Female Expatriates in Gendered Organizations

A qualitative study on women in industrial organizations

Sara Hansson
Mathilda Ingemarsson

Supervisor: Ramsin Yakob
Preface

Throughout this semester, new insights and inspiring meetings have brought us to widen our horizons and to gain a deeper understanding of the contemporary gender debate. With these new insights we hope to raise the knowledge, awareness and interest of expatriate assignments among women and that this study will be a source of inspiration to both organizations and scholars, as well as to everyone who would find this thesis interesting.

We would like to express our appreciation to the representatives in both companies for help and support, as well as to all interview and focus group participants for sharing interesting histories and for being inspirers. Lastly, we would also like to thank our supervisor Ramsin Yakob for guidance and support along the way.

Linköping, May 29, 2016

Sara Hansson & Mathilda Ingemarsson
Abstract

**Background**  Today's organizations are facing an increasing need of competent global managers. International experience is thus often a requirement in order to reach positions within top management. Expatriate assignments, whereby an employee relocates to work in another country for a longer period of time is a common way to gain international competence. However, the typical expatriate has traditionally been a man and still today, women are underrepresented in international management. Pressure from society on gender equality challenges organizations to increase their number of female expatriates. In order to explain the low share of female expatriates, prior research has foremost focused on the woman as an individual in the expatriation process rather than the organization's impact. Therefore we see a need of investigating how the organization and its underlying gendered substructures affect female expatriates.

**Purpose**  The purpose of the study is to investigate how gendered substructures in an organization influence the prospects of female expatriates.

**Methodology**  The study is based on a qualitative approach and builds upon interviews and focus groups conducted in two Swedish MNCs. A deductive approach has been used, whereby gendered organizational theory creates the framework of this study.

**Conclusion**  The result from our study shows that gendered substructures influence the prospects for women to take on expatriate assignments. This can be seen in the vertical segregation within organizations, the lack of role models and a higher pressure on women in managerial positions.

**Contribution**  This study is important since it stresses the organization's role on women's prospects for expatriate assignments. Furthermore it highlights the complexity of gender equality work in organizations and gives its contributions to further research within the field.
## Table of Contents

1. **INTRODUCTION** ........................................................................................................... 1  
   1.1 BACKGROUND .......................................................................................................... 1  
   1.2 PROBLEM DISCUSSION ............................................................................................. 3  
   1.3 PURPOSE AND PROBLEM DEFINITION ..................................................................... 6  
   1.4 DELIMITATIONS ........................................................................................................ 6  
   1.5 COURSE OF ACTION .................................................................................................... 6  
   1.6 THESIS OUTLINE ....................................................................................................... 7  

2. **METHODOLOGY** .......................................................................................................... 9  
   2.1 SCIENTIFIC APPROACH ............................................................................................ 9  
   2.2 RESEARCH STRATEGY .............................................................................................. 10  
   2.3 RESEARCH APPROACH ............................................................................................ 10  
   2.4 RESEARCH DESIGN ................................................................................................... 11  
   2.5 REALIZATION OF STUDY ......................................................................................... 12  
   2.6 PRIMARY DATA ......................................................................................................... 14  
   2.7 SECONDARY SOURCES ............................................................................................. 19  
   2.8 ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA .......................................................... 20  
   2.9 QUALITY OF RESEARCH .......................................................................................... 22  

3. **THEORY** ....................................................................................................................... 25  
   3.1 GENDERED SUBSTRUCTURES ................................................................................... 25  
   3.2 GENDERED SUBTEXT ................................................................................................ 33  
   3.3 SUMMARY OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ............................................................ 34  

4. **EMPIRICAL FINDINGS** .................................................................................................. 37  
   4.1 THE RECRUITING PROCESS — TRANSPARENT OR BIASED? ....................................... 37  
   4.2 REPATRIATION — ANXIETY OR NEW POSSIBILITIES? ........................................... 40  
   4.3 THE EXPATRIATE ASSIGNMENT — A CAREER BOOST? ........................................ 43  
   4.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF NETWORK ........................................................................... 44  
   4.5 BEING A FEMALE EXPAT — A NON- ISSUE OR AN OBSTACLE? ............................. 45  
   4.6 THE EXPATRIATE ASSIGNMENT — DESIGNED FOR MEN WITH HOUSEWIVES? ...... 47  
   4.7 FAMILY PLANNING AND EXPATRIATION ................................................................ 48  
   4.8 THE STRUCTURAL EXPLANATION ............................................................................. 49  

5. **ANALYSIS** ..................................................................................................................... 53  
   5.1 ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESSES - SEGREGATION AND GLASS BORDERS .................. 53  
   5.2 ORGANIZATIONAL GENDERED CULTURE — IS SOCIETY TO BLAME? .................... 55  
   5.3 INTERACTION BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS — WHAT IS HIDDEN UNDER THE SURFACE? 56  
   5.4 GENDERED IDENTITIES - "IF SHE CAN, I CAN" ..................................................... 59  
   5.5 THE ABSTRACT EXPATRIATE .................................................................................. 61  

6. **DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION** .................................................................................... 63  
   6.1 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CONTEMPORARY GENDER DEBATE ................................ 64  
   6.2 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ........ 65  

7. **REFERENCES** ................................................................................................................. 66  

**APPENDIX I** ...................................................................................................................... 73  

**APPENDIX II** .................................................................................................................... 76  

**APPENDIX III** ................................................................................................................... 78
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Gender equality in corporate boards and senior management is a widely discussed topic on political as well as managerial arenas today. During the past decades, research in this field has foremost focused on women on national boards (Acker, 1990; 1992a; 2006; Abrahamsson, 2002; Lückerrath-Rovers, 2013). Still, little attention has been given to whether women are given the same opportunities as men to extend their careers beyond their national border. More and more companies are going global which requires them to send employees abroad. A survey conducted in 2014, investigating trends in global mobility, found that over 50% of the responding companies predicted a need of increased mobility among their employees (Cartus, 2014). Employees going on international assignments are referred to as expatriates, a notion Groenewald and Neubeiser (2000) define as "an employee who is on a long-term assignment outside their home country" (Mayerhofer, Hartmann, Michelitsch-Riedl & Kollinger, 2004:1372). The benefits a multinational corporation (MNC) receives from sending expatriates are increased control and specialist knowledge, but to send employees on international assignments is also combined with a high risk since expatriates are very expensive and the probability of expatriates failing is relatively high (Mutsuddi, 2012).

A major part of the early expatriation research builds on the traditional picture of an expatriate as a male employee in his 50's, working for a MNC based in a western country. Accompanied by his family, he relocates from the parent company to a subsidiary abroad for three to five years (Dowling & Welch, 2004). Furthermore, expatriate assignments have traditionally been key positions initiated from the organization and seen as a stepping stone up the career ladder (McNulty, 2014). However, the image of what an expatriate is has changed over the last couple of years. Organizations are changing and the typical career path, climbing the hierarchy within one company, is challenged by individuals creating their own, boundaryless careers. Haslerger and Vaiman, (2013) refers to this phenomenon by claiming that careers have gone from being external, created by organizations, to internal, created by the
individual itself. Therefore, expatriate assignments today are not exclusive for senior managers in their 50's; also junior employees push for going on international assignments in order to develop and challenge themselves (Siljanen & Lämsä, 2009).

It is also no longer only big MNCs that have the need to send expatriates since the technical development has created possibilities for smaller companies and start-ups to be "born global". Through these viral opportunities, the need for long-term assignments has declined in favor for short-term and flexible options (McNulty, 2014). Although global mobility challenges have changed rapidly and opened up for an increased heterogeneity among expatriates, much of the literature still focuses on the traditional view of expatriates as middle-aged men (ibid).

However, research on female expatriates was initiated in the late 1970's (Adler, 1979). In the initial stages of female expatriate research, women in senior management were very few and since expatriates usually were chosen from a company's senior level, the lack of female expatriates was explained by this fact (Altman & Shortland, 2008). It has passed over 35 years since Adler (1979) first raised the question and a lot of research has since then focused on different aspects of women in international environments. A majority of the studies take the perspective of the individual woman's human capital, preferences and role within the organization (Shortland, 2009). According to the relocation service agent Cartus (2014), women represent only 24 % of all expatriates worldwide. A contradiction in this context is that 60 % of all students going on Erasmus exchange are women (European Commission, 2014). Why do women disappear from the international arena when entering the corporate world? As International Business students, striving towards an international career, we found this topic particularly interesting.
Our globalized and fast-paced world has put pressure on MNCs to gain understanding of international affairs and cultures, which requires employees that possess international expertise. However, many organizations struggle with shortages in skills due to high competitiveness and are therefore in need of competent global managers in order to retain their market position (Tung, 2004; Ployhart, 2006). Therefore it is crucial for organizations to retain and attract the best international managers, which Tung (2004) suggests to be women. Her statement derives from research showing that the typical leader style of a woman might be more successful when working in different cultures (ibid). Additionally, political pressure and societies call for a greater diversity in management and by accommodating to society's pressure organizations add legitimate value, which also will attract and retain the best talents, a necessity for MNCs today (Hillman, Shropshire & Canella, 2007). A frequently used measure to evaluate gender equality is the presence of female senior managers and women on executive boards. Since the way to senior management positions often require international experience (Insch, McIntyre & Napier, 2008), organizations must pay attention to gender diversity among expatriates. Through an enlarged and diversified pool of both male and female expatriates, companies would gain better conditions to meet global demand and standards (Varma & Russell, 2016). Taking this into consideration, one could presume that we since the 1980's would have seen a remarkable change on women holding international careers, but have we?

Adler's (1984b) three myths made grounds for a debate already in the 1980's when investigating the absence of women in international management. The first myth says that women are not interested in working abroad due to family reasons. Through an extensive survey on MBA students in North America, she found no evidence supporting this myth. Further, Adler investigated if the second myth, which claimed that prejudices from host country nationals towards women would make female managers ineffective, even existed. Her results found that host country nationals were not as reluctant to female expatriates as previously estimated. At last, Adler examined the third myth; organizations are reluctant to recruit female expatriates and therefore do female employees doubt their chances to an international career. This last myth
turned out to be partially true; many companies were found hesitant to send women on international assignments.

Since Adler's ground breaking research over 30 years ago, these three myths have been central in several studies within this field. Lowe, Downes and Kroek (1999) concluded that there is a significant difference between men and women in their willingness to work in specific countries but not in their willingness to seek international assignments. Taylor and Napier (1996b) confirm Adler's research by stating that the role of host country nationals is a non-existing problem for female expatriates. However, even though women have the same motivation to work abroad as their male colleagues and are likely to have the same chances to succeed with their tasks, they are less likely to be chosen for placements abroad (Forster 1999). According to Adler's (1984b) and many following studies conducted within the field (Lowe et al, 1999; Taylor & Napier, 1996b; Forster, 1999), the lack of females going on global assignments seems to be related to the organization.

Even though the number of female expatriates has slightly increased over the last decades (Organization Resources Counselors (ORC), 2005), research refers their absence to an expatriate glass ceiling with many corporations having cultures that involuntary favor men as expatriates (Insch et al, 2008). Shortland's (2009) extensive work on mapping and categorizing the causes that exclude female expatriates from international management explains one of the reasons as "Statistical discrimination". This implies that many organizations reason that the advantages of investing in support, aid and encouragement for female expatriates do not compensate or outweigh the cost of the required resources. Additionally, Shortland's theory points to an isomorphic behavior among organizations; they look at similar successful organizations and replicate their behavior and structures, excluding women from international assignments (ibid).

Through history, organizations consisted solely of men and were thus created by and for men (Acker, 1992b). When women entered the labor market, the existing organizations, and the perception of what an organization is and looks like, were already built and shaped according to the organization's male workers (Collinson & Hearn, 1994). Taking this in mind, one may presume that the organization per se; its
structure, culture and underlying assumptions, are still today shaped after and adapted to a male perspective and the behavior, wants and needs of a male employee. As a consequence, Acker (1990) introduced the notion *gendered organizations* in order to describe the situation whereby females have been placed into male contexts and in order to take on superior roles in an organization, are thus expected to comply with typically "male" roles, to 'man'age and being a 'man'ager (Acker, 1992a).

Kanter's (1977) research on men and women in organizations found that gender differences in organizations were not caused by individual characteristics of men and women as earlier thought, but because of organizational structures. Organization and management theories were for a long time considered to be gender neutral (Wilson, 2001), but in the late 1970's classical social and organizational theories like Maslow's hierarchy of needs were criticized of being shaped for men (ibid). In the contemporary debate Bendl (2008) claims that researchers avoid emphasizing feminine traits since that would question most management and organizational theory conducted through history. However, during the late 1980's and the beginning of the 90's, the gender aspect of organizational cultures got a lot of attention (Acker, 1992b; Gherardi, 1995) and today almost every literature on organizational theory includes sections where gender and diversity are handled (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). Regardless of the fact that most corporations today have outlined extensive plans and policies of diversity, few live as they learn. Statistics from 2014 show that women in Sweden possess 29 % of all management positions in the private sector and only 6 % hold the position as chief executive officer (Statistiska Centralbyrån (SCB), 2014). The industrial sector has the lowest rate of women in management with 18,9 % (ibid).

In the year of 2012, ten Swedish-owned MNCs, of which the majority operates in industrial sectors, took action when committing to the initiative "Battle of the Numbers", which aimed to support female leadership among and in their organizations (Battle of the Numbers Summary, 2013). The MNCs all agreed upon and signed an individual declaration of how they actively would work on equality between genders by using several different measures such as recruiting, promotion, work/life balance, company culture and salaries. As previously mentioned, an expatriate assignment is often a necessary step in order to climb the career ladder. Therefore, we have reason
to believe that Swedish MNCs have an interest of increasing the number of female expatriates. Referring to the discussion above, we assert that there is a need for organizations to identify and understand their hidden underlying structures that might form obstacles for female expatriates.

