Women and Networks

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# Table of contents

1. INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................................ 4
   1.1 BACKGROUND ....................................................................................................................................... 4
   1.2 PROBLEM DISCUSSION .......................................................................................................................... 5
   1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION ............................................................................................................................ 6
   1.4 PURPOSE ................................................................................................................................................... 7
   1.5 LIMITATIONS ......................................................................................................................................... 7
   1.6 THEORETICAL RELEVANCE ................................................................................................................... 7
   1.7 PRACTICAL RELEVANCE ....................................................................................................................... 7

2. METHODOLOGY ......................................................................................................................................... 11
   2.1 CHOICE OF SUBJECT ............................................................................................................................ 11
   2.2 THE RESEARCH STRATEGY ..................................................................................................................... 11
   2.3 THEORETICAL DATA COLLECTION ....................................................................................................... 11
   2.4 EMPIRICAL DATA COLLECTION ............................................................................................................. 12
      2.4.1 Choice of informants ......................................................................................................................... 12
      2.4.2 Choice of interview method ............................................................................................................... 12
   2.5 VALUE OF THE STUDY .......................................................................................................................... 13
      2.5.1 Validity ............................................................................................................................................... 13
      2.5.2 Reliability ....................................................................................................................................... 13

3. THEORY .................................................................................................................................................. 17
   3.1 WHAT IS A NETWORK? .......................................................................................................................... 17
      3.1.1 Social networks ................................................................................................................................. 17
      3.1.2 Professional networks ...................................................................................................................... 17
      3.1.3 Formal networks .............................................................................................................................. 17
      3.1.4 Informal networks ............................................................................................................................ 17
   3.2 OLD BOY’S NETWORKS ......................................................................................................................... 18
      3.2.1 What they are and how they work ...................................................................................................... 18
      3.2.2 Are they an obstacle for women’s career making? .......................................................................... 18
   3.3 WOMEN AND NETWORKING ............................................................................................................... 18
      3.3.1 The importance of networking ......................................................................................................... 18
      3.3.2 Women-only networks ..................................................................................................................... 18
      3.3.3 Advantages and disadvantages with women only networks ............................................................ 18
      3.3.4 Are women willing to help each other? ............................................................................................ 18
   3.4 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE NETWORKS ............................................................ 19
      3.4.1 Use of networks ............................................................................................................................... 19
      3.4.2 Building networks ............................................................................................................................ 19
      3.4.3 Benefit ............................................................................................................................................ 19
      3.4.4 Gender differences ............................................................................................................................ 19
   3.6 THEORETICAL SUMMERY ..................................................................................................................... 21

4. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE NETWORKS ................................................................. 23
   4.1.1 Social Network .................................................................................................................................. 23
   4.1.2 Professional Network ........................................................................................................................ 23
   4.1.3 Formal Network .................................................................................................................................. 23
   4.1.4 Informal Network ............................................................................................................................... 23

5. CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................................. 25
   5.1 DISCUSSION .......................................................................................................................................... 25
   5.2 LIMITATIONS ......................................................................................................................................... 25
   5.3 FUTURE RESEARCH ............................................................................................................................... 25

6. APPENDICES ............................................................................................................................................. 25
   6.1 Appendix A ............................................................................................................................................. 25
   6.2 Appendix B ............................................................................................................................................. 25
   6.3 Appendix C ............................................................................................................................................. 25
4. CONDITIONS IN SWEDEN AND AUSTRIA

4.1 NUMBER OF WOMEN AT THE TOP

4.2 CHILDRE AND GOVERNMENTAL MEASURES

5. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

5.1 THE NETWORKS

5.1.1 Business and Professional Women-Austria

5.1.2 Föken

5.1.3 Rotary

5.2 THE INTERVIEWS

5.2.1 The main obstacles for female career advancement

5.2.2 Men-only networks as an obstacle

5.2.3 Women and networking

5.2.5 Differences between men- and women-only networks

6. ANALYSIS

6.1 THE MAIN OBSTACLES FOR FEMALE CAREER ADVANCEMENT

6.2 MEN-ONLY NETWORKS AS AN OBSTACLE

6.3 WOMEN AND NETWORKING

6.3.1 The importance of networking

6.3.2 Women-only networks

6.3.3 Advantages with women-only networks

6.3.4 Disadvantages with women-only networks

6.3.5 Are women willing to help each other

6.5 DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEN- AND WOMEN-ONLY NETWORKS

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 PROPOSED FUTURE RESEARCH

8. REFERENCE LIST

8.1 BOOKS AND ARTICLES

8.2 INTERNET SOURCES

APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 2
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Over the last three decades, women have taken a leadership role in redefining fundamental aspects of our lives; work, family, sexuality, equality, and justice.\(^1\) A widespread assumption is that barriers have been coming down, women have been moving up, and equal treatment is an accomplished fact. Although women have made enormous progress over the last several decades, they remain under-represented at the top and over-represented at the bottom in both public and private sectors.\(^2\) There are only 11\% of women in the highest decision-making positions of the 50 biggest companies of the enlarged EU and in the 15 “old” members states only 24\% of entrepreneurs are women.\(^3\)

One of the current issues having considerable impact on women’s careers internationally is the glass ceiling. The term “glass ceiling” is used to describe all the frustrations of working women at every level who can see where they want to get to but who find themselves blocked by an invisible barrier.\(^4\) The glass ceilings exclude many women from leadership positions and create the subtle biases that confront women who attain such positions. A deeper understanding of the glass ceiling can be given by, in literature frequently mentioned, obstacles for women's opportunities for leadership. These are, among others, the traditional gender stereotypes, inadequate access to mentors and informal networks of support, and inflexible workplace structures.\(^5\)

The existence of informal male networks, sometimes referred to as "old boys' networks", tends to exclude women from top jobs. This is an obstacle that is treated in few books and articles, but that has become a “trendy” issue in women business circles. More and more women are joining women-only networks or trying to create their own informal networks. The purpose is to establish useful contacts, learn new things, and be able to share their concerns with other women in the same situation. For some it gives an opportunity to find a mentor who can guide them.

\(^2\) Rhode p. 6
\(^5\) Rhode p. 7
1.2 Problem Discussion

Inadequate access to informal networks of support is often mentioned as one of the greatest obstacles for female career advancement. Many women-only networks were created in the 1980’s and the trend has become even stronger in the 1990’s. Probably because more and more women have come to realize that they need professional contacts for a successful career and that they also needed each other’s support.\(^6\)

It is also stated that one of the reasons that there are so few women in managerial positions is the existence of “old boy’s networks”. The members, who can only be male, are provided with influence and are often elected into top management through each other. This is another reason why some of the women only networks were created. When the female managers realized that the “old boy’s networks” were working very well for men’s career advancement, they wanted to create something similar for women.\(^7\)

There are books that in a smaller or greater extent discuss the subject of women-only networks and contain list with the existing networks today. One typical example is the book “Kvinnliga nätverk: ett sätt att utvecklas på jobbet” (Female networks: a way of developing in the workplace) by Carin Lann. In her introduction chapter she shortly explains the differences between networks and writes about how important it is for women to network by giving examples from her own experiences. The rest of the book contains lists of networks in Sweden. An other example I found in Austria is Karin Büchers book “Handbuch-Frauen-Netzwerke” (Handbook-Women-Networks), which I from the name assumed would be a real women-networks guide, but it turned out to be a disappointment. After few pages of interviews, also this book was just a long list of women-only networks in Germany.

All theoretical data highlights the importance of networking for women, but almost no research has been done to show if these networks really work. It is essential to see if the female-only networks are of any help for women and what positive outcomes they bring.

\(^6\) Lann (1996) *Kvinnliga nätverk: ett sätt att utvecklas på jobbet*, Brombergs Bokförlag, Köping  p.15
1.3 Research Question

The problem discussion above leads to the research question: “If being kept from male networks is an obstacle, how do women benefit from creating women only networks?”

1.4 Purpose

The aim of this bachelor thesis is to study if women’s lacking access to male networks is an obstacle for career advancement and to give an insight into women-only networks and their effectiveness to support women leaders and managers and increase women's representation in senior positions.

1.5 Limitations

I have chosen to do my research in only two different cities in two countries. The reason is that I was studying in both of them, which gave me an easier access to the interviewees. The research is also limited to no more than three different networks; due to the lack of resources, like time and money.

1.6 Theoretical relevance

The best argument to defend the theoretical relevance of this study is the lack of information on the subject. Even though the importance of networking is mentioned in many books and articles, limited research has been done to see if female-only networks are giving a positive or negative result to female career advancement (see problem discussion).

1.7 Practical relevance

By fulfilling the purpose of the paper I hope it will help women in business to overcome at least one of the obstacles for career advancement and guide them to make a conscious and better choice of networks.
2. Methodology

2.1 Choice of subject

After writing a group paper about businesswomen and the obstacles they are facing when trying to reach higher positions, I became interested to look deeper into the topic. This is a subject that will probably have an importance in my life and there is a great probability that I and many other female students in my circle of friends will be facing the same problems in the future.

Being a woman in today’s business world is not easy at all. To write about all the obstacles they face could easily result in a whole book. After reading about it more and more I became conscious that the subject of female networking was a very important one, but that very few women have realized it. Some women that were aware of the significance of networking are part of networks that are created only for women. However I could not find if these networks were bringing women to higher position levels and decided to take a closer look into that.

2.2 The research strategy

Due to the relatively minimal existing research on the subject of this thesis; an explorative method has been used. Explorative investigation aim to research conditions and phenomenas that are less known or completely unknown. It is most suitable to use a qualitative method when doing an explorative approach. The central with a qualitative method is that a deeper understanding of the problem studied can be created. This method suits my research, because there is a greater need for a deeper understanding of how female networks work, if they are useful, and if male networks are creating obstacles for career women.

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9 Karl Erik Rosengren and Peter Arvidson (2002) *Sociologisk metodik*, Liber, Malmö p.302
10 Andersen (1998) p.31
2.3 Theoretical data collection

Due to the novelty of the subject of women networking it was not easy to find many already established theories. Therefore it was essential to look for theory in all three languages used to create this paper: Swedish, English and German.

Some of the books used in the paper are written on the subject of women managers and the obstacles they face and they shortly mention women’s importance of networking. Other books have the topic of how to make a career, where the importance of networking is also mentioned and few books had to be ordered from other libraries in Sweden. The books on career making are all from the middle 90’s, but the ones on women’s networking are all relatively new, one or two were even published few months ago.

The internet and databases were used for searching articles on the subject of female networking in hope of giving an overview of the “state-of-the-art” of the theories. Surprisingly few were found. For this reason the empirical study is of a great importance. Most of the scientific articles used are obtained from the database Elin, available on the Växjö University’s library homepage. I also used the search engine “Google” in order to find other articles on the internet and also homepages about female networks.

2.4 Empirical data collection

2.4.1 Choice of informants

All of the interviews were personal and gave me the chance to meet members of two networks in Växjö, Sweden; “Fröken” and “Rotary”, and one women-only network in Linz, Austria; the BPW, “Business & Professional Women”. I used the internet to find addresses and member lists for women-only networks in both of the cities.

I first contacted the president of the BPW Linz and asked her for help to find other members that would be willing to help me with my research. She asked many of them on the next meeting, but only 4 women were willing to do the interview, because they did not feel

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11 Electronic Library Information Navigator
comfortable doing them in English. After I realized that I was able to carry out the interview in German, five more women agreed on answering the questions. All interviewees had to be contacted by telephone because the use of e-mail is not yet a well used resource in Austria.

The two networks in Sweden already had member lists online with their names, occupations and e-mail addresses. I chose about 20 people from the list, which I believed would fit into my research. All of them were contacted via e-mail with a short explanation about my subject and an inquiry about their interests to be a part of it. I chose to send the e-mails separately to each candidate to make them more personal in hope of a greater answering frequency. Almost all people contacted were willing to help and it resulted in 14 interviews.

2.4.2 Choice of interview method

I consider interviews as the most useful way of gathering information for this subject. The reason being they can give me an inside view and a deeper understanding of the informal networks of support. They also provided me with personal perspectives of the network-members, which are of great importance for this research. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured style where all interviewees were allowed to talk freely on the given questions with as little control as possible from the interviewer. The follow up questions were asked whenever they were needed. Some of the first people I interviewed brought up other interesting questions, which I asked in following interviews during the time of empirical data collection.

A was already in Austria at this time and therefore chose to meet all of the respondents face to face. Most meetings took place in coffeehouses, which brought a more relaxed atmosphere. The interviewees felt comfortable to talk openly and it was easier to ask follow up questions. Due to the reason that the questions were of a more personal character and included about these peoples own experiences and opinions, I felt that it was not appropriate to tape the interviews. I believed that they would not be relaxed enough and some of the women even expressed their wish not to be taped. Also Andersen recommends researchers to not use the tape recorder, as it can affect the answers. He suggests instead to make short notes during the interviews and to edit those more detailed afterwards. This method seemed most suitable and was used both in Austria and on the interviews I did when I returned to Sweden.

12 Andersen (1998) p. 145
2.5 Value of the study

2.5.1 Validity
The primary problem with using collected information is its relevancy for the study. Therefore it is important to test the validity of the researches, which means to see how the gathered information corresponds to the subject being studied.\textsuperscript{13}

In hope to get as wide range of sources as possible, I used books, publications and the Internet in three different languages. Due to the novelty of the subject I did not find it appropriate to use any to old data. Thereafter the most relevant theory was included. To provide the reader with a better understanding of the subject, I find it necessary to first explain what networking is all about. Since the purpose was to see if male-networks are an obstacle for women’s career advancement, and to give a deeper insight into women-only networks, it is relevant to include these two subjects in both theoretical and empirical findings.

2.5.2 Reliability
To have a reliable research it is important that the information is trustworthy, that the interviewee is motivated to give relevant information\textsuperscript{14} and if the operations of the study can be repeated with the same results.\textsuperscript{15} The researcher must be able to show that the interpretations are not constructed by stereotypes, prejudices or easy accessible conclusions.\textsuperscript{16}

I chose to only do personal interviews for this study, because I believed it would provide me with a deeper understanding of the research problem. The notes are made during each interview and the interviewees were asked afterward if that was what they meant. Not using any recording equipment may have decreased the reliability somewhat, but I have tried to present the collected material in great detail. I have also tried to render the gathered information as truthful and honest as possible.

\begin{thebibliography}
\item[14] Patel and Tebelius p.77
\item[16] Patel and Tebelius p.80
\end{thebibliography}
3. Theory

3.1 What is a network?

There are many types of networks that vary in size and purpose. Different networks can represent different types of interests for the individual. On one side the network can be characterized by “being together relationships”, where equality, closeness and belonging are central. On the other side, a network can be organized be “organizational principles”, where rationality, benefits and self-interest dominate. Jeffrey G. Allen explains a network like this:

“Real networking is a balanced system of give and take. It is like a bank of favours, where you regularly pay in and from which you regularly get something out. The best networkers practice preventive networking, by caring about their contacts and nurturing them for decades.”

3.1.1 Social networks

Social networks fill a social purpose and function as a way of relief that bring out thoughts like “I am not alone. There are others in the same situation”. This type of network a person starts creating early in life, and it consists of family, friends and other acquaintances. It is a formation of contacts that the individual can turn for support in difficult situations.

3.1.2 Professional networks

In these types of networks, the focus is on the professional life instead of the private. The contacts help each other solving business problems, they might have at work. In professional networks is exchange of experiences an important ingredient. The more different experiences the members bring into a situation, the more will the network and its members develop.

18 Irmelin Drake (1996) Kvinnor och ledarskap, Studentlitteratur, Lund p.177
20 Lann p.16
21 Alm p.48
22 Lann p.16
### 3.1.3 Formal networks

Formal networks tend to be professional organizations and are those in which members pay fees, receive newsletters and usually engage in “networking activities”. Formal networks can be divided up in internal and external networks.

A formal internal network can be a group of accessible people within the company, to whom a manager should turn to when there is a social or professional problem. Which formal internal network she chooses depends on the own interests and needs and on the access on available networks in the organization. A formal external network is a certain forum, association, organization or few people that exist outside the organization where the manager is working. Those contacts that are made outside the company are usually voluntary and the support or help you receive usually costs.

### 3.1.4 Informal networks

Informal networks are those that consist of like-minded individuals who may meet irregularly to discuss various issues. An example could be a group of women who sometimes meet to have dinner and discuss work-related matters. Even informal networks can be divided in internal and external networks.

When a leader contacts or asks for help from a person in an other part of the organization, it can be said that she is contacting her informal internal network. A person’s informal external network consists of people who are not working in the same organization.

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23 Ehrich p. 7  
24 Drake p.178  
25 Drake p.179  
26 Ehrich p. 7  
27 Drake p. 179  
28 Drake p.180
3.2 Old boy’s networks

3.2.1 What they are and how they work

We have frequently heard about the “old-boys’ network” and there is probably a great deal of validity in its effectiveness. This network has often been viewed as a sort of club, in which only selected members may join, in either a formal or an informal sense. Important characteristics of networking and the “old boy system” is that it is dependent on informal interactions involving favours, persuasion, and connection to people who already have influence.

The old boys’ network connections that lead to wealth are often decades in the making. The traditional old boys’ network consisted mainly of macho, very white, predominantly middle-aged men dripping with money and power. However, the rise of the Internet community has resulted in the creation of an entirely new network; a new boys’ network through which companies form, contacts meet, investments flow and deals happen. Underneath it all was a belief that this new boys’ network would be different from the old one - race and gender neutral, open and flexible. However, in many ways this new network remains as male and as white as the traditional old boys’ network.

There is a very strong connection between obtaining help from fraternity and sorority members and obtaining prestigious, high paying jobs. Some of this connection might be causal in the sense that a given student using fraternity help would do worse on employment if he were denied the opportunity to network with fraternity brothers and alumni. The availability of networks may partially explain why admission to certain colleges and universities is considered so desirable.

32 David Marmoros and Bruce Sacerdote (2002) Peer and social networks in job search, European Economic Review, Volume 46, Number 4-5, Page 878
Of these the most influential of America's exclusive students’ societies has been Yale University's Skull and Bones, founded in 1832, where both George W Bush and John Kerry are members. Many of the Skull and Bones members hold powerful positions in the State Department, the White House and the CIA.\(^{33}\) Three of them became presidents of the USA.\(^{34}\) Another exclusive society is the 134 years old Bohemian Club, where among others Bill Clinton, Dick Cheney, George W Bush and Colin Powell are members.\(^{35}\) But beyond all these lies the mother of all networks, the Order of Illuminati. It is uncertain how old this society is, but it is significant that many American presidents have been Illuminati and the Illuminati symbol of the eye in the pyramid still graces the dollar bill.\(^{36}\)

3.2.2 Are they an obstacle for women’s career making?

Research studies indicate that one of the most frequently reported problems experiences by both women and racial minorities is the limited access to or exclusion from informal interaction networks. Women have been largely excluded from “old boy” networks, which traditionally are composed of individuals who hold power in the organization.\(^{37}\) Study findings also point out that the “old boy network” is still strong in most organizations throughout Europe. There are many established networks, clubs and groups both inside and outside companies in which women are not even allowed to participate.\(^{38}\)

Many of these networks have now, for different reasons, started to allowed female members. After the feminists argued that it was harmful for a club to exclude women, the Skull and Bones decided in 1991 to admit women. This decision provoked outrage among its old members, who argued that the magic of male bonding would crumble. Much embarrassing publicity ensued before the decision to admit women was ratified.\(^{39}\)

