model for having a career. Career planning is in the male line of business, women have to convince their managers that motherhood is something they are

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71 Fischlmayr, “Female self-perception as barrier to international careers”, 774.
74 Ibid., 817.
75 Fischlmayr, “Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”., 775.
76 Mayrhofer and Scullion, “Female expatriates in international business”, 818.
77 Fischlmayr, “Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 776.
78 Ibid.
79 Linehan and Walsh, “Beyond the traditional linear view of international managerial careers”, 183.
80 Fischlmayr, “Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 776.
capable of balancing with their job. While men are perceived as the ones who are “being in
the office first in the morning, and last to leave in the evening”\(^{81}\), females are the ones who
have responsibility for the home and family commitments – perceived as “part-time workers”.
For example, in the year of 2005 only 20 percent of the Swedish male parents used their
parental allowance.\(^{82}\) In order to keep hold of and being able to continue to promote female
expatriates, senior male executives will need to implement and put initiatives into practice to
eliminate attitudinal, cultural, and organizational biases.\(^{83}\)

According to Hofbauer and Fischlmayr, the expectation of women staying at home taking
care of the children is still very common, at least for a few years after giving birth to. With a
growing number of children the female inclination to be advantageously employed
diminishes. Further, the authors mention that “gender roles in society are clearly distributed,
meaning that top positions are reserved for men, while family and child care are designated
for women who must stay at home and leave their careers for several years.”\(^{84}\)

\(\text{That women give birth to children is a biological fact, but that women stay at}
home to take care of the children is rather a social fact. In spite of the fact that all}
women do not bear children and that all women do not always want to give
priority to caring, the possibility alone is sufficient to use as an excuse for
excluding women from certain jobs, as said by Westberg-Wohlgemuth.}\(^{85}\)

3.8 The Glass Ceiling

Women are still a minority among employees who possess a position within an organization
which includes a lot of responsibility and power. Women do not reach the higher levels within
the companies and usually their career ladder ends at the lower managerial positions. Women
who succeed in passing the middle-manager level soon discover that they cannot reach the
top. There is a glass ceiling between them and the top management level which prevents them
to climb any higher in the organizational hierarchy. This glass ceiling is maintained due to
visible and invisible, conscious and unconscious, mechanisms within the organization. In
other words the existing norms and values and the organizational culture, in addition to male
and female leaders and their individual conditions and opinions about what is right and what
is wrong, and how one should act and behave.\(^{86}\) The expression “glass ceiling” was invented
in 1977 by Rosabeth Moss Kanter to describe the invisible barrier women often meet on their
way up in their career. Even though this metaphor has weakened since then it still exists and
this invisible ceiling is still quite thick.\(^{87}\)

There are several possible explanations why this glass ceiling exists, for example attitudes.
Men and women differ from each other both biologically and culturally. Usually the top
positions within an organization are held by a male with a degree in engineering or business
with a long career path behind him. Women obviously differ from this well-known model for

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81 Linehan and Walsh, “Beyond the traditional linear view of international managerial careers”, 182.
82 Statistiska Centralbyrån. På tal om kvinnor och män, 44.
83 Linehan and Walsh, “Beyond the traditional linear view of international managerial careers”, 182.
84 Hofbauer and Fischlmayr, “Feminization of International Assignments”, 50.
85 Hanna Westberg-Wohlgemuth, Kvinnor och män märks: Könsmärkning av arbete – en dold lärandeprocess,
(Solna: Arbetslivsinstitutet, 1996), 182. (Translation: Gendering of work and knowledge: sex-marking – a
(hidden learning-process)
86 Drake and Solberg, Kvinnor och ledarskap, 21-22.
87 Anita Göransson, Kvinnor, män och karriärer – Visioner och verklighet i näringslivet, (Stockholm: SNS
Förlag, 2004), 11-12. (Translation:Women, men, and careers)
success and have a hard time getting access to this male collective. Further, women give birth and this usually means that they are “forced” to stay at home for a long period of time and have longer breaks in their career.\textsuperscript{88}

We believe that this glass ceiling and the fact that women have a hard time reaching the top positions within an organization contributes to the under-representation of women on international assignments. Since they are not represented to a significant extent in the higher managerial levels, they are neither available for international careers.

3.9 The lack of women in leading positions

As mentioned earlier the glass ceiling prevents women to reach the top managerial levels within organizations. However, statistics show that the proportion of female managers varies between the public and the private sector in Sweden. What characterize the work of a manager is that the work includes decision making, planning, leading, and coordinating.\textsuperscript{89} The proportion of female managers in different levels in Sweden’s 500 largest corporations in 2003 can be seen below:

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart.png}
\caption{Diagram 3:1 Proportion of female managers at different levels within larger corporations}
\end{figure}

\textit{Diagram 3:1 Proportion of female managers at different levels within larger corporations}

Source: Göransson, 21.

\textsuperscript{88} Ronald Fagerfjäll, \textit{Så spräcker vi glastaket! En handbok om hur det privata näringslivet ska kunna rekrytera och utveckla 3000 nya kvinnliga toppchefer}, (Stockholm: SNS Förlag, 2003), 29. (Translation: Shatter the glass ceiling!)

\textsuperscript{89} Göransson, \textit{Kvinnor, män och karriärer}, 15-16.
Middle-manager positions such as marketing manager, sales manager, and finance manager which may lead to higher positions are dominated by men. Further, positions like business area manager, division manager, or regional manager from which candidates usually are recruited for top positions are rarely held by women.\textsuperscript{90} We are of the opinion that the lack of women holding the positions from which candidates usually are recruited for top positions, and according to us international assignments as well contributes to the under-representation of female expatriates. The recruitment base of women is simply too small.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{proportions.png}
\caption{Diagram 3:2 Proportions of men and women in executive positions by sector}
\end{figure}

\textit{Source:} Statistics Sweden.\textsuperscript{91}

The diagram above shows the proportion of men and women holding executive positions by sector. Within the private sector the proportion of female executives is the lowest, only 22 percent. Further, in the government sector only 35 percent of the executives are women. The proportion of women within all sectors has increased between the year of 2003 and 2004. Of course it is important to consider the proportion of men and women working in the two sectors when revising the diagram above. Even though one regards this fact men are still over-represented in executive positions within the two sectors.\textsuperscript{92}

### 3.10 Women and Self-esteem

That women are under-represented in international management is the reality today; however to what extent does their own self-perception contribute to this fact? Organizations’ reluctance to send women on international assignments is a common explanation for why few females work internationally but little has been said about the women’s self-established impediments.\textsuperscript{93}

Fischlmayr presents both external and internal barriers for female international careers. The three external barriers she mentions are 1) the personnel managers’ reluctance to recruit female candidates, for example due to expected intolerance by foreigners or the difficulties

\textsuperscript{90} Göransson, "Kvinnor, män och karriärer,” 21-22.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Fischlmayr, “Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 773.
associated with the dual-career couple issues. 2) Cultural factors – women cannot be sent to certain regions or countries due to different circumstances, and 3) the personnel manager has gender based stereotypes in mind when he or she recruits employees to international assignments and makes the decision according to them.\(^94\)

However, women sometimes cause obstacles themselves for not being selected to work internationally. First, some women are reluctant to move to another country. The ability and motivation to transfer abroad are essential to become a successful expatriate. A study made in 1995 shows that men are usually more willing to move than women. Second, the main reason for women’s reluctance to relocate is their family situation. More and more couples live in a dual-career family which makes it more difficult to accept an international assignment. Some companies try to find solutions for their male employees living in a family like this, however this is not the case when it comes to female employees and they are therefore not selected to the same extent. In some countries like the United States, Australia, and Switzerland there are laws who do not allow both partners to work and male spouses are rare. Men are traditionally not looked upon as household keepers and often find themselves bored or feel lost among non-working female spouses as mentioned earlier.\(^95\)

The third and maybe the most important obstacle women cause themselves have to do with their gender based behavior. From childhood on, boys and girls are aware of their gender based role in society and this reflects in self-concepts and self-esteem. Men and women act differently in social settings and the self-esteem and the role in society is reproduced in the language we use. Men often talk about facts, results, and numbers and their self-overestimation makes them find fewer faults in themselves. When talking about the reason for having a successful career men use words like “I know…” and “I am able to…” while women say “I think that I would be able to…” and “I believe…”, or “Maybe…” It is common that females reduce their own value by emphasizing for example luck, chance, or the ease of the task instead of their own skills and capabilities. When women use indirect formulations, ask a lot of questions, and use a passive voice it shows a lack of determination for what they want. Permanent and personal terms are used less frequently when talking about their success. This contributes to the transferring of a poor self-image rather than emphasizing their individual performances. Women usually hold themselves responsible first in case of any mistakes while men stress their status and obtain a strong image and power; however they have a hard time to confess failure.\(^96\)

Success is often associated with being aggressive and “masculine” and this sometimes cause social disapproval. Most women depend upon acceptance and approval from others and may therefore be scared of being too successful and have difficulties admitting they have performed well. The lack of confidence in their performance is attributed to missing self-confidence, risk avoidance, and an unfocused career planning. This sometimes results in women trying to copy their male colleagues and ignore their female qualities such as showing emotions, good communication skills, and the ability of showing empathy. Women’s competitive advantage lies in their expressiveness, the ability to read between the lines, their intuition, their strategic planning and so forth, yet they rarely realize this. If women do not start to recognize their own abilities, stop appearing in a modest way and show no pride about their achievements they will not be able to increase their self-respect. Since personnel managers tend to value women less than men, females are often left without important tasks

\(^{94}\) Fischlmayr, “Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 774-775.
\(^{95}\) Ibid., 776.
\(^{96}\) Ibid., 776-777.
and promotion and therefore denied access to power networks. Those networks may be essential for future recruitment to international assignments. Self-esteem and self-confidence are said to be positively related to cultural adjustment and to job performance and therefore essential for women to increase.97

3.11 Women and Risk taking

Women have always been the ones who our society generally believes have to be protected from risks in any form. Men are the ones who first climbed the mountains, explored the bottom of the ocean, were sent out to universe, and went to war. Even today women are usually satisfied with being the first woman to do something, not being the first human being to do it. The above mentioned has to do with physical risks; however, studies show that men and women relate to risks differently in most cases.98

Generally, men have a higher risk tendency in comparison to women which brings both positive and negative consequences. Men have for example accomplished more in our world which has made them famous and rich. On the other hand, men also end up in prison more frequently than women, are more often seriously injured, and are more involved in alcohol and drug abuse compared to females. Put differently, men take more risks which may lead to physical damage. Further, women are also more risk averse in social contexts and this can become a barrier in their career and to their future success. Men are better at dominating a discussion and uphold their opinions while women more often avoid tough discussions with words and phrases that reflect caution. Women worries more, have a lower self-esteem, and have a tendency to back out to a greater extent than men when it comes to fame.99

Men and women usually consider questions like “Do I enjoy the fact that something new will happen to me or does it make me anxious?” and “Am I sure that I can create good results or do I doubt my capacity to succeed?” differently. How they answer these questions may be essential to their future career. One possible explanation to these differences is the locus of control. People with an internal locus control (usually men) believe that they themselves determine what will happen to them while people with external locus control (usually women) believe that the environment determines their lives. In other words, women think the control lies outside themselves and nothing they can do anything about.100

Women have until not too long ago been controlled by men and generations of females are taught to be humble, tolerant, patient, and accept that men are in control. Therefore it is not very surprising that women have to work with themselves to feel that they actually are in control of their life. A study shows that people holding a position which includes power had a greater internal locus of control than employees in lower levels, independent of gender. Still, women are the ones who usually hold positions in the lower or middle-management levels within an organization.101

97 Fischlmayr, “Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 777.
99 Ibid., 63-64.
100 Ibid., 67.
101 Austin, Åtta vägar till kvinnlig framgång, 68.
We are of the opinion that the fact that women are more risk averse might impact the under-represented in international assignments. We believe there is a possibility that women simply are afraid to take the risk to apply for or accept to be transferred to an international position.

3.12 Homosociality

Another possible reason for women being under-represented in international assignments is the homogeneity and conformity among male managers. In both society and in most organizations men control the positions which include a great deal of power. The result of this is that men identify and familiarize with other men more easily than women. This gender segregation is called homosociality. Women on the other hand are instead more hetero-social and divided as a group since they do not have as much power as men. They need to familiarize with men because they are the ones possessing the power. Therefore, it is important to interpret this from a power-situation and not see this as a typical female behavior. In other words, women do not have an aversion to other women.\(^\text{102}\)

One explanation to why men dominate the highest managerial positions might be that men prefer men. To reach top positions in an organization it is essential to socially fit into the organization and become accepted among one’s colleagues. Due to lack of clear measures of competence, organizations may select candidates because of social qualifications instead, such as social background and having a degree from the right elite school. Since men already posses most of the highest positions in an organization and therefore are the ones selecting other candidates, the need to fit in results in conformity. This in turn results in the fact that men choose men for top positions and international assignments. Hence, the opinion that a certain kind of person deserves these kinds of position is reinforced. Consequently, top executives believe they have the right to exclude candidates from other groups since they are viewed upon as incompetent and do not belong to the “right” group.\(^\text{103}\)

To work in a top position or go on an international assignment is often characterized by uncertain working conditions, communication with people, and dedication to one’s work. Because of this, men seem to select candidates for these positions whom they have faith in and who they know will act and think more or less alike, put in another way, other men. Women communicate and express themselves differently from men and male executives therefore feel uncertain about how women will act. Instead they choose a man since they know men will use the same language and understand what is been said. Further, it is more accepted among men to dedicate most of one’s time to work. Women on the other hand clearly show that there are other things in life that are important, for example children and will therefore be viewed upon as a dubious card. All the above mentioned becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy where the opinion regarding how a good top executive will look like is reproduced by itself and men continue to select men for top positions and international assignments.\(^\text{104}\)


\(^{103}\) Ibid., 45-46.

\(^{104}\) Holgersson, *Rekrytering av företagsledare*, 45-46.
3.13 Summary

Below we will present our own created model to summarize the literature review. The reader will find the different areas of concepts we have considered throughout this thesis and the concepts found in the model below are also the ones we are using in the forthcoming empirical data. In addition, we will use the same model in Chapter 8 where we draw conclusions from our empirical findings to see if our ideas in fact have an affect on women’s possibilities to obtain an international assignment. We have not included the sections concerning expatriates and international assignments and the expatriate cycle in this model by reason of that the purpose of these sections is to give the reader a background to the concept of expatriation. We believe it is essential to understand why expatriates have become a vital issue for international and multinational organizations. Further, we have included a question mark which represents aspects that might appear during our data collection. In addition, these may perhaps be necessary to include being able to perform a comprehensive analysis.

![Diagram of Possibilities to Obtain an International Assignment]

Figure 3.2 A summary regarding the literature review
Source: Created by the authors

The hostile perception that some cultures have against women in work environments are one of the reasons why the number of female expatriates are few. Further, cultural values in a few countries, such as traditions, laws, religion, and leaders can turn a professional stay in a country into a very difficult assignment. In comparison to male expatriates female ones tend to be negatively stereotyped by host nationals particularly in countries which do not value women as professionals, some host countries refuse to transact with women. Gender differences are visible by stereotypes, discrimination, and prejudice. By using gender symbols and stereotypes, individuals establish identity. Stereotypes play an important role in the selection if the candidate’s profile is weak or the information on the task is poor. The idea of the woman’s role as wife and mother are stereotypes that often come from the host nation. The secondary careerist role is still more socially acceptable for females. Women highlight children as an obstacle for their career, child bearing and nursing are not included in the traditional model for having a career. Women have to convince their managers that motherhood is something they are capable of balancing with their job.

A network can be seen as a pattern of continuous social relations between diverse actors. Networking contributes to receiving and giving support, and also to create an important circle.
of acquaintance. A certain level of friendship is required and lots of informal meetings are necessary when using and establishing networks. However, female managers feel excluded from the networks and this is regarded as a major barrier to women’s progress to the senior management ranks from which the expatriate cadre is mainly selected. The possible support received from networking could have benefited female expatriates’ careers.

Women are still a minority among employees who possess a position within an organization which includes a lot of responsibility and power. The invisible barrier women often meet on their way up in their career is known as the glass ceiling. We believe that this ceiling and the fact that women have a hard time reaching the top positions within an organization contributes to the under-representation of women on international assignments. In both society and in most organizations men control the positions which include a great deal of power. The result of this is that men identify and familiarize with other men more easily than women. This gender segregation is called homosociality. To reach top positions in an organization it is essential to socially fit into the organization and become accepted among one’s colleagues. We are of the opinion that the lack of women holding the positions from which candidates usually are recruited for top positions and, according to us, international assignments, contributes to the under-representation of female expatriates. The recruitment base of women is simply too small.

Some women are reluctant to move to another country and another reason for women’s reluctance to relocate is their family situation. Their gender based role in society and the fact that women act differently in social settings reflects in self-concepts and self-esteem. Studies show that men and women relate to risks differently in most cases. Generally, men have a higher risk tendency than women which brings both positive and negative consequences. Women worries more, have a lower self-esteem, and have a tendency to back out to a greater extent than men when it comes to fame.
4. PRACTICAL METHOD

In order to collect as valid and accurate data as possible, one has to match the practical method with the decisions one has made in the earlier stages of the thesis. The chapter contains a description of how the thesis has been created and we intend to present and motivate the procedure when collecting our empirical data.

4.1 Words or Numbers?

When starting a research project one has to choose an appropriate method to collect the empirical data. This method may be quantitative, qualitative, or sometimes include elements of both. It is important to consider which choice of method that is appropriate for the chosen problem to examine. Different questions require different methods, in other words different methods generate different answers. In general, one associates the qualitative method with the inductive approach and the quantitative method with the deductive approach. The difference between the two methods can be described as the type of data one collects; words or numbers.

The researcher’s interpretation of the empirical data is the important base of the qualitative method. In comparison to the quantitative method, one cannot or should not transform the empirical data into numbers. Even though this is the general opinion about quantitative and qualitative research, it is not a fixed rule that always applies. Our research is based upon individual experiences and opinions and our aim is not to draw general conclusions. We believe this would be complicated to study with a quantitative method. It would most likely include too many, and sometimes abstract variables, which would make it difficult to get an understanding for the study. As a result of our chosen problem and perspective we will perform a qualitative study since, in our opinion, it will answer our research question in the best possible way.

There are several aspects of the qualitative method that is criticized by many scientists. For example the lack of objectivity and the fact that the result is built upon what the researcher

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105 Idar Magne Holme and Bernt Krohn Solvang, Forskningsmetodik: Om kvalitativa och kvantitativa metoder (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1997), 76. (Translation: Research Methods)

106 Widerberg, Kvalitativ forskning i praktiken, 65.

107 Maj-Britt Johansson Lindfors, Att utveckla kunskap: Om metodologiska och andra vägval vid samhällsvetenskaplig kunskapsbildning. (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 1993), 72. (Translation: How to develop knowledge)


109 Holme and Solvang, Forskningsmetodik, 76.
finds interesting and meaningful. This complicates the procedure of reiterating the study once again. Qualitative studies are also criticized for the difficulties of generalizing the results to other environments, due to the limited amount of observed objects or individuals. However, according to Holme and Solvang, the qualitative method has its strengths in its flexibility and closeness to the empirical reality. This closeness can be described by the researcher’s attempt to observe the phenomenon from the inside. By putting oneself into the situation of others and their perspectives, the researcher tries to obtain a complete picture as possible. The complex and sometimes difficult interpretation of the empirical data collected with a qualitative method takes a lot of time and effort to process. However, our opinion is that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. We agree with Jacobsen who says that giving priority to many variables instead of many study objects makes the empirical data more distinct.

4.2 Selection – uniting two sectors

To be able to answer our research question we had to find women who presently are hired for an international assignment or previously have been an expatriate during their career. This was the basic criterion when selecting suitable respondents. Another criterion was finding women representing different industries within the Swedish business world together with the same number of representatives working for the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Further, we aimed at finding women who had worked in different countries to increase the degree of diversity in our empirical data. The criterions above were consciously drawn from our problem definition and the purpose of the study.

When trying to find suitable organizations within the Swedish business world we started “brainstorming” to come up with a selection of companies we thought would be of interest and match our criterions. We were of the opinion that it would be easier to find female expatriates within Sweden’s larger corporations; according to us the possibility of having female expatriates would increase if a company proves to be represented in several countries in the world. Therefore, we decided to limit our possible selection group to only include companies with at least 10,000 employees and be represented in no less than 20 countries. Since we were of this opinion we started to review several large Swedish organizations’ web pages to see if they were in agreement with our expectations. We found several interesting and appropriate companies which fulfilled our criterions for our study; however the final choices were Financo within the financial industry, Tecno within the high-technology industry, and Applico within the appliances industry.

