JÖNKÖPING INTERNATIONAL
BUSINESS SCHOOL
JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

Female Entrepreneurs and Networks

Exploring the secret of successful networking

Master Thesis within:	Business Administration
Author:	Lucia Liščáková &
	Nadezhda Lisichkova
Tutor:	Prof. Leona Achtenhagen
Jönköping	May 2014

Acknowledgments

Master Thesis in Business Administration

Title: Female Entrepreneurs and Networks: Exploring the secret of successful networking

Authors: Lucia Liščáková & Nadezhda Lisichkova

Tutor: Prof. Leona Achtenhagen

Date: 2014-05-12

Key words: Female Entrepreneurs, Women Entrepreneurship, Network, Networking, Business Growth

----

Abstract

In this Master Thesis, we study the characteristics of networks used by female entrepreneurs in Sweden. The authors conduct twenty-two semi-structured interviews with Swedish female entrepreneurs and investigate the relation between the characteristics of the networks and achieving business development. In the study, an extensive literature review is presented, combining female entrepreneurship theories and network theories. Later, the literature review serves as a basis for the analysis as it provides an understanding of the networks, network types and characteristics of the networks used by women entrepreneurs, with the latter also related to business growth.

The findings reveal networks to be inspiring, motivating and supportive; helping women to reduce the fear of failure; as well as they include the inability to always fulfill the needs and expectations of female entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the quality of the network is found to be the most important characteristic as it has impact on the motivation for business growth, the business growth itself, and the access to resources.

Finally, the paper provides suggestions for further research including the development of a networking project as envisioned by the women entrepreneurs included in the study.

Table of Contents:

Appendixes

1 Introduction

In today's world, the majority of the people are thriving for becoming prosperous no matter the industry or the approach, which might differ from person to person. When it comes to entrepreneurs, this need might be even greater. However, it is not simple to become a successful entrepreneur; it takes a lot of effort as well as resources. Due to this reason, many entrepreneurs engage in creating networks in order to gain valuable information and resources which help them especially in the start-up phase (Ud Dowla, 2011). The world we are living in today is highly interconnected and therefore there is a need to trigger economic resurgence and close the gap in social and economic inequity (Nelson, 2012). Entrepreneurs might be characterized by their independence and autonomy but at the same time, they are also dependent on links of trust and cooperation. The ability of the entrepreneur to build and develop networks beginning from the start-up phase of the business is crucial for the later stages of the business development and for entrepreneurial growth (McAdam, 2012).

When looking at women's entrepreneurship in particular, the emergence of this topic is often traced back to the 1980s (Hisrich & Brush, 1986). Since then, there has been a dramatic increase of scholarly research in this field. In order to compensate for the lack of attention paid to female entrepreneurs and their initiatives as the field develops and matures, there is a need for research in new directions (Hughes et al., 2012). Nevertheless, a gap remains concerned with the question of how exactly networking is connected to and how it influences female entrepreneurs in different industries. While there is much research in the field of networking, and there is much research in the field of female entrepreneurship, little is known of how these two fields interact and influence each other. Networks are shown to boost women's entrepreneurs' access to market, provide them with business opportunities and pave the path for them to participate in policymaking, thus leading towards successful economic development (Nelson, 2012).

1.1 Background

An increasing number of women is entering today's business environment. The GEM Women's Report states that in 2012, an estimated 126 million women were starting or running new businesses in 67 economies around the world (Kelley et al., 2013). In addition, about 98 million women were running established businesses. These women are

not only creating jobs for themselves and their co-founders but they also employ others. A projected 48 million female entrepreneurs and 64 million female business owners currently employ one or more people in their businesses. Moreover, many of these women plan to grow their businesses. A predicted seven million female entrepreneurs and five million females established business owners plan to grow their businesses by at least six employees over the next five years (Kelley et al., 2013).

Despite the gender equality that Sweden is famous for, researchers still find evidence that women are underestimated in terms of business ownership and managerial positions. And there also still is a gap in the salaries for equally qualified men and women on the same position. Even though women appear to be climbing up the corporate ladder, there is still well hidden discrimination against them in the workplace that is becoming harder to detect (Johnston, 2014). Sweden has very well-developed parental benefits system which includes paid paternal leave for 18 months, tax-funded daycare, paid leave in case of sick children, etc. (Kelley et al., 2013). Women entrepreneurship has been found to be highly influenced by the impact the welfare system has and public healthcare has been labeled as 'women friendly' (Hernes, 1987). But despite that, gender segregation is still visible in the labor market where not only professions but also whole industries are labeled as 'male' (SCB, 2012).

In order to fight the gender segregation, it is essential to understand the reasons and factors behind that inequality. Therefore, for example in Sweden, in the last decade, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth funded a research program, named 'Female Entrepreneurship and Management'. The program involves a dozen of researchers on the territory of Sweden who work actively with supplementing entrepreneurship theory with focus on women's entrepreneurship and gender theory but also with "policy, practice and support systems" (Achtenhagen & Tillmar, 2013, p.6). Internationally, a project named 'Diana' was started in 1997 by Candida Brush, Elisabeth Gatewood, Nancy Carter, Myra Hart and Patricia Greene to develop the studies on women's entrepreneurship and which nowadays involves researchers from 23 countries, including Nordic countries.

Moreover, the Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems also invested in a research program- 'Research on women's entrepreneurship', that involved ten research projects in universities on the territory of Sweden between 2007 and 2011. The assump-

tion for the decision to create this program was to rejuvenate the research and to increase the awareness about women's entrepreneurship and consequently, to increase the number of female entrepreneurs by fostering entrepreneurship with different policies. For that purpose, the research was focused on discovering the challenges that women entrepreneurs face. The Swedish government stated in 2008 that female entrepreneurship and businesses owned by women will be favored in the municipalities that introduce customer choice. The impact on supporting women's entrepreneurship is claimed to be lost regardless of all these programs and projects, not only in Sweden but in the European Union as well, as powerful women politicians and economists failed to efficiently work together (Achtenhagen & Tillmar, 2013).

The viability of a start-up can be influenced by many factors; therefore researchers have started to recognize the importance of networking and its impact on business development in general (Johnston, 2014). Entrepreneurs and managers have to be able to perform countless and different tasks for which they often do not have any prior training. In these circumstances, it can be very valuable to have support, receive advice from friends, or get help from personal contacts in order to gain resources, add and increase value, as well as discover new market opportunities and exploit them (Ibarra, 1992; Renzulli et al., 2000). Granovetter (1973) clarifies that business organizations are rooted in networks, consisting of interpersonal relations and bigger social structures.

Additionally, networking is closely connected to the degree of success or failure of an entrepreneur. Johannisson (1996) emphasizes the benefits one can receive from mutual exchange in personal networks. The need for networking for the purpose of achieving successful venture growth is also underlined (Johannisson & Nilsson, 1989). Furthermore, networks can provide different external benefits such as financial resources, important information and expertise or support.

Certain articles when studying women's networks, tend to incline towards measuring the networks used by men as a standard when evaluating women's networks. Foss (2010, p.87) claims that this type of assumption is rather easy to test but such tests do not suggest new insights as "theoretical arguments are not developed for why women should or are less capable at networking than men". Instead, such research studies commonly start with the statement that women are incapacitated in their capability to network in similar way as men due to their 'given' role in the family and in society.

3

Therefore, there is the need of studies exploring women's entrepreneurs' networking in their own right, as it may illustrate a different view point which could add to the knowledge on how individuals view and operationalize entrepreneurship (de Bruin et al., 2007).

1.2   Problem

The previous part of the thesis offered an overview of the background regarding female entrepreneurship and networking. But understanding the behavior of women entrepreneurs and the driving forces for them to engage in business activities appears to be highly related to the use of networks and their relation to business growth, as well as to their growth ambitions.

A limited number of articles discuss the question by studying the impact of gender on the capacity of entrepreneurs to assemble the resources and the support that might be required for the survival and growth of new businesses (e.g. Aldrich et al., 1997), the relation between networking and performance (Aldrich & Reese, 1993), networking and entrepreneurial outcomes of women's business ownership (Renzulli et al., 2000), human capital and networking on growth expectancies (Manolova et al., 2007).

In this thesis we focus on the networks and the network characteristics used by female entrepreneurs in Sweden, as existing research does not yet adequately address the question of how the main actors in the women-owned enterprises - the female entrepreneurs perceive and use networking.

Thus, the problem identified is a lack of knowledge on networking, as used by female entrepreneurs.

1.3   Purpose

The purpose of this master thesis is to explore the content of the networks used by female entrepreneurs and the effects of networking as perceived by them. More specifically, what type of networking and social networking do female entrepreneurs use in order to add value to their start-up businesses; the benefits and the significance of network for supporting the business development and growth of the entrepreneurial activities.

1.4   Disposition

This thesis is structured as follows. We will first present a literature review on the fields of female entrepreneurship and networks. Next, we introduce the method and sample. It provides an overview of the study, elaborates on the used research philosophy connected to the purpose of this paper and discusses the research strategy. After that, we present the findings integrated with analysis in one chapter. Lastly, we provide the conclusions, limitations connected to this thesis and suggestions for future research.

2   Literature review

"I wanted to be a 150% entrepreneur and a 150% mom, and I found that I was having a very hard time doing both. I was about 75% and 75% – still better than 100%, but not what I was accustomed to at work"- **Barbara Corcoran** (Main Quotes, n.d.)

As the purpose of our study is to understand the characteristics of the networks used by female entrepreneurs, the literature review starts with a brief introduction of entrepreneurship and female entrepreneurship; followed by motivation and characteristics of women entrepreneurs, including the comparisons between male and female entrepreneurs; then continues with networks and network structure; and finishes with the link between venture development and support from networks.

2.1 Entrepreneurship and female entrepreneurship

The emergence of female entrepreneurship as an academic topic is often traced back to the late 1970s and early 1980s (e.g. DeCarlo & Lyons, 1979; Hisrich & Brush, 1986). Since then, there has been a dramatic increase of scholarly activity and research in the field of women's entrepreneurship. Nowadays, women's entrepreneurship is a phenomenon researched around the globe. Jennings and Brush (2013) state that historically, the focus of this research was aimed at women who run their own business, including the self-employed entrepreneurs. Moreover, the authors argue that much of the previous research work explores the processes of how women become entrepreneurs, the consequences of this, the contextual and psychological factors that inhibit women's entrepreneurial activity, and whether the mentioned processes, factors and consequences are different from their male counterparts.

The literature about female entrepreneurship provides quite a good picture on the different dimensions relevant for female entrepreneurs. The majority of the literature is heavily dominated by studies originating from the USA and other English- speaking countries, followed by studies conducted in the Scandinavia – mainly in Sweden and Norway. There has been a huge progress in the last decade with an increasing number of articles regarding women's entrepreneurship published in different prestigious journals such as Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice, Journal of Business Venturing, Journal

of Small Business Management, and Entrepreneurship and Regional Development (Ahl, 2004).

This trend can be expected to continue growing (De Bruin et al., 2006). For example, Brush and Hisrich (1991) analyzed how the increasing importance of women entrepreneurs forces banks and other financial institutions to embrace these entrepreneurial groups and treat them not only as important for the financial operations but also consider in an aspect that might give competitive advantage (Smith-Hunter, 2006). Banks are also taking actions to target female entrepreneurs as they recognize the importance of women's entrepreneurship and its vitality for future profitability of the financial institutions (Kessler, 2001).

2.2 Characteristics of female entrepreneurs

35% of female entrepreneurs in Sweden are 45 years old or younger in comparison to 27% of male entrepreneurs (Tillväxtverket, 2014). Thus, female entrepreneurs in Sweden appear to be younger than found in other studies, such as stated by Devine (1994) where women on average, have a tendency to be older in age, usually married, with higher education in college, and earning less compared to the wages and salary of the male counterparts. The study looked upon factors such as age, marital status, educational level and earnings in a large scale research project on the characteristics of self-employed women by using data from the 'United States 1990 Current Population Study'.

The subcategory of women who are highly educated and professional was rising among female entrepreneurs in Sweden (Holmquist & Sundin, 1990). Most of them are single and living or lived in relatively big cities. The married women on the other hand, are described as overachievers trying to balance effectively both- a successful professional career and family, at the same time. But despite the moderately high number of women that have and run their own business, these women are characterized as being invisible in many contexts. These women also possess diverse characteristics dependent on the geographical area, size and type of industry and business.

There is a direct pattern between the relationship status of women and the fact whether they are running the business with their partner, as the women entrepreneurs adjust their

enterprise to the family situation (Holmquist & Sundin, 1990). Additionally, there is a direct pattern between the educational level and the likelihood of a person to become entrepreneur (Dolinsky, 1993). The probability of entering, staying, and reentering the business ownership is enhanced with the level of educational completion. This was found to be accurate for women the same way as it had been recounted for men earlier. The women are as well educated as men (Birley et al., 1987) and therefore cannot actually be assumed to need any specific gender business training. In Sweden, 45% of female entrepreneurs have achieved a higher level of education in comparison to 35% of male entrepreneurs as according to Tillväxtverket (2014).