Many people viewed the Internet as a golden opportunity for women to finally gain equal access to top positions in an industry due to its late start up, in a time where women have

\(^{33}\) Being one of us, Economist, Volume 325, Issue 7791, p20-24  
\(^{36}\) Being one of us, Economist  
\(^{37}\) Linehan p. 823  
\(^{38}\) Brooks p. 82  
\(^{39}\) Being one of us, Economist
already accomplished so much. However, as mentioned earlier, it seems that the Internet industry has just become a “new” old boys’ network.\textsuperscript{40}

3.3 Women and networking

3.3.1 The importance of networking

3.3.1.1 Stay healthy
The most significant benefit from networking is that social involvement is healthy. Networking can actually help you live a longer, happier and healthier life. Not only is networking important to your career development, it also helps you build strong emotional and social ties. Those ties can later on improve the quality and length of your life.\textsuperscript{41} Research has identified that social support from a network is providing a protective function against stress and other illnesses. For the workers with little or no social support, the stress experienced at work (for example urgent deadlines and heavy work load) was more closely correlated with indicators of stain (for example high blood pressure) than for the workers who where supported by social networks.\textsuperscript{42} People with strong social support networks are less sustainable to the unexpected and not as stressed out by setbacks. A network gives much-needed perspective and support in tough times and ample opportunities for stress-free good times as well.\textsuperscript{43}

3.3.1.2 Gather information
The other very important reason why to put time and energy on networking is that networks are a source for gathering information. Having access to information means having influence.\textsuperscript{44} Networking is not only limited to gathering contacts outside your current organization. A strong internal network can act as your eyes and ears, on the lookout for everything from office politics to job opportunities.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{40}Gamba and Kleiner
\textsuperscript{41}Jessie Eisenstein (1996) \textit{Powering up your network}, Women in Business; Vol. 48 Issue 2, p7
\textsuperscript{42}Dorothy Miell and Rudi Dallos (1996) \textit{Social Interaction and Personal relationships}, SAGE, London p. 279
\textsuperscript{43}Networking Works! : The Wetfeet Insider Guide to Networking, p.8
\textsuperscript{44}Anders Kinding (1995) \textit{Odla dina kontakter}, Kompetens media förlag i norden AB, Stockholm p.18
\textsuperscript{45}Rob Yeung (2003) \textit{Ultimate Career Success Workbook}, Kogan Page, Milford, CT, USA p.177
Business professionals are also no longer staying in one job or company for an entire career as they use to. This workplace reality requires people to be knowledgeable of the marketplace, externally focused, and keenly aware of their professional environment. Professionals who do a goods job at networking tend to be better informed and more knowledgeable of their professional environment than non-networking counterparts.46

3.3.1.3 Find a job

Many people tend to use networking when they are looking for a new job. Indeed, there is a vast ‘hidden market’ of jobs that do not get advertised but filled by word of mouth.47 Some of the most desirable job opportunities are those you’ll never hear about unless you have a network that gives you the inside scoop. Especially when the job market is tight, many companies are unwilling to post attractive managerial job listings for fear of getting hundreds of responses, many from unqualified candidates. Instead, they ask employees and colleagues to circulate the word, either verbally or via e-mail, among their colleagues and friends to find qualified candidates.48 According to an inquiry made by BH Careers International, about 80% of all job opportunities are never advertised and 60% of the asked people got their latest jobs by using their network.49

3.3.1.4 Professional development

“It’s who you know, not what you know, that counts” is an often heard phrase.50

Successful career management often necessitates exploring alternative methods of creating or accessing resources. Establishing an effective network can be critical in the success strategy. Networks are especially important because they provide access, visibility, and support.51 For a lot of people who do not, in their professions, meet the kinds of people who can assist them in advancing, making contacts is essential to gain recognition and visibility. While of course the ultimate goal of this type of networking is to make contacts with people who can help out in their professional development.52

47 Yeung p.177
48 Networking Works!, p.7
49 Martin Wallström (2005) Nätverka dig till jobbet, CS Jobb
50 Allen p.195
52 Brooks p. 80
3.3.2 Women-only networks

Women always use to work in different forms of networks, for example looking after children, food preparation and other types of housework, like weaving and making clothes. This type of teamwork use to be frequent before the technology came into our homes. Women also used to organize themselves in networks to, among other things, fight for equal rights, women’s right to vote and other “female” issues. The modern professional women have often an other motive for forming networks than before. In contrary to the women who created networks from an ideology or conviction, today’s women are creating their networks for their own sake. They are consciously trying to get a big and significant circle of acquaintances where they can receive help and give support to other women. Women are in other words establishing new networks to promote their own interests, reach their goals, materialize their dreams and get ideas.

Female managers are furthermore often excluded from male networks. Such networks provide men, but not women, with the connections and influence that they need for entry into management positions, as well as for election or appointment to top management positions. The key motives for establishing women-only networks are therefore to provide support and to circumvent women’s exclusion from “old boys” networks. Some argue that this type of organizing is separatist and exclusive while others consider it to be essential for circumventing men’s organizational power.

Formal women-only networks sponsor a variety of activities, such as workshops, seminars, speaker series, talent banks, and informal social events. Some groups link professionals with potential clients; some help individuals develop marketing, leadership, media, and other

53 Drake p.174
54 Drake p.175
career-advancement skills; and some focus on representing women's shared concerns in their professions or workplaces.\textsuperscript{57}

Many women have risen to the challenge by forming their own small groups or “Girl Gangs”, that get together regularly in person, by phone, or via email to talk about life and career. These buddies share ideas and contacts, celebrate personal and professional successes, and help their members get more done. Given the demands faced by the average woman juggling work, family, and life in general, an informal group offers a great way to harness the energy of different people dealing with similar situations. By forming their own girl gang, women can draw on possibilities to make all of the members more powerful.\textsuperscript{58}

3.3.3 Advantages and disadvantages with women only networks

Benefits of women-only networks are said to include increased self-confidence, the provision of learning opportunities, gaining of new skills and growth of social contacts.\textsuperscript{59} Many of these networks play a crucial role in addressing the sources and symptoms of gender inequality. They expand aspirations, expose obstacles, and identify solutions. By bringing women together around common interests, these networks can encourage informal mentoring, forge coalitions on gender related issues, and enhance individuals' reputations within the broader community.\textsuperscript{60} Carin Lann, who is a Swedish business woman at the top, writes in her book that she would not have bin where she is today without the support, visibility and the personal development that she had gained through networking. The professional support she got mainly from other women; the visibility through the engagement in different networks where she was active; and the personal development by exchanging experiences with other women in similar situations.\textsuperscript{61}

Some women say that these networks have benefited their careers, others have found them to be lacking in value. 53\% of high-level women in one study stated that networking in professional women’s organizations had not helped them advance in their professions.\textsuperscript{62} While there is recognition that there may be positive outcomes of this strategy, women only

\textsuperscript{57} Rhode p.31
\textsuperscript{59} Pini p.287
\textsuperscript{60} Rhode p. 31
\textsuperscript{61} Lann, p7
\textsuperscript{62} Adler and Izraeli p.396
networks are not as simple solution for increasing women’s involvement in management.\textsuperscript{63} It appears that women need not only to form their own networks, but also to penetrate men’s networks to a greater extent if they are to be promoted into positions of power in corporations.\textsuperscript{64} One reason is that it is from male-dominated networks that managers likely to be selected, because it is men who hold the majority of senior positions.\textsuperscript{65} Statistically however, a network with only women has less power and poorer information access than the male networks. This is because women have lower positions in the business, politics, club activities, church, media, shortly in all aspects of the society.\textsuperscript{66} While women-only networks are useful for providing women with “valuable psycho-social support”, women seeking to progress their careers also need to “extent their networks practices” and participate in mainstream networks.\textsuperscript{67}

\subsection*{3.3.4 Are women willing to help each other}

Because the women’s movement and the media have focused primarily on men who discriminate against women in the office, most working women are cautious with their male colleagues, but consider their female co-workers “sisters”. Unfortunately, too many of these women are realizing that some of their “sisters” are sabotaging their careers.\textsuperscript{68} Women are often jealous and envious, which is a manifestation of their insecurity and low self-esteem.\textsuperscript{69}

Jill Barber and Rita E. Watson explain in their book that there can be two types of women in the workplace: “the Eves” and “the Margos”. The Eve represents many young women with fast track expectations who want to make it to the top without putting in the hard work it takes to get there. An Eve does not rely on her skills and intellect, but rather manipulates, and lies to get what she wants. A Margo represents established women who have struggled to achieve success.\textsuperscript{70} The reason that some women become Eves is that women are not encouraged to establish a strong sense of self-confidence and independence; many therefore suffer from low self-esteem. These types of women feel threatened by the differences between other women

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{63} Pini p.287
\bibitem{64} Adler and Izraeli p.396
\bibitem{65} Pini p.287
\bibitem{66} Liza Marklund and Lotta Snickare (2005) \textit{Det finns en särskild plats i helvetet för kvinnor som inte hjälper varandra}, Pirat förlag, Stockholm p.149
\bibitem{67} Pini p.287
\bibitem{68} Jill Barber and Rita E. Watson (1991) \textit{Sisterhood betrayed, women in the workplace and the all about Eve complex,} St. Martin’s press, New York, p. 6
\bibitem{69} Ehrhardt Ute (1994) \textit{Gute Mädchen kommen in den Himmel böse überall hin. Warum Bravsein nicht weiterbringt,} Wolfgang Krüger Verlag, Nördlingen, Germany p.27
\bibitem{70} Barber and Watson p.5
\end{thebibliography}
and themselves. In order to get ahead, they think they need an extra edge because they cannot compete to get what they want.\footnote{Barber and Watson p. 18}