We decided to contact these companies to ask if they were interested to participate in our thesis. During the phone call we explained the purpose with our study and the problem we have chosen to elucidate. The ones we talked to at each company were very helpful and enthusiastic about our thesis subject. At Financo the head of the International Assignments department helped us to get in touch with a suitable respondent in Luxembourg. The same applies for Tecno where the Human Resource department helped us to find an appropriate representative from their organization. Regarding Applico we found a very interesting candidate on their web page that we decided to contact in person.

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110 Bryman, Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder, 269-270.
111 Holme and Solvang, Forskningsmetodik, 92.
112 Jacobsen, Vad, hur och varför?, 142-144.
The reason for including the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is due to that we find it interesting to study different sectors in our society, this to develop a more faceted picture of female expatriates. Although we study two distinguished sectors they still have work related matters in common. Many employees have a close relation to Swedish companies and work with business associated matters. The Ministry for Foreign affairs works with promoting exports, imports, and foreign investment. This is intended to strengthen the position of Swedish companies and Swedish skills in markets were we are able to compete. Because of this we believe it is possible to unite these two sectors in our research. As a result we have chosen to focus on women working close to the business industry.

To find suitable respondents within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs we contacted a female representative from the Swedish Mission where one of the authors earlier enrolled in an internship. She was interested in our thesis project and agreed to participate. She also recommended another female working for the Ministry for Foreign Affairs who she thought would be of interest for the study and who we contacted. However, at first this person accepted our inquiry but later rejected it and cancelled the interview. Further, an employee at the Human Resource department, in Stockholm, tried to help us to get in contact with other possible respondents. Unfortunately, she was not very successful and one and a half week later we still did not have any respondent who we could contact. Therefore we started to screen the web page www.swedenabroad.se (the website for Swedish Diplomatic Missions abroad) to find female representatives ourselves. We e-mailed 14 suitable women across the globe to find out if they would be interested to participate. Five replies were received; however three of them could not participate within a reasonable timeframe. Luckily the other two women were happy to contribute to the study.

We know that the study might have been affected by the fact that representatives from Financo and Tecno were the ones who selected the respondents from these companies instead of ourselves. There is a possible risk that they selected respondents who would enhance the image of the companies; however, we do not believe this is the case since we got access to knowledgeable and professional women within the organizations. Instead, we believe they have contributed in a positive way since we do not have the information about who would be a suitable respondent.

4.3 Access to a closed environment

Even though one chooses an organization suitable to the problem definition, one has no guarantees to succeed. Alan Bryman mentions “open” and “closed” environments concerning access. Closed environments usually include different kinds of organizations, for example schools and corporations. To get access to an organization consists of hard work, strategic planning, and some good fortune.

Finding respondents willing to participate in our research was not as easy as we had hoped it would be. The reasons for this were either an unreasonable time frame or other circumstances. We were in contact with ABB, SKF, Astra Zeneca, Handelsbanken and Scania but could not get hold of the right person who could help us find suitable respondents, or the possible respondents could not participate within our scheduled period of time. Another company we were in contact with was Swedish Match. According to the person we talked to, Swedish

http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/3092

Bryman, Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder, 278-280.
Match has no, and has never had, any female expatriates which we found very surprising. We have also experienced problems regarding the access to respondents within the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs as mentioned above.

4.4 The interview manual
To collect our empirical data we have chosen a semi-structured type of interview, which is a combination between the focused and structured form. We have used specific questions but at the same time allowed our respondents to clarify and develop their answers with the help of complementary questions. In contrast to the structured interview, the respondents have had the possibility to answer the questions with their own words.¹¹⁵

When designing the interview manual we had our problem definition, the purpose of the thesis, and the literature review in mind (see Appendix 1). We believe that the questions included in the manual are the most suitable ones for answering our research question. Areas included in the manual are the international assignment, the recruitment, the glass ceiling, stereotypes, homosociality, women and self-esteem/risk taking, and networks. The section regarding expatriates and expatriation is not included in the interview manual. The purpose of this part in our literature review is only to provide the reader with an essential introduction for the chosen subject. To give our respondents the opportunity to review the questions and prepare themselves before the interview, we decided to send them the interview manual in advance. We are aware of by doing this we might miss out on some of their spontaneous comments and thoughts. Yet, we are of the opinion that the advantages with doing this outweigh the disadvantages and we will get more developed answers as well. Before we sent the interview manual to our respondents, we also let two persons and our supervisor read through it and comment on the questions. This gave us the chance to revise some of them to avoid indistinctness.

To give the respondents enough time to answer all our questions, but without the risk of making them tired and out of focus, we scheduled 60 minutes per interview. However, the length of the interviews varied between 45 and 60 minutes. The possible reasons for the interviews’ variation in length will be discussed under "Interview method" below.

4.5 Interview method
There is no perfect method for collecting empirical data and no matter what type of interview one conducts it is important to give an account for the possible shortages with the chosen technique.¹¹⁶ Our interviews were all conducted via telephone. Since we interviewed women presently working outside Sweden, as well as different parts of Sweden, telephone interviews were the only possible way to collect the data due to costs. Given that we could not afford to travel to meet all our respondents in person we decided to conduct telephone interviews to achieve the same conditions for all respondents.

The result of the empirical data collection will be influenced by the chosen method and there are of course both advantages and disadvantages with conducting telephone interviews. How

¹¹⁵ Tim May, Samhällsvetenskaplig forskning. (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2001), 150-151. (Translation: Research in Social Science)
¹¹⁶ Carina Andersson et al., Intervjuer, (Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet, Förvaltningshögskolans rapporter nr. 49, 2003), 12. (Translation: Interviews)
people act on the phone differ from person to person. Some people find it easier to express themselves without meeting in person while others become taciturn and silent. We believe this might be one reason why our interviews varied in length between 45 and 60 minutes. Non-verbal communication; for example body gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact might also hold some information which we have missed out on when performing telephone interviews. At the same time, our own body language has not affected the respondents and their answers. As mentioned earlier, we are interested in the respondents opinions and own experiences regarding our chosen subject, hence our interview can be characterized in the sense of a regular conversation.

We started all our interviews with offering the respondents anonymity and asked them if we were allowed to record the interview. To record the conversations was merely a way for us to facilitate our work with processing the empirical data later on. Nonetheless, one has to bear in mind that using a tape recorder can make the respondent uncomfortable and less willing to respond in an honest way concerning sensitive issues. Some of the questions in our interview manual might be seen as somewhat sensitive to discuss, which can have had an impact on the answers. On the other hand, our respondents might be eager to talk about gender differences and similar issues to help finding a solution to the problem. We also believe it is possible that the women find it easier to talk to a female interviewer than a male one since we might have experienced some of these problems ourselves. However, all respondents were very easy to talk to and provided a lot of useful and relevant information. Therefore, we have not experienced any problems due to the recording of the interviews. Further, it is almost impossible to discover and control if the respondents does not tell the truth during an interview and this can of course affect the result of the study. They may give a better picture of the company or the situation that is not in accordance with the reality. They may also answer questions in a way they think is appropriate for the study.

Both of us have participated when carrying out the interviews; one led the interview and the other one were listening and taking notes. By doing this, we believe we complement each other and have avoided misunderstandings since it is more difficult for only one person to lead the conversation, take notes, and ask resulting questions at the same time. If only one of us would have performed the interview there might be a risk that the interviewer relaxes during the conversation and becomes unfocused since the conversation is still recorded. If the interviewer is out of focus he or she does not reflect upon the fact that the interviewee might state something that the interviewer does not really understand and resulting questions are not asked. Another aspect worth mentioning is that we have performed the interviews in Swedish since we believe it is easier for the respondents to express themselves in their own language. Later on we translated the interviews into English and this might include a risk of loosing nuances in the wording since English is not our mother tongue. Nevertheless, we have sent the translated interviews back to the respondents for approval (this will be discussed in the section “Processing” below) which we believe reduces this risk.

4.6 Implementation

We have performed six interviews with competent respondents from the Swedish business world and the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, who possess experience within our area

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118 Ibid., 64.
of interest. Due to the fact that we got accepted to studies abroad and an international internship during the spring semester of 2006 we had to postpone the completion of the thesis until the fall. This will explain the time difference between the implemented interviews. To collect empirical data interviews were conducted with:

- Anna Andersson at Financo on the 16th of January 2006, 10.00-10.50.
- Britt Berglund at Tecno on the 18th of January 2006, 15.00-16.00.
- Doris Davidsson at one of the Permanent Missions of Sweden in Europe on the 29th of September 2006, 10.00-11.00.
- Emma Eriksson at one of the Swedish Embassies in Asia on the 2nd of November 2006, 08.00-08.50.
- Fia Fredriksson at one of the Swedish Embassies in South America on the 2nd of November 2006, 13.00-13.45.

A more detailed account of our respondents will be given when presenting our empirical finding in Chapter 6.

4.7 Processing

The processing of the interviews started off with reviewing the recorded conversations. This made it possible for us to pay full attention to what the respondent said and find noticeable links to our literature review. The interviews were then transcribed, word by word, during the same day. The reason for transcribing the interviews word by word was to not miss out on any important information. Sometimes one specific word can be decisive and the meaning of the respondent’s answer may differ if one loses out on that word.

To get a better overview of the empirical findings we have used the same structure as in the interview manual when presenting the data. In addition, this will also make the link between the literature review and the empirical findings more evident. The interviews have been reworded into third person and are reproduced separately because we believe it makes it easier to read and improves the structure as well. However, we are aware of the fact that the chosen reproduction method might give the reader a feeling of reappearance of some data. Still, we are of the opinion that it facilitates the interpretation and comparison of the respondents’ answers. The fact that all respondents were given anonymity made the presentation of our study objects and the empirical findings somewhat difficult. Since we could not present the name of the respondents, the countries where the respondents from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs have worked, or now are working in we had to refer to the host country or the geographical region/continent related to each respondent. Further, regarding the respondents from the Swedish business world, the corporations related to each respondent have fictitious names. However, we believe it is important to safeguard the respondents’ integrity and therefore we had to preserve their anonymity. When the processing of the data was finished we sent it to the respondents to get their approval to use the gathered information. This was to make sure that we had understood and interpreted their answers in a correct way. Some of the respondents had some minor changes that we corrected, while others did not have any comments. The length of the interviews differs from each other and the reason for this may be the respondents’ personalities and/or their experience of working abroad. After receiving their approval we started to analyze the empirical data.
4.8 The analysis
Within social science there are different ways of analyzing the empirical data depending on which approach the researcher has chosen. Therefore, one can say that the selected approach will decide if most of the work during the research process will take place before the data collection, or after. Using an inductive approach, there are no predetermined models or methodological rules to follow and therefore the analysis of the collected data becomes a task which demands a great deal of work.\(^{119}\)

We have studied six individual respondents and collected our empirical data through telephone interviews. Before one can start analyzing the data one has to transform the collected information into something which is possible to interpret, regardless of the chosen data gathering technique. In agreement with our way of processing the information, Johansson Lindfors argues that interviews should be transcribed from a tape. The researcher himself/herself should further be the one who does this as soon as possible after the interview has been carried out. Further, she mentions that it sometimes can be difficult to decide if everything the respondent says has to be included in the empirical study. We have sometimes experienced that the respondents have delivered lengthy expositions which not always include information relevant to the research. Therefore, from case to case we have decided which information that would be necessary to include. Further, the summary of the collected data may possible be affected by the researchers preconceptions which we have discusses earlier in Chapter 2.\(^{120}\)

Since we have used a semi-structured type of interview our interview questions were already divided into different categories on the basis of our literature review, for example the glass ceiling and networks etcetera (see Appendix 1). Therefore, when carefully going through the data we had collected most of the information could be placed in these predetermined categories which we believe make the analysis easy-to-grasp. We are aware of the risk that by doing this we might direct data into a specific category on the basis of the literature review and the interview manual. The data could possibly fit into other categories as well since some of them were interrelated in many aspects and sometimes overlapped each other. Therefore, it was sometimes difficult to analyze the areas separately, hence, in some situations in our analysis in Chapter 7 we have referred to previous statements in the analysis. Nevertheless, we did not feel any need to include other categories than the ones used in the interview manual, which can be looked upon as an empirical saturation. Further, Johansson Lindfors talks about the analysis as the researcher’s reconstruction of social constructions found within the empirical observations. The data is understood and interpreted within its context and will be affected by this context.\(^{121}\) These interpretations of the gathered information are put together into diverse categories as mentioned above.

We do not believe that the scope of our empirical data collection would be enough to develop a formal and generalizing theory, nor has this been our aim. Instead, we would like to create an understanding for women’s possibilities to obtain an international assignment. In addition, we would like to elucidate how women within two different sectors may perhaps learn from each other’s experiences, this to create new knowledge regarding women on international assignments.

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\(^{119}\) Johansson Lindfors, *Att utveckla kunskap*, 139.

\(^{120}\) Ibid., 146-147.

\(^{121}\) Ibid., 149.
5. PRESENTATION OF OUR STUDY OBJECTS

This chapter will introduce the reader to the different study objects present in this thesis and describe why they are suitable for our study. All organizations included use expatriates in their operations; however, few of them are women. Therefore, we believe these organizations are of interest for exploring women’s possibilities to obtain an international assignment.

5.1 Financo

The Financo Group is a financial grouping existing in the Northern Europe, serving 400,000 institutions and corporate customers, as well as five million private customers. Further, they have a comprehensive distribution network with approximately 600 branch offices. The Nordic and Baltic countries, as well as Ukraine, Germany, Russia, and Poland are the platform for Financo’s local presence. A merger between two corporations established Financo in the 1970’s. To meet competition from major international competitors and to strengthen the organization’s position amongst corporate clients were the main motives for the merger. The company has a staff of approximately 20,000 employees and is represented in some 20 countries around the world, further, the company is today a leading North European financial group. Financo has a top position when it comes to being a company for financial institutions and large companies; they serve approximately 700 financial banks, 500 major companies, and 200 large institutions. The OM Stockholm Stock Exchange is where Financo share is listed. Financo has 152 expatriates of which 36 are females, in other words approximately 24 percent are women.

5.2 Tecno

Tecno has its roots in Sweden and was established in the 1930’s. The company carries out business activities from over 30 locations in Sweden unaccompanied. Tecno is one of the world’s leading high-technology companies and has competencies and capabilities in systems integration which is one of many broad spectrums that Tecno is covering. The company manufactures, develops, and delivers advanced services and products for diverse markets. Although Tecno’s production, research, and development are carried out primarily in Sweden, the company has the world as its market. Tecno is beyond doubt a global company and its

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122 Financo’s home page
123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
125 Ibid.
126 Susanne Albinh (susanne.albinh@financo.se). (10/11/06). Statistik. Sandra Gustafsson.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
services and products can be found in more than 50 countries worldwide. Tecno’s operations covers all continents and the company has 12 800 employees.\textsuperscript{128}

Countries in Europe, in addition to countries such as the United States, South Africa, and Australia are locations where Tecno has its major operations today. The company is progressing further to develop its business operations worldwide. This growth is expected to continue into the future.\textsuperscript{129} Technological competencies and products, that are very unique globally, are areas Tecno over the years have been successful in developing. This expertise makes up the core of the company. Furthermore, the company will develop new technology and new systems and products, in addition to development projects. This will be built up throughout international collaboration; for example through its own research and/or through cooperation with other companies.\textsuperscript{130} Tecno estimates the proportion of female expatriates to ten percent\textsuperscript{131}.

5.3 Applico

Applico is world leading in a specific areas of appliances, this by reason of that the company is selling more than 40 million products to customers in 150 countries each year. Applico is today the world’s number one choice within their appliances’ areas. This success is possible after 80 years of innovations and acquisitions. The company is competing in the individual product categories as well and is the market leader in many of them. To be able to meet the real needs of consumers and professionals Applico has its focal point on innovations that are considerately designed based on widespread consumer insight.\textsuperscript{132}

No other appliance company than Applico has a wider scope of solutions, nor the know-how to back them up.\textsuperscript{133} Various machines are included in Applico’s products assortment as well as many well-known brands.\textsuperscript{134} With approximately 70 000 employees the company is found in some 60 countries around the globe.\textsuperscript{135} Applico has approximately 170 expatriates around the globe, which is a rather small number in comparison to the total amount of employees. The proportion of women varies from one year to another; however, in a longer perspective Applico estimates the proportion of female expatriates to ten percent.\textsuperscript{136}

5.4 The Ministry for Foreign Affairs

The Foreign Services consists of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs as well as the 105 missions abroad, which comprise representations, embassies, consulates, and delegations. 2 500 persons are approximately working in the Foreign Services as a whole and the 105 missions abroad report directly to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The Foreign Service is in charge of Sweden’s relations with other countries around the world. Further, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is liable for the coordination of the Swedish foreign policy at the Government Offices.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{128} Tecno’s home page
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} Karin Strand (karin.strand@tecno.se). (06/10/23). Statistik. Sandra Gustafsson. (saagun02@student.umu.se)
\textsuperscript{132} Applico’s home page
\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{135} Anders Edholm (anders.edholm@applico.se). (09/25/06). Information om verksamheten. Sara Sundqvist. (saasut02@student.umu.se).
\textsuperscript{136} Torild Melki (torild.melki@applico.se). (10/13/06). Statistik. Sandra Gustafsson. (saagun02@student.umu.se)
\end{flushleft}
In addition, Sweden has diplomatic relationships with nearly all independent states around the world.  

By promoting exports, imports, and foreign investment, trade is encouraging growth, full employment, and development in Sweden. Further, another means of promoting Sweden abroad is to create a strong image and profile of the country internationally. Free trade is a necessary part for Sweden’s welfare and by pursuing simple, open, and fair conditions one can vigorously enhance this. International trade provides employment, growth, and sustainable development.

Representing, monitoring, and promoting all aspects of Swedish interests in an international organization or in the country of their operations are responsibilities included for missions abroad. Furthermore, they are answerable for providing services to Swedish companies, agencies, organizations and/or individual citizens. Reports including information and analyses of, for instance, economic and political developments and the country’s outlooks on world events, are sent regularly to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stockholm. By providing services to Swedish companies and encouraging foreign investments in Sweden the priority task of missions abroad is being fulfilled; promoting Swedish economic interests abroad. An important part of Swedish foreign policy is international development cooperation. This field contains issues involving the growth of resources, democracy, greater economic and social equality, human rights, and last but not least gender equality.

55 percent of all expatriates within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs are female. However, as mentioned in the introductory chapter this figure includes all women working abroad, for example administrative staff such as assistants who usually are women. We are interested in looking at women possessing higher positions within the organization, such as Second secretary or higher. According to us, the number of females will then be considerably lower and this opinion is something our respondents from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs agree with.

This short introduction to the study objects clarifies that they clearly fulfill our selection criterions and emphasize the importance of international assignments. We therefore believe that Tecno, Applico, Financo, and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs are interesting companies and organizations for our study. All organizations have business operations world wide, in at least some 20 countries, which also was one of our criterions. Another one was to have no less than 10 000 employees within the Swedish business world. All of this requires skilled and knowledgeable expatriates and we aim to create an understanding for women’s possibilities to obtain an international assignment. Further, to be able to get a better understanding for women’s situation we will examine these two types of sectors to obtain a more faceted picture and elucidate how women within the two sectors may perhaps learn from each other’s experiences. This is to be able to answer our problem definition.

137  http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/2721
138  http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/3021
139  http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/2644
140  http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/2721/a/14968
141  Kerstin Hagsten (kerstin.hagsten@foreign.ministry.se). (06/09/29). Statistik. Sandra Gustafsson. (saagun02@student.umu.se)
6. EMPIRICAL STUDY

To be able to answer our problem definition we need to collect empirical data from women with experience from international assignments. At this stage we have declared our standpoints regarding our scientific and practical method, and clarified the literature review in order to assemble relevant information. The respondents and the conducted interviews will be presented separately, since we believe this structure facilitates the reading of the empirical data. Each interview will start with a presentation of the respondent and her previous experience. The respondents’ answers to our questions will be linked to the same categories used in the interview manual.

6.1 Anna Andersson

Anna is 50 years old and head of Financo Asset Management in Sweden since 2001 and Financo Asset Management in Luxembourg since January 2006; where she is presently working. After studying business at the University of Lund she graduated in 1979 and started her career at PK-banken in Lund. In 1982 she moved to Stockholm to start working within the financial sector. She continued her work until 1989 when she resigned as “number two” from a relatively small financial company owned by Kinnevik. Anna got her first child after this and stayed at home for nine years. She spent six of these years abroad with her husband who worked in England and she would like to describe herself as a “happy and satisfied housewife” during this time. She returned to Sweden in 1999 and started working at Financo and has stayed within the company since then.

6.1.1 The Foreign Assignment

Anna lived abroad for the first time when she moved to England with her husband who worked there at that time. She enjoyed her life abroad and thought it was fun to meet new people, to get new perspectives, and experience that the world has much more to offer than what can be found within Sweden and its market. When she got the chance to work in Luxembourg she thought it would be one way to get a challenging job and at the same time give her two children the opportunity to receive a better education and a larger network than in Sweden. Anna believes that her children will become more European from the beginning and that the labor market in Sweden is not the right market for them when they will apply for jobs later on. Anna also points out that her husband is Czech and that it is easier for him to “fit in” in Europe in comparison to Sweden. This might have had an impact on her choice to work abroad, in one way they are both immigrants in the host country, which makes it easier she says.
Anna’s choice to work abroad has been affected by her life situation. Anna’s husband is ten years older than her and has cut down on his work and stays at home more. According to Anna, this is one of the reasons she could take the job in Luxembourg. She says that if one party of a married couple finds his or her job in Sweden highly qualified and challenging there is a risk that this party might not give up this job to go abroad. When we asked Anna what she thinks her international assignment will mean for her future career she is of the opinion that her career is already over, due to her age. She does not believe she has a future career to look forward to but she hopes she can stay in her host country. She has recently got more responsibility at work and will be globally responsible for the back-office within Financo Asset Management.

When asking Anna about women having to prove their competence and skills to a greater extent than men to get selected for an international assignment, she says that she does not want it to be like that. Nevertheless, it is probably the case. Further, she believes it also has to do with how one markets oneself; regardless of being a man or a woman. According to Anna, men are usually better at marketing themselves and women find it easier to say that “I cannot do this”. Anna also points out that it is often men who possess the higher positions within an organization and would like to help their “buddies” to better jobs and choose someone they can “go to the sauna with”.

6.1.2 The Recruitment

Anna was offered to take the job in Luxembourg and did not have to apply and go through any recruitment process. However, Anna thinks it is the same criterions for men and women to get recruited to an international assignment. Nevertheless, one reason for the lack of women in these assignments could be that the husband in a marriage makes more money and possesses better career opportunities compared to the wife who for example gives birth. Anna for instance stayed at home for nine years and says that if one would like to become Managing Director one cannot stay at home for such a long time. As a woman, one has to choose somehow and realize that one cannot do everything. Anna is of the opinion that when recruiting a person for an international assignment it is important that the final candidates, either men or women, have the same knowledge and prerequisites for the job. However, she thinks fewer women voluntarily apply for these assignments because of their life situation. If a woman would get the job her husband/partner may not give up his career and move with her abroad.

When recruiting someone for a foreign assignment one of the most important qualities to look for within a person is to be intrepid. If one wants to create relations with other people one has to “prostitute oneself”, as Anna puts it. One has to be very outgoing and not wait for other people to “invite you to dance”. Further, one has to be humble and open to the fact that there is no right or wrong way of doing things just because one is used to do it in a certain way in Sweden. Three characteristics Anna highlights are brave, open, and humble. Anna experiences that she got a lot of help from Financo before moving to Luxembourg and cannot think about anything that could have been handled differently. She attended a course at SAS about moving abroad and what may happen mentally when leaving Sweden behind. She and her family have also got help from an accountant via Financo.
6.1.3 Stereotypes
When asking Anna if she thinks gender stereotypes exist and affect the recruitment of expatriates, she says that it probably depends on more than the person who is recruiting the expatriate. She thinks that women do not apply in the same extent as men to these kinds of assignments, simply because they do not have the possibility to go abroad. Women give birth and this is just the way it is and nothing one can change. If Anna would recruit someone for an international assignment and a woman has applied, she would carefully analyze if this woman could be the best person for the job. She would want her to be the best person because men would probably be overrepresented at the future workplace.

Anna says that she has had to prove more when working abroad than in Sweden. Her first year working in Luxembourg has been quite hard because she has had to be tougher towards her employees in her host country in comparison to Sweden. To prove that she has the courage and that no one can push her around she has had to put both feet down and say that “this is the way we are going to work”. Her employees have tried to give her short answers such as “this is not possible because...”. However, Anna has not accepted these answers, instead she has asked for proof that it was not working and most of the times there were none. Besides this, she has not experienced any other problems due to her gender.

6.1.4 Networks
According to Anna, networking is of great importance. It is important not only for expatriates but in one’s work life in general. First, it is essential because suddenly there is a gap or opening in an organization and someone one knows comes to think about one and one’s knowledge and skills. Second, if one has a large network; and more important the right network, even though it is not in the top management someone close to them knows one. This creates a reputation that precedes one and helps one in one’s career.

6.1.5 The Glass Ceiling
Anna has not experienced the glass ceiling and believes her superiors have received her in a positive way during her career. She mentions that men and women often use different tones and languages, which make it possible to get a close relationship with ones superior. Women can take advantage of their femininity in a good way. Anna believes it is an advantage that men and women perceive the surrounding differently. If one generalizes, women interpret things in a more sensitive way than men and to achieve this mix is positive she says.

6.1.6 Women and Self-esteem
Women’s self-esteem and the traditional gender roles within our society can sometimes prevent women in their careers, according to Anna. She believes that women would like to be sure that they can handle 70-80 percent of a new job even before applying. Men on the other hand, if they are sure to be able to handle 30 percent of a new assignment the remaining 70 percent will work out somehow. Anna says there is no easy way to change this and she is trying hard to get her daughter to become more self-confident. She believes one has to let women make mistakes, and get them to realize that it is not that “dangerous”. As long as one does not operate on another person it does not matter what happens and what goes wrong she says.
6.1.7 Women and Risk taking
Regarding women and risk taking, Anna believes that if one has a family a woman is less inclined to apply because one might not have the possibility to move. It is one thing to stay at home when having children because it is one’s own decision. However, if a married couple is in their forties and in the middle of their careers, Anna thinks it is less likely that a woman accepts to stay at home for five years to follow her husband abroad. She has a hard time believing that this couple will stay married under these circumstances. If one is a career woman one probably would like to have a husband who is a bit competitive too.

6.1.8 Homosociality
In a matrix organization homosociality and men choosing other men for leading positions is less common, according to Anna, this simply because they do not meet that often. One is more dependent on “the guys” and the close relationships if everyone works, for example, in Stockholm. Anna can recognize this in the management of Financo and Financo Asset Management in Stockholm where there are a lot of men and only one woman and where they seem to choose the easiest solution. However, since Anna was asked to take the job in Luxembourg she has never felt that she has had to compete against anyone.

6.1.9 Additional comments
The reason for less females being recruited to foreign assignments in comparison to men is connected to, according to Anna, the fact that few women actually applies for international assignments. Further, this has to do with the women’s life situation. Anna does not believe it has to do with low self-esteem; rather it is because it would not work out for the rest of the family.

Anna’s response to our question about how to get more women recruited to these types of assignments is that she is not sure that there has to be more female expatriates in the first place. Anna stayed at home for nine years and according to her, these years were the best in her life. She dislikes the pressure that is put upon Swedish women to indicate that if one does not work one is “not smart enough” and so on. When living in England she sometimes experienced that people in her close surrounding questioned her way of life and asked how she could stay at home for so many years and what she was doing all day long. Further, there is a financial pressure in Sweden which makes it difficult for women to stay at home as a housewife, according to Anna. Anna finds all of this a pity and believes it is a privilege to be able to stay at home. However, it is important to have one’s own interests and hobbies. Otherwise, one’s existence may disappear and sooner or later the day will come when the children do not need one anymore. Further, to get more women to move abroad it is important to help the spouse find a meaningful employment. It is not that easy to just stay at home all the time. Anna highlights that she thinks it is a lot of fun to move abroad and that it is sad that not more people have the courage to take the final step. She would really like to recommend, especially young people, to move abroad for a period of time.
6.2 Britt Berglund

Britt graduated from senior high school with a focus on mechanical engineering in the year of 1985. She got job offers from four different companies and chose Tecno. The reason she chose Tecno was due to her notion of the city and the fact that she also had some friends there. She started working as a designer and constructor at Tecno in 1985. She stayed with Tecno for three years and after this she wanted to do something different.

Britt enrolled in the Mechanical engineering program at Linköping University in 1988; it was her father who convinced her to register for this education. Britt considered enrolling in a child nursing program, but Britt’s father said “you can take care of children at home”. During the last two years of her studies at the program, Britt was working with a project at the same time. The project “Girls and Technique” was aimed to get young women to consider the technical approach and way of thinking to convince them to apply for technical programs. Britt studied mechanical engineering and had a special focus on the technical quality in the end of her education. Britt went back working for Tecno in 1992 when she had graduated from Linköping University. She got a new job as a quality engineer and this job later became a position as an operation developer. Britt got her first child in 1994, one month after a tragic and hasty fatal accident which involved her husband. The accident resulted in her becoming a single mother. Britt stayed at home with her son for about one year, after that she got bored of staying at home and started working half time again when the child was 15 months old.

When she got back for full time she got transferred to an area within Tecno dealing with projects. She became the expert of project management and was supposed to guide the persons who were in charge of the projects concerning methods and routines etcetera. This became here responsibility until the year of 2000. At the same time she was enrolled in a management training program at Tecno during 1.5 year. She met her present spouse at this program and in 1999 they both got an offer regarding going abroad working for BAE Systems in England. Her present spouse has two children from a previous relationship and they all became a big family who together went abroad in the year of 2000. Before going abroad Britt thought she was going to be a project leader within a South African program she was supposed to work with. However, most of the time she sat in front of a computer, more or less being an administrator and after exactly one year the family moved back to Sweden.

After one year at BAE Systems, Britt started working at Tecno in Sweden again. She continued working with the South Africa program and is still doing this today. Back in Sweden she more or less started as an assistant with the program and has worked her way up the ladder. She is now responsible for some areas concerning the business. Her present position at Tecno is Operation Manager for the South Africa contract. This means that she is responsible of the development and delivery of specific products to the South African customer.

6.2.1 The Foreign Assignment

Britt chose to go on a foreign assignment partly due to the fact that she always has had problems dealing with languages. It has been difficult for her as a result of her having some kind of dyslexia. Her lack of knowledge regarding the English language has been the reason for her strives in getting better and therefore she has always wanted to go abroad to work. After meeting her spouse who got an offer to go on a foreign assignment, Britt got a job offer there too. The position she got had been considered as a job opening in England for a while.
Britt believes that the foreign assignment has meant a lot for her career. She says that when a Swede from Tecno goes abroad there is not an entire organization that is taking care of one when one has arrived. One needs to arrange everything oneself, for example matters concerning school and accommodation etcetera. The only thing they got help with over there were how to pay taxes, since this was a quite complicated matter. Britt says that one needs to grow as a person to be able to manage all of this. It is not a matter of course to for example contact authorities and alike, by oneself. One need to dare and with one’s own eyes see that it is working and that one is managing the circumstances, according to Britt. She believes she has learned a lot of the English language and that her self-confidence has grown incredibly. Without the experience from going abroad, she thinks she never would have gotten the position she has today and she would never have dared to take it either. Britt believes she never would have gone to England if she had to go alone. Due to the fact that her spouse was considering going as well they made a joint decision to go abroad. The first six months only Britt’s child came along, however the following six months her spouse’s children came over as well. Britt’s child was only six years old when they moved and by reason of this they had a Swedish au pair in the beginning.

Britt is entirely convinced that women need to prove their competence and skills in a greater extent, in comparison to men, to reach the same positions. England is a very hierarchical country and she says that she did not have that opinion or knowledge before she went there. The company grades their employees, the grading scale starts at nine and goes up to one (nine is equal to novice and one equals excellence). Britt went to England with a grade of five. She explains that this meant that one is quite low in the hierarchy.

6.2.2 The Recruitment

Britt applied for the assignment and was not offered the position abroad. However, some people did inform her about it. According to Britt, it is difficult to tell if the criterions to get recruited to an international assignment differ between men and women. She knows several employees within Tecno that have gotten positions for foreign assignments and these people are both men and women. However, out of these people men are dominating the positions for going abroad in comparison to women, according to Britt. She adds that it has been quite big transformations regarding men and women in the last years. When Britt started at Tecno in 1985 she experienced an atmosphere that women should be at home taking care of children and the house. However, she says that it is different now. An example of this is the reactions one gets from the South Africans who are working at her work place. Something they find surprising is that there are a lot of skilled female technicians who can stand in front of a very large group of people and talk. In addition, this is something that of course changes the attitudes among people, according to Britt.

When going to England her duties were not really clear and she believes that her role could have been more specified. Therefore, she did not have a busy or fulltime schedule. She believes that her managers did not understand that her capacity was much higher than the job she was offered. One could see this on the skills and experience that the person who later
replaced Britt had. The successor did not have the same background as Britt, and she thinks that the job suited the successor better than her. Britt got frustrated and did not think she was allowed to do the things she should do. She thinks that this was something the recruiter should have known and understood. The language could have been an issue here; she says that one is talking differently and that the position sounded very interesting. However, she believes that she could have gotten even more out of the job if it had been more challenging.

Britt believes that the main criterions for the selection process for the recruiter are depending on the situation. Something the recruiter should think about when recruiting is that they know that the person can manage the whole assignment; she says that the first time getting there is very hard. As a recruiter one needs to prepare the person going abroad that there will be some hard times. Other matters worth considering are where the person is going and their authority on the assignment, the last one is according to Britt one of the foundation blocks. In Sweden people do not care about authority and the hierarchy in the same way they do in England. She says that generally if a Swede is aligned in a project and someone with lower authority is running the project, the one with higher authority is still listening. This is not the case in England. People where she was working could just give a damn about what she was saying because they had higher ranks. She mentions that an important matter for the recruiter is therefore to give the person going abroad the right grade on the scale, as mentioned above. One also has to see if the person in question is capable of going.

6.2.3 Stereotypes

Britt is fully convinced that stereotypes regarding men and women exist when recruiting expatriates and she believes it exists everywhere. However, it is depending on the boss and the personnel manager. Britt thinks she has been well received by her colleagues in her host country. Still the tasks she was given where in the line of “Ulla-Bella the secretary”. She was not the type that took the fight in the discussion; instead she did what she was told to do. She does not know what would have happened if she would have taken the fight, it would probably have gone well. However, according to herself, she did not have the energy or cared enough to go against her boss and take the fight when the opportunity was given. If Tecno wanted to send her abroad and found it worthwhile, then Britt believed that it was ok, even though she did not take the fights all the time. According to Britt, she learned several other tasks instead.

Britt has not experienced any problems in the host country due to that she is a woman, since it is not that different in comparison to Sweden. However, one of the executives acted in a rather inappropriate way when they were out on business trips. She believes that way of acting was his jargon and that he also had a very special personality. This executive tried to seduce Britt and she believes that this is not as common in Sweden. She could make jokes about this issue with the executive but she thinks that if this would have happened in Sweden the executive would have been reported. She says that one does not report issues like this in England in the same way one does in Sweden, “in this country the boss is the boss, and one does not go up against him (or her)”, as Britt puts it. Therefore, she believes that cultural differences do exist. According to Britt, men are more primitive there in comparison to men in Sweden and they are more conservative as well.
6.2.4 Networks
Britt believes that a good network has an essential role when being recruited to a foreign assignment and also important for succeeding with the assignment. She had a good relationship with her boss; he showed his concerns and stayed in touch during Britt’s time abroad. She believes that if one does not get some response from the boss back home one can feel left outside when getting back after the assignment is over. Britt’s boss had a plan for her when she got back and he helped her to look for positions as well. She says that networks are very important and that problems that are occurring and matters that make one worried are good to talk about within the network.

6.2.5 The Glass Ceiling
Britt believes that she has a different view of the glass ceiling. She is working in a male dominated area even though there actually are quite many women and many of them are engineers. She tells us that these women have reached a certain level, that they are around 40 years old and that they have the feeling of “is worth the effort to go any further?” Britt is not sure it is worth to climb the ladder even higher, and take those extra and sometimes much harder “punches”. Additional, she has just rejected an offer of climbing the ladder and receiving those hard punches, she does not appreciate the value in relation to the effort. She does believe that the glass ceiling exists and that it exists due to that men are recruiting men. Further, it has to do with the fact that women are more pensive before they are accepting these “higher jobs”. Still, there is a point in that women are the ones who give birth and when that time has come women are the ones who have the main responsibility at home. This is a fact and just the way it is, according to Britt. This is also why she believes that women do not have the energy and believe it is worth the “pain” to climb in the hierarchy. This is an issue that has been discussed a lot at Britt’s work place; everyone is in agreement of “do I really want to commit myself in providing more effort?” This is a scale of balance between women wanting and the fact that men chooses men.

There is a big difference between the receiving from superiors at work during Britt’s career. There are a few meetings that Britt does not want to attend at work due to that there are some people there who she cannot handle. This is something Britt’s boss knows and he attends them instead. The reason for not attending the meetings is because some people are acting unprofessional, like it has to do with female and male matters. Many women are reacting on this “unprofessional” behavior from male coworker. Britt says that she does not like it and that it is no fun at all. After a couple of situations just like the one mentioned above Britt believes that one is trying to withdraw from those situations. Some people are trying to patronize one and this is more common if one is a woman. Especially if one is rejecting their opinions or saying something that they do not accept as appropriate. This is still a matter where one has been toughened by the hardship of climbing the ladder.

The reasons for the existence of the glass ceiling, is according to Britt, that people are feeling threatened. For men women are looked upon as a threat against their authority and the women are trespassing on their “playground”. Some women are not “buddies” with their male executives and are in general not acting like the other male executives. Female executives are proposing different types of issues, demands, and questions which male executives sometimes are not familiar with or consider as important. These stereotypes and thoughts are something that is very difficult to remove, according to Britt. She believes that this issue is something that the top executives should look into and work hard on. She mentions that Tecno has worked with these kinds of issues for a long time, but still they do not have any top executives
who are females. However, as understood by Britt, Tecno would like to have women on high leader positions but they are still few. Further, Britt believes it will come with time.

6.2.6 Women and Self-esteem
Britt does believe that women prevent themselves in their career due to their own opinion of themselves and the society's traditional gender roles. Women often do not value the effort of climbing the career ladder in the same way as men, according to Britt. She believes that women’s self-esteem is lower in comparison to men’s, however; if a woman says that she can do something she can, as said by Britt. If a man says that he can do it, it is not always true. However, he will make sure that he can manage it in some way. Women want to do everything they take on perfectly and ideal to be satisfied with themselves. This is an example of a situation where the self-esteem comes into play. Further, Britt always examines her own act before she considers someone else to have made a mistake. This is something she believes women in general are doing wrong; they take on too much responsibility in comparison to men.

To get rid of the traditional roles and get better self-esteem is something that Britt believes is difficult. It is all about getting more women to each work place, and then the women get strength from each other. Another important thing is to get approval from the superiors, one’s executive needs to have faith in one. Britt believes that she has been very lucky by the fact that her bosses often have had faith in her. She therefore has grown in her own pace. If she has had bosses without believe in her ability she has directly felt more worried. One believes that one is doing something wrong and this makes one feel bad. Britt thinks a lot of the self-esteem has to do with one’s own rules and ways of thinking, what motto one has etcetera. Britt’s motto has always been to do the best she possibly can do. This is something that she considers when she is raising her son.

6.2.7 Women and Risk taking
Britt is convinced that there exist differences between men’s and women’s risk taking and that this is something that affects the decision of choosing expatriates. She believes that women are much more risk averse in comparison to men. This is due to the fact that women in general have the responsibility for the children and for their health, according to Britt. She is concerned about other people’s opinion and says that it is rather ridiculous and unimportant matters. However, these thoughts are of importance to her.

6.2.8 Homosociality
Britt does believe that homosociality among men are playing a part in the final decision of choosing an expatriate. It has to do with the sexes' different “languages”, according to Britt. She has joined a mentor project where the contributors got educated in the differences between men and women. A simple thing such as how men and women act differently is, according to Britt, important and something she often experiences in discussions with her spouse. They have different ways of expressing themselves. She communicates in a way he sometimes thinks is vague, for example when she puts “maybe” after matters she is quite certain about. These are examples of matters that play a decisive role when one is having the last interview during the recruitment process. Britt believes that it has to do with how the person in question builds up a contact with the interviewer. Men are more in the line of “talking the same language” and she is fully convinced of this. An example of this could be that one is very interested in sports and there one has a common link with joint interests. The
person who recruited Britt was a man and he had been abroad on assignments a couple of times. He was aware of what it includes and what he was talking about, as she puts it. She felt that it was a very good thing that he was quite experienced concerning foreign assignments.

6.2.9 Additional comments

When we asked Britt to think freely about what the reasons are for why few females are recruited to foreign assignments she mentioned that it is due to several reasons. One is the fact that women are more hesitant regarding applying for the assignment in comparison to men. Women do not believe that they can manage the task and this is the main reason, says Britt. Another reason is that it might not always be easy to send a woman. It has to do with respect, the company one is working for needs to give support and to show that they have faith in one. She believes that it is more difficult to get this if one is female and this is something that is of importance. A last point could be that men choose men and that it sometimes might be more elegant to send a man in comparison to a woman.

Britt believes that more women can be recruited to foreign assignments if they are contacted in advance. If there exists a foreign assignment opportunity in a company they are certainly having an idea of the characteristics the person should have. Something Britt has experienced is that if a woman has potential for a position the Human Resource department has announced that their will be a job opening to her. The HR department will then inform her that they would be happy if she applied for the position. This is something she considers as being helpful, if the company believes in an employee women dare to apply in another way.
6.3 Cajsa Carlsson

Cajsa was born in the year of 1959 and she grew up in Gothenburg. She studied at the School of Business, Economics and Law at Gothenburg University. Cajsa was enrolled in the Business Program with a major in accounting and finance (the former Business Program with a focus on cost- and asset analysis). She graduated in 1981 and the same year she moved to Stockholm due to the fact that there were a lot more jobs in Stockholm in comparison to the ones existing in Gothenburg at that time.

She has been working at different banks and she started her career at SEB where she worked for a few years. After that she started working within the finance area with activities concerning treasury. She worked with financial matters for a while and then she became an asset manager at Stockholm Stad. Further, the Swedish investment bank became her workplace and she worked at the financial department in this organization, starting in 1983. In the year of 1989 this department became PK-banken, and she worked with placement setups for Swedish companies on the Swedish interest market and internationally. She quit working at PK-banken in 1993 when she got her second child (she got her first in 1990). Cajsa stayed at home with her children for three years, starting in 1993. She started working again in the fall of 1995 at Applico where she is still working.

Cajsa’s career at Applico started in the dealing room and Applico has a rather big financial department which includes risk mandates as well. Cajsa was the head of Applico’s Swedish liquidity in the beginning of her career with the company; however after a couple of years she became the head of the company’s dealing room. This includes the Internet bank and all the trading mandates they have. In 2000 Cajsa moved to Singapore and became the head of Applico’s Regional Treasury Center, which is a treasury function situated outside the main office. She was responsible for the Asian region, from India to New Zealand. This means that one is in charge of the local financing/funding, all treasury related business’ and currency exposure, trade with Asian currencies, and inter faced towards operations. Cajsa stayed in her host country for 2.5 years and after that she moved to the USA and became the head of the equivalent set up for the North American market, i.e. the USA, Canada, and Mexico. Last year she moved back to Sweden and is now the head of all the global treasury centers. She is operationally responsible for the European area and “over all” responsible for the global areas such as the set ups in Asia, North America, and South America. She has a global responsibility for the interfaces towards Applico’s business; the operations from Stockholm, Sweden.

6.3.1 The Foreign Assignment

Cajsa chose to go on a foreign assignment partly because she believes that it is a good experience regarding both one’s life and one’s career. To live and work in a foreign country gives one new perspectives due to that one is acting in the milieu in another way. This in comparison to if one goes to a country and works there for a couple of days and then leaves for home. She has always been interested in working abroad, this since she is working in a global company. However, the international assignment came rather late in Cajsa’s life; she already had a husband and two children who were quite old. She believes that it is more usual to go abroad for an assignment when one is single. However, it felt rather natural for Cajsa to work in another country by reason of the fact that she works in a multinational company. Further, she says that it was enjoyable to have been given the opportunity to go abroad as well as the fact that she wanted an international assignment in her career.
Cajsa believes that the foreign assignment has meant a lot. The assignment has had a positive development for her career; the position she got when she came back to Applico in Sweden was of a higher rank. The international character of her assignment made her suitable for a position with global responsibility when she came back to Sweden. In addition, she believes that she would not have been given the position she possesses today if she would not have had the experience from the foreign assignments.

The decision to work abroad has certainly been affected by Cajsa’s life situation. After mature consideration, she and her family accepted the assignment which meant that her husband had to give notice to terminate his job. Otherwise they would not have been able to go. This is something that the people involved have to take into consideration. Does the spouse have to terminate his or her job, take leave of absence, or get some kind of new job when abroad?

Cajsa believes that women need to prove their competence and skills in a greater extent, in comparison to men, to reach the same positions. This is by reason of that more men possess the higher positions in a greater extent, according to Cajsa. However, she also believes that this question is a matter of generations. If women dare and believe in themselves etcetera is something that affects the situation. Further, she believes that the more women that possess the higher positions the easier it is for other women to impersonate with the challenges, that is a fact, according to Cajsa.

6.3.2 The Recruitment

Cajsa was offered the first assignment abroad by the company; however, she showed that she wanted to go as well. The second assignment had to do with a problem that had to be solved; and Cajsa was the right person for solving it. Further, she says that one has to show that one really wants to go abroad. Cajsa believes that there are two different ways of selecting a candidate. The first one is that the companies have their internal job adds that one can apply for; second, there are specific assignments which most of the times have a given candidate. Applico has a process called “talent review” which means that they have a pool of talented employees and this pool also shows the competences existing in the company. However, Cajsa only has experience from being recruited internally, which she also believes is the most common way of recruiting.

Cajsa does not believe that the main criterions for the selection process are separated among men and women. However, she believes that the life situation is affecting the result of being recruited. Men are dominating the higher positions, and it is not that usual that these men have wives with higher positions as well. However, vice versa for women are rather common; that their husbands possess a high position within a company, according to Cajsa. This means that if a woman is offered an international assignment, which includes that she has to move abroad, then there will be two careers that have to be coordinated. This is very difficult as said by Cajsa. There are a lot of social networks for women, for example SWEA (Swedish Women’s Educational Association); however, there is no SWEA for men. For example, as a female spouse one has 25 other women to socialize with and these women are more or less in the same situation as the other women in the network. However, men might only have three other “friends” or less to socialize with who have the same life situation as them; given up their career, taken a break from their careers, see this life situation as an experience and an adventure they want to experience. This is something Cajsa with family have experienced.
These are examples of matters that affect women to accept or deny an international assignment. Pure competence etcetera is actually not always deciding if a person will go.

Cajsa believes that it is helpful to talk with people that have been away on international assignments, and what tip-offs they may have and what they experienced with practical matters such as choosing school for the children, what neighborhood to live in etcetera. This is rather difficult for the HR department to help one with. Something Cajsa was offered and appreciated was a reference family. However, she did not feel that this family was the right one for her family and situation. Cajsa already knew “a person who new another person…” whom she could ask for guidance. She is of the opinion that the company that is sending an employee for an international assignment has to stand by with a lot of help to their employees.

Cajsa believes that everyone, working for a larger company, is offered an introduction course for going abroad. A good thing is if one is given the opportunity to go with the family to the host country and become a little acclimatized so there will be no chock when finally stationed. Cajsa and her family decided that her husband would not work abroad; instead he stayed at home taking care of the children since she was traveling a lot and was not at home that often. One’s life situation is playing a big role and one is going through a lot of different stages when living in a foreign country. Therefore, one has to carefully consider what the foreign assignment may include before accepting it.

6.3.3 Stereotypes
Cajsa has no personal experience of that stereotypes are existing among men and women when recruiting expatriates. However, she definitely believes that there might exist stereotypes in countries where there is more difficult to send women for a specific position in comparison to men, due to cultural reasons. Stereotypes are therefore more evident when recruiting to specific countries, but this has to do with the host country. Cajsa thinks she has been well received by her colleagues in her host country.

She has certainly experienced some problems in the host country due to that she is a woman; she has no specific example though. Further, her experiences of Singapore and the USA are that in Asia one is more prepared of the fact that it might be different, therefore one is not reacting that much. In addition, in the USA one experiences things to be much more different and one is not prepared for it. There are for sure cultural differences even though one looks the same. In general it is more common that women stay at home with the children, even though there are more women on high positions in their business life in comparison to Sweden. Cajsa would say that it is a very big difference if one is working in New York City or in a small town somewhere in the USA.

6.3.4 Networks
Cajsa does not have any experience of professional female networks; however, she believes that a good social and professional network has an essential role when being recruited to a foreign assignment. Further, she believes that networks have a positive effect for succeeding with the assignment. One’s internal network is of course very important for one’s “success factor” when it regards what results one is achieving. Very few jobs are focusing on only one tiny specific area, the job is often integrated with others, and therefore an internal network is of importance. Further, she believes it is helpful and very important to have an external
network as well, so that one can benchmark the results and so on with the environment’s results to check the quality and the standard etcetera.

6.3.5 The Glass Ceiling
Cajsa is not sure if she has experienced the glass ceiling. She is of the opinion that it has to do with what one wants to achieve. One can let oneself be stopped by different things; however she believes that one first and foremost has to be realistic and honest towards oneself. She is convinced of the existing of the glass ceiling. According to Cajsa, there is no difference between men and women in today’s society due to that women give birth, men have paternity leave in Sweden as well as women have maternity leave. Many men are good at taking responsibility for their family and their children, this is something Swedes are encouraging and something that is not as common in other countries, she says. People around the globe think Swedes are insane when they say that the father can be at home with his child/children for five months and still be able to keep his old job when getting back to work, according to Cajsa. However, she believes that there exists discrimination among the sexes in Sweden; nevertheless she has not experienced it personally. Cajsa believes that her superiors always have treated her with respect during her career.

Cajsa considers the glass ceiling as being self-inflicted sometimes; however, she believes that younger women in their twenties do not experience problems with the glass ceiling. Older women might have more struggles with it; “one wants to be invited for a dance” instead of vice versa, as said by Cajsa. It might be a question of generations and Cajsa believes that women in general are on their way to conquer the glass ceiling. It is very different today in comparison to 25 years ago. Further, this might have an effect on the family situation; in ten years it might be as common for men as it is for women to stay at home with the children while the woman is working and hopefully it will be as accepted. However, it is up to oneself; if one can shield oneself from the glass ceiling and the existing opinions and ideas it is easier.

When it comes to international assignments one of the spouses has to step back, “retire”, there are very few that are moving out and both of them are making a successful international career. She says that it might be common that the other partner has a less responsible job and that this partner is thinking of the future and how it will become. In general, women are taking the most of the responsibility at home, for the family and the children and this becomes more evident when regarding the international assignments, as said by Cajsa.

6.3.6 Women and Self-esteem
Cajsa does believe that women prevent themselves in their career due to their own opinion of themselves and the society’s traditional gender roles. In general, women are bad at enhancing themselves, which men on the other hand are very good at. “Women believe they are never good enough and believe they never have a sufficient amount of experience, ever”, as said by Cajsa. Men, on the other hand, do not have to have any experience at all sometimes to be able to take on rather big challenges. Cajsa believes that the above mentioned is due to the opinion of oneself, again she is talking about the question of generations. In the future there will not be the same difference between the genders. Further, she says that there are men with bad confidence as well who need a push forward. There exist a lot of different coaching programs which deals with this problem. The boss needs to get all employees to work in proportion to their best individual ability, that is the main duty as a leader, as said by Cajsa.
6.3.7 Women and Risk taking
If one is seriously considering going on an international assignment one has intentions of taking risks no matter if one is a man or a woman, according to Cajsa. Everyone is not interested in working abroad.

6.3.8 Homosociality
Cajsa does not believe that homosociality among men is playing a part in the final decision of choosing an expatriate. In the end of the recruitment process a woman has overcome all possible “obstacles” mentioned above and should be in agreement with her family about the meaning of moving abroad. Therefore, in the final step of the recruitment process men and women are equal. An international assignment when one is single, without family, is “a piece of cake” in comparison to if one has a family, she says.

6.3.9 Additional comments
When we asked Cajsa to think freely about what the reasons could be for why few females are recruited to foreign assignments she mentioned the family situation as a main reason for having few females working abroad. She does not really see the same difference regarding the younger generation; however, she does not know if she is right. If one is talking about executive positions it is even more difficult to achieve them if one is “older” and has a family etcetera, in these positions women are especially under-represented.

How more women can be recruited to foreign assignments is something that has been discussed in a great extent within Applico, according to Cajsa. An idea is that Swedish trade companies can interact when it concerns to send people abroad. A suggestion is to find some kind of pool of competence in the area one is moving to. This will make up an interesting list of prospective employees; employers can in advance find out who is moving to the area, the competence/CV of the prospective, the length of the stay, and if there are some skills that the employer might need in his or her company. Some kind of “matchmaking list” would facilitate for the enclosed spouse to come along and give up his or her career at home. If the spouse will not be able to get leave of absence he or she might have to give notice of termination. If the spouse could consider working even though he or she will not be hired by the same employer as the other spouse, it would facilitate the situation. He or she might be able to work for another Swedish company in the same city for example. According to Cajsa, the above mentioned is an alternative since it is not very amusing to give up one’s career and stay at home “doing nothing”.

Applico has been using Cajsa as a “living evidence” and bench marker to attract women to apply for international assignments. Cajsa is of the opinion that one, independent of the gender, should not accept an assignment and move abroad if one cannot bring the family. There are many crashed relationships depending on that one goes abroad and does not enjoy the life situation.
6.4 Doris Davidsson

Doris is 36 years old and holds a law degree from Uppsala University and a Master’s degree from Amsterdam, the Netherlands, where she studied international law and EC-law (EC - the European Community). She has worked at a law firm in Brussels and has been employed within the European Union for one year. After working abroad, Doris returned to Stockholm to start working at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Affairs. She stayed there for approximately one year before moving on to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the International Trade Policy Department. In general, she worked with questions concerned with international trade for 2.5 years, and more specifically with intellectual property issues. In 2003 she continued her career at one of the Permanent Missions of Sweden in Europe where she is still stationed as First Secretary within the group for Economic Affairs. She is one of Sweden’s representatives in the WTO negotiations (World Trade Organization). The representatives cover different areas concerning the negotiations within the WTO and the organization’s regular meetings. Doris is responsible for several areas, and the group further covers several bodies within the United Nations.

6.4.1 The Foreign Assignment

Doris’ choice to move abroad for a second time and to start working at the Swedish Mission was nothing she had planned or longed for, instead it happened more by mere accident. Doris was already working close to the Mission because of her current position in Stockholm and went to her present host country a couple of times per month to attend different meetings. With short notice one of her closest co-workers got a new job within the Mission and a job-opening appeared. She decided to apply for the job and she got it. However, she was not sure she would accept the offer.

Doris’ hesitation to accept the job had to do with her private life and not so much with her professional life; early on she was of the opinion that it would be valuable for her career. She had already lived abroad for a couple of years and was very career oriented, worked a lot, and put a lot of energy and effort into her job. Still, she was over 30 years old when she got the offer and thought at first that she should stay in Sweden to start a family and settle down. However, after some consideration she decided that life is not really working like that and she decided to take on this opportunity and move to the host country. She describes her final decision more in the terms of “Ok, why not?”

Doris believes that her international assignment has had and will continue to have a positive effect on her future career within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Further, she believes that the type of work she has had at the Mission has exposed her in a favorable way towards the Ministry in Stockholm. The Economic Affairs group has for example experienced periods without an ambassador which have made her, as First Secretary, more visible in the organization. The fact that she has been selected for this assignment will, according to herself, give her recognition outside the Ministry for Foreign Affairs as well and be positive for her future career if she decides to leave the Ministry.

However, Doris believes that women, to a greater extent than men, need to prove their competence and skills to reach the same positions as their male co-workers. She has seen obvious examples of this and thinks it has to do with the women’s personality but also the fact that women are living in a “male world” with “male structures”. According to Doris, women have to adapt to these male structures in a large extent. They have to bring forward elements of their personality which they in a female environment would probably not have to enhance
in the same way. She has experienced that she has had to change and force herself to learn how to act in a certain way.

Doris tells us about two substitutes they were interviewing for a summer position. It was one man and one woman with almost the exact same background and work experience. The woman was meticulously prepared and knew all the details about the job but at the same time she appeared to be a bit nervous and her voice was shaking. The man on the other hand was laid back and had not prepared at all for the interview, he simply took a chance at several questions he was asked. Nevertheless, his message came forward much stronger than the woman’s. Doris sees this as an example of the male world that exists and that women have to learn to act in a certain way.

6.4.2 The Recruitment
Doris applied for the job opening and had two formal interviews; one with the person in charge for the Economic Affairs group at that time, and one with the ambassador in her host country. Since she was already working close to the Economic Affairs group from Stockholm and they knew exactly who she was, Doris was more or less the obvious candidate to select. Therefore, she cannot say that anything could have been handled in a better way during the recruitment process. Regarding how much help one gets when moving abroad she tells us that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs takes care of the practical details regarding the move. The Ministry finds an appropriate house or apartment together with the employee and pays for this. Schools are also paid for by the Ministry. There is a strong feeling for spouses within the Ministry and they supply a lot of information about children and spouses which is an important part of the Ministry’s activities. Spouses are also allowed to take language courses and the expatriate has financial benefits for living abroad as well.

Doris has not enrolled in the Diplomat Program that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs offers and can therefore not tell us about the criterions to get selected to the program. Nevertheless, she knows that one has to go through a very tough screening process. Still, she is of the opinion that most of the women recruited to the program are very go-ahead. They talk a lot and have a very “forward thinking” behavior. However, Doris does not think this is the best type of personality to recruit at all times. She believes that these women sometimes are a bit narrowed minded and afraid of criticizing the Ministry. They do not possess a great deal of life experience which she thinks is essential to be able to connect with people in a positive way. She finds it interesting that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs seems to look for a certain type of personality but she experiences a wider competence and more “social intelligence” among people who are not recruited via the Diplomat Program.

When it comes to differences between men and women and the criterions to get recruited to an international assignment, Doris experiences most men working abroad as more relaxed and laid back than the women. She says that the recruiter might look for go-ahead women when sending them abroad even though this might not be a traditional female characteristic. Doris finds it interesting that she can see this obvious difference among men and women, even though one cannot generalize and say that it applies to everyone.

6.4.3 Stereotypes
Doris believes gender stereotypes exist and may affect the recruitment of expatriates. She mentions the male bonding that takes place which creates close relationships between men.
The issue concerning stereotypes can, according to Doris, also be linked to what has been said earlier regarding the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the recruitment of a certain type of women.

Regarding the way Doris has been received by her co-workers in the host country and possible problems with working in the country due to the fact that she is a woman, she says that she has often experienced that she has had to struggle and prove more. She believes this has to do with the fact that she is a woman and younger than many colleagues. She has for example been the chairperson in one of the committee within the WTO and she believes that the combination of age and gender sometimes put her in a weaker position from the beginning. However, she has never heard anyone make any explicit comments about this; instead it is something she senses.

6.4.4 Networks

A developed and well established network within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is an essential issue to become recruited to an international assignment, according to Doris. Previously, the Human Resource department recruited all employees to the international assignments within the Government Offices but nowadays the Ministries take care of this on their own. However, there has been some criticism towards this change because it demands more networking among people. If one applies for a job and the ambassador in this country never has heard of one, but has worked close to another applicant, it is certain that this will affect the recruitment. She believes that creating a network is an important part, and one of the main purposes, of the Diplomat Program that the Ministry offers. When attending this program one creates close relationships with people in more or less the same age and these people will become the “starting network” and will follow one during one’s career within the Ministry.

6.4.5 The Glass Ceiling

Doris believes that she has now climbed the career ladder a bit and it would for example be possible for her to apply for a managerial position. However, she has not done this yet and she has not experienced the glass ceiling either. Nevertheless, she is certain that it exists within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs as well and not only within the business life. A clear evidence of this is, according to Doris, the under-representation of Swedish female ambassadors in foreign countries and the lack of female managers within the Ministry. She thinks it is obvious that there is something that prevents them but she is not exactly sure about what it is. Further, she is of the opinion that there is a lot of “old men” within the Ministry. As mentioned earlier Doris has not experienced the glass ceiling and she mentions that she is not yet in the stage of her life when having children and a family. However, she believes it is possible that one experiences a stronger feeling of being “left behind” in the professional life when this day comes.

Doris says that she has been received quite well by her superiors during her career and has not, at least not yet, experienced a concrete feeling of being discriminated. Nonetheless, she has only had one female superior and has had varied experiences of her male superiors. For example, when working at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Affairs she had an older male superior that were bonding extremely well with her male co-workers. He was very social and polite but mainly towards the other men at the Ministry. This created a distance between him and the female employees and resulted in women getting less access to
him since they did not bond with him in the same way as men did. Further, Doris believes and finds it interesting that female superiors as well find it easier to bond with men; it apparently goes both ways, she says. She thinks it might have to do with the fact that female superiors sometimes become charmed by men and that the “man-woman”-dynamic plays a role in this.

The main reason why the glass ceiling still exists is the male structures in the society, according to Doris. She believes this phenomenon describes the problem and that, for example, her male superior at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Consumer Affairs is a link in the creation of this ceiling. The ones the superior bonds with are the ones he or she first comes to think of when a position needs to be filled within an organization, she says. This is due to the fact that these people have created strong relationships and a mutual confidence, in other words, such strong connections that one as a woman often cannot even become a part of.