2.2.1 The start-up process and motivation factors

The reasons and motivations for women's entrepreneurship differ. According to GEM Women's Report (2012), there are two primary motives for entering entrepreneurship-necessity and opportunity to pursue the possibility. Necessity-driven entrepreneurship includes also people who are pushed into entrepreneurship, for example due to lack of other career choices or unemployment, and can help the economy to create jobs as well as take advantage from self-employment initiatives especially in less developed regions. On the other side, developed economies are able to attract those wanting to become entrepreneurs by offering more employment options. Consequently, those entrepreneurs starting their businesses are more opportunity-driven. Furthermore, acting on entrepreneurial opportunity is the primary motivation for approximately 90% of the women entrepreneurs in Denmark, Sweden and Slovenia (Kelley et al., 2013).

Certain background factors and situational factors play an important role when the woman is deciding to start her own business. These factors include age, status of employment, educational status, income size, knowledge and skills regarding the future field of business, knowing other entrepreneurs; pull factors such as independence (Cromie, 1986), and push factors such as dissatisfaction with their previous paid employment (Due Billing, 1996) and flexible combination of work and family (Duchenaut & Orhan, 1998).

Another major reason for women to embrace entrepreneurship is the 'glass ceiling'- a term representing an invisible barrier that prevents women from climbing up the management ladder in organizations (Lewis & Cooper, 1995). Managing their own business

and the chance to receive income whilst addressing family issues, attracted women to entrepreneurship and acted as motivation reason for them to leave the labor market and start their own venture (Loscocco, 1997). Additionally, women tend to enter entrepreneurship due to the need to balance family and work and interestingly, it could be questioned why this is not considered as an issue for men. Entrepreneurial careers provide flexibility which is important to women who are single with no children and it becomes even more important to those with families. For this reason, it is crucial to support female entrepreneurship in every way possible, versus just generally supporting the women entrepreneurs as taking care of family and kids does not need to be considered primarily as a women task.

2.2.2 Are women and men equally likely to engage in entrepreneurial activity?

Many studies have been conducted to find out whether men and women differ in their tendency to get involved in entrepreneurship. Females are less likely to be engaged in different forms of entrepreneurial activity and be self-employed compared to males (Jennings & Brush, 2013). This fact holds true worldwide. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Women's Report by Kelley et al. (2011), out of the 59 participating economies, Ghana was the only country with more women entrepreneurs. Moreover, only a couple of economies had approximately equal numbers of men and women entrepreneurs. The vast majority of the economies had more men entrepreneurs. Other research, based on labor market datasets, entails that women are less likely to be self-employed than men (Lerner et al., 1997). Also, women are less likely to be engaged in academic entrepreneurship, probably due to the commercialization of scientific research (Jennings & Brush, 2013).

Consequently, companies owned by women are viewed as an asset that is underdeveloped in our society. Chua and Wu (2012) note that women entrepreneurs suffer from higher borrowing costs compared to men in the terms of taking a loan, thus pointing out a significant gender difference. Women also tend to establish a company with lower levels of initial capital (Carter et al., 2003). A considerably smaller percentage of female-owned firms (less than 9%) seeks angel investment compared to male-owned firms (Becker-Blease & Sohl, 2007). However, wouldn't it be more appropriate to focus

on comparing samples of women, rather than comparing female and male entrepreneurs, since this would allow researchers to better understand gendered attributes and processes in new ventures?

2.3 Why networks?

Human and social capital is a critical component of the capabilities and knowledge of the entrepreneur (Greene et al., 1997). An indicator of the person's social capital is their network. It is a key component which aim is to increase the potential of the entrepreneur's human capital and to affect their success.

Entrepreneurship has been found to be embedded in networks of ongoing social relations and thus, it is either controlled or enabled by the linkages between resources, entrepreneurs and opportunities (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986). Moreover, social relations are rooted in the economic behavior or action of companies or individuals (cf. Granovetter, 1985). Social relations in networks are seen as important for the research of entrepreneurship and therefore need to be further investigated. Additionally, the development of networks and contacts has been found to be a key factor in determining whether the venture will fail or not.

For some decades, scholars have been focusing their research on the importance of networks and social relations as an aid towards business creation and growth. Researching networks is a popular topic in studies about entrepreneurship but only few studies include women and they "show non-conclusive results" (de Bruin et al., 2007, p. 325). The significance of networking has also emerged as an important theme from the GEM (2012) Women's Report. Essential policy measures should include developing support for networks, encouraging projects that aim at women mentors, boosting local women to create networks and make connections; and enabling other women to act as role models, as well as helping with providing advices and services (Kelley et al., 2013).

Networking can be defined as actions aimed at building, preserving and utilizing informal relationships (Forret & Dogherty, 2004). These relationships are able to support the individual's needs related to work or business by providing access to resources and accumulating possible shared benefits.

Entrepreneurial networks can be described as the sum of the relationships the entrepreneur participates in and which deliver a relevant resource for his/her activity. The relationships include the links that the entrepreneur creates with distributors, suppliers and customers, or social contacts such as friends, acquaintances and family (Drakopoulou Dodd & Patra, 2002). The networks in organizations are described as beneficial due to their impact on increasing motivation and performance (Spreitzer, 1996). On the other hand, networking between individuals can be defined by behaviors that are intended at creating, keeping and exercising informal relationships which can provide the benefit and maximize the mutual advantages by supplying access to resources. Moreover, networking is related to favorable performance ratings and to subjective and objective measures of professional success (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). The participants in networks can use their formal and informal contacts to improve their career success.

2.3.1 Networks structure

The structure of the network can be defined as connections - formal and informal of related family; social and organizational memberships that describe our level of success; as well as the resources that we have available to us in order to suit our needs, expectations, and obligations (Coughlin & Thomas, 2002).

The network's structure is discussed as social capital in the sociology literature and it has an impact on the access to resources. Moreover, it has a positive influence in the area of business ownership (Coughlin & Thomas, 2002). This influence is said to have a hidden impact on the success of the entrepreneur as it supports the access to financial resources and at the same time, helps the maturity of the human capital potential. This is achieved via linking- directly or indirectly, in a network with others. Additionally, the positive influence coming out of the network's structure also is different and thus, explained with women having less access to important networks especially when compared to men (Harlan & Weiss, 1982).

Whom you know is also recognized as an important factor in the network structure. Moreover, the characteristics of networks and their structure can be measured by using the network activity, its diversity and density, or the interrelationships between the people in the network (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986).

2.3.2 Weak ties or strong ties?

The progress of entrepreneurs is highly related to the importance and to the above mentioned influence of the connections, or ties in the network. The strength of ties in a network indicates the quality and strength of relations and the strength of the tie is a function of 'the emotional intensity, the amount of time, the reciprocal services and intimacy' (Granovetter, 1973, p.1361).

A network should include both weak and strong ties due to the reason that the nature of the ties has an impact on the structure and the operation of networks (Granovetter, 1973). Several benefits are connected to the information as well as the support achieved through the strong ties: it is more accurate and detailed; it is cheap and trustworthy; and it is more reliable because it usually comes from a continuing relationship. Strong ties also bond similar people which eventually tend to be interconnected. On the other hand, the economic action is included in ongoing networks consisting of personal relationships. Therefore, weak ties are perceived as critical element of social context and a channel through which different influences, information, or ideas reach the individual, and so Granovetter's study can be interpreted to be directed towards bridging (Patulny & Svendsen, 2007). Alternatively, Burt (2000) suggests that it is not the insiders of the network that possess the biggest advantage but the person that extends over two or more networks and is able to facilitate the interactions between them. This can be interpreted to be directed towards bonding (Patulny & Svendsen, 2007).

Female entrepreneurs are found to be positioned as less networking than men because their networks are smaller and with less weak ties (Foss, 2010) Likewise, women use weak ties less than men and tend to rely more on strong ties for example for resource acquisition (Carter et al., 2003). On the other hand, the male contacts women have in their networks can give them access to resources and opportunities. Additionally, they can increase their contact list and reduce the dependence on kin and family (Godwin et al., 2006).

2.3.3 Do women and men network differently?

Several factors affect business start-ups in relation to possible gender differences (Renzulli et al., 2000). Women's and men's social capital and the likelihood of setting-up a business should not be underestimated because the conception of social capital provides

access to resources which belong to someone's social relations. Furthermore, women and men tend to be part of different social networks. Contrary, different networks provide visions for new business ideas, relying on the quality of the resources and information flowing through them.

In a contrasting view, some authors claim that women's and men's networks are quite similar, with the argument that "women business owners have adapted to the same competitive conditions as men and continuing competitive pressures require similar behaviors, regardless of gender" (Renzulli & Aldrich, 2005, p.323). The testimonial that women's and men's networks are quite similar and not so different is also supported in the studies by Cromie and Birley (1992) and Foss (2010), where the latter states that no major differences exist in the female and male entrepreneurs' networks. This argument leads us to the question: If women and men networked similarly or with little differences in their networking behavior, would the gender gap in entrepreneurial activities still exist? Moreover, would women have the same access to financial resources, and would there be the same rate of female and male-owned business foundations?

Understanding the heterogeneity of the relationship in the networks is essential for researching the quality and type of the gathered information from the networks. Women appear to be inclined towards having more kin in their networks as well as they have more homogeneous networks (Renzulli et al., 2000). Nevertheless, homogeneity and too much kin in the network are argued to be the main disadvantages that potential small business owners have to face, as such kinship ties provide lower information levels.

There are still fewer women than men in managerial positions (Ibarra, 1993).Therefore, this minority of women also have fewer women to choose for their social networks and they do not have the same influence in the organization. Moreover, Ibarra (1992) also found that women and men use and search for social networks differently: women tend to develop two networks- one, which consists mainly of relationships with other women in order to comfort the need for support and friendship, and another which includes dominant men in the company in order to comfort the need for knowledge and advice. On the contrary, men usually tend to have relations and ties with other men in the networks.

Men actually spend more time on trying to develop and accordingly maintain their contacts, as pointed out by Cromie and Birley (1992). As time is one of the major resources for managing the business or for starting up a new venture, women endure more competing demands on their time due to their family responsibilities (Lévesque & Mac-Crimmon, 1997). Consequently, women undergo into more isolation than men (Moore & Butner, 1997) and as a result, the female entrepreneurs are having less time for networking or taking part in network activities (Mencken & Windfield, 2000).

In other studies, women entrepreneurs are found to be actually as active in networking as their male counterparts and they also have comparably dense networks (Cromie & Birley, 1992). The diversity of the women entrepreneurs' network is found to be the same as men's in regards to professional and personal relationships. Yet, women tend to rely on a male contact as their prime but revert to their own sex for the rest and the same statement is found to be true for the men as well. Women entrepreneurs are found to be afraid of failure and additionally, they are more afraid of failure compared to men (Kelley et al., 2011).

However, does having a homogenous network lead to increased social support over the cost of possible economic development in terms of resources? The network consisting of the same kin relationships provides women with the needed emotional support but it also comes with the sacrifice of business development and potential knowledge gain (Ibarra, 1992). As women are ascribed a different social position than men, this requires the woman to act as such and have feminine behavior, while men's social position involves qualities as leadership, competence, physical strength and autonomy (Deutsch, 2007). Therefore, the gendered attitude and behavior and these social roles occupied by women and men are very closely connected.

2.3.4 Networking women entrepreneurs

Networks of the entrepreneurs might spread towards other people, organizations and groups of companies that support the entrepreneur in setting up the venture (Hansen, 1995), and actually, the contacts in the networks can help the entrepreneur 'get the things done' (Greve & Salaff, 2003). Greve and Salaff (2003) also point out the importance of the concept of 'discussion networks'- subgroup including all 'first order contacts' in the network. These discussion networks are described as the amount of per-

sonal contacts the entrepreneurs turn to when they want to debate questions regarding the starting-up or running of the business, and the people in these discussion networks can help the entrepreneurs with obtaining resources for future growth of the business (Renzulli et al., 2000). Women managers incline towards discussions for advice and assistance to other females (Nicholson & West, 1988). Consequently, female entrepreneurs' networks and the contacts in them are influenced by a variety of factors that affect the access to resources leading to growth ambitions.

2.3.5 Motivations, growth ambitions and networks – are women entrepreneurs really interested in business growth?

There are three phases that are related to starting and developing a business: a) the motivation phase; b) the planning phase; and c) the establishment phase (Wilken, 1979). Greve and Salaff (2003) relate to these phases in order to identify the different activities connected with social networking. In the motivation phase, the authors claim that the entrepreneurs have relatively smaller networks consisting of close contacts that they use to test their ideas. Usually, these close contacts are mainly family members and friends. Conversely, as argued by Cromie and Birley (1992), family members are the persons in the female entrepreneur's network that will become a downside for the business if the woman is too closely oriented towards them. This is supported by Renzulli et al. (2000, p.529), who point out: "The greater the proportion of kin in an individuals' discussion network, the lower the likelihood he or she will start a new business". The assumption is that women tend to be a more 'soft' type of networkers and inclined towards collaborative approaches and at the same time, develop mixed networks that consist of both- professional and personal contacts coming from and outside the area of business (Foss, 2010).

The female entrepreneurs are likely to create an utmost performance threshold, after which the women business-owners do not want to grow more and comparatively, these thresholds have been found to be lower than the ones created by their male counterparts (Cliff, 1998). There are several factors influencing the growth of a firm, such as work experience and industry experience (Bruederl et al., 1992), or the years of education (Robinson & Sexton, 1994). The survival and the growth of a business company rely on the ability of the firm to maintain and extend its inter-firm relationships network, ac-

cording to Venkataraman and Van de Ven (1998). There is also another factor influencing the performance of the entrepreneurial activity, namely the family situation (Loscocco & Leicht, 1993). The family situation affects performance in a different way according to the owner's gender. Women seem to not want to grow more not due to the fact that they have a lower quantity of resources but because they might perceive the consequences of growing their business as more negative (Díaz & Jimenez, 2006).

Davis and Shaver (2012) studied the growth ambitions of women entrepreneurs and show growth intentions to be highly dependent on the gender, career stage and the relationships with others. Many scholars acknowledged that networks have importance as resources for business growth and developing the firm. Bogren et al. (2013) explored the motivation for women entrepreneurs in relation to networks. They conducted a study in Sweden and Norway exploring the kinds of networks and contacts that women perceive as supportive in business and found out that there are different levels of motivation of women entrepreneurs in relation to business growth. Moreover, the study stresses the idea that heterogeneity as well as diversity of the networks is strongly related to women's willingness to grow the business. Women entrepreneurs' willingness to be part of new network groupings and their motivation are both increased by taking an active role in heterogeneous and diverse networks.

When searching for financial capital, women use both informal and formal networks (Gatewood et al., 2009). The business development and growth ambitions are also connected with the access to business capital and they are not gender related (Ljunggren, 2008). Additionally, women who network more actively and have a largely spanned network, tend to expand their business more than other small business owners, no matter if it is a male or a female (McGregor & Tweed, 2002).

As seen in the literature review, networking plays a vital role in female entrepreneurs' business development. Networks provide access to knowledge and resources but the access is directly linked to the gender as well as the network behavior of the entrepreneur. Different benefits can be gained from different types of networks and are dependent on the ties included in the networks. Additionally, networks are not only beneficial for information exchange but can also help female entrepreneurs during the start-up phase and while growing their business.

3. Method

This chapter of the thesis introduces the method used in order to generate empirical data and analyze it for solving the research problem based on the data from the empirical study. Specifically, it states the definitions of the method-related terms as well as provides information on how the data was generated, who participated, and the reasons behind the chosen approaches.

3.1 Research philosophy- interpretivism

The research philosophy chosen for this thesis is interpretivism, as a crucial part of this philosophy includes adopting an empathetic stance by the researchers (Saunders et al., 2012). Interpretivism includes the strategies in sociology that interpret the actions and meanings of actors based on their self-subjective frame of reference (Williams, 2000). The authors of the thesis had to enter the social world of the subjects under study as we wanted to make sense of the world from their point of view. Since the aim of the thesis is not to generalize in a statistical sense and predict, but rather to interpret and understand human behavior, this research philosophy is suitable.

3.2 Qualitative research method

3.2.1 Definition

To be able to justify the chosen research method in relation to our topic, it is important to understand qualitative research methods more generally. According to Saunders et al. (2012), qualitative research methods comprise any data analysis practice (for instance categorizing data) or data collection technique (for instance an interview), which generates qualitative data other than numbers. In order for the qualitative data to be useful for the researcher, it has to be summarized, categorized and structured.

Norman (2002) describes qualitative research methods as those methods linked to interpretive and naturalistic types of research. This means that the subject is studied within its natural setting as well as that the results are interpreted. The interpretation can be performed by using a range of empirical data gathered through techniques such as interviews, observations and experience. Finally, Robson (2002) describes qualitative data by their fullness and richness based on the opportunity to examine the subject in its real manner.

3.2.2 Using qualitative methods

The arguments for using and justifying qualitative approach for our particular topic are as follows:

A qualitative approach is regarded as useful for this master thesis because this method enables an insightful exploration of the research objects as the empirical data can be studied by using the literature as a guidance. Moreover, it aims to understand the specific research topic from the perspective of local population included (Mack & Woodsong, 2005, p.1). Secondly, a qualitative approach is fruitful when there is a relatively small amount of research as is the case for networking considering the female entrepreneurs' point of view and among female entrepreneurs. Thirdly, qualitative research provides the ability to give "complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue" (Mack & Woodsong, 2005, p.1). Nevertheless, the study itself is context and time bound with the intention to research motives, reasons, meanings and subjective experiences of our interviewees (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

3.3 Research approach- abductive

An *abductive* approach was chosen for this master thesis. The approach allows the researcher to start from the known facts and works towards an explanation. The process goes about by having common knowledge in a specific field and conducting interviews in order to gain in-depth knowledge regarding women entrepreneurs and their use of networks. This can be referred to as interplay between the theory and the gathered data from the interviews (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

Abduction-based research focuses on the emergent worlds of the particular field of study in a way that the emergence is not restricted only to deductivist or inductivist projections alone (Patokorpia & Ahvenainenb, 2008). Since we are interpreting the collected data, the processing consists of discovering and assembling such combinations that consist of features for which there is no previous knowledge existing. Such lack of knowledge forces the authors to search for new explanations and information, therefore the abductive approach is suitable for the purpose of this study due to the fact that it recognizes that human behavior is influenced by the way the individuals interpret the situations they find themselves in (Reichertz, 2007).

3.4 Exploratory research design

This master thesis requires an *exploratory* study as the purpose is to investigate the topic of how female entrepreneurs use different types and characteristics of networks while running their business, as well as the interconnection and perceived importance of networking on business development. An exploratory study seeks to find out 'what is happening, researches new insights and asks questions in a new light' which is the purpose of this thesis (Saunders et al., 2012, p.78). Lastly, an exploratory research design fits the topic since it challenges new problems on which there has been little or no previous research done (Brown, 2006).

3.5 Data generation method- interviews

For the purpose of this master thesis, the primary data generation technique includes conducting semi-structured interviews with various female entrepreneurs on the territory of Sweden. Thereby, we can investigate more in detail and gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics of networking and its perceived effects on female entrepreneurship. Lee and Lings (2008) discuss in-depth interviewing as a useful technique of qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews are used because the researchers want to allow higher validity of response from the interviewee's perception of reality and also add more flexibility to the data generation process (cf. Burns, 2000). When the interviewees' time is limited, this type of interviews is preferably used (Hancock, 2002). Nevertheless, Robson (2002) explains the use of semi-structured interviews in relation to the exploratory study for the purpose of seeking new insides.

3.5.1 Using interviews

With the view of collecting empirical data for this thesis, interviews are believed to be the best approach. We have conducted twenty-two semi-structured interviews in which we aim to interpret the perceptions of the subjects under study as we enter the field with specific prior insight which is assumed to be deficient.

In order to investigate the characteristics of the networks used by female entrepreneurs in Sweden, it is crucial to study and understand the perceptions of the interviewees. For this purpose, interviews help to obtain the data required for the chose topic (Saunders et al., 2012).

Lastly, another argument for using interviews is that this approach of data generation provides the advantage of understanding and studying each interviewee separately.

3.6 Sample characteristics

3.6.1 Size of the sample

Data collection was generated by interviewing twenty-two female entrepreneurs in Sweden. The number of the interviews provide enough data to analyze in order to get new insights for the purpose of this study.

Since the purpose of the paper is to study the characteristics of the networks used by female entrepreneurs, the number of the interviews does not have to be extensive. However, a very small sample would not provide sufficient information needed in order to answer the purpose of this study properly.

The given time constraints did not allow the researchers of this study to perform more than twenty-two interviews. The focus was rather on interviewing quite large number of interviewees using high quality semi-structured interviews.

Lastly, by having twenty-two interviews, we have reached saturation. Saturation is the "point in data collection when no new or relevant information emerges with respect to the newly constructed theory" (Saumure & Given, 2008, p.3). Therefore it can be assumed that the information obtained from the conducted interviews is relevant to many female entrepreneurs in the same industries.

3.6.2 Criteria of the sample

There were certain criteria based on which the twenty-two interviewees have been selected. These criteria were constructed according to the theory summarized in the literature review. Hence, the participants are believed to be able to provide rich and meaningful input for the purpose of this study.

The criteria were as following (criteria are taken into consideration as additive):

1. Women who are entrepreneurs,
2. working with and owning an established business in Sweden,
3. who have run their business for at least three years prior to the interview,

4. who use networks,

5. and who are operating in the areas of consulting and sales, in order to reduce possible industry effect on the findings

3.7 The process of interviewing

3.7.1 Searching for participants

The process of conducting the interviews started out by searching for suitable participants. After successful identification of possible interviewees, we contacted them and carried on with the preparation for the interviews as well as conducting the actual interviews.

At first, we ran a broad search for female entrepreneurs who would fit our topic of the master thesis and the specific criteria stated above. The search was conducted via the internet as well as through the researchers' personal networks.

The Vilja- JIBS Female Network was very helpful for the data collection process. Vilja is a career network for female students at Jönköping University with the purpose of creating a contact network between successful business women as well as ambitious students (N. Berglund, personal communication, February 25, 2014).

We contacted different network organizations as well as government organizations which were previously and are currently engaged in different projects regarding female entrepreneurship in Sweden. The contacted organizations include ALMI, Tillväxtverket, Styrelsekraft, Kvinnliga Talare, Driftig.nu, Winnet, Ambassadorer.se (a project actually initiated by Tillväxtverket). Unfortunately, there was no reply received from any of these organizations.

Later, we got in touch with different female entrepreneurs whose data were acquired and triangulated from different sources including lists of female entrepreneurs participating in some of the mentioned organizations and projects. Triangulation includes using two or more sources of data/data collection methods which are independent (Saunders et al., 2012).

Especially helpful were the women listed as ambassadors in the webpage of Ambassadorer.se and the European Commission. The European Union and the European Commission have initiated a women 'ambassador' program, called 'Ambassadors Network'

in different European countries, where women entrepreneurs take part in events and contribute in workshops that are designed to inspire other women and build up their confidence for starting a business. The network consists of approximately 270 female entrepreneurs (European Commission, 2014).

Using the snowball sampling technique, we were able to acquire contacts of other female entrepreneurs through the women who agreed to participate in our research. This was especially helpful as this is an approach to sampling of hard-to-reach populations, while simultaneously still gaining unbiased estimates of the characteristics of the population (Shafie, 2010). With this approach, the initially sampled individuals lead the researchers to other members of the hidden population and they in turn, will lead to other members, and so on.

Lastly, we sent over 150 e-mails to potential interviewees within a period of 2 weeks. The response rate was very low. Approximately one third of the received replies were negative, varying from direct refusal to different reasons for refusal, such as maternity leave, lack of time or lack of English language proficiency.

3.7.2 The structure of the interview

Since the exact topic of this study is novel, we did not find any specific pre-tested set of questions to be asked. Instead, we identified relevant themes from the literature review and structured the interviews around these.

Our analysis includes searching for relationships between different themes as well as the connections of these relationships to the cultural context in overall. This analysis might be used to create specific analytic themes in order to find conceptual themes and label them by providing a name for a section or sub-section (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012). The advantage of the theme analysis is the freedom and adaptability of the questions based on each interviewee's unique answer.

Here are the details of five themes based on the interviews:

1- <u>**Start-up phase and network usage**</u>
   This part focuses on how the female entrepreneur created her company and what roles networks played in the decision of starting the company. Here, we are also interested in what the interviewees define as 'networking'.

2- The impact of networking

We want to examine whether and how the female entrepreneurs test their ideas via networks and whether and how these networks inspire them to turn their ideas into businesses. Furthermore, we are interested in finding out about the role of social networking in the lives of female entrepreneurs. As our interviewees consist of women only, and these females have certain personal and family obligations, it is insightful to know the level of support women receive when they want to start up a business or in their role as an active entrepreneur. The social and personal networking can also be expected to play a role in the life of the female entrepreneur; therefore the importance of personal contacts and discussion parties with other entrepreneurs is reviewed here as well. Lastly, we want to see if the women studied are afraid of failure and if having a network plays any role in reducing this fear of failure.

3- Type of networks

In this part, the main focus is given to finding out about the different types of networks that female entrepreneurs use (e.g. smaller, bigger, using loose and/or close ties, formal, informal, social). The emphasis is on the size, the content, and the kind of networks women entrepreneurs in Sweden use. Moreover, we are interested in finding out if different types of networks are used in the different stages of the business development.

4- Business development and company growth as related to networking

Since business development is an important aspect to be considered when having a business, this section includes questions connected to company growth. Our main focus here is to find out if female entrepreneurs are interested in growing their business and if so, whether the growth of the business is perceived to be related to networking. Also, it comprises what kind of networks female entrepreneurs consider as most supportive and relate these types of networks to the different stages of the business.

We want to explore if there is a connection between the size of the network and the business growth. Moreover, we are researching the entrepreneur's ambitions to grow and the most important characteristics of the network used while considering the network as a means to expand the business. Lastly, we want to study whether women entrepreneurs rely on a specific gender as their primary contacts

in the networks when trying to develop the company or if the gender maybe is irrelevant.

5- **Comparisons between female and male entrepreneurs' networking**

This subject looks upon the way the female entrepreneurs assess themselves as compared to the male entrepreneurs in terms of networking activeness, fear of failure, and the nature of networks' density. The previous two categories paid attention to the specifications of female entrepreneurs' networks and their relation to business development. The researcher's main research subjects are female entrepreneurs and there might be certain stereotypes occurring, therefore it is important to investigate them.

3.7.3 The interview process

We developed an interview pro-forma that included questions regarding general information about the family and education as well as questions related to the company establishment, business itself, network structures, business growth, business development, and social environment factors.

The semi-structured interview pro-forma consisted of extended questions where the clarifications and explanations were added and provided a description of how certain factors impact others. The dimensions of the interview questions were developed by the researchers themselves who, when needed, provided clarity to the questions when asked by the interviewees. This was because the interviews were conducted in English language and to avoid the language barrier and possible misinterpretation.

The interviews were carried in different locations- those made in person were in varying localities such as the female entrepreneurs' office, an appointed place, or booked conference room such as on campus of the Jönköping University and its premises. Other part of the interviews was conducted via Skype due to the big geographical distance between the interviewers and the interviewee.

The average time of the interview was between 45 minutes and 1 hour, with some interviews lasting up close to 2 hours. All interviews were recorded after agreement by the interviewees. Also, detailed notes were taken during each interview (Lee & Lings, 2008).

Furthermore, the data from the interviews were transcribed and both researchers added their own comments to each interviewee, so no information was lost. Transcribing the interviews in qualitative research includes reproducing the interview information in a written form (Saunders et al., 2012). This also allowed the researchers to go back to the desired information at any time needed.

Finally, the analysis in a qualitative study generally involves summarizing, structuring and categorizing of the data in order to identify relationships, build up and investigate propositions and construct reasonable conclusions. As stated by Saunders et al. (2012), this can lead to reanalysis of the categories made up from qualitative data in a quantitative manner. Responses collected from the interviews were analyzed and compared to the literature review in order to find matches and specific patterns. Pattern matching involves analysis of qualitative data and the subsequent prediction of a specific pattern of outcomes based on the theory (Saunders et al., 2012).

3.8 Trustworthiness

Saunders et al. (2012) provide suggestions as to what should be taken into account when conducting qualitative research using interviews.

3.8.1 Reliability

The first point regards reliability, which is concerned with whether different researchers would obtain similar results and gain comparable information while investigating the same phenomenon (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Marshall and Rossman (1999) argue that the findings acquired from a research method that is non-standardized are not essentially meant to be repeatable, due to the fact that they mirror the reality at the time they were gathered and a specific situation which might change under different circumstances. These authors also propose several suggestions to be used while applying the qualitative approach. For instance, they recommend making notes about the research design used as well as the arguments supporting the choice of methods and strategy. Hence, other researchers will be able to understand the process used and the findings obtained from the data. Moreover, it will allow them to reanalyze the collected data if appropriate.

Nevertheless, it is important to make sure that the purpose of the study always remains the same even if the circumstances change. Since the phenomenon under study here is fairly new, the chosen approach is supported by the extensive literature review in compliance with the method used. This enables other researchers to understand the viewpoint used in this study and it helps them in further research. The careful documenting of the process is important and adds to the reliability of the study as the researchers have reached saturation and felt more comfortable that the results are reliable.

3.8.2 Validity

Another point that needs to be mentioned is the validity of the study, or the extent to which the method used for collecting the data accurately measures what it should measure (Saunders et al., 2012). Kuzmanić (2009) argues that it actually cannot be specifically stated when exactly validity could or should be allocated in an interview. Since there is a possibility of losing important information while transforming the verbal data into written data, we acknowledged this risk and therefore recorded all of the interviews. Moreover, to overcome the validity issue connected with interviews, triangulation of research methodologies was used as the interviews were conducted in tandem team (Priem et al., 1999). Both interviewers took notes separately and reviewed the notes before combining them.

Lastly, since it is not possible to transform into writing the body language and emotions observed during the interview, it is important to pay attention to these attributes while performing the interview itself (Kuzmanić, 2009). In order to ensure high validity, the researchers prioritized face-to-face interviews. Additionally, both of the interviewers paid attention to enhanced preparation and in-depth understanding of the theory connected to the interview questions and the research topic itself in order to be able to pay attention to all of the details mentioned.

3.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are an important issue which needs to be taken into account when conducting a study in order to avoid any kind of embarrassment or harm of the participants included in the research (Saunders et al., 2009). This is especially connected to anonymity, confidentiality, data generation and the analysis process. Therefore, in order to preserve any possible concerns, the purpose of the study was explained to the partici-

pants. Moreover, the length of the interviews was stated before conducting the interviews in order to avoid false expectations. The agreed length as well as the date of conducting the interviews was always kept. We also ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of our interviewees. Lastly, it is of high importance to mention that the participants were informed about the possibility of not answering particular questions. After having conducted all the interviews, we informed them about the results of our study. Almost all of the interviewees were interested in the outcome of our thesis.

4 Findings and Analysis

This chapter of the thesis represents the empirical findings derived from the interviews with various female entrepreneurs' data, and will guide the reader through the results part in order to analyze them.

4.1 Presenting the findings and analysis

This part of the thesis gives a comprehensive overview of the conducted interviews. Five main themes are reviewed as mentioned previously (the start-up phase and network usage, the impacts of networking, type of networks, the business development and company growth as related to networking, comparisons between female and male entrepreneur's networking) and so the findings are presented in the same order.

Each interviewee has been assigned with a specific number and nickname in order to keep the anonymity and confidentiality (see Appendix 1). Anonymity protects the research participants since the identifying information of individual participants is not included in the thesis. Additionally, only the researchers themselves are able to identify the answers of the participants, therefore maintaining the confidentiality of the individual subjects (Institutional Review Board, 2014).

The tables keep the findings clear and short for the further analysis, as the total number of interviews was twenty-two and each interview lasted approximately one hour.

4.2 Start-up phase and network usage

4.2.1 The motivation for start-up

Here are the findings from the first group of questions included in the interview.

Data collected	Which interviewee
o **Previous experience in the same field**	9,13,14,17,18,19,20,21,22
o **Tired of being employed / wanted freedom**	1,2,3,5,6,9,12,14,19,20

o **Wanted to have their own business**	3,5,6,9,13,14,19
o **Help other people/companies**	7,8,15,16
o **Saw a gap**	4,8,15
o **Entrepreneurial background**	5,10

Some components relating to the start-up phase have been gathered here from the interviews with the female entrepreneurs. In the table above, we can see that most of our interviewees possessed previous experience in the same field or industry background, thus they obviously felt confident enough to open their own business within the same industry, or initially wanted to have their own business.

Additionally, many of the interviewees started their own company because they wanted more freedom and were tired of being employed. This accords with the findings by Cromie (1986), who found that one of the major factors motivating women to be entrepreneurs is independence. Moreover, the interviewees' answers align with Ducheneaut and Orhan (1998), who identified that women turn to entrepreneurship because they want to be flexible when combining family and work.

One of the interviewees (number 12) had a different reason saying: "*I was recommended to start my own business from my accountant.*" Sometimes people outside the close circle are able see the potential in future possibilities for the aspiring entrepreneur. So, it may be claimed that there is an advantage of talking and sharing the idea about the potential venture as the future entrepreneur can receive help, support and valuable input from places he/she might least expect. Moreover, opportunity recognition is connected and "influenced by personal ambitions" (De Bruin et al., 2007, p.331), and the way entrepreneurs perceive themselves is linked to their ambitions since "how entrepreneurs think about themselves and their situation will influence their willingness to persist towards the achievement of their goal" (Gatewood et al., 1995, p. 373).

An interesting pattern emerged when female entrepreneurs identified the motives for starting a company as being tired of employment and wanting more freedom. This finding is not surprising since their choice of industry to operate in is not strictly bound to

specified working hours. Thus, the motives to become entrepreneurs provide the women with more freedom to distribute their time. On the other hand, we received a very interesting answer from interviewee (number 17), with binational origin, where she stated one of the motives to start a business as: "*Opportunity to carry out projects in Sweden as an immigrant*"- suggesting that Sweden seems more attractive for business opportunities and development for her venture. The decisions might be linked with the transparency and efficient public institutions Sweden is famous for and very low levels of corruption compared to the interviewee's other country of citizenship (Chêne, 2011).

4.2.2 What the interviewees consider as 'networking'

Findings collected under this heading are related to networking from the first group of questions included in the interview.

Data collected	Which interviewee
o **Meeting new people and creating new contacts**	2,3,5,7,8,9,11,13,14,15,16,18,21,22
o **Going out for a coffee or socializing and social media**	2,3,5,6,11,12,14,16,17,20
o **Exchanging knowledge and ideas**	1,2,5,7,10,13,14,18,19
o **Keeping contacts from school/university/previous job**	3,9,16,19,21
o **Consider networking as very important**	5,9,10,16
o **Part of the job**	5,9,10
o **Want new opportunities**	2,9
o **Getting new or more clients/assignments**	6,9

In order to analyze the characteristics of the networks used by female entrepreneurs in Sweden, we had to investigate what these women consider as 'networking'. Answers

gathered within this group show that networking means meeting new people and creating contacts for most of the respondents. One of the interviewees (number 14) states: "*Networking is sharing and caring*" and "*Networking is fun*". We can assume that the interviewees view networking as a social event. From the demographic profile, it can be seen that all of the interviewees have families, therefore the social networking allows them to relax from the burden connected with family duties. At the same time, we can assume that the 'sharing and caring' side of the networking can make the women feel needed and appreciated. A high number of female entrepreneurs also considers socializing and social media as well as exchanging knowledge and ideas as networking. Here, another respondent (number 4) mentions: "*Networking equals get the things done*". Thus, it may be claimed that networking might be used as a tool to achieve one's goal.

We can notice an interesting pattern with female entrepreneurs identifying networking as meeting new people and creating new contacts. The gathered replies are in alliance with Drakopoulou Dodd and Patra (2002), where networking comprises of relationships and links that the entrepreneurs form with different contacts. From the answer of networking as 'exchanging knowledge and ideas', it could be argued that the interviewees probably see the relations created via networking as vital resources in the same way as social capital is considered by Greve and Salaff (2003) and Renzulli et al. (2000), as well as social capital and human capital are elements of the knowledge and abilities of the entrepreneur and bridge-building process that connects individuals (Greene et al., 1997).

Another very different answer was received from interviewee number 17*: "Being aware and open, reading news and magazines, and even fiction a great deal, and maintaining friendships on all levels of family, class, disciplines, etc. The ways and means of maintenance of ties is dependent on culture, personality preferences, communities of practice, and much more, it is a feel-good tool*". Such answer possibly suggests that different people view networking from different angles and so this is interrelated with the person's environment and upbringing. She also associated networking with her employment as well as her own business, stating: "*Networks show who are my competitors*". This answer could assume that networks provide female entrepreneurs with information relevant to all levels of the business- information that can help with identifying the possible competitors and with adjusting in uncertain business situations. Lastly,

interviewee number 8 supports such perspective by illustrating: *"Networking gives motivation for growth"* assuming that the motivation for growth might increase when the entrepreneur successfully identifies her competitors.

4.3 The impact of networking

4.3.1 While setting-up the business

Additional findings from the first group of questions included in the interview are below:

Data collected	Which interviewee
o **Consider networks as inspiring for starting business**	1,3,5,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22
o **Consider good network helps with reducing the fear of failure**	1,2,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,21,22
o **Used network for help/ to help establish the business**	1,2,3,4,5,7,8,9,12,13,14,15,17,18,20,21
o **Consider women to be afraid of failure**	1,3,4,5,8,9,10,11,12,14,15,18,20,21,22
o **Tested their ideas via network/ing**	1,2,3,4,6,9,11,12,14,15,18,20,21
o **Consider networks affect the fear of failure**	2,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,12,14,15,21
o **Consider that friends played important role in the early stage of the business**	4,8,9,10,11,12,21,22
o **Reached to family members as the most important people in the contact network**	6,7,8,11,12,14

Answers gathered from the start-up phase and network usage indicate that the majority of female entrepreneurs used network for help or to help them establish their business. This relates to the argument, pointed by Greve and Salaff (2003), that women use networks to test their ideas and get help via contacting others and that women rely on their personal networks for venture development (Hansen, 1995). On the other hand, not many women considered friends as important in the early stage of the business. Such

data possibly suggests that while starting up the venture, friends didn't really help them with what was essential for that process- in terms of material resources or financial capital. One of the interviewees (number 5) said: *"You change friends when you change business"*- such answer assumes that the female entrepreneurs change and adjust their networks- personal or business, through the whole business development process.

Networking is considered to be a social activity and almost all of our interviewees (18 of 21) consider networks as inspiring for starting the business. The basic standpoint behind different projects in Sweden and all around the world is to stimulate women to become entrepreneurs and our findings share this claim.

Fifteen of the women consider themselves and women in general to be afraid of failure when it comes to business, which is in alliance with the Kelley et al. (2011).Those interviewees also consider networking to be a factor that affects and can help reduce the fear of failure. This quote supports the findings (respondent number 17): *"Women are cautious and don't want to do mistakes. They utilize the resources better"*. And this is a key discovery regarding a unique characteristic of the networks, not found in the literature we reviewed so far. Since many of them appreciate the support they receive from business networks, mentors, other entrepreneurs, this finding is not surprising. Therefore, networks and networking can be viewed and used as a tool for reducing the fear of failure for the aspiring female entrepreneurs and for those with already established business.

On the contrary, there are some differences in the statements of the interviewees. Some of them stated that women are not more afraid of failure than men and it all depends on the person itself and on the individual characteristics. Usually, this response was received from female entrepreneurs who were very confident in themselves. Such data may imply that the fear of failure is directly linked with the person's character, psychological strength, mindset and self- confidence, and is not necessarily gender related. Nevertheless, this observation can be connected with one reason few entrepreneurs mentioned as a motivation for starting a business- the entrepreneurial background, as the upbringing is closely influencing the nature of the individual. *"[Women]…are not afraid of failure. They are concerned about not succeeding perhaps. Men typically lack vision and the ability to see constraints and difficulties so they are not even aware of the kinds of barriers that are received as 'risks' by observers"*.

4.3.2 Effects of networking - the support and time for networking

Here are the findings from the next group of questions included in the interview.

Data collected	Which interviewee
o **Consider the personal contacts with other entrepreneurs as valuable**	1,2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22
o **Had support from family in her role as an entrepreneur**	2,3,4,7,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,21,22
o **Doesn't have time for social networking outside the area of business /Spending time with her family is the biggest priority when not working/**	1,4,5,7,8,9,10,12,13,14,18,19,21
o **Had support from business networks in her role as an entrepreneur**	3,7,8,9,12,14,15,18,19,20,21
o **Had support from female friends in her role as an entrepreneur**	3,4,5,6,7,8,12,13,20,21
o **Had support from other entrepreneurs in her role as an entrepreneur**	3,10,11,14,15,18,22
o **Consider social networking outside the area of business to be important**	2,3,6.11,15,16,20,22
o **Had support from mentors in her role as an entrepreneur**	5,11,14,15,18,20
o **Had support from friends in her role as an entrepreneur**	3,9,10,12,13,21
o **"It's not about the gender but about the complementary skills of the person in the discussion"**	10,11,14,15,19
o **Had support from personal networks in her role as an entrepreneur**	3

The table shows that almost all of the participants consider personal contacts with other entrepreneurs as valuable, such as interviewee 10: *"Yes, it depends on the character of*

the business- sometimes you have to get to know the person and have personal contact, other times is not necessary". Furthermore, the testimonial that the personal contact with other entrepreneurs is valuable just adds up to the so expressed statement regarding the fear of failure by our interviewees in the previous subchapter, as it means that keeping contacts or interacting with others may increase the individual's openness, and thus, helping to reduce the fear of failure as the individual has more contacts to turn to and seek advice from. On the contrary, interviewee 9 simultaneously says: *"For those women who know what they want, the personal contacts with other entrepreneurs are not so important"*, and thus creating a tension with the previous statement. It could be argued that by having enough of self-confidence, women entrepreneurs won't need to keep the personal contacts in such extent.

Most of the female entrepreneurs don't have time for social networking outside the area of business as they spend their free time with the family. But some interviewees still consider social networking outside the area of business as important and support the claim as expressed by interviewees 9 and 13, that: *"Focused women want to get the business done"*. Thus, it could be assumed that even though it is social networking **outside** the area of business, such women entrepreneurs still view these social activities as possible future business opportunities.

Entrepreneurs value time and for them time equals money, therefore it is not surprising that the majority of the participants declare the lack of time for social networking outside the businesses albeit the results state that some of them admit such a need for socializing outside the area of business. This disclosure is not unexpected having in mind the time restraints connected to family obligations and children as discussed by Lévesque and MacCrimmon (1997), as the women receive and value the support from their family in their role as entrepreneurs. Secondly, the paper published by Bogren et al. (2013) indicates that personal networks are of great importance for female entrepreneurs. Such argument is however not shared by our participants, thus, a contradiction with the literature occurs again. The inconsistency might be due to the fact that Bogren's et al. (2013) study by was carried not only on the territory of Sweden but also in Norway. Moreover, the variation in the results from our study can be also due to reasons such as the access to potential participants (some of the women interviewed live in

the far north of Sweden), how the interviewees defined entrepreneurship and the data collection process conducted in the two mentioned countries.

The pro-forma we used to interview the participants contained questions regarding the supportive assets that women entrepreneurs received from friends, family, personal networks and/or business networks, and/or digital networks, and these questions were developed with reference to previous researches for instance by Renzulli et al. (2000), Ibarra (1992), and Greve and Salaff (2003). The results we received were to a certain extent (8 out of 22 interviewees) in compliance with Ibarra (1992), who highlighted the significance of friends and friendships in the network that females develop, and in alliance with Bates (1990), who recognized the importance of family, friends and founder in the start-up phase of the business. The rest of the interviewees didn't consider friends and family as valuable. These findings might suggest they couldn't provide a useful support related to business and instead, women may turn to contacts outside their personal surroundings. The argument is not surprising and might be linked to similar data gathered for the start-up phase. Also, this may possibly advocate that female entrepreneurs do not rely so much on family and friends regardless the stage of the business. At the same time, interviewee 17 claims: *"Networking is a supply chain to a particular project"* and here it could be argued that she observes networks as a support tool for any kind and direction.

The data perhaps indicates that some women had support from female friends, whereas most of the interviewees find the gender irrelevant, stating that it is about the complementary skills of the person. Here, it can be presumed that networking has the effect of connecting people and resources in a complementary way. However, interviewee 6 expresses a different statement with the following claim: *"It's all about support strategy, and sister's support"* and *"It's all about self-confidence"*. Contrary, interviewee 15 believes: *"Women are sometimes jealous of other women who are successful"*. This finding may suggests that women who are not so self-confident and lack self-esteem might not want to be a part of networks consisting of successful female entrepreneurs and so will not turn to them for support.

Only one participant reflects the personal networks and digital networks as being supportive in the start-up phase. But looking at the hi-tech time and digitalization of the era we live in, the answer from one of the interviewee should not surprise us as she received

support from a digital network, more specifically Facebook, when she was starting up her business. Additionally, she is currently using it to promote her activities.

4.4 Types of networks

Here are the findings from the second group of questions included in the interview.

Criteria and definitions about the size of networks and the type of ties used during the interviews can be found in Appendix 4.

Data collected	Which interviewee
o **Prefer to use informal networks**	2,3,4,5,6,8,11,12,13,15,17,18,20,21,22
o **Prefer to use formal networks**	1,3,5,6,7,8,9,10,13,15,16,17,19,20,22
o **Prefer to use smaller networks**	2,3,4,6,7,8,10,12,14,15,18,19,20,22
o **Prefer to use bigger networks**	1,4,9,10,11,12,14,15,16,17,20,22
o **Prefer to use strong ties**	7,8,10,11,14,19,21
o **Prefer to use weak ties**	2,3

It has been demonstrated that the female entrepreneurs we interviewed do not have a distinctive preference regarding the size of the networks they use. The interviewees use both smaller and bigger networks (see Appendix 4 for criteria and definitions). Such data may imply that being flexible in the choice of networks used can give the female entrepreneurs a broader and enlarged resource basis. Therefore, a key finding about the preferences in the networks size is that female entrepreneurs do not limit themselves by using only one particular size of network over another, rather combine networks which have different sizes, in order to maximize the benefits received.

Some of the respondents (number 5) support the statement above and don't strictly follow the choice of having small or big network: *"The size of the networks depends on the idea and what you need from the network"*.
Also, another pattern emerges where most of the women using smaller networks prefer strong ties. Having in mind the industries of our participants, it is not surprising that the women are inclining towards using bigger networks as being engaged in creating large networks increases the gain of valuable resources especially in the start-up phase (Ud

Dowla, 2011). Another interviewee (number 17) has a little different view: *"The size of the network is connected to openness and awareness. Moreover, the reputation is important – how does the network reflect on me as an individual?"* It could be argued that such a statement is highly connected with the individual's moral beliefs and standards, thus who you have in your network influences the reputation and the choice of either to be a part of this particular network, or not.

Regarding the content of the network used by female entrepreneurs, the answers are similar. The interviewees use both formal and informal networks, and this is in accordance with Gatewood et al. (2009), who stated that women use both informal and formal networks, especially when searching for financial capital. However, several respondents (e.g. number 14) connect the content of the network with the size of the network, which is a point that should not be underestimated: *"The content of the networks depends on the network itself, a smaller network is more informal"*. It may be assumed that when a network is smaller in the size, the contacts in it develop a closer relationship and are not being restricted by formal behavior.

Here are more findings from the second group of questions included in the interview.

Data collected	Which interviewee
o **Prefer to use professional networks currently**	2,3,5,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,18,19,20,21,22
o **Used social networks in the start-up phase**	8,9,11,12,13,15,18,21
o **Prefer to use social networks currently**	1,3,4,5,7,10,19,22
o **Used professional networks in the start-up phase**	1,10,14,19

Different types of networks were used by the female entrepreneurs in the different stages of their business development. The results from the table above demonstrates that almost all of our interviewees use professional networks nowadays. Moreover, the female entrepreneurs admit the importance of professional networking and use it. It might be claimed that female entrepreneurs view professional networks as the most central factor for their business, as these professional networks enable them to extract all the necessary information and provide access to financial capital and resources.

Using social networks as a mean to help in the start-up phase is important to the entrepreneurs and the number of those who used social networks in the start-up phase is larger than those who have used professional networks. Such data may be connected with the importance of having a well-developed contact network, as good network may provide the entrepreneurs with sales and contacts from people they'd never be able to reach on their own.

On the other hand, one interviewee (number 6) does not agree with strictly limiting the networks to professional or/and social in the different stages in the business and states: *"The type of network that is used in the different stage of the business depends on the background, as well the experience of the entrepreneur."* It could be argued that the network preference is strongly linked to multiple factors, such as personality and character of the entrepreneurs as well as their environment. The tension arises with the opinion expressed by another female entrepreneur (number 17), who illustrates: *"The kind of the network female entrepreneurs use: the quality over the quantity, choosing right partners and visibility are the most important aspects"*. This data suggests that the number of contacts is irrelevant, as long as the entrepreneur is able to actually see and use the full capacity of the other contacts in the network.

During the start-up phase, some of the entrepreneurs used social networks and then switched to professional once they grew their business. These circumstances can be explained with the different phases of the business lifecycle as identified by Wilken (1979) as well as by Greve and Salaff (2003). It may be claimed the interviewees probably see these relations as important resources and the resources change during time, consequently there needs to be an adjustment in the networks used. *"Women tend to use networks when they just started their business, then they think networking only takes time and costs money, and doesn't work. This is because they have been to all the wrong networks!"* (interviewee 17).

4.5 The Business development and company growth as related to networking

Here are the findings from the third group of questions included in the interview.

Data collected	Which interviewee
o **Interested in growing their business**	1,2,4,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,16,17,19,20,21,22
o **Used or are using net-work/ing for growing their business**	2,4,5,6,8,9,10,11,12,14,15,16,17
o **Consider business networks as more supportive**	1,2,7,8,9,15,16,18,19,20
o **The gender of the contact in the networks is irrelevant for business growth**	1,5,6,9,12,13,14,18,21
o **Rely on a male contact as their prime one in network when growing the business**	1,2,4,6,8,11,15,20,22
o **Consider that networks help 'get things done'**	1,2,3,4,5,9,12,15,21
o **On whom you rely in order to grow depends on the busi-ness/person**	5,6,8,10,14,17,21
o **Consider both personal and business networks to be sup-portive**	5,10,11,14,22
o **Consider personal networks as more supportive**	6,12,13
o **Rely on a female contact as their prime one in network when growing the business**	10,19
o **Rely on a female contact for non-business networking while trying to achieve busi-ness growth**	11,15

The majority of women entrepreneurs in our research are interested in growing their business. Additionally, they state that based on their observations women in general are interested in business growth. The desire to develop the business is linked with the use of network or networking in order to achieve it. Contrary, Díaz and Jimenez (2006) ar-gue that women don't have the desire to develop and expand their business as they view the outcomes of growth in a negative way. Our results are not in alliance with the results from that paper, probably because their study was performed using different methodol-ogy- quantitative, and the authors compared male and female- owned companies on the territory of Spain approximately ten years ago. Additionally, Cliff (1998) states that women entrepreneurs want to grow only to a certain extent and do not want to develop

more. This may imply that the female entrepreneurs are cautious about employing and being responsible for other people as on the other hand, the total costs of employment in Sweden are very high (Doing business, 2014). Part of the gathered data suggests that most of the participants are using or have used networks in order to help them grow their business, as stated by Gatewood et al. (2009). The women admit networks to have the essential influence when financial capital is needed, being it in the start-up phase or later, in the development of the venture.

Many of the interviewees state that networks help them 'get the things done' however, some of them (numbers 6 and 18) point out the importance of another factor: *"Depending on the quality of the network, networking might help the female entrepreneurs 'get things done'"*. Also, interviewee 14 comments: *"Some women need to be a little pushed in order to 'get things done'; it's connected with the self-confidence"*. Therefore, it could be argued that 'getting things done' via networking depends not only on the network itself but also on the individual in the network and her perceptions.

Contrary, we see a different statement, as interviewees 7 and 13 mention: *"Networks don't help you 'get the things done', it is only you that helps yourself, it's about personality, some people need the support from others"*. This statement is supported to certain extent by interviewee 10: *"Networks don't help you 'get the things done', but it can provide experience and knowledge how to 'get the things done', moving between different networks is beneficial because you can get different things from different networks"*. The data may suggest that it is not the network itself that helps the women 'get the things done', rather it is the person's commitment to achieve the targets in mind.

In addition, the majority of the women consider the business networks as more supportive. On the question of which type of networks our interviewees view as most important and supportive, the results might claim that they use both personal and business networks and the business networks are prevailing. The data is in alliance with the finding related to the current usage of networks in general, where the respondents strongly prefer to use professional networks. The paper by Bogren et al. (2013) is applicable for this pattern as their research was conducted on the territory of Sweden and Norway and concluded the importance of diversity and heterogeneity of the networks, as well as both social and professional networks matter when the entrepreneur shows willingness to grow the business. Also, Hill et al. (1999) advise that in order for the entrepreneurs to

move forward and grow in their business development, female entrepreneurs should develop more professional contacts and focus on more business related networks. Using more professional and business networks advocates that contacts from such types of networks are more helpful as the focus prevails on business. On the other side, personal networks can be supportive in another aspect such as the highly needed moral and psychological support.

On one hand, a pattern is observed regarding the help women entrepreneurs want to receive concerning the business problems with some of them relying on a male contact as their prime one in network when growing the business. The finding is in accordance with Cromie and Birley's (1992) research findings. *"Yes, it is easier to ask men, they are more obvious in what they do, and mostly you turn to your partner or father"* (interviewee 8). Relying on male contact might be explained with the fact that there are still more men than women on top managerial positions (OECD, n.d.).

On the contrary, some of the interviewees state that the specifics of the business or the person itself are the factors influencing who the entrepreneur relies on. Only a small number of our interviewees rely on a female contact regarding the business growth. This finding was astounding since the reviewed literature states otherwise, claiming that women managers incline towards business discussions with other women (Nicholson & West, 1988). The contradiction might be due to the fact that the book by Nicholson and West (1988) analyzes members of the British Institute of managers and not entrepreneurs. *"Women don't always hire the best women to work for and with them."* Such data possibly offers another aspect on why women's main contact is often male which might be connected with the jealousy of other women within the area of business.

Again, the authors notice an interesting pattern regarding the gender of the contacts, as high number of respondents state that the gender of the contact in the network is irrelevant while growing the business. Part of our interviewees pointed out that the gender of the contact in the network is irrelevant for business growth and another part added that the reliance connected with business growth is not gender oriented but industry dependent. This is to a certain degree supported by Ljunggren (2008) who finds that the determination to grow is interlinked with the availability of business capital and that the gender doesn't matter. Also, it is the network itself and not the gender of the contact, as Greeve and Salaff (2003) highlight that the networks are essential as the contacts in

them help the entrepreneurs get the things done and the sex of the contact is not mentioned. *"The gender doesn't matter. There are smart people, and there are stupid people"* (interviewee 17).

4.5.1 Networks associated with growth, or quality over quantity?

More findings from the third group of questions included in the interview are presented in the table below.

Data collected	Which interviewee
o **More positive effects and access to resources are related mainly to the quality of the network**	5,6,7,8,10,12,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22
o **Consider the quality of the network as the most important factor affecting the business growth**	2,3,6,9,11,13,15,17,18,19,20,22
o **The ambition for growing the business is directly linked to the quality of the networks**	3,4,5,7,9,14,15,17,18,19,20,22
o **The ambition for business growth is bigger when the network is bigger/larger**	3,4,7,9,10,11,12,13,
o **Consider the size and the quantity of the network as factors affecting the business growth**	1,4,5,11,14
o **More positive effects and access to resources when the network is bigger**	4,9,11,13

One interesting trend is detected with female entrepreneurs stating that actually, it is not the size and quantity of the networks that affect the business growth, but the quality. Quality is the most important feature of a network for the female entrepreneurs in Sweden. Quality is the feature which has influence on all the stages of the business venture. The significance of the quality of the network is essential for business growth and is prevailing over the networks' size, as identified in our findings.

Nevertheless, some interviewees state that the quantity and the size play an important role when the entrepreneur has ambitions and desire to grow the business. They also share the opinion that a bigger and/or larger network increases the entrepreneur's ambition in growing the venture. Growth ambitions can be affected by the size of the net-

work- the bigger the network, the bigger the ambition to grow, as supported by McGregor and Tweed (2002). Moreover, such data may claim that by having more contacts in the network, the chances of finding quality are higher and so quantity can lead to increased possibility of finding quality.

The majority of interviewees consider quality of the network as the one factor that influences their and other women entrepreneurs' ambition to grow. On the other side, few interviewees consider that the bigger the network, the bigger the entrepreneur's ambitions to expand. A thought-provoking opinion was expressed by interviewee 6: *"I am a doer"*. It can be assumed that the growth ambition then is highly related to the determination and pro-activeness of the individual. Alternatively, the ambition to grow the business is associated with another characteristic of the network as interviewee 2 mentioned: *"The female entrepreneur's ambition to grow is connected to how diverse the networks are"*. This is supported by interviewee 8: *"Depends on who you have in the network. It's about quality and close relations with the people in the network"*. The quality of the network is similarly stated to be directly linked to the ambition for growing the business, as access to good contacts can influence the women's determination and help them add value and contribute to faster growth. Additionally, the quality is an essential characteristic which the network should possess, agreed upon by a big part of our interviewees. This precise finding is not in alliance with any literature reviewed by us. No matter the efforts the authors put in their interplay between theory and our results, we were still unable to find the literature which would point towards a connection of quality of the networks as related to growth and growth ambitions.

On one hand, the majority of interviewees stated that the positive effects and access to resources arise from the quality of the networks. On the other hand, some of the interviewees claim that the benefits are a direct function of the network size – the bigger the network, the larger access to resources they have. An interesting evolution between the ambitions to grow the business and the positive effects and access to resources as related to networking is seen from the statement of interviewee 9: *"Ambitious entrepreneurs seek networks that give them ambitious people"*. The quality of the network proved once again to be essential characteristic for obtaining resources and providing positive effects. This finding is not surprising as quality has an effect on growth and quality network appears to increase the possibilities of the entrepreneur. The empirical findings,

show that having many people in a network may not always help the female entrepreneurs with accessing the needed resources, rather it is who the entrepreneurs have in their network.

4.6 Comparisons between female and male entrepreneurs' networking

Here are the findings from the fourth group of questions included in the interview.

Data collected	Which interviewee
o **Women network in a different way**	3,6,7,8,9,12,13,14,19,20,21,22
o **Women's networks are not less dense than men's networks**	3,6,8,9,15,16,19,20,21
o **Women have less dense networks than men**	1,4,5,7,18,22
o **Women are more into social networks, and men –in professional ones**	11,13,14,18
o **Women are less active networkers than men**	1,4,5,15
o **The activeness in the network is related to the person and/or industry**	2,10

Answers gathered under theme 5 show a high number of responses linked to the opinion that women and men network in different way. Interviewee 17 said: *"Women are different kind of networkers, they feel more uncomfortable asking for help/sales, etc.; men are more straight forward"*. The interviewees point out that women tend to be involved in social networks and social networking, while from their observations, men are more into professional networks. This data may possibly suggest that women and men network differently due to women being better listeners. At the same time, interviewee 5 shares that: *"Women are more selective in their networks"*. Moreover, when it comes to business, men are more pro-active and pay attention to contacts that can be helpful for them in this particular moment, while women always keep in mind the potential use of the contact for the future (Vanbrabant, 2012).

Women do not consider themselves and they don't view other women to be less active networkers than men and it is in accordance with Cromie and Birley (1992). In fact, the

majority of women just network in a different way than men, as stated by Ibarra (1992) who mentions the differences in social networking of men and women. Alternatively, networking differently might be connected to the personality and to the common assumption about female as weaker gender, thus making them the 'softer' type of networker. Supporting the claim, one of the interviewees expressed her opinion that women are not as straight forward when asking for help in business. Only 4 interviewees support the testimonial that women are less active networkers than men. Such difference in the network activeness may be due to personal discomfort of being able to manage oneself in a network event (Vanbrabant, 2012).

Worth mentioning, even though supported by only two interviewees, is that activeness of the networks is interrelated with the person or industry. Different industries require different amounts of activeness as for instance, sales industry is usually connected with high degree of activeness in order to attract more clients.

Lastly, the data from the table suggests a high number of responses pointing out the observation that women's networks are not less dense than men's networks. Density isn't a mechanism that can serve as a factor that distinguishes men's and women's networks. Women and men have comparably dense networks (Cromie & Birley, 1992) and our findings confirm the statement, since several interviewees agreed that female entrepreneurs' networks are not less dense than male's. But few of the interviewees tend to disagree and according to them, women have less dense networks compared to men and the differences in the opinions are even more visible from a quote by interviewee 16: *"Men have stronger networks and they have had longer time to develop their networks"* and that can be related to men participating in 'boys clubs' and fraternities (in the USA), thus coming from a need to bond with other men (Johnson, 2009).

4.7 Networking projects

We observed an interesting pattern regarding the female entrepreneurs' dissatisfaction with the networks they currently use. Therefore, we decided to include an additional question to the original interview questions. This question was aimed at finding out the type of project the female entrepreneurs would be interested in and which would provide them their perfect network. We started asking the additional question on the fourth interview.

Here are the findings from the additional question regarding the networking projects.

Data collected	Which interviewee
o **Is interested in new project**	4,6,8,9,11,12,13,16,17,19,20
o **Perfect network includes a mixture of several networks**	10,14,18,21
o **Found her perfect network/ current network is satisfying for her**	5, 7,15

Most of the participants asked agreed that they are not satisfied with the network they are in at the moment as well as they expressed their interested in a new project regarding networking. The majority of the interviewed women want a project which would include network with the aim to help them get more clients and contacts, or extend their business- interviewee 9: *"A network which would give me contacts that would help with developing my business and where people with different backgrounds meet."* Moreover, interviewee 4: *"Networks that help bring people together and create business. Find the middle ground where entrepreneurs meet."*

Nonetheless, interviewee 11 has a similar opinion and would prefer a *"Smaller network where you can trust each other to tell the opinion about work and where people would professionally help each other by providing feedback."* The networks which would be preferred therefore include business and professional networks where people wouldn't meet just to socialize and talk about personal matters.

The dissatisfaction with the current network is seen on interviewee 8 who has already taken action: *"I'm working on creating a network by connecting people that are relevant to me, creating new combinations."*

Contrary, only three women confirmed that they found their perfect network or that they are satisfied with the network they are currently in. For instance, interviewee 7 affirms: *"I don't need to get much from the network, just the people to work with."*

An interesting pattern occurred with several interviewees who all agreed that there is not a single perfect network, rather it should be a mixture of several networks- as interviewee 14 states: *"I found my perfect network; however it is not just one network but several. You get different things from different networks."* Additionally, interviewee 10

also points out the different networks she uses: *"I am satisfied with the mixture of networks I have. It includes small and big networks; local, national and international networks- it's a great variety."*

4.8 Background of the individual

Even though the main focus during the interviews was not on the background and demographic profile of the women entrepreneurs (detailed information about the sample can be found in Appendix 2 and 3), it is still intriguing to mention a few observed trends.

Firstly, a visible pattern was detected regarding the marital background and family status of the participants, where almost all of our interviewees are married or live in a partnership. These same women also have children.

Regarding the educational background, the majority of the women interviewed have a university degree and the rest have a gymnasium diploma. This pattern can be seen also in the research of Dolinsky (1993) who came to conclusion that with the higher education level, the probability of starting, developing and reentering entrepreneurship grows.

Lastly, the age when the women started their business varies from 28 to 52 years. Therefore we observe trend that these women were already independent when they took the decision to start a new venture by themselves. This pattern can also be connected to the well-developed social system which makes it easier for the women to combine family and professional life, and this is also in alliance with the latest report provided by GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2012 Women's Report). Furthermore, the interviewees have been running their business from 3 up to 20 years.

5 Conclusions

This final chapter of the paper summarizes the findings about female entrepreneurs and networks, refers the research purpose through extracting the most relevant information from the 'Findings and Analysis'. It also reviews the limitations and provides suggestions for future research in the field of female entrepreneurship and networking.

5.1 Specific characteristics of the networks used by female entrepreneurs

The aim of this thesis was to explore the characteristics of the networks used by female entrepreneurs by conducting semi- structured interviews.

The study has shown that there are few components that motivate the women to become entrepreneurs. For most of the women, the decision was based on the fact that they had previous experience in the same industry and additionally, others were being tired of employment or they wanted more freedom. The possibility to become entrepreneur is highly connected with the ability to see a gap in the market and fill it, and as such it serves also as a motivation factor. The motivation to begin a business is tightly connected to the support one may need. The interviewees used networks to start their venture and view the networking as inspiring women to turn their ideas into business. Thus, this thesis reveals networks to be inspiring, motivating and supportive, thus contributing to the research of networking.

Most of the women are or were afraid of failure when it comes to business. They use networks to help them overcome this fear. Being part of a network allows the female entrepreneurs to build self-confidence and mental support for their actions, which help women reduce the fear of failure. The implication of this study for a female entrepreneur could be said to be that networks can be helpful in reducing or attempting to reduce the fear of failure This conclusion has implications for scholars in the field of networking, i.e. how networks affect the fear of failure regardless of the gender of the entrepreneur.

Despite the lack of time for social networking women entrepreneurs cherish the personal contacts with other entrepreneurs, no matter the type of the network they are in. The networks provide the ability to transform a connection from personal to business or

vice-versa, as sometimes what starts as a business contact can turn into a social relationship and other times a friend can become a business partner.

Female entrepreneurs do not limit themselves by using only one type of network, rather they use a mixture of both- smaller and bigger networks, as well as formal and informal. Different types of networks are used and can be used in the different stages of the business development; therefore there is a great variety of networks that female entrepreneurs can choose from. However, the movement does not come from a desire to be involved in different networks, rather it comes from a need since all these types of networks do not provide them with what they need at the time they need it.

5.2 Characteristics of networks used for growth

Networks are a basis for resource creation and exploitation and they help women 'get things done'. As networks are motivating, they also are a factor leading women to develop their business. The business networks and all the networks used by female entrepreneurs when they want to move forward in evolving their business must contain a certain characteristic- Quality.

Female entrepreneurs often depend on a male contact when a business advice is needed. Quality is the most important characteristic of a network and that is what the network should provide women with – quality contacts. Quality network and quality contacts lead to quality resources and growth. Sometimes the possibilities of finding quality are higher when having more contacts in the network and so quantity can lead to increased possibility of finding quality. But nevertheless, it is also important who the entrepreneur has in the network as quality of the network is a characteristic affecting the growth ambitions.

This thesis contributes to better understanding of the women entrepreneurship and networking theories as the literature review presented previously revealed the lack of empirical studies in these fields. The implication of this study could be said to be that the quality of the networks is the most essential characteristic a network should possess, as quality influences the motivation of the entrepreneur, her desire to grow the business, and the business development. Furthermore, it helps understand the importance of networks and networking for successful business development. A growth supported by quality network and quality contacts can be a sustainable growth, even though it might

happen in a slower pace compared to help, information, knowledge, and recourses gained by a huge amount of people in a big sized network.

5.3 Discussions and suggestions for further research

The thesis combines two theoretical research areas, network theories and female entrepreneurship theories, with the empirical data on female entrepreneurs' networking behavior, giving the thesis a strong foundation to be applied for future research.

The study was conducted in one country– Sweden and all of the participants included are Swedish. The implications of this should be further analyzed, however it is possible that the welfare system in Sweden has a significant role in comparison to other countries, thus providing a specific setting for female entrepreneurs (Hernes, 1987; Kelley et al., 2013). Hence, it would be interesting to investigate the characteristics of networks used by female entrepreneurs in other contexts.

The limitation related to methodology used in a qualitative research is associated with generalization and consequently, the results of our study cannot be generalized in statistical sense. Nevertheless, our findings can be considered indicative mainly to the extent of the two industries- sales and consulting. Therefore, as the generalizability is restricted to our sample, the idea behind this thesis can be extended to other industries and other countries, due to the fact that the topic of networking and its effects is emerging worldwide (Ud Dowla, 2011).

This master thesis is also built on combination of two theoretical research areas, network theory and entrepreneurship theory, with empirical data gathered on female entrepreneurs' networking behavior. Therefore, the findings presented in our study could be helpful for future research in the two mentioned areas. The outcome that good network can help reduce the fear of failure for the women who are starting-up or developing their own business, combined with the key finding presented (unique characteristic and influence the networks possess), might be considered while conducting the future study.

Also, additional research on the topic can be aimed at longitudinal study, which would analyze in its initial stage the networks' impact on women, who are yet to become entrepreneurs or are presently attempting to become entrepreneurs. In the later stage, the study can look upon how much the networking behavior or the networks affected the

women after 5 years (for example), investigate their network usage when looking back and currently, the number of women who have become entrepreneurs because of the network influence on motivation, and vice-versa.

The authors of this thesis conducted their research and interviewed the participants without prejudice or assumptions before-hand. We did not take the stance of women to be the 'weaker' gender, or assumed that entrepreneurship is male-gendered. Foss (2010) states that while developing research on entrepreneurial networks, it is helpful to take a look at the feminist theory perspective on intersections between gender and other social categories; therefore, we suggest a future research that could study the topic of this master thesis with one or several feminist theories as perspective.

Moreover, since our research is exploring the characteristics of networks used by female entrepreneurs in Sweden, the interviews were conducted in English with Swedish participants; accordingly, there is the limitation of language interpretation and barrier.

Lastly, it is worth to mention the growing power of the digital networks that can be used not only in assisting the new start-ups, but also in promoting growth for the ventures. Since most of our interviewees are interested in growing their business but are not using social media to do so, future research may be pointed at analyzing why women entrepreneurs in Sweden are not so actively using social media in all its aspects to help them achieve faster business growth. Such research can be also helpful for government organizations which can create a project promoting and raising the awareness and at the same time helping women to network more efficiently.

5.3.1 A suggestion to the government and other organizations

We also would like to point out the real necessity to support different projects that inspire women to get involved in entrepreneurship. Thus, a topic marked as important by our participants emerged, while we were conducting the interviews, as most of the women stated that they haven't found their 'one perfect' network which would provide them with what they require, expect and need from a network, no matter the type. Therefore, we suggest creating a network or a network project, which would be based on the requirements provided by the participants in our study.

The female entrepreneurs in our project expressed their interest and need for a new network project that is mainly business oriented where they could exchange knowledge or

be connected with others who are in the network because of the same purpose. These women want a network that is not only a social event in which people gather just to chat. They are interested in a business network which they could benefit from- being it new clients or meeting people with whom they can develop a totally new business or meeting people who are innovators.

References

Ahl, H. (2004). The scientific reproduction of gender inequality: A discourse analysis of research texts on women's entrepreneurship. Copenhagen: CBS Press.

Achtenhagen, L., & Tillmar, M. (2013). Studies on women's entrepreneurship from Nordic countries and beyond. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship,* 5(1), 4-16.

Aldrich, H. E., Elam, A. B. & Reese, P. R. (1997). Strong ties, weak ties and strangers. Do women owners differ from men in their use of networking to obtain assistance? in Birley, S. & MacMillan, C. (Eds) ,Entrepreneurship in a Global Context, Routledge Studies in International Business and the World Economy, Routledge, London.

Aldrich, H. E. & Reese, P. R. (1993). Does networking pay off? A panel study of entrepreneurs in the research triangle. Frontiers of entrepreneurship research.

Aldrich, H., & Zimmer, C. (1986). Enterprise through social networks. In D. Sexton and R. Smilereds, *The Art and Science of Entrepreneurship.* Cambridge: Ballinger.

Bates, T. (1990). Human capital inputs and small business longevity. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, Vol. 72 No. 4, pp. 551-9.

Becker-Blease, J. R., & Sohl, J. E. (2007). Do women-owned businesses have equal access to venture capital? *Journal of Business Venturing*, 22, 503–521.

Birley, S., Moss, C., & Saunders, P. (1987). Do women entrepreneurs require different training? *American Journal of Small Business*, 12(1).

Bogren, M., Friedrichs Y., Rennemo, Ø., & Widding, Ø. (2013). Networking women entrepreneurs: fruitful for business growth? *International Journal of Gender and*

Entrepreneurship, Vol. 5 No. 1, 2013 pp. 60-77.

doi: 10.1108/17566261311305210

Brown, R. B. (2006). Doing Your Dissertation in Business and Management: The

Reality of Research and Writing, Sage Publications.

Bruederl, J., Preisendorfer, P. & Ziegler, R. (1992). Network support and the success

of newly founded businesses. *Small Business Economics*, 10, 213–25.

Brush, C. G., & Hisrich, R. D. (1991). Antecedent influences on women-owned busi-

nesses. *Journal of Management Psychology,* 6(2):9-16.

Burns, R. (2000). Introduction to Research Methods. London: Sage.

Burt, R. S. (2000). The network structure of social capital. *Research in Organisational*

Behaviour, Vol. 22, pp. 1-83.

Carter, N. M., Brush, C. G., Greene, P. G., Gatewood, E. J. & Hart M. M. (2003).

Women entrepreneurs who break through to equity financing: The influence of

human, social and financial capital. *Venture Capital International Journal*, 5 (1).

Chua, J. & Wu, Z. (2012). Second-order gender effects: The case of U.S. small business

borrowing cost. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 36(3).

Cliff, J. E. (1998). Does one size fit all? Exploring the relationship between attitudes to

wards growth, gender, and business size. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 13,

523–42.

Coughlin, J., & Thomas, A. (2002). The Rise of Women Entrepreneurs: People, Pro

cesses and Global Trends. Quorum Books, Westport, Connecticut.

Cromie, S., & S. Birley. (1992). Networking by Female Business Owners in Northern

Ireland. *Journal of Business Venturing,* 7(3): 237–251.

Cromie, S. (1986). Motivations of aspiring male and female entrepreneurs. *Journal of*

Occupational Behavior, 8, 251–261. John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Davis, A., & Shaver, K. (2012). Understanding gender variations in business growth intentions across the life course. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 36(3).

De Bruin, A., Brush, C. G., & Welter, F. (2007). Advancing a framework for coherent research on women's entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice,* Vol.31 (3), p.323(17) [Peer Reviewed Journal]

De Bruin, A., Brush, C., & Welter, F. (2006). Introduction to the special issue: towards building cumulative knowledge on women's entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice*, Vol. 30 No.5, pp.585-94.

DeCarlo, J. F., & Lyons, P. R. (1979). A comparison of selected personal characteristics of minority and non-minority female entrepreneurs. *Journal of Small Business Management,* 17, 22–30.

Deutsch, F. M. (2007). Undoing Gender. *Gender and Society* 21(2), 106-127.

Devine, T. (1994). Characteristics of self-employed women in the United States. *Monthly Labor Review*. 117(3):20-34.

Díaz, C., & Jimenez, J. (2006). Spain - the gender gap in small firms' resources and performance: Still a reality? Growth oriented women entrepreneurs and their businesses: a global research perspective, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

Dolinsky, A. (1993). The effects of education on business ownership: a longitudinal study of women. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 18(1), pp43-53.

Drakopoulou Dodd, S., & Patra, E. (2002). National differences in entrepreneurial networking. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, 14, pp.117–134.

Dubois, A. & Gadde, L.- E. (2002). Systematic combining: an abductive approach to case research. *Journal of Business Research* 55, pp. 553– 560

Ducheneaut, B., & Orhan, M. (1998). The Idea of Creating A Business: Context and

Specific Features for Women. Proceedings of the 43 RD ICSB World Conference on "Entrepreneurship at the Threshold of the 21st Century". Singapore.

Due Billing, Y. (1996). Starting a Business – an attractive alternative to a traditional career in an organization? In S. Halvarsson, *Aspects of women's entrepreneurship.* Stockholm

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. and Jackson, P. (2008). Management Research. London: SAGE.

Forret, M. L., & Dougherty, T. W. (2004). Networking behaviors and career outcomes: Differences for men and women? *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 25, 419-437.

Foss, L. (2010). Research on entrepreneur networks. The case for a constructionist feminist theory perspective. *International Journal of Gender and Entrepreneurship,* Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 83-102.

Gatewood, E.J., Shaver, K.G., & Gartner, W.B. (1995). A longitudinal study of cognitive factors influencing start-up behaviors and success at venture creation. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 10(5), pp. 371–391.

Gatewood, E. J., Brush, C. G., Carter, N. M., Greene, P. G. & Hart, M. M. (2009). Diana: a symbol of women entrepreneurs' hunt for knowledge, money, and the rewards of entrepreneurship. *Small Business Economics*, Vol. 32 No. 2, pp. 129-44.

Godwin, L., Stevens, C., & Brenner, N. (2006). Forced to play by the rules. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice,* 30: 623-642.

Granovetter, M. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78, 6, 1360–80.

Granovetter, M. (1985). Economic Action and Social Stucture: The problem of embed-

dedness. *American Journal of Sociology,* 91(3), 481-510.