Of course, not all women sabotage or betray, and many do help others to succeed. A lot of established female managers are using a system of networking and mentoring that assists newcomers up the career ladder. Some would like to help other women, but they do not know how to help.\footnote{Barber p.7-8} Many women are not making career, because of fear of being perceived as hard and cold and therefore not being liked by others. As a result, instead of career and success, they choose friendship, collegiality and social closeness.\footnote{Ute p. 57} What they do not understand is that you do not have to be without friend, just because you have made a career. On the contrary, women who are goal oriented in their work use their strengths to support others and are self-confident enough to ask friends for help.\footnote{Ute p. 58} When women achieve success, they readily include other women in their networks and provide each other with a competitive edge for breaking through to senior positions. They tend to look out for one another offering encouragement and advice. Like men, women achieve the greatest success by relying on their colleagues for support and information.\footnote{Timberlake p.39}

Marklund and Snickare mean that it is truth that women often do not support one another, but that it has nothing to do with gender, it is about hierarchical position. The significant thing is how subordinated the group is and how great the possibilities for development are. They believe that subordinated males are acting exactly the same as subordinated females. If possibilities for career development are small, then there is not much to do. The positive strategy becomes that you do not want to develop anyway. If someone after all does go on, the others get upset, because the person that breaks loose is “deserting” the ones that are left behind. The person that is living has moreover a minimal chance helping one of the others, because the appointments on the next level are often to few. Leaving can therefore trigger a conflict. The group is defending itself by trying to force back the deviant person, or if it is possible try to make his or her new job difficult. Research shows that this is not a typical female behavior, but that men do the same. The reason that corporate males support each other is that they have possibilities of development and can be of help for one another in the
future, not that men are nicer to each other than women are.\textsuperscript{76} It is also more dangerous for a female manager to support and help a woman than someone from the norm group – a man. There is more attention on a woman, even in high positions, and is therefore even riskier to make a mistake, than it is for her male colleges. Some are afraid that people will think that one picked her just because she is a women, and not for her competence.\textsuperscript{77}

\textbf{3.4 Differences between male and female networks}

\textbf{3.4.1 Use of networks}
Males use their networks more successfully; as they promote their business and themselves to a much greater extent than the extent to which females use their networks.\textsuperscript{78} Women believe that using their relations is \textit{rude}. The fear of the rumor, that they have reached a certain position only because someone has put in a good word for them, is keeping them of networking with people in higher positions.\textsuperscript{79}

\begin{quote}
"Women need to understand that you can ask someone for something and they'll ask for something back, and that's a norm and an expectation, not an infringement on a personal relationship. It's not personal. It's business."ootnote{Connie Duckworth and Bethany McLean (2003) \textit{Networking lessons}, Fortune, Volume 148, Issue 10, p. 192}
\end{quote}

\textbf{3.4.2 Building networks}
In a research done by Susan M. Schore, the men interviewed said they networked “automatically” and “unconsciously”, and usually felt readily included when they reached out to others. The women reported that for them, networking was likely to be much more “work” than “net”; they expended greater effort in building and maintaining their networks. Many women commented on the difficulties of gaining access. Women initiated more work-based relationships, went to more work-related functions, and invited more co-workers to lunch than did men. The latter, on the other hand, spent more time developing their networks outside the immediate work setting in such activities as golf and tennis, as well as in socializing with their

\begin{footnotes}
\item[76] Marklund p.69-70
\item[77] Marklund p.147
\item[78] Ehrich p. 7
\item[79] Ute p.68
\end{footnotes}
colleagues and wives. Most of the women said they never socialized with their informal networks outside of work.  

The contrast between women building and developing their networks on company time, and men building their networks outside of work is perhaps not surprising. Fostering networks on the golf course or by playing other sports has been a tradition for corporate males. These activities strengthen ties between them and provide opportunities to gain information and build political allies. Women, on the other hand, generally carry most of the home and childcare responsibilities. Constraining their time outside of working hours more than their male counterparts. These differences can be summarized as in the following table:

Table 1: Differences in Networking Characteristics by Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Networking Characteristics</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Types of networks</td>
<td>Women-only networks; Informal networks</td>
<td>Informal networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of access</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>Easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort expended</td>
<td>Extraordinary</td>
<td>Minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timing</td>
<td>During work day</td>
<td>Outside of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of functions</td>
<td>Wide</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most frequent function</td>
<td>Visibility, advise information, support</td>
<td>Career advancement contacts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many popular ways to network are as seen, not suited to women's schedules or tastes. Women prefer to develop intimate relationships through smaller gatherings and places where they can talk one on one about not only their job but also their personal affairs. On the other hand, men are down to business and would rather zone in on business and not form the personal relationship side of it. This difference is likely due to the differences in socialization of men.

82 Schor, p.54
83 Schore p.54
and women that make women more comfortable in a small circle of friends while men are more comfortable in a less intimate, more competitive environment.\footnote{Sharon Timberlake (2005) Social capital and gender in the workplace, Journal of Management Development, Volume 24, Issue 1, p.39}

Women are therefore taking a different approach to networking these days. They are moving away from the golf courses and high power lunches and moving towards online discussions, book clubs, nail salons and other non-traditional venues. Many women find that this non-traditional way of networking gives them the personal touch they crave as well as the flexibility to work it into their busy schedule.\footnote{Perri Capell (2006) Women Find Nontraditional Ways To Network for Advancement, CareerJournal.com}

3.4.3 Benefit

Both men and women affirmed the value of networks in getting promoted into senior management. However, the actual role networks played in this respect for each group differed in Schors’ study. Only women reported having gone to people in their networks for help in handling job changes, seeking information about position openings, and discussing strategies for getting the jobs. Only men reported that others in their networks had contacted them (without being asked) to offer them a job. People in the men’s networks sought them out to tell them of job change possibilities while women had to locate openings for them selves.\footnote{Schor p.55}

3.4.4 Gender differences

3.5.4.1 Communication

Women’s talk shows support for others and they tend to respond to what others say. Women want to care about others, to make them feel valued, and to include them. Another characteristic for women’s talk is its personal, concrete style. Women include details, personal disclosures, anecdotes, and concrete reasoning in their conversation. This provides a personal tone and foster feelings of closeness by connecting with their communication partner.\footnote{Richard L. Weaver II (1996) Understanding Interpersonal Communication, Harper Collins, New York p. 258}

The goals of men’s talk are in general exerting control, preserving independence, defending their ideas and enhancing status. Conversation allows opportunities to prove them and
negotiate prestige. There are some characteristics for men’s talk too. First, they speak to exhibit knowledge, skill, or ability. Disclosing personal feelings makes them appear weak or vulnerable. Men also use talk to achieve goals and they dominate the conversation. They attain this because men talk more frequently, they talk for longer periods of time, they redirect conversations to their own topics, and they interrupt and challenge other speakers. In addition, men offer minimal response to what others say.\textsuperscript{89}

3.5.4.2 Friendship

The gender differences, when it comes to friendship, evolve already in early ages. In the school playground boys are inclined to play in large mixed-age groups, while girls are more often in smaller groups or same-sex pairs. Boys tend to play competitive team games that involve skills of cooperation, competition and leadership, whereas the activities enjoyed by girls tend to emphasize intimacy and exclusiveness.\textsuperscript{90} This has a great impact on our adult life. Friendships between women appear to involve more confiding, intimacy, personal concern and emotional expression than friendships between men. Friendships amongst men in contrast show more aggressive interaction, competition and more oriented towards discussing practical interests, such as work and sport. Men become closer by sharing activities and doing things together. But the differences are rather minimal and there are many similarities in same sex relationships, for example both men and women have been found to place a high value on intimacy, empathy, trust, respect, acceptance, spontaneity and enjoyment of their friendships.\textsuperscript{91} However the differences may have been somewhat exaggerated, because research was focus on them. Both men and women are caring, supportive and encouraging in their relationships, but women are likely to express these feelings more openly. Just because men do not engage in such explicit displays of affection and personal disclosure does not mean that their friendships are less emotional.\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{89} Weaver p.259
\textsuperscript{90} Diana Dwyer (2000) Interpersonal Relationships, Routledge, London p.106
\textsuperscript{91} Miell and Dallos p. 229
\textsuperscript{92} Dwyer p.108
3.6 Theoretical summery

There are different types of networks that a person can be a part of, both inside and outside ones workplace. Some of them are a way of socializing with others and others are created to make professional contacts. The important thing is that everyone should be part of one or more networks, because it brings many benefits to the individual. The most significant benefit is that social involvement is healthy and that networking actually can help you live a longer and happier life. It also provides you with, visibility, support and important information that all will give you more influence in your career and can lead you to that desirable job that will actually never be advertised.

Old boy’s networks, which are seen as a sort of club, in which only selected members may join, has a long time consisted of white middle-aged men with money and power. Research studies indicate that women have largely been excluded from these types of networks, which is a career advancement problem. Even though many of these networks have now started to allowed female members, there is still not much change in many parts of Europe.

In order to break through the glass ceiling and to circumvent exclusion from “old boys” networks, women are today establishing female-only networks to promote their own interests, reach their goals, materialize their dreams and get ideas. These provide them with increased self-confidence, many learning opportunities, new skills and social contacts. But these kinds of networks are not as simple solution for increasing women’s involvement in management. It is from male-dominated networks that managers are likely to be selected and therefore should women also participate in mainstream networks. Women are also often jealas and envious and are likely to sabotag each other’s careers. Of course many are willing to help others to succeed too.

It is also important to remember that there are a lot of differences between men and women. We are not communicating or making friendships in the same way, and are therefore not creating or using our networks similarly. Women prefer to develop intimate relationships through smaller gatherings and men are more comfortable in a less intimate, more competitive environment and are often right down to business. Another important aspects is that women are building and developing their networks on company time and men outside of work often in sport activities.
4. Conditions in Sweden and Austria

In this part of the paper I would like to present a short background with interesting facts on the conditions women face in Sweden and Austria. These numbers show how many women there are in managerial positions and at the top, and what is being done by the government for the working moms. I hope this will ease the understanding of some answers in the empirical part.

4.1 Number of women at the top

Countries with strong democratic tradition have often also reached far when it comes to male and female equality, and Sweden belongs to the countries that are at the head of this equality. The Swedish women tend on average to be higher educated than men and work to the same extent as men. No other country has such an extended child-care as Sweden and the men are taking more part in the housework than in any other country. But when it comes to females at the managerial positions in the private sector, Sweden does not lie at the top, as one could expect. There are not many women at top-positions anywhere in the world, but in USA and a few European countries a greater progress than in Sweden has still been made.93

The share of women with power in the trade and industry has for a long time been frightenly low, but there have been some positive changes in Sweden during the last century. The number of the female executives has increased from 9% to 26% in all private companies. The women are, however, still not reaching the very top positions. They constitute only 1,5% of all CEO’s of stock market companies and only 11,7% of CEO’s of all companies.94

Also the Austrian women are more educated then ever before. More than half of the University graduates are women, and they tend to finish their education faster than their male colleagues, but only few managed to become company directors in the private sector.95 Only 4,8% of the top positions in Austria are represented by women. According to an inquiry, more than half of the Austrian women are convinced that there is still no equality in the country.96

Looking at the top 50 companies in each European country in Table 2 (Appendix 1), the first striking thing is how male dominated the management is everywhere. It is still almost only men who are presidents and members of the highest decision-making bodies. Norway is at the top with almost 30% female decision makers, closely followed by Sweden, Bulgaria, and Slovenia. Austria is far down the list with only about 7% women. This could easily make one believe that those two at the top (being Scandinavian countries with gender equality) have the greatest number of female top managers. But looking at Table 3, only 2 of the Norwegian and none of the Swedish presidents in the top 50 companies are women. The highest number of female presidents was in Slovenia and Bulgaria, high above the average number in Europe. Even Austria has one female company president.\footnote{European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making \url{http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/women_men_stats/out/measures_out438_en.htm}}

\section*{4.2 Childcare and governmental measures}

Every second Austrian mother stays at home after having a child. Only one fourth goes back to their former job. The other fourth re-enters the labour market, but works only part-time. The government invests a lot of money to support families. In that way the poverty risk is reduced, but on the other side it creates a greater encouragement for one of the parents to stay at home. The families where only one parent work, get much more financial help than in many other European countries.\footnote{Spiegel.de, \textit{Women Face an Unfair Choice: Career or Children}} There are some countries, such as Sweden, that are not using monetary incentives to rise the birth rate. Instead, they invest in an infrastructure that allows women to have children while continuing to pursue careers.\footnote{Karin Alfredsson (2005) \textit{Children playing...mothers working}, Sweden.se}

A new legislation in 1974, expanded Swedish men’s parenting opportunities. This year the parental insurance was introduced. It is linked to gainful employment, and benefits are directly related to a person’s salary. For 13 months, parental insurance, in the form of leave-of-absence from work, is paid at the equivalent of about 80 percent of one’s salary (up to a certain amount), while for an additional three months; everyone receives the same fixed, daily rate.\footnote{Karin Alfredsson (2005) \textit{Children playing...mothers working}, Sweden.se} This money can be divided between parents in any way they please. Thus, Sweden
introduced paternity leave to the world.\textsuperscript{101} In spite of the fact that parental insurance aroused considerable international interest, thirty years later, Swedish fathers still use only 17 percent of the insurance days. In 1995, the Swedish Parliament introduced a month of parental insurance that could not be transferred between parents (a “mommy month” and a “daddy month”). In 2002, this period was increased to two months. A heated debate on individualizing parental insurance—giving half of the time to fathers and half to mothers without the possibility of transferring benefit days—is underway in Sweden presently.\textsuperscript{102} It is only since 1990 that also Austrian fathers have the opportunity to take time of from work to take care of the family. But only less than 3\% of the fathers use this opportunity. Most fathers, but only a third of the Austrian mothers, with children under the age of 3, are working.\textsuperscript{103}

Another reason that women in Austria choose to stay away from work for a long time is the lack of childcare-places, especially for children under the age of 3.\textsuperscript{104} Most kindergartens in Vienna are open at least till 5pm, and are therefore allowing women to combine both family and work. But in other parts of Austria the situation is different. Over 50 percent of all childcare places are not open longer than 2pm und many are closed more than 14 weeks a year. Therefore only 20-30 percent of the children under age of 14 are in the daycare.\textsuperscript{105} In Sweden is this much better regulated. Almost all pre-schoolers spend their days in some form of municipal day care. This includes the children of parents who are studying or are unemployed. With the introduction of a maximum fee in 2002, most parents can afford daycare.\textsuperscript{106}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{101} Karin Alfredsson (2005) \textit{At home with dad}, Sweden.se
\textsuperscript{102} Alfredsson,\textit{ Children playing...mothers working}
\textsuperscript{103} Geuenich
\textsuperscript{104} Geuenich
\textsuperscript{105} In Österreich fehlen 46.000 Kinderbetreuungsplätze (2006) diestandard.at
\textsuperscript{106} Alfredsson, \textit{Children playing...mothers working}
\end{flushright}
5. Empirical findings

5.1 The networks

The following is a short presentation of the three networks, whose members I interviewed for the empirical research. The first two are women only networks and the third one is a world known professional club that used to be limited only to male members.

5.1.1 Business and Professional Women-Austria

International Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW International) was founded by Dr. Lena Madesin Phillips in 1930 with 16 member countries. She challenged leading women in Europe and The United States to form an international organization to support and promote women in business and other professions. Today the BPW is the largest organized network of business and professional women in the world and they have members from over 80 countries from all five regions of the world. Its members consist of influential female leaders in their own countries in business and various professions as well as young entrepreneurs. BPW-Europe is the European Region of BPW International represented in 35 countries with over 23,000 members in all parts of Europe, among other in Austria and Sweden.

BPW International works with other international women’s organizations and different UN bodies to create a difference in women’s lives locally as well as around the world. The main work of the network focuses on mentoring, leadership training and giving women responsibilities so that they can advance in their careers and become leaders in their fields. The members contribute back to society by “helping women to help themselves”. BPW projects world-wide, including: vocational training, micro credits, career guidance, helping women in crisis to regain their worth, economic independence and much more.\textsuperscript{107}

5.1.2 FRöken

FRöken, Företagsamma Kvinnor I Kronoberg, is a women-only network for female entrepreneurs in the Swedish provinces of Kronoberg and Blekinge. It was formed in 2002, as a part of the entrepreneurial organization called “företagarna”, to help women grow in their

\textsuperscript{107} http://www.bpwintl.com/
businesses. About 200 female entrepreneurs can be reached through this network, and many of the members have listed their names and contact information on the networks homepage. FRöken’s goals are to stimulate more women to start up and run companies, and to get more women to actively take part in the local firms board of directors, which normally are dominated by men. It helps female entrepreneurs to increase their competence, to be more visible in media, to get to know each other, share knowledge and experiences, and develop in their entrepreneurial role. This network organizes free mini-seminars within different subjects, which not only gives useful knowledge, but also creates business opportunities.\(^{108}\)

5.1.3 Rotary

Rotary is a worldwide organization of business and professional leaders that provides humanitarian service, encourages high ethical standards in all vocations, and helps build goodwill and peace in the world. Approximately 1.2 million Rotarians belong to more than 32,000 clubs in more than 200 countries and geographical areas.

Paul P. Harris formed the world’s first service club, the Rotary Club of Chicago, on February 23th, 1905. He was an attorney who wished to recapture in a professional club the same friendly spirit he had felt in the small towns of his youth. The name "Rotary" derived from the early practice of rotating meetings among members' offices.

The organization had been limited to male members and remained so officially until 1989, when the Council on Legislation, Rotary's parliament, voted to eliminate the male-only provision, opening up membership to qualified women across the world. Today, there are approximately 145,000 female Rotarians worldwide (12% of all members), many of them serving in leadership roles.\(^{109}\)

\(^{108}\) http://www.holtze.se/froken/index.html
\(^{109}\) http://www.rotary.org/
5.2 The interviews

5.2.1 The main obstacles for female career advancement

At first I wanted to see how aware the women were about the different obstacles and if networking was perceived as one of the larger barriers, or if they feel that there are other things in their way that are complicating their career advancement and blocking their way to the top. This is also a good starting point to see if the views on career-barriers differ in the two countries.

5.2.1.1 Children

Most of the women in Austria believe that children are the main obstacle when trying to build up a career, specially the ones who have children themselves. One mum explained that the reason is that there are many well educated young women right now, who after their studies get a good job, but leave it soon to have a baby. After having a child women often stay at home up to 2.5 years. During this time, they cannot think about a career at all. Afterwards it is hard to come back to the labour market and its almost impossible to get their old job back. The time of raising children is often followed by part-time employment. All women interviewed believe that not enough is being done by the government to make the child care opportunities better in the country.

The Swedish women talked about how many women in the country still carry along the culture that women are the once who have to take care of home and children. Even if Sweden is seen as a country with high gender-equality, the inequality in the work at home still exists in highest degree. Women have the greatest part of the responsibility for family and children and in many cases they drop their career or put it on hold, because they can not handle both having a job and being a good mother and wife. Therefore they believe that having a husband who supports you and does not question you being away from home is very important.

One at home mom explained about the child-care options in Sweden. She says that it is positive with the maximum fee for day nursery, so more mothers can afford it and are able to work. There are also 400 lows protecting the employees when they become parents. But everything is not that simple. If you are on parental leave you become 80% of your salary, but there is a maximum-fee paid out and if you are earning a lot, you can no longer get your 80%.
It is mostly the man who earns more; therefore the family loses more money if he is on parental leave. For that reason many women in Sweden prefer to stay at home and let the husband work. There are some companies in Sweden who pay extra, so that the fathers can be able to stay at home instead, but because they are not forced to pay there are not many companies that do so.

5.2.1.2 Being a woman and the society

According to the Austrian interviewees a woman still has a lower position than a man in the Austrian society. This itself constitutes an obstacle. For many men it is still hard to understand that even women are able to do a good job in a managerial position. This is especially difficult for the old conservative males, who can be found in most of the higher managerial ranks. Therefore women even have to fight this image, to be able to make a career. The situation in Sweden is not exactly the same. One Swedish mother used to live in England and talks about the advantage of living in Sweden. She says that the Swedish culture accepts working women and there is noting strange about being both a woman and a manager. The society is created in a way where everybody works and it is more unacceptable if you are not working.

Austrian employers, when it comes to younger people, also tend to rather choose a man to employ, than a woman. Most young women incline to settle down and maybe get married. For managers of companies it is not always easy to count on women because when they are really fit for the working process they often leave for family reasons. Even in Sweden many supervisors think about how big the possibility is that you may want children. If they believe that this is the case, you are no longer the first one they want to hire, because you will have to take 1-2 years of for maternity leave.

5.2.1.3 Women them selves

All women asked in Sweden said that the main obstacle for women career advancement are the women them selves and their way of thinking. Women did not use to have many rights and depended economically on their husbands. Today, in a country like Sweden with highly developed social politics, women can go anywhere and do anything they want. But many do not aim that high in their career because of tradition. The interviewees also said that women see the obstacles more that men do, like if they were in a way search for them.
They also say that many women have low self-esteem and that women never believe that they are good enough and therefore do everything carefully. Women think they have to be well-read and do not throw themselves into things that easy as men do. One *Fröken* member mentioned an excellent example. She said if a company, search for a person and lists ten criteria this person should have, a men who has only one will apply, but a woman have to have nine to dare to try. Few other interviewees said that women also find it hard to market them selves and to show what they can and that they can. They wait to be asked instead of going for it.

5.2.2 Men-only networks as an obstacle
The Austrian women say that it is really hard for woman to become a part of a men’s-only network, because men have been using their networks for a long time. Only women who already are in high positions might have a fair chance. Men easy get their jobs through each others help, and some women meant it is a pity that women do not have access to old boy’s networks. Some male clubs as Rotary have started to admit female members, but the BPW members believe that one negative aspect is that you need a recommendation from 2-3 members to become a Rotary-member. For that reason mostly men become admitted and very few women.

It was almost impossible to find any Rotary-club in Austria with female members and none of the clubs wanted to answer my questions about the lack of women in their clubs. One BPW member told me about another typically Austrian example, the “Vienna Philharmonics”. They did not use to admit women, but after some time of public pressure and a subsidy from the government they were forced to accept women too. Even now they only have one single female member. Most women interviewed believe that the time for women to become a serious part of old boy’s networks is here, but it is a slow process and it is going to take a long time.

Old boys’ networks in Sweden are no longer seen as an obstacle for women. Rotary has for century’s been a men-only network. Today there are approximately 10-15% female members in each Rotary club. Many big networks have female managing directors (MD). Växjö Rotary club latest president happens to be a woman. A male member tells that there are few clubs where women are not admitted still exist, but there are very rare. Those types of networks were still no women are allowed are getting out-of-date and are not working as well as they
use to. They are on a way to disappear, because younger men are not taking an active interest in them. Women are fast becoming a great part of the labour market and occupy high positions. Not allowing them in the network, a good many opportunities can be missed.

All Rotary members interviewed believe that it is best with mixed-networks, because both genders can benefit from each others differences. There is no balance if you only have one of them and the perspectives get smaller. As a member said, it does not matter if you are man or woman, but what kind of person you are and what you can contribute to the network and the other members. They are meeting for other reasons than gender. The female members feel welcome and do not experience that they are being left out at all or separated from the guys. One of the women interviewed was a Rotary member for 3 years, and she says that seeing Rotary as a men-only network is old, because there are many women who do great achievements there. There is some conservatism among older male members, but only a little. It is more person-related than gender-related. If you do someone a favor, they will do a favor to you to.

Even the man interviewed agreed that it is an old way of thinking that men are only helping one another and their buddies from Rotary. He believes that this type of men, with conservative thinking, are already gone and if not, they should be gone. The new generation of men is seeing women as their equals. He tells further that the reason for so few female members is that women have been allowed in the network for only a few years. The spread in recruitment of new members has been equal between women and men, since the network has been open for both genders. It is also hard to find female members because not all women asked answers yes. Women mostly prioritize the family and therefore decline the offer. One FRöken member explained that she was asked to join the Rotary club but had to decline. She could not join at that time because she had small children and Rotary has special meeting-times which are hard to manage.

5.2.3 Women and networking

5.2.3.1 The importance of networking

Most of the Swedish women understood the importance of networking very early. They started establishing important contacts already in college or at their first job. Most of them are members of several networks and some of them have created their own networks or have been
leaders in others. There are also member of some board of director for other companies. This is a type of networking, where you can meet many powerful people with who you can keep the contact and who can be very helpful. One woman said that almost everybody she knows is part of some network. Also the women in Austria are convinced that networks are a big help for the career. If you do not show yourself, you can not expect people to know about you. But most women still have too little experience using them.

In Austrian it is more common among female managers that they found their own firm, than to be hired by a big company. This means that many small and new-established companies are led by women. To make it work it is important to know people and to have useful contacts. Therefore many create their own networks with people in the same business circles, who can be helpful for their company. Also the Swedish women believe that it is also much easier to manage your job when having a network. One Fröken member, who not long ago started her company, explains that networking is like oil in machinery. When a question rises in your work, you can always pick up the phone and call someone who knows that industry, for ex: question about a low or logistics. It is a way of spreading and gathering knowledge and information. There is always some there who can help you. You can easy gather the information you need, or spread information you want other people to know about. You can also get hold of information about were things are happening. get to know where the most important people are and where you should show yourself, your results and what you have achieved.

A young Austrian female manager states that creating networks outside your working place is even more important than the once you have to create inside the company. When you know people outside, the ones inside can not hurt you, in other word, you do not have to put up with any negative experiences from your co-workers or subordinates, or be in fear of losing your job, because there are others who will support you and help you further.

One Austrian woman interviewed moved to a new city with her partner and says that in a city where you are well known and have established important business contacts, it is easier to get offered a job. The reason is that people, who know about your qualities and strengths, would not hesitate to hire you or recommend you for a job. When moving to another city where you do not know anybody, you will soon realize the importance of networking. At first, you will
have to apply for jobs and try to present and promote your self by creating contacts with people – in other words networking.

Another realized how useful networking is when she tried to go back to the labour market after being on maternal leave. She says that many mothers stay away from work and loose their jobs; afterwards they once again have to prove their skills. If you do already have an established network and try to keep contact during your time away you will probably not have to search and apply for jobs because people know you and what you are able to do.

5.2.3.2 Woman-only networks
All female owner of a business enterprise in Växjö are automatically members in Fröken, but not many of them are active members. Many of them go to the meetings to show them selves and spread the massage about what they work with. This is a way of marketing and finding clients and costumers for there business. It is also interesting for them to meet other business owners and see how things are working out for them.

Most BPW-members went to the network the first time with a friend, who already was a member and encourage them to come alone just to see what it is about. They did not necessarily plan to become a member but after attending a good lecture and feeling welcome they decided to join the network themselves. Now most of them say that they would have been looking for networks earlier in their lives if they knew about it, because it would have been easier to find jobs and to get in contact with important people who can help you further. One of the BPW members said that she used to think that women-groups sound so feministic and negative in some way, but when she went there as a guest with a friend she realized it was not like that at all. She met some women who totally impressed her, real businesswomen who also have children. She said that she felt a warm welcome and a kind of affinity among the members, which led to close contacts that she always can rely on and turn to.

Some pointed out about how giving it can be to create a personal network with few close friends that you meet regularly. In this kind of network you can be yourself and talk openly about everything. Among friends even criticism can easily come up and they will honestly tell you their opinion and what they believe you do right or wrong. It is good to get support and strength, but sometimes also to relax and just talk to friends.
5.2.3.3 Positive aspects of woman-only networks

A network made only for women can be seen as a good thing, because many women are not only looking for professional- but also private contacts. They are in need of meeting other hardworking woman, in the same situation and with similar problems, that they can talk to and get support from. Many female managers are working mostly with men every day. It is therefore important for them to sometimes be among other women, without male presence. It makes it easier for them to share and discuss problems in their own way, with other who can understand them and give them tips and advices. For example to exchange experiences with other women about how they manage work and family life.

Another common problem among the members is the female way of thinking and not believing that they are ever good enough. Being able to meet women who have fight them up and reached high positions, have made them stronger and helped them think positive and believe in themselves. Many of the members said that the greatest advantage with a woman-only network is all the confirmation and encouragement that you get from other members, which give you strength to go on and overcome your problems. It gives you the possibility to develop yourself, but you have to receive the help by taking an active interest in what is being offered to you. One woman stated that being in the network has been important for her, because she became a better self-esteem, which made her more charismatic and self-confident. This had further led to a rise in the career, which she long has been waiting for, and she believes it is all due to being part of the network. Many have also created very useful business contacts which have later become the essential part of their work. Women networks are also a good place to find mentors. BPW have created a mentor program in order to support younger women in their career development.