Doris tells us that a common and consistent commentary she has received from her superiors during the years, primarily from men, is to be more go-ahead and talk more. Of course this has to do with one’s personality as well, according to Doris, but she would like to describe her way of acting as typically female. To advance and make a career she has got the advice “to be more like this…we would appreciate more of this, for example talk more and push forward more”. Doris believes this is a part of the glass ceiling as well, and if one does not do this it will be difficult to make a career.

Doris is positive towards acceptance of gender by quotas and believes this is one way to make the glass ceiling disappear. She is certain that there exist just as many competent women as men and it would be a matter of course for her to have 50 percent female ambassadors for example. Discrimination should not be a part of the Swedish society, she says.

6.4.6 Women and Self-esteem
Doris certainly believes that women’s self-esteem and the traditional gender roles in our society might restrain women in their career advancement. She says that men early on learn to be less self-critic and not being afraid to express themselves. She thinks men are more comfortable than women saying things without being 100 percent sure it is right. Women on the other hand learn from an early age not to stick out and to adapt to the environment they presently find themselves in. According to Doris, the starting point for this is the traditional gender roles in our society. Further, these gender roles also maintain these differences among men and women. However, she does not believe one should “stop being a woman”; still a lot of women do exactly this. “The question is to what extent women should have to adapt instead of men?” Further, she says that the issue of women and self-esteem is crucial within this context.

6.4.7 Women and Risk taking
Doris believes it is hard to tell if women are more risk averse than men and does not have an exact opinion about this. She does not know if there is a difference between men and women regarding risk taking.
6.4.8 Homosociality
Doris likes to re-connect to what has been said earlier about men and male bonding. She believes that homosociality might affect the final choice of an expatriate since men often have created these close relationships with each other and this plays a role when making a recruitment decision.

6.4.9 Additional comments
When asking Doris to reflect upon what the reasons could be for women being underrepresented in international assignments she mentions several causes. One reason could be the issue of risk taking and Doris believes the main cause is the family situation since most of the female expatriates she knows are singles. She tells us that men, not always but often, move abroad together with his wife and family. She believes it is harder for men, for some reason, to leave their job etcetera behind to follow their wife. This is once again due to the traditional gender roles she says. However, one can find examples even though these men are quite few.
6.5 Emma Eriksson

Emma is 29 years old and holds a Political Science degree from Uppsala University with a major in economics. During her education she spent one year abroad as an exchange student in Paris studying political science. She has altogether lived in Paris for five years, as mentioned earlier as an exchange student but also before she started her education. During the last semester of her education she enrolled in a six months internship at one of the Swedish Embassies in Europe where she later was offered a substitute employment for one and a half years. After this employment she applied for the Diplomat Program and got accepted in 2004. When finishing this program she started working at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stockholm and stayed there for one year before moving to Asia. She is stationed there since September 1st, 2006, and works as a Second Secretary within the area of economy, trade, and agricultural affairs. Her employment in Asia is her first international assignment as a diplomat.

6.5.1 The Foreign Assignment

As mentioned earlier, Emma’s employment in Asia is her first international assignment. This assignment will last for three years but can possibly be extended up to four years. The decision to work abroad was natural since Emma always has wanted to live abroad. Further, the reason for moving had to do with her family situation and her husband. Emma is married to a Frenchman who, after living together with her for two years in Sweden, felt it was time to move on and they therefore decided to go abroad. The choice of moving to Asia had partly to do with the fact that it is quite easy for her husband to get a job there. She also adds that they do not have any children which also made it easier for them to leave.

Emma thinks it is hard to tell exactly how her foreign assignment will affect her future career. However, she says that within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs working abroad is almost required to be able to achieve an executive position, for example to become an ambassador. Further, she believes that working in Asia will broaden her professional profile since she now works with promoting aspects of Swedish interests which she has not done before. At the same time she says that one becomes separated from one’s colleagues in Stockholm which is negative. This leads to a smaller network compared to the entire organization in Stockholm and the other ministries; one misses out on the daily contacts which includes for example having a coffee together and so on, which she says may lead to other people “forgetting about her”. Therefore, an international assignment is not necessarily a positive thing for the career, according to Emma. Further, she says that if one has a well established network when going abroad it might be easier; however, Emma believes that working abroad in the beginning of one’s career can sometimes be negative.

Emma does further believe that women need to prove their competence in a greater extent than men to reach the same positions. At the Ministry for Foreign Affairs most executives are men and most of the ambassadors as well. According to Emma, this is by reason of their networks which often consist of males. These networks are later used to “check up on people” which she believes clearly affects the possibility to obtain higher positions both in Sweden and abroad. She is of the opinion that women have to be visible for the executives at home or abroad in another way than men. One has to be more go-ahead as a woman, partly because it is more “risky” to hire a woman, especially in her age, she says. This since women is the ones who give birth which include parental leave and this is not a matter of course when working
abroad. Emma believes that managers consider this when hiring a woman, even though they should not. It is something she would consider herself if she was the manager, she says.

If one already has children and a woman obtains an international assignment she believes it is less likely that the man stays at home to take care of the children, even though one of course will find examples of this too. She believes that it is more likely that a man get an international assignment and the woman stays at home which means that he can concentrate on his job in another way; this since he might not have to stay at home if the children get sick for example.

6.5.2 The Recruitment
Emma applied for her assignment abroad which is the normal routine within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Approximately 100 positions are advertised each year and one can apply for ten to twelve positions one is interested in and has ranked. However, the recruitment process varies between positions. Sometimes one has formal interviews with for example the ambassadors at the embassy or Swedish mission one has applied to, and sometimes one simply gets selected without having any interview which was the case for Emma.

Regarding the criterions for being selected to an international assignment Emma does not believe there is any difference between men and women. However, she says that the recruiter might focus more upon a woman’s family situation and private life in comparison to men’s. Women may therefore get more questions regarding the future and how one looks upon one’s family etcetera. She is not sure if it really is more difficult for a man to move abroad together with his wife than it is for women, or if this is just an impression people have. Men might for example find it more difficult to leave their job and stay at home for several years.

Emma applied for two positions in Asia but the one she had ranked as number one unfortunately got cancelled and she was offered the other position which she had ranked as number eight. This created a bit of confusion and trouble at first and this is something she believes could have been handled better during the recruitment process. In addition, when she got recruited to this position the Ministry for Foreign Affairs mentioned that they had the balance among men/women and younger/older employees in mind. This has led to the fact that Emma today is the only young and female Second Secretary at the embassy. However, she was also the only one who had applied for this position and therefore she is not sure how much her age and gender actually made a difference in the decision.

When recruiting a person for a foreign assignment Emma believes one has to look for people who are very open, outgoing, and social. One has to be able to go to receptions and greet people with a smile for hours. One has to find people who are aware of the fact that it might be difficult to leave friends and family behind and that one sometimes will feel quite lonely. Further, she believes one has to be self-confident as a person. However, what criterions a recruiter should have depends on where in the world the person will be sent.

6.5.3 Stereotypes
Emma does not believe that stereotypes regarding women’s and men’s way of performing their job exist. However, stereotypes in the host country may of course make it more difficult for a woman to work in certain countries and therefore not become selected for a position. Further, she believes that most stereotypes regarding men and women have to do with the
private life. One might think that a woman’s family situation will affect her professional life; that she cannot attend receptions and dinners for example because of the children and be hindered to work extra hours etcetera.

Emma has been received well by people in her host country but when she worked in a European country a lot of people often assumed she was the administrative assistant when she attended receptions for example. She says that the only thing she could do was to laugh about it because getting angry would not lead anywhere. However, she believes this might be tough to deal with, especially for younger women who have to manage this almost every day. This might be the reason why some women get excessively formal and have a strict attitude.

6.5.4 Networks
A well established network is, according to Emma, essential to get recruited to an international assignment. One is often working in small offices abroad and one has to be able to connect with people at all levels. It is not like working at the office in Stockholm where one has 600 other employees around oneself, she says. In a large office one can avoid people one does not like but at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs the executives often choose candidates for international assignments on the basis of their social skills, their reputation of being hard working, and cooperative but also easy to work with. Because of this, it is much easier to get selected if one knows the executive on a personal basis or if one knows someone who knows the executive in question, she says. Therefore, networks are very vital for getting recruited. Further, to have access to networks makes it easier to get hold of information one might need, either from the right people at home in Stockholm or in the host country. This is especially important in countries where one does not speak the language or can read the daily news papers.

6.5.5 The Glass Ceiling
Emma has not experienced the glass ceiling and this might have to do with her age she says, and the fact that she is in the beginning of her career. She has never experienced any problems due to her gender, not at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and not before her employment there either. Further, she has always been well received by her superiors who have helped her to advance in her career. However, she does believe it exists. There are many female handling officers within the Ministry (more than 50 percent actually) but still most of the executives are men which she sees as a proof of some type of glass ceiling.

Regarding the reasons for the continued existence of the glass ceiling, Emma believes it has to do with both the women themselves and the society. More women than men feel insecure and underestimate their knowledge and skills to a greater extent than men. Further, the fact that most executive positions are held by men plays a role as well. These men may find it easier to relate to the “male behavior” which sometimes includes talking mainly about the positive sides and excess accomplishments. On the other hand, women often underestimate and enhance things they could have done better as well as how they need to develop their skills. This is why men often are the ones who get selected, according to Emma. In addition, she believes women are the ones who take the main responsibility for the children and this is difficult to combine with the type of organizational culture within the Ministry. One is supposed to work a lot and to work late hours, which is difficult if one has to leave at five to pick up the children.
To get this ceiling to disappear Emma believes there has to be more female executives within organizations. This will, according to her, lead to more women in higher positions in general. If there is equality between the genders at the top of the organization both men and women will get access to higher positions. In other words, the most suitable candidate will therefore get the job and not because one is a man or a woman. This is something one has to concentrate on and Emma is open towards acceptance of gender by quotas during a transitional period. She does not believe it is appropriate to legislate that it always has to be 50/50 but during a period of transition one has to make sure to get more female executives within organizations. This will later on lead to the acceptance of having 70 percent men and 30 percent women or the other way around, if the best candidates have been selected, she says. Acceptance of gender by quotas can be carried out in different ways, when selecting a new ambassador for example one has to nominate three candidates and both genders have to be represented. She says, it is a good thing to force people to at least bring forward different alternatives.

### 6.5.6 Women and Self-esteem

Emma is certain that women’s self-esteem sometimes may hinder them in their careers. Women are unfortunately good at saying “No, I cannot do this, I will not be able to handle this, and this will never work out”, according to Emma. If a woman looks at a job description and knows she only fulfils 90 percent of the requirements of the job, the last ten percent could still hinder her from applying for the job, she says. Men do not have that barrier, if they fulfill ten percent of requirements they still apply for the position.

### 6.5.7 Women and Risk taking

According to Emma, women might be more risk averse than men, or at least less adventurous after a certain age. She tells us that when she was working at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Stockholm women in her age either went abroad together with an “adventurous” spouse or their spouse comes from a foreign country, just like Emma’s husband. However, if the husband does not want to move, the woman usually stays in Sweden. Women who are single would usually like to move to cities like New York, London, or Paris but are to some extent still hesitant to go abroad as well. Emma believes this has to do with the fact that many of the single women hesitate to take the risk of not meeting someone to settle down with. According to Emma, men do not care as much about this and are of the opinion that it will work out somehow.

### 6.5.8 Homosociality

Concerning homosociality Emma is sure that it exists and can affect the selection of an expatriate. However, she believes that the same phenomenon can be applied to women but not to the same extent. Nevertheless, most executives are men and that is why men often choose men.

### 6.5.9 Additional comments

When asking Emma what the causes could be for the lack of women in foreign assignments she says that she believes it has to do with the spouse’s situation. Organizations must become better at finding creative solutions for spouses, for example assist with job searching and work permits etcetera. Women who decide to work abroad often have husbands who have a
professional life as well and in addition usually earn more money than the woman, which makes it difficult to leave. The economic loss one experiences if the husband quits his job is rarely compensated. A woman can “give birth for a couple of years”, as Emma puts it, but men might be less willing to give up their careers for several years, sometimes up to ten years if a woman is stationed abroad for two periods in a row within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Today spouses only get language training and no other help. The main problem is in other words the spouse’s conditions who often affect women’s decision to accept an international assignment or not. However, Emma is in general satisfied with the assistance she has gotten from the Ministry. The Ministry helps the employees with all practical matters concerned with the move, especially in countries where one does not speak the language.
6.6 Fia Fredriksson
Fia is 49 years old and a Swedish ambassador working in South America which means that she holds a managerial position within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. This embassy represents Sweden in several South American countries. Fia has been working within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs during a ten year period and before this she worked with development assistance questions within the UN (United Nations) at UNICEF (the United Nations Children’s Fund) for about 4-5 years. Before that she worked in Sweden with the same type of questions. Before she started working at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs she was working at the Church of Sweden Mission with development assistance questions for approximately five years. Her education is not something that most people associate with the type of work she performs; she has a linguistic education in addition to a lot of other areas, Political Science being one of them. She has studied at Uppsala University in Sweden as well as in the United States and Spanish, Swedish, and English linguistics constitutes the foundation of her degree.

6.6.1 The Foreign Assignment
Fia chose to go abroad since it is a natural part of the work within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The same applies for her assignments within UNICEF at the UN. She got the assignment at UNICEF when she was already stationed in South America working for the UN. Foreign assignments and working abroad have therefore always been a natural part of the work life, as said by Fia. It is an increment and a big interest to be able to work for Sweden and/or work with questions that promotes Sweden abroad, she says. Further, she believes that the world becomes much smaller as soon as one starts to explore it.

One cannot work within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and expect to be stationed in Stockholm forever, at some point one has to go abroad and work, according to Fia. The foreign assignment has meant a lot for her; however, she has a different point of view when it comes to climbing the career ladder. The most important thing for her is to have an interesting job where one can develop and grow as a person; one does not necessarily have to climb a career ladder for making progress. She is of the opinion that if she can acquire an interesting position or interesting duties when finally back in Sweden it does not matter if she has a fancy or respectful title. The number one concern is that the substance is motivating. The family goes first and secondly one has to feel that one can make progress and develop parallel to the work; one has to be stimulated by the tasks one takes on, according to Fia. Fia says that she has never taken a job only by reason of the career opportunities if it meant that it would have a negative impact upon her family.

The decision to work abroad has clearly been affected by Fia’s life situation. However, the fact that she is married to a man of Chilean origin means that she already lives in a world with diverse cultures. Fia and her husband have four children, all girls, and they lived in South America for many years when the children were young. The decision to take on the assignment in this region in the year of 2001 meant big changes for Fia and her family. Two of their children stayed in Sweden, which Fia considers a high price to pay; she had a hard time accepting the fact that her family “split”. Today the children are grown ups and according to Fia this means that it is much easier to work the way she does. Further, she believes that one has to consider the fact that the career cannot mean everything. “One is not married to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs”, as she puts it.
Fia believes that women unfortunately need to prove their competence and skills in a greater extent, in comparison to men, to reach the same positions. This is something she has observed especially since it exist an inherent solidarity among male colleagues, in particular noticed in larger assemblies. There are often additional requirements for women; they need to take that extra step many times. However, female executives within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs are making progress; they are under-represented to a smaller extent. In South America the Swedish male ambassadors are a minority, instead the females are the critical mass and in majority. Nevertheless, one can sense the masculine atmosphere in the organization, women have to elbow their way forward. However, Fia does not believe this is something one should have to do. An example of this is that it is much easier for a mediocre male white-collar worker to become an executive in comparison to a mediocre female white-collar worker. Sweden has a high political profile when it comes to the work in her region and this means that Fia does not feel discriminated at all, vice versa. However, she believes that discrimination can be visible within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs generally.

6.6.2 The Recruitment

Fia does not believe that the main criterions for the selection process are separated among men and women. However, other things might influence the selection. One is not asked to go abroad or take on an assignment; everyone working within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has to apply for such a position. Further, one is expected to apply for international assignments when working within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs regardless the level of the position.

Fia believes the main criterions for the selection process during the recruitment are different depending on what position it is and the level of the position. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs has undergone a radical change when it concerns executive positions and the policies for these. They have put a lot of effort in education and training as well as looking for future executives, this is something one can see in the criterions, according to Fia, and she believes they are well prepared. Further, concerning lower level positions the advertising procedure and the criterions are very open and transparent. Fia does not believe there is something the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has overlooked regarding the selection process. Fia thinks she has been treated in a beneficial way during the recruitment process and she cannot complain at all. She has always been given the positions she has applied for.

6.6.3 Stereotypes

Fia does not experience that stereotypes are existing among men and women when recruiting expatriates within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. She believes it has to do with the fact that foreign assignments are a necessity and something natural for the organization. In general she believes that gender stereotypes do exist in the society. Further, in South America these gender stereotypes are extremely evident. However, Fia does not believe it exits within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

She has experienced some problems in the host country due to that she is a woman, especially in contact with the host countries ministers who rather listen to an older male diplomat. On the other hand, she has never experienced any problems when it comes to diplomat colleagues or other people who are working within the international communion. Latin America is a continent where the "machismo" is still quite widespread, according to Fia, one can notice this at meetings and in fact in all kinds of situations. Fia says that she simply just lets the man
talk if he is of the same opinion, for example if there is an important message which needs to be put forward; then one should not profile oneself. Basically one takes a strategic step backwards in the situation mentioned above. Fia says that there exists a fear among men in South America that women might increase their influence, which is a fact.

6.6.4 Networks
Fia is of the opinion that a good network has a fundamental role for succeeding with one’s work and the assignment and that it might affect the recruitment as well. One can come a long way with only one’s resume; however, one cannot go any further without a network regardless of the position one wish for or possesses today. Within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs a network is very important and an enormous asset since it is such a changeable organization. One has to be able to be identified; it is difficult just to uphold oneself by name. Networking is a continual work and others need to know who one is and what one has performed and achieved. By reason of this the internal network is very important, especially when one is moving around worldwide a lot. The work within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is pretty much concerned with conducting a dialog and that is why the external network is rather big, it stretches over countries as well as between countries. Basically it means that if one has been working in several countries and with various people one can influence and affect each other more.

6.6.5 The Glass Ceiling
Fia has not experienced the glass ceiling and is referring this to the fact that she has one of the chief executive positions of the white-collar category within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. However, there are other positions with a more political character and Fia is not familiar with these positions or what characterizes them. She does not belong to that category and she does not believe she would be interested in applying for those positions either. Still, Fia experiences solidarity among men, as mentioned above; a mediocre man can become an executive within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs although not a mediocre woman. This results in that women have to “fight” in another way in comparison to men, in general one has to show people back home (at the headquarter/head office) who one is. When one is stationed at an embassy within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs one is far away from Stockholm, especially when stationed in regions such as Latin America. These regions are not as politically high prioritized or topical for Swedish foreign policy and therefore one might be forgotten. By reason of this one has to bench mark oneself as a woman, according to Fia. However, she has never experienced the concept of “to here but no further” during her ten years within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which according to her, is a rather short period of time for achieving high positions. According to Fia, she has been positive and well received by her superiors during her career. They have allowed her to develop and safeguard her knowledge, experiences, and potential. She believes she has been treated rather beneficial and has never experienced that she has been restricted due to her superiors.

The two main reasons for why the glass ceiling still exists are the solidarity among men, as mentioned earlier, and the fact that some perceptions become a rule, according to Fia. She says it is a rule that there are most men who are executives or possess the senior manager positions which means that women in senior manager positions or as executives are rather rare. To come up with something new or with something different is always difficult, according to Fia. This by reason of the fact that things will not work as smoothly as before and there will be “anxiety in the lines”. To remove the glass ceiling and to become an
ambassador in Europe or possess the really high political positions is not easy if one is a woman. That is why there need to be a larger group of female executives within the whole organization if one is going to be able to affect and create a change, as said by Fia. “We simply need a change on the whole – more women as managers”.

6.6.6 Women and Self-esteem
Fia does believe that women prevent themselves in their career due to their own opinion of themselves and the society’s traditional gender roles. To put it in another way “women would not be in the situation they are in today if it was not for that”, according to Fia. Further, she believes that it is a question of generations; the younger generation has a completely different self-perception in comparison to the older generation. She believes this is due to that one has grown up in different societies and with time there will be fewer differences between men and women. According to Fia, she definitely belongs to the generation that sometimes wonders “what am I doing and quickly tries to get out of the situation…”

6.6.7 Women and Risk taking
Fia does believe that there is a difference in risk taking between men and women, however there exist differences in risk taking between different individuals as well regardless gender. She is of the opinion that women view their life in a more integrated way which in turn means that they estimate the risks in another way in comparison to men. Some women take more risks in comparison to other women. She believes that she belongs to the part that has strong intentions of taking risks. To be stationed in her region, which is considered as a very dangerous and insecure, must be implied as risky. Further, she does not believe that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs would not send a woman to a specific country due to that it is considered dangerous. It is more about the specializations linked to the various positions and embassies, and one needs to find the right skills.

6.6.8 Homosociality
Fia does not believe that homosociality among men are playing a part in the final decision of choosing an expatriate. Due to that there is a diverse composition of the ones who perform the selection, it is a formalized matter. On the other hand there can instead be a situation of someone choosing their friend, however this friend can be a male or a female.

6.6.9 Additional comments
When we asked Fia to think freely about what the reasons might be for why few females are recruited to foreign assignments she mentioned the family situation as a main reason for having few females working abroad. When someone is going abroad working it is often only one person in the relationship/marriage that gets a job. The spouse might not get a job for a period of 4-5 years and that is a big problem within the organization. However, this is something that has been discussed in a great extent within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The spouse gets a pension grant and the organization tries to facilitate for the spouse regarding getting a job by establish working permits between the countries involved. However, Fia says it is very difficult to get a job or to even get a decent occupation during the stay; to get help with schools is on the other hand rather easy. An idea of how there can be more women on foreign assignments is simply to get more women in executive positions as well as offer a lot of help for the spouse when going abroad.
7. ANALYSIS

On the basis of our literature review and the empirical findings we will in this chapter conduct an analysis in agreement with the purpose of the study and create an understanding for how women perceive their possibilities to obtain an international assignment. Initially we give an account of some important aspects highlighted by the respondents in our empirical data. The analysis will follow the same structure as the interview manual and the presentation of the empirical data, this to facilitate the reading of the chapter.

7.1 Supplementary theories

After completion of the empirical data collection we found some interesting aspects discussed by our respondents which we had not included in our literature review. Therefore, we have in this chapter supplemented a second part to create a better and broader foundation for our study. The concepts will later on be linked to our empirical findings and show the way to the analysis.

7.1.1 Dual-careers

It has been stressed that the family ought to be the most important concern when considering a successful expatriate cycle. In the light of this “an extensive proportion of marriages are dual-career partnerships with both partners employed and psychologically committed to work or employed in upwardly mobile jobs”, according to Riusala and Suutari. A study conducted in the United States showed that one of the five most important challenges for international human resources were the management of dual-career couples. An indication of 67 percent feel that their spouse is reluctant to give up his or her career in a recent survey made among potential expatriate managers. It is especially common in the Nordic countries that each partner has their own working career. Therefore, problems related to dual-career couples are hence very important issues in Nordic companies. A growing reason for rejecting international assignments is spouses’ reluctance to give up their own career, this according to recent findings. A consequence is hence the need for corporate programs for dual-career couples on foreign assignments. The program should comprise aspects related to the spouse’s work, for instance assistance in finding a job for the spouse in the host country. The company can either arrange a job within the organization if possible or if not in some other organizations which are operating in the host country. Further, if the spouse is trying to find a job in the host country, by him/herself, the company can cover the spouse’s costs related to this. Also, other required arrangements could be help regarding work permits or other practical matters.

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143 Ibid., 83.
A topical research among women in relationships, (married, engaged, or co-habited), or not having a relationship, (divorced or singles), shows that a few of these women thought that they could find supportive and encouraging husbands. On the other hand, others were prepared to stay single in order to pursue an international career since they were doubtful of such prospects.\textsuperscript{144} Further, there is evidence showing that there could be more partners who are less willing to break or abandon their career since dual-career couples are becoming more common. However, demographic developments may decrease the desire of managers for pursuing an expatriate career. Rejecting offers of foreign assignments due to the career of their spouse have been reported by as many as 15 percent of expatriate candidates, and in the future this figure is expected to increase.\textsuperscript{145} Even if there are several ways a company can assist dual-career couples few firms around the globe have actually dealt with these kinds of problems in an effective way, although this phenomenon has an increasing occurrence.\textsuperscript{146}

7.1.2 Male structures

Management has from the beginning of the century been characterized as representing male qualities and includes stereotypical male traits such as “tough-mindedness”, and managers have tried to legitimize their role through “managerial ethics”. The “cognitive schema” for a manager bears a resemblance to that for men rather than that for women, this since management has been associated with masculinity. To label managers as male gives men the right to obtain management jobs and it becomes a norm. When these norms once are institutionalized in an organization’s formal structures and their informal customs, these practices resist alteration. In other words, organizations and its employees become used to gender based job separation. Thus, a separation of genders within managerial jobs is in accordance with gender segregation both within and across organizations.\textsuperscript{147}

Existing “structures” within organizations, by which is meant workers’ demographic characteristics, are used to minimize the transaction costs in filling jobs; instead of creating new informal structures. It includes both statistical discrimination and word-of-mouth recruitment but also subjective evaluation of candidates. To reduce risks and to better be able to predict a candidate’s performance, organizations tend to choose applicants from demographic groups one is familiar with. Most employers are more familiar with male managers than female and it is therefore likely that they see a male choice as less risky. This might be one reason for women’s under-representation in management. To restrict outsiders (in this case women), powerful groups try to institutionalize their privileges.\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{144} Rueyling Tzeng, ”Gender issues and family concerns for women with international careers – female expatriates in Western multinational corporations in Taiwan”, Women in Management Review, 21:5 (2006), 385-386.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 212.
7.1.3 Male bonding and Old-boys’ networks

There are several ways of searching for job openings, for example reading the want ads or apply directly to an employer. However, personal relationships also provide people with labor market opportunities. One may be able to find job openings through informal channels if one relies upon personal contacts with friends, relatives, or acquaintances. These contacts are one’s social network and consist of social capital, which one can invest in by networking and find out about possible job opportunities.\(^{149}\)

Further, there are also “non-searchers”; in other words people who get their jobs while not actively searching for one. These people tend to obtain job information from personal and professional contacts during so called routine conversations. Non-searchers also tend to get better jobs than both formal job seekers and personal contact users. People in the middle of their careers with good social resources are more likely to get a job without even searching for it, and this especially applies to men with a great deal of work experience. This “non-searching” may further serve as an important informal mechanism in the maintenance and reproduction of gender diversification in the labor market.\(^{150}\)

During marriage and parenthood women’s friendship networks tend to shrink relative to men’s, but increase again when familial responsibilities decrease. This certainly affects employment outcomes since women get job information from other women and men from other men.\(^{151}\) Women’s social resources and social networks also tend to include fewer contacts than men’s. This may decrease the possibilities of obtaining informal job information in the same pace as men. Further, men are more likely to get this information since they maintain greater network centrality in comparison women. This results in informal isolation of women within organizations and “Good ol’ boys” networks which keep women from information about job openings. Employers are allowed the discretion to select male employees to fill jobs which in turn increase the probability of a man getting an executive position. Non-searcher may also, if informal recruiting is used to fill higher positions within an organization, serve as an important mechanism in maintaining the glass ceiling effect.\(^{152}\)

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\(^{151}\) Ibid., 526.

\(^{152}\) Ibid., 542-543.
7.2 Our analysis

After supplementing a few aspects we found important to include in our study, to facilitate the understanding for women’s possibilities to obtain an international assignment, we will now reconnect the empirical findings with the literature review and the supplemented theories, and vice versa. We would like to emphasize that it sometimes is easy to notice matters and situations; however, the significance can be rather difficult to interpret. This since international assignments with a gender perspective is a complex phenomenon and can be studied from different angles depending on one’s gender.

7.2.1 Foreign Assignment

According to the respondents, the choice to go on a foreign assignment is based on for example a wish of getting new perspectives and experiences regarding one’s life and career, meeting new people, and improve a foreign language. Further, the opinion that other markets have more to offer in comparison to Sweden, the fact that working abroad is a natural part of one’s work, and a wish to offer the children a more European life; is also affecting the choice. However, for more or less all respondents the foreign assignment is linked to their life situation. Anna highlights the fact that her husband is Czech and that it is easier for him to “fit in” in Europe than in Sweden. Britt mentions that her spouse got offered an international assignment which in turn meant that Britt got one too, further, Cajsa believes it is easier to go abroad if one is single and also points out that even though she has a family she wanted an international assignment in her career. Emma stresses her family situation; she is married to a Frenchman who wanted to go abroad, and the fact that she and her husband do not have any children also made it easier. Doris on the other hand mentions that it had to do with a job opening.

All the above can be interpreted as one’s family situation being one of the most important matters when accepting an international assignment. We believe this is a central part for female expatriates since women are the ones who give birth and therefore have a natural role at home for a while, at least when the children are infants. The fact that the life situation and a dual-career are playing a part as well is in agreement with what Riusala and Suutari discuss concerning the family\(^{153}\). When considering a successful expatriate cycle the family ought to be the number one concern. According to them, the management of dual-career couples is a rather significant challenge, especially in the Nordic countries where the partners have their own working career. In agreement with this, four out of six respondents put forward their family when talking about why they chose to go on a foreign assignment. Further, we interpret Cajsa’s statement as wanting to improve her career and being able to break the glass

\(^{153}\) Riusala and Suutari, “Expatriation and careers”, 81-82.
ceiling. In addition, she believes it is easier to go if one is single which could be looked upon as a gender stereotype. Both these statements can be supported by Drake and Solberg\textsuperscript{154} and Linehan and Walsh\textsuperscript{155}. According to Drake and Solberg, women do not reach the higher levels and their career ladder ends at lower level managerial positions; we interpret this as she wanted to go on an assignment since this would mean that her career possibilities would improve and she can therefore climb the ladder when back home in Sweden. Further, we believe that the “issue of being single” is in agreement with what Linehan and Walsh say regarding women’s career and that they have to balance their “family life” with their job, since they are the ones who have responsibility for the home and family commitments. We believe this shows the “label” that women often have today; they are the ones in charge of the family and the home. Since this is almost a general rule in the society we believe a single woman is in a much better position for having a successful career, since this more or less means she does not have a family “standing in her way”.

The majority of the respondents believe that the foreign assignment has had a positive affect on their career. Both Britt and Cajsa are of the opinion that they would not have gotten the position they possess today if it was not for the foreign assignment. Further, Doris says it is valuable and positive for her career and according to Emma, it is almost required if one wants to obtain an executive position. The lack of women in leading positions has to do with the low level of female managers, according to Göransson\textsuperscript{156}. Candidates for top positions are usually recruited from middle-manager positions and these positions are rarely held by women. Hence, we find support to the statements above and therefore believe that this is one of the most central reasons for women not going on international assignments either. We think there is a significant link between the lack of women in leading positions and the fact that few women go abroad on assignments. This since making progress in the company/organization is a step closer to an international assignment, in other words climbing the ladder and having a flourishing future career. Further, Fia is of the opinion that even though the assignments have meant a lot for her career the most important thing for her is to have an interesting job where one can develop and grow as a person. It does not matter if one has a fancy or respectful title. Britt says that one needs to dare and see that one can manage the circumstances with living abroad; she believes that her self-confidence has grown incredibly. We believe that these two statements are in accordance with what Fischlmayr says\textsuperscript{157}; men often talk about results and stress their status and women reduce their own value and have a lack of confidence. We believe that women in general have a lower self-esteem and that this can have an influence of getting selected for an assignment or getting promoted to a higher position; men take more space and women allow them to.

The choice to work abroad has evidently been affected by all the respondents’ life situation. Anna says that her husband has cut down on his work and that is why she could accept the assignment in Luxembourg. According to Britt, she would never have gone if she had to go alone; she and her spouse made a joint decision. Cajsa points out, that after mature consideration her family accepted the assignment which in turn meant that her husband had to give notice to terminate his job. For Emma it had to do with her French husband who felt it was time to move on, further, Doris mentions her marital status and age as a source of hesitation for accepting an international assignment; she first considered it was time to start a

\textsuperscript{154} Drake and Solberg, \textit{Kvinnor och ledarskap}, 21-22.
\textsuperscript{155} Linehan and Walsh, \textit{Beyond the traditional linear view of international managerial careers”}, 182.
\textsuperscript{156} Göransson, \textit{Kvinnor, män och karriärer}, 21-22.
\textsuperscript{157} Fischlmayr, “Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 776-777.
family and settle down. According to Fia, it was a joint decision, however, she had a hard time accepting the fact that her family had “split”.

All of this can be interpreted as the life situation and dual-careers being a vital influence for accepting an international assignment. A growing reason for rejecting international assignments is spouse’s reluctance to give up their career. We believe this shows that the women we have interviewed are fully aware of this and some of their husbands had to cut down on work or gave notice to terminate their jobs. Further, some have a spouse/husband with foreign extraction or a spouse who went along on an assignment as well. According to us, this is something that we believe makes the international assignment easier. A lot of women treasure their family and would not go abroad for a foreign career without them. The fact that Doris hesitated at first for the benefit of perhaps starting a family is in agreement with what Tzeng\(^{158}\) says concerning women currently not having a relationship. Tzeng’s concept highlights some women who prepare to stay single in order to pursue an international career. We believe this is rather usual; we can just go to our selves – it is easier to go abroad for studies, internships, or work etcetera if one does not have a partner who is left behind miles and miles away. We can just imagine how it would be if one has a family. We believe that one’s life situation has a decisive role when accepting an international assignment.

All respondents think or believe that women need to prove their competence and skills in a greater extent in comparison to men to obtain the same positions; however, they express themselves differently. Anna believes it has to do with how one markets oneself and that men are better at this. Further, she points out that men possess the higher positions and also help their “buddies” to advance. Cajsa also mentions that men possess the higher positions in a greater extent and the fact that women need to dare and believe in themselves. Further, she says that more women in leading positions would make it easier for other women to impersonate with challenges. According to Doris, women are living in a male world and have to learn to act in a certain way and bring forward elements they would not have had to enhance in a female environment. Fia has observed an inherent solidarity among male colleagues and she mentions that women need to elbow their way forward in the masculine atmosphere in the organization. In addition, Emma on the other hand believes it has to do with that most executives are men and the networks often consist of men. Another thought is that women are the ones who give birth and according to Emma, managers have to consider this when employing women.

According to Fagerfjäll,\(^{159}\) the top positions within an organization are usually held by a male with a long career path behind him and women have a hard time getting across this male collective. This can be supported by our empirical findings as mentioned above, several of the respondents mention the glass ceiling. We are in agreement with the respondents as well, we believe that if there can be more women at leading positions women will not have to prove their competence and skills in a greater extent than men; they will be accepted without doubt. Fia and Doris talk about male structures and homosociality. According to Reskin and McBrier,\(^{160}\) management has for a long time been associated with masculinity; men at manager positions become a norm and Holgersson\(^{161}\) discuss that women communicate and express themselves differently from men and therefore make men uncertain. This reflects the society we live in and we believe that women many times need to become more “masculine”

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\(^{158}\) Tzeng, “Gender issues and family concerns for women with international careers”, 385-386.

\(^{159}\) Fagerfjäll, Så spräcker vi glastaket, 29.

\(^{160}\) Reskin and McBrier, “Why not ascription?”, 211-212.

\(^{161}\) Holgersson, Rekrytering av företagsledare, 45-46.
and that there exist misunderstandings due to that men and women speak two “different languages” at times. Drake and Solberg\textsuperscript{162} and Fischlmayr\textsuperscript{163} argue that men’s awareness of networks is more extended and that the strong male internal groups are easily established, which reflects what Emma and Anna mention concerning networks.

### 7.2.2 The Recruitment

Concerning the recruitment there is one obvious difference between the business world and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Regarding the latter, all employees have to apply for the international assignments whereas the employees in the business world often are asked to take on such assignments, or at least asked to apply for them. All respondents from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs have therefore applied for their positions abroad and gone through a formal recruitment process. However, this process varies among the respondents. Emma for example simply got selected without having an interview, while Doris had two interviews before getting selected; both with the ambassador and the person in charge for the Economic Affairs group. Among the respondents from the business world Britt is the only one who applied for her position; however, she got informed about it and the other two were asked to take on the assignments abroad.

We find the recruitment process within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs a bit surprising and would like to question how the Ministry knows that the person they choose for an assignment is the best suitable one; this without, in some cases, not even talking to the person before selecting him or her. The second stage in the expatriate cycle is selection and research often emphasizes skills such as intercultural empathy, emotional stability, self-awareness, flexibility, and interpersonal skills\textsuperscript{164}. To be able to determine if a person possesses all or some of the skills mentioned above, we believe it is necessary to perform personal interviews with the applicants. However, as mentioned in our literature review, for many organizations a key determinant of eligibility for international assignments is the technical competence\textsuperscript{165}. We believe this is what the Ministry in many cases look at when determining who they will send where, especially in the cases where no interviews are carried out. Further, we are of the opinion that one has to meet or at least talk to the applicant in question to be able to determine if he or she is suitable for a certain position. This would therefore become a common practice when selecting candidates within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The general opinion among all respondents regarding the criterions for being selected is that the same criterions apply for both men and women. However, Emma and Fia do believe that other things might influence the selection. Fia is of the opinion that the criterions are different depending on the type of position and the level of the position, but still remains the same for men and women. Emma mentions that the recruiter might focus more upon a woman’s family situation and private life in comparison to men’s. Women may therefore get more questions regarding the future and her family etcetera. Further, she says that one reason for this could be that men might find it more difficult to leave their job and stay at home for several years. We believe this statement can be linked to several parts of our literature review. Firstly to the issue of dual-careers; as mentioned earlier Riusala and Suutari state that the family ought to be the most important concern when considering a successful expatriate cycle\textsuperscript{166}. Further,

\textsuperscript{162} Drake and Solberg, \textit{Kvinnor och ledarskap}, 183.
\textsuperscript{163} Fischlmayr, “Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 780.
\textsuperscript{164} http://www.som.cranfield.ac.uk/som/news/manfocus/downloads/expatriates.doc
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} Riusala and Suutari, “Expatriation and careers”, 81-82.
Tzeng’s research among women who both have and do not have a relationship showed that few women thought they could find a supportive and encouraging husband. In addition, some were prepared to stay single in order to pursue an international career\textsuperscript{167}. We are of the opinion that dual-career issues for sure affects women’s possibilities to work abroad. It could result in women rejecting international assignments due to the fact that their spouses are unwilling to give up their professional careers. Further, it might be less likely to get selected if being a woman due to the fact that the recruiter does not believe the family situation will work out and it therefore becomes more risky to select a woman. Riusala and Suutari further states that this is especially common in the Nordic countries where most couples are dual-career couples\textsuperscript{168}, something that we agree with. Secondly, we believe that the traditional role of women staying at home and men being seen as the breadwinner still exist in our society and certainly affect women’s international careers. Linen and Walsh argues that “it is more difficult for the male partner to adjust to the secondary careerist role, as this role is still more socially acceptable for women\textsuperscript{169},” and this supports Emma’s statement.

Doris told us that she was more or less the obvious candidate to select due to the fact that she was already working close to the Economic Affairs group. We believe this can be linked to what she has said about the importance of networks within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. She sees a developed and well established network as a crucial issue to become recruited to an international assignment. This is in accordance with Fischlmayr’s opinion; that networks have an essential role when choosing a suitable candidate\textsuperscript{170}. Further, Doris believes that most of the women recruited to the Diplomat Program are very go-ahead and that this is not a traditional female characteristic. However, she is of the opinion that the Ministry might look for this type of women and she can further see an obvious difference in the behavior between men and women, where men are more relaxed and laid back. According to Fischlmayr, the primary motive for not sending women abroad is the old-fashioned mindsets and the stereotypical attitudes\textsuperscript{171}. We believe that one reason for selecting this type of women to the program and sending them abroad could be that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs believes that one has to be in a certain way to be able to handle the job within the Ministry. We think this has to do with gender based stereotypes and that they emphasize more traditional male characteristics. Sinangil and Ones argue that low-level work and domestic duties are connected to women’s traditional roles\textsuperscript{172}. Therefore, when selecting females to the Diplomat Program and later sending them abroad one tries to find females who go beyond these roles and are more go-ahead than the traditional picture of female characteristics. Characteristics the respondents highlight as important when working abroad are; openness, being outgoing, social, self-confident, intrepid, brave, and humble.

Regarding the respondents from the business world the issue of dual-careers is highlighted as well. Cajas says that a woman’s life situation is affecting the results of being recruited. She mentions that men dominate the higher positions and that it is unusual that they have wives with high positions as well. However, vice versa for women are rather common and if she is offered an international assignment two careers have to be coordinated instead of one. Cajas further says that male spouses do not have the same social network as women when moving abroad becoming “househusbands” and all of this together affects women’s decision to accept

\textsuperscript{167} Tzeng, ”Gender issues and family concerns for women with international careers”, 385-386.
\textsuperscript{168} Riusala and Suutari, ”Expatriation and careers”, 81-82.
\textsuperscript{169} Linehan and Walsh, “Beyond the traditional linear view of international managerial careers”, 183.
\textsuperscript{170} Fischlmayr, ”Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 774.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 781.
\textsuperscript{172} Sinangil and Ones, “Gender Differences in Expatriate Job Performance”, 463.
or deny an international assignment. Anna also brought up the fact that men are often the ones who possess better career opportunities and make more money in comparison to women who, for example, give birth and stay at home for longer periods. Among our respondents one is single, three have husbands from a foreign country and highlight the fact that it is easier for them to live and, in some cases, work outside of Sweden. Further, one has a Swedish husband who resigned from his job when moving out together with his wife and one respondent followed her husband abroad but got employed as well. We interpret this as a clear sign that it is not that common that Swedish women with a Swedish husband or partner choose to go on international assignments. After completing the interviews with our respondents it seems like the issue of dual-careers is the most important one and the main reasons for women not applying and accepting international careers, as well as not being selected at all.

7.2.3 Stereotypes

None of the respondents within the Swedish business world are of the same opinion regarding the possible existence of gender stereotypes when recruiting expatriates. Britt is fully convinced that stereotypes in the recruitment process exist while Cajsa does not have any experience of it. Anna on the other hand believes it depends on more than the person who is recruiting, she believes women do not apply in the same extent and in addition she is of the opinion that the reason for this is due to the fact that women give birth and that is just the way it is. Further, two out of three women within the Swedish business world has experienced stereotypes in the host country. Anna mentions that she had to prove more when working abroad and that she had to put both feet down. Britt, who was the one who did not experience any problems in the host country due to that she is a woman, mentions the inappropriate way some executives acted on business trips though. One executive tried to seduce her and she believes that this has to do with the existence of cultural differences. All respondents within the Swedish business world have been well received by their colleagues; however, Britt says that she more or less carried out tasks in the line of “Ulla-Bella the secretary”.

Two out of three respondents within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs do not experience that stereotypes regarding women and men exist when recruiting expatriates. However, Doris mentions that male bonding can take place and create a close relationship between men. Further, all respondents believe that gender stereotypes exist in their host country/countries. Doris has often experienced that she has had to struggle and prove more in comparison to men; Emma is of the opinion that women’s private life will affect their professional life. In addition, Fia mentions the “machismo” in South America which takes expression at meetings and in fact in all kinds of situations. Further, she says that there exists a fear among men concerning women’s possible increased influence.

All respondents within the Ministry have been well received by the colleagues in the host country, still there exist some issues. For example, Doris believes the combination of her age and the fact that she is a woman puts her in a weaker position, Emma mentions that a lot of people assume she is an administrative assistant and this is according to her tough to deal with. She continues; the only thing she could do was to laugh about it because getting angry would not lead anywhere. Fia says that the host country ministers sometimes rather listen to an older male diplomat than to her.

We find that Fia’s and Doris’ statements mentioned above are in agreement with what Caligiuri and Tung discuss in their article “Comparing the success of male and female
expatriates from a US-based multinational company. They argue that female expatriates tend to be negatively stereotyped and that some refuses to transact with women. We can also find support to what Emma says regarding how to deal with issues that come up in the host country due to that she is a woman. According to Tung, harsh environmental conditions are something women are willing to comply with and they are also prepared of the fact that they may encounter hardships. However, they are enthusiastic when it comes to challenges. We find support to what Doris mentions regarding male bonding in McDonald’s and Elder’s article “When does special capital matter? Non-searching for jobs across the life course”. They argue that men obtain informal job information in a greater extent in comparison to women since they have greater networks. Women are isolated from the “good ol’ boys” networks which in turn affect the employment outcomes for women.

Since we have been living abroad several times our selves we are aware of the existence of different stereotypes in other countries. This is something one should be conscious about and prepared to encounter, further we are of the opinion that one has to be open minded and humble towards differences. Our ways of doing things in Sweden does not always have to be the right or the best way, therefore one has to accept other cultures and there customs.

7.2.4 Networks

All respondents within the Swedish business world, as well as the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, are of the opinion that networks are fundamental and are playing an important role when being recruited to an international assignment. According to Cajsa, internal networks are very important for one’s “success factor” and it is helpful to have an external network as well so that one can benchmark the results with the environment’s results. Anna says that a network creates a reputation which precedes one and helps one in one’s career. For example, if there is an opening in an organization or a company and someone comes to think about one and one’s knowledge and skills. Britt highlights the importance of having someone (for example within a network) to talk to regarding problems that occur and matters that make one worried.

Fia says that it is difficult to uphold oneself just by name and that others need to know what one has achieved, therefore a network is an enormous asset since the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is such a changeable organization and the fact that one is moving around worldwide a lot. With only a good curriculum vitae and no network one cannot go any further. Doris believes that if one applies for a job and the ambassador in this country never has heard of one it will certainly affect the recruitment. Emma is of the same opinion as Doris and says that the Ministry chooses candidates on the basis of their reputation. She adds that it is much easier to get selected if one knows the executive on a personal basis or if one knows someone who knows the executive in question. Further, she says that when working in small offices abroad one has to connect well with people.

We interpret the above line of reasoning as networks being an important part when one is recruited for an international assignment. This is in line with Fischlmayr, she states that success and performance are not enough any longer and that something else is required at

173 Caligiuri and Tung, Comparing the success of male and female expatriates from a US-based multinational company, 764.
174 Tung, “Female Expatriates”, 245.
175 McDonald and Elder, “When does social capital matter?”, 542-543.
176 Fischlmayr, “Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 780.
higher management levels, for example support from others. Further, she says that women’s loose networks become a problem when choosing a suitable candidate, both internationally and domestically. In other words, women are not considered as potential candidates. We can also find support to what Britt states regarding having someone to talk to about problems and matters that make one worried. Drake and Solberg\(^{177}\) state that networks contribute to give and receive support. We believe that this is rather important, to have someone to talk to concerning issues irrespective of them being of positive or negative character. Without support it can be difficult to manage the tasks or to believe in one, we think that one needs to get acknowledgement to feel confident and be proactive.

We believe that the women’s, within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, opinion of the importance of a network reflects Drake’s and Solberg’s definition of the same. They define it as “a pattern of continuous social relations between actors”. Further, we believe that networks are an extremely important part of the recruitment process, if not indispensable. Fischlmayr argues that a certain level of friendship is required and a lot of informal meetings are necessary when using networks. According to Emma, it is much easier to be recruited if one has personal connections to the executives (or his/her friends/connections) and Doris mentions that one needs to be known by the recruiters/ambassadors. Both their opinions correspond to Fischlmayr’s reasoning. We are of the same opinion, connections are essential, and without them it is much harder to be recruited or just get to the final pool of possible candidates. We believe that all the above mentioned is very important. We are in the end of our education and will soon start looking for jobs, which in turn can reflect what has been said about networks. It is essential to have a network to both get information from concerning job-openings as well as when finally at the closing step in the recruitment process, to be able to use regarding references etcetera.

7.2.5 The Glass Ceiling

Five out of six respondents are certain that the glass ceiling still exists, whereas one does not have any opinion about this. Further, none of the respondents from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs have experienced the glass ceiling themselves even though all of them believe it is present within organizations. Among the respondents from the business world one respondent has not experienced the glass ceiling, one is not really sure if she has experienced it, and the last one (Britt) told us that she has a somewhat different view of this ceiling which we will discuss later on. However, the opinions about why the glass ceiling still exists vary among the respondents.

We will start by looking at the possible reasons for the existence that the respondents from the business world highlighted. Cajsa is of the opinion that the glass ceiling has to do with what one wants to achieve and that one can let oneself be stopped by different things in life. She considers the glass ceiling as being self-inflicted some times. Even though she believes that the woman is the one who takes on most of the responsibility at home, she does not think one can say that differences and discrimination between men and women in society are due to the fact that women give birth. This since both men and women have parental leave in Sweden today. In other words, Cajsa does not agree with Fischlmayr’s opinion that men are considered as the breadwinners and women as household keepers\(^{178}\). Further, she does not believe that young women in their twenties will experience the same problems with the glass

\(^{177}\) Drake and Solberg, *Kvinnor och ledarskap*, 174-177.

\(^{178}\) Fischlmayr, “Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 776.
ceiling and that it might be a question of generations. She says that women in general are on their way to conquer this ceiling. Lastly, she mentions that it is up to oneself to shield oneself from existing opinions and ideas. We agree with Caja that the glass ceiling might be a question of generation. Equality between men and women has already come a long way in Sweden and we believe this work will continue in the future and hopefully young women of today do not have to experience the glass ceiling during their professional life. Further, nowadays there is awareness about the lack of female executives and female expatriates within organizations and we believe this is a positive sign and that organizations will be forced to handle this fact and do something about it in the near future.

Britt on the other hand, does believe there is a point in the fact that women are the ones who give birth and have the main responsibility at home. This is also why she believes that women do not have the energy or believe it is worth to climb the career ladder. Climbing in the hierarchy sometimes includes much harder “punches”, she says. She is of the opinion that the glass ceiling still exists due to that men are recruiting men and that women are more pensive before accepting “higher positions”. According to us, Britt’s statement that men recruit men can be interpreted as that homosociality does exist within organizations. Holgersson states that men control a great deal of power in most organizations and the result is that they identify with other men more easily than with women. Further, Britt says that people are feeling threatened, women are looked upon as a threat against men’s authority and are trespassing on their “playground”. Women are not always “buddies” with the male executives and do not act like them. Instead they may propose different types of issues, demands, and questions which male executives sometimes are not familiar with. Britt believes these stereotypes are difficult to remove, however, she believes it will come with time. It is all about getting more women to each work place, and then the women will get strength from each other she says. We find support for the above mentioned in Reskin’s and McBrier’s article “Why not ascription?”. They say that managers have been labeled as men for a long time and that this fact gives men the right to obtain higher positions and that it becomes a norm. Male managers have become a powerful group within organizations and when restricting outsiders (women), this group tries to institutionalize their privileges. We do believe this is one reason for the under-representation of women in both executive positions and in turn also expatriate positions, and a factor contributing to the existence of the glass ceiling. We believe that it is crucial to get more women on higher positions within organizations who will allow more women on all organizational levels. This will increase the pool of suitable candidates to select future expatriates from.

Some of the reasons for the existence of the glass ceiling highlighted by the respondents from the business world are in accordance with the opinions of the respondents from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Fia for example mentions that she experiences a solidarity among men which results in women having to “fight” in another way than men to receive higher positions. Further, she believes the ceiling exists since “certain things” become a rule. According to her, it is a rule that most executives are men and female executives still are quite rare. To overcome the glass ceiling she believes it has to be a critical mass, a larger group of female executives within organizations, if one wants to create a change. “We need a change on the whole – more female managers”, she says. However, to come up with something new is always difficult, according to Fia. We are of the opinion that this solidarity among men can be explained with the concept of homosociality as mentioned above but also with male bonding and “Old-boys’ networks”. Since we do believe that women actually take on most of the

responsibility at home and often stay at home for longer periods with the children, their professional network will get smaller. McDonald and Elder state that people in the middle of their careers with good social resources are more likely to get a job without even searching for it, and that this especially applies to men with a great deal of work experience. Further, they state that this may maintain and reproduce gender diversification in the labor market. Since we believe women’s networks get smaller when staying at home, they do not have the same access to job information as men do. McDonald and Elder state that “Good ol’boys’ networks” isolate women within organizations and employers are allowed the discretion of selecting male employees to fill open positions, which in turn increase the probability of a man getting an executive position. In addition, Fia is of the opinion that creating something new is always difficult. We find support for her statement in McDonald’s and Elder’s article stating that when norms once are institutionalized in an organization’s formal structures and their informal customs, these practices resist alteration. Further, we do agree with McDonald and Elder that this will maintain the glass ceiling.

Emma believes the presence of the glass ceiling has to do with women themselves and the society. Women often underestimate their abilities and skills in addition to the fact that most executives are men. These executives may find it easier to relate to the “male behavior” and this is why they select other men to higher positions which can be explained by the concept of homosociality, as discussed earlier. Further, just like Britt, Emma believes women are the ones who take on the main responsibility for the children which also has an affect. This is in agreement with Linehan’s and Walsh’s statement that women highlight children as an “obstacle” in their career and that women often have to convince their managers that motherhood is something they can balance with their job. Emma is of the opinion that there has to be more female executives within organizations and that this will result in more females in higher positions in general. Therefore, she is open towards acceptance of gender by quotas during a transitional period. This is in agreement with Doris’ opinion, who also is positive towards acceptance of gender by quotas and sees this as one way to make the glass ceiling disappear. We agree with what Emma says regarding acceptance of gender by quotas during a transitional period. Of course women should obtain a position by reason of their competence and skills but even though the issue of equality in the professional life is constantly debated the process is rather slow. Therefore, we think that to be able to accomplish a significant change in the near future one has to take action and acceptance of gender by quotas can be one way to progress.

Further, the main reason for the existence of the glass ceiling is, according to Doris, the male structures in the society. Men bond with other men and these are the ones they first come to think of when a position needs to be filled. She says they create a strong relationship and a mutual confidence among each other, sometimes such strong connections which women cannot even become a part of. This “male bonding” creates a distance between men and women and results in women getting less access to male executives since they do not bond in the same way. This is in accordance with the opinion of both Fia and Britt and can be linked to several parts of our literature review; homosociality, male bonding, and old-boys networks as discusses earlier.

182 Linehan and Walsh, “Beyond the traditional linear view of international managerial careers”, 182.


7.2.6 Women and Self-esteem

All respondents are of the opinion that women’s self-esteem may hinder them in their careers. The respondents from the business world put forward that women would like to be able to handle 70-80 percent of an assignment before even applying, but if a woman says she can do something, she really can. This in comparison to men who they think are able to take on rather big challenges without having any experience at all since men find it easier to believe it will work out somehow. According to Cajsa, women are bad at enhancing themselves and she says that “women believe they are never good enough and that they never have a sufficient amount of experience, ever!” Britt further says that women want to do everything perfect and ideal and that she finds it important to get approval from her superiors and that they need to have faith in one. She believes that one’s self-esteem also has to do with one’s own rules and ways of thinking and that a woman in general takes on too much responsibility in comparison to a man when something goes wrong.

One of the respondents from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is of the opinion that women would like to be able to handle almost 100 percent of a job description before even applying. Further, she says that men do not have this barrier and if they can handle 10 percent the rest will work out one way or another. Doris and Emma believes that women are less comfortable saying things without being 100 percent sure it is right and that women in general find it easier than men to think that “No, I cannot do this”, “I will not be able to handle this”, and “this will never work out”. Doris further believes that men from an early age learn to be less self-critic and not being afraid to express themselves. According to her, females learn not to stick out and to adapt to the environment and that it has to do with the traditional gender roles. However, she does not believe one should “stop being a woman”.

Fia and Cajsa, two of the oldest respondents, express the opinion that differences in women’s self-esteem are a question of generations. Fia believes that the younger generation of women has a completely different self-perception in comparison to the older one. Further, Cajsa says that she does not think there will be the same difference between men and women in the future. In addition, Anna and Britt told us that they are trying to teach their children to become more self-confident.

Fischlmayr discusses women’s internal barriers for being selected to work internationally and one of the most important aspects has to do with women’s gender based behavior. As mentioned earlier, Doris states that females learn from an early age not to stick out and to adapt to their environment, this in comparison to men who learn to be less self-critic and not being afraid to express themselves. Further, she believes this has to do with the traditional gender roles. This is in agreement with Fischlmayr’s opinion that boys and girls from childhood on are aware of their gender based roles in society and that this reflects in their self-perception. We believe this is true and something one has to work with from a young age, and just like Anna and Britt try to teach one’s children to become more self-confident. Further, we are not saying that the aim should be to try to “eliminate” all differences between boys and girls from childhood. However, if girls from a young age learn to be less self-critic and self-confident they will become better at enhancing themselves later on; in their private life as well in their professions life.

Further, Fischlmayr says that men and women act differently in social settings and that the self-perception is reproduced in one’s language. Men often overestimate their abilities and

Fischlmayr, “Female self-perception as barrier to international careers?”, 776-777.
find fewer faults in themselves, while women on the other hand emphasize luck, chance, and the ease of the task when talking about their success. Fischlmayr mentions in her article that women often show a lack of determination for what they really want and this contributes to a poor self-image. We believe this can be linked to the statements above regarding women’s wish to be able to handle at least 70 percent of an assignment before even applying, and the type of language women use when expressing themselves in ways like “No, I cannot do this”. We believe that stating that one cannot do something or believing that things will not work out creates this poor self-image and hinder women from getting recruited to international assignments. Fischlmayr also argues that women usually hold themselves responsible first in case of any mistakes which is in accordance with Britt’s statement; that a woman in general takes on too much responsibility in comparison to men when something goes wrong.

Doris is of the opinion that some women “stop being a woman” since they try to adapt to their environment and when discussing stereotypes during our interview with Emma, she mentioned that women sometimes get excessively formal and have a strict attitude. Fischlmayr discusses success as being associated with aggressiveness and “masculinity” and that women sometimes try to copy their male colleagues and ignore their female qualities. We believe it is important not to ignore these female characteristics and that they are needed within organizations. These characteristics can be seen as competitive advantages within organizations and result in diverse ways of thinking, how one approach matters and various leadership styles. This is essential to become a successful organization, we believe that one has to value and safeguard diversity to be able to develop and think “outside the box”.

7.2.7 Women and Risk taking
The opinion about women and risk taking varies among the respondents. Britt, one of the respondents from the business world, is convinced that there exist differences between men’s and women’s risk taking and that it affects the selection of an expatriate. She says that women are more risk averse in comparison to men and that this is due to the fact that women in general take on most of the responsibility for the children. Anna touches upon this aspect as well and says that if one has a family one is less inclined to apply for an international assignment. Cajsa on the other hand says that if one seriously considers working abroad one is open towards taking risks, regardless of gender.

Among the women from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs the opinions differ as well. Doris believes it is hard to tell if women are more risk averse than men and does not have any exact opinion about this. Emma believes that women might be less risk averse than men, or less adventurous, at least after a certain age. She says that if women go abroad to work it is often with an “adventurous” spouse or with a spouse who comes from another country. Further, she mentions that at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs single women sometimes hesitate to go abroad and take the risk of not meeting anyone to settle down with. Fia is of the opinion that there exist differences in risk taking between the genders but also between individuals, regardless gender. In other words, some women are more risk averse than other. According to Fia, women view their life in a more integrated way and therefore estimate the risks differently than men.

There is no clear-cut opinion among the respondents regarding this question but four out of six mention that women may be more risk averse than men and that this often has to do with their life- and family situation. Austin discusses that men and women usually consider questions like “Do I enjoy the fact that something new will happen to me or does it make me
anxious?” differently\textsuperscript{184}. We believe that since women feel like they have the main responsibility for their family, new circumstances may make them anxious since it would, in the end, have an affect on other people than themselves. If they view their life in a more integrated way they estimate how their decision will affect their surrounding. Even though a woman is single, she may consider what will happen in relation to other people if she makes a certain decision. According to Austin, men have been in control for generations and have more of an internal locus of control than women. Women on the other hand usually have an external locus of control and believe that the environment determines their life\textsuperscript{185}. We find the above statements in accordance with Austin; this since women are more concerned about the environment, the surrounding indirect affects their decisions. We believe that this consideration sometimes hold them back in their professional life.

### 7.2.8 Homosociality

There are some distinguished opinions concerning the existence of homosociality when being in the final step of the recruitment process within the Swedish business world. Britt does believe it has an effect and she believes it has to do with the sexes' different languages. Britt's spouse for example thinks that she communicates in a vague way when she puts “maybe” after matters she is quite certain about. This is something she mentions as an important part when one is having the last interview. According to Cajsa, homosociality is not affecting the final decision since one in the end of the recruitment process has overcome all possible “obstacles” as a woman. Therefore, she believes that men and women are equal in the final step. Further, Anna says that homosociality is less common in a matrix organization since people do not meet that often. However, if one would be stationed at the headquarter in Stockholm one would be more dependent on “the guys” and their close relationship. AT Financo’s headquarter it is a lot of men and few women (only one) and according to Anna, they seem to choose the easiest solution.

The respondents within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs disagree regarding homosociality affecting the final decision. Emma for example is sure that it exists; most executives are men and therefore men often choose men. However, she believes the same phenomenon can be applied to women but not to the same extent. Doris is of the opinion that it might have an effect since we are living in a male structured world where men have created a close relationship with each other; this in turn plays a role when making a decision, according to her. Fia does not believe it matters in the final decision, on the other hand she does believe there might exist a situation of someone choosing a friend.

The concept of homosociality was something almost all the respondents had different opinions about. According to Charlotte Holgersson\textsuperscript{186}, men control the positions which include a lot of authority and control, both in society as well as in most organizations. Therefore, women need to familiarize with men since they are the ones possessing the power. This theory can be supported by our empirical findings; for example Emma is of the opinion that men often choose men since they possess the executive positions. Further, Anna believes that a woman stationed at the head office would be dependent on men and their close relationship since there are few women and a great number of men.

\textsuperscript{184} Austin, Åtta vägar till kvinnlig framgång, 67.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{186} Holgersson, Rekrytering av företagsledare, 45.
Britt mentions the different languages that men and women use which proves Holgersson’s statement right; women communicate and express themselves differently in comparison to men. Further, Britt says that her spouse sometimes experience her way of communicating as vague when using words such as “maybe”, this is something she believes has a decisive role in the recruitment process. According to Holgersson, men select candidates they know will act and think like themselves, in other words men, and they feel uncertain about how women will act in some situations. Once again, Doris mentions the male bonding which can be supported by McDonald and Elder\(^\text{187}\), they point out that men maintain a greater network than women and this is central since it keeps women away from information about job openings. In contrast to this theory, Cajsa and Fia say that homosociality is not affecting the final decision. This since one as a woman already has overcome all possible “obstacles”, as said by Cajsa. Therefore, men and women are equal in the final step of the recruitment process.

In agreement with Holgersson, we are of the opinion that a possible reason for women being under-represented in international assignments is the homogeneity among male managers. We believe that a lot of people think it is easier to understand and impersonate with others who are talking the same “language” as oneself. However, we do not believe one should take the easiest way out. We are of the opinion that a workplace needs diversity; one should safeguard different thoughts and opinions since this develop the mindset and how to carry out tasks. According to us, Cajsa’s statement regarding overcoming all obstacles is interesting. We believe this can be interpreted getting to the final step of a recruitment process as a woman is tough; however, in agreement with Cajsa, when finally there one has already overcome all possible obstacles.

### 7.2.9 Additional comments

To find out if the respondents wanted to add some aspects they found important with regards to our study, we asked them to think freely about what they believe the possible reasons could be for the under-representation of female expatriates and how one can increase this number. Among our respondents, all of them except one mentioned the spouse’s and family’s situation as the main cause for the lack of women in these assignments. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Riusala and Suutari describe the dual-career couples as a very important issue, especially in Nordic organizations\(^\text{188}\). The respondents believe that women do not apply for these positions since it would not work out for the rest of the family due to the fact that the spouse might not get a job in the other country. One respondent from the business world highlights that if one is talking about executive positions abroad it is more difficult to achieve them if one is an “older” woman and has a family, and that women therefore are especially under-represented in these positions. We believe that being able to achieve an executive position one has to have a lot of work experience which means that one probably is a bit “older”. Further, the older one gets the more likely it is that one has started a family. This creates a vicious circle for women, in other words, it appears to be difficult to combine the family and professional life which we believe is not a surprising fact, according to us.

Further, another respondent from the business world is not sure that it even has to be more female expatriates. She believes there is a pressure upon Swedish women indicating that one has to work and that it is not socially accepted to be a stay-at-home mother/wife. We find this statement interesting and believe that one contributing factor for the lack of female expatriates

\(^{187}\) McDonald and Elder, ”When does social capital matter?”, 542-543.

\(^{188}\) Riusala and Suutari, “Expatriation and careers”, 81-82.
might actually be that women are not interested in these assignments which of course are entirely acceptable. This can be linked to what Britt said earlier about women not wanting to take those extra “punches” which climbing the career ladder might include. The third respondents from this sector mentions that women are more hesitant to apply and that host country stereotypes might play a role. Sometimes it could be difficult to send women to a certain country or it is considered more “elegant” to send a man.

All three respondents from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs state that the situation for the spouse is the main cause of the under-representation of women. The problem is that when moving abroad it is usually only one person in a relationship who gets a job and the other person has to stay at home for several years. This is seen as a big problem and organizations must become better at finding creative solutions for spouses. Further, women who consider working abroad might have a husband who works as well, and who probably earns more money. Therefore, the financial loss one experiences has to be compensated somehow. Riusala and Suutari discuss that a growing reason for rejecting an international assignment is the spouse’s reluctance to give up their own career. They state that organizations therefore need to create programs for dual-career couples which should include, for example, assistance in finding a job for the spouse in the host country, cover cost associated to job searching, work permits, and other practical matters.189 We believe this is one of the major issues organizations have to take into consideration in the future, and develop practices for if they would like to successfully manage expatriates. According to us, this is even more important to work with to get the number of female expatriates to increase.

189 Riusala and Suutari, “Expatriation and careers”, 83.
8. CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL DISCUSSION

On the basis of our research question, the twofold purpose of this thesis, and the analysis we have conducted in the previous chapter we will here present our conclusions. The chapter will further show that our problem definition is answered and that we have achieved our purpose.

8.1 A review of our analysis

To facilitate the transition to our conclusions we will give a short summary of the analysis. The majority of the respondents believe that their foreign assignment has had a positive affect on their career. However, it is almost a general rule in the society that single women are in a better position for having a successful career, since this means they do not have a family “standing in their way”. Concerning the recruitment of expatriates, there is one obvious difference between the business world and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Regarding the latter, all employees have to apply for the international assignments whereas the employees in the business world often are asked to take on such assignments, or at least asked to apply for them. The general opinion among all respondents regarding the criterions for being selected is that the same criterions apply for both men and women. However, according to the respondents, women still need to prove their competence and skills in a greater extent in comparison to men to obtain the same positions. Further, the recruiter might focus more upon a woman’s family situation and private life in comparison to men’s.

Most respondents have experienced some kind of host country stereotypes, but still believe they have been well received. However, the opinion about gender stereotypes affecting the recruitment process or not, varies among the respondents. Further, the opinion that networks are fundamental and play an important role when being recruited to an international assignment, is common among the respondents. Networks create a reputation which precedes one and helps one in one’s career, for example when it comes to job openings.

If the concept of homosociality affects the final choice of an expatriate or not was something most of the respondents had different opinions about. Further, managers have been labeled as men for a long time and this has become a norm. Male managers is a powerful group which can restrict women from obtaining higher positions and we think there is a significant link between the lack of women in leading positions and the fact that few women go abroad on assignments. In addition, five out of six respondents are certain that the glass ceiling still exists within organizations. Women’s self-esteem may also hinder them in their careers since they often want to do everything perfect and ideal. They believe they are never good enough and that they never have a sufficient amount of experience, ever. However, the concept of women and risk taking does not appear to influence women’s possibilities to obtain international assignments in any greater extent, instead it seems like it has to do with differences among individuals and not between the genders.
Lastly, the spouse’s and the family’s situation was perceived as the main cause for the lack of women in international assignments. The respondents believe that women do not apply for these positions since it would not work out for the rest of the family. This is seen as a big problem and organizations must become better at finding creative solutions for spouses. One’s family situation is one of the most important matters when considering a foreign assignment.

8.2 How women perceive their possibilities to obtain a foreign assignment

As already stated in our thesis, women are under-represented in international assignments. Therefore, we found it interesting to study how women perceive their possibilities to obtain such assignments. Initially we had some thoughts and ideas what we personally considered being some of the causes for this fact. Throughout the progress of our thesis and after completing all interviews we found that some of the thoughts and ideas were accurate, a few were not that evident, and we further found some other interesting aspects highlighted by the respondents. It has become obvious to us that there is a large amount of diverse factors that affect women’s possibilities to work abroad. These factors have to do with the external environment and society, as well as women’s internal and personal values and characteristics.

It is easy to believe that women’s under-representation mainly has to do with for example external factors such as gender inequalities that exist in our society; however, we can now state that this is not the case. There is no clear-cut answer to how women perceive their possibilities to obtain a foreign assignment, this since their experiences are complex and individual. However, the core of our answer to the research question distinguishes a few aspects which are common among the respondents.

We would like to conclude that the major cause affecting women’s possibilities to obtain an international assignment is the issue of dual-career couples. The spouse’s and family’s situation is the main reason for the lack of women in these assignments. Women do not apply for these positions since it would not work out for the rest of the family based on the fact that the spouse might not get a job in the other country. Due to spouses being unwilling to give up the professional career at home women might not apply or reject international assignments. Further, to get selected if being a woman might be less likely since the recruiter may perhaps believe that the family situation will not work out and therefore it becomes more risky to select a female. By reason of this, it is essential that organizations become better at finding innovative solutions for spouses.

Another aspect which appears to be of great importance is the lack of women in leading positions. The glass ceiling clearly still exists within organizations due to different reasons mentioned in our analysis. Our conclusion is that these reasons are related to the fact that women give birth which results in them being absent from the labor market for longer periods. In addition, the glass ceiling is sometimes self-inflicted and has to do with women’s self-esteem. Further, some women do not believe it is worth to climb the career ladder, additional homosociality and male structures also play a part in this matter. More women are needed on each and every managerial level to allow more women to achieve higher positions. If this is accomplished there will be a larger pool of competent and skilled females to choose from when selecting candidates for international assignments. Further, the younger generation of today has already made significant progress regarding this issue and will probably overcome this ceiling in the future.
One of the aspects we thought would affect the under-representation of women in a greater extent than it did was women’s attitudes towards risk taking. However, the issue of women being more risk averse showed not to be that relevant in this question. Being risk averse does not appear to be linked to gender; instead it is an individual characteristic. If a woman is understood as risk averse it often has to do with her regarding her spouse and possible children. In addition, host country stereotypes do exist but do not have any significant effect when choosing to send a woman abroad.

8.3 Experiences from two sectors

Our main purpose with this study was to create an understanding for women’s possibilities to obtain an international assignment. In addition to this purpose, we also wanted to elucidate how women within the Swedish business world and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs may perhaps learn from each other’s experiences. Even though we have studied two diverse sectors, the issues and problems for the women seem to be the same to a great extent. Still, both sectors have something to learn from each other. First, our conclusion is that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs should improve their recruitment process. As mentioned in our analysis, expatriates are sometimes selected without having any personal contact with the person in charge of the future workplace. We find this surprising and think that the Ministry should apply the process used within the Swedish business world where they make use of interviews from which one can determine if a person possesses necessary skills for the assignment. Second, something the Swedish business world can learn from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is to support their expatriates in a better way before and during their assignment abroad. The Ministry has a stronger feeling for spouses, the family, and practical matters regarding moving to a foreign country. To successfully manage an expatriate one has to consider the entire expatriate cycle.

During the process of conducting the thesis we have developed a deeper understanding for women’s possibilities to obtain an international assignment by studying female expatriates. Since the problems and issues for female expatriates are similar in both sectors, we state that women have joint lessons to learn from the two sectors if they would like to obtain a foreign assignment. They need to improve their self-esteem and become more proactive and go-ahead. Characteristics highlighted by our respondents are for example being intrepid, brave, and self-confident. Further, women need to lower their personal demands; one does not always have to fulfill the requirements to 100 percent. Women rarely put themselves first and sometimes emphasize the environment too much; instead they should become a bit more “selfish”. In addition, it is important that women safeguard their female characteristics since this distinguishes them from men and therefore becomes a competitive advantage in the labor market. We are of the opinion that “one should not stop being a woman”, as one of our respondents put it.

To return to our figure 3:2 A summary regarding the literature review, we will now show how we have modified the figure on the basis of our analysis and conclusions.
When analyzing the empirical data we found that our initial thoughts and ideas to some extent were proved to be right and some proved to have less significance. As one can notice in the modified figure the three concepts; dual-careers, the lack of women in leading positions, and the glass ceiling were perceived by the respondents as the major factors influencing their possibilities to obtain an international assignment. Stereotypes in host countries as well as women and risk taking did not appear to be influencing their possibilities noticeably. Further, the rest of the concepts discussed have an impact. However, the impact was not as evident as regarding the three major influencing factors.

Figure 8.1 Factors influencing women's possibilities to obtain a foreign assignment
Source: Created by the authors
9. THE QUALITY OF OUR RESEARCH

This chapter will discuss the research credibility. When reading through the thesis the reader has had time to form his or her own opinion about the research and we have chosen to include and discuss the validity, the practical applicability, and the intersubjectivity. The reason for including these criterions is that we find them the most appropriate ones for our study. As a final point we will discuss possible areas which we believe would be interesting to conduct future studies within.

9.1 Validity

The meaning of validity is “truthful”. When conducting a qualitative study, researchers are however more interested in authenticity since perfect validity is almost impossible to achieve. Nevertheless, it is an ideal they try to achieve, in other words researchers aim at providing an honest and balanced picture of social life. We have studied female expatriates and have used a qualitative approach, since we believe this approach is the most appropriate one. We do not have the knowledge to state that complete validity is attained. Nevertheless, we have tried to obtain a complete picture of the women’s situations and experiences and have tried to put ourselves into their positions and understand their perspectives upon international assignments. Therefore, we believe that authenticity has been achieved.

Further, the criterion validity shows that enough information has been collected and that the study measures what it is supposed to measure. In addition to this criterion, theoretical saturation is an important concept. According to Johansson Lindfors, if one has collected enough information, additional empirical data would not provide the study with any new and important information.

Six interviews were conducted with suitable respondents who possess experience within the specific area we have chosen to study. After these interviews had been carried out we decided that no further empirical data needed to be collected. This was due to the fact that the respondents gave us interesting and useful information including quite similar replies to our interview questions. If differences occurred it was mostly by reason of the diverse organizations they work for, their age, and the amount of experience from international assignments. These frequently recurring replies to our questions do we believe show tendencies of theoretical saturation.

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190 Neuman, Social Research Methods, 170-171.
191 Judith Bell, Introduction till forskningsmetodik, (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2000), 90. (Translation: Introduction to research methods)
192 Johansson Lindfors, Att utveckla kunskap, 165.
9.2 Practical Applicability

Practical applicability is concerned with to what extent the study’s result can be used in reality by others. However, this is difficult to find out before the study is completed and used by others. Since we have studied a field of topical interest we believe our study will be useful for others. Expatriates are a vital part of an international organization’s human resource management due to the rapid globalization which is taking place. The conclusions we have drawn in this study are linked to the respondents’ situations since they derive from different companies and organizations. This means that they have different experiences from international assignments. However, since we have found similarities among the respondents’ experiences despite their different situations we believe that the study can be applicable to other female expatriates. Our aim was not to generalize female expatriates; nevertheless, we believe that our study can be useful for organization’s to improve their work with, and increase their awareness about, female expatriates and international assignments.

Hopefully, the result of our study will contribute to increase the awareness regarding women on international assignments among companies and organizations. Further, we are of the opinion that gender issues and differences among men and women are not of common interest or a mandatory part of the educations at USBE. Therefore we wish that this study can function as an eye-opener for the future planning of the business educations, not only at USBE, but also at other universities’ business departments. The above mentioned can be considered as indications of practical applicability.

9.3 Intersubjectivity

If one uses identical methods, which means having the same basic conditions and knowledge as the authors of this thesis, one should be able to achieve the same results. This is the basic idea of intersubjectivity. Further, it is related to the researcher’s interpretations which have to be accepted not only by the respondents, but also by for example other researchers and practical critics. It is difficult to predict if intersubjectivity has been achieved but it is something we have aimed for. Since our standpoints regarding our scientific and practical method are clearly declared, the possibility for other researchers to achieve the same result should increase.

To be able to find the thesis trustworthy by any means we believe it is important to reflect upon the intersubjectivity criterion. Our preconceptions might have affected the interpretation of other people’s opinions and there is a possible risk that misunderstandings therefore occur. However, we have tried to minimize and secure this by several lines of actions. For example, we sent the gathered empirical findings back to the respondents, this to let them confirm as well as make possible corrections. If the respondents had any suggestions for correction we followed their examples. Further, we contacted the respondents if any problems arose with interpreting the empirical data. We believe this have contributed to minimize the possible risk of continued misinterpretation during the thesis.

The fact that the respondents accept the empirical data does not always have to result in that this is their “real” view, this by reason of that they might have accepted our interpretation of the interview although it was incorrect. However, we believe that our respondents were

anxious to give us a picture as correct as possible. Another reason for increased intersubjectivity is, according to us, the open character of the conducted interviews. The respondents have had the possibility to express themselves thoroughly and provide details regarding every question. These comprehensive answers made it easier to interpret the empirical data.

According to Bryman, it is difficult to “freeze” a social environment and it is therefore difficult to apply the research to other settings and/or situations. Hence it is even more important to have a critical approach. Due to our respect for the respondents and their experiences we admit that it sometimes has been difficult to retain such an approach, still we have throughout our research tried our best. However, we believe that we have been rather successful and have not let our personal opinions direct our conclusions. Bryman mentions that one’s colleagues can evaluate the quality of the study.\textsuperscript{196} Since the thesis has not been presented to the public before the thesis work was over, the intersubjectivity might have been affected. Nevertheless, the thesis will be examined by several persons as a part of the final evaluation, who in other words will function as revising colleagues. Hence, since these colleagues will suggest possible corrections the intersubjectivity will be enhanced.

\textbf{9.4 Suggestions for future studies}

During the implementation of our thesis we have come to realize that there are interesting areas worth exploring for continued research. Due to the limited timeframe we have not been able to explore our area from the perspectives of the recruiter and/or the executives. We believe that it would be of great interest to find out if the recruiters and the executives perceive women’s possibilities to obtain an international assignment differently compared to the women themselves. Further, another important aspect to look deeper into would be if the criterions to get selected to an international assignment actually varies between men and women, and if the expectations of men’s and women’s performance abroad differ. In addition, would more female executives within organizations increase the amount of female expatriates as well? Our study might be useful and could underline a more detailed research in the above mentioned suggestions for future studies.

Foreign assignments within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs are more common and a natural element in their work compared to the business world. Therefore, we believe that a more profound and extensive study of women’s possibilities to obtain international assignments within the Swedish business world alone would be of interest. Further, during our work with the thesis we have found several different challenges for women to overcome to attain these assignments, mentioned by the respondents. It would be interesting to follow up on these, within for example a five year period, to see if they have managed to meet up on these challenges and have learned how to safeguard the differences among the genders.

\textsuperscript{196} Alan Bryman, \textit{Samhällsvetenskapliga metoder}, 260-261.
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Telephone interview with Doris Davidsson, 09/29/06  
Telephone interview with Emma Eriksson, 11/02/06  
Telephone interview with Fia Fredriksson, 11/02/06
Appendix 1

Befattning, utbildning, och yrkeserfarenhet/karriär?

Utlandsuppdraget
Vart åkte du iväg på uppdrag och hur länge?
Varför valde Du att åka på utlandsuppdrag?
Vad anser Du att utlandsuppdraget/uppdragen har betytt för Din karriär?
Har Ditt val att arbeta utomlands påverkats utav Din livssituation? (Civilstånd, familj, barn)
Anser Du att kvinnor behöver bevisa sin kompetens och färdighet i större utsträckning än män för att nå samma position?

Rekryteringen
Ansökte Du om utlandsuppdrag eller blev Du tillfrågan utav Ditt företag?
Anser Du att kriterierna för att rekryteras till en utlandstjänst skiljer sig mellan kvinnor och män?
Finns det något som kunde ha hanterats bättre under rekryteringsprocessen?
Vad anser Du att rekryteraren bör ha för huvudkriterier vid urvalsprocessen?

Stereotyper
Anser Du att det existerar "könsstereotyper" om kvinnor och män som påverkar rekryteringen av expatriates?
Hur har Du blivit bemött utav Dina kollegor i Ditt värdland/värdländer?
Har Du stött på några problem i det värdland/värdländer där Du har arbetat på grund utav att Du är kvinna? Om ja, hur har Du hanterat dessa?

Nätverk
Anser Du att ett bra nätverk är centralt för att bli rekryterad till ett utlandsuppdrag och, väl på plats, lyckas med Ditt arbete?

"Glastaket"
Har Du upplevt det så kallade "Glastaket"?
Om ja, hur agerade Du för att komma igenom detta?
Hur skulle Du vilja beskriva bemötandet ifrån Dina överordnade under Din karriär?
Vilka anser Du orsakerna vara för att glastaket fortfarande existerar?
Hur tror Du att man kan få detta "tak" att försvinna?

Kvinnor och självförtroende
Anser Du att kvinnor kan hindra sig själva i sin karriär på grund utav deras egen självuppfattning och samhällets traditionella könsroller?

Kvinnor och risktagande
Anser Du att det finns en skillnad mellan kvinnors och mäns riskbenägenhet och att det påverkar valet av en expatriate?

Homosocialitet
Anser Du att så kallad homosocialitet bland män (det vill säga att män väljer män) spelar in i det slutliga valet av en expatriate?

Övrigt
Om Du får tänka fritt, vad kan orsakerna vara att få kvinnor rekryteras till utlandsuppdrag?
Hur kan man få fler kvinnor att rekryteras till sådana uppdrag enligt Dig?
Är det något som Du vill tillägga som Du anser viktigt och som inte berörts under intervjun?