Greene, P., Brush, C. & Brown, T. (1997). Resources in small firms: An exploratory
study. *Journal of Small Business Strategy*, 8(23), 29–40.

Greve, A., & Salaff, J. W. (2003). Social Networks and Entrepreneurship.
Entrepreneurship: Theory & Practice, 28(1):1-22.

Hancock, B. (2002). An Introduction to Qualitative Research. Trent Focus Group.

Hansen, E. L. (1995). Entrepreneurial networks and new organization growth. *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice,* Vol. 19 No. 4, pp. 7-19.

Harlan, A., & Weiss, C. L. (1982). Sex differences in factors affecting managerial career advancement. In P.A. Wallace (Ed.), Women in the workplace: pp 59-100. Boston: Auburn House

Hernes, H. (1987). Welfare State and Women Power. Essays in State Feminism. Norwegian University Press, Oslo

Hill, J., McGowan, P. & Drummond, P. (1999). The development and application of a qualitative approach to researching the marketing networks of small firm entrepreneurs. Qualitative Market Research, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 71-81.

Hisrich, R. G. and Brush, C. D. (1986). *The Women Entrepreneur: Starting, Financing
and Managing a Successful New Business.* Lexington Books, Lexington.

Holmquist, C., & Sundin, E. (1990). What's special about highly educated women entrepreneurs? *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, 2, pp.181-193.

Hudson, L. A. & Ozanne, J. L., (1988). Alternative ways of seeking knowledge in consumer research. *Journal of consumer research*, vol. 14, pp. 508-521.

Hughes, K. D., Jennings, J. E., Brush, C., Carter, S., & Welter, F. (2012). Extending Women's Entrepreneurship Research in New Directions. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 36(3), 429-442.

Ibarra, H. (1992). Homophily and differential returns: Sex differences in network structure and access in an advertising firm. Administrative Science Quarterly, 37: pp 422-447.

Ibarra, H. (1993). Personal networks of women and minorities in management: A conceptual framework. *The Academy of Management Review*, 18: 56-87.

Jennings, J. E., & Brush, C. G. (2013). Research on Women Entrepreneurs: Challenges to (and from) the Broader Entrepreneurship Literature? *The Academy of Management Annals*, 7:1, 663-715.

doi: 10.1080/19416520.2013.782190

Johannisson, B. (1996). Personliga nätverk som kraftkälla i företagandet. in Johannisson, B. and Lindmark, L. (Eds), Företag, Företagare, Företagsamhet, Studentlitteratur, Lund.

Johannisson, B. & Nilsson, A. (1989). Community entrepreneurs: networking for local Development. *Entrepreneurship & Regional Development*, No. 1, pp. 3-19.

Johnson, M. (2009). Cracking The Boy's Club Code: The Woman's Guide to Being Heard and Valued in the Workplace. Morgan James Publishing.

Kelley, D., Brush, C., Greene, P., & Litovsky, Y. (2011). The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: 2010 Women's Report. Wellesley, MA: Babson College & GERA.

Kelley, D. J., Brush, C. G., Greene, P. G., and Litovsky, Y. (2013). *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2012 Women's Report.* Retrieved March 25, 2014, from http://gemconsortium.org/docs/download/2825

Kessler, A. (2001). The market in women small entrepreneurs. Bank Marketing, Vol. 33 No.9, pp12-13

Kuzmanić, M. (2009). Validity in Qualitative Research: Interview and the Appearance of Truth through Dialogue. Psihološka obzorja. Horizons of Psychology, 18 (2), 39-50.

Lee, N., & Lings, I. (2008). Doing business research: A guide to theory and practice. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Lerner, M., Brush, C. & Hisrich, R. (1997). Israeli Women Entrepreneurs: An Examina tion of Factors Affecting Performance. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 12: 315-339.

Lévesque, M., & MacCrimmon, K. R. (1997). On the interaction of time and money in new ventures. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 89–110.

Lewis, S. & Cooper, C. L. (1995). Balancing the work/home interface: A European per-spective. *Human Resource Management Review*. 5 (4): 289-305.

Ljunggren, E. (2008). Kunnskapsbehov om entreprenørskap och kjønn i Norge. Ar-beidsnotat 1031/08, Nordlandsforskning, Bodø.

Loscocco K. A. (1997). Work–family linkages among self-employed women and men.

Journal of Vocational Behavior, 50, 204-226.Loscocco, K. A., & Leicht, K. T. (1993). Gender, work–family linkages, and economic success among small business owners. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 55(4), 875–87.

Mack, N. & Woodsong, C. (2005). Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide, Family Health International, USA

Manolova, T. S., Carter, N. M., Manev, I. M. & Gyoshev, B. S. (2007). The differential effect of men and women entrepreneurs' human capital and networking on growth expectancies in Bulgaria. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice,* May, pp. 407-26.

Marshall, C., & Rossman. B. G. (1999). Designing qualitative research. Sage Publication, 3rd Ed.

McAdam, M. (2012). *Female Entrepreneurship.* Routledge, New York.

McGregor, J., & Tweed, D. (2002). Profiling a new generation of female small business owners in New Zealand: networking, mentoring and growth. Gender, Work and Organization, Vol. 9 No. 4, pp. 420-38.

Mencken, F. C., & Winfield, I. (2000). Job search and sex segregation: Does sex of social contact matter? *Sex Roles*, Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Moore, D. P., & Buttner, E. H. (1997). Women's organizational female business owners: An exploratory study. *Journal of Small Business Management*, July, 18–34.

Nicholson, N., & West, J. (1988). Managerial job change: men and women in transition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Norman, G. R. (2002). International handbook of research in medical education. Vol. 2, Kluwer academic publisher.

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., Leech, N. L., & Collins, K. M. T. (2012). Qualitative Analysis Techniques for the Review of the Literature. *The Qualitative Report,* Vol. 17. Article 56, 1-28.

Patokorpia, E., & Ahvenainenb, M. (2008). Developing an abduction-based method for futures research. *Elsevier,* 126–139.

doi:10.1016/j.futures.2008.09.019

Patulny, R., & Svendsen, G. (2007). Exploring the social capital grid: bonding, bridging, qualitative, quantitative. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol. 27 Iss: 1/2, pp.32 – 51.

Priem, R. L., Lyon, D. W. &. Dess, G. G. (1999). Inherent Limitations of Demographic Proxies in Top Management Team Heterogeneity Research. *Journal of Management.* 25: 935.

Reichertz, J. (2007). Abduction: The Logic of Discovery of Grounded Theory, in A.

Bryant and K. Charmaz (Eds.). The Sage Handbook of Grounded Theory, London: SAGE, pp. 214 – 228.

Renzulli, L. A., & Aldrich, H. E.(2005). Who Can You Turn To? Tie Activation within Core Business Discussion Networks. Social Forces 84: pp 323-342.

Renzulli, L. A., Aldrich, H., & Moody, J. (2000). Family matters: gender, networks, and entrepreneurial outcomes. Social Forces, Vol. 79 No. 2, pp. 523-46.

Robinson, S., & Sexton, E. A. (1994). The effect of education and experience on self-employment success. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 9, 141–56.

Robson, C. (2002). Real World Research (2nd edition). Oxford: Blackwell

Saunders, M., Lewis. P., & Thornhill, A. (2012). Research Methods for Business Students. 6th edition. Prentice Hall.

Saumure, K., & Given, L. (2008). Data Saturation. In Lisa M. Given (Ed.), The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods. (pp. 196-197). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications,

SCB. (2012). På tal om kvinnor och män: lathund om jämställdhet (Speaking About Women and Men: Quick Guide on Equity). Statistics Sweden, Stockholm.

Shafie, T. (2010). Design-based estimators for snowball sampling. Paper presented at Workshop on Survey Sampling Theory and Methodology. Vilnius, Lithuania (pp. 23-27).

Smith-Hunter, A. (2006). Women Entrepreneurs Across Racial Lines: Issues of Human Capital, Financial Capital and Network (New Horizons in Entrepreneurship). Edward Elgar Pub.

Spreitzer, G. M. (1996). Social structural characteristics of psychological empowerment. *Academy of Management Journal*. 39(2), pp 483-505.

Ud Dowla, A. (2011). How Entrepreneurs use Social Networks in their Business.

Retrieved February 4, 2014, from http://stud.epsilon.slu.se/3300/1/Dowla_a_ 111003.pdf

Venkataraman, S., & Van de Ven, A. (1998). Hostile environmental jolts, transaction set, and new business. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 13, 231–55.

Williams, M. (2000). Interpretivism and Generalisation. *BSA Publications Limited*, Vol.34, No.2, pp.209–224.

Wilken, P. H. (1979). Entrepreneurship: A Comparative and Historical Study, Ablex, Norwood, NJ.

Internet references

Chêne, M. (2011). *What makes New Zealand, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and others "cleaner" than most countries?* Retrieved May 8, 2014, from http://blog.transparency.org/2011/12/07/what-makes-new-zealand-denmark-finland-sweden-and-others-%E2%80%9Ccleaner%E2%80%9D-than-most-countries/

Doing Business - World Bank Group. (2014). *Employing Workers in Sweden.* Retrieved April 26, 2014, from http://www.doingbusiness.org/data/exploreeconomies/ sweden/employing-workers

European Commission (2014). *WES - the European network to promote women's entrepreneurship.* Retrieved March 27, 2014, from http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise /policies/sme/promoting-entrepreneurship/women/wes-network/index_en.htm

European Commission (2014). *The European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors.* Retrieved March 27, 2014, from http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise /policies/sme/promoting-entrepreneurship/women/ambassadors/index_en.htm

Institutional Review Board. (2014). *Protecting Confidentiality & Anonymity.* Retrieved

    April 20, 2014, from http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/confidentiality.htm

Johnston, K. (2014). *Authors work to reveal hidden gender bias* - The Boston Globe.

    Retrieved May 9, 2014, from

    http://www.bostonglobe.com/business/2014/03/29/authors-work-reveal-hidden-

    gender-discrimination/7vMZ61rk6eydmdszKbO5YP/story.html

Main Quotes (n.d.). *Barbara Corcoran.* Retrieved May 9, 2014, from

    http://www.mainquotes.com/quotesfrom/Barbara-Corcoran/2.html

Nelson, A. (2012). *Creating networks to empower women*. Retrieved May 9, 2014, from

    http://www.tradeforum.org/article/creating-networks-to-empower-women/

OECD. (n.d.). *Gender Publication - Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now.* Retrieved April

    26, 2014, from http://www.oecd.org/sweden/Closing%20the%20Gender%20

    Gap%20-%20Sweden%20FINAL.pdf

Tillväxtverket, (2014). *Opportunities and obstacles to growth in Swedish SMEs.* Re

    trieved April 1, 2014, from http://www.tillvaxtverket.se/sidhuvud/englishpages/

    surveyofswedishsmesforetagensvillkorochverklighet2011/opportunitiesandobsta

    clestogrowthinswedishsmes.4.6a7dfe9a134cd71cae1800010724.html

Tillväxtverket, (2014). *Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth –*

    Tillväxtverket. Retrieved March 1, 2014, from http://www.tillvaxtverket.se/

    sidhuvud/englishpages.4.21099e4211fdba8c87b800017332.html

Vanbrabant, D. (2012). *How Do Women Network Differently From Men?* Retrieved

    May 9, 2014, from http://www.thenextwomen.com/2012/09/20/how-do-women-

    network-differently-men

Appendix 1: numbers and names assigned to the interviewees

Number assigned to each interviewee	Name of the interviewee
1	Ina Firstie
2	Sarah Power
3	Karin Show
4	Eva Vagen
5	Mor Leader
6	Catarina Femin
7	Veronica Joy
8	Amber Republic
9	Anna Japan
10	Cecilia Networker
11	Anna Artist
12	Zeid Fun
13	Sofia Grand
14	Mari Kidd
15	Eva Lean
16	Jeanine Brod
17	Mary Knowal
18	Ingrid Admirer
19	Rayna Anon
20	Anna-Carin Holiday
21	Jenny Secure
22	Marie Lasty

Appendix 2: demographic profile of the interviewees

Data collected /general questions/	Which interviewee
Educational background – university	2,3,4,6,7,8,9,10,11,14,15,16,17,18,19,21,22
Educational background – other-high school/gymnasium	1,5,12,13,20
Married, or partnership /sambo/	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,20,21,22
Children	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,20,21,22

Appendix 3: age and number of years of business operation

Number assigned to each interviewee	Age when the business was started	How long the current business is being done
1	33	5
2	39	3
3	33	19
4	44	5
5	45	10
6	28	20
7	44	16
8	43	20
9	37	13
10	29	3
11	46	3
12	48	10
13	33	3
14	34	17
15	54	7
16	44	3
17	28	12
18	52	6
19	34	20
20	49	4
21	35	5
22	38	10

Appendix 4: definitions of types and ties of networks

Definitions	
Small network	A network, consisting of less than 5 contacts
Big network	A network, consisting of more than 5 contacts
Strong ties	Strong relationship including high emotional commitment and high occurrence of contact among individuals with the same sex
Weak ties	Weak relationship including low emotional commitment and low occurrence of contact