Many joined the network on account of a search for variety and knowledge. They were tired of hearing people around them talking about the same themes every day. The only subject was there work and things surrounding it. BPW is an open network for women from all kinds of working areas and this gives them the opportunity to see how things are done in other companies. There they can get useful know-how, widen their general knowledge and get ideas of different ways of working. Other sources that offer interesting and useful knowledge for the members are the club-evenings. You receive information about things that concern women and you are able to attend lectures about themes you never gave a thought about. The FRöken members that have visited the theme-evenings are very pleased with the contents and what
they were able to learn there. The lectures are a type of education intended mainly for women. It is giving specific knowledge to the specific target group, like teaching them how to work in a board of directors. There was one evening about mobile phones: technical stuff, danger with radiation etc. One of the FRöken members who were there tells that she liked it, because she felt she could ask any questions at all without having to be ashamed. She explains that there is a more open atmosphere with only women. It is pleasant, fun and more relaxed. You can many times learn more when there are no men, because men do not dare to reveal their lack of knowledge and pretend that they know how everything works. They would never have a lecture about something like mobile phones.

5.2.3.4 Negative aspects of woman-only networks

After joining the network in the hope of creating business contacts and learning things from other members, some women got disappointed. They soon realized that the network was not that professional as they had hoped for and that the only thing the members’ had in common was that they were women. The greatest reason for this disappointment is that feelings are the biggest aspect for some women in the network. They let their emotions govern their actions and think:” If I don’t like you, I don’t want to work with you.” This is typical women and therefore everything has to happen harmoniously.

According to some interviewees, having a network which only consists of women, leads to same negative result as in men-only networks, someone gets excluded. One BPW-member means that this is not the right way for the future, because the world is changing and both sexes have to cooperate. By excluding men you miss the male aspect on things and the male way of thinking. Others say that women mostly are interested in female stuff. Therefore they do not get enough knowledge about how the male world works and how they can successfully cooperate with men, who also are the ones who mostly are in managerial positions. They are the ones who really are able to help women to reach higher positions in their career and it is therefore important also to have men in the network.

Many believe that as long as networks and different projects for women are created, a false impression about women as weak and needy will go on to exist. According to one woman it enhances the image of women being less capable than men. Giving women special benefits can be helpful, but it creates a false image. The best way is to mix, was the unified answer of
all people interviewed. They say it is nice to sometimes meet with other women that you have
something in common with, but you can do it in a mix network as well. It is more important
to join a network for other reasons then gender. One said that our world is created of two
genders and therefore it is natural to work and surround you with both of them.

5.2.3.5 Not many women join the networks

As already mentioned before, children are the biggest obstacle for career advancement, and it
also means an obstacle to join a network and meet people in your free time. The reason that
too few women join the networks is that they often stay at home in the evening and take care
of the family. The mentality in Austria is that a good mother should stay at home with her
children, but many interviewees say that this way of thinking is about to change. Even if they
would like to go out, it is hard to organize the day and find some time for your own if you
work and have a family. For many women it is a problem to find someone who will take care
of the children while they are away from home, because most of the network meetings are in
the evenings. The same reasons are mentioned by Swedish women. They also say that women
often prioritize children while they are small. They want to be with the kids, no mater how
well paid they are. Also the free time is important, being able to do some sports or meet
friends. It takes a lot of time to plan and to think forward, but the problem is that most women
always put their selves and their own needs on the side. Almost all Fröken-members said that
they go to the meetings only if there is a very interesting lecture. One woman interviewed
emphasized how important it is for mothers to stop thinking that they don’t have time, just
because they have children. At the age of 25-35, like most mothers are, it is important to join
networks and meet people in order to find a job after the maternity live.

The women interviewed explained that many also choose to stay at home because they
underestimate the importance of networking. They feel that they have enough contacts and do
not have to search for and join a special network. Others don’t even know that these kinds of
networks exist. The women I interviewed heard about the BPW for first time only 2-3 years
ago, even though the organization already exists for more than 75 years. Never the less, they
are convinced that more women are going to understand the importance of networking in the
future.
5.2.3.6 Women helping other women

In most cases men are the once helping women to get further in their carrier. Everybody agree that women do not have enough power to help, and those women who do have power are very few. But are women willing to help other women? There are different opinions on this. Some of the Swedish woman said that women are not that open for helping others. They believe that women are more jealous of each other than men and find it difficult to see a person stick out from the crowd. One said she rather works with men, because there are so few women in high positions and they want to prove their competence, the competition between women can get very hard and therefore she feels more threatened by women. But most of the Swedish women told that they were helped by both men and women (mostly men, because they are the ones having power). They believe that women gladly help other women when they can, even more when they get older.

Two Austrian women interviewed said that it always has been men who pushed them forward and believed in them. Mostly because there are only men in this kind of positions. They believe that women gladly help other women but rarely are in that kind of position to do so. The others meant that only a few women are willing to help other women. The reason for that is, according to them, fear of competition. Egoism and fighting for your own career prevents people from helping others. They also said whenever they helped another woman they never got anything back. Those women did not even bother to thank the once that assisted and guided them. Some women that helped even felt backstabbed by their younger “sisters”. Because of this ungratefulness and lack of respect they do not see a further reason to help others any more. Some said that if a woman would manage to become a part of a men-only network, it is doubtful that she would help others to get there. Other comments were that women have to learn to support each other. They can not expect a man to help them if they are not there for one another.

One of the BPW-members meant that women are each others biggest enemies. Instead of helping each other they are mean to each other. A man always knows that if he helps a friend to a better position, this friend will be there for him too, to pull him up. But most women do not understand the importance of supporting one another; instead of that they are always pulling down the ones who managed to reach higher positions. She explained this way of thinking by the Crab-phenomena. Once you have tossed in a few crabs in a bucket, there is no need of putting a lid on, because they will regulate themselves. Any ambitious crab that
decides to make a run for freedom will find it impossible to climb out of the bucket. It is not that the bucket is too deep or slippery. It is the seemingly odd behavior of the other crabs. As soon as one starts making a move to scramble over the others and out, its fellow crabs will reach out those long, sharp pincers and pull the errant crab back. Nobody escapes the crab bucket. That is because no crab will allow another crab to move up and out...even if they have once been in the same situation themselves. In the same way, most women will not let another women climb out, just because they can not stand to see her rise above them. But if they helped and supported each other, they would all climb higher.

5.2.5 Differences between men- and women-only networks
There is a different dynamic in women-only networks than in those with only men or mixed ones. The problem is that women are thinking more emotional than professional. Networks with only women are less objective because women tend to see everything personal. Especially when it comes to conflicts. One Austrian woman said that it of course is important to build up a relationship with people, but we do not have to love each other. It is different by men who overcome things much easier and therefore male networks are more work-oriented. Most women interviewed also believe that the biggest difference between men and women are women’s love for talk. They can discuss every subject without ever coming to a conclusion. Men rather solve the problems immediately and go on with their lives. One woman gave the example about men having a leader that they can follow. Women instead first have to discuss to infinity if the leader proposed is the right one.

According to a Fröken member, women are not that good at using contacts because of their nature. Boys play often team-sports and for them it is more natural to be in a group, while girls mostly are 2-3 at the time. Girls have a best friend and boys are in a gang. All women are of course not the same, some are bad, and some are very good at creating networks. Even BPW-members say that men are more used to meet each other informally and govern and use networks much better than women do. One said that it is natural for a man to think: “Who do I know, that can help me?” and to call these people without being ashamed. A woman’s first thoughts are: “Shall I?” “Should I?”, because women do not want to be in the way and cause problems. Another woman with same opinion says that women are careful and wait to be asked instead of asking themselves. This is not a way of making career; no one is going to beg you to take a better job. More women have to show who they are and what they want.
A young BPW-member talks about commitment differences in networks. She says that men’s networks are all about commitment, and a man who does not follow the rules, gets some kind of punishment. Men live by the rules, because they know that it takes time to commit. This is something that does not exist among women. Once they say one thing, and the next time something else. This is something that men find hard to understand. Women must learn how to follow the rules and when there is a chance to break them.
6. Analysis

The following chapter is an analysis of the work, which connects the theory with the empirical findings.

It is good to remember that the aim of this bachelor thesis is to see if women’s lacking access to male networks is an obstacle for career advancement, and to give a deeper insight into women-only networks and their effectiveness to support women leaders and managers and increase women's representation in senior positions. To be able to see how female networking is developed in other parts of Europe but Sweden, a compare is made with women from Austria.

6.1 The main obstacles for female career advancement

As I earlier mentioned, I wanted to see how aware the women were about the different obstacles. I wondered if networking was perceived as one of the bigger barriers, or if there are other hindrances, that are slowing women’s career advancement and way to the top. I also wanted to see if the views on career-barriers differ in Sweden and Austria.

Children were the first career obstacle that was pointed out by most of the Austria women. Due to the Austrian culture where a woman still has a lower position than a man in the society, it is usual for mothers to stay at home up to 2.5 years after having a child. After such a long time it is hard to come back to the labour market and almost impossible to get your old job back. As seen in chapter four, the government is not enhancing women’s career conditions by giving more money to at home moms; it is only encouraging them to stay at home even longer. In the same chapter I mentioned how much is being done in Sweden to relieve the pressure from the working mums. The government here has invested in an infrastructure that allows women to have children while continuing to pursue careers. Even if the old traditions are deep-seated in the people, this can still be the reason why most of the Swedish women do not see children as the biggest career barrier. Most of them believe instead that women them selves and their way of thinking constitute the obstacles for career advancement. They have all the opportunities in the world, but because of their low self-esteem many woman do not reach for higher positions.
6.2 Men-only networks as an obstacle

Linehan writes that women largely have been excluded from “old boy” networks, which traditionally are composed of individuals who hold power in the organization, which is therefore an obstacle for making career. This seems to be an issue in both countries, but to the different degrees.

According to Brooks, there are still many established networks, clubs and groups throughout Europe in which women are not even allowed to participate. This seems to be very true for Austria. It was almost impossible to find any Rotary-clubs in the country with female members. The Austrian women say that it is really hard for them to become a part of a men’s-only network. Only women who already are in high positions might have a fair chance. For many men, especially the old conservative once, it is still hard to understand that even women are able to do a good job in a managerial position. And because they are the one recommending new members to the Rotary-clubs, it is understandable that mostly men and very few women become admitted. In spite that, most women interviewed believe that even if it is a slow process and it is going to take a long time, women are going to become a natural part of these networks.

This process has got much longer in Sweden. Old boys’ networks are no longer seen as an obstacle for women. Each Rotary club has approximately 10-15% female members, and some even have female Presidents. Few conservative males are still trying to hold on to the old but, the new generation of men is seeing women as their equals. Therefore many Swedish men are more open-minded to female managers, and most of them are not interested in old type of networks that exclude women. The female members feel welcome and do not experience that they are being left out at all or separated from the guys. Even if women in Sweden do get recommended, many of them choose to spend their time with their children instead of being active members.

6.3 Women and networking

6.3.1 The importance of networking

According to the “Wetfeet insider guide to networking”, you would never hear about some of the most desirable jobs without a network. Most managerial jobs are never advertised, people are getting recommended instead. Even though networking does not come on the first place of
female obstacles for career advancement, everybody still agree that it is a crucial part of once career development. Most of the Swedish women understood the importance of networking very early. They started establishing important contacts already in college or at their first job. As said by Brooks, to gain recognition and visibility, is essential to make contacts with people who can help you further in your professional development. Therefore many women in Sweden not only join male networks, but are also become members of boards of directors, where they can get together with some of the most powerful individuals of the society. The Austrians realized the networking opportunities only few years ago, now most of them say that they would have been looking for networks earlier in their lives if they knew about it, because it would have been easier to find jobs and to get in contact with important people who can help them further. Even of most of the Austrian women are convinced that it is necessary to have networks both inside and outside your workplace, many still have little experience using them.

### 6.3.2 Women-only networks

Fröken was established to make it easier for female business owners to meet, get support and learn new things. Even though they automatically are members, few women use this opportunity. But the ones who do go to the meetings are well aware of why they are doing it. They are marketing themselves and looking for potential clients and customers, but they also go there to meet other women that they can talk to and learn something at the seminars. This is exactly how Rhode describes formal women-only networks. She writes that they sponsor a variety of activities, like seminars, speaker series and informal social events. They link professionals with potential clients and help the individuals develop different professional skills. BPW is a typical women-only network. It offers everything Rhode mentions and has furthermore a mentor program as support for younger members. Most of the members went to the network out of curiosity, but they liked the atmosphere and realize that they could learn something and benefit from joining. Now many of them go to the gatherings regularly.

As Logue mentions, many women are forming their own small groups, that regularly get together to share ideas, get support and help each other with anything they can. According to the interviewees, women are gathering in the same way both in Sweden and in Austria. They like this kinds of networks, because friends give honest criticism and they can relax and talk openly.
6.3.3 Advantages with women-only networks

Lann writes that members of a women-only network can gain professional support and personal development by exchanging experiences with other women in similar situations. This is one reason why many women go the meetings. They are not only looking for professional, but also private contacts, because they are in need of meeting other hardworking woman in the same situation and with similar problems, that they can talk to and get support from.

According to Pini, benefits of this kind of networks include increased self-confidence, learning opportunities, gaining of new skills and growth of social contacts. Many interviewees talk about how women’s low self-confidence is slowing their careers down. By being part of a female-network they resaved a lot of encouragement from other members, which have made them stronger and helped them think positive and believe in themselves. There are also opportunities to created very useful business contacts, which for many have later become the essential part of their work.

Many joined the network on account of a search for variety and knowledge. Here they can meet people from other industries and learn about their work. In this way they get useful know-how, widen their general knowledge and get ideas of different ways of working. Club-evenings seams to be most popular. Here they can gain education intended mainly for women and because of the open atmosphere ask any questions at all without having to be ashamed.

6.3.4 Disadvantages with women-only networks

As said by Adler and Izraeli, many high-level women say that women-only networks had not helped them advance in their professions. According to the empirical findings, the biggest disappointment was that the network was not that professional as hoped. Dealing with so many women at the same time is not easy, because feelings can often become the biggest aspect for many of them. They cooperate only with people they like instead of looking at the professional gain.

According to Marklund and Snickare, a network with only women has less power and poorer information access, because women have lower positions in all aspects of the society. And as Pini points out, women have to penetrate men’s networks to a greater extent if they are to be
promoted into top management, since men hold the majority of senior positions. The empirical findings show that many agree with this. They say that men are the ones who really are able to help women to reach higher positions, and that they so far mostly have been helped by their male bosses and coworkers due to the same reason.

A lot of people also believe that these kinds of networks are separatist. We live in a society created of both genders, therefore it is natural to work and surround you with both of them and excluding one is rarely positive. Some women say that by excluding men you miss the male aspect on things and the male way of thinking. It is more important to join a network for other reasons then gender. Some are also afraid that creating special meeting places for only women, and giving them special benefits, creates a false impression about women being less capable than men. To avoid all this negative aspects, the best way seems to be to have mixed networks and let men and women work together and help each other out.

6.3.5 Are women willing to help each other

Almost all Swedish women and only two of the Austrian believe that women gladly help other women. The problem is only that they rarely are in that kind of position to do so. Barber and Watson write that many do help and that they are using networking and mentoring to assist the newcomers up the career ladder. There are others who would like to help, but do not know how to. The Swedish women confirmed this by saying that they were helped by women too, but also many men because they have possibility to do so.

Few of the Swedish woman and most of the Austrian said that women are not gladly helping others. The reasons are that women are jealous of each other and find it difficult to see a person stick out from the crowd. They also feel more threatened by women because of they fear of competition, egoism and fighting for your own carrier prevents therefore people from helping others. Some women in Austria also pointed out, that whenever they helped another woman they never got anything in return, as if their help was a matter of course. Therefore they don not see a further reason to help. According to Barber and Watson, many women suffer from low self-esteem, especially the young newcomers. They believe they are not as good as others and feel threatened by the differences between other women and themselves. In order to get ahead, they manipulate and lie instead of using their intellect and skills, because they are convinced of not being able to compete with the already established women.
One even got so for saying that women are each others enemies and that they are, just like Crabs in a bucket, pulling each other down instead of helping, because they are joules and can not stand to see an other women rise to the top. Marklund and Snickare mean that it is truth that women often do not support one another, but that it has nothing to do with gender, it is about hierarchical position. Research show that this is not a typical female behavior, but that men do the same. The reason that corporate males support each other is that they have possibilities of development and can be of help for one another in the future.

6.5 Differences between men- and women-only networks

It is easy to find differences between genders if you are looking for them. To start with men and women differ even when it comes to communication and friendship making. When women talk, they do it in a personal tone and like to involve people and make them feel valued. Men often dominate the conversation that gives them the opportunity to defend their ideas and achieve goals. According to my empirical findings, women do not just talk differently; they like to talk much more then men. When women socialize, they can talk to infinity.

Already in school, boys are inclined to play in large mixed-age groups, which gives them the perfect ground to start learning about competition, leadership and networking, and make them more comfortable in a less intimate, more competitive environment. It makes it more natural for men even in the adult world to be in groups and do those activities through which they network. Girls are more often in smaller groups or same-sex pairs. Later on women stay more comfortable in a small circle of friends because this make them worry less about what people are going to say and they have to work much more with networking. This is also confirmed by the interviewees, who say that because of these differences women are mostly insecure and careful. Because women are not used to socials in larger group in their spare time; they initiated more work-based relationships.

But if we look beyond this, we will probably see that male and female professionals have much more in common than we think.
7. Conclusions

The problem discussion above leads to the research question: “If being kept from male networks is an obstacle, how do women benefit from creating women only networks?”

Networking was not mentioned as one of the biggest barriers, but when we stared talking about it, it was obvious that they were well aware of how important networking is.

Female professionals should go to the networks, get support and better self-esteem. In women-only networks they can benefit from the contacts, learn from others and discuss problems. They will see that other women are struggling and are insecure too. This would make them less suspicious and jealous of other women and would make them more willing to receive and give help to others. When the sisterhood and their mind are strong, almost nothing can stop them.

The next natural step is to network with men, not just because they have most of the corporation power, but because we are all part of the society. The gender should in the 21st century no longer be an issue. You can gain a lot by being part of women-only network, but you should not exclude yourself from the rest of the world, but also join (what used to be) male networks and be aware of widening your informal networks.

Men have been working much longer than women, they have a lot of experience that you could benefit by, but you may miss in a women-only network. You can also learn a lot from men about networking. They are both better at it and have been practicing it longer. In order to break through the glass ceiling, women need to associate with powerful individuals, because it is mostly men in higher positions you can get a wider network through a man.

Even if women would like to help each other with their career advancement, they are often not able to do so, because they do not have that kind of power. For the once that would like to help, but do not know how, joining a women-only network can be useful. Here they can get in contact with other women who are searching for help and can join a mentoring program.
7.1 proposed future research

As I wrote in the beginning of this paper, I chose only one of the many obstacles that female professionals face. Some other barriers that can be written about are for example the traditional gender stereotypes or inflexible workplace structures.

Another advancement barrier that can be connected to the contents of women-only networks and networking in general is the inadequate access to mentors. A research question can for instance be: Can women get an increased access to mentors by being part of a network?
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Appendix 1

Table 2: Presidents and members of the highest decision-making body in Top 50 companies

Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/women_men_stats/out/measures_out438_en.htm
Appendix 2

Table 3: Presidents and members of the highest decision-making body in Top50 companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Companies</th>
<th>On Stock Exchange</th>
<th>In Database</th>
<th>President</th>
<th>Women (%)</th>
<th>Men (%)</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Women (%)</th>
<th>Men (%)</th>
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<td>50</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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Source: European Commission, DG EMPL, Database on women and men in decision-making [http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/women_men_stats/out/measures_out438_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/women_men_stats/out/measures_out438_en.htm)