1.3 Purpose and Problem Definition
The purpose of this thesis is to investigate and analyze gendered substructures in Swedish global organizations. Additionally, our work aims to give its contributions to the contemporary debate on women in international managerial positions.

This leads us to the following research question:

- How do organizations’ gendered substructures affect and influence the prospects of female expatriates?

1.4 Delimitations
This study is limited to expatriates and will not investigate other types of international assignments. Furthermore, industrial industries with low numbers of female employees are in focus; sectors with more women, such as the media or the fashion industry are not subjects of this study. Furthermore, this study focuses exclusively on Swedish MNCs, foreign organizations are not participating in this study.

1.5 Course of action
This is a comparative case study on female expatriates in two Swedish MNCs, operating within industrial sectors. The study has been realized through interviews and focus groups with employees in both companies. The participants were current and former expatriates, recruiters, HR-representatives and employees without expatriate experience.
1.6 Thesis outline

Introduction
- In the introduction we present the background and problematization of our study and introduce the reader to our chosen fields of research, female expatriates and gendered organizations. Additionally we present our purpose and research question.

Methodology
- In our methodology section we discuss our choice of research approach, design and strategy. The participating organizations are presented and followed by a discussion concerning primary and secondary data, as well as the study's quality.

Theory
- With a critical approach, whereby prior research is reviewed and valued, the theory section presents and deepens the understanding of the research fields.

Empirical findings
- In our empirical findings we present the collected data from our focus groups and interviews.

Analysis
- Thereafter we proceed from our purpose and analyze our empirical findings with help from the theory that we presented in the theory section.

Conclusion
- At last we present the study's conclusions, which are discussed in the light of our methodology, theory and empirical findings. Furthermore we give our contributions to the research field, as well as implications to further research.
2. Methodology

2.1 Scientific approach
In order to get a legitimate picture of the authors’ perception of reality and knowledge it is crucial to mediate the study’s ontological and epistemological standpoints. The science of ontology builds on how the nature of the social world is explained (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Moreover, the science of epistemology aims to explain how knowledge from the social world is possible (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Hammersley, 2013). The theories of ontology and epistemology form the base for several methodological philosophies. The field of ontology can be divided into two different theoretical standpoints, objectivism and constructionism. Objectivism is an ontological position, which claims that social entities and phenomenon are objects whose reality and existence can be explained externally and independent of other social actors. The other ontological position; constructionism, asserts that the social world and social entities are constructions, continually built and explained by the perceptions and actions of other social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Since our research questions and purpose concerns investigation of social relations and gendered substructures, our research is positioned within the constructivism.

Furthermore, one perspective within the epistemology is the interpretivism, which claims that knowledge changes over time, through and in accordance with people and social actors. Therefore, researchers that take an interpretative perspective must understand the subjective meaning of social interaction, which requires a logic that reflects differences of people and objects (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Hammersley, 2013). At first, interpretivism appears to be the best suitable perspective for our study, but considering that our study aims to identify rather than interpret organizations' underlying gendered substructures, we have chosen to apply a critical realism perspective.

The realism perspective strives to explain the subject for investigation in a way that is as objective as possible (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2011). Furthermore, the realism perspective is interested of the context since it aims to understand the context's impact on the studied object (ibid). However, even though the goal of the realist is to
conduct research that is totally objective, many researchers claim that it is impossible to produce material that is completely unbiased (ibid). The sub-perspective critical realism criticizes our possibilities to be certain of what reality is since social structures are in constant change, compared to the structures of the natural science. Furthermore, this perspective looks upon social constructions as being created by mechanisms that are real but not observable without the studying of their effects (ibid). The identification of these mechanisms is, according to the critical realist, necessary in order to change the social world and reality (Bryman & Bell, 2015). It is important that we, as female researchers, stay as objective as we possibly can when carrying out research within the gender field. Since this study aims to investigate the underlying gendered substructures, we need to identify the mechanisms that support and reinforce these structures. We will therefore apply a critical realism perspective and in accordance with this perspective we view knowledge as developmental and also, that there are many ways to interpret reality.

2.2 Research strategy
The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the prospects of female expatriates within organizations. According to Alvehus (2013), this kind of purpose is best investigated by studying fewer respondents but more detailed and thorough. Our research strategy will therefore apply a qualitative approach. In contrast with quantitative research, which in collection and analysis of data focus on numbers and statistics, qualitative studies emphasize the importance of words and their meanings (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Sandelowski, 2004). Furthermore, qualitative research stresses the understanding of social actors and realities in order to understand the participants' perceptions of their reality (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Hence, in order to investigate what is hidden under the surface in the organizational structure, we recognize a qualitative research methodology to be the one best applicable.

2.3 Research approach
We initiated our study with an extensive study of prior research and theories within the expatriate field. Thereafter we conducted interviews and focus groups in order to collect empirical data. This approach can be seen as a deductive approach, the classical view of science, whereby the research proceeds from established theories that are
tested against observations (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The opposite of a deductive approach is an inductive approach, which means that theory is the outcome of research (ibid). Even though the inductive and deductive approach are seen as ideal ways of how research should be conducted, it is barely possible to just stick to one of them (Alvehus, 2013). Although an inductive approach builds on empirical findings, having a theoretical understanding is often necessary. Likewise, most deductive processes entail interpretative elements from the researcher (ibid). Our study is primarily deductive since the results of our empirical findings build on the foundations of our theoretical compilations. However, although previous theories made an important ground in our research, the inductive approach is still present since we had to revise and extend our theoretical framework according to our empirical findings in retrospect. Accordingly this is a deductive study with some inductive features.

2.4 Research design

We have chosen to collect data through two organizations and thereby applied a research design that can be described as a comparative case study. As critical realists, we are very interested in how the context influences a studied situation and case studies are a common research design among qualitative researchers that provides this possibility (Alvehus, 2013). However, a deductive study like ours, based on a theoretical framework, cannot study all the content in a case. Both because it in research terms is impossible but also since the research has to be conducted in accordance with the study's purpose, which means that a specific angle of the case must be chosen (ibid). Bryman and Bell (2015) suggest that we can get a better understanding of the specific situation by studying and comparing different cases. Additionally, it can bring more validity to the study since the researcher is able to decide under what circumstances the chosen theory is applicable or not (ibid). However, the comparative design has its flaws; when focusing on two or more cases, the researcher has to pick a focus already from the beginning, which can lead to that other interesting angles have to remain uninvestigated (ibid). Since our study has a clear deductive approach this disadvantage was not prominent. Additionally, as critical realists the increased validity that comes with this approach is beneficial in order to not fall for simple explanations (Alvehus, 2013).
2.5 Realization of study

The study's empirical material is collected through interviews and focus groups. The choice to use more than one method when gathering data was made in order to obtain different perspectives and perceptions of organizations' gendered substructures.

2.5.1 Interviews

Qualitative interviews offer great flexibility, which makes it a suitable way of collecting empirical data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Contrary to quantitative structured interviews that are structured in accordance to a predetermined schedule with standardized questions, qualitative interviews are to a greater extent adapted after the individual respondent. By compiling and interpreting the results of several interviews, the goal is to draw new conclusions (ibid). Additionally, a qualitative interview can be distinguished as non-structured or semi-structured. An unstructured interview may resemble a normal conversation where the interviewer enter the conversation with very few predetermined topics or questions and develops the conversation as it proceeds, while a semi-structured interview is guided by specific topics or questions (ibid). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to come up with exploratory questions; to ask the respondent to clarify, motivate, give examples or simply to show appreciation and understanding, which invites the respondent to elaborate answers and reasoning, giving another level of depth to the interview (Gillham, 2008).

In order to fulfill the purpose of our study and to be able to make comparisons and draw conclusions from our data, it is necessary to apply a semi-structured interview technique where we can steer the interview. In addition, the use of interviews is motivated and supported by many feminist researchers who advocate a qualitative research framework since its flexibility entails the opportunity to construct optimal interview conditions; a high level of trust between interviewer and respondent, a visible mutual understanding from the interviewer and finally, a non-hierarchal relation between respondent and interviewer (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Oakley, 1981).

2.5.2 Focus groups

A focus group is most easily explained as an interview with more than one person. However, contrary to an interview, the researcher in a focus group is rather a moderator than an interviewer (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The synergies from a group's
setting might result in additional or new ideas that would not have been revealed in personal interviews (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The use of focus groups through discussions and collaboration invites the participants to inspire others to reveal personal information, get perspectives on common understandings or new experiences, challenge, support and react to each other's opinions (Wilkinson, 1998). However, we must keep in mind that also focus groups have their weaknesses. One of them is that since participants' opinions and answers are influenced by other participants or the researcher, they might not be independent of each other and therefore, it is hard to draw valid conclusions (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Additionally, in case one of the participants is very dominant, the rest of the group might hesitate to express their opinions and the answers might thus be biased (ibid). Moreover, it is possible that characteristics, personality traits, gender, ethnicity and behavior of the interviewer or researcher will affect or influence the results (Wilkinson, 1998).

Wilkinson (1998), who has conducted research in the field of feminist theory, stresses the importance and advantages of interaction between participants. Moreover, focus groups have traditionally been applied within marketing research (Bryman & Bell, 2015) and therefore we find it interesting to apply this method in another field in order to reveal new findings.

2.5.3 Choice of organizations
A crucial criterion in our choice of organizations was to select organizations with a history of sending out expatriates. Furthermore, the organization's interest for the research field and a willingness to participate were mandatory factors in order for us to be able to conduct the research. Since we were interested in the underlying structures and how they influence female employees' prospects for expatriate assignments we wished to study organizations that traditionally not have attracted many women. After some initial research we contacted ten Swedish multinational corporations that corresponded to our requirements. We initiated a discussion with five of the corporations that all would be a good fit for our study and finally we chose to proceed with the two that were willing to invest enough time in our study.
With a great interest in improving their gender balance in the expatriate field, the two participating organizations were eager to engage in and contribute to our study since they today are dominated by men but are actively working towards gender balance within their organizations. By working with only two organizations we have been able to gain a better understanding since we could look upon the situation more objectively by, within the same organization, getting access to several people's different perspectives. This objectivity is essential when conducting research with a critical realism perspective (Alvehus, 2013).

Both organizations wished to be anonymous and will hereafter be referred to as Alpha and Beta. Organization Alpha is operating in a typically male dominated industry employing mainly engineers and technicians. With about 40,000 employees Alpha is world leading in their business, operating all over the world. Alpha has currently 350 expatriates, whereby 12 %, are women (Alpha, 2016).

Organization Beta is one of the market leaders in its industry and on the global market. With 15,000 employees, Beta is operating worldwide, producing and selling high-technological products. Also Beta has a history of primarily employing engineers and technicians, which historically and still today mostly are male. At the moment, Beta has 150 expatriates of whom 5 % are women (Beta, 2016).

2.6 Primary data

2.6.1 Selection and sample

Interviews and focus groups have been our primary data in this study, whereby we have collected data from a total of 12 respondents. Additionally, we spent a full day with a HR-representative in Alpha as well as an introducing Skype meeting with HR-representatives in Beta. This preparation helped us to understand how the organization worked with their expatriates.

When selecting participants it was crucial that they were familiar with the expatriate topic. However, due to our dependency to the organizations as well as our very limited access to their employees, we were not able to choose respondents to the interviews or focus groups by ourselves. Instead we expressed our preferences and our contact persons at the companies contacted employees they considered to be a good fit.
In Alpha we conducted interviews with one recruitment manager, one female expatriate and one HR-representative. At Beta we interviewed one recruitment manager, one former male expatriate and one female junior employee without expatriate experience. The focus group at Alpha consisted of four females, all working as engineers. Three of them were former expats, whereby two of them had been outgoing expatriates from Sweden and one had been an incoming expatriate from the US but is today permanently employed at the Swedish plant. The fourth participant had not yet been an expatriate but had set an international assignment as a goal for the nearby future. Since one of the respondents did not speak Swedish, the focus group was conducted in English. All participants were familiar with each other even though only two of them worked together at the moment. They interacted well with each other and they agreed most of the time but were, however, not afraid of opposing a statement they did not agree with. At Beta the focus group consisted of two females, both being former expatriates working within HR and communication. In the original setting a third woman would have participated in the session, but due to illness she had to cancel at the last minute. The two women that in the end formed the focus group in Beta both knew each other and had a very good communication with each other.

With regard to our critical realism perspective and in order to understand the possible gendered structures within the organization, it was important for us to have diversity among our respondents. We also wanted to include women that not yet had been on an expatriate assignment in order to capture different perceptions of international assignments, a perspective that has not been deeply investigated in prior female expatriate research. Additionally, in previous gender research little attention has been given to how men reflect and perceive their situation since the woman most often has been in the spotlight (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). Since recruiting managers, former expatriates and employees who not have been on international assignments necessarily agree on how the organization handle its expatriates; we chose to not include the recruiting managers and the male expatriate in our focus groups. This decision was made in order to minimize the risk for insecurity among the participants.
In total we conducted six in-depth interviews and two focus groups and these are presented in the tables below.

**Table 2.1: Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years within the company</th>
<th>Location and duration of interview</th>
<th>Expatriate location &amp; duration</th>
<th>Accompanying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JJ: Woman, current expatriate, General Manager</td>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>45-50</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Skype interview, 45 minutes</td>
<td>Switzerland, 3 years</td>
<td>Yes, husband and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KK: Man, Recruitment Manager</td>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>45-50</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>Alpha’s facilities, 50 minutes</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LL: Woman, HR Professional</td>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Alpha’s facilities, 50 minutes</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC: Woman, junior employee, Competence Manager</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Phone interview, 40 minutes</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD: Man, former expatriate, engineer</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Skype interview, 45 minutes</td>
<td>India, 1,5 years</td>
<td>Yes, wife and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EE: Woman, Recruitment Manager, (Head of HR)</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>45-50</td>
<td>25 years</td>
<td>Skype interview, 40 minutes</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.2: Focus group Alpha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years within the company</th>
<th>Location and duration of focus group</th>
<th>Expatriate location and duration</th>
<th>Accompanying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FF: Woman, former expatriate, Global Operations Developer</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Alpha's facilities, 1 h and 50 minutes</td>
<td>Sweden, 3 ½ years</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GG: Woman, former expatriate. Global Project Portfolio Manager</td>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Alpha's facilities, 1 h and 50 minutes</td>
<td>China, 3 ½ years</td>
<td>Yes, husband and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH: Woman, Flow Manager</td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Alpha's facilities, 1 h and 50 minutes</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II: Woman, former expatriate. Production Manager</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>Alpha’s facilities, 1 h and 50 minutes</td>
<td>China, 4 ½ years</td>
<td>Yes, husband</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3: Focus group Beta

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of years in the company</th>
<th>Location and duration of focus group</th>
<th>Expatriate location and duration</th>
<th>Accompanying</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA: Woman, former expatriate. Employer Branding HR</td>
<td>45-50</td>
<td>16 years</td>
<td>Skype meeting, 55 minutes</td>
<td>India, 3 years Thailand, 1,5 years</td>
<td>Yes, husband and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BB: Woman, former expatriate. Communication Manager</td>
<td>45-50</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Skype meeting, 55 minutes</td>
<td>India, 2 years</td>
<td>Yes, husband</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.6.2 Gathering of primary data

Before conducting our empirical research we compiled interview guides in order to "shape a certain amount of discipline in the relevant topics" (Bryman & Bell, 2015:369). The interview guides were composed with regard to our theoretical framework, whereby we categorized the questions under different themes, which were, gendered substructures, organizational processes, gendered culture, interaction between individuals and gendered identities. In accordance with our critical realism perspective these questions were created with the purpose to discover in what way the underlying gendered structures and mechanisms influenced our respondents on a level that was visible for us as researchers (Jespersen, 2004). However, it was crucial to start off the interviews and focus groups with some "warm-up questions" to make our respondents comfortable before we asked questions that required a larger effort from the respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The interview- and focus group guides followed the same pattern even though some themes had to be rephrased in order to adapt to the respondent's role within the organization.

2.6.3 Criticism of primary sources

Since we met the participants in the interviews and focus group at Alpha face to face, we could pay attention to their body language. This was not the case with Beta since the focus group and interviews were conducted through Skype. When it is not possible to see the body language of the person you talk to it is hard to know what questions that engaged the respondents the most (Alvehus, 2013). On the other hand, it may entail a sense of security and comfort for the respondents to be in their home setting (ibid). The fact that the interview and focus group participants were chosen by a HR-manager in consultation with us might have added a certain bias to our research since the organizations consciously or subconsciously may have chosen participants with certain traits or experiences that stress specific aspects or factors within the organization. However, with regard to the fact that the organizations voluntarily engaged in our study, in order for them to benefit from participating, it is also in their interest to get a fair and true view of their organizational situation.

The focus group in Alpha was conducted in English, which not was the native language for three of the participants. This can be seen as an aggravating circumstance for them
in order to express themselves. However, due to their previous expatriate assignments and international work environments they were used to speak English and we did not notice any specific problems. The focus group in Beta as well as all other interviews was conducted in Swedish, which means that direct quotes used in our thesis had to be translated into English, which might imply a risk for misunderstandings. In accordance with the recommendations from Bryman and Bell (2015) we translated all quotes back to Swedish afterwards, in order to determine that the meaning unchanged when translated.

Our first idea was to conduct two focus groups in each organization but it was not possible due to the lack of female expatriates in both organizations. Also the circumstances of a reduced focus group in Beta that in the end only consisted of two participants is subject for criticism. However, we considered that despite this fact, it was better to go through with the focus group than to cancel it since the busy schedules of our respondents made it hard to find a time for another session. An additional point of criticism is the homogeneous locations of our respondents’ stationing. Many of our respondents were placed in Asia and one could presume that the perceptions of the organizations’ behavior might differ depending on where in the world the expatriate was located. Finally, in order to add more credibility to our primary sources it would have been desirable if our participating organizations not were anonymous. This fact is, however, nothing we could control and also not essential in order to answer our research question.

2.7 Secondary sources
2.7.1 Selection and sample
We have used secondary sources in terms of both internal and external data. In order to collect broad statistics about gender in organizations and gender equality we have used public investigations conducted by companies owned by the Swedish government, such as Statistics Sweden. Additionally, we have used reports from external organizations with an interest in the topic, whereby Battle of the Numbers and Cartus are two examples. Furthermore, both companies in our study are publicly listed which means we had access to their annual reports as well as their homepages that provided extensive information. We have used information concerning financial
numbers, strategies, challenges and gender distribution statistics from their homepages. We also received extracts of their specific data concerning gender distribution and policies for expatriates from the companies' HR-departments.

2.7.2 Criticism of secondary sources
Even though the usage of secondary sources made it possible to use data far more advanced and extensive than we could collect ourselves, we had no control over the quality or intentions of the secondary data (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Furthermore, there is always a risk that we as researchers are tempted to use secondary sources because of their availability instead of their suitability for the research problem (ibid). Since the annual reports, policies and statistical figures are compiled internally this is of course a critical factor since we cannot guarantee their accuracy or impartiality. Furthermore, we did not have unlimited access to the organizations' internal policies and data. They were very careful on which material and information they could or were willing to share with us. This is a problem for many researchers (ibid) but since our study's purpose is most dependent on primary sources, we did not see it as a major problem.

2.8 Analysis and interpretation of data
According to Esaiasson et al (2007), the line between the collection of data and the analysis of qualitative material is not always distinctive since the reasoning process often starts already during the gathering of empirical data. Through the study's deductive approach, this was also the case in our process since we were able to start the analysis and reasoning in the light of our theoretical framework already when we started collecting data.

However, qualitative research is interpretative research and its mission is to contribute to further understanding of a phenomena (Alvehus, 2013). To analyze qualitative research is in many respects the ability to bring out the essential data of the often large amount of unstructured empirical findings (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson & Wängerud, 2007). Alvehus (2013) state three problems with qualitative material. First is the chaos problem; there is no structure in the collected material. Secondly arises the representation problem, it is not possible to present all collected data in the study. At last we have the authority problem, what can we say about previous research and the findings of our study?
To deal with these problems the author gives three recommendations of how to handle the qualitative material, assort, reduce and argue (Alvehus, 2013). Following these recommendations we started off by reading through the material several times and thereafter we could sort it in to different themes. According to Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015), it is important to pay attention to the themes that repeatedly were being subject for discussion since these indicates the major content of the empirical material. Our themes were chosen with regard to the study's purpose and theoretical framework, as well as to the new themes that developed during focus groups and interviews. The themes we chose were: Selection and recruitment process, repatriation, family & spouse, organizational support, perceived possibilities, role models, "being a woman in a man's world", career and stereotypes. When the categorizing of the material was finished, the representation problem was clearly visible through the large amount of empirical findings. For us it meant that the material had to be selected and reduced in accordance to our purpose and research questions. Alvehus (2013) discuss the risk of reducing so much material that contradictions disappear, which often are what is the most interesting to analyze. As critical realists this is even more important to keep in mind since we in accordance with this perspective, wanted to show many different views of the topic. At last, the argumentation is made visible in our analysis, which is based upon both empirical findings and theory, whereby we matched our theoretical framework with our sorted and reduced empirical material. Alvehus (2013) reminds us of the authority problem that might arise when trying to combine empirical findings with the chosen theory without being nuanced enough. This will lead to an analysis that does not contribute to any new findings (ibid). To overcome this issue the author suggests that the researcher should strive for an as fair presentation of the empirical material as possible. In accordance with this recommendation and with our critical realism perspective in mind we twisted and turned on all empirical findings in order to minimize the risk of too simplified explanations.
2.9 Quality of research

2.9.1 Validity

The validity of a study questions its result with respect to the study's research question; "Do we investigate what we aim to investigate?" (Alvehus, 2013:122) When conducting qualitative research there is always a risk that the researcher's own interpretations influence the study's direction in a way that not is entirely unbiased (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In accordance with the critical realism perspective we have throughout our study aimed to investigate our chosen field of study in an objective way (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2011). However, there's almost impossible to draw exact analyses of the reality since both the participants and we as researchers are influenced, not only of the perception of the reality but also of own values (ibid). Being women ourselves, and with a great interest in this subject, there is a risk that we subconsciously have had a pro-feminine standpoint in our work. According to Alvesson and Billing (2009), the most important task for gender researcher is to expose underlying, gendered situations in organizations that claim to be gender neutral. With this approach a risk of "gender hypersensitivity" arises since it is easy to see many aspects of a situation as gendered even though that is not the central issue in all cases (ibid). However, since we have been aware of this risk from the beginning we have been able to stop and reflect when feeling that our discussions have drifted away from our purpose.

2.9.2 Transferability

Bryman and Bell (2015) explains the transferability of a study as its external validity. That is, can the result of the study be generalized into other contexts? (Alvehus (2013) claims that a study that includes more than one case raises the possibility to generalize its results but the critics of qualitative research claims that it is impossible to generalize findings of one qualitative study to another (ibid). Our study has been following the guidelines of qualitative research and in accordance with our critical realism perspective, an understanding of the context's influence has been important (Justesen & Mik-Meyer, 2011). Since the context is important for the results of our study can the transferability not be guaranteed when repeated in other settings (Bryman & Bell,
Even though it is possible that the findings of our research also apply to other organizations, our work may only represent these particular organizations.

2.9.3 Reliability
A study's reliability means that other researchers would come to the same conclusions if they would repeat the study by using the same method (Alvehus, 2013). In order to shape prospects for following researchers, an extensive description of the study's approach must be demonstrated (Bryman & Bell, 2015). We have thoroughly described our approach and motivated our decisions, which makes it possible to repeat our study. However, since our respondents are very influenced of their organization, family situation and the country for the expatriate assignment, the exact same results in future research would only be possible if conducted with the same respondents. Nevertheless, despite the variety in our respondents’ background, very similar statements and conclusions have been made in our focus groups and interviews, which strengthen our study's reliability.

2.9.4 Ethical value basis
When conducting research there are situations where ethical considerations must be made. The major interest of our thesis is to contribute with knowledge to the research field of female expatriates but at the same time is the interest of protection and integrity for the individual participants crucial. As we already have mentioned, gender research is a sensitive subject and even though all names are figured it might be clear for the involved organizations who said what. The participants in our study might therefore place themselves in a vulnerable position if they reveal controversial facts or opinions. This makes it hard for us to ensure that the participants' opinions are their own and not what they feel obligated to say. Our impression is, however, that the participants were not anxious about this. We also feel confident that the companies will treat their employees with respect since it is in their interest to improve their handling of expatriates.

In order to conduct research with a high ethical level we have been following the recommendations from Vetenskapsrådet (2011). The requirements for the protection of the individual can be concluded into four general rules; requirement of information, requirement of approval, requirement of confidentiality and requirement of usage
(Vetenskapsrådet, 2002; own translation). Additionally, Gillham (2008) stresses the importance of clarifying in what way the research information will handle anonymity and safety issues for the individual. In order to achieve the requirement of information we informed all participants of the study's purpose. They received the information and examples of questions and themes we wanted to discuss during interviews and focus groups well before the sessions were carried out. They were also in advanced informed that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to stop or leave the ongoing interview or focus group without giving any reason. To be able to reach approval between the respondents and us as researchers, we have been striving towards openness and clarity in our work. Our goal was that the participants would feel relaxed and interested when taking part in our study and therefore it has been important for us to be very clear with the fact that the participation was strict voluntary. The requirement of confidentiality has been pursued through clarifying for all our participants what access restrictions our research material will have and why. Since both participating organizations chose to be anonymous we coded their and all participants' names already from the start in order to reduce the risk of recognition. We have also handled the collected material with confidentiality by storing it in places that only we have access to. Furthermore we informed all participants that the usage of the material is limited to our study.
3. Theory

The research within the field of female expatriates emanates to a great extent from Adler’s (1984b) three myths of why women not want international careers. As much as Adler is considered the founder of female expatriation theory, the research of gendered organizational theory belongs in many respects to Acker. We find it very interesting that these two fields of research, with potential to have very much in common, seem to have pursued parallel research. Furthermore, we are arguing that the effects of the narrowed focus on Adler’s (1984b) myths has resulted in an over-proportional part of the research focusing explicitly on the female expatriation process, lacking understanding of what role a gendered organization might have. To combine these two research fields will hopefully help us in the understanding of how a gendered organization might influence female expatriates within corporations.

3.1 Gendered substructures

The structure of an organization describes how responsibility, control and power are distributed among its participants (Pugh, 1990). Apart from the organizational structure, every organization also has underlying structures that are harder to discover and control, so called substructures (Von Eschen, Kirk & Pinard, 1971). Social identification theory describes substructures by stating that different groups within an organization create their own group-identity (Peteraf & Shanley, 1997). Substructures are often explained as the basic foundation that supports its superstructure (Von Eschen et al, 1971). How well an organization performs is therefore highly depending on its substructures. Following Kanter’s (1977) findings on gender differences within organizations to be a result of organizational structure, many scholars today take the perspective of gendered-organizations instead of gender-in-organizations, in order to highlight the predetermined gendered structures that specific organizations and professions have (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). This implies that today’s research is largely focused on investigating conceptions and discourses about masculine and feminine behaviours instead of focusing on men and women as individuals in the organization (ibid). In order to grasp the underlying gendered organizational substructures, it is important to not only focus on equal opportunities, but also to understand the existence of unequal practices that are deeply rooted and reproduced in the
organizations structure, culture and interaction patterns (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998). Acker (2012) refers to a gendered organization as an organization with built-in inequalities between men and women depending on underlying, gendered substructures. These gendered substructures can be found in organizational processes, cultures, interactions between individuals and gendered identities within the organization. (Acker, 1992b; 2012).

3.1.1 Organizational processes

Acker (1990; 1992b; 2012) argues that a gendered substructure is shaped through an organization's processes, where there are built-in inequalities which leads to a gender segregated labor market. The segregation of women and men in the workforce can be seen from both a horizontal and a vertical perspective (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). The horizontal segregation reflects the difference in gender representation between businesses and is characterized by that women are holding a secondary position in the labor market (ibid). However, gender imbalance cannot only be seen between industries but also vertically, within an industry. The difference between women's and men's occupations can be seen, whereby men tend to hold positions with a higher level of responsibility and status (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). The vertical segregation can be explained through the horizontal since there often are less possibilities to career advancements in businesses where women are over represented (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). Even though several countries have introduced laws that forbid all types of gender discrimination, these traditional male and female considered industries and occupations shape a perception that still today has an impact on manager's decision making (Acker, 2012). Historically it has been argued that in many male-dominated organizations, the different career possibilities between men and women depend on the low number of female employees within the organization (Kanter, 1977). Gherardi and Poggio (2001) oppose this view by pointing to the non-equivalent gender redistribution of managers, even though the rate of women entering male-dominated businesses has increased. This phenomenon is usually referred to as a glass ceiling and describes a barrier so thin that it is hard to discover, still thick enough to prevent women and minorities to reach senior management positions (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990).
As previously mentioned, international experience is desirable and in some companies even mandatory in order to reach senior management positions (Altman & Shortland, 2008). Expatriate assignments are often the only way to extract the full value of multicultural understanding (Insch et al, 2008) but the requirement of international experience might cause a second lawyer of glass for women since they are less likely to be chosen for expatriate assignments (Forster, 1999). In the middle of the 90's the *glass ceiling* term was translated into the expatriate world as a *glass border* (Linehan & Walsh, 1999). This was a few years after Acker (1990; 1992a; 1992b) presented her work on gendered organizations, which points to that female expatriate research has been following the organizational gender literature, even though the specific term gendered organizational theory has not been prominent. One could presume that Adler (1984b) referred to the *glass border* already in the 80's when she found that companies were reluctant to send women on expatriate assignments. However, she was careful to not draw any parallels between the low number of female expatriates and gendered segregation, or even discrimination within organizations. Her mission was to inform and to provide evidence rather than to raise public opinion (Altman & Shortland, 2008). Despite her intentions and relatively modest approach she made a great impact on both public and professionals. Still today her findings make grounds for much research (ibid).

A big difference between the research stemming from gendered organizations, compared with the one conducted within the expatriate field, is that the research in the expatriate field is restrained through the lack of public numerical statistics. This has made it difficult to draw conclusions and compare horizontal and vertical segregation among and within businesses. There are no definite gender statistics but according to Organization Resources Counselors (2005), women range from about 30 % in non-profit and charity sectors to as low as 6 % in construction and engineering. Statistics that show what types of positions expatriates held within the company before their assignment are scarce but vertical segregation within the organization, where women tend to hold inferior positions than men, can be seen as one of the explanations of women's exclusion from expatriate assignments (ibid).
3.1.2 Gendered culture

An organization's culture consists of unspoken assumptions created and evolved in the organization over time and can be divided into visible and hidden factors (Alvesson & Billing, 2009). Schein (1990) refers to three levels of organizational culture: Observable artifacts, values and basic underlying assumptions. Artifacts are the only visible part of the culture and represent everything physical, such as dress code, symbols, language, annual reports and not least, the actual products or services offered by the organization. Values of an organization imply its norms, ideologies and philosophies. Even deeper hidden are the basic underlying assumptions, often unconscious also for the organization itself (ibid). Moreover, Acker's (1992b) definition of a gendered organizational culture does not differ in substance from Schein's (1990) description of organizational culture. However, she makes the important addition of gender by defining a gendered culture as: The “creation of symbols, images, and forms of consciousness that explicate, justify, and, more rarely, oppose gender divisions” (Acker, 1992b: 253).

A gendered organizational culture is, just like every organizational culture, influenced by the larger, surrounding culture in form of business practice and politics. (Acker, 2012). Pfau-Effinger (1998) refers to this impact as the norms and values that exist in every modern society, with the goal to achieve a desirable behavior for men respectively women. According to Alvesson and Billing (2009), the perception of masculine and feminine values varies between, and also within different subcultures in an organization. Nevertheless, researchers have identified several types of typical feminine and masculine characteristics within organizations whereby authority, paternalism, entrepreneurship and careerism are considered masculine traits (Collinson & Hearn, 1994), while supportiveness, collaboration and sensitivity are seen as typical female traits (Heilman, Wallen, Funchs, & Tamkins, 2004). Davidson and Cooper (1992) points out the managerial subculture to be the most obvious example of a gendered organizational culture due to the low numbers and status of female managers in most organizations. Wilson (2001) argues that all organizations are more or less gendered in their culture and that the majority of them are leaning towards a masculine culture.
According to Shortland’s (2009) review of the existing research in the female expatriate area, the importance of the organizational culture has not been deeply investigated. However, the national culture has been subject of investigation through Adler’s second myth; the belief that foreigners are prejudiced against female managers. This myth has been further examined later on and modern research, which takes the host country national perspective, shows that female expatriates are perceived as professionals above all and first thereafter, their gender is perceived (Tung, 2004). Furthermore, Tung (2004) argues that organizations’ attitudes towards female expatriates must change, since women might be better suited for international management positions than men. This assertion stems from research showing that the typical feminine leader style helps women to integrate with people from different cultures in a better way (ibid). Even though there has not been a focus on the organizational culture in previous expatriate research, the gendered organizational culture do possibly affect the expectations of who and how an expatriate should be. Since expatriates within most organizations historically have been men, the lack of role models for female employees has created a perceived picture of an expatriate as a man (Altman & Shortland, 2008).

3.1.3 Interactions between individuals

West and Zimmerman (1987) are arguing for that gender is not something we are. Instead they explain that gender is "being done" through ongoing achievements and interactions within organizations. To illustrate the "doing of gender" the authors points to how gender is done through conversations (West & Zimmerman, 1983). By studying interruptions in conversations they discovered that in conversations between people of the same sex there were very few interruptions among participants. However, in groups with mixed sexes, men were found to initiate a superior majority of the interruptions (ibid). Acker (1990) supports the findings of West and Zimmerman (1983) by claiming that gendered substructures of an organization are shaped and reproduced through the interaction between its individuals. Deutsch (2007) proceed from West and Zimmerman’s (1987) research when arguing that if gender is constructed, it can also be deconstructed. Furthermore, Deutsch (2007) criticize West and Zimmerman (1987) by claiming that their focus on "doing gender" leads to the creation of
differences instead of deleting them and a perception of gender inequality as impossible to avoid. Shaw (2001) argues that acts of resistance can change the construction of gender roles. For example, a girl’s joining of a boys’ hockey team can have further consequences than just for the individual itself. Other people seeing the girl interact with the boys’ team might change their conception of gender, leading to an undoing of gender (ibid). However, Acker (2012) points out sexuality as a conformation of gender difference and as an aggravating circumstance in order to achieve functioning work relations and gender equality in the organization.

Adler (1984a) reported that companies failed to include their female managers in expatriate discussions since they thought that women would not be interested anyway, mostly due to prejudice from foreigners. Even though this myth has been proven to be incorrect, women are to some extent still excluded from expatriate opportunities due to their lack of social networks (Insch et al, 2008). Since men hold most positions in top management, informal activities like golf or dinners are mostly attended by men. Expatriate candidates are according to the authors often chosen from these informal networks since management tends to pick people they know and trust (ibid). Furthermore, according to Alvesson and Billing (1994) do women and men differ in how they look upon their chances for a job; women tend to apply when they fulfill all of the qualification requirements or even more than that, while men more often apply if they fulfill some of them and reason as such that they will learn the rest along the way.

A perception of gender equality tends to be the general perception in many organizations although inequalities in the selection process still exist. In order to advance within the organization, "the importance of being asked" is crucial according to Benschop and Dooreward (1998). On the paper, most positions may seem to be open to "everyone" but in reality, some employees may be asked or encouraged to apply to a certain mission or position (ibid). Harris and Brewster (1999) claim that most companies are using the so-called "Coffee-machine system" in order to select expatriates. This refers to a situation where expatriate candidates are suggested based on chitchats with senior managers by the coffee-machine. Through the coffee-machine system the selection process will be very fast but the possibility for the company to
take a strategic approach on expatriate assignments is decreased, as well as the chances for women to be selected (ibid.) To overcome this obstacle, Insch et al (2008) stresses the importance of awareness of potential gender biases already in organizations’ selection processes for expatriate assignments.

3.1.4 Gendered identities

The first three aspects of gendered substructures in combination with prior experiences of the individual leads to a fourth one; the individual's choice of identity as it understands the structure and expectations of its organization (Acker, 1992b). Kanter (1977) describes three factors, crucial for how employees look upon themselves and their development within an organization: The structure of possibilities, the structure of power and the relative representation of a particular social group in their position. Through these perceptions, gendered identities are shaped although they can change with time and experience (ibid). Dye and Mills (2012) are skeptical towards Kanter (1977) and Acker's (1992b) theories of gendered identities by questioning the practical possibility to look into individuals' minds in order to discover their arranging of gendered substructures that leads to constructions of gendered identities.

Furthermore, modern research claims that even though we today might consider our organizations to be gender neutral they are still gendered (Acker, 2012). Acker (2012) exemplifies this through the "abstract worker" who is expected at work at a certain time in the morning, to work a certain number of hours, never being absent and to finish all the assigned work during the hours of a working day. At a first glance this appears to represent quite normal working conditions and not especially gendered. However, even though much has changed during past decades, today's typical working day still derive from the idea of the man being the family's breadwinner, meanwhile his wife is taking care of all unpaid housework (Shortland, 2009). A woman will therefore face a bigger challenge to obtain the work-life balance when incorporated into the male organization (Acker, 2012). Likewise, this abstract worker represent the traits and lifestyle that many employers expect of an employee and who thus subconsciously might prefer a man to a woman in order to eliminate potential risks of for example absenteeism due to pregnancy (ibid). Furthermore, women's career
possibilities tend to be lower since the usual career steps within organizations follow the path of the abstract worker (Benschop & Dooreward, 1998).

Being a woman in a "man's job" is often seen as the "pride and joy" of the company, as the symbol or living proof of gender equality and as an indication saying that the organization is on the right track. Women in high positions are often referred to as role models that will inspire other women to strive for the same position. However, research suggests that being a token does not have the same drawback for men as for women (Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998). To a female police officer her gender can be a hindrance meanwhile a male nurse may experience advantages and profit from his gender. A woman striving for a higher "male" position must break barriers and boundaries in order to meet the requirements of the abstract or ideal worker. They must live up to high expectations and being in the spotlight or a "show piece" also entails a lot of attention, jealousy and high expectations to live up to, which makes them more vulnerable in their positions and forced to work harder and invest more in their work than a man.

In female expatriate research, Adler (1984b) claims that a big obstacle for female expatriates is the lack of female role models and the stereotyping of expatriate assignments as male professions. In accordance with Adler's (1984b) findings, Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) suggests that members of the majority of a group are seen as individuals, while being in minority, one individual's actions and behavior will reflect upon all members of the minority. Summarizing, women that hold expatriate positions, which normally are seen as "male" positions, are seen as tokens or show pieces.

The perception of expatriate assignments has changed over the last couple of years. Bonache and Pla-Barber (2005) claim that even though international expertise is ever more important for companies, there's a trend of organizations attempting to decrease their numbers of expatriates due to high expenses and increased safety risks in the surrounding world. To be able to cope with the increased need of global managers, cheaper and less risky alternatives to expatriation such as shorter-term

---

1 *Token actions are done to show that you are doing something, even if the results are limited in their effect* (Cambridge Dictionary).
assignments and frequent flyer are introduced in many companies (Hutching, Liriob & Metcalfec, 2012). These reduced benefit packages and less secure careers has lowered employees' interest in expatriate assignments and following queuing theory, "next in line is next to be served", an increase of female expatriates would be predicted (Shortland, 2009). However, queuing theory does not seem to be applicable on expatriate assignments since the participation of women increase very slowly (ibid).

3.2 Gendered subtext

In order to better understand and find the underlying gendered substructures, Smith (1989) introduced the gendered subtext, which is explained as the complexity of built in administrative and managerial factors that governs and regulates our societies and organizations. The gendered subtext is even subtler than the gendered substructures and are therefore harder to discover (Benschop & Dooreward, 1998). Acker (2012) sees "the gender subtext as a part of the gendered substructure, but not its totality" Acker (2012:217). To divide the gender subtext from the gendered substructure, she uses the notion gender subtext for policies, metaphors, descriptions and common practices that contribute to the organization's gendered processes and structures (Acker, 2012).

Bendl (2008) identifies several different types of gendered subtexts. The first one is Subtext of unconscious exclusion and neglect, which implies that research, organizational texts and documentations, unconsciously are biased towards men and exclude or neglect women. Furthermore, Subtext of attributed masculinity and males as the norm identifies women as the exception, valuing males’ conceptions as a norm with higher value. This is demonstrated also in Acker’s (2012) abstract worker who is underpinned by a normative male subtext, which reproduces masculine-oriented values in organizations. The third Subtext of women as "the other" focus more on the reproduction of women being "the other" then men being the norm. For example, women are, even when in managerial positions enacting and adapting to "malestream" conditions, still seen as "the other". Furthermore, Subtext of feminization implies that by naming something feminine, one challenges roles and positions that normally are considered to be gender neutral to actually be masculine. At last, Subtext of pretended equality between males and females refers to research
that, on the contrary, stresses typically female traits to be better than male traits. The author claims that this would not create gender equality but rather turn the hierarchy around, giving advantages to women and putting men in a minority position (Bendl, 2008).

Alvesson and Billing (2009) raise a warning for the risk of stating impact and consequences from potential gendered subtexts before having deeper knowledge about the local context, the organization and its employees' feelings, thoughts and reactions. Subtexts might be considered gendered and therefore unequal from researchers' point of view but are not necessarily being perceived in the same way by employees within the organization (ibid).

3.3 Summary of theoretical framework

![Figure 3.1. The gendered organization (Authors' illustration)](image)

Every organization has its own gendered substructures, which can be found in the organization's processes, culture, interaction between individuals and gendered identities (Acker, 1992; 2012).

When looking at an organization's processes, both horizontal and vertical segregation is often clearly visible; men and women tend to work in different industries and also within the same organization, women and men usually work within different areas
(Alvesson & Billing, 2009). Furthermore, an organization’s gendered culture can be defined as the “creation of symbols, images, and forms of consciousness that explicate, justify, and, more rarely, oppose gender divisions” (Acker, 1992b: 253). However, an organization’s gendered substructures are not shaped in isolation, it is influenced by the surrounding society with its prevailing business practices and politics (Acker, 2012). In the interaction between an organization’s individuals, West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender is being done. At last, the individual’s identity is shaped through the perceived possibilities within the organization (Kanter, 1977).

These gendered substructures are influenced by the organization’s gendered subtext and vice versa. Together they influence all decisions and actions by mediating a preferred view of what is common practice within the organization (Acker, 2012).
4. Empirical findings

In order to get a better understanding of the empirical findings we start off by introducing the current business situation in both companies. At the moment, Alpha's industry is experiencing a downturn; sales are low and the main part of the profits steam from their service division. The difficult times are also reflected upon the staff; new hires and recruits are rare. Under normal circumstances, personnel are offered a variety of internal training and courses but these opportunities are limited at the moment. The decrease in demand also reflects upon the availability of expatriate assignments. In 2015 the company had 17 % women in their workforce, 17 % female managers and 12 % female expatriates (Alpha, 2016)

On the contrary, Beta saw an increase in demand during 2015 and the nearby future looks promising with a strengthened position towards competitors and a 16 % sales growth. With new orders on new markets, Beta's CEO stresses the importance of presence on new markets and to intensify international work in order to meet market demand. This indicates that Beta will see an increase of expatriates, operating on both new and old markets. In 2015, 23% of the total workforce were women; they held 27 % of the managerial positions and the company had 5 % female expatriates (Beta, 2016).

4.1 The recruiting process – transparent or biased?

Both Alpha and Beta state that they according to their company policy announce all expatriate positions and then it is up to the individual employee to apply. However, the impression we have been given is that Alpha follows their policy to every extent, while Beta seems to use the policy as a guideline, rather than a rule. A recruiting manager at Beta explains that under the right circumstances she would definitely encourage someone to apply to a position if she thought the employee was suitable or wished to go. Meanwhile, one recruiting manager at Alpha explains that he would put himself in a tricky situation by encouraging someone to apply to a position. It would raise the hopes and expectations of the employee, and therefore, unless he was extremely certain that this employee was the best suited for the position, he would avoid it to every extent possible.
The focus group in Alpha hold the opinion that they would not want to be selected to a position on other grounds than their skills and qualifications. Still, they state that coaching or encouragement would be a good way to motivate even though, in the end, it is always up to the individual itself. They describe the company culture as based on the idea that "If you want something, you have to fight for it". It is up to each and everyone's own motivation and determination how high you reach, no one will promote you or ask you to go on an expatriate mission. You have to apply internally whether it concerns training, promotions, projects or expatriate assignments. However, this point of view is not entirely shared by a female expatriate on a senior position in Alpha. In her opinion, the decision of whom to hire is very much up to who the recruiting manager is. She believes that despite her capabilities, a part of the reason to why she obtained the role was because there were very few applicants. Her main competitor was a Frenchman that barely could speak English, a requirement for the position.

"Since I've not been at Alpha for so many years, automatically when I apply for a position, I am unknown, one doesn't recognize my name and that makes my options very limited since I compete with people that know each other through different networks [...] Even though I've done a good job for three years now, it's still only a small group of people who knows who I am"

- JJ, Female expatriate, Alpha.

She also refers to a former expatriate colleague who now changed to another company since he could not find a new job on the internal job market after his contract expired. He experienced that the recruiters already knew who she or he was looking for and that the "open application process" is nothing but a charade. This statement is supported by another female employee at Alpha who comments the advertisements for expatriates like this:

"There are a lot of positions posted on the international job market and they are all kind of written as if you already know the position"

- HH, Female employee, Alpha
How much knowledge you have of expatriate assignments is according to a female expat in Alpha depending on the manager you have. In order to increase women's awareness of expatriate assignments, the HR representative at Alpha suggest that they could inform and open up for a discussion early on in their employment. But as always at Alpha, it is up to the individual to apply in the end, "we don't encourage women to apply, it's the same for everyone" (LL). Another recruiting manager agrees by saying that of course there are things the organization could do in order to encourage women to apply to expatriate assignments.

"But I'm a bit against that, I want it to be the right person. We are supposed to write the adds so that they attract everyone [...] if they feel that no, now they're looking for a woman in this position, then I think it's for the wrong purpose. But the main problem for us is that the industry is so dominated by men."

- KK, Recruitment manager, Alpha

At Beta, one male expatriate explains that he had good contact with his boss who knew that he had an interest in working abroad. When an opportunity came up on the internal job market in Australia, his boss who knew more of what was going on behind the curtains encouraged him to apply. According to this male expatriate, the job ads on the Australian market are normally not visible for employees outside of Australia since they have a different data system. Sounding a bit uncomfortable he added:

"I think or I am pretty sure that he, my boss talked to the recruiting boss over there, so it was well...Yeah.. Mm...."

- DD, Male expatriate, Beta

A female employee at Beta was about to change company after working many years for the organization when an expatriate opportunity came up. At a first glance she did not understand that she was able to apply to the assignment but when a colleague with a similar background received the offer but turned it down, she applied. She had the expat position rewritten according to her wishes since the assignment was on inferior level in accordance to the position she held at the time. She expresses her thoughts as such:
“Many jobs that I’ve been recruited to, well I hope it has been based on competence but I wouldn’t be surprised if I was selected because I am a woman, I would say it’s quite easy to make a career as a woman at Beta now.”

- AA, Female expatriate, Beta

A younger woman in the same organization expresses that she has little knowledge of the recruitment process of expatriates but that she has indicated her interest in her personal career development discussions and expects her manager to give a hint when a suitable assignment comes up. A recruiting manager at Beta says that in general it is not easy to get people to apply to missions abroad since it is quite a big deal for a whole family to move abroad. In order to increase the amount of female expatriates they are always taking a closer look on their applications if they receive some.

4.2 Repatriation – anxiety or new possibilities?

Alpha is characterized by not working with career planning and their expatriates are not guaranteed a position within the company upon their return to the home country. Hence, when you leave for an expatriate assignment, you let go of your current position in the home organization and you do not know what position you will be able to get when you return a few years later or what economic situation the company will be in. Six months in advance of the expiration of the expatriate contract, the expat is supposed to actively start looking for jobs at Alpha’s internal job pool with support from the organization. According to the company policy, you are guaranteed a placement in the organization for six months after that your contract has expired but if you have not found a suitable placement by then you are left without any employment.

“We have a contract saying that 6 months before the contract ends, a discussion should be initiated. The president is responsible but I had no talks. I mean, start off with living up to the contract, I think that’s number one.”

- II, Female expatriate, Alpha
With an industry in recession, the focus group participants seem to doubt the liability of the organization. If you take on an expat contract when the industry is having an upturn and then your contract expire in a downturn you might end up without a job. We are given an example of an employee on a high position in the organization, which upon return to Sweden could not find an available and appropriate position and then left the company and was hired by a competitor. This is not a desirable situation since the company lost competence and knowledge, which on top of that also was transferred to a competitor.

"I think it’s an issue that you are not guaranteed a job after the expat assignment. When we moved we had a trust in the company, that they would take care of you and they would find good solutions when you come back. But now in several occasions, since the reduction, we have shown that we are not taking that responsibility” And I know it’s not only me thinking this way."

- II, Female expatriate, Alpha

To end up without job when you have a family to support is a prominent topic in the focus group at Alpha. Many upset feelings aroused while discussing this and it is suggested that if the organization would want people to go on expat assignments and to keep the mobility, the organization should offer some kind of employment upon return, not necessary the same position as before but something as a security for a longer period than six months.

“If you send out someone that you don’t want back I think you chose the wrong candidate. I guess you want to take them home and grow them into a new position, why would you otherwise select them?”

-HH, Female employee, Alpha

That you have delivered good results as an expatriate does not mean that you can feel safe about your future. The female expatriate that currently is abroad does not know what her future will look like. Even though she is on a high position and she knows that the organization is satisfied with what she produced during her assignment she is not
sure that she will find a job when her expatriate contract expires, which causes a lot of stress and worry.

"There's nothing I can go home to, I am in a little rubber boat on the ocean, trying to find land somewhere.."

- JJ, Female expatriate, Alpha

Contrary to Alpha, the expats in Beta keep their employment within the company when going on an expatriate assignment. However, they are not guaranteed the same position as they had when they left or promised a particular position upon return. This may sometimes be a problem for Beta in case the expectations of an employee are not corresponding to the company’s.

As earlier mentioned, the industry Beta is operating within is booming and the company does therefore experience a great upturn at the moment. The male expatriate experienced that there were plenty of jobs and positions to choose form upon return. Supported by the organization, he applied for new positions when his expat contract was about to expire.

Another former expat at Beta says:

"I knew that I wouldn't find an as exiting job [as abroad; own interpretation] when I came home. The organization supported me and I don't know if I got the job because, well partly because they were supposed to support my return but I ended up with the job I applied for and wanted, so I think that the company has been supportive."

- AA, Female expatriate, Beta

As on Alpha, the focus group at Beta concludes that upon the return to Sweden one of the biggest organizational challenges for the organization was to re-integrate former expatriates in the home country again. They recognize that job security and the anxiety of what is happening next are the main reasons to why employees in general would hesitate to apply to expatriate assignments. Beta's challenges are to retain employees and be able to use and take advantage of their new competences and experiences. In case the repatriated expatriates do not find their new position to be a good fit, it is
quite a big risk for the organization since an unstimulated employee might look for new career paths in another company.

4.3 The expatriate assignment – a career boost?

In both companies, experience from working abroad is an advantage for employees aiming for higher positions even though none of the organizations state it as an absolute requirement. However, none of our respondents stated that they went abroad with the main purpose to boost their careers. The majority went because of personal reasons; to live and work abroad was something they had strived towards for a long time. A recruitment manager at Alpha states that it is very important with international experience in order to climb higher, especially when working within marketing and sales. He thinks that the employees within those areas are aware of this but does not know how much they know in other departments. When speaking to the female expatriates at Alpha who went abroad within the production area they say that they do not think it has been particularly beneficial for them, but if they had been expatriates within marketing and sales, they would have taken bigger steps in their careers. One raised opinion is that men in general are more career focused when going abroad, they know that if they want to be promoted, an expatriate assignment could be the way to the top.

The former expats we talked to at Beta claim that they don’t think that they got their new positions within the company only because they had been expatriates but that it certainly could have been a contributing factor. The junior employee thinks that it would be very useful in her career to have worked as an expatriate even though her primary motivation would be personal. The recruitment manager at Beta expresses her point of view:

"We are not telling our expatriates: ‘- You are going because it's a step in your career.' But then it could still be like that, implicitly."

- EE, Recruitment manager, Beta
4.4 The importance of network

The HR department at Alpha thinks it is very important to give support to repatriated expatriates so they can become ambassadors for other employees and inspire and raise the interest for expatriate assignments. However, there is no expatriate network or mentorship program for expatriates within the organization. According to the recruitment manager we spoke to, Alpha is:

"...a big workplace but everyone do more or less keep track of what everyone is doing. The best commercial for expatriate assignments is of course when we can refer to someone who has returned home and who has been able to take the next step in the career"

-KK, Recruitment manager, Alpha

When talking to female expats in Alpha they state that in order to find people to talk to about expatriate assignments it is all based on contacts. One female expat, currently in the end of her assignment, did not know many female expats before going. However, she hopes that she can inspire other women to work abroad by showing that it is possible, as a woman and with a family. The woman interested of working abroad in the future says; "In my position, wanting to go abroad, I keep track of who is abroad" (HH).

Also in Beta there is no official network for expatriates and the recruitment manager here has the same perspective as Alpha when talking about role models:

"For every woman you see that goes on an expatriate assignment, both from Beta's perspective, that we actually send her, but also that she makes it work with her family, I think that creates a positive picture. And that's often the case; if she can, I can. You compare yourself with others"

- EE, Recruitment manager, Beta

The former female expats in Beta stresses the importance of each other’s support while being abroad:
"You can say like this – there is no official mentorship program or process but BB and I have been mentoring each other. You are very alone out there, even if you have other expats there are no other women."

- AA, Female expatriate, Beta

4.5 Being a female expat – a non-issue or an obstacle?

During the focus groups it was obvious that the participating women preferred not to talk about topics that were related to "difficulties of being a woman". One participant even pointed out that they hadn't talked much about being a woman, and she thought it would have been no difference if it only had been men in the focus group. She suggested that maybe that's an indicator saying; being female and expatriate is not a problem!

This was a recurrent theme throughout the focus groups in both in Alpha and Beta; the overall perception was that there is no difference between female and male expatriates while in the organization. Many of our respondents thought that the experiences are much more connected to who you are as a person, rather than if you are a man or a woman.

In both organizations, the typical expatriate is described as a marketing guy. One junior respondent in Beta thinks that the stereotype is a middle-aged man that moves abroad with his family. This perception is not something that would influence her decision, but since this stereotype influences what kind of social connections you can get while being abroad, it can be hard to take on an expatriate assignment if most expatriates are "the same" and you are not. She estimates her chances to work as an expatriate as pretty high but believes that as long as the company mostly send senior employees it is hard to increase the percentage of female expatriates since men are over-represented on senior positions within the company. In order to raise the mobility among women she thinks that Beta must work more dynamically with their international assignments by offering other types of contracts, like short-term contracts and project assignments. She thinks the key to attract more women is to work with diversity instead of only focusing on the gender question. The fact that gender equality is frequently debated in Swedish organizations is discussed among many of our participants. The junior
employee in Beta says that it is a very big subject particularly in Sweden and that people in other countries think that we are too focused on gender and that we therefore are blind for the fact that equality is so much bigger than that. Also in Alpha these thoughts are discussed; "We are obsessed with gender in Sweden " (HH). However, even though many of the participants seemed to look upon the gender question as a non issue, the challenges for women when moving to another country and culture was a central topic in the discussions.

"When I first met with senior management, brand new, from Sweden and the first woman in a management position [...] one of the male colleagues looks at me and says: 'Welcome to Switzerland, but what are you doing here? You cannot do this job.' I guess it was too much for them, being both Swedish and a woman."

- JJ, female expatriate, Alpha

Moreover, this kind of situations is by many of our participants stated as "not unique for the expat situation". When the participants in Alpha were asked if female expatriates experience more pressure and need to be more committed then men in order to succeed as expatriates, they had the same reasoning: "I don’t think that has anything to do with expats, I think that’s just in general" (HH) " and "the ones that take the step are very committed but I get the feeling it’s easier to take that step for a man but I’m not sure" (II). We are also given an example from one of the female expatriates in Beta that was in India. She mentions a situation where a male expatriate without family or spouse, was very well taken care of and pampered by the company upon his arrival, a treatment she never experienced herself "as a woman".

The junior employee at Beta that has not been on an expatriate assignment so far but still have a lot of experience from working and living abroad says that she has never experienced any downside from often being the only woman in male-dominated environments. Rather the other way around; "You easily stand out from the crowd and therefore I think it’s easier to get recognition. If you know how to use it, it can give you advantages" (CC).
A male expat in Beta experienced the only female expatriate on his location to have more difficulties with making her voice heard. If that was depending on her being a woman or on her personality he found hard to judge. "I talked to her about these things but she said she had never experienced anything negative against her" (DD).

4.6 The expatriate assignment – designed for men with housewives?

According to the recruiting managers in both organizations spouse or family accompanies the majority of their expatriates. This was also the case for all but one of our participants. In both companies was the importance of the family support discussed and seen as the key to succeed with the assignment: "If it doesn't work with the family, you will not perform on the job" (II).

The spouse is a central topic in the focus groups. One female expat at Beta experienced that a lot of spouses panicked over their own career, feeling that they lagged behind and lost networks during the time they were away. Also, the fact that an accompanying partner must give up income and pension in the home country is perceived as a big obstacle. Depending on the possibilities to get a working-visa, country regulations and the spouse’s profession, the spouse’s occupation in the host county varied a lot. Some successfully found employment in the host-country, some studied, but the majority were home, taking care of the household, with or without kids.

Many of the expatriates that had their placements outside of Europe talked about the expat community as it was like a second family. The ones that had children attending school experienced that a lot of the contacts they were able to make were linked to the school. In international schools parents are often expected to be involved in activities, which is possible, since the spouse most often is at home. However, most networks and daytime activities are "typically for women". The women in our focus groups deliberated this topic and questioned: What do you do if you do not like baking or water yoga, whether you are a man or a woman? “If your husband is not into these activities, how do you get into the social expat society?” (GG) says a former expatriate who worked in China. Furthermore, she says that if something went wrong in school, they always called her at work instead of her husband who was at home. Wherever they went, people assumed that he was the one working and when they understood
that it was the other way around, they were all so curious of "what does he do all
day?" Another expat whose husband stayed at home and took care of the kids
expressed that he had a lot of struggle during their time in India; sometimes he even
lied about his occupation in order to be accepted.

A female expatriate with no family or spouse who had her assignment in Europe
describes that she had a lot of struggles to find time outside of work for all the
arrangements she needed in order to install in the new country. Another employee
moving to an European country with two children and a spouse that worked is of the
same opinion. When coming home from a 10-hour working day, she had a couple of
hours of work that waited at home. She says that sometimes she thought that to be
able to handle the situation she would have needed a "houseman".

4.7 Family planning and expatriation

During the focus group session with Alpha, the company's parental leave policy for
expatriates is discussed. The rules for parental leave are currently regulated after the
rules of the country where the expatriate live. Since Sweden has one of the most
generous parental leave legislations in the world, not many countries are regarded as
attractive for parents of small children when it comes to parental leave. Not only the
fact that many countries only have three or four months of maternity leave creates
obstacles for the family. "Since the contracts are written as they are, you basically
don't get paternity leave" (II). The participant that has not been on an expatriate
assignment yet explains that both she and her husband are looking for expatriate
assignments but if they would have a child it would be a bigger problem for him to
take on an expatriate assignment: "not having the time home with the child, he is not
up to that" (HH)

One of the former expats in Alpha gave birth during her expatriate assignment and
after a discussion she got the higher insurance costs paid by the company. "From that
perspective I felt I had full support" (II). When asked if she was ever considering going
home when becoming pregnant she replies:

"We sure had a discussion whether we should stay or not, whether the
timing was good or not. But we ended up with thinking; if we want kids we
cannot stop our lives. And I also felt I had fulfilled my obligations to Alpha because I had already worked there for three years so it was not like I went one month and then I got pregnant"

- II, Female expatriate, Alpha

The recruiting manager at Beta only knows of one case where a female expatriate got pregnant. In this case the expatriate chose to go home and according to the recruiting manager, a part of it was because of the fact that you are no longer eligible for social insurance in Sweden when living abroad for such a long time.

"When having a child you might want to come back to it [social insurance; own explanation] as quick as possible and one might choose to move home. Additionally, it's not so good for the company either. You are going in order to accomplish a mission and you cannot do that if you become pregnant, then we have to send someone else and by the time you're back your expatriate contract might have expired"

- EE, Recruiting Manager, Beta

4.8 The structural explanation

The participants in both Alpha and Beta repeatedly claimed that the low numbers of female expatriates is dependent on the fact that most expatriate possibilities are within areas dominated by male employees.

"It's in Alpha's company structure; we are a lot more men than women. Many women work within HR and finance, we have women working within sales but relative to how many men, they are not many. We try to attract more women but it's a challenge, not only for us but for the whole industry"

- LL, HR representative, Alpha
Also in Beta, the marketing and sales departments are distinguished as the areas with most possibilities to expatriate assignments.

"In functions like communication, finance and HR we have almost as many women as men, I think it’s 50/50 actually. However, to those sales functions it’s very hard to get female applicants. Because they are non-existing, we don’t have many women at Beta working within marketing and sales."

- EE, Recruiting manager, Beta

To deal with the problem, both companies have initiated different projects in order to raise the numbers of female employees. Alpha has launched a female mentorship program with the mission to boost women and help them build networks within the organization. Currently, a new policy to encourage diversity within the company is under development. Also Beta invests a lot of resources in attracting more women to the organization. They try to influence already on institutional level by pushing for many engineering programs on universities and actions for increasing the technical interest among girls. The last few years, Beta has focused a lot on attracting female students to apply for jobs, which, according to an employee involved within employer branding has resulted in that they have lost a bit of their positioning among male students. However, how few women that actually work within marketing and sales is not possible for us to control since both companies claim to have no statistical documentation.

The recruiting manager and the HR-representative at Alpha discuss the possibility for employees within other areas, like HR and communication to go abroad and they both agree on that there are possibilities to work abroad also in these positions, but usually it will not be on an expatriate contract but as a "Local Contract" employee. Local Contracts are similar to a permanent employment but they additionally include some benefits such as support of rent during a limited period of time. Another significant difference is that when going on an expat assignment, your salary is calculated based on the salary you had in your home country. When it comes to Local Contract, the salary is based on the salary level in the host-country. The different types of contracts imply different strategic choices for Alpha. If they want an employee to go abroad as a
stepping-stone in their career and then gain from their expanded knowledge; expatriate contracts is the optimal choice for the organization and it offers a lot of perks for the employee even though it entails a lot of insecurity and stress for what is yet to come. Local Contracts offers more security to the employee since they have an ongoing contract with no expiration date, but on the other hand this limits the flexibility and mobility for the organization, meanwhile the offer is less beneficial and therefore less costly.
5. Analysis

"It's a very complicated area which easily make those who believe in absolute truths frustrated" (Alvesson & Billing, 2009; 7)

After conducting research within this field it is easy to understand why Adler (1984b) had such a deliberate and careful approach in her research. The fact that both organizations chose to be anonymous shows that even though the gender debate has been going on for years, gender is still a very sensitive topic. Some feel accused, some get upset and some think it is nonsense. There are all kinds of perceptions and opinions. The men who participated watched their tongues in order to not say anything that possibly could be interpreted to be inappropriate and if they accidentally did so, they were quick to correct themselves. Women were careful to not "back-talk" their own sex and to stress that they were individuals and not representatives of all women.

5.1 Organizational processes - segregation and glass borders

According to Acker (1990; 1992b; 2012), an organization's gendered substructures are created in its processes, whereby a gender segregated labor market arises as a consequence of its built-in inequalities. Furthermore, Alvesson and Billing (2009) divide the gender segregation on the labor market into horizontal and vertical segregation. Horizontal segregation between men and women in the workforce can be clearly identified in both organizations since they are operating within industries that are male-dominated. Both companies state that this is the main reason to why they have low numbers of female expatriates. Organizations referred to the same argument in the 70's when explaining the low number of women in management (Kanter, 1977). Forty years later, the same argumentation is applied in the expatriate discussion, even though these two companies have managed to raise the number of women in management. However, women are still in minority within our studied organizations. If the main problem is that they only have 17,5 % respectively 23 % women in their workforces – why are their female expatriate rates as low as 12 % and 5 %?
Vertical segregation within the companies seems to be the explanation, which is reflected upon the fact that women tend to work within HR, finance and communication while men mostly work within marketing and sales. Since the possibilities to expatriate assignments are a lot higher within marketing and sales, their lack of women automatically leads to disqualification of many women's abilities to apply to international assignments. Gherardi and Poggio (2001) claim that men tend to hold more prestigious positions than women and their theory is supported by the junior employee in Beta's perception that as long as the company keep sending employees on senior positions, it will mostly be men since they are over-represented in these positions.

Benschoop and Dooreward (1998) stress the importance of understanding unequal practices in order to grasp an organization's gendered substructures. The two organizations state that there are possibilities for women to work abroad even if they work within HR or communication. Within Alpha, the Local Contract possibility is stated as the best chance for women working within these areas. However, since the salary for Local Contracts is based on the host country’s salary level, it influences your possibilities to work abroad. For example, working on an expatriate contract in India, where cost of living is relatively low, implies a very comfortable life, although working on a Local Contract with an Indian salary might be less appealing. If additionally accompanied by a spouse, the financial situation might not be bearable. The fact that the recruitment manager in Alpha describes an expatriate contract as a stepping stone in your career, the Local Contract possibility can be interpreted as a sign of what Benschop and Dooreward (1998) call an equal opportunity with unequal practices; you are able to go abroad but it will not be as beneficial for your career as an expatriate contract would be. The different implications of international assignments within different areas further strengthen Gherardi and Poggio’s (2001) reasoning that men tend to hold positions with higher levels of responsibility and status.

According to Insch et al (2008), expatriate experience is often a requirement when reaching for top management positions. Forster (1999) claims this preference to cause a second lawyer of glass for women since they are less likely to become expatriates. Linehan & Walsh (1999) refer to this situation as a glass border, which disqualifies
women to become managers. Neither in Alpha or Beta can Linehan and Walsh's (1999) glass border be clearly identified; especially Beta has a comparatively high level of women on managerial positions even though they have very few female expatriates. Perhaps is it so that the glass border is not present. Just as Shortland (2009) stresses, due to the lack of statistics, we do not know in what areas these female managers operate. However, since international experience is critical in order to reach higher management in marketing and sales, one could presume that women can become managers in areas such as HR and finance but not in marketing and sales, which often is a necessary background of top-management managers. Therefore, in accordance with Shortland (2009) we suspect that vertical segregation is one of the reasons explaining women's absence on international arenas.

5.2 Organizational gendered culture – is society to blame?

The participants in the two organizations are more or less convinced that gender structures in society have an impact large enough to create an obstacle for organizations that are trying to change. The statement that the problem is "bigger than us" is supported by Acker's (2012) theories, claiming that the gendered organizational culture is influenced and adapted after the national culture. Since Sweden today is "obsessed with gender" as one respondent said, we find it interesting that the organizations give the impression of working very hard with gender equality but have little statistical documentation in order to measure their progresses. The recruiting manager at Beta commented on their women working within marketing and sales: "They are non-existing" (EE), but how few are they? No one seems to know and both organizations have been very careful on sharing statistical figures of the gender distribution within their organization. Just as we suspected in the early phase of our study, much of the statistics we asked for, they claimed to not even exist. Schein's (1990) theory on organizational culture describes basic underlying assumptions as the component in the organizational culture that is most difficult to discover, since they often are subconscious also for the organization itself. This theory can be applied on our studied organizations. Is there actually a lack of women in sales and marketing in both Alpha and Beta? If not, it might be an underlying assumption that forms an overall perception that there are no women in these areas.
5.3 Interaction between individuals – what is hidden under the surface?

Bendl's (2008) subtext of attributed masculinity and males as the norm explains the situation whereby females are seen as "the other" when compared with masculine values if male behavior is seen as the norm. This gendered subtext of women as "the other" was debated in the focus groups, as the women are tired of always being seen as different when they diverge from the norm. The gender debate has been going on for years now and they are sick of getting attention because of their sex and not from their efforts. In line with Deutsch's (2007) criticism against West and Zimmerman's (1987), many of our participants find today's gender debate to be counterproductive since it focuses on differences and portray women in the organization as troublemakers. In accordance with Deutsch (2007) they perceive that the focus on "doing gender" in many aspects reinforce gender inequalities, although they agree that there still are gender inequalities to overcome.

In order to increase the number of female expatriates, Insch et al (2008) stress the importance of awareness of potential gender biases already in organizations' selection processes. Bendl's (2008) two subtexts of feminization and of attributed masculinity as the norm challenges the gender neutral offer as being masculine if a renewed offer is seen as feminine. If the gender neutral offer actually is masculine, this also implies that what is male is seen as the norm and what is female is seen as the exception. The expatriate offer at Alpha is seen as gender neutral from all respondents and the recruitment manager says that changing the offer in order to attract more women would implicitly make the offer biased, favoring women and counteract the recruitment of the best suitable candidate. In this case, where a renewed offer would be considered "too feminine", one could presume that the initiating offer is favoring men.

None of the companies can be said to use a "coffee-machine system" in their selection of expatriates, a strategy Harris and Brewster (1999) suggested to be a common way of recruiting expatriates. On the contrary it is stated as almost impossible in Alpha and very rare in Beta to be headhunted for an expatriate assignment. We have not found support for Insch et al's (2008) theory, claiming that women often are excluded from informal networks were expatriates tend to be chosen. However, despite these
statements, the respondents support Benschop and Dooreward's (1998) findings on "the importance of being asked". According to participants in both companies, your network plays a crucial role in how much information you have about expatriate assignments and how good your chances are to be selected. This indicates that even though the companies strive for an open selection process, it is very hard to be completely unbiased. Also the perception that some positions seem to be written for a special person might influence the number of people applying. Alvesson and Billings (1994) theory that women only apply for jobs when they feel they fulfill all requirements is exemplified through the woman in Beta who did not understand she could apply until a female colleague with similar background turned down the offer. If their theory is applicable on women in general, the usage of very specific advertisements will sustain the number of female applicants to remain low. A further example is the woman in Alpha who explained that she received the job since there were very few applicants and that her main competitor did not fulfill the requirements for the position. Benschop and Doorewaard (1998) claim that high pressure is a common obstacle for female managers, which can explain her reasoning. She does not refer to her strengths, but to other candidates’ weaknesses as the main reason for her getting the job. It is hard to decide whether this argument depends on her being a woman in a typical male position, trying to lower the expectations and minimize jealousy, or if it is a strict personality trait that lies behind this modest approach. Still, since many of our respondents perceived that it's more difficult for women to take on expatriate assignments, one could presume that Benschop and Dooreward's (1998) findings are applicable on female expatriates in our studied organizations. The women's awareness of the high pressure that follows and how carefully they will be examined could then be a further explanation of Alvesson and Billing's (1994) theory since they then only would apply when they feel absolutely sure of their capabilities, in other words, when they fulfill 100 % of the requirements.

It is hard to judge to what extent women feel that they are affected of being in minority. Our empirical findings show that the opinions differ among our respondents, which supports Alvesson and Billings (2009) opinion that gender studies is not a field that can be seen as purely black or white. West and Zimmerman's (1983) findings on
interruptions of conversations are supported by the example of the male expatriate's perception of the female expatriate to have more difficulties making her voice heard. However, the opposite opinion is also shared from the junior employee in Beta who states that she receives advantages from being in minority since she stands out from the crowd. This is contrary to Benschop and Dooreward (1998) who suggests that being a woman in a "man's job" make women more vulnerable in their minority positions due to high expectations. Furthermore, the authors argue that the behavior of the minority’s members is reflected upon the entire group. Our participants did not confirm this, but even though our female respondents did not see themselves as tokens, they somehow experienced that they had to prove themselves worth of their position. However, this was referred to as being a general state of mind, and not specific for the expatriate situation. This is an interesting contradiction; the majority of the female respondents claim that they are not negatively affected of being in minority, but in the meantime they express that women must live up to higher expectations than men. Where does this leave us? According to Schein (1990), a company's culture consists of its visible artifacts, values and basic underlying assumptions. However, the general perception in both organizations is that their expatriate offers are gender neutral, and just as the women claim, you are treated equally as a woman or a man. Additionally, both companies have policies for gender equality and diversity, which indicates that both the visible artifacts and values within the organization appear to be gender neutral. However, higher expectations on women indicate that the underlying assumptions do not correspond to the artifacts and values, which implies that the organization is not fully gender neutral.
5.4 Gendered Identities - "If she can, I can"

The spirit that your career is "up to you" is deeply rooted in Alpha's company culture. This might appear to be an efficient strategy if the company wants their most motivated employees to become expatriates. However, whether the lack of career planning is good or bad for gender equality among expatriates is debatable. According to Benschop and Dooreward (1998), the typical career steps in an organization are adjusted to the typical worker, which traditionally has been a man. Additionally, Collinson and Hearn (1994) categorize careerism as a typical male trait, which is supported by the focus group participants in Alpha who claim that men are much more career focused than women. These theories imply that the lack of career planning might be favorable for the women in Alpha since everyone has to compete on equal terms. Nevertheless, an absence of career planning makes it hard to visualize the next natural step in the career and since the stereotyped expatriate is still seen as a man, it might be even harder for a woman (Altman & Shortland, 2008).

Shortland (2009) argues for that queuing theory does not seem to be applicable on female expatriates since the number of women in international management increase very slowly even though the expatriate benefits have decreased in many organizations. Comparing the organizations' percentages of female expatriates it seems like Alpha's strategy attracts more women to work as expatriates. On the other hand, Alpha is in the middle of a downturn, which has led to an increased uncertainty for employees taking on expatriate assignments. This fact could indicate that the queuing theory, contrary to Shortland's (2009) findings, is applicable; women are offered positions that no longer attract men (Shortland, 2009). However, once again statistics are scarce and we are not able to decide the determining factor of Alpha's relatively higher number of female expatriates.

Kanter's (1977) structures of possibilities, power and the relative representation of a particular social group in their position leads us to question how females within these organizations shape their identities. Do women see themselves as expatriates if most expatriates are men? Referring to the statistics, the organizations' share of women, female managers and female expatriates can be an indicator of Kanter's (1977) structural factors. The 17 % women, 17 % female managers and 12 % female
expatriates in Alpha are all numbers demonstrating women's relative representation. The situation in Beta is quite different: 23 % are women, 27 % are female managers but only 5 % are female expatriates. Since the percentage of women equals the percentage of managers in Alpha, the women's perceived chances to power through the managerial role are likely to be quite small, but in the meantime as high as the chances to work in Alpha at all. However, the perceived possibilities to work as an expatriate may be smaller. At Beta on the other hand, there are relatively more female managers than women in the total workforce and many female respondents seem to share the opinion that there are bright career prospects for women within their organization. However, the number of female expatriates at Beta does not correspond to the same pattern. In both Alpha and Beta are the low numbers of female expatriates once again explained through the fact that most women are working within areas that traditionally employ more women, such as HR and finance, areas that offer fewer expatriate assignments. How does this fact influence the way women identify themselves within the organization? According to Acker (1992b), the individual's choice of identity is dependent on how structures and expectations from the organization are perceived. Additionally, Peteraf and Shanley (1997) argue that different groups within organizations shape their own group-identity. This leads us to question; does a female engineer relate more to the social group of women than the social group of engineers within her organization? If so, according to Kanter's (1977) structural factors, she might perceive that her possibilities are rather small, even though they are not. The recruitment manager at Beta who expressed the importance of role models as "If she can, I can" (EE), supports Shaw's (2001) undoing of gender as well as Kanter (1977) by demonstrating the importance of being able to identify your possibilities as an employee within the organization. Through our empirical findings we have not been able to decide whether women tend to identify themselves more with their gender than their profession. However, what we can confirm is that Dye and Mill's (2012) criticism of the possibility to map an individuals mind is justified.
5.5 The abstract expatriate

Through our findings of gendered substructures in previous sections, we support Adler (1979) and Shortland's (2009) prior research; both women's and men's expectations and perceived image of an expatriate today is based on the historical and contemporary view of who expatriates are and how they act. Acker (2012) introduced the abstract worker when arguing that the common expectations of a worker still derive from the idea of the man being the family's breadwinner. We consider these unspoken assumptions to be similar to the implications of the abstract worker, which motivates us to introduce an elaborated version of the abstract worker; the "abstract expatriate".

Just like Acker (2012) claims that the typical working day is gendered, we suggest that the expatriate assignment derives from the same idea. This is especially evident when looking at the family situation for most expatriates; the man is the family's breadwinner meanwhile the woman is taking care of all unpaid housework (Shortland, 2009). Since the woman is expected to take care of many social activities and arrangements related to the children, it can be a struggle to take on an expatriate assignment, some of the women even expressed that they would have needed a houseman. Additionally, the woman in Beta who perceived a male colleague to be pampered by the organization also indirectly supports Acker’s (2012) findings on that women with professional careers are expected to take care of the household duties.

Also the fact that men still today earn more than women\(^2\) is a contributing factor to why women with family and spouse might hesitate to accept an expatriate assignment. Accompanying as a spouse, you do not get any cover for loss of income or pension. Hence, if a male spouse earns more than the female expatriate, it may entail a big economic risk for the whole family if the man quits his job (Shortland, 2009). Seen through the eyes of an expatriate, the uncertainty of what will happen or how you economically will manage after you finished your assignment might thus influence your willingness to apply in the first place. Beside the economic stress, many of the participating women have described how their husbands were bored or had a hard

\(^2\) In the year of 2014, the average salary of a woman in Sweden corresponded to 86 % of the average salary of a man.
time finding networks and daytime activities, as well as being accepted by the local culture and other expatriates. Just as a female manager according to Davidson and Cooper (1992) could get a low status due to an apparent masculine subculture within organizations, a male spouse would in a very feminine subculture such as the spouse community, experience a lower status. The difficulties a man might experience as a spouse, implies yet another drawback for a family where the woman is the expatriate.

Furthermore, pregnancies appear to be quite exceptional among expatriates. The recruiting manager at Beta who explained a pregnancy during an expatriate assignment as quite unfortunate for the company can be related to Acker's (2012) abstract worker, since this implies that one subconsciously might prefer a man to a woman in order to minimize the risk of absenteeism and pregnancy. In view of Adler (1984b), as well as Benschop and Doorewaard's (1998) findings on how members of a minority's actions and behaviors are seen as representative of the entire group, the example of the woman who terminated her expatriate assignment due to pregnancy may strengthen recruiters’ subconscious disfavor of women in fertile age.

Furthermore, this theory is also applicable in the case where the woman at Alpha gave birth during her expatriate assignment. She expressed that she felt she had fulfilled her obligations to the company before she became pregnant. Moreover, the expatriate contracts are adapted to the regulations in the host country, which implies that in most cases, childcare or paternal leave is not included. Hence, if you have a family and want to work as an expat you must find some kind of solution for your family. This solution often implies that the woman is not working since the idea of the abstract expatriate supports this arrangement.

Identifying gendered substructures that influence women's possibilities to expatriate assignments is crucial in order to reach gender equality on all levels. But yet again, the gender topic is a minefield! Beta almost lost positioning among men when focusing a lot on the recruiting of women and fronting their women, which exemplifies Bendl’s (2008) Subtext of pretended equality between males and females. Women being given advantages and seen as the managers of the future implies a risk of turning the hierarchy around. This would not lead to the end of an inequality but rather a beginning of another inequality, with men in an inferior position.
6. Discussion & Conclusion

Through this study, we have investigated how organizations’ gendered substructures influence the prospects of female expatriates. Firstly, we can conclude that gendered substructures in organizational processes are partly explaining the lower possibilities for women to take on expatriate assignments. Alvesson and Billing's (2009) vertical segregation is easily identified in both organizations and supports the underlying assumptions of what divisions or areas in an organization that men and women are supposed to work within. Women are given possibilities to work internationally but due to vertical segregation, primarily within typical female dominated sectors. Additionally, reality is not corresponding to theory when it comes to Linehan and Walsh's (1999) glass border. There are women in managerial positions although there are few female expatriates. However, due to the lack of women working in marketing and sales, we suspect that women primarily become "middle-managers". If our suspicions are applicable, we assert that this could imply a new interpretation of the glass border; there are possibilities for women to take on international assignments although international experience in these areas does not qualify to higher positions within the organization. In order to give women the same possibilities and prospects, organizations must start of by employing women in marketing and sales.

In order to be a truly gender neutral organization, gender neutrality must permeate all levels. Since underlying assumptions support values and artifacts, an organization that appears to be gender neutral but still has gendered underlying assumptions is not gender neutral. Although these two organizations appear to present a gender neutral expatriate offer, we assert that women still must live up to higher expectations than men since being the company’s “pride & joy” implies a greater pressure. In accordance with Benschop and Doorewaard (1998), we claim that this is an explanation to the lack of women in international management. However, since underlying assumptions are very hard to grasp, understand and identify, an organization that appears to be gender neutral in their values and artifacts might consider this to be good enough. We see a risk that if organizations perceive themselves to be gender neutral without understanding their underlying gendered assumptions, they will be satisfied and
thereby stop working towards gender equality, leaving gendered underlying assumptions to live on.

Furthermore, due to a lack of role models, women do not identify themselves with or as expatriates. This indirectly discourage women to work as expatriates since the perception of low possibilities is likely to prevent and impede women to apply to international assignments. The lack of role models leaves the stereotype of an expatriate as male unchanged. We support Shaw's (2001) theory on that acts of resistance will lead to an undoing of gender and we are therefore arguing that the lack of female expatriate role models will leave the expatriate gender roles unaffected.

The results of this study show that the expatriate offer is masculine and not gender neutral. We can confirm that Adler's (1984b) third myth is still alive; organizations are reluctant to send women on international assignments. However, we assert that this is due to Acker's (2012) underlying gendered substructures, which drives organizations to subconsciously favor men as expatriates. Concluding, vertical segregation, high pressure on women, a perception of low possibilities and the lack of role models all support and reinforce the idea of an abstract expatriate. The abstract expatriate implies that female expatriates face bigger obstacles than male expatriates. They must not only adapt to a new culture and society, which in itself already can be challenging, but they must also adapt in order to fulfill the organization's requirements and expectations of the abstract expatriate.

6.1 Contributions to the contemporary gender debate
Contradicting to Benshop and Dooreward's (1998) theory, we can conclude that being in minority as a woman may imply a career advantage. However, referring to the problematics with unfair treatment, in accordance with Bendl (2008), we claim that it is a hazardous strategy to give advantages to women since it might enforce or create another sense of inequality by putting men in an inferior position. Nevertheless, favoring women to some extent could possibly be the first step towards gender equality. The relatively high number of female managers at Beta proves that societies expectations plays a very important role in gender equality and that a reasoning referring to structures in society such as; "it's bigger than us", does not hold. Kaplan and Northon's (1992) saying "What you measure is what you get" is certainly present
in this context. When society measures the number of female managers, the number of female managers increases. It seems like organizations only comply with the standards they know will be controlled or made public. This makes us draw the conclusion that if external pressure is non-existing, it is unlikely that organizations will invest time and resources in this matter. Hence, in order to increase the numbers of female expatriates, companies must keep statistics and map their gender distribution within the organization. If there are no statistics, \textit{what you don't measure - you won't get}; more female expatriates.

6.2 Research contributions and implications for further research

The results of this study are important; contrary to much of previous research, which has focused on the female expatriation process, we stress Acker's research on gendered organizations to be applicable in the female expatriate field. Hence, in order to find the best suitable expatriates and build strong global relationships we are referring to the result of this study when recommending organizations to first look to themselves and their gendered substructures. Future research on female expatriates must thus put more emphasis on the role and responsibility of the organization in their lack of female expatriates.

At last, by applying a critical realist perspective we have to some extent limited our study. We have been able to map gendered substructures by studying their effects, which was in line with our purpose and research question. However, throughout our study we have faced situations where an interpretive perspective could have been an alternative. One example is the many Freudian slips whereby our respondents subconsciously used the pronoun "he" when talking about an expatriate. In order to analyze these and to create a deeper understanding of the substructures, an interpretative perspective would have been applicable. Therefore in future research, aiming to get a deeper understanding of this specific field, we would gladly support the idea of applying an interpretative perspective to understand another reality. Additionally, we would find it interesting if future research replicated our study in other industries since different industries might have different gendered substructures.
7. References


Alpha (2016), *Alphas homepage* [confidential information]. (retrieved 2016-03-14)


Beta (2016), *Beta’s homepage* [confidential information]. (retrieved 2016-03-15)


Vetenskapsrådet (2002). *Forskningsetiska principer inom humanistisk-samhällsvetenskaplig forskning*, available through


Appendix I

Interview guide – focus group & interviews with expatriates

Introduction

- Thank the respondents for their participation.
- Introduce our study and ourselves.
- Inform about purpose and research question.
- Inform about their rights and what we expect from them during the focus group/interview.
- Ask for permission to record.
- Ask participants to introduce themselves and their role within the organization.

“Warm up” questions

*Experienced expatriates*

- Have you always strived towards an international career?
- How come you chose to go on an expatriate assignment?

*Inexperienced*

- Can you see yourself working as an expatriate? Is that something you strive for?

Organizational Processes

- How do the organization inform about possible expat assignments?
- Do all employees have access to the same information?
- Did someone encourage you to apply?

Gendered Substructures

- How do you look upon a typical expatriate? What attributes and behavior would you refer to?
- What expectations do you have on an expatriate?
- What are your experiences of being a woman in an industry dominated by men?
The last question was excluded from the interview with the male expatriate and replaced with the following:

- Did you notice any differences in the challenges that occurred to female and male expatriates?

**Gendered Culture**

- Has your perceived image of an expat assignment changed since you first started in the company? If so, in what way?
- Gender in organizations is a subject widely discussed in politics and society today; is this discussion having an impact on your organization? In what way?

**Interactions between individuals**

- Did earlier expatriates within the organization have an impact for your decision to apply to an expatriate assignment?
- Do women and men have the same possibility to obtain expatriate assignments?

**Gendered Identity**

**Experienced expatriates**

- How was the support and encouragement from the organization and your surroundings when you decided to apply for an expatriate assignment?
- Did you discover any advantages or disadvantages of being a female expatriate?
- What do you think was the reason for that you got an expatriate assignment?
- Did the expatriate assignment influence your career and your possibilities within the organization?

**Inexperienced**

- What kind of support from the organization would make the expatriate assignment more attractive to you?
- How do you look upon your future possibilities to go on expatriate assignments?
• What influence do you think an expatriate assignment would have on your further career?

Closure

• Are there other questions or opinions that you would like to contribute with or that you consider relevant in this discussion?

• Summarizing the main points in the discussion
Appendix II
Interview guide – interviews with recruitment managers

• Thank the respondents for their participation.
• Introduce our study and ourselves.
• Inform about purpose and research question.
• Inform about their rights and what we expect from them during the interview.
• Ask for permission to record.
• Ask participants to introduce themselves and their role within the organization.

Organizational Processes

• Please explain how the recruitment process for expatriates works.
• According to you, what advantages and disadvantages has this type of recruitment process?
• Please explain how the repatriation process works.

Gendered Substructures

• If you would describe the typical expatriate, how would you describe it?
• What is included in the expatriate contract?
• Do you see any advantages or disadvantages by sending a female expatriate?

Gendered Culture

• What are the current trends for expatriate assignments?
• Is your organization influenced of the gender equality debate in the society today? If so, in what way?

Interaction between individuals

• Do women and men have the same possibilities to obtain expatriate assignments?
• Do you work with any mentorship programs for female expatriates?
Gendered Identity

• Is it important with international experience in order to climb the career ladder?
• Do you think all employees perceive the same possibilities to obtain expatriate assignments?
• Are there things that the organization can do, in order to attract more women to apply to expatriate assignments?

Closure

• Are there other questions or opinions that you would like to contribute with or that you consider relevant in this discussion?
• Summarizing the main points in the discussion.
Appendix III

Hereby we present original quotes from interviews conducted in Swedish with their translation into English. To get the true essence of these quotations, we have chosen not to translate word by word in order to get as legitimate quotations as possible.

"Since I've not been at Alpha for so many years, automatically when I apply for a position, I am unknown, one doesn’t recognize my name and that makes my options very limited since I compete with people that know each other through different networks [...] Even though I've done a good job for three years now, it's still only a small group of people who knows who I am"

“Eftersom jag inte har varit så många år inom Alpha så det blir ju så att när jag söker ett jobb så är jag okänd, man känner inte igen mitt namn så det gör ju att jag kan verkligen inte välja och vraka, för att då konkurrerar ju jag med folk som känner varandra genom nätverk [...] Jag har fått chansen att göra det här jobbet under tre år, och man verkar vara nöjd med jobbet, men det är fortfarande bara en liten krets som vet vad jag kan. ”

- JJ, Female expatriate, Alpha

"We don't encourage women to apply, it's the same for everyone."

“Vi uppmuntrar inte kvinnor att söka, det är lika för alla."

- LL, Recruiting Manager, Alpha

"But I'm a bit against that, I want it to be the right person. We are supposed to write the adds so that they attract everyone [...] If they feel that no, now they're looking for a woman in this position, then I think it's for the wrong purpose. But the main problem for us is that the industry is so dominated by men."
“Men jag är lite emot sånt, jag att det ska vara rätt person. Man ska ändå skriva de här ansökningarna så att de motiverar alla. Om man känner att "nu är de ute och söker en kvinna på den här posten”, då tycker jag att vi får liksom fel syfte. Men, grundproblemet för oss är ju att branschen är väldigt mansdominerad...”

- KK, Recruitment Manager, Alpha

"I think or I am pretty sure that he, my boss talked to the recruiting boss over there, so it was well...Yeah.. Mm...."

"Jag tror eller jag är ganska säker på att han, min chef pratade med rekryterande chef där också, så det var ju.. Ja....Mm...

- DD, Male expatriate, Beta

"Many jobs that I've been recruited to, well I hope it has been based on competence but I wouldn't be surprised if I was selected because I am a woman, I would say it's quite easy to make a career as a woman at Beta now."

"Flera jobb som jag har rekryterats till, ja alltså jag hoppas ju att det är på kompetens men jag skulle inte bli förvånad om jag blev vald för att jag är kvinna för att det är lätt skulle jag säga att göra karriär hos BETA just nu som tjej."

- AA, Female expatriate, Beta

"There's nothing I can go home to, I am in a little rubber boat on the ocean, trying to find land somewhere."

“Det finns ingen reträtt plats för mig, det finns inget jag kan åka hem till utan jag är ute i en liten jolle på oceanen, och ska försöka hitta land någonstans."

79
"I knew that I wouldn't find an as exiting job [as abroad; own interpretation] when I came home. The organization supported me and I don't know if I got the job because, well partly because they were supposed to support my return but I ended up with the job I applied for and wanted, so I think that the company has been supportive."

"Jag visste att jag inte skulle hitta ett jobb som jag tyckte var lika spännande när jag kom hem och då ställde organisationen upp och jag vet inte om jag fick det jobbet för att, ja dels för att de skulle supporta min hemkomst, men jag fick ju i alla fall det jobbet som jag sökte och ville ha när jag kom hem, så där tycker jag företaget har ställt upp då."

- JJ, Female expatriate, Alpha

"We are not telling our expatriates: '- You are going because it's a step in your career.' But then it could still be like that, implicitly."

"Vi säger inte till våra expatirater: ‘- Du åker ut för att det är en del i din karriär. Så gör inte vi. Men sen kan det ju vara det underförstått ändå.'

- AA, Female expatriate, Beta

"... a big workplace but everyone do more or less keep track of what everyone is doing. The best commercial for expatriate assignments is of course when we can refer to someone who has returned home and who has been able to take the next step in the career".

"... en stor arbetsplats men alla har koll på varandra mer eller mindre. Och det bästa skyltfönstret är ju att visa att nån som har kommit tillbaka får ett jättebra nästa steg och så, det är det absolut bästa."

- KK, Recruitment Manager, Global Business Unit
"For every woman you see that goes on an expatriate assignment, both from Beta’s perspective, that we actually send her, but also that she makes it work with her family, I think that creates a positive picture. And that’s often the case; if she can, I can. You compare yourself with others"

"För varje kvinna som man ser åker iväg, både från ett företagsperspektiv, att vi faktiskt skickar men även då att hon faktiskt får det att funka med sin familj, det måste ju, tycker jag, skapa en positivitet liksom. Och det är ju oftast så med; kan hon så kan jag, man jämför sig ju med andra."

- EE, Recruitment Manager, Beta

"You can say like this – there is no official mentorship program or process but BB and I have been mentoring each other. You are very alone out there, even if you have other expats there are no other women."

Man kan väl säga såhär att det finns inget program för det, det finns ingen process, men BB och har ju mentorerat varandra kan man säga. man är ju väldigt ensam därute även om man har andra expats med sig men det var inga mer tjejer."

- AA, Female expatriate, Beta

“When I first met with senior management, brand new, from Sweden and the first woman in a management position […] one of the male colleagues looks at me and says: 'Welcome to Switzerland, but what are you doing here? You cannot do this job.' I guess it was too much for them, being both Swedish and a woman."

"När jag stegar in i och hälsar på ledningsgruppen,, som helt ny och första kvinnan i ledningsposition, […] en av de manliga kollegorna, han tittar ju på mig och säger, 'Välkommen till Schweiz, men varför kommer du hit?
*Du kan ju inte ta den här positionen.* Jag tror att det blev för många svag punkter för honom, att jag var svensk men dessutom kvinna."

- JJ, Female expatriate, Alpha

"You easily stand out from the crowd and therefore I think it's easier to get recognition. If you know how to use it, it can give you advantages"

"Du sticker ut väldigt mycket i en grupp och därför tror jag att det är lättare att få ett erkännande. Och vet man hur man ska utnyttja det så kan man utnyttja det.""

- CC, Junior employee. Beta

"I talked to her about these things but she said she had never experienced anything negative against her"

"Jag pratade med henne om lite såna saker och hon sa aldrig nånting om att hon hade upplevt nånting negativt"

- DD, Male expatriate, Beta

"When having a child you might want to come back to it [social insurance; own expl.] as quick as possible and one might choose to move home. Additionally, it's not so good for the company either. You are going in order to accomplish a mission and you cannot do that if you become pregnant, then we have to send someone else and by the time you're back your expatriate contract might have expired"

"Om man får barn så vill man ju oftast ganska snabbt komma tillbaka till det [försäkringskassan; egen förklaring] igen och man kanske därför väljer att flytta hem då. Plus att det är ju inte så bra för företaget heller. Man åker ju dit för att faktiskt utföra ett uppdrag och det kan man ju inte göra då om man blir gravid så att då måste man ju skicka någon annan i vilket som helst för det där uppdraget, man måste ju skicka en vikarie"
"In functions like communication, finance and HR we have almost as many women as men, I think it's 50/50 actually. However, to those sales functions it's very hard to get female applicants. Because they are non-existing, we don't have many women at Beta working within marketing and sales."

"I funktioner som kommunikation, det är finans, det är HR, alltså vi har ju nästan lika mycket kvinnor, jag tror vi har 50/50 faktiskt. Däremot till de här säljfunktionerna, där är det ju jättesvårt att få kvinnliga sökande. För de finns inte, alltså de finns inte ens, vi har inte många kvinnor på Beta som jobbar med marknadsföring och försäljning."

"It's in Alpha's company structure; we are a lot more men than women. Many women work within HR and finance, we have women working within sales but relative to how many men, they are not many. We try to attract more women but it's a challenge, not only for us but for the whole industry"

"Det ligger i Alphas företagsstruktur, att vi är ju mycket mer män än kvinnor. Många kvinnor kanske jobbar inom finance, HR, vi har både säljare som är kvinnor men i förhållande till hur många män det är så är de väldigt få. Vi försöker jobba med att få in kvinnor men det är ju en utmaning och det är inte bara för oss utan för hela branschen."

- EE, Recruiting Manager, Beta

- LL, HR representative, Alpha