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*What are Swedish female expatriates' perceptions and experiences of cultural masculinity?*

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International Business Bachelor thesis, spring 2015

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a study of Swedish female expatriates and their experience of masculine culture. Starting from Hofstede's work, the study identifies what environment women will face when they go abroad on international assignments. From an organisational and cultural perspective, it explores female expatriatism by building a solid theoretical framework and research context as a foundation on which analysis and conclusions are built. Through this, companies can also prevent the wasting of valuable resources in the form of inefficient human resource management.

This thesis is a qualitative study which includes five women who all have Sweden as the country of origin. The countries where the women are or have been assigned to are Australia, China, USA and Singapore. By interviewing these women, we have created an image of what it looks like for female expatriates in terms of masculine culture.

The study demonstrates how women experience masculine culture and what companies should have in mind in regards to efficiency, and that many companies today have a long way to make best use of their employees' skills.

Key Words : Expatriates, Women's career, Women's Obstacles, Masculine Culture, Management

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## **Introduction**

In this thesis we look at female expatriates and what they, in terms of culture and gender issues, experienced during their time abroad. The countries examined in the thesis are China, Australia, USA and Singapore. As a starting point in our theory, we used Hofstede's work, with emphasis on the masculine culture. To support the analysis, a review of previous research and accumulated knowledge was made. Through interviews with women who gained the trust of each company to spend a period abroad on company business, this thesis has reached an understanding of how women perceive themselves to be treated and how culture abroad affect women's work and, with it, companies' utilisation of resources.

### **1.1 Problem Discussion**

In an increasingly globalised world where competition is ever more fierce, corporation's need to use resources in a rational and efficient way to increase with it. That does not only include resources invested in such things as machinery, buildings and equipment, but also such invested in human resources. Human resources do a wide variety of tasks within an organisation, but the arguably single most important area is the management. It is the backbone on which the rest of the organisation is structured and its function is generally the most crucial. While management is meaningless on its own, without management, most other tasks would be meaningless too. Not all organisations need engineering, nor marketing or designers, but no organisation manages without management. Thus, management is the most important single one. For what is an organisation that is not organised?

Management is arguably dependant on the skills of its managers. Their abilities, skills and talents determine how efficient management is performed. How efficient economic resources invested in the organisation's human resources are used. An organisation with talented managers can set higher goals, handle more difficult challenges compete against tougher competition than an organisation with unskilled managers can. Thus, in the end, an efficient human resource management return a higher profit from invested resources. The most efficient human resource management must be the one utilising, attracting, retaining and fostering the best talents possible and any failure to do so is a reduced efficiency, an inefficiency, that comes with an inefficiency cost - the alternative cost of not having the best talents available.

Gender discrimination is by nature an inefficiency since the only grounds for it is a non-relevant characteristic of the individual or group. If you are excluded from career advancement, directly or indirectly, because of your gender then competence - in a wider sense including suitability - has not been the only determining factor. The organisation has a resource (human) that is not put to its best use. The most suitable for a job might not be chosen. Thus, the management does not manage as well as it would otherwise have, which causes alternative costs. The organisation uses its resources to acquire the skills and knowledge that is not put to the best of its uses. In some sense, that is like acquiring a machine that is not used to its full capacity, thus not returning as much on the initial investment and maintenance costs as it could have, in the end causing the financial ratios not to be as good as they might have been otherwise. The return on invested capital is lower than it would have been otherwise and the difference is the cost of inefficiency.

Lets put the above reasoning into numbers. A publication by McKinsey & Company (2010) found that the top quartile companies with the highest number of women in executive committees performed 41 per cent better in terms of return on equity and 56 per cent better on operating results, compared with companies with all-male executive committees. A study from University of British Columbia looked at mergers and acquisitions from a gender perspective and found that female managers are more risk-averse and that the paid price of acquisitions was

reduced by 15.4 per cent for each female member on a board (Levi, Li, Zhang 2013). According to Credit Suisse Research Institute (2012), boards with female representation result in higher return on equity, lower gearing, higher book value multipliers, and better average growth. Research by non-profit organisation Catalyst (2008) concludes that a higher representation of women in top management can be linked to higher return on shareholder investments. In order to foster and utilise human resources efficiently, it is arguably important for companies to be aware of and actively work with gender issues.

Gender issues in organisations are, without question, a hot topic. Time and again it has been proven that men and women have dissimilar opportunities to reach prosperity, in terms of career and achieving higher positions in organisations. It is well known that there can be differences in treatment from colleagues, managers and other contacts, directly or indirectly correlated to the gender. Women working in Europe have lower salaries, status and career opportunities than their male colleagues (Helmes & Guffey, 1997). Studies shows that women are treated differently than men at work (Davidson et al, 1994). They have lower status, they are isolated and because of their gender, subject to more personalised treatment. However, this culture is specific to each workplace and not the same everywhere. Furthermore, Davidson et al (1994) also believes that women are more interested in, and aware of, these gender differences than men are which may affect their perception of different situations.

Many disadvantages for female expatriates can be derived from a *masculine culture*. In such a culture, roles in society and the workplace alike are divided in a manner that puts women at a disadvantage when it comes to independence and career. Characteristics that typically are associated with males - such as assertiveness, competitiveness, and heroism - are promoted in such cultures, while women are expected to assume other characteristics - such as modesty and timidity (Hofstede & Bond, 1984). Such notions become self-reinforcing due to things like lack of role models and human tendency to isomorph. Since the pool of available competent human resources is not as great as it could have been, and the best person for a job might not be assigned due to self-exclusion or exclusion by the assignee (Adler, 1979), it is not unreasonable

to argue that this hurts the companies' efficiency. In any organisation of size, the human resources are of great importance and especially organisations facing fierce international competition. If human resource management is inefficient the best talent, the sharpest brains and the most knowledgeable might not be chosen. If the organisation fail to deal specifically with issues concerning gender it might also fail in attracting and retaining female talent. In the end that would be an inefficient use of invested means.

Sweden is an open economy where a high share of GDP comes from trade (Ekonomifakta, 2015). In the mentioned globalising world Swedish corporations need to stay competitive and one important aspect, as described above, is the human resource management. How Swedish corporations perform abroad is important and an integral part of abroad performance are the expatriates. As understood from the problem discussion so far, this thesis will focus on management. Management expatriates are most often high-potential employees sent out to enrich a company's international activities with their talents, especially if management is one of the company's competitive advantages (Oddou, 1991; Hill, 2010). The difference between Sweden's relatively feminine culture (Hofstede, 1984) and a masculine culture abroad could also cause further difficulties for Swedish female expatriates sent abroad.

If Swedish female expatriates face difficulties abroad due to a masculine culture, as indicated in this problem discussion, that could harm the sending organisation's efficient use of investor's invested economic resources and therefore this is an area that is important to explore.

## **1.2 Research question and objectives**

Women in management does matter and they are faced with greater challenges due to their gender, which constitutes a business inefficiency that is not an acceptable use of shareholders investments, especially not under the harsh competition of international business today. Because there is so little research done in this area from a Swedish perspective, this thesis' objective is to explore Swedish female expatriate's own experiences of cultural masculinity in abroad assignment and how organisations work with these issues, in order to gain an understanding of



how efficiently corporate human resources are used. The objective is further to look into aforementioned aspects from a leadership and management perspective, exploring issues concerning the organisation's ability to allow women to function efficiently as managers, focusing on implications stemming from corporate culture.

### ***1.2.1 Purpose of the study***

The purpose of this study is to explore Swedish women's views on and experiences of masculine culture and how it affects their work situation, in order to ultimately be able to help businesses make better use of their human capital and add knowledge to its field of research - female expatriatism in international business. As a result of this, the aim is also to raise awareness about how women experience the workplace culture in countries where the interviewees were assigned.

### ***1.2.2 Research question***

*What are Swedish female expatriates' perceptions and experiences of cultural masculinity?*

### ***1.2.3 Definition of expatriate***

An expatriate is a person who has been transferred to another country, for a longer or shorter period of time, for employment purposes (Edström & Galbratih, 1977). Even though an expatriate can have a wide variety of roles, due to comparability of results and with regard to the research question, in this thesis the term will refer to female expatriate managers and thus "career" to advancement as such.

## **1.3 Thesis structure**

This thesis is structured into five chapters.

**Introduction** - This chapter contains the problem discussion, the purpose of the study, and the research question.

**Method** - Describes this thesis research approach, how data is selected and gathered, delimitations, the survey design, the selection of sources, and provides a validity discussion.

**Theoretical framework** - This chapter introduces relevant theories and builds several tools which are used in the analysis.

**Research Context** - Provides a research background and reviews current knowledge.

**Results and analysis** - Presents the empirical data, structures it into analysis.

**Conclusion** - Presents drawn conclusions.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 A deductive research approach

This thesis core research approach is deductive (Bryman & Bell, 2007). It begins with examining previous knowledge and theories, *the general*, examines how they hold in the thesis area of research, *the specific*, and draws conclusions regarding how the general resonates with the specific. It takes something that is true in a more general context and/or historically, collects data, tests what is true in general against the data collected, and draws conclusions. To be specific, it describes ideas and findings from scientists such as Hofstede, Eagly, Cotter, Kanter, and Adler, collects primary data from swedish female expatriate managers sent abroad, compares this primary data with the ideas and findings described, and draws conclusions regarding their prevalence on the experiences and perceptions of the swedish female expatriates sent abroad.

The deductive approach was chosen because this thesis does not aspire to develop new theories or models regarding its subject. Testing if other theories and models prevail, or would seem to prevail, in this thesis area of research is the core aim of this thesis, rather than developing new theories and models explaining phenomenons specifically regarding swedish female expatriates sent abroad. To put it simply, it would not be unreasonable to think that, for example, an american female expatriate sent abroad would have more or less similar experiences to a swedish dito's, thus american experiences would be a good place to start when exploring the experiences of their swedish counterparts. Deductive research approach is often associated with quantitative research, yet this thesis uses a qualitative research approach. The reasons behind this are stated below. The outcome of this decision is that the conclusions of the thesis are comparisons (or tests, if one will) of ideas and models presented, rather than its own set of theories (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

### 2.2 Qualitative research

As described in chapter one, the purpose of this thesis is to explore and gain an understanding of swedish female expatriates' own perceptions and experiences of cultural masculinity while sent

abroad. In qualitative research, as well as in this thesis, the improved understanding of complex human issues is more important than generalisability of the results. Thus, probabilistic sampling is neither productive, nor efficient, for qualitative studies which is why alternative approaches are used (Marshall, 1996). The qualitative research method is concerned with words rather than numbers, where the main objective is to gain an understanding of how reality appears according to respondents' perceptions (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In order to gain a deeper understanding of this thesis' complex and often subjective area of research, as well as capture important aspects influencing the respondents' answers, a qualitative research using qualitative interviews was deemed the most appropriate approach (Wilson, 2013). While the essence of qualitative research is slightly elusive, the method of data collection and processing is one of the aspects that define qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The process resulting in this thesis begun with composing a set of general research goals, corporated through the research question. In this step, the theoretical framework and research context was created. Next, relevant primary data gathering aspects were considered and the data gathering method was selected and subsequently executed. The gathered data were then interpreted resulting in the analytical chapter, and then conclusions were drawn from this interpretation. This approach is close to the main steps of qualitative research described by Bryman & Bell (2007).

The qualitative research approach using qualitative interviews allowed the researchers to access the experiences and perceptions of the interview subjects on a deeper level. Not only does it allow follow-up questions, but the subject also contributes with their own analysis defining potential problems, advantages and reasons behind these - i.e keeps the interpretive prerogative - which is important because the interview subject and the group she is picked from are the ones with the first-hand experience. Any other approach risk taking the interpretive prerogative away from the group.

The qualitative research method's weaknesses lie in the smaller amount of collected data and limited comparability between data gathered (e.g cases), which affects validity and

generalisation adversely (Bryman & Bell, 2007). More about that in the subchapter addressing the quality of the research below.

### **2.3 Primary data**

The specific nature of the topic of this thesis in conjunction with a lack of other sources providing satisfying data prompted the decision to gather primary data rather than relying on secondary. Gathering primary data allows researchers to tailor the nature of the data to its specific needs. A specific group can be targeted, with specific questions (if the collection happens through interviews, as with this thesis), and the raw data is available for the researchers interpretation. This ensures that the data collected has not gone through more than one stage of interpretation, i.e has not been interpreted before that interpretation is interpreted again. Interpretations always highlights some data while ignoring or neglecting other data, and is affected by the interpreter's own values, interests, experiences, and ability to understand the data. Interpretations are also compilations of data into information, a process which can have variable quality and results - perhaps a pattern that seemed to have emerged was just coincidences which the interpreter failed to distinguish. Primary data, especially regarding complex and subjective topics such as with this thesis, is therefore, all else equal, of a higher quality than secondary data (Bryman & Bell, 2007). To time-efficiently and cost-effectively collect primary data for the study through interviews, various interview methods were proposed to the respondents; personal interviews, video calling, phone call or email (Saunders et al, 2009). All of the four respondents abroad chose to answer the questions by email, as it was the only way they were able to answer, due to time constraints and the inconvenience of being in different time zones. One respondent was located in Sweden, and was met for a personal interview. Due to the fact that different interview methods have been used, the answers can not be fully compared with each other, as, for example, spontaneous counter-questions and pitches fall away in interviews via email (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, follow-up questions were still possible in both methods. The interviews will be described closer below.

## 2.4 Selection

Sampling was made using criteria-guided convenience sampling method, due to relatively tight time constriction in conjunction with the selected group being relatively inaccessible. To the authors' knowledge there are no lists of Swedish female expatriates, and so to find them, the authors used the Google search engine to find organisations with foreign engagement. A hundred e-mails was sent out, most of them were responded to, and six individuals emerged who both were willing to participate (i.e. were accessible) and matched our criteria. The major drawbacks of convenience sampling is that the sample cannot be seen as representative of the population it is sampled from. The sample is subject to under- and overrepresentation of subgroups (such as generation, geography, or interests) both through randomness (when a subgroup 'just happens' to be over- or underrepresented) and through effects stemming from such things as interest in participation and the nature of the participants organisation (Bryman & Bell, 2007). For example, when asked to participate, it might be more likely that a participant who feels she has something to say accepts the request than one who has nothing to say and no interest in the topic. This results in limited representativeness. However, it does not limit the thesis ability to, in the spirit of qualitative research, explore the topics it sets out to explore since it rather takes an interpretivist epistemological position where understanding the social world is achieved not through natural scientific models (such as in quantitative research), but through examination of the participants' own interpretations of world (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Convenience sampling is also a frequently used sampling methods in qualitative research (Marshall, 1996).

The six emerged female expatriates were interviewed. Five of them responded to questions via e-mail, while the sixth was met up for a personal meeting. However, in the thesis only five of those six interviewees were taken into account in the empiric review, analysis and conclusion. The person whose answers are not presented, was one of the five that responded via email. This person was found not to be a manager, and furthermore provided incomplete answer, and was therefore deemed unfit for this thesis.

Before outlining the initial e-mail messages requesting interviews, a set of criteria was made. First and foremost, the respondent needed to be women. While men, obviously, can also have experiences and valuable input, they would always be second-hand experiences since this thesis explores the women's own perceptions and experiences. It is important that women keep the interpretative prerogative - i.e define potential problems, potential advantages, reasons behind these, etcetera - because they are the ones who are closest to the issues this thesis investigates. Furthermore, the interview subjects needed to have a connection to Sweden, a managerial expat position, and be or have been sent abroad. Without a this, they would be less likely to be able to contribute to this thesis topic since it specifically looks at Swedish female expatriate managers sent abroad, as explained in chapter one. In order to get a fair picture of the situation and have time to understand the culture prevailing in the country where they were expats, interviewees with at least four months of expatriate experience were chosen. Women of different ages and in different types of industries were chosen. The countries included in the study has been the countries in which our interviewees have been assigned, and is therefore a coincidence.

## **2.5 Delimitations**

The focus of this thesis is to gather, analyse and discuss empirical qualitative primary data regarding exclusively Swedish female expatriate manager's perception and experiences in the countries where they have been assigned. The interview subjects are or have been assigned to China, USA, Singapore and Australia. They all have cultural experiences from working in Sweden as well as abroad. These delimitations have been applied in order to reduce the width of the thesis and increase its focus. As described in chapter one and three, women face greater difficulties due to culture than men do, Sweden is an open economy where exports are an important part, and managers are a crucial part of any organisation. Therefore these aspects has become the foci of this thesis.

The theory chapter will describe the glass ceiling phenomenon, cultural masculinity, social gender roles, and the balance between work and family life. The specific theories have been selected due to their relevance and usefulness in regards to the research question. Furthermore,

only the elements within the theories that is the most apposite in regards to the research question have been used, as suggested by Parboteeah, Hoegl and Cullen (2005), and Kostova (1997).

## **2.6 Survey design**

The theoretical framework and the research context, describing the accumulated knowledge of the field of research, is used as a foundation for outlining the thirty interview questions categorised into four general themes; masculinity of the organisation's culture, obstacles women face in regards to their their workplaces and careers (e. g. the glass ceiling phenomenon), the tradeoff between responsibilities and ambitions at home and at work, and measures taken by the organisation in order to deal with issues related to an inefficient utilisation of female human resources. While these themes are not specifically listed in the review of empirical data, they are perspectives that permeates the review.

The questions concerning the masculinity of the organisation's culture are based on Hofstede's cultural dimension *masculinity*. The questions regarding obstacles and the work-life tradeoff are based on such instances described in the research context, i.e based on Adler's (1979; 1987), Linehan and Walsh's (1999) and Harrison and Michailova's (2012) researches, and especially on Adler's 1987 research due to its rich description of these. Since measures can deal with a wide variety of problems, from providing on-site day care centers and flexible work hours to the implementation of gender equality policies and meeting procedures ensuring that women have equal speaking times, questions regarding measures are more open and designed to catch a wider variety of measures. Special attention has also been given the comprehensibility of the language and terms used. The questions can be found in Appendix I.

## **2.7 The interviews**

Gathering of primary data was done through semi-structured interviews, either through e-mail or through personal interviewing. The semi-structured approach was chosen, as opposed to the unstructured, because the focus of the thesis was known and this approach provided a balance between comparability, flexibility and focus (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Personal and e-mail interviews were chosen due to the gathering techniques' flexibility and this thesis' focus on the



interview subjects own views and perspectives. It was important to let the interview subjects have the interpretative prerogative - i.e define potential problems, potential advantages, reasons behind these, etcetera - because of their first-hand knowledge and experience, and these methods enabled this. An interview schedule was used (chronologically) in conjunction with follow-up questions, however, the interview subjects were never discouraged from going off at tangents in order to catch points important to them. Follow-up questions were asked to deeper explore the subjects experiences and to reduce errors due to miscommunication (misinterpretations) on either side. The methodology used exposes the thesis to risks such as the interview subject's potentially incomplete or erroneous memory, hyper- or hypoboleous effects (exaggeration or understatement) on statements due to bias or memory imperfection, as well as introducing researchers' own values and biases through questions and interpretations (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Even though follow-up questions is a step away from standardisation - which among other things bring comparability - they are also a way to counter these risks, which added to the researchers' decision to use them. E-mail interviews was chosen when personal interviews were not possible. Different means of interviewing affects comparability adversely (Bryman & Bell, 2007) which weakens this thesis analytical and conclusion chapters, yet including them and the comparisons in the thesis still contributes to exploring the research question. Oral history method were partly used where subjects were asked to reflect upon specific events relevant to the research question in order to further explore events brought up by the interview subject (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The interview schedule and its questions were also conscientiously constructed in such a way that several questions explores the same phenomenon and so that they were neutrally, yet not entirely openly, asked, in order to reduce the sources of errors mentioned above while still guiding the interview subject within the thesis' topic (i.e to prevent the reflections becoming irrelevant to the research question). The personal interview were recorded and transcribed in order to not only catch what was said but also how it was said, and it was further translated from swedish to english. These proceedings were motivated by error reduction, records allows researchers to go back and repeat rather than having to rely on memory, that often are biased and inaccurate. It further enables later follow-ups or other re-usage of the data. The advantages described above were considered out-weighing the risk of interview subject being uncomfortable

with being recorded and thus giving answers of a lower quality. Data gathering conducted through the use of e-mail was initiated through an email message introducing the potential respondent to the thesis topic, purpose, nature and researchers' university. This was copy-pasted into individual emails, thus all potential respondents got the same introduction and interview request. None of the interview subjects saw the questions before agreeing to participate, and none of those who had agreed to being interviewed canceled after learning the questions, thus not affecting sampling. The personal interview was carried out by both of this thesis' authors, where one had the main role of asking questions and the other kept an eye on time, the recording device, and filled in with follow up-questions now and then. Roles performed, phrasing and wording was consistent in every interview in order not to give rise to a source of error. Phrasing was, furthermore, in a comprehensible language using known terms. Interview location was chosen due to good noise condition and convenience. The interview subjects were offered confidentiality and anonymousness in order to get as honest answers as possible, without regards for employer, colleagues or others.

## **2.8 The quality of the study - validity and reliability**

Validity and reliability have their drawbacks as measures of quality in a qualitative study such as this thesis (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Results from this thesis can be hard to reproduce due to the subjective nature of perceptions and experiences, and even with the same interview subjects, it is not certain that the result would be the same - especially with time - and nothing is being measured (but rather described). Instead Lincoln & Guba's (1985) and Guba & Lincoln's (1994) suggested criteria *trustworthiness* and *authenticity* is used to measure the quality of this thesis. Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability in turn constitutes trustworthiness. Credibility regards the establishment of believability from the research participant's perspective, which is achieved in two ways in this thesis. First, the respondents were offered to confirm the empirical data gathered and second, several questions regarding the same phenomenon were asked and follow-up questions were used to confirm that the researchers understood the data correctly. For example, both the question regarding the amount of female managers in top positions and the direct question regarding the glass ceiling phenomenon was asked to determine if this barrier existed. The answer was then followed by a confirming follow-up question.

Transferability regards to which degree the results of a qualitative research can be generalised, i.e transferred to other contexts. This is addressed in this thesis by extensive description of the research context and the thesis' research process, enabling others to determine the contextual uniqueness and transferability of findings into other contexts. To strengthen the thesis' dependability and confirmability (i.e the lack of researchers' bias affecting the findings), the auditing method suggested by Lincoln & Guba's (1985) and Guba & Lincoln's (1994) was used, saving all documentation used in this thesis in an accessible manner, so that peer auditing is possible. The descriptions of measures taken, methods used and decisions made are also described in detail, so that an auditing peer can follow the process to the fullest. Furthermore, to the extensive documentation and detailed descriptions (of how research was conducted) and why important decisions were made, a hermeneutic approach was then applied, putting it into a context, in accordance with the recommendation of Collins & Hussey (2009), in an effort to strengthen the reliability of the results.

## **2.9 Literature criticism**

This thesis uses primary, secondary and tertiary literature sources. Primary sources are original sources gathered by the researchers. Gathering primary data requires time and effort, but results in more accurate in regards to the research question and has a high validity (Eriksson & Wiedersheim, 2014). Secondary data includes sources such as reports, books and papers, and while relatively available, they might lack accuracy in regards to the research question (Saunders et.al, 2003; Sekaran, 2003; (Eriksson & Wiedersheim, 2014). Tertiary sources, such as databases, encyclopedias and fact books, consist of both primary and secondary data (Saunders et.al, 2003). Primary sources were used to describe research context and theoretical framework in order to strengthen the reliability of the thesis. Secondary sources have been used mainly in the theoretical background, and the four steps outlined in Holme's and Solvang's study (1996) has been used on all sources. Tertiary sources were used to gain a broader understanding of the environments influencing our research question, as well as to locate previous studies made in mentioned areas, providing us with an overview of the shortcomings underlying the research question.

## 2.10 Limitations

The qualitative research method's weakness is the smaller amount of collected data and limited comparability between data gathered (e.g cases), which affects validity and generalisation adversely (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Interpretations, which is a side effect of interviews, always highlights some data while ignoring or neglecting other data, and is affected by the interpreter's own values, interests, experiences, and ability to understand the data. Interpretations are also compilations of data into information, a process which can have variable quality and results - perhaps a pattern that seemed to have emerged was just coincidences which the interpreter failed to distinguish. (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Due to the fact that different interview methods have been used, the answers can not be fully compared with each other, as, for example, spontaneous counter-questions and pitches fall away in interviews via email (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

The major drawbacks of convenience sampling is that the sample cannot be seen as representative of the population it is sampled from. The sample is subject to under- and overrepresentation of subgroups (such as generation, geography, or interests) both through randomness (when a subgroup 'just happens' to be over- or underrepresented) and through effects stemming from such things as interest in participation and the nature of the participants organisation (Bryman & Bell, 2007)

The methodology used exposes the thesis to risks such as the interview subject's potentially incomplete or erroneous memory, hyper- or hypoboleous effects (exaggeration or understatement) on statements due to bias or memory imperfection, as well as introducing researchers' own values and biases through questions and interpretations (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Even though follow-up questions is a step away from standardisation - which among other things bring comparability - they are also a way to counter these risks, which added to the researchers' decision to use them. Different means of interviewing affects comparability adversely (Bryman & Bell, 2007) which weakens this thesis analytical and conclusion chapters, yet including them and the comparisons in the thesis still contributes to exploring the research question.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

#### **3.1 The Glass Ceiling**

The glass ceiling, first established by Kanter (1977), is a conceptualisation of the barrier women and minorities face when they climb up the career ladder (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia & Vanneman, 2001). They face this barrier because of the fact that they are women, or, for example, from a different culture. Cotter et al. (2001) argue that there is a strong correlation between the obstacle called glass ceiling and the female sex. This phenomenon leads to a gap within organisations, characterised by higher concentration of, e.g, men in higher positions, not reflecting the overall organisational gender distribution (the Economist, 2014). Access to education in the OECD countries is the same for both men and women, however, there are differences in labor force participation, where men outnumber women. There is also a visible difference when it comes to leadership positions (Cotter et al, 2001). The glass ceiling is said to have the effect that women feel less worthy, that they are not good enough to have high positions in business, which is causing them to give up before they have even tried (Nevill, Pennicott, Williams & Worrall, 1990).

Kanter (1977) believes that the gap between the minority and the majority becomes larger the smaller the minority group is. In a group where the minority is, for example, 40% and 60% majority, the minority find it easier to get the same treatment as the majority, and the gap becomes smaller, than it would instead be 80% versus 20%. When the gap is large, minority tend to embrace the majority of the properties, in order to obtain better conditions. For example, that women who work with men in the majority, adopt male characteristics to be respected and heard.

What often prevents women from getting to the top is the organisational culture, prejudices from colleagues and managers, motherhood and being flexible when it comes to traveling (Cotter et al, 2001) other reasons could be that their managers do not take them seriously, do not take advantage of their expertise and do not give them the opportunity to advance (Nevill, Pennicott,

Williams & Worrall, 1990). The fact that many of the reasons behind the glass ceiling are reflected in other parts of this theory chapter strengthens the relation between them and an inefficient human resource management.

### **3.2 Cultural masculinity**

A theoretical pillar throughout this thesis is Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimension *masculinity*. Hofstede's research is chosen due to his wide acceptance and influence in the field of international business research, where he is frequently referenced (Kirkman, Lowe and Gibson, 2006; Griffith et al, 2006; Homburg et al, 2005; McCrae et al, 2008) and the dimension is chosen because it describes the relation between gender and culture. One of the causes behind the glass ceiling phenomenon was the organisation's culture.

Hofstede & Hofstede (2005) calls the way people feel, think and act our 'piece of software'. All people are different when they are shaped in early childhood, as a result of one's social environment. People who grow up in the same or similar environments thus have software similar to each other. These groups are what is called culture, and also how 'culture' is defined in this thesis (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

According to Hofstede & Hofstede (2005), cultures are built by early implementation of the people's values. These values are inherited between generations and that is how they live on forward. People live their lives according to these values, which control how people act, think and learn. Hofstede & Hofstede (2005) describes a total of six aspects, or 'dimensions' of culture. These dimensions can be used for comparison between cultures. As mentioned, this thesis will only be using the masculinity dimension because it relates gender to culture in a way none of the others do. It will, however, briefly describe the dimension *power distance* because its presence is positively correlated with the presence of a masculine culture (de Mooij, 2005), thus its characteristics are often characteristics of a masculine culture also.

According to Hofstede, subjects of a masculine culture are driven by competition and achievement. Heroism and assertiveness are encouraged through material rewards and masculine

cultures are more competitive. In masculine societies, the gender roles between men and women are divided and clearly distinct. Men are supposed to be straightforward, competitive, tough and assertive, while women are supposed to be modest, tender and prioritise quality of life. They are also expected to take different roles within society. Opposed to a masculine culture is a feminine culture (i.e. low masculinity score). In a feminine culture a high quality of life is considered success and caring for the weak is important. Cooperation and modesty is encouraged, and the culture is more consensus-oriented. In feminine cultures gender roles overlap both men and women are expected to have the typical feminine characteristics (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Hofstede, 1984).

List of Hofstede's (1984) masculinity index scores by countries described in this thesis.

<b>Country</b>	<b>Masculinity</b>
Australia	61
Singapore	48
China	66
The United States	62

Some countries are working actively with equality, in others, inequality is seen as a natural phenomenon. The dimension of *power distance* is about whether the population in a particular culture expects and accepts that power is unevenly distributed. It is the acceptance and expectance of distinct hierarchies. For example, in a country with a high power distance, the interaction between managers and their employees are limited and less open, and there is an emotional distance between them. This often leads to communication problems. There is also a need for authoritarian managers, which is a leadership style that women generally is less comfortable with (Eagly, 1987; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Hofstede, 1984). In countries where the power distance is low, there is a more open relationship between managers and employees. Colleagues and managers communicate with each other in a more relaxed manner which results in a more employee-oriented way to lead (Hofstede & Bond, 1984).

According to Hofstede & Hofstede (2005) and Hofstede & Bond (1984) men would generally be more comfortable in a masculine environment while women generally prefer leadership styles, achievement rewards, and other traits that are the opposite from what are characteristics of a masculine culture, and thus this trait of a masculine culture affects women's career opportunities adversely, which is why it is relevant to this thesis.

Hofstede & Hofstede (2005) and Hofstede & Bond (1984) provides a definition of strong leaders. According to them, a strong leader instructs or suggests in a more forceful manner, is more assertive, and are less interested in consensus than its opposite. Strong leaders, in this sense, have employees working for them while its opposite have employees working with them.

Hofstede's research is not without its critique. It was done by Hofstede and his research team consisting of Americans and Europeans, between 1967 and 1973, through gathering of data concerning attitudes among employees at the IT-company that he was working for at the time. The sample selection from the population that the dimensions claim to describe (entire nations) was not random, western perspectives on culture risk affecting the analysis, and the research is over forty years old. Furthermore, it makes the assumption that there is a one-to-one relation between culture and nation while many nations have many different cultures (Hill, 2010). It is unlikely that Hofstede's index scores of Vietnam reflect all of the 54 different cultures residing within the country's borders. The conclusions and results from the research should be used with caution, however, as mentioned, due to Hofstede's wide acceptance and influence in the field of international business research, where he is frequently referenced (Kirkman, Lowe and Gibson, 2006; Griffith et al, 2006; Homburg et al, 2005; McCrae et al, 2008), his research has been chosen.

### **3.3 Social gender roles**

Social roles are closely related to prejudice, one of the reasons behind the glass ceiling phenomenon, and division into distinct social roles is a trait of a masculine culture. In order to understand the phenomenon of social gender roles and what that means in practice it will be



explored in this subchapter. Because this thesis focuses on female expatriate managers, that will be reflected also in this subchapter.

The social roles creates an expectation of how we should behave in different contexts (Eagly 1987). They also create illusions about how men and women are expected to act and react in different situations. The theories about the social roles describes how it is possible to interpret certain behaviors that often might be a construction of the social norm. The deeper these expectations are rooted, both in others and ourselves, the more it adapts to individuals to follow them. Something that is typical for this is the male and female behavior and what is expected of the different sexes. Even the status plays a role for these gender roles. Eagly (1987) means that women are expected to be responsible for the home while the men will serve as the family's breadwinner. The men awards the higher status, who ensures that the family finances are stable (Eagly 1987). That women have a responsibility to the family and the home, has long been recognised as a contributing factor to that they are not equally represented as men in the labor market. In addition, earlier researchers argues that women who choose employment, choose to work where employers have an understanding and acceptance of their larger responsibilities in the home (Anker, 2001). This would mean that work-life flexibility is important for organisations who want to retain and attract the best female talents.

Eagly (1987) summarizes the end of their study gender stereotypes and its meaning. Male and female divided in two dimensions; agentic attributes and communal attributes. Communal attributes is about the property to feel empathy and commitment to the health of others. Qualities that also define the concept of communal attributes is sympathy, helpfulness and friendliness. Also having easy to express feelings, be warm, soft and expressive is such property that defines the communal personality. Agentic attributes are described as the second dimension of gender stereotype, which defines of properties like self-assurance and control requirements, which are linked to men much stronger than to women. More properties are considered to belong to this definition is ambitious, aggressive, powerful, dominant, clear, independent and competitive.

These two extremes are not something people believe in or divide themselves or others, because no person may possess all the characteristics from one dimension. Expectations are that women should be more to the communal type and men more agentic.

Glick & Rudman (2001) touches the same area but in a more modern time. They report how women often are influenced by the stereotypical expectations in terms of discrimination. Coworkers and colleagues have a (often subconscious) perception that women have communal properties, like being open, soft and accommodating. If a woman would behave differently, there is a risk that she is perceived as stiff and socially incompetent, which in turn pays for itself. She might not be offered some employment to which she in fact has all the qualifications for.

Furthermore, women are received differently than men because of a social construction. This structure is built on the gender order that prevails in society, where man is superior (Hirdman, 2007). To get an understanding of female managers and female leadership, society must be seen as created from a gender order and what it entails women who hold these positions (Wahl et al, 2001). Gender is a design built on norms and expectations (Bell, 2001).

Henchman (2007) presents two different approaches of these rollers patterns. One approach is that it keeps the sexes apart, and the other one is a hierarchy between them. That they are kept apart means by the emergence of a we - and those situation where the man is what is supposed to be a norm and women are the dissenting party. Henchman says that this is reflected as well in working life as in personal characteristics, interests and more. The hierarchical part is more about the fact that women are excluded from certain positions in the company. A clear example is that female managers often referred to as "women managers" and not just managers. Henchman also concerns the so-called "gender contract". An unwritten rule of how women and men are expected to behave and treat each other, where the man is again the party is seen as the norm.

These theories and findings will enable this thesis to analyse what is considered good leadership in the different cultures. It will help the this thesis bring out and understand the interviewees own stories.

### **3.4 The balance between work and family life**

The balance between responsibilities and ambitions at work and at home is another reason behind the glass ceiling phenomenon and it is closely related to both masculine culture and gender roles, as women are expected to take a greater responsibility for family life and child rearing and there is a trade off between the two (Linehan and Walsh, 1999; Eagly, 1987).

Edwards & Rothbard (2000) contradicts that there would be such a trade-off. They do not consider work balance to be interlinked with life balance, since claim that research available has not been able to prove such a relationship. Furthermore, Galea et al (2014) finds that distinguishing between work life and private life is difficult. However, Adams, King & King (1996) has found that work, family and private life affect each other's balance - if an individual spends too much focus on one part, the others will be negatively affected - thus a trade off between them. Furthermore, Kirchmeyer (2000) describes the balance between work and private life like people having different roles in life - a work role and a private role - that require time, dedication and mental presence in order to find a good balance, and that the two roles must be given care and attention in order to be able to work together. Adding to that, Linehan and Walsh (1999) highlights that women are adversely affected by having to chose between work and family-life since they are considered to have greater responsibility for the latter.

Family-friendly employment policies contribute to a good balance between work and family life (White, Hill, McGovern, Mills & Smeaton 2003). This includes the government provides child care and the employer offers flexible hours and the ability to work from home. An increased number of work hours contribute to family life being adversely affected. Long working hours thus contributes family balance deteriorates. Even high-performance workers often experience negative effects on family and private life (White et al, 2003). Thus, there is a tradeoff between responsibilities and ambitions in family life and in work life.

### 3.5 Theoretical framework summary

In order to answer the research question, “*What is Swedish female expatriates' perception of cultural masculinity?*” and fill the purposes of this thesis, a theoretical ground has been created that enables interpretation and promotes understanding of the empirical data.

As a conceptualisation of organisational gender discrimination is given through the description of the glass ceiling concept. It provides explanations to why the phenomena occurs that can be further explored in a Swedish international perspective, and it ties inefficiency in human resource management closer to the other parts of this chapter. If an organisation displays a glass ceiling pattern to the disadvantage of women, it is unlikely that it is because the organisation's female employees are less competent for senior positions, and likely that it is due to discrimination. As described in the subchapter such patterns are generally caused by culture, prejudice, difficulties combining work and family life and exclusion. As described in the problem discussion, gender discrimination is by nature an inefficiency since the only grounds for it is a non-relevant characteristic of the individual or group. If you are excluded from career advancement, directly or indirectly, because of your gender then competence - in a wider sense including suitability - has not been the only determining factor. Thus, the organisation has a resource (human) that is not put to its best use. The most suitable for a job might not be chosen. Thus, the management does not manage as well as it would otherwise have been and the return on invested capital is lower than it would have been otherwise, the difference is the cost of inefficiency.

The subchapter regarding culture is used to describe cultural aspects that influences the different conditions that women and men face as subjects of culture. From the subchapter it can be read that culture consists of values shaped early in life that influences how people act, think, feel and learn. It affects our perceptions, fears and driving forces in our lives and, thus, cannot be disregarded or easily changed. This is important because it has implications on how to combat potential discrimination stemming from culture, i.e the nature of the measures taken to counter cultural bias towards males. The masculinity dimension were chosen because it describes the

relation between gender and culture in a way that none of the other dimensions do. To have cultural masculinity as a tool for analysis and understanding of the empirical data is essential because the masculinity of the culture, as described in the subchapter, has a crucial effect on women's ability to make a career on equal terms as men, thus on the efficiency of human resources. Culture is one of the reasons behind the glass ceiling concept, thus they are linked.

Social gender roles borders to culture but pinpoints aspects that are specific and of practical nature. While the cultural masculinity subchapter describes characteristics of such culture, where distinct division of gender roles is one characteristic, it does not provide a deeper picture of what these gender roles are and what they mean. As described in the subchapter, gender roles are expectations on how to behave and what to do based on gender and to deviate from these, transcending one's role, will have negative consequences - especially in a masculine culture as described in the subchapter with the same name. This, in turn, is important to be aware of since it affects the conditions women and men face. A woman in a very masculine culture could avoid putting her best foot forward because of expectations on her not to be ambitious and competitive, as these are a male traits, but rather soft and family-oriented (Eagly, 1987; Glick & Rudman, 2001). This, in turn, could also mean that the best talent might not be chosen. In order to understand and interpret the empirical data, what gender roles really mean has been described.

As women are considered to have the main responsibility when it comes to family life while men serve as the family breadwinner (Eagly, 1987), this puts women at an extra disadvantage when it comes to making a career. The balance between work and family life was something that Linehan and Walsh (1999) especially highlighted in the findings of their article *Senior female international managers: breaking the glass border* as one of the most important difficulties for senior female expatriates. The work life balance subchapter describes this balance, the tradeoff that has to be made, and why flexibility is important in order to promote the best talent.

The subchapters of Theoretical framework are interlinked with each other, sometimes even overlapping, forming a web of theories with which understanding and insights from the empirical

data can be caught. They all contribute to the exploration of the empirical data, in the end answering the research question and fulfilling the purpose of this thesis.

#### **4. Research Context - a background and continued review of current knowledge**

It was once said that everything is defined by its opposite, but it is more true to say that it is defined by its context. The context is what gives meaning, and this thesis is no exception. Even though this field of research is relatively young and further lack the manpower other fields benefits from, it has accumulated a pool of knowledge from which highlights relevant to this thesis' research question has been selected. While the theoretical framework highlights theories and models, the research context helps form a practical foundation on which this thesis' analysis is built.

##### **4.1 Women and the role of international managers**

A starting point for expatriate gender diversity research can be found in 1979 and Adler's *Women as androgynous managers: A Conceptualization of the Potential for American Women in International Management*. She described how even though there were many female managers who appeared to have the qualities necessary for international management, a lack of female expatriates were present, and the research question she set out to answer was why this was. Research on the attitudinal and behavioural skills found to be associated with success in the international environment was presented and concluded to go beyond the characteristics generally associated with either the male or the female gender role in North America. As the title reveals Adler describes an international manager role that is androgynous rather than male or female, arguing that since the range of skills associated with successful international management is extensive and goes beyond a limited subset of sex-linked characteristics, it would appear that expatriates need the full range of both characteristics generally associated with women and men respectively. This is then put in contrast to the dominance of male international managers. Adler finds that based on cultural and social norms and preconceptions and assumptions about women and female leadership, women are implicitly and explicitly excluded

from overseas assignment through self-selection, women not applying for or turning down offers; corporate selection, corporations failing to consider women or by rejecting them along the way; and foreign country selection, by rejection of suggested women or causing expat failure. In her research she also develops *The Model of the Androgynous International Manager*, a tool that can be used to conceptualise an appropriate orientation for the role of the international manager. Adler concludes that more research should be conducted to define the alternative career paths of domestic and international managers as well as documenting the career progression of male and female international managers. Finally she also concludes that more research on the decision-making criteria of female candidates themselves and of personnel responsible for overseas assignment decisions, as this will clarify the difference between myth and fact, increasing the effectiveness of international personnel.

Adler's research has contributed to the field of research in many ways. Besides inspiring others with her groundbreaking research, Adler's contribution was that she systematically put cultural perceptions about women next to ditto perceptions about successful international managers and showed that there were no contrast between them but rather that there were harmony, i.e perceptions of successful international managers included cultural perceptions that also described women, hence showing that the role as international manager, in fact, is androgynous and not only did not exclude women but rather would benefit from their inclusion. Since perceptions about women did not mismatch the perceptions of international managers, something else had to explain why there were so few women in such positions, and subsequently Adler provided an explanation. She argued that there was social and cultural norms behind the discrepancy, hence implying that the problem of inefficiency in international management was solved through such things as changes of attitudes, breaking down misconceptions and more knowledge rather than anything else. This paragraph summarises why this research stands out, thus is worth special attention.

## 4.2 A mythbusting description of a masculine culture

One of the most extensive articles in this field of research is the *Pacific Basin Managers; A Gaijin, not a woman* from 1987 where Adler takes a look at North American international managers in Asia, focusing on Indonesia, Japan, the People's Republic of China, India, Singapore, and the Philippines. The article consists of four parts where the first part investigates how many women there are among the expatriates sent to Asia, and concludes that they are few but also a beginning of an increasing trend. The following three parts each revolve around one of the three most common myths - that women do not want to be international managers, that companies refuse to send women overseas and that foreigners' prejudice against women renders them ineffective, even when interested and sent. The study surveyed 1129 graduating management school MBAs and found that there were no significant differences between male and female interest in the pursuit of international careers. However, students agreed that there were fewer opportunities for women than for men, and fewer for women pursuing international careers vs. domestic careers. Furthermore, the study found, 54 per cent of the 60 major North American multinationals surveyed hesitated to send women overseas, and seventy per cent believed that women would not be interested. In contrast to the latter, 83 per cent of the female expats interviewed in the article stated that they had been the one introducing the idea of international management to their boss. The study found that more than half of the surveyed international personnel executives, from the companies mentioned above, declared that sending a female manager to Asia under the discriminatory conditions present in the countries described in the article would neither be fair to the woman nor the sending company. Finally the study found that the participating women were overwhelmingly successful and that the sending corporation's hesitation was a bigger problem than the receiving culture's prejudice.

The article also investigated the impact of being female on the experience of working as an expatriate in Asia and gives a thorough description of what it might be like for a woman being expatriated to a highly masculine culture, and will thus help answer this thesis' research question. Almost all of the participants described their assignment as a success, and the corporations agreed on this. Making up 42 per cent of the participating women, the ones that



considered 'being female' was an advantage was biggest group. Most frequent among the advantages described was the fact that female managers stood out of the mass. They were 'visible'. Foreign clients were curious about them and remembered them better than their male counterparts. That constituted an advantage in the competition for clients time and attention. Other advantages described by the women in the study was better interpersonal or social skills and that they had it easier to talk to men. The latter since women, as they described it, were not perceived as a threat which inspired trust and made the men more relaxed. There was also a notion among some of the Asians that since women were so scarce, the female expatriates would not have been sent unless they were the best. The participating women often felt that they received special treatment that their male counterparts did not receive. Most of the advantages described in the article are ones that would come from a strong gender role, i.e a society that has a relatively strict division between gender roles and that is masculine in a 'Hofstedian' sense (Hofstede, 1984). The second largest group, consisting of 38 per cent, were the ones that either found 'being woman' not impacting their professional life - predominantly expats in China - or found it impacting in both a positive and a negative way. Professionalism and doing a good job were described as more important than gender by the ones who did not think their gender impacted professional life. The third largest group were the one fifth that thought 'being female' primarily came with disadvantages. Most of the disadvantages described stemmed from the home companies. They included issues like obtaining the position in the first place, only obtaining a temporary position, limited responsibility in order to limit traveling to areas not considered suitable for women, and limiting the female expats to internal work rather than including contacts with clients. One respondent even described the co-workers as feeling threatened, resentful and refusing to do what she said. Another testified that she constantly had to prove herself to her British male co-workers. But not all disadvantages arose internally, some also expressed difficulties being met with the same respect by the locals as male counterparts. They described how locals had difficulties addressing the women in an appropriate demeanor, and sometimes rather addressing men than women because they doubted women's authority and social status. Since most North American women the Asians had met were wives or secretaries, they initially assumed that this was the case also with the female expatriates. Senior male

colleagues had an especially big responsibility to redirect the focus back to the female expatriate in early dialogue, because failing to do so challenged the female expatriate's credibility, authority, and responsibility thus undermining her potential effectiveness.

So why were the female expatriate managers met with such relative high acceptance when Adler painted the work force situation for local women in such dark colours? The answer has inspired the title of the article. Foreign women in Japan were first and foremost seen as *gaijin*, a word consisting of *gai* (外) which means *outside* and *jin* (人) which means *person*. Thus, they were above all seen as foreigners and were not expected to act as locals or carry the local culture, giving them room to exert their roles as expatriates efficiently. This logic is described as a pattern also applying to female expatriates in the other Asian countries investigated in the article.

Adler finishes by concluding that, with the aforementioned findings, the question that has been the focus of her article - whether or not the discriminatory role and poor situation of women domestically in the Asian countries is an indicator on how North American expatriates would be received - is no. When it comes to North American female expatriates the fact that they are North American are more important than the fact that they are female, and thus the primary indicator should be the performance of other North American expatriates, Adler concludes.

The two most important contributions of this article to its field of research is the addressing of several myths related to female expatriatism, and the provision of an idea of what can be expected either as being the female expatriate manager sent to Asia and other places where similar masculine culture can be found or as being the one sending them. Many myths and concerns around relatively new phenomena stem from uncertainty and lack of knowledge, and can hold back a sound development. Adler's research systematically addresses some of these concerns and provides the knowledge lacking, to the advantage of both sender and sendee of female expatriates. Adler's article is, however, quite out of date and it is not certain that her conclusions still holds true, this is one of the things that this thesis will examine.

### **4.3 Senior female international managers: breaking the glass border - a story of obstacles**

In 1999 Linehan and Walsh published the article *Senior female international managers: breaking the glass border*. The term *glass border* was inspired by the term *glass ceiling* and describes stereotypical assumptions by home country senior management about women as managers and about their availability, suitability and preferences for international appointments (Mandelker, 1994) and constitutes a subtle barrier limiting women's advancement towards top international management positions. In their article the authors analyse interviews with 50 female senior managers who had successfully broken through the glass border and that describes what obstacles they had to overcome in order to do so and found that these obstacles included difficulties associated with female exclusion from established formal and informal male networks, absence of female role models and senior mentors, tradeoff between international career versus relationship and family life, isolation and loneliness, stereotypical attitudes associating success with being male, and male trailing partners. The interviewees also described difficulties with being taken seriously in the the initial stages of their managerial careers as they believed that they were being judged on their appearances, how it were necessary for women to have experience from senior management before being considered for international managerial positions while the same standard did not apply to male counterparts, and not only did the women often have to be more qualified, they also had to be more ambitious and more mobile than male managers.

The article especially presses the difficulties with balancing the tradeoff between work-life and family-life. As women culturally are considered the main responsible for the latter, women are faced with particularly difficult dilemmas, and often find themselves taking responsibility for both family and work. Adding insult to injury, working women faced social exclusion as neighbours perceived them as 'always working' and 'too busy' to be invited to neighbourhood gatherings.

Linehan and Walsh's article contributes to the field of research by continuing to deepen the picture of what a female expatriate might be facing when going abroad, and highlights many of the issues a sending organisation has to deal with. Of particular importance is the underlining and stressing of the fact that many, if not most, of the obstacles women have to face in their international careers stem from within their own organisation. The article confirms Adler's finding in *Pacific Basin Managers; A Gaijin, not a woman* (1987) of this phenomenon, including the need to convince home-country senior management of their abilities as many of the latter perceived it as a risk to let female managers represent their organisation abroad. The interviewees believed that discrimination and prejudice against women as a group affected their careers adversely, further confirming that the home-organisation's culture is where the most significant problems for women's international careers can be found.

#### **4.4 Can women function efficiently as managers in a highly masculine culture?**

The last piece to the puzzle of research context is Harrison and Michailova's *Working in the Middle East: Western female expatriates' experiences in the United Arab Emirates* (2012). Through a number of survey questions and interviews the authors investigate the experiences of 86 western female expatriates from Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the USA working in the United Arab Emirates. The study found that the extensive week-long cultural context training that the women were provided pre-departure was not perceived to be rewarding because the respondents did not have much contact with Emiratis. Instead the participants worked in a multi-cultural community setting with members from all over the world. Rather than the extensive training offered, the women would have preferred practical knowledge such as the time required to obtain visas, driver's licenses, where to find full-time daycare for young children, how to set up a bank account, how to dress properly during religious holidays such as the Ramadan, how to network with other expatriates, and how to avoid offence due to inappropriate behaviour in public. Contrary to the findings of Adler (1987), the participant female expatriates were treated as women firstly and as professionals secondly. Several respondents highlighted difficulties when assuming senior positions in industries such as engineering because their Emirati clients could be very demanding, sometimes even bullying, demanding that the women

did extra work for the same price, while this could not be addressed as strictly or strongly as it would have been in a western culture because the clients were often important and doing so would disrupt their professional relationship. This did, however, become less of a barrier once the women's competence were proven. The high number of expatriates in the country, particularly in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, means that there are plenty of networking and social opportunities and there are many businesswoman's networks and expatriate organisations such as the Australia-New Zealand Association, Women in Abu Dhabi and the International Businesswomen's Group in Dubai. There are also online forums established by expatriates themselves that offers information and support in all manner of practical matters. Similarly to Adler, Linehan and Walsh's researches outlined above, Harrison and Michailova finds that women are able to successfully work and live in an arab society characterised by islam, despite western preconceptions about them being inhospitable places for female expatriates. Eighty per cent of the respondents also either returned to work in the country or extended their time beyond their initial time commitment of the assignment. The study finishes by recommending western HR practitioners to make the best use of their workforce by not excluding female expatriates when assigning personnel to the United Arab Emirates and elsewhere in the region. Female expatriates in the Middle East is an area where there seem to be little research done, while it is a region that is economically important. Therefor Linehan and Walsh's research, like other selected articles outlined in this thesis, contributes by providing a fairly unique insight in what might face a female expatriate stationed in this region and underlines important aspects for a sending company to consider.

#### **4.5 The bigger picture**

The situation of female expatriates today is not unaffected by its historical context, research context provides answers to 'what to look for?' when analysing data and answering this thesis' research question. Thus it constitutes a pillar, next to the theoretical framework, upon which the analysis rests. These four selected articles show a development from female expatriates being almost absent, prompting the question *why* in Adler's 1979 research, and the ones out there were lacking mentors and were being excluded from male networking, to a situation where female

expatriatism is commonplace and women even have their own networks. A recurring theme in the articles reviewed is the story of women struggling to be sent overseas, against obstacles stemming from the own corporation including preconceptions about women's competence and the implication of foreign countries cultures on female expatriatism, and once there they do face some discrimination - both from locals and from their own company - but manages to adapt, and finally reaches success. Another recurring theme is the mismatch between work and family life. Whether it is life partners unhappy with their careers coming second, double responsibilities for both work and family-life, or difficulties finding the right daycare for young children, there seem to be a constant tradeoff between the two.

## 5. Results & Analysis

### 5.1 Review of empirical data

Our respondents range in age from 34 being the youngest to 48 years old for the most experienced. Their branches vary from consulting and auditing to investment and car manufacturing, with work experience ranging from two to eighteen years. Their country of assignment were Singapore, The United States of America, The People's Republic of China and two were assigned in Australia.

The respondents in summary. Names are fictitious, all other facts are correct.

Name	Role	Business	Country	Experience
Therese	Associate Director	Investment	Australia	9 years
Anna	Associate	Investment	Singapore	7 years
Maria	HR, process developer	Car manufacturing	China	18 years
Victoria	Started as analyst, became Vice President of Acquisitions	Investment	USA	2 years
Caroline	Started as assistant, became manager	Audit, Tax, Consulting	Australia	2,5 years

#### 5.1.1 Australia

Two respondents were questioned regarding their experiences of Australia, Caroline and Therese. Caroline have two and a half years of experience, and Therese has nine years, from their respective position.

Caroline did not know how many women there were in her organisation, but expressed that on senior levels there were predominantly men and only a few women, while Therese estimated that sixty per cent of the employees were women while there were no female managers at all. She had, however, not experienced the glass ceiling phenomenon while Caroline stated that “Yes, in

*some sense. It is hard to manage family and work life. It takes a lot of time in order to make a career, and women are expected not to have that time*". Caroline stated that her organisation's culture promoted strong leaders ahead of cooperation and consensus while Therese's organisation promoted both. Both of them experienced a strong focus on results and goals in their respective organisations, but in Therese's there were also a great flexibility. None of the respondents experienced that women did some tasks more often than men or vice versa, and both of them agreed that in Australia, you work to live. Caroline, however, stated that there was a difference depending on organisational level - on senior levels co-workers lived to work to a higher degree than on lower levels. Therese described conflicts as solved through negotiations and a willingness to reach consensus, Caroline agreed but also added that there was a lower acceptance for deviating opinions. On the direct question whether or not the respondents experienced the culture as masculine, Caroline experience it that way while Therese experienced it to be fifty-fifty. When asked what character traits that were encouraged in terms of promotions and career development, Caroline listed "*professionalism, work hard and keep a high quality, good at communication, be professional*" while Therese listed "*intelligence, decisiveness, ability to take initiative, flexibility, hard work*" as the most important ones. When it comes to gathering opinions for a manager from subordinates before making a decision their experiences diverge - Caroline experienced that this would be seen as a weakness, while Therese claims it would be seen as natural in her organisation. However, they both agreed that requesting information or input that by its nature is not something that a manager should know - like specific details about a product from an engineer - would not be considered a weakness but rather to utilise available competence within the organisation. Both of the respondents agreed that assertiveness was important for a leader in their respective organisation's and that a lack thereof would cause concern and discomfort among subordinates, and Therese added that "*To be assertive and comfortable in your own skin is very important. Also to be able to clearly communicate visions and decisions is very important. A leader who is not assertive causes concern and discomfort in all subordinate levels, which causes nobody to know what is expected of them. I think that is very negative for an organisation*". On a direct question, Therese did not think that the organisation's culture affect women's career opportunities adversely, while Caroline thought that it did; "Yes.



*There are so called 'sauna clubs' [i.e male networks revolving around activities such as hunting or visiting a local sauna, authors comment] [...] that you are not invited to as a woman, and the demand to always work does not go together well with family life which women often value highly*". Caroline thought that her organisation's culture to some extent affect the respect and treatment of women adversely, while Therese did not thought that it had such an effect. None of them thought that they would have been met with more respect if they were men rather than women, nor did they think that the fact that they were women made it harder to get coworkers to listen to their thoughts and suggestions. Regarding organisational promotion of female networking, none of their respective organisations promoted such networking. When asked directly, Therese thought that female competence were utilised to the same extent as male while Caroline responded that men tended to participate in sales meetings more often than women did in her organisation. Furthermore, only Caroline described that her organisation promoted achievements through material rewards, and she described a bonus system where focus was on chargeable hours on which bonuses then were calculated. Therese, on the other hand, speculated that her company was too small and young to be able to pay large bonuses, even had they wanted to do so. None of them experienced competition between their co-workers. Caroline felt that it was 'okay' to show weakness in front of her co-workers while Therese was not comfortable with the thought of it at all, but added that this might depend on her personality too.

According to the respondents, there is a larger acceptance in Australia for women to stay home from work in order to care for a sick child than it is for men. Therese: *"It is more common for women to stay at home if the child is sick, even though my husband has stayed at home at times too. [...] My husband didn't even get paternity leave here, even though he works for a Swedish company, so he had to go on vacation for weeks when our son were newborn [...]. This is even though Australians prioritise family and quality of life very high compared to other countries"*. Regarding the balance between career and family their responses were again divided. Caroline thought that there were a bad balance between the two, and that it was hard to get it together, while Therese stated that there was a good balance and no problem leaving early if needed.

Therese added that her boss often came late because he had left off children in their school or daycare center.

None of them had experienced any demeaning comments or behaviour directly related to their gender, but would such occur none of them felt comfortable contacting their organisation for support knowing that they had routines for such occurrences. Therese stated that her company was too small to have even thought of having a gender equality plan, while Caroline did not know but thought her organisation had one. None of them, nor their colleagues, had had any courses in gender issues.

### ***5.1.2 Singapore***

Anna was assigned to Singapore and have nine years of experience as an Associate. She works for an investment company focusing on commercial real estate.

She approximates her organisation to have about fifty per cent female employees and, on a direct question, has not experienced a glass ceiling in her organisation. When it comes to leadership, she describes a vast cultural difference between the country she was assigned to and the company for which she was working; *“I was working for an American company and while they did promote strong leaders, they also promoted cooperation and communication. Singapore as a country only focuses a lot more on strong leaders”*. There were differences in the tasks performed by men and women, where administrative work were predominantly handled by the latter.

In her organisation there were a division between locals and westerners when it came to the work-life balance. She described how the locals ‘definitely’ lived to work, while it was generally fifty-fifty for the western co-workers. She experienced a high focus on results and goals before quality of life and flexibility, and in her organisation conflicts were solved mostly through communication and trying to reach consensus which she attributed the company’s American origin. On a direct question she described the company’s culture as *“relatively mixed, but more*

*masculine than feminine*". When it came to promotion and career, characteristics that were encouraged the most were *"assertiveness, social competence, loyalty, ability to take initiatives, and hard work"*. But she also described another difference between the culture of her organisation and Singapore where the latter *"predominantly focuses on knowledge, loyalty, and hard work"* while the other character traits were promoted because her organisation was American, she reasoned. To take in thoughts and opinions of the subordinates when making a decision was not considered a weakness in her organisation, however, she too emphasized the importance for a leader to be assertive in order to function effectively. However, she did not think that her organisation's culture affected women's careers or respect and regards adversely, and she thought female competence were utilised as much as male. Although she did not feel comfortable showing weakness in front of her co-workers, she experienced a low level of competition between the co-workers and achievements were rewarded with both material rewards - such as bonuses - and social rewards - such as the appreciation of colleagues. She further describes that being a woman did not affect how she was perceived in her particular organisation, but *"however, there is a huge difference between being a westerner and an asian when working and living in Singapore. White men are seen as gods, would never be questioned and they constantly hear 'yes boss' while white women are expected to eat lunch with each other and hang by the pool all days. Many asians thought it was strange that I worked and initially I was not taken seriously while interviewing if I was interviewing with an asian company. They just wondered why I was there when I did not 'have' to work. In western companies, of which there is a lot in Singapore, this was never a problem"*. She also described how she had been faced with demeaning comments related to her being a white woman from these Asian companies, but pointed out that this had not occurred in the organisation which she was working for. Had she been subject to such demeaning comments from within her own organisation, she did not know if there were routines to handle such matters but she claimed to be sure that there were.

She did not have children so she felt that she could not answer whether or not there was a higher acceptance for her to stay home to take care of a sick child than it would have been for a man,

however, *“in Singapore it is very common to have a nanny, so people generally does not stay home to care of their children when they are sick, neither men nor women. It would, however, probably be totally inconceivable for a Singaporean man to stay home and tend to his sick child”*. She also described the work-life balance as better than it could have been, would her boss not have been an American man who prioritised his family and often left early; *“this was however not common among other co-workers, neither men nor women. In Singapore you generally work very long days, so I would say there is a greater focus on work than on family life”*.

She was asked whether there was a gender equality plan in her organisation and if it was followed; *“Equality was important in my company and they were often appointed one of the best companies in the USA to work in as a women [...]. Even if I do not know for sure, there probably was a gender equality plan and as a large stock exchange listed company I am sure that its implementation was followed up upon”*. However, her organisation did not promote female networking in any way and neither her nor her colleagues had been to a gender equality education or course.

### ***5.1.3 The People’s Republic of China***

Maria works for a car manufacturer and was assigned to China in her role as HR process developer from which she had eighteen years of experience.

In her company there were about fifty-fifty gender representation among the employees, while in the top management positions there are a vast majority of men. However, she points out that *“we do have a goal to increase the women’s share from twenty-something today to 32 per cent or something like that. I am a little surprised by that, it is not a whole lot...”* and adds *“in China I can imagine that they follow this goal closely, that they ‘take just about anyone’ or just pick someone off the street to get the right amount of women. This is not facts, just a feeling I get”*.

When asked whether the organisation’s culture premieres strong leaders before cooperation and consensus, she has a harder time answering the question; *“That was a very hard question... I*

*don't know... I do not have a clear picture of what they are after in terms of leaders in China. I get the feeling it is more about who you are, rather than your character or competence [...]. There are all sorts of leaders, the whole scale! Everything from those who assertively boss subordinates around in a firm manner - those are never popular - to those who are silent and almost invisible”* and reflects over leadership in general *“in China the leadership is naturally different from leadership in Sweden, and this is something that one has to take into account”* and continues *“we have common goals, but when it comes to the the softer issues, we are very different [...], such as views regarding personal development and staff development. Also how they handle it when one get sick, in Sweden if you are sick then you are sick (nothing to do about it, authors' clarification), I do not think that is the case in China. Laws and regulations are also very different, so they have different expectations on them as employees, and the manager can make completely different demands”*. Later she adds that it is difficult to describe any certain character traits that are promoted when it comes to career, since the regular recruitment process is hard to distinguish from the ones that are recruited because they have the right personal contacts. According to Maria, employees in China appreciate clear rules and expectations on them what to do. They expect to be told exactly what is required of them. The relation between managers and employees are described as strict. The manager does not ask a subordinate how their day was or what they did the past weekend, the employees are there to work. In staff meetings with the manager, the subordinates are generally not expected to talk. Adding to the description of different leadership, it is not strange for a Chinese manager to sleep for a while by the desk. However, the risk of an employee stumbling in on you while you take a nap is not very high since there is no ‘open door policy’ in managers’ offices. It is not something that is considered strange however, but rather something that keeps the manager effective. Maria were asked about the Chinese’s view on the life quality of the employees, if an employee that were stressed out to the point where the employee’s health was threatened were shown consideration and perhaps offered some time off. *“This is very interesting”*, she answered, *“if you look at their culture there is an emphasis on harmony and that everything is supposed to be connected through meditation, feng shui, yoga and so on, and this is very deeply rooted in them since the culture is several thousands of years old. But in practice they do not have that thinking at all.*

*This with well-being, and above all they do not speak about it... so I don't think the employees health would be considered in such a scenario. It has something to do with the fact that if you do not deliver what you are expected to, you run a great risk of losing your job".* She also expressed that a Chinese manager would probably never ask for subordinates opinions, nor would they ask for input from a subordinate, such as an economist about specific economic details; *"I don't think such instances occur, they would not even think that far. They march to their own beat, based on gut feelings. They are probably not very fact-based"* and explains this with the Chinese managers wanting to avoid asking for help so that the face will not be 'lost', and that *"they do not have the ability to gather up information from different sources, think things through, and get an idea of what would be good to do"*. The strict hierarchy between managers and the subordinates are, nonetheless, something that is subject to change as the Chinese, according to Maria, are inspired by western ideals and ways to do things.

Maria does not feel that the culture in her organisation affects women's careers and that she would not have been more or less respected had she been a man. Nor does she think that the Chinese culture in general affects one's ability to make yourself listened to. She has never experienced any degrading comments directly related to her gender, and she would feel comfortable handling such comments herself but also with talking to a corporate representative if that would be prompted. She does, however, reflect that *"but it depends what kind of abuse and how you react. If you feel very very bad because of it, it could be hard to ask for help, from anyone. [...] I can imagine that there are many in our organisation that does not feel that they could talk directly to their boss if something would happen - if so, they would probably not know who to turn to"*.

Solving problems was described as not the Chinese's forté since they lack an interest in planning and are unused to think long-term. They tend to live *"here and now, and if something does not work they just try again instead of think before they act"* and do not practice much consequential thinking. And when something goes wrong, they are described to *"sneak around, they do not want to lose face, they are very afraid of that. Don't lose face, that is really important! So they*

*never confesses to mistakes or not to have done what they were asked for. Even if they are confronted, they do not admit their mistakes*". According to Maria, an employee, including managers, that does not deliver expected results are at great risk of losing their job. It is not unconceivable that sales figures get slightly boosted, just to preserve one's face and job. There is a high focus on results in China. "At the same time", Maria continues, "i did not perceive them as very efficient, there is not much done. You wonder what they really learned at the university... you get a sense of wide corruption".

When asked if there would be greater acceptance for a women to stay home with sick children than it would be for a man, Maria answers that the Chinese are not very family-focused. "They do not appear very family focused to me, compared to Sweden. They get married to someone, make a baby and that baby is then taken care of by the fathers parents". Regarding gender roles, Maria talks specifically about Shanghai and describes them as not the traditional roles that you would find in Sweden. Instead, men have the responsibility for housework, and he does not get to keep his salary. "He gets an allowance, 'here you go', and the rest is handled by the wife and mother in law". In the rest of the country this is not as extreme, however, the gender roles are different there too, Maria claims, and continues "the women are often responsible for the family economy together with their mothers, they are a bit more long-term in their thinking. They too want fast advancement, but the men wants it faster in a way that might not be sustainable in the long run, they want to show off new stuff. Chinese generally are not thinking very long-term, but the women are at least somewhat better than the men" and she follows up with an example regarding gender roles and reflects on why Chinese men often are so irresponsible "a female expatriate is coming to Sweden for two years and her husband has trouble accepting that she is coming here and he is to come along just nicely. She is very driven and wants to go forward and he has to fall into the line and follow suit. He has trouble accepting that because he wanted to be the one pushing for such a thing if it came up. According to her, she is however the one who runs the whole family, he is still 'mommys little boy' and his mother wants to stick her nose in most of the things they do. She has had to fight a lot to draw boundaries for his mother. I actually think she is a typical example of a Chinese women". Maria thinks that the dominant role of mothers

might be what makes the men so subordinate and unused to take responsibility, and that the dominant role, or pampering, might be due to the one child only policy, but after some contemplation adds that she too, in fact, takes more care of her son than her daughter and that this might be a trait of mothers in general, and that self-sustainability might be more important to daughters than to sons, the latter more comfortable with being taken care of. Thus, Maria observes this phenomenon in both her own and in Chinese context, however more pronounced in the latter. She describes how women in China does not have a particularly caring role, nor is it the typical housewife role, it is rather a role of fixing and responsibility. One example was how women often makes sure their husbands have a good job. According to Maria, without women taking such great responsibility, the family would not make it. When asked about what would be an ideal husband in China - a question meant to explore gender roles - Maria responds that Chinese women probably would prefer a husband that took more responsibility and was more self-sufficient. She points out, however, that marriage in China is not as based on love as much as being *“technical”*. The desire to show off new stuff, mentioned above, is interlinked with Chinese preference for material rewards before collegial appreciation, according to Maria. She describes how it is important that their success is showing in some way. She further describes how competition in the Chinese workplace is harsh and that this is the reason behind the envy described above. Another reason she brings up is the lack of job security, *“so it is important to do well at work, one wants to advance up the hierarchy as fast as possible”*.

In China, conflicts are rare, according to Maria, however, when arguments do happen they are often severe. *“Conflicts are uncommon, but when they fight, they fight with a capital F no matter where they are. Once you lose your face, the fighting will be immense. Then the fight will be a way to regain your face. Overall there were a very friendly atmosphere, but there were a lot of envy, especially among the girls about clothes for example. A lot of trash talk behind the back. It didn't show, but you could feel it under the surface if you were heedful. You have to solve potential conflicts yourselves, there is no support from managers. If, e.g, two Chinese project managers would not see eye to eye about something, I would not think they would call for their manager. No matter what opinion someone else had, the project managers would march to his or*



*her own beat. They are not looking for consensus*". She further describes how two managers on equal levels that did not see eye-to-eye would rather go separate ways and never talk to each other *"I don't think empathy exists... that is something I have been wondering. Is there empathy in their bodies? I don't think so"*. Maria often underlines that these are her impressions and thoughts, her experiences, and she seem to contemplate on what to say not to generalise too much or too unfairly. She also mentioned that when she was there, a Chinese company had recently acquired her company and that they were in a 'cultural bridging' process, both of them possibly affecting her experiences.

According to Maria, there are female networks in her organisation, but they are on the women's own initiative rather than supported by the organisation. The organisation has, however, provided gender related courses and it have a 'Code of Conduct' plan that is currently being developed but no specific gender equality plan.

#### ***5.1.4 The United States of America***

Victoria worked in the United States of America for an investment company in which she had two years of experience as vice president of acquisitions.

She approximates that there are around twenty per cent women working in her company and even though there are only a few female managers, she expresses that she has not experienced the glass ceiling phenomenon, but rather that if you are good at your job, you are promoted no matter what gender you have. The corporate culture premieres goal orientation and strong leaders, while cooperation is also important, according to Victoria. When asked whether one gender performed tasks more often than the other - such as administrative work, or cleaning up dishes left behind - she testified that all administrative work was done by women *"All administrative personnel were girls. They answered the phone, booked meetings, made copies and signed documents etc. [...] All administrative personnel has been women in all my previous assignments"*. In her office there was a fifty-fifty balance between working in order to live and living in order to work, according to Victoria, and conflicts was generally solved by communication and a willingness to reach consensus. She also describes the organisation's

culture as masculine. Important character traits when it comes to promotion and career was *“social competence, ability to take initiatives, flexibility and hard work”*. Asking colleagues for opinions before making a decision or help with something that was not within the manager’s area of (expected) competence would not be perceived as a weakness, but would rather be encouraged, according to Victoria. Furthermore, it was important that a leader was assertive and clearly signalled what was expected from subordinates, she stated. When asked about whether the organisation’s culture affected the way men and women were faced in terms of respect and regards, Victoria responded that *“for my part I experienced that personality was more important than whether you were a woman or man”* and she did not think that the organisation’s culture affected the extent to which female competence were utilised. However, when asked whether the organisation’s culture affected women’s ability to make a career, she answered that *“I think a certain type of person is preferred and that there are more men that have the characteristics sought than women. Any effect on women’s careers would be indirect”* and when asked whether she would have been easier to earn her co-workers respect had she been a man, the response was that *“I always had a good relation to my co-workers, but since I was the only woman in my department I am sure it would have been easier would I have been a man. Competence and knowing your job was however a bigger part of gaining their respect than my gender”*. Achievements were described as rewarded with both material rewards and with the appreciation and respect of colleagues, and there was a ‘healthy’ amount of competition that did not stand in the way for cooperation between co-workers. However, her workplace was not a place she felt comfortable showing weakness in.

Victoria were asked whether there was a good balance between work and family life in her organisation; *“Being in the United States I think there was a relatively good balance, but compared to Sweden I think it would have been perceived as very career focused. To take more than two weeks vacation straight was, for example, not really accepted less there was something special, like a honeymoon or an overseas vacation very far away”*.

While Victoria never experienced any demeaning comments directly related to her gender, she was sure that there would have been routines to handle such issues and she would not have hesitated to bring it up with someone. She was asked whether her organisation had a gender equality plan, and her response was *“Gender equality plan as in number of men and women? Not to my knowledge. However, it is illegal to discriminate in any work context and this is given a lot of attention. Everyone is supposed to be evaluated after competence in recruitment processes, everyone should have the same chances etc. This is something that permeates the entire American culture. For example, I never experienced being treating me differently because I was from another country, had a degree from an unknown University or that they did not know how to pronounce my name (her name in this thesis is fictitious, authors’ comment). As long as I had the competence requested and seemed like a nice person, that was the only thing that mattered. The fact that I was from another country was only seen as exotic and fascinating. Perhaps it would have been different had I come from a less developed country”*. Neither Victoria nor her colleagues had been to any gender issues related education *“the thought has probably never even occurred to them. I experience gender issues as much more in focus in Sweden than abroad”*. There were no corporate female networks support, according to Victoria.

## **5.2 Analysis**

### ***5.2.1 Australia***

There are a number of indications that the women do experience a masculine culture in Australia. The culture premieres strong and assertive leaders before cooperation, it has a distinct goal orientation, in higher levels you are expected to live in order to work, the acceptance for deviating opinions is relatively low, and the only organisation large enough to do so rewarded achievements with material rewards. Adding to this is the distinct gender roles present, where women are expected not to have enough time for a career and to be home more often with sick children, while men are brought on sales meetings more often, not expected to stay home when a child is sick and does not have paternity leave. These are all indications of a masculine culture (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Hofstede, 1984). There are, however a number of indications that the culture the women describe deviates from a full masculine culture. In their specific

workplaces there were no tasks done more often by one gender than the other, low level of competition among co-workers, in lower levels you work in order to live, and conflicts were solved mainly through communication and a willingness to reach consensus. These are all traits of a non-masculine or feminine culture (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Hofstede 1984). This mixed image is consistent with Hofstede's (1984) cultural masculinity index where Australia scored 61 - a number on the upper half of the scale, yet not too far from the lower half either.

Even though respondent Caroline is the only of the two who, on a direct question, responded that she had experienced the glass ceiling phenomenon, both women describe a glass ceiling structure where women are equally or even predominantly represented throughout their organisations, while on higher levels they are less represented or not represented at all (Kanter, 1977; Cotter et.al, 2001; the Economist, 2014). They also describe a predominantly masculine culture with prejudice such as regarding who are the main caretaker of children, and low flexibility - as Caroline put it "*the demand to always work does not go together well with family life*" (Caroline) - which are all causes behind the glass ceiling phenomenon (Cotter et. al, 2001).

Many obstacles described in the research context chapter are confirmed in the empirical review. There is the low flexibility in regards to the balance between work and family life stressed by Linehan and Walsh (1999), women are being excluded from recruitment processes in accordance with Adler's (1979) findings, prejudice against women and exclusion from male networks in conjunction with a lack of female networks both also found in Linehan and Walsh's (1999) results. The importance of female networks was highlighted as important in Harrison and Michailova's (2012) work.

### ***5.2.2 Singapore***

As with Australia, there are many indications of a masculine culture in Singapore too. A high focus on results and goals before life quality was described, leaders were supposed to be strong and assertive, and a division of gender roles was present as women were expected to "*hang out at the pool*" (Anna) and in the office they handled administrative work. Furthermore, they were seen as the main caretaker of children. These are all traits of a masculine culture (Hofstede,

1984; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). The culture was also described as masculine by the respondent. However, conflicts were also described as solved mainly by communication and consensus, cooperation with subordinates was accepted, coworker competition was low and these are traits of a non-masculine or a feminine culture (Hofstede, 1984; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). This picture is overall not too far from what one could have expected from Hofstede's masculinity index score of 48, i.e. in the middle of the scale.

There were no direct indications of a glass ceiling phenomenon present. The respondent had not experienced this phenomenon, and there were no other direct indications in her description that such phenomenon was present. In fact, the organisation was described as to have won several gender equality related prizes. However, the Singaporean culture is still described as a relatively masculine one, where prejudice about women's role in society exists and where flexibility between work and family life is low due to long work hours and high focus on results. Since these are causes behind the glass ceiling phenomenon (Cotter et. al, 2001), there are indirect indications that the phenomenon is present.

Regarding obstacles highlighted in the research context, a few were found in Anna's description. Prejudice against women surfaced when Anna dealt with local companies, and there was a lack of flexibility between work and family life, both also found in Linehan and Walsh's (1999) work. Furthermore, there was no support for female networks which was highlighted as important in Harrison and Michailova's (2012) work.

### ***5.2.3 The People's republic of China***

In Maria's description, several traits of a masculine culture can be found. The leadership role is described as strong and assertive, as they are expected to clearly state the subordinates' tasks, and not to gather opinions from subordinates before decisions are made. There is a low regard for quality of life described, as focus on results is described as very strong and regards for employees' health as low. Rewards are described as material and competition between co-workers as harsh. Even though they are not what one might expect from a western perspective, the gender roles are still clearly described as divided into tasks and roles. These are

traits of a masculine culture, according to Hofstede (1984) and Hofstede & Hofstede (2005). There is also indications of a high power distance being present. Maria describes the relationship between managers and their subordinates as strict, there is no interest in the employee's life outside work, nor in their opinions before making a managerial decision. According to Maria, managers can place high demands on their subordinates and the tolerance for deviations are low, and there is no 'open door policy'. These are traits of a high power distance in the culture (Hofstede, 1984; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005), which, is correlated to a masculine culture (de Mooij, 2005). Not much speaks against a masculine culture in Maria's description. Even though the leaders' characteristics in a quote is described as "*the whole scale*" (Maria), from dominant and assertive to almost invisible, that is later described as a result of networking and knowing the right people, rather than actual character traits of what is culturally considered a good manager or leader. China has a masculinity index score of 66 which is well within the upper half of the scale (Hofstede, 1984), and the image painted by Maria does not deviate much from what one might would have expected from that score.

Maria's story contains many gender role descriptions. Wives and mother in law's, i.e. women, are the main responsible for family life including economy, mothers have a very dominant and pampering role in their son's lives, and in an example the husband had trouble following his wife on an expatriate assignment because he wanted to be the one initiating such an endeavour. Men, on the other hand, are described as irresponsible, in greater need of material rewards to display success, and short-term thinking in their efforts to acquire these material rewards. These are all expectations on how one should behave in different context, based on gender, in accordance with Eagly's (1987) findings.

Maria describes a culture with many flexibility inhibiting traits. In her description, family life has low priority. There is a low acceptance for staying home with a sick child, or if one self is sick, and very strong focus on results are things that Maria describes. When work constitutes a big commitment, it will affect private and family life adversely (Adams et. al, 1996).

The respondent further described a fifty-fifty gender representation overall while the top positions were mostly men, which are characteristics of the glass ceiling (Cotter et al, 2001). At the same time, the culture show many signs of being masculine as described above, there are preconceptions about women's role in society - such as who has the main family responsibility, described as being the wife and her mother - and flexibility is low, also described above. Those are, as mentioned, causes behind this barrier phenomenon (Cotter et. al, 2001) and would further indicate its existence. There is also a gender equality program described where top management aims to reach a 32 per cent share of women, indicating that the Swedish female expatriate's organisation might be aware of such a barrier phenomenon.

Reviewing Maria's story from a 'research context perspective', i.e. matching obstacles and experiences explored in chapter four in this thesis with such experienced by the respondent, there is not much to find. However, there is a distinct tilt in the balance between work and family life towards the former and expectations on women to take on certain defined roles, both also highlighted by Linehan and Walsh (1999). While male trailing partner's difficulties with following his wife on expatriate assignments abroad was also something brought up by Linehan and Walsh (1999), the context is different. In their description the male trailing partner were unhappy with following his wife abroad, holding the expatriate back from her assignment or reducing the chances of assignment success. In Maria's description the expatriate was sent from China, thus not affecting Swedish female expatriates sent abroad. It does, however, strengthen the image of divided gender roles when he is uncomfortable with not being the one initiating the endeavour since assertiveness, as opposed to "*just coming along nicely*" and "*just fall into the line and follow suit*" (Maria), and being the agent - i.e. agentic behaviour, such as exerting control requirements, self-assuredness, ambitiousness, independentness - are traits of a masculine gender role (Eagly, 1987).

### ***5.2.3 The United States of America***

In Victoria's description there is a mix of characteristics from both a non-masculine or feminine culture and from a masculine one. Masculine traits described, according to Hofstede (1984) and

Hofstede & Hofstede (2005), were a strong focus on goals and results before quality of life, strong and assertive leaders, competition among the coworkers, material rewards, and the fact that all administrative personnel was female - indicating a division of gender roles. Speaking for a more non-masculine or feminine culture, again according to Hofstede (1984) and Hofstede & Hofstede (2005), in her experiences, was the importance of cooperation, the conflicts solved through communication and strive for consensus, and that gathering opinions from subordinates and utilising their competence was seen as natural.

Even though several interview questions was meant to explore a potential presence of a glass ceiling phenomenon, there is not much indicating a presence, nor an absence, of such a phenomenon in the respondent's experiences. The combination of it only being approximately twenty per cent women in the organisation and it being described as being only a few women in manager position does not provide enough basis for analysis. However, the respondent describes a fairly masculine culture with both career focus and a relatively low flexibility which are causes behind - thus indications of - the glass ceiling phenomenon (Cotter et. al, 2001), yet hardly evidence, and she did not experience the glass ceiling herself.

Examining her story through glasses built by the research context, one finds that she would have found it easier to gain her co-workers respect in some situations, had she been a man, in accordance with Adler's findings (1979), and a lack of organisational support for female networking, highlighted as important by Linehan and Welsh (1999).

#### ***5.2.4 Analysis summary***

China displayed the most masculine culture of the countries described, with its significant power distance, clearly defined gender roles, strong focus on work ahead of family life, heavy results focus ahead of quality of life, harsh competition in the workplace, distinct achievement focus with material rewards, and low regards for 'the weak' (e.g. the sick). While China displayed the most masculine culture, Singapore displayed the least masculine one. Even though there are similarities between the countries - such as focus on results, strong and assertive leadership, and



defined gender roles - Singapore, in contrast to China, was described as having a less high power distance, lower competition among co-workers, and consensus-seeking to solve conflicts. These differences and similarities between the countries would confirm their respective masculinity scores, listed in the theoretical framework chapter, where China has the highest and Singapore the lowest. Regarding the manager's role, again China stands out from the crowd. While all countries were described as promoting strong and assertive leaders, Chinese managers are described as having no regards for employee's opinions nor for their well-being. The manager-employee relation is described as very strict, and focused on results above all else. This description is in accordance with the Chinese power distance score of 88, which is the highest among the countries described in this thesis (Hofstede, 1984). In contrast, in the United States, cooperation and two-way communication with subordinates was seen as something 'natural' and social competence were one of the important characteristics of a manager in terms of promotion, indicating that the manager role to some degree also is a leadership role where subordinates are not expected to blindly follow the manager's dictate - as with Chinese subordinates - but need to be led. The United States having the least extensive power distance among the countries examined in this thesis is not entirely in accordance with Hofstede's (1984) findings where Australia scored 36 and the United States 40 - but it is not a surprisingly large deviation either. A comparison between Australia and the United States shows that while cooperation with subordinates is considered 'natural' in the United States, it is only considered 'acceptable' in Australia, and that the acceptance for deviating opinions is also low in the latter. As a result of its high power distance, China was also found to have the lowest work-life balance flexibility with low regard for quality of life, low regards for the employees' health and low priority of family life. Regarding obstacles described in the fourth chapter, the analysis of Australia displayed the most signs of these while the United States displayed the least. None of them encouraged female networking and both of them was described as having prejudice against women, but the former was also described as having low work-life flexibility and as excluding women from recruitment processes in accordance with Adler's (1979) findings.

## **6. Conclusions, future research and practical implications**

### **6.1 Findings by country and contribution**

This thesis set out to explore Swedish female expatriates perceptions and experiences of cultural masculinity, and finds that there are many similarities but also differences between the countries.

Australia displayed a mixed image of masculinity, confirming its masculinity score in the theoretic framework, where leadership is exerted through clear directives that are not to be questioned by subordinates and where gender roles are distinguishable yet not as clear as they could have been. The country also displayed a distinct glass ceiling tendency where competence was not the only basis for promotion but where prejudice, lack of family life flexibility and cultural masculinity contaminated the recruitment processes in a way that put women at a disadvantage, reducing efficiency in human resource management. Furthermore, obstacles to women's careers were found in the expatriates' experiences further putting women at a disadvantage and showing that measures to increase flexibility between work and family life needs to be taken, recruitment processes need to be reviewed not to exclude women from consideration, and that female networking need to be encouraged. Measures to combat cultural masculinity and prejudice are also needed.

In Singapore, empirical data points to a predominantly masculine culture, albeit ambiguous, that is one of the least masculine of the countries described in this thesis. Once again leadership is exerted through clear directives, however, a leader is also expected to cooperate with subordinates. Gender roles are clear and women are met with prejudice, especially when dealing with local partners, but also within the expatriate's own organisation. Flexibility in Singapore is low with long work days and low regards to family life, while the effect of this was somewhat negated by availability of au pairs, this is affecting women's careers in Singapore adversely due to their higher responsibility towards family life. While the expatriate was asked several questions regarding different signs of the glass ceiling phenomenon, such as regarding the distribution of women in different levels of her organisation, the expatriate's experiences of

Singapore did not provide basis for conclusions regarding presence of the barrier phenomenon. However, obstacles were found holding women's careers back. Work to reduce prejudice against women needs to be initiated, measures to provide more flexibility between work and family life need to be taken, and initiatives to promote female networking is needed.

Empiric data show that Swedish female expatriates sent abroad to China experience managerial roles that are very dominant and assertive, the most dominant and assertive among the countries described in this thesis. There is no acceptance for deviating opinions, in fact for almost no opinions at all, from subordinates and no leniency should a subordinate not be able to fulfill its obligations, no matter the reason. The organisational hierarchy is very strict in China, and the regards for quality of life is none. The term 'managerial' used in the first sentence of this paragraph is more appropriate than 'leadership' since the empirical data show such a distance between managers and employees that is so great that possible leader traits of the managers are more or less irrelevant. Furthermore, the competition between co-workers is harsh, turning employees against each other in order to win material rewards so that social status can be gained through display of items. According to empirical data, expatriates sent to China experience a very strong cultural masculinity, much stronger than in any of the other countries described. This is not what one would have expected from the cultural masculinity index scores for the countries, where only minor differences can be found between them. They also experience distinct and divided gender roles. There are norms for what roles women and men take in society, and they are clearly visible. The lack of flexibility between work and family life experienced in China is a greater barrier to women's careers than it is to men's, since the former's greater responsibilities towards family. The glass ceiling phenomenon was also experienced, which was not surprising considering the very masculine culture, the low flexibility and prejudice regarding women's role in society as the main homemakers. Practical obstacles were relatively absent in the expatriate's story, however, there is a need for measures promoting flexibility between work and family life, prejudice regarding women's role in society need to be combated, and since networking was described to have such an important role in career making, women's networking need to be promoted by the expatriate's organisation.

The empirical data further shows that female Swedish expatriates assigned to the United States experiences one of the least masculine culture of the countries described, while still a masculine one. As a leader you are once again expected to exert a fairly dominant role where goals and results are important, while the subordinates opinions are of interest and competences are relatively well utilised. Regarding the glass ceiling phenomenon, even though several questions were designed to explore the expatriates experiences of it, there is a lack of direct indications in the expatriate's story. However, looking at her description of recruitment processes, the expatriate highlights that they are being done with competence in focus. This prompts the question what is regarded as competence in her organisation. An answer is found in her statement that the characteristics that are sought after are more common among men than among women, indirectly affecting women's careers adversely, and that it would be easier to gain co-workers respect in some situations, had she been a man. If competence is defined as something more associated with characteristics in turn associated predominantly with men, affecting the recruitment process, this would skew the gender distribution in higher levels. Together with indirect indications such as the culture being masculine, prejudice regarding women's role (e.g. seen as the main caretaker), and flexibility being relatively low, there is enough basis to conclude that Swedish female expatriates sent on assignment to the United States face a glass ceiling phenomenon that affects their ability to make a career adversely. Regarding practical obstacles to women's expatriatism in the United States, a need for female networking support from the organisation is found in the expatriates experiences, and a need for measures to combat disadvantages caused by masculine culture - such as prejudice against women regarding their roles in society and in the workplace (as women were seen as the main caretaker), and lack of flexibility between work and family life - is also found in the expatriate's experiences.

This thesis has contributed by exploring and describing Swedish female expatriates experiences of cultural masculinity while sent abroad. It has gathered empirical data from such expatriates, interpreted it through relevant theoretical framework and matched it with other experiences found in previous research within the field of female expatriatism and international business, it

has drawn conclusions from these interpretations and thus created an understanding of the data adding to mentioned field of research. Through this created understanding it has fulfilled its purpose, and answered its research question.

## **6.2 Future research**

The empirical data of this thesis is of a qualitative nature. In order to provide more knowledge regarding issues described a larger quantitative study with standardised questions should be made on Swedish female expatriate managers sent abroad. More advanced statistical methods can be used to distinguish patterns. A contribution of this sort could be used in conjunction with others like it, e. g. about female expatriates from other countries or in specific industries, in order to study potential patterns that would emerge. Does the home country culture have an affect? Does patterns in home country matter, such as high-tech or export orientation? Such questions could be answered.

Studies about what measures are effective under what circumstances should be made in order to guide corporations in their effort to become more competitive and for science to gain a greater understanding of them. Inefficient measures could cost more than they do good.

Finally, more studies about the connection between gender issues awareness in regards to corporate income and costs in a specifically Swedish expatriate manager environment should be made to further expand the pool of knowledge in that area. It would serve as a basis for a deeper understanding, but would also contribute to a debate both in business and society in general where there are many strong feelings and where old ways might need to be questioned.

## **6.3 Implications for practitioners**

This thesis presents and interprets several experiences of Swedish female expatriates sent abroad, providing insights useful in the preparation of other Swedish female expatriates about to be sent abroad. It provides concrete descriptions of issues and circumstances that might arise, from the respondent' own perspectives, and through a theoretical framework creates an understanding of

them that help guide future expats and organisations both in their expat preparation work, and during ongoing expat mission - thus help organisation's HR-efficiency. The thesis provides an understanding why it is important to work specifically with the issues women in described contexts face and what might be the consequences of falling behind on these issues. It further helps managers responsible for recruitment processes make a more conscient process, e. g. through showing that while female expatriates sent abroad do face obstacles due to their gender, they also tend to overcome them and succeed in their missions.

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## Appendix I

### Interview questions

#### *About the person*

- What is your current position?
- How many years of experience do you have?

#### *About the workplace*

- What percentage of the employees are women?
- Are there any female managers? If so, in which position?

Short about what the glass ceiling is followed by: Have you experienced any invisible barriers such at the glass ceiling?

#### *Culture*

- Would you say that your organisation's culture premieres strong leaders before cooperation and consensus?
- Would you say that achievement and goal orientation are stronger ideals than quality of life and flexibility?
- Take a moment to reflect on your workplace. Are there any tasks that are more often done by any gender? Examples: Cleans dishes, meddle between coworkers etc
- Reflecting on our workplace, what would you say is more accurate. That you work to live, or live to work?
- Would you say that most conflicts are solved through mostly negotiation and meddling, or through social or other leader taking the command deciding how to proceed?
- Would you describe the culture in your workplace as masculine or feminine?

- If you reflect on promotions and career in your organisation, what top character traits and qualities are encouraged?
- Are you as a leader expected to gather opinions from your subordinates before making a decision, or would that be considered a sign of weakness?
- How would it be considered if you were to ask your subordinates for help with something that you do not know how to do, or ask questions requesting knowledge that you do not have? Would they think that you do not know your job?
- How important would you say that assertiveness is as a leader?
- Would you say that the organisation's culture affects women's abilities to make a career adversely?
- In what way would you say that the organisation's culture affects the respect received by women compared to the respect received by men?
- Would you say that the organisation promotes female networking in any way? Examples: Groups, mingle, after work activities.
- Would you say that the culture of your organisation helps foster and utilize female competence and experiences?
- Are office achievements mainly rewarded with bonuses and material rewards, or by the appreciation, respect and regards from your coworkers?
- How competitive would you say that the culture in your workplace is?
- Do you feel that you need to signal a strength and toughness, or do you feel that it is okay to show weakness?
- Would you say that there is more acceptance or even expectations for you to prioritise family life, than for a male coworker with the same responsibilities?
- Do you feel that there is a trade-off between family and career in your organisation?

*Respect and regards*

- How would you describe the way your gender affects the ability of your subordinates' to respect you?
- How would you describe the way your gender affects the ability of your superordinates' to listen to your suggestions and knowledge?
- Have you experienced situations where you are disparaged, verbally or otherwise, simply because of your gender?
- If you were faced with discrimination or disparaging with regards to your gender, would you feel comfortable contacting an organisation representative? Is it clear to you who to contact? Would the organisation help you? Does your organisation have routines on how to deal with these issues?
- Does your organisation have a gender equality plan, and is it being taken seriously?  
Införlivas i verksamheten?
- Have you and your coworkers been in any implementory measures, such as courses or group discussions concerning gender issues?