The Role of Networks in Female Entrepreneurship

What Hinders Females’ Weak-ties Networking Activities
Acknowledgement

First of all, we would like to thank the female entrepreneurs who contributed to our study by finding time to be interviewed and for sharing their stories with us. We found every story inspiring and educational. Furthermore, we hope that more female entrepreneurs would share their stories to inspire other future entrepreneurs.

Secondly, we would like to thank our fellow students who took their time to act as our opponents from the beginning to the end of this Thesis writing process. The feedback we received from them helped us to improve our study, get on the right path and thereby complete our research.

Lastly, but not least, we would like to extend our gratitude to our supervisor Olof Brunninge for his support and constructive criticism which guided us throughout this study. His wisdom and suggestions have played a big part to the improvement and accomplishment of this Thesis.

Sincere thanks,

Mariam Malende & Katariina Väisänen
Master Thesis in Business Administration

Title: The Role of Networks in Female Entrepreneurship: What Hinders Females’ Weak-ties Networking Activities
Authors: Mariam Malende and Katariina Väisänen
Tutor: Olof Brunninge
Date: 2017-05-22

Key terms: Entrepreneurship, Women/Females, Networks, Strong-ties, Weak-ties, Self-employment, Sweden

Abstract

Background: Although numerous attempts have been made by governments and policy makers to increase female entrepreneurship given its contributions to job creation and societal development in general, there is still a big gap between male and female entrepreneurship in many countries. Various studies have provided evidence emphasizing that having a weak social position and inadequate connection to support networks is what negatively affect women’s entrepreneurship. In Sweden, the context of this study, while the position of women in society keeps on getting stronger and stronger considering the gender equality policies in place, female entrepreneurs are still reported to be greatly reliant on small networks made up of family and friends. While the concept that social networks contribute to enhancing entrepreneurship might not be new, little has been studied on how Weak-ties connections can be of importance in advancing women’s entrepreneurship, particularly in Sweden.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to understand the role of strong-ties and weak-ties networks in the entrepreneurial activities of female entrepreneurs, and furthermore explore what hinders female entrepreneurs from utilizing weak-ties networks, given that female entrepreneurs are said to rely more on strong-ties networks. Method: A small sample of Swedish female entrepreneurs is being studied through semi-structured interviews in aims to gain an understanding of the issues at stake. Conclusion: The empirical findings have showed that female entrepreneurs are using their strong-ties and weak-ties for acquiring knowledge and support. Furthermore, issues such as lack of time, failure to find like-minded people, having low drive for growth, lacking networking skills, and changes in the environment were found to hinder female entrepreneurs from utilizing wider weak-ties.
Table of Contents

1 Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Background ............................................................................................................ 1
   1.2 Problem Formulation ........................................................................................... 2
   1.3 The Purpose of the Study ...................................................................................... 3
   1.4 Research Question ............................................................................................... 4
   1.5 Key Words ............................................................................................................ 4
   1.6 Definitions ............................................................................................................ 4
     1.6.1 Entrepreneur and Business-owner .................................................................. 4
     1.6.2 Networks ......................................................................................................... 4
       1.6.2.1 Strong-ties Networks .................................................................................. 5
       1.6.2.2 Weak-ties Networks .................................................................................. 5

2 Empirical Frame of Reference: Institutional Context of Sweden ..................... 6
   2.1 The Social System .................................................................................................. 6
   2.2 Female Entrepreneurship in Sweden .................................................................... 8

3 Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................... 11
   3.1 Previous Research on Social Networks ................................................................ 11
   3.2 Strong-ties Vs. Weak-ties Networks .................................................................... 14
   3.3 Networking Activities of Female Entrepreneurs .................................................. 16
   3.4 Motivational Theories on Female Entrepreneurs ................................................. 18

4 Methodology ............................................................................................................... 22
   4.1 Research Philosophy ............................................................................................ 22
   4.2 Research Strategy .................................................................................................. 23
   4.3 Research Approach ............................................................................................... 23
   4.4 Methods of Data Collection ............................................................................... 24
     4.4.1 Collection Method ......................................................................................... 24
     4.4.2 Choice of Respondents .................................................................................. 25
   4.5 Method of Data Analysis ..................................................................................... 26
   4.6 Evaluation of the Research .................................................................................. 27
     4.6.1 Dependability .................................................................................................. 27
     4.6.2 Transferability ................................................................................................. 27
     4.6.3 Credibility ....................................................................................................... 28
     4.6.4 Conformability ............................................................................................... 28

5 Empirical Findings ....................................................................................................... 29
   5.1 Interviewee A ......................................................................................................... 30
   5.2 Interviewee B ......................................................................................................... 32
   5.3 Interviewee C ......................................................................................................... 34
   5.4 Interviewee D ......................................................................................................... 36
   5.5 Interviewee E ......................................................................................................... 38
   5.6 Interviewee F ......................................................................................................... 40
   5.7 Interviewee G ......................................................................................................... 41
   5.8 Interviewee H ......................................................................................................... 44
   5.9 Interviewee I ......................................................................................................... 46

6 Discussion ..................................................................................................................... 48
   6.1 Knowledge Factors ............................................................................................... 49
     6.1.1 Feedback ......................................................................................................... 49
     6.1.2 Advice .............................................................................................................. 49
6.1.3 Knowledge and Skills ........................................................................................................50
6.1.4 Opportunities, Customers, and Business Partners .......................................................51
6.2 Support Factors ..................................................................................................................52
  6.2.1 Financial Support ..........................................................................................................52
  6.2.2 Emotional and Operational Support .............................................................................53
6.3 Hindrances..........................................................................................................................55
  6.3.1 Lack of Time ................................................................................................................55
  6.3.2 Failure to find Like-minded People ..............................................................................56
  6.3.3 Having a Low Drive for Growth ....................................................................................57
  6.3.4 Having a Small Network prior to Self-employment .......................................................58
  6.3.5 Lack of Networking Skills ............................................................................................58
  6.3.6 Changes in the Environment .........................................................................................59
6.4 The Relationship between Strong-ties and Weak-ties Networks ......................................60

7 Conclusion.............................................................................................................................62

8 Limitations ............................................................................................................................63

9 Implications ...........................................................................................................................63
  9.1 Practical Implications .......................................................................................................63
  9.2 Implications for Policy Makers .......................................................................................64

10 Suggestions for Future Research .........................................................................................64

11 References ..........................................................................................................................66

Figures
  1 Summary of the Interviewees’ Profiles .................................................................................29
  2 Summary of the Findings ....................................................................................................48
  3 Summary of the Analysis ....................................................................................................60

Appendices
  1 Appendix 1: Email to the Interviewees ..............................................................................77
  2 Appendix 2: Interview Questions .......................................................................................78
1. Introduction

In this chapter, the background of the research topic is introduced followed by the formulation of the research problem. After that, the research questions are presented followed by definitions of the most important terms in the study.

1.1 Background

Due to its contributions to job creation and societal development in general (Audretsch, Keilbach, & Lehmann, 2006; Allen, Elam, Langowitz, & Dean, 2007; Patrick, Stephens & Weinstein, 2016), female entrepreneurship has become a widely practiced and studied phenomenon globally. In academia, the interest in this phenomenon can be traced back to the 1980s following an increase in the need by both the policy makers and the scholars to understand all matters regarding female business ownership (Achtenhagen & Tillman, 2013). Pushed and pulled by urgency and convenience respectively (Holmquist & Sundin, 1989; Allen et al., 2007; Orhan & Scott, 2001; Maritz, 2004; Alstete, 2003), women are nowadays actively involved in entrepreneurship (GEM, 2007; Powell & Eddleston, 2008). And according to studies by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), women currently own up to a third of the world's formal businesses (Minniti, Arenius & Langowitz, 2005).

Scholars have suggested that entrepreneurship is a social process continuously interacting with the surrounding society, which makes it vital to study the phenomenon in a specific context (Hytti, 2005; Bourne, 2010). In line with the above, this study will be based on Sweden, a country argued to form a fertile ground for studying female entrepreneurship (Tillmar, 2006). This is due to the fact that it is considered to be one of the world’s most gender equal (Sköld, 2011) and “women friendly” countries given its extensive welfare system (Achtenhagen & Tillmar, 2013). This welfare system consists of family friendly policies such as parental benefits and child care facilities, which make it possible for both men and women to integrate family and work life (Tillväxtverket, 2012). In the 1980s, Sundin and Holmquist (1989) found that female entrepreneurship in Sweden was characterized by invisibility, diversity, and adjustment. Since then, the Swedish Government, media, and other organizations have recognized the possibility to prosper through encouraging female entrepreneurship (UNCTAD, 2014). Different measures, such as entrepreneurial training and education, mentoring, networking, and child care services
(Rainey, Bosma, Stam & Terjesen, 2016) have been taken to make entrepreneurship for women in Sweden more possible, accessible and visible (Tillväxtverket, 2015).

### 1.2 Problem Formulation

Although numerous attempts have been made by governments and policy makers to help bridge the gap between male and female entrepreneurial activities, it is still a persistent problem in many countries (Kelley, Brush, Greene & Litovsky, 2013; Caliendo, Fossen, Kritikos & Wetter, 2015). Studies, for instance those on personality attributes, blame this imbalance on women’s low scores in entrepreneurial characteristics of risk taking, innovativeness, opportunism, self-efficacy, willingness to try and fail, self-confidence (Bird & Brush, 2002; Koellinger, Minniti & Schade, 2013; Wagner, 2007; Caliendo, Fossen & Kritikos, 2009; Birley, 1989; Chaganti, 1986; Bönte & Piegeler, 2013), believed to be required to triumph (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Minniti, 2010). Note should however be taken that for a long period the definitions, characterization, and the underpinning factors of the process of new business formation have been male-derived (Bird & Brush, 2002). From Fischer’s (1993) view, women are more hindered in entrepreneurship in comparison to their male counterparts because of, one, variations in socialization and development, and two, systematic factors and discrimination in the access of important resources.

Various studies have since provided evidence supporting Fischer’s latter observation. For instance, reports by the OECD (2004) and UNCTAD (2014) on female entrepreneurship have emphasized that having a weak social position and inadequate connection to support networks negatively affect women’s entrepreneurship. Research from a number of scholars agrees that, the contacts within one’s networks play the biggest role in whether one develops the ambition and the know-how to pursue entrepreneurship (Johannisson & Peterson, 1984; Hite & Hesterly, 2001; Martinez & Aldrich, 2011). These contacts can act as a source of all the important resources, support and meaning (Anderson, Drakopoulou & Jacket, 2010), which positively corresponds with entrepreneurial performance (Westlund & Adam, 2010). In the case of female entrepreneurs, “Knowing” and “Being known” by just a few makes it hard to captivate and collect information, funds, business partners, and human capital needed to prosper in entrepreneurship (Hart, Stevenson & Dial, 1995; UNCTAD, 2014).

In Sweden, the context of this study, while the position of women in society keeps on getting stronger and stronger considering the gender equality policies in place (Ahl & Nelson, 2015; Regeringen, 2009; Statistics Sweden, 2012), female entrepreneurs are still reported to be greatly
reliant on small networks made up of family and friends (Bogren, von Friedrichs, Rennemo & Widding, 2011; Tillmar, 2006), also known as strong-ties networks (Fernández-Pérez, Alonso-Galicia, Rodríguez-Ariza, del Mar Fuentes-Fuentes, 2015). This is not surprising given that Sweden scores high in individualism on Hofstede’s cultural dimension (Hofstede, 1980), and for men in general, they normally take the high-level positions in organizations which opens them to more contacts with other people (Mintzberg, 1983). According to Hofstede (1980) individualistic communities are made of people who keep concern for themselves and those they are in immediate contact with. Of recent Hofstede has added that, in Sweden it is more of a norm to have loose or no connections with people that do not fall in one’s arms’ length relations (Hofstede Center, n.d.)

Studies in social networks have however indicated that, as much as strong-ties networks come with solidarity and loyalty (Martinez & Aldrich, 2011) and provide information cheaply (Granovetter, 1985), they also restrict access to efficient diverse information and points of views, and they greatly depend on reciprocity (Edelman, Bresnen, Newell, Scarbrough & Swan, 2004; Martinez & Aldrich, 2011; Jack, 2005). Beside, Granovetter (1973) and Burt (1992a, 1992b) stress that an entrepreneur’s network should be made of both strong and weak ties because they both affect the operation and structure of networks. In support, Fayolle (2016) added that by combining these two ties, one obtains a larger sources of social capital.

While the concept that social networks contribute to enhancing entrepreneurship might not be new (Sequeira, Mueller, & McGee, 2007), little has been studied on how Weak-ties can be of importance in advancing women’s entrepreneurship, particularly in Sweden. With the world’s economy struggling to recovery from the effects of the 2007 – 2008 United State financial crisis (GEM Report, 2016/2017), there is great need to improve female entrepreneurship given its contribution to job creation and economic development.

1.3 The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the role of strong-ties and weak-ties networks in the entrepreneurial activities of female entrepreneurs, and furthermore explore what hinders female entrepreneurs from utilizing weak-ties networks, given that female entrepreneurs are said to rely more on strong-ties networks.
1.4 Research Question

a. “What role can networks play in advancing Female Entrepreneurship?”
b. “What hinders female entrepreneurs from widening their weak-ties networking activities?”

1.5 Key Words

Entrepreneurship, Women/Females, Networks, Strong-Ties, Weak-Ties, Self-Employment, Sweden

1.6 Definitions

1.6.1 Entrepreneur and business-owner

An entrepreneur can refer to a self-employed person who is using his/her business as the main source of income (Sköld & Tillmar, 2015). Expanding this notion, Block & Landgraf (2016) are adding that an individual can, in fact, be either a part-time entrepreneur or a full-time entrepreneur. The former is also known as a “combiner”, who is simultaneously in salary/wage employment and expected to move to full-time entrepreneurship at some point (Tillväxtverket, 2012), thereby assumed to be a pre-stage of the latter one (Block & Landgraf, 2016).

As business ownership can be understood as a subgroup of entrepreneurship (Sköld, 2011), the terms entrepreneur and business-owner are used intertwined in this study in terms of practicality (Sundin, 2011). Embracing Sköld’s (2011) delimitation, the term business-owner is incorporating entrepreneurs who are sole proprietors, in a business partnership, or employed in own limited company.

1.6.2 Networks

According to Aldrich and Zimmer (1986), networkers are groups of people with a focal person and all the other individuals with whom the focal character has direct and indirect connections. These connections can be of family, friends, friends of friends, or group obligations, and they help in the provision and access of relevant information, opportunities and other vital resources (Granovetter, 1973).
1.6.2.1. Strong-ties Networks

These consist of people whom an entrepreneur has a close intimate relationship with, particularly family members and friends (Greve & Salaff, 2003; Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Jack, 2005). These ties are normally made of deep frequent and lengthy interactions, and constant unspoken reciprocity between members (Aldrich & Sakano, 1995; Jack, 2005).

1.6.2.2 Weak-ties Networks

These types of networks compose of members with whom the entrepreneur does not have a close personal relationship with and those characterized of briefer duration and minor contacts, such as people who belong to a similar group as the entrepreneur, friends of friends, or acquaintances (Granovetter, 1982; Aldrich & Sakano, 1995).
2 Empirical Frame of Reference: Institutional Context of Sweden

In order to fully understand the experiences of female entrepreneurs and female business owners respectively, the social context surrounding them needs to be understood as well (Bourne, 2010; Ulvenbland, Blomkvist & Hansson, 2011). Therefore, in this part, the institutional context of the study is presented. As the presence of the welfare state can influence and be influenced by female entrepreneurship (Ahl, Berglund, Pettersson & Tillmar, 2014) as well as any modifications in the societal or organizational sphere (Sundin, 2011), the social system and female entrepreneurship in Sweden are introduced.

2.1 The social system

Sweden is argued to be one of the most gender equal countries in the world (Sköld, 2011; Ahl et al. 2014; Johansson Sevä & Öun, 2015), originating from the fundamental idea that men and women ought to have the same opportunities, obligations, and rights in life (Statistics Sweden, 2014). Essentially the Hofstede Center (n.d.), that has continued the research of Geert Hofstede on cultural differences, has concluded that Sweden represents a feminine country where the society is driven by values of caring for others, all being included, and ensuring a good quality of life. According to the study made by Ahl et al. (2014), the Nordic welfare model was originally inspired by the idea in the 1960s that both men and women could conveniently engage in full-time employment (Thörnqvist, 2006), which is a prerequisite for a well-functioning welfare state where the main role of the state is to take responsibility for its citizens’ well-being (Ahl, 2011). Municipalities, counties and the Swedish state are jointly taking part to this task (Sköld, 2011) by providing the Swedish people with health and social insurance systems, child and elderly care (Pettersson, Ahl, Berglund & Tillmar, 2017), education (Sundin & Tillmar, 2010; Tillväxtverket, 2012; Ahl & Nelson, 2015), and unemployment and parental insurance and allowances (Ahl, 2011) that are financed through taxation (Sköld, 2011; Pettersson, Ahl, Berglund & Tillmar, 2017). For instance, parents are guaranteed by law a certain predetermined amount of days off per child and about 80% of their normal earnings for those days. Nonetheless, many of these benefits, such as parental allowances and unemployment insurance, are still tied to the beneficiary’s earnings (Johansson Sevä & Öun, 2015; Tillväxtverkt, 2015). In addition to that, families in Sweden benefit from the dual-income household model, in which individuals are taxed, not families (Bourne, 2010; Ulvenbland et al. 2011; Johansson Sevä & Öun, 2015).
According to Johansson Sevä and Öun (2015) this has facilitated women’s position in the labor market as the income they bring to the household does not increase the family’s tax.

Approximately 70% of the taxes collected from the public are allocated to finance the social system (Sköld, 2011; Ahl et al. 2014), and therefore nowadays many social benefits are considered to be the absolute right of the people living in Sweden (Bourne, 2010). Likewise in other Nordic welfare states, the public sector in Sweden is considerably large (Sundin, 2011; Sköld, 2011; Ahl et al. 2014) due to the said ahead fact that the Swedish citizens have been willing to outsource certain obligation to be performed by the state (Sundin & Tillmar, 2010; Ahl, 2011). It has been alleged that independence and equality between individuals is so highly advocated that dependency on family and friends is being reduced by all possible means (Ahl, 2011). Be as it may, the public sectors is an important employer of women in Sweden (Sköld, 2011; Ahl et al., 2014) as over 50% of the female workforce are employed in the public sector (Sundin, 2011). In 2007, 81% from the whole share of women between ages 20-64 participated the work force (Bourne, 2010).

Although today the parental allowances are considered to be neutral in terms of gender (Thörnqvist, 2006), women still tend to be the main users of these benefits (Tillväxtverk, 2012), which in turn correlates with lower earnings (Pettersson et al., 2017). In fact, in 2013 only 25% of the benefits were utilized by men (Statistics Sweden, 2014). Reasons for this can be myriad, but according to one explanation, men still tend to earn more than women (Thörnqvist, 2006). Building on this, there have been discussions among the scholars on whether the gender equality in Sweden is realized in reality. According to Thörnqvist (2006), Sweden has no restrictions for women to work in any specific industries or occupations. Similarly, through “gender mainstreaming” the state is trying to monitor that women are treated and paid equally (Ulvenbland et al. 2011; Ahl, 2011; Ahl et al., 2014). However, according to Ulvenbland et al. (2011) and Statistics Sweden (2014) differences in pay and barriers for women still exists. For example, by giving childbirth and utilizing parental allowances for a minimum of two years can make women to trade-off a promotion, fulltime salary, and important relationships with the working community (Törnqvist, 2007; Pettersson et al., 2017). Regardless of the “family friendly” policies however, some women still choose to take on traditional roles, but some researcher have taken imply that the presence of these policies may not assure equal practices between men and women (Bourne, 2010; Ulvenbland et al., 2011), suggesting that Sweden can be seen as a family friendly state at least at global level (Törnqvist, 2007).
Although Sweden is relying on the welfare model (Thörnqvist, 2006), Sundin and Tillmar (2010) have found that the public sector in Sweden has been a subject of various changes for the past 20 years. The country has made a transition from a Keynesian demand-side economy (Thörnqvist, 2006) to a state making attempts to privatize the female-dominated public sector (Sundin, 2011) in order to invite smaller companies to accomplish the tasks originally assigned to the welfare state (Sundin, 2011; Ahl et al., 2014). In simple terms, the Swedish State is aiming at shifting from being a provider of welfare services to being the payer and has therefore, according to Sundin & Tillmar (2010), added competition and freedom of choice in the public sector to the political agenda, hence expecting women to succeed as entrepreneurs.

2.2 Female Entrepreneurship in Sweden

In May 2007, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth was assigned a task to promote female entrepreneurship and later on several support programs and measures were put in place (Tillväxtverket, 2012). Through these programs, the country allocated SEK 400 million to support female entrepreneurship between the years 2007-2009 (Sköld, 2011). In 2010, the Swedish government decided to allocate an additional SEK 100 million per year until 2014 (UNCTAD, 2014). According to Pettersson (2012), these efforts have been excessive compared to other Nordic countries who have an equal interest towards female entrepreneurship.

Like other female entrepreneurs worldwide, Tillväxtverket (2012) has reported that Swedish female entrepreneurs are a heterogeneous group of people, with diverse backgrounds, coming from different age groups, and active in different fields. They are either full-time or part-time entrepreneurs, although in general they tend to be working part-time more often than men (ibid.). Women also tend to own businesses that are smaller, and their profitability has been claimed to be lower than those of businesses owned by men (Ahl et al. 2014). Even though 80% of women in Sweden are reported to be employed in service sector (Thörnqvist, 2006; Sundin & Tillmar, 2010; Ahl, 2011; Sköld, 2011; Statistics Sweden, 2014; Tillväxtverket, 2015), only approximately 50% of the businesses in care and service sectors are reported to be female owned (Thörnqvist, 2006; Ahl & Nelson, 2015).

According to a report by OECD (2016), the most common way to monitor entrepreneurialism in a country is to rely on self-employment rates. Since the 1940s the share of women-owned businesses in Sweden has remained around 23-25% (Sköld, 2011; Ahl & Nelson, 2015). In 2014,
from the share of all employed Swedish women approximately 1.6% were self-employed with employees and alternatively, 3.8% were reported to be sole proprietors (OECD, 2016). In addition to that, according to the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth women are said to be responsible for 30% of all startups in Sweden annually (Tillväxtverket, 2015). However, this number can alter from region to region, with Kalmar having the highest percentage of 38% and Västernorrland the lowest with 24% (ibid.). Current statistics have however shown that the majority of entrepreneurs in Sweden are still men (Statistics Sweden, 2014). According to Tegtmeier, Kurczewska and Halberstadt, (2016), this might be due to the fact that women are still mostly located in “low-growth” sectors where opportunities for entrepreneurial behavior are somewhat limited, for example, healthcare and education (Tillväxtverket, 2012). Swedish government is however still hoping to see more women succeeding as entrepreneurs in these fields (Ahl et al., 2014).

The large public sector in Sweden has led to the segregation of the labor market in terms of gender (Thörnqvist, 2006), meaning that sectors such as healthcare, education and other service are still “female dominated” (Bourne, 2010; Sköld, 2011). However, according to Statistics Sweden (2014) the situation is changing. The younger generations of females are reported to be more distributed across sectors (Tillväxtverket, 2012) and entrepreneurship is not always a “necessity” but rather based on individuals’ personal preferences to alter their current job situation (Sundin, 2011; The United Nations, 2014). Ahl & Nelson (2015), who were comparing female entrepreneurship policies between the US and Sweden, concluded that with welfare state we should actually expect to see the amount of entrepreneurs to increase. On the other hand, Sundin (2011) has found that the welfare model has also been claimed to diminish entrepreneurship. More closely, the social “security net” provided by the state is claimed to reduce incentives for the “necessity” of becoming an entrepreneur. That is to say, the welfare model and income stability that comes along can actually work to reverse direction in regards to entrepreneurial behavior (Sundin, 2011; Ahl & Nelson, 2015). However, Ahl et al. (2014) are reminding that despite of the welfare state, an entrepreneur is running a double risk compared to people possessing regular employment. Essentially, monthly income is not guaranteed and as unemployment benefits are tied to income, an entrepreneur can be in a disadvantaged position. Therefore, some scholars have argued that being an entrepreneur is in fact discouraged (Ahl, 2011).

Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth has learned from programs that are aiming at supporting female entrepreneurship that, one of the fundamentals of developing entrepreneurship is networking (Tillväxtverkt, 2015), and that the nature of females’ networks have so far been less career oriented compared to men (Tillväxtverket, 2012). The diversity of networks was elicited as a prerequisite for successful networks where people from diverse
backgrounds exchange experiences and skills, and are thereby stimulating more women to become entrepreneurs (ibid.). To facilitate this, different organizations and authorities have taken efforts to assist women in their entrepreneurial path by organizing events where women can receive vital information related to their business concept, business plan, company registration, taxation and accounting. According to Tillväxtverket (2012) this type of “Start-up Days” were held 35 in 2011 across the country. Furthermore, in response to the fact that women are said to have fewer role models, 880 Ambassadors for female entrepreneurs have been appointed since 2008 to inspire females, assist them in their entrepreneurial careers, and provide role models with whom women can identify themselves with (Tillväxtverket, 2015). Females have the opportunity to have personal meetings with the ambassadors and during the years 2008-2011 the number of these meetings reached 107 000 (Tillväxtverket, 2012; Tillväxtverket, 2015).

However, despite all these efforts and investments, Sweden has not yet met the growth expectations in regards to female entrepreneurship (Sköld, 2011). In addition to that, in spite of efforts to bridge the gender-inequality gap, it has been argued that the premises for becoming and being an entrepreneur are still not the same for men and women (Tillväxtverket, 2015). In 2010 and 2013, Sweden saw an overall increase in entrepreneurial activities however, 78% of these small businesses were owned by men and women had only a 22% share (McCracken et al., 2015).
3. Theoretical Framework

In this section, the theoretical frame for the study is introduced. Firstly, previous research on social networks will be discussed in order to give an overview to the topic. Following that, the theoretical concepts of weak-ties network and strong-ties network in regards to female entrepreneurship are explained. Lastly, motivational factors to be in entrepreneurship are discussed in aims at later on providing a better overview to female entrepreneurs’ networking behavior.

3.1 Previous Research on Social Networks

Social networks is one of those concepts that have for a long period of time received a lot of attention. According to Nohria (1992), studies on this concept date back to as early as the 1930s in organizational research, and around the 1950s in sociology and anthropology. Characterized of a focal person and all the individuals with whom the focal character has direct and indirect connections (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986) or a set of connections of all types between a group individuals (Mitchell, 1973; Hoang & Antoncic, 2003), social networks as a theory has been widely accepted and applied in many fields (de Beer, Mollenhorst & Schutjens, n.d.). For example, sociologists and anthropologists have in their antecedent investigations employed this concept to convey the nature and impact of interactions and exchanges that commence amongst people (Maguire, 1983; Harland, 1995).

In the field of entrepreneurship, there has been a great emphasis on the role of these networks towards the advancement and success of entrepreneurial activities (Johannisson, 2011; Gedajlovic et al., 2013) to the extent of considering them to be the most valuable asset an entrepreneur can possess (Johannisson & Peterson, 1984; Brüderl & Preisendörfer, 1998; Hite & Hesterly, 2001). In support of the above, Scott and Twomey (1988), Matthews and Moser (1996) and Martinez and Aldrich (2011) added that networks play a big deal in whether individuals develop desire to pursue, and skills needed to succeed in entrepreneurship. The contacts embedded in these social networks have been observed to present entrepreneurs with vital information, resources and meaning (Anderson et al., 2010), things that have also been referred to as social capital (de Beer et al., n.d.; Burt, 1992b). Studies by Watson (2007) and Westlund and Adam (2010) have indicated that social capital from networks positively correlates with the performance of small and medium-sized businesses. Building on the above, Arregle and colleagues (2013) explained three ways through which networks and their associated social capital aid entrepreneurs in their activities. Top of their list was that, through networks entrepreneurs can gain access to supplies
and financial capital which can be used to attain other resources. At the beginning of a start-up, many nascent business owners are said to have, if any at all, limited knowledge, skills, past successful experiences, and no ability to give collaterals for mortgages (Cassar, 2004). Due to lack of the above, convincing those outside the banking system becomes the only alternative for securing financial support and share of the risks involved in entrepreneurship (Martinez & Aldrich, 2011).

Secondly, an entrepreneur’s network can act as a source of relevant information that an entrepreneur can use to eliminate uncertainties, and to discover and act upon opportunities. Considering not having prior successful experiences in business venturing as mentioned before, new entrepreneurs tend to lack important skills and knowledge, such as on markets and consumers’ needs, technologies, and management of resources, required to develop a positive mindset towards entrepreneurship (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000; Vohora et al., 2004). However, diverse researchers report that these skills can be obtained through interacting closely with other people (Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Mosey & Wright, 2007; Liñán & Santos, 2007).

Thirdly, the contacts in an entrepreneur’s network can offer emotional backing, advice, motivation, and encouragement at different stages of the entrepreneurial process. In line with this, Johannisson (2000) also found that individuals in social networks play a crucial role in encouraging entrepreneurship not only by providing entrepreneurs with information but also, with guidance and moral support through the entrepreneurial initiative.

Networking is nowadays easier given the increasing number of both physical and virtual socializing spaces. Places such as social media sites, cafes, coffee bars, and restaurants, are increasingly turning into meeting places where people with similar interests, including entrepreneurs, gather and have discussions on how to advance their interests (Mason et al., 2011). However, even though it is a widely acknowledged and applied approach in a range of social science themes (Araujo & Easton, 1996), critics have raised concerns regarding social networking’s importance, initiation, reproduction, structure, and how it affects people’s behaviors (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Mizruchi, 1994). Martinez and Aldrich (2011) found in their research that at times an entrepreneurial mindset and the desire to succeed are provoked by the lack of networks, but not their presence. They continued that, sometimes people turn to self-employment due to blocks in their way or lack of assistance in the labor market. More critics of the network theory have indicated that the term network is slowly turning into an umbrella under which various methodological and theoretical positions in the social science field are taking refuge (Araujo & Easton, 1996). Moreover, the social network theory usually considers social
structures as a given (Jack, 2005). It is greatly important to understand that, just like with entrepreneurs, social networks are also dynamic in nature (Schutjens & Stam, 2003; Slotte-Kock & Coviello, 2010; Jack et al., 2010; Stam, Arzlanian & Elfring, 2014) and because of this, they need to be managed (de Beer et al., n.d.). The findings of de Beer and colleagues (n.d.) indicate that entrepreneurial networks transform over time, both in their relevance to the entrepreneur and the contacts they consist of, because of internal and external factors.

Changes in networks caused by internal factors specifically relate to changes in the entrepreneur’s life direction, wellbeing, and resource needed. Once the status and goals of the entrepreneur evolve, there is always need for new network contacts (Garnsey, 1998; Stam et al., 2014). For example, in regards to the resources needed, Butler and Hansen (1991) discovered in their study on network evolution that the resources required by entrepreneurs vary depending on the phase of the entrepreneurial process, that is to say: “the pre-start, startup, and ongoing business phase”. In their view, at the pre-start stage the focus is normally on how to spot opportunities but as the business grows in scope, networks with critical information then became the main focus of the entrepreneur. After learning from an event, the entrepreneur may no longer depend on the contacts in this specific group for resources, and may instead trade in their social capital for new human capital (Lavie, 2006; Elfring & Hulsink, 2007; Martinez & Aldrich, 2011).

Changes brought up by external factors on the other hand stem from consequences of events outside of the entrepreneur. These may include changes in the entrepreneur’s personal household and the household’s life course, for instance in regards to family responsibilities, employment, or income (Jayawarna, Rouse & Kitching, 2011). Furthermore, the partners in these social networks may relocate to another area, or even not be in position to contribute to the network, hence losing their vital roles to the entrepreneur (Knoben, 2011). Moreover, there might also be changes in the market, either developments or declines. In order to stay in business despite the events mentioned above, entrepreneurs have to transform their networks and networking strategies (de Beer et al., n.d.). Basing on Cromie and Birley (1992), networking is an action-based activity and in order to build and manage contacts, one has to employ more energy and demonstrate interpersonal skills. They added that the more one interacts with others on a frequent base, the more skilled one becomes at building contacts.

An entrepreneur’s network can be composed of different kinds of contacts ranging from family and friends to business associates, all acting as a source of social capital (de Beer et al., n.d.). Most researchers have categorized these contacts into either Strong-ties or Weak-ties following a study by Granovetter (Aldrich, Rosen & Woodward, 1987; Hills, Lumpkin & Singh, 1997; Jack,
2005). In his work on ties, Granovetter (1973) defined the “strength” of a social tie as a consolidation of the number of time, the intimacy, the emotional intensity, and the reciprocal duty with the tie. In addition, he noted that although these elements are greatly interrelated, they are also considerably independent. The work of Granovetter gives a clear differentiation of the ties, Strong and Weak ties, and through this, he conveys the homogeneity and heterogeneity of the influence of these ties on people’s behaviors (Jack, 2005). In similar vein, Cromie and Birley (1992) observed that although contacts are significant in business start-up and management, their scope, diversity, density, and consequent efficiency depend on their qualities and their social effect on the entrepreneur.

3.2 Strong-ties Vs Weak-ties Networks

Ever since Granovetter presented his seminal piece on strength of ties, a variety of investigations have been carried out to explore strong-ties and weak-ties in both network and entrepreneurship literature (Burt, 1992a, 2005; Martinez & Aldrich, 2011). Scholars have since referred to Strong-ties as people whom an entrepreneur has a close intimate relationship with, namely family members and friends (Greve & Salaff, 2003; Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Jack, 2005). These ties are made up of deep frequent and lengthy interactions, and constant unspoken reciprocity between members (Aldrich & Sakano 1995; Jack, 2005). Advocates of strong-ties emphasize that due to continued communication amid the parties, solid bonds get created and in turn, the share of resources, especially tacit knowledge, becomes easier and even flourishes (Jones et al., 1997; Dekker, 2004; de Beer et al., n.d.). In agreement, Jack (2005) observed that the ongoing relationship leads to trust which makes the parties able to have discussions while lessening opportunism and uncertainty concerns. Family members and friends are in position to offer both emotional support intimately and at the same time aid the entrepreneur in activities akin to business venturing (Arregle et al., 2013; Welter, 2011). Granovetter (1985) stated that, support from family and friends is considered more reliable economically because it comes cheaply, rich in details and accuracy, and from an ongoing relationship. In their study on balancing cohesion and diversity in entrepreneurial networks, Martinez and Aldrich (2011) also reported that cohesive networks made of strong-ties have the advantage of both commitment and solidarity. As a consequence of all the above, strong-ties are said to be what the entrepreneur organizes first in the bid for resources because in theory, the high risks involved in starting a business makes the acquisition of initial capital only possible from trusted sources (Martinez & Aldrich, 2011).

Weak-ties on the other hand, are composed of members with whom the entrepreneur does not have a close personal relationship with or those characterized of briefer duration and minor
contacts, such as people who belong to a similar group as the entrepreneur, friends of friends, or acquaintances (Granovetter, 1982, Aldrich & Sakano 1995). Unlike strong-ties that involve constant interactions, parties in weak-ties may only engage occasionally to exchange information when it is needed (Katz & Williams, 1997). These kinds of ties were depicted as heterogeneous and diverse by Burt (1992a), and Lin (2001) later on related this diversity to having different attributes, location, occupation, ethnicity, gender, age, economic status, just to mention a few. Considering their foundation, weak-ties networks are fundamental elements of the social system because they enable easy movement of a wide range of sources of information and different perspectives into the society as a whole (Burt, 1992a; Burt, 2005; Martinez & Aldrich, 2011). Furthermore, weak-ties can be counted on to discover new business ideas, and to organize relationships needed to get projects in motion (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986). As Granovetter (1982) observed, the higher the amount and diversity of weak-ties in an entrepreneur’s network, the greater the prospect of succeeding in the venture. However, Martinez and Aldrich (2011) found in their study that this diversity and heterogeneity can lead to possible governance issues that may negatively impact entrepreneurial success.

Despite all its associated advantages, critics of strong-ties stress that relying on close-knit relationships can result in the lack of new relevant information (Fayolle et al., 2016). For instance, Burt (1992b) noted that information obtained from strong-ties to be redundant and easily predictable because of cognitive proximity within the network (Fayolle, et al., 2016), hence making it less valuable in comparison to that from weak-ties. Developing on that, Lechner and Dowling (2003) and Arregle et al. (2013) indicated that weak-ties are more important in providing access to new relevant information given that they are market-based and with no personal connection. In the same token, theorists have argued that weak-ties result in heightened access to a broad circle of information on potential products or services and markets, sources of capital, innovations, possible business locations, and investors (Granovetter, 1973; Davidsson and Honig, 2003; Burt, 2005). According to Granovetter (1973), an entrepreneur can also depend on contacts within his or her weak ties with complementary knowledge or positions to discover venture opportunities and to critically analyze the project throughout all the venture phase. Contrary to weak-ties, the creation and sustenance of strong-ties requires a lot of effort and for this reason, most people tend to have few strong-ties in their personal group (Jack, 2005). For example, Aldrich et al. (1989) reported in their study that many people with enterprises had only between three to ten strong-ties in their networks.

Considering all the above, in order to build strong, durable and effective social capital, an entrepreneur’s network should consist of contacts from both strong and weak-ties (Granovetter,
According to Martinez and Aldrich, (2011), the only way to solve the dilemma of where to invest most of the little resources nascent entrepreneurs normally possess is by concentrating on “something-in-between” since investigation show that there is no one single solution.

### 3.3 Networking Activities of Female Entrepreneurs

Following the work of Aldrich and colleagues on entrepreneurial networking in the mid-1980s, a range of empirical research on this topic has recorded differences between female and male networking activities (Katz & Williams, 1997; Klyver & Grant, 2010). These differences have included, among others, the formation process of the networks, their composition, and the ways they are managed (Bird, 1989; Brush, 1992; Rosa & Hamilton, 1994). According to Katz and Williams’ (1997) report, women are more prone to have smaller networks made of strong-ties, and limited time to spend on networking. As a result of domestic responsibilities inform of housework and childbearing and rearing, which are categorized as lonely form of activities, women tend to end up confined at home and with little time to establish network connections in comparison to their male counterparts (Munch, McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1997; Hunt, 1983).

Munch and others added that, these domestic roles force women to readjust the content of their networks from diverse contacts to mainly family and friends. Not to differ from the above, Orhan and Scott (2001) observed that unlike men who start by employing professionals and then the spouse as source of entrepreneurial advice, women entrepreneurs start from their spouse to friends, and then later on to professionals. In the same token, Moore (1990) observed that, women were highly inclined to have household members in their networks than men. Some scholars have interpreted the findings of Moore to imply that male SME owners mostly use formal networks, and women use informal networks (Watson, 2011).

In their study, Cromie and Birley (1992) observed that the people one knows and the roles one takes greatly impact the amount of others with whom one can interact with. They added that with other things remaining constant, the more frequent a person interacts with others, the more experienced that person becomes at establishing contacts. This supports the argument of Hunt (1983) and Munch et al. (1997) who concluded that domestic roles take women away from networking with other contacts other than strong-ties. Fogarty (1972) also found that, once women start isolating themselves due to domestic responsibilities, their vital networks of work colleagues and business contacts also get broken.
In regards to the roles and positions taken, Cromie and Birley (1992) observed that women normally take lower level positions in organizations in comparison to a regular man. Considering the status and power that comes with the post, managers are well situated to collect a lot of relevant information from people they get in contact with (Mintzberg, 1983). Given that women usually take on entrepreneurship without managerial history (Aldrich, 1989; Greene et al., 2001; Verheul & Thurik, 2001; Irwin & Scott, 2010; Price & McMullan, 2012), their social networks tend to comprise of less qualified or equipped contacts compared to those of male entrepreneurs (Stevenson, 1986; Ford, 1989; Nicholson & West, 1988; Cromie & Birley, 1992; Manolova, Carter, Manev & Gyoshev, 2007). According to their study on the gender of the personal contacts of female managers, Nicholson and West (1988) noted that female managers were more likely to turn to fellow women for advice and assistance. In agreement, McPherson, Smith-Lovin, Cook (2001) and Bogren, von Friedrichs, Rennemo and Widding (2013) mentioned that people with the same characteristics and backgrounds commonly associate with each other. However, due to the scarcity of women in powerful positions, like managers (Klyver & Grant, 2010), women entrepreneurs end up turning to their “significant others” such as family and friends for advice (Noe, 1988; Cromie & Birley, 1992).

Although most studies have focused on the differences between the networks of female and male entrepreneurs (Katz & Williams, 1997), there are also studies that have observed variations within female entrepreneurial networks themselves (Aldrich, 1989). In a study on 90 women with high prestigious careers, it was found that possessing children made a big difference to the gender composition of women’s networks (Zanna, Crosby & Loewenstein, 1987). Of all the married women with no kids sampled, half of them reported an all-male contacts in their networks while only 14% among those with children reported having all-male contacts in their groups. Furthermore, Wellman (1985) also observed that having children negatively affected cross-sex connections in women’s networks than in men’s networks.

Despite of the strong and convincing evidence above, there are some investigations that found no differences between the networking activities of men and women entrepreneurs. For instance, Carter and Gracia (2009) and Foss (2010) concluded in their studies that there were no extensive differences in how male and female entrepreneurs organized their resources from networks. In contradiction to their expectations, Cromie and Birley (1992) ended with evidence indicating that the personal contacts of female networks are not always narrow but equally diverse as those of male entrepreneurs both in regards to the relationships and how they are employed. Meaning that women are not more inclined than men to turn to family and friends for entrepreneurial advice. Moreover, a study by Klyver (2011) demonstrates that even though female entrepreneurs are more
likely to involve family members who are not partners in the venture, both female and male entrepreneurs obtain emotional support from their close-kin within their entrepreneurial networks.

3.4 Motivational theories on female entrepreneurship

Renko, Galen Kroeck and Bullough (2012) claimed in studying individuals’ start-up initiatives that motivation is an important factor in differentiating those entrepreneurs who are making progress from those who are not. In a similar manner, understanding individuals’ underlying motivations in terms of entrepreneurship can enable access to understanding their network content and behavior in this specific network as individuals attempt to develop and maintain relationships that can have the potential to assist them in their professional career (Sharafizad & Coetzee, 2016). Renko et al. (2012) are explaining this kind of behavior by relying on expectancy theory originally introduced by Vroom in 1964, who claimed expectations to be a vital component of individuals’ motivations as individuals’ actions are motivated by the expected consequences. That is to say; that an individual’s network content and the behavior in these networks can be argued to be determined by what one expects to gain from these networks.

Having said that, scholars have found that individuals hold various intentions and motives when it comes to entrepreneurship (Moore, 2005; Dawson & Henley, 2012; Svaleryd, 2015; Johansson Sevā & Öun, 2015; Patrick et al., 2016). Motivations have been a subject of interest in entrepreneurship studies for some time now (Dawson & Henley, 2012; Renko et al., 2012), but it has also come into attention that motivational studies focusing on gender differences are still somewhat lacking and contradicting (Kirkwood, 2009; Maes, Leroy & Sels, 2014; Patrick et al., 2016). For instance, Renko et al. (2012) and Patrick et al. (2016) found that men and women are motivated by different factors in terms of entrepreneurship, however, Kirkwood (2009) disagrees with this argument by saying that men and women are in fact motivated by the same factors, but they just tend to act on them in different manners. In addition to this, Block and Landgraf (2016) claim that motivational differences have also been found between full-time entrepreneurs and part-time entrepreneurs, where the latter form of entrepreneurship is essentially claimed to be more risk-averse and motivated by being able to test their entrepreneurial abilities.

When investigating what motivates an individual to become an entrepreneur, scholars often bring forward the dichotomy between “pull” and “push” factors (Holmquist & Sundin, 1989; Hughes, 2003; Dawson & Henley, 2012; Ekinsmyth, 2014; Svaleryd, 2015; Patrick et al., 2016). In the late 1980s, Holmquist and Sundin (1989) explained females’ motivations to engage in
entrepreneurship with the pull/push theory. In broad terms, Holmquist and Sundin (1989) defined pull-factors as motives connected to new, attractive opportunities, yet push-factors in turn, are related to negatively charged circumstances, associated with negative personal and external factors (Kirkwood, 2009). For example, the possibility to improve work-life balance through increased flexibility can be a clincher factor for pulling individuals to self-employment (Kirkwood & Toolel, 2008; Dawson & Henley, 2012), while unemployment, or the fear of it, may lead individuals in their decision to become self-employed for “necessity”, indicating that the decision may not always be voluntary (Hughes, 2003; Svaleryd, 2015; Dawson & Henley, 2012). However, instead of putting labels on different motivational factors, Svaleryd (2015) is suggesting that the dichotomy of pull and push can be unclear as individuals perceive circumstances differently. Having said that, Maes, Leroy and Sels (2014) are supporting that even though people would see self-employment as an alternative, they would arguably engage in it for divergent reasons. By far, the results from diverse studies have been contradicting since pull and push-factors can be open to different interpretations (Hughes, 2003). Attempting to determine whether people are pulled or pushed in practice (Dawson & Henley, 2012), and placing their underlying motivations into two different categories can be problematic (Holmquist & Sundin, 1989). In consequence, suggestions have been made that relying on pull and push-factors can be oversimplifying (Kirkwood, 2009).

Scholars have nonetheless come an agreement that individuals have financial, lifestyle, social, intrinsic and independence motives in regards to entrepreneurship (Fischer, 1993; Carter, Gartner, Shaver & Gatewood, 2003; Johansson Sevä & Öun, 2015). Sullivan and Meek (2012) and Sharafizad and Coetzer (2016) have confirmed this notion by adding that women tend to hold a manifold set of motivations especially where the desire for flexibility over work time, self-fulfillment, and improved work-family balance has been cited. Sharafizad and Coetzer (2016) who were studying women’s motivations to become entrepreneurs and thereby their networking behavior found out that women can be placed in three different categories based on their motivations: Classic Entrepreneurs, Forced Entrepreneurs, and Work-Family Balance Entrepreneurs. Classic entrepreneurs are usually pulled into business for self-fulfillment, independence (Block & Landgraf, 2016), and financial rewards (Svaleryd, 2015). According to Carter et al. (2003) and Block and Landgraf (2016) the desire for independence has been cited as the most frequent reason to become self-employed. However, Tegtmeier et al. (2016) among other scholars are arguing that it is the desire for self-fulfillment that drives women into self-employment, meaning that the findings have been divergent to certain extent. With all that said, the advantages of obtaining a better locus of control through self-employment can, for some people, surpass the benefits of higher earnings in a “regular” employment (Patrick et al., 2016).
This notion is dissenting from economic theories where scholars of the field are suggesting that a person will choose to become self-employed if the profits earned are higher than the wage income and other associated benefits (Minniti & Naudi, 2010; Renko et al., 2012). In simple terms, Svaleryd (2015 p. 57) is claiming that “a person becomes self-employed if the net present benefits of becoming self-employed exceed the net present value of the costs involved”. However, Maes, Leroy and Sels (2014) are adding that an individual’s personal attributes, surrounding social norms, and perceived behavior of control need to be addressed as well. This means that transformation into an entrepreneur cannot always be rationalized in quantitative terms, and is therefore calling for more diverse views (Renko et al., 2012). In a similar manner, Tegtmeier et al. (2016) complemented one of the most pivotal theories in shedding light on why individuals choose to become entrepreneurs. The original argument of this “Jack-of-all-trades” theory introduced by Lazear (cited in Tegtmeier et al., 2016) is that, with their occupational choices individuals are attempting to maximize their lifetime earnings (ibid.). However, scholars in the field have found that women are not always intrigued by wealth creation and therefore have shown less interest towards financial returns as the major motivating factor (Kirkwood, 2009; Nel, Maritz & Thongprovati, 2010; Sullivan & Meek, 2012; Dawson & Henley, 2012; Tegtmeier et al., 2016). In fact, it has been found that for many female business owners the concept of success is multidimensional (Patrick et al., 2016). Implying that instead of only measuring their success in financial terms, they are also interested in the altruistic need to contribute to the society (Nel et al., 2010; Poggesi, Mari & De Vita, 2016; Tegtmeier et al., 2016), and think of their business as a “cooperative network of relationships” (Horridge & Craig, 2001) that is motivated by activities such as helping others (Tegtmeier et al., 2016).

Forced entrepreneurs can be argued to be more pushed to become self-employed due to unemployment, poor working opportunities (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016), or poor working conditions (Sullivan & Meek, 2012). Firstly, Svaleryd (2015) has confirmed that there is a positive relationship between unemployment and entrepreneurship, and this has been found to hold true especially with men during economic downturns (Dawson & Henley, 2012). Nevertheless, according to Svaleryd (2015) high unemployment benefits, as well as high earnings from salary or wage employment, can decrease the attractiveness of self-employment for both sexes. Secondly, frustration with working conditions (Sullivan & Meek, 2012), labour market barriers (Hughes, 2003), such as discrimination due to ethnicity (Svaleryd, 2015; Patrick et al., 2016) and experiences of a class ceiling (Moore, 2005) can push women to become self-employed. Patrick et al. (2016) are adding that especially for women from minority groups, self-employment could be a way to avoid discrimination in the labor market.
The third group consist of mainly women with children or spouses who are motivated by improved work-family balance and thereby flexibility (Sharafizad & Coetzer, 2016; Patrick et al., 2016). In relation to the latest category, combining work and family has traditionally understood as women’s field (Johansson Sevä & Öun, 2015) as women are more frequently than men reported to experience a variety of work-family conflicts and thus engage in different coping strategies (Jennings & McDougal, 2007; Kirkwood & Toolel, 2008; Johansson Sevä & Öun, 2015) in aims at satisfying both work and family needs (Kirkwood & Toolel, 2008; Patrick et al., 2016). According to Kirkwood (2009) this type of family-related motivations are often labelled as push-factors, and one group of female entrepreneurs known to rely on this strategy are referred as “mompreneurs”, willing to combine doing business and looking after children (Ekinsmyth, 2014) or simply mothers motivated to engage in entrepreneurial activities in aims at maintaining a particular lifestyle and identity (Duberley & Carnigan, 2012; Dawson & Henley, 2012). However, Patrick et al., (2016) are claiming that there is not enough evidence that obtaining a balance between family and work would be a major reason for women who turn to self-employment.

Along with family background and personal characteristics (Patrick et al., 2016), it has been argued that becoming an entrepreneur depends on individual’s stock of human capital (Svaleryd, 2015; Patrick et al., 2016; Tegtmeier et al., 2016). The essence of this argument is that individuals possessing higher levels of human capital ought to have better access to vital resources in regards to self-employment (Patrick et al., 2016). Tegtmeier et al. (2016) in turn are emphasizing especially training, balanced knowledge and experience of the industry as the major facilitators towards self-employment. Ultimately, they have found that people with extensive rather than specialized knowledge are more likely to become self-employed (ibid.).

In summary, these two theories, motivational and expectancy, are claiming that people are motivated by different factors when it comes to their entrepreneurial activities. And by the same token, these motivations determine the composition of their networks, how they behave in their networks, and most importantly, why they engage in these networks. By discovering the motivational factors of female entrepreneurs, their networking activities can also be understood better.
4. Methodology

In this section, the choice of research methodology that is used to address the research problem is introduced and discussed, that is to say; the research philosophy, strategy, approach, design and method.

4.1 Research Philosophy

Since our aim in this study is to understand people and seek to discover the reasons underlying their point of views, we have decided to conduct a study that allows to consider the interviewees responses in reflection to their surrounding context in which they are embedded in. Building on this, we are following a relativist ontology and social constructivist epistemology in order to understand the experiences of female entrepreneurs in Sweden in regards to their networks.

Relativism assumes that scientific laws are created by people rather than being naturally out there to be identified, which is a theoretical perspective that has greatly been shaped by the findings of Latour and Woolgar (1979). In their studies on how scientific notions change within research, they found that when people have contrasting opinions, the capability to obtain acceptance from others can be determined by one’s position and past reputation. They added that in such a situation, the truth about a particular concept may also be attained through debates and compromise amongst the advocates. In summary, from a relativist view, there may never be a single ultimate truth to discussions but instead reconciliation of different theories as people interact and present acceptable scientific evidence.

Taking into account that entrepreneurship and gender in particular are context dependent phenomenon, it would be sensible to assume that there are no right or wrong answers when it comes to an entrepreneurs reasoning to engage with a certain network. We believe that female entrepreneurs tend to have different experiences in regards to their strong and weak-ties networks and therefore room needs to be given to subjective thinking that can be best supported by social constructionist epistemology. The reason behind this is that social constructionist epistemology is taking the stand point that reality is not objective and external but rather socially built up and given context and meaning by people’s experiences and daily communications with others (Watzlawick, 1984; Shotter, 1993; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). In research, this standpoint calls for collecting facts, measuring the regularity of patterns in people’s behaviors, and considering their individual and collective thinking and feelings. Unlike the positivistic perspective, this gives
the researcher a chance to be part of the study, to concentrate on a few specific cases, and to gather extensive detailed data which can aid in coming to a general understanding of the situation at hand (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015).

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), different standpoints hold key assumptions of how to view the world and because of this, the choice of philosophy one makes should support and underpin the rest of the decisions to be made throughout the study. In other words, we believe that in order to achieve the purpose of this study, there is need to consider that there is no one single truth to the matter in question and, different opinions from different people should be gathered so as to come to a detailed general understanding of the problem.

4.2 Research Strategy

Since the topic of networks in female entrepreneurship is not so widely studied yet and especially in connection with motivational theories, we are aiming at exploring the field and thereby obtain new discoveries. Building on this, we believe that taking a qualitative approach will bring us to data that is rich and that can be analyzed more freely. In agreement with this, Neergaard and Uløi (2007), and Easterby-Smith, Thorpe & Jackson, (2015) have also found that qualitative research can aid in researching something that is previously unexplored and thereby advance the theoretical field of entrepreneurship. As mentioned earlier, we do not want to treat the surrounding context as something external and further, want to be open towards different point of views. Therefore, the benefit of qualitative approach is that it helps to contribute to our understanding taking into consideration the Swedish context and give role to the meanings and experiences of the participants (Neergaard & Uløi, 2007). Having said that, we are not expecting to be able to represent results that are universal and the reason behind this is that in qualitative studies there are also differences in the level of subjectivity among researchers, as found by Neergaard (2007).

4.3 Research Approach

Given that the goal of this study is to contribute to existing theory and build new theory through exploring and understanding how female entrepreneurs are using their strong-ties and weak-ties, we believe that in-depth materials need to be collected first before coming to any conclusions regarding this phenomenon. Inspired by Strauss’ (1987) view on grounded theory, we started the study by familiarizing ourselves with existing studies on both female entrepreneurship and networks in order to establish a knowledge base regarding the issue. With this, coupled with
analytical, structured, and fairly mechanistic measures to understand the collected data (Strauss, 1987; Corbin and Strauss, 2015), we then moved on to detecting gaps within the existing knowledge and made conclusions. In support of Strauss, Easterby-Smith and colleagues (2015) criticized Glaser’ (1992) traditional grounded theory view by adding that preconceptions are inevitable in research because people rarely get interested in a study subject or field without having prior knowledge about it.

4.4 Methods of Data Collection

4.4.1 Collection Method
Since the purpose of our study is to explore female entrepreneurs’ viewpoints on strong- and weak-ties networks, having semi-structured interviews seemed to be the most appropriate way to understand them. Our aim was to make our interviewees to open up and let us into their world by having interviews that are more close to directed “real-life” conversations, as both Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) and Eriksson and Kovalainen (2011) have suggested about qualitative interviews. However, in order to maintain some type of structure and initiate the flow in the conversations (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015), the interviews included pre-set questions. However, we did not want them to only answer the questions but also elaborate their answers by emphasizing why. Overall, the interviews were planned in advance and the questions were formulated in a way that would have meaning to the respondents. For instance, we wanted to learn about their backgrounds prior to going to more specific questions and especially discover how they understand the issues. Rather than asking about how they use their strong-ties directly, we tried to approach the issue from a different angle by asking how their friends and family contributed to their businesses and what their overall perceptions are. Also, throughout the interviews we were prepared to pose reflective questions in order to check common understanding with the interviewees.

Interviews can be conducted in multiple ways ranging from traditional face-to-face interviews to remote techniques (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Remote techniques helped us to conduct an interview in a more flexible manner as it can be either synchronous or asynchronous, depending on whether we and the interviewee were conducting the interview at the same moment, as explained by Easterby-Smith et al. (2015). With the first one, the interview can be conducted over the phone or internet chat, when in the latter one the interviewee responds to the questions through email (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011), also referred
as “written correspondence”, which Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) have found especially useful when there is a problem to access data. However, with written correspondence it is possible to miss interaction with the interviewee and thereby other valuable information when the interviewees have to transcribe their own answers, facing the danger of accidentally leaving out information that could be valuable to us (ibid.). On the other hand the data is already “transcribed”, meaning that one part in the data generation process is already done and that the data is ready to be analyzed.

Prior to the interviews, through LinkedIn, Facebook, and Google we orientated ourselves with the participants’ professional backgrounds in order to be able to ask probing questions of higher quality and to understand them better. Participants were interviewed either face-to-face in a commonly agreed meeting place, via skype, phone, or email, depending on their regional location, personal schedules, and language preferences. Every interview was recorded and transcribed into textual form including all the words that had been said during the interview. Moreover, the interviewees were asked for a permission to do so in order to keep up ethical standards.

We were present in all interview situations and the roles were divided so that one would lead the conversation and the other would focus on probing and clarifying questions. In order to enhance a discussion-like atmosphere, the structure of the pre-set interview questions was kept loose. Hence, the interviewees were allowed to talk for as long as they felt like it and jump from one topic to another if we felt that there was a sense of storytelling. Lastly, clearing questions were asked in the end in order to discover if there were any other issues the interviewees wanted to bring up.

Two of the respondents preferred to conduct the interview by email, owing to their limited amount of time or and to their language preference. The interview questions were modified to be more elaborative to avoid misinterpretations and it was agreed that we could return with further questions if necessary. Also, the interviewees could answer in Swedish if they were more comfortable to do so. This decision was made based on the belief that the quality of the answers is higher if the interviewees can express themselves in their mother tongue. Also, respondents who were not familiar with the topic in advance were provided with the opportunity to receive the interview questions in advance and ask questions if needed.

4.4.2 Choice of Respondents: Sampling

When conducting a qualitative study, it is vital to select the most relevant candidates to interview (Creswell, 2007). These can be obtained through the guidance of the study’s purpose, theoretical
framework, philosophy or methodology (Cassell, 2004). According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2015), using this non-probabilistic approach helps the researchers to pick a purposeful sample while decreasing the chances of the findings being influenced by the sampling method.

With the purpose of this paper being to explore and understand the roles of networks with female entrepreneurship using Sweden as the context, we started by reducing the population of the study to only female entrepreneurs in Sweden. From there, with the help of a class colleague, contact was established with a senior member of an organization that brings entrepreneurs together. After some time however, we failed to get in touch with this contact. This forced us to start looking for other female entrepreneurs willing to be interviewed for the study. The participants were obtained through searches on Facebook, LinkedIn, Google, and previous Theses from Jönköping International Business School (JIBS), and some were named by other participants.

In summary, to use the descriptions of Easterby-Smith et al. (2015), the selection of the participants in study started out as purposive sampling with a clear criteria of eligibility to be followed. However, due to the loss of communication with the established contact at the organization, we moved on to convenience sampling and started selecting accessible female entrepreneurs willing to take part in the study. At the end, there was also snowball sampling as participants asked people in their own network to join the study.

4.5 The Method of Data Analysis

Since we are seeking to understand female entrepreneurs in regards to the research problem and also inspired by Grounded Analysis, we have started the analysis process by revisiting the theory and getting more familiar with available information on the research problem recorded in the literature reviewed. This was done as a way to keep in mind the focus of the investigation and the pre-existing knowledge on the matter. With this done, we moved on to analyzing each interview independently, and later on cross-analyzed them with one another in connection to the existing theory in order to determine the connections and the gaps. Following that, the Grounded Analysis approach helps to develop theory from the themes that are grounded within the data identified systematically as noted by Easterby-Smith et al. (2015). This kind of approach also allows theories to be derived from comparing various data fragments with each other (Charmaz, 2014).

With the amount of the primary data collected being a lot, in order to make it easy to go back to it a number of times we have decided to code it depending on the similarities and differences in
the data fragments. Categorizing the data in this form made it easier to see the common factors between the data and the existing knowledge, and also for the new concepts to develop and for conclusions to be made.

4.6 Evaluation of the research

The basic framework in social science is suggesting that the quality of the research should be evaluated based on reliability, validity, and generalizability (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). However, as qualitative studies are often subject to a particular context, this may not always make sense (Neergaard, 2007; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Therefore, we have decided to follow the advice of Eriksson and Kovalainen (2011) who are suggesting that talking about the trustworthiness of the study would be more meaningful. Namely, this means that especially studies based on relativist ontology and constructionist epistemology should be evaluated based on their credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

4.6.1 Dependability

Dependability implies that we, as the authors of the study are responsible for showing that the way in which the study has been conducted is logical and that all pertinent information is well documented (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). Having said this, throughout the study process we have aimed to be as transparent as possible in explaining how and in which order we have conducted the study. We have explained why particular decisions have been taken, for instance, our decision concerning Research Philosophy and The Method of Data Collection. In addition to that, we have been open for feedback from the readers of this study in terms of how the order of the theoretical framework could be improved, the way in which the empirical findings are presented, and how the data could be analyzed better.

4.6.2 Transferability

Owing to the fact that the study we have conducted is qualitative and based on social constructionist epistemology, where our standpoint towards the topic is subjective and the surrounding context Sweden arguably is influencing to certain extent, our aim is neither to try to represent a coherent perspective, nor aim to generalize results to a large population, as recommended by Wigren (2007) and Neergaard (2007). Therefore, instead of talking about the possibility of replicating the study as in quantitative field, transferability is assessing whether similar results can be found when conducting the study in another context (Eriksson &
Kovalainen, 2011). Because the empirical data for this study was collected from Sweden, it can be expected that similar results should be found from other Scandinavian countries who share similar historical, cultural and institutional backgrounds. Moreover, since the participants in this study are from different business fields and people with diverse backgrounds, it can be claimed that the sample has been diverse enough to allow similar results to emerge in other contexts as well. However, since we also believe that the quality of interaction between us and the participants has played a role in determining how much the participants have been willing to share, it could be argued that another researcher could possibly get answers of different depth.

4.6.3 Credibility
Credibility is a key component of trustworthiness and it is based on the idea that the materials and findings provided by the researcher can be validated by another researcher (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). To ensure this and inspired by Patton (1999), this study is conducted by two researchers and the steps in the study process have been taken and discussed both individually and commonly. Theories applied in this study have been chosen in consensus, data collection has been made in the presence of both of us, and before coming into final conclusions, we have analyzed the data individually in order to measure consistency. Patton (1999) is calling this research triangulation, which implies that the credibility of the study can be improved, the potentiality of misinterpretation bias can be reduced, and more profound insights can be obtained if multiple researchers are working on the same data.

4.6.4 Conformability
Conformability refers to the link between the data, findings and interpretations (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011). The essence is that the link between the foregoing elements is clear and easily understood by the reader. For this study, the main concepts are provided separately under definitions and other concepts are based on the joining links found from the theories. For instance, the decision to include subsection 3.4 Motivational Theories on Female Entrepreneurship is based on the findings from theories that claim entrepreneurial motivation to influence the content of their networks. Moreover, when collecting empirical material, the questions for the interviews were inspired by the theories found, arguing that the findings are to some extent aligned with the theories and data used. In addition to that, during the interviews we asked probing questions related to matters we were interested in, such as specific questions related to their business and operations.
5. Empirical Findings

In this section the results from qualitative interviews are reported and analyzed. Interviews are introduced individually and the names of the respondents are replaced with random letters in order to protect their anonymity.

The findings of this study are to be reported in a summary form however in regards to information considered most valuable to the research problem, direct quotations are employed in order to capture fully the views of the interviewees. In the summaries, the background of the interviewees are presented followed by their reasons for resorting to self-employment, their experiences as self-employed, views on support, funding, and networks. Lastly, after every summary a short case analysis will be presented in order to understand the interviewees better in regards to the research problem.

(Figure 1): A summary of the interviewees’ profiles.
5.1 Interviewee A: 10th April 2017

Before starting her current business which will re-launch at the end of this year, she had another company specializing in food products for babies for about 12 to 13 years. However prior to entrepreneurship, interviewee A worked for a big nutrition company after finishing her studies in food and nutrition.

When asked about why she resorted to self-employment, she said that although she had a desire to set her own working hours, she did not have plans to start her own business until she had a child who required specific food products that were not available on the market, and big food companies were not willing to start producing

“....So I had no plans at all to do it myself. I started out by calling all the major players and like tried to convince them like you should do this but then they we were like it is too small a market and it is not going to be profitable... I was so annoyed and I just thought that I should do it myself, and the same day I just decided like, oh my God, I am going to do it myself.”

Nowadays, with a lot of experience, interviewee A has ventured into other activities as well and this time she is going after projects that she finds interesting and challenging

“...the motivation this time is, first, I know that I can, I mean it is a luxury so yeah I am giving myself a couple of years to do it whether it works or not, then I want to do something that feels good in my heart, and I believe that I can contribute in some way to the world. So that is the main thing...I have been really looking at what is fun, what I like to do, and what do I know....and I end up doing something that I don't know anything about .... going in totally in a new area which I think is kinda fun, to do something very different.”

In regards to both emotional and financial support, interviewee A mentioned that it was not straightforward for her. Although her strong-ties contacts are always supportive of whatever she ventures in and without doubt supported this idea, her husband was a bit reluctant when she decided to start her own company. Worried that her business idea might not be good enough to lead to profits, interviewee A’s husband, despite providing her with financial support, helping her with product designs and giving feedback on the products with the rest of the family, he kept on letting her know that she can quit if she wanted to.

“...he was supportive but was very reluctant to the thought and as soon as I would have a big huddle he was like, okay, you can quit if you want.”

Driven to succeed and to obtain genuine business advice on her idea, interviewee A decided to turn to people outside her strong-ties network, those in her weak-ties network, who she believed would look at the business opportunity instead of looking at her as a person. With no funds or prior knowledge about entrepreneurship and the sector in general, interviewee A says that she
decided to turn to professional people and organizations for help. She for example reached out to ALMI, Företagare Centrum, joined different female networks, and even obtained professors as mentors, but this was not without challenges. With the professional organizations, interviewee A says that she was met with somewhat negative thoughts, even from fellow women, conveyed through lots of questions, doubt, and recommendations she deemed not her way.

"...there are many people who have said something to me that I do not like to take into account because I did not believe it. Like almost everyone said that you have to start locally like start in your hometown. But I think that was just a stereotype picture because there I was, it was my third child and I think their picture was that I was just this mother who just loves to cook things ..."

Due to lack of belief in her idea, the organizations turned interviewee A down because they believed the idea to be too big for a mother of three to execute. This however gave interviewee A even more courage to work harder and use different measures to succeed and prove them wrong. So she joined more weak-ties networks. According to interviewee A, joining several networks such physical and virtual networks on Facebook, and mentorships provided her with people to share business knowledge and advice with, and people to socialize with.

"When I started as an entrepreneur I felt that I was alone so I was asked if I wanted to be part of this group of female entrepreneurs, which was really good because I met other people from totally other fields and through that we stayed together.... It is good to have someone with whom you can share the good and the bad."

When asked about the diversity of her weak-ties networks she replied that they are mostly small and composed of females and locals. She explained that although she prefers to have a mix, in cases of small groups it is easier to have only one gender to avoid misunderstandings in regards to the nature of the relationships. She added that, it is also not easy to find professionals who are interested and willing to contribute in the share of knowledge. She however stated that she has had difficulties staying part of or joining other new weak-ties networks partly because of lack of time, and also not being able to find people who share the same goals.

"But I sometimes like to step outside of these groups because some of the groups are more like complaining groups where people are talking about only things that are hard. ... I often find in some groups that consist of mainly women that in the end it ends up being not about business at all but about personal things."

She further stated that her contacts, within her weak-ties, change as her needs and wants change. For example, in the beginning she needed support in general however now that she knows about general business, she is a bit selective in the groups she joins, how she contributes, what she contributes, and how she spends her time.
Interviewee A: Individual Analysis

From this interview, it seems that in the beginning interviewee A went into business due to necessity. She had an urgently need for specific products for her child but the companies in the food industry were not willing to produce them so she decided to do it herself. With more experience and understanding of general business, interviewee A nowadays prefers to do business in areas that interests her. She can be now categorized as a classic entrepreneur after self-fulfillment and independence.

Because she had little knowledge in the business area she was venturing in at the start, she tried to get as much advice, knowledge and support as possible, not only from her strong-ties but weak-ties too, and as a result she ended up joining various networks. However this is not the case now that she is at a different stage in business, with different prioritizes and needs. Like with the business activities she takes on, she is also now selective in her networking activities. She has left some of the weak-ties networks she had joined in the beginning because of, one, lack of time and two, failure to find people who share her goals.

5.2 Interviewee B: April 11th 2017

After her doctoral thesis in service innovation, interviewee B has since been helping other companies with ways of developing customer relationships and services. It all started when a company she got to know while writing her doctoral thesis asked her to help them with service improvement. At the end of this, interviewee B decided to continue doing this kind of work and resort to entrepreneurship. However as a person with a lot of interest in entrepreneurship, she is currently running different projects at the same time.

“It was actually a customer who asked me to help them.... And then I said, okay I would like to keep on with this kind of work and so on. ... I was like, okay i am going to work like an advisor and help all the firms.”

In regards to support, interviewee B said that her strong-ties network, especially her family, is very supportive and shows a lot of interest in all the projects she takes on. Her husband, for example, being raised in an entrepreneurial family and also having a side business himself, gives her advice on different issues and helps out at home with the kids. She also added that her kids play a big role in testing her products and giving feedback. Her friends however, due to fear of failure, are at times not so supportive of venturing into self-employment

“My friends think I am crazy because of this security thing. They always say it is better to have a job. So I don't always have full support from the friends but I don’t really care about what people say.”
Interviewee B also added that she has been lucky enough to have, amongst her weak-ties contacts, a mentor, and a person to partner with in one of her three projects. According to her, the mentor, a very educated and experienced person, has been giving her advice on life and business for over years, and the business partner provides her with the relevant knowledge that she may lack, social support, and has been active in raising funds for their project. The latter has been of great importance because according to her experience, getting funds or investments for projects has not been an easy thing.

“... when I started with my product that I have on the side, everything was fine and so on and I was about to validate my idea with people outside, people in companies, to see if my ideas were interesting, but when I was about to find funding this is when I found it really hard. ... this is a tricky and really delicate question.”

She further said that it is also complicated to get funds from the governmental institutions established to provide support to entrepreneurs. Her experience with such institutions involved a lot asking and begging, poor treatment and long waiting, before she was provided with funds.

“There are structural problems because the ones giving money are the least risk taking persons working for the government with total power on you because they are the ones with the money. And after a while, they think that the government's money is their money, and they are there thinking and thinking and thinking, and wondering if they should give you some money months after months after months.”

When asked about her networks in general, she relied that they are of different entities from relatives of friends, acquaintances, to different established women's groups, meaning that they are composed of both strong-ties and weak-ties connections. She explained that for example, she once came to the realization that her friends’ spouses could be of great use to her projects and so she asked her friends to connect them. She used members in her strong-ties network to establish new weak-ties relationships. She also added that she met one of her now business partners while traveling. When asked about established female groups, interviewee B said that she wants to meet and be part of women groups so as to extend her weak-ties connections but however, it is scarce to find groups made of female entrepreneurs, women in the same industry, or women even with goals similar to hers.

“I don't have networks in this type of work. I know lots of girls in the research field but I have no network or people who would be close enough to what I do. ... I have heard of networks such as Women in IT but Women in IT doesn't mean entrepreneurial woman. It is not the same. I go to lots of networks with women and .... it is a lot of conservations about anything that has to do with daily small things, politics and so on but there is no strategic thinking about...”

In interviewee B’s opinion, a dream weak-ties network is one where you have people of all genders, who are aware, and have a mixture of things to contribute to their network mates. On the
future of female entrepreneurship, she said that it is something that is still under developed and should be developed because women have a lot of great clever ideas and solutions. She concluded by saying that female entrepreneurship is a step further to women’s equality and a message that women can do things outside the kitchen.

**Interviewee B: Individual Analysis**

During the interview it was established that interviewee B was pulled to entrepreneurship since it was more of a convenience for her to continue with this work and apply the knowledge she had acquired while completing her doctoral education. Since she prefers projects she finds fun, she can be categorized as a classic entrepreneur looking for growth and self-fulfillment.

Since she had been in the research for quite some time and in contact with various people, including colleagues and study participants, she already had existing weak-ties networks alongside her strong-ties prior to self-employment. With all the projects she is involved in today she seems very interested in connect with different people with resources and complementary skills that can contribute to her projects. With that said however, once she feels that she is not benefiting from a certain group in her weak-ties networks she moves on to another.

**5.3 Interviewee C: April 12th 2017**

After her education in music and media marketing, interviewee C worked for several companies in the entertainment industry for over nine years both as an employee and as a freelancer. The job that required her services only on freelance led to her first step into self-employment, however this was not fully pursued until she decided, while on maternity leave, to quit her then job and start her own company with a partner.

While working in the music industry interviewee C got to travel throughout Sweden as well as other countries and on these trips, she saw lots of good ideas that could be brought to her home city but did not act on her entrepreneurial instincts believing that it is only possible for “men over forty years”. However, when she got frustrated with the gender discrimination and lack of progress at her workplace, she decided to pursue her longtime dream.

“I could never really go anywhere from there. I had to leave and come back in order to climb the organizational ladder.”

In regards to support interviewee C said that she has been lucky to have a lot of supportive strong-ties members in her life without whom she would not have succeeded. First on the list is her
husband who according to her has made all this possible by helping out at home and giving her a lot of advice on things. She also credited the start and success of the business to her friend and business partner whose knowledge and skills have contributed greatly to the building of their product.

“I do get a lot of support from my spouse. I could have not done this without him being so supportive. …. One of the guys with whom I started the company with …. I could have not started the company without him and his skills but he could have not built this kind of product without my insight and knowledge”

Furthermore, she has established weak-ties relationships with a number of different people, and mentors who she talks to for advice because they have had experiences similar to hers. She said that although she is a feminist, her networks, both strong-ties and weak-ties, are composed of both men and women with good values

“I do talk a lot with my friends within this network because many have similar experiences. I have always been a feminist ... However with my network I decided that I need to work with good people with good values no matter are they male or female.”

She is also a board member of a group found to promote women in leading positions. Within this weak-ties group, workshops are held monthly with the purpose of encouraging creativity, and sharing of knowledge, sponsorship, and all tools needed to encourage entrepreneurship. Like the founders of the group, interviewee C joined this group because she wanted to do things differently. She changes her weak-ties networks and goes elsewhere once she sees opportunities that can make things change for her.

“It would be easier to stick on one thing and be happy with that but I have always wanted to push the bar. Even with work, I won’t settle just to be part of the team. …. If you think you cannot advance at your workplace, you won’t waste your time at work trying to.”

When asked about why women tend to have smaller networks of mostly strong-ties and a few weak-ties, interviewee C replied that she herself does have a big network but however believes this matter to be because women tend to have little time to build weak-ties relationships due to family responsibilities.

“... I can see that that is probably a pattern from society because a lot of women tend to do more work around the house and with children. That leaves less time to build their networks. If you have only a certain amount of time you go to the closest range. …. You work with what you have, and if you have to finish your work, pick up your kids, make dinner, that will contain what you do.”

She ended with a view that the future of women entrepreneurship seems bright due to lots of young women putting ideas into businesses because they have been brought up with a better
mindset. To her they seem to have the mentality that they can do anything and that the world is out there for grabs. And so believes this will likely make the competition more equal between genders hence changing things for the better.

Interviewee C: Individual analysis
Based on the interview, it came to light that the interviewee moved from being a part-time business owner as a freelancer to full-time entrepreneur when she established her current business in partnership with her business partner. Following the frustrating working conditions and low career progress at her then job, it could be argued that the interviewee was both pushed, and pulled after meeting her now business partner, who shared the same values and dreams. She can nowadays be characterized as a classic entrepreneur, driving for self-fulfillment and changing things for better.

Since her line of work that runs on being in contact with people and she is so driven to progress, interviewee C has been very active in her weak-ties networking activities. For instance, she has established relationships with different people and groups with whom she shares, advice and knowledge in regards to business and common interests. That being said however, because she is committed to do things differently she alters her weak-ties networks from one to another once she sees opportunities that can make things change for her.

5.4 Interviewee D: April 18th 2017

Although she was raised in a business family, prior to owning and running a retail shop interviewee D had been working as a primary school teacher for many years. With desire to change her then work life interviewee D thought of many things, including teaching somewhere else. However afraid that it might be hard for a woman of her age to get a new job, she started thinking of having her own shop at the farm, that she owns together with her husband, since she had for years been sewing dresses for her family members and friends in her free time.

“…. I was thinking of having my own shop at my farm but when I asked the designers who owned this shop ... they said that it was a bit too close to their shop, and so said no. And when I told my father, the businessman, he asked me if I had asked if I could buy the shop …. I called the owners and asked them if they wanted to sell the store to me …. They thought it through and decided to sell it to me.”

In regards to support, interviewee D said that she received and still receives a lot from her strong-ties connections, especially her family. Because many people in her family have their own businesses, they have showed her nothing but encouragement throughout her time in self-
employment. For instance, it was her dad that encouraged her to buy the shop and even went ahead to lend her money she used to pay off the former owners. Her cousin’s wife and best friend also has a similar shop and so they often communicate and share ideas on how to handle different issues regarding their businesses.

“My family they just said that if it a dream, then go for it…. And to buy all this, I borrowed money from my father’s company. … And also my cousin’s wife has a similar shop. We have been best friends for a long time and we call each other a couple of times per week just so ask each other how do you do with a customer like this and so on…”

She also added that as far as more funding is concerned, it helped a lot that she and her husband were already running a business and had already established a good weak-ties relationship with a bank in their hometown.

“…. after two and a half years or something I borrowed something from the bank as well. That was not that difficult because we already had a business, so we talked to the same man. ... he connected me with another person in the bank who was very good at shop business.”

When asked whether she was part of any official weak-ties groups she replied that unfortunately not. She said that although she would like to be part of one, she does not know of a group with people in her line business where they meet regularly to share information.

“I don’t know if there is something for me. I know there is network in [the city] only for women, but not people in this business where they have breakfast together and something like that…”

In addition, she said that it is not easy to just talk anybody, regardless of the ties, about this business because it would be hard for them to understand. And for that reason she has only been reaching out to people like her best friend, and a few weak-ties connection such the owners of the franchise, and a few fellow shop owners she normally goes to annual exhibitions with.

“It is not so easy to talk to anybody about this business …. If you talk to your sister or husband, they don’t know …. But I have got help. When we go to exhibition, we are always the same people who go. So I meet them every year and sometimes if I have a dress and one want it in two months and cannot get it, can call and get it from me…”

Interviewee D said that she is interested in extending her weak-ties networks by joining different groups. She has even tried to encourage other shop owners on the same street to meet regularly to discuss the issues that affect all them. However, these efforts have failed because, one, they are all, including interviewee D, too busy and on top of that, they all have different work schedules

“I am interested but I have always been a bit too busy. … But I think that the network does not work when we have so much work. It is easy if you have an employee and able to go whenever during daytime.”
In her opinion and from what she has read, although starting a business may not be easy there are more women interested in it today compared to ten years ago. And to those thinking of starting a sole proprietorship her advice is that, go in knowing that it will take a lot of your time and will always be in your mind no matter where you may be.

**Interviewee D: Individual Analysis**

She jumped directly to full-time entrepreneurship after feeling discontent with her employment at that time and being in belief that she could not get another job, she decided to take fulfilling her dream. With that said, it can be argued that interviewee D represents a person who was both pushed and pulled to go into self-employment.

Due to being a sole proprietor and therefore lacking of time to engage in establishing weak-ties networks, interviewee D seems to rely mostly on her strong-ties and significant others. For instance, her relative with a similar business with whom she contacts at a regular basis to share business related experiences. Having said that however, during the interview she showed desire of wanting to extend her weak-ties networks but with people in the same line of work because she thinks that it is hard for others to understand.

### 5.5 Interviewee E: Received on April 17th 2017

The interviewee is a full-time entrepreneur owning a Foot Care Clinic with her husband and a wholesale company in partnership, selling foot therapy products. She has been running the clinic for twenty years now and the wholesale company came into picture about 15 years ago, when she discovered that there is a need for a larger variety products. Now, the wholesale business has been developing so much that the interviewee is planning step out from her initial business to devote more time to product development.

Before becoming a full-time entrepreneur, the interviewee was fully employed in the municipality and only part-time working with her own businesses. However, as soon as her company started to be profitable, she decided to quit referring to the fact that

> “I did enjoy being employed there, but it is more stimulating to have your own business... One can decide herself over many things. It is lot of fun to build something concrete all by yourself...”

She comes from an entrepreneurial family herself, which could explain the fact that becoming an entrepreneur was nothing extraordinary to her family. In fact, her mother had a clinic as well,
from where she gained vital experience. She finds working for herself very stimulating but at times one might feel lonely and insecure when obliged to take decisions alone. Therefore, she often misses sharing thoughts and solving problems with someone, but there is no urgency for her company to hire more people and expand to other markets.

In the beginning, interviewee E reached out to her weak-ties, such as professional organizations that provided her with help in product development, something she is still pleased about. Today, she is not part of any “official network” due to lack of time however, she finds the people with whom she is working with important in terms of support. More closely, due to the nature of her business, she has other self-employed people working by her side with whom she is discussing and cooperating with in relation to issues they are facing. Moreover, she also receives help from her family, and especially with the fact that her husband has a well-paying job, has made it possible for her as well to start running her own company. However, due to being a sole proprietor and a mother of two, she is lacking time to balance the needs of her work such as engaging in weak-ties networking activities with her home life. However now that her children are older the issue is not as prominent.

“I work more than full-time with both of my companies. When my children were small, I was combining my time with them and work...today combining work and family is not that much of a problem...My children give me extra help when needed and my husband is helps a lot so this affects him the most...Since my husband is not part of running the business it is important that he feels involved.”

In regards to composition of the unofficial networks she is part of, she could not explain exactly why some people are part of her weak-ties network saying that sometimes it just happens to turns out to be so. However she was clear that her being active in weak-ties networks depends on what kind of benefits she is intending to withdraw. However, she believes that relationships should be mutually benefitting and ideal, and so would like to have like-minded people in her networks. Not necessarily from the same industry, but people from whom she can get ideas and positivity.

Interviewee E: Individual Analysis
Interviewee E’s move to full-time entrepreneurship resulted from the fact that she felt that running her own business would be more stimulating in comparison to working for someone else. Secondly, there also seemed to be demand for foot therapy products, an area she grew up seeing her mum work in, and so she decided to maximize on this opportunity. She can be categorized as a classic entrepreneur, given that she is looking for self-fulfillment and growth in regards to her business.
In regards to financial and emotional support, she strongly relies mostly on her strong-ties connections made of family and colleagues. Her low involvement in weak-ties networking activities has resulted from her lacking time given that she runs the both businesses alone, and before her kids got old, she also she had difficulties balancing work and family life. She however added that in the few weak-ties networks she is part of, her engagement and activeness depends on the kind of benefits she expects to gain from them.

### 5.6 Interviewee F: April 20th 2017

Interviewee F was a trained and practicing nurse and midwife for some years. However her switch to having her own business started when she got diagnosed with a disease that could not allow her to continue practicing midwifery. With a lot of desire to continue working in the same area, she decided to study sexology and theology, and later opened a sexology clinic where she first worked on part-time then later on full-time.

“For me going on retirement due to sickness was not an alternative. I wanted to do something that I could manage. Working with sexology became a way to extend my midwifery work... sitting still at home was not an option. I have a strong inner driving force to have fun and be challenged”

In regards to support, interviewee F said that her strong-ties connections have been very supportive, especially her husband who has been standing by her from the start. He has been there for her economically and emotionally, and without him she would not have been able to focus on doing this. She also said that it was easier for them to endure the struggles of starting a business without any outside help because they do not have children

“We also have no children, which makes it feel a little easier. Had we had several children, the economic situation would have been more difficult..... I did not get any financial help. Many in my area thought it was strange that I would try to live on this. My husband has helped me by constantly supporting me and believing in my skills.”

She further added that she gets some of her new ideas from both her strong-ties and weak-ties networks composed of women she considers as friends, and professional colleagues respectively. For instance, she stated that she is part of a weak-ties group of women entrepreneurs with whom she meets often and gets inspired about different business issues

“The most important core issue is to feel that people understand what I'm talking about when I describe difficulties of running companies. ... In these networks you can talk about accounting, different systems or techniques that may be important for one's work.
When asked about her view on female entrepreneurship, she replied that it is really tough especially to raise funds without having someone behind to support you. In regards to extending one’s networks, she mentioned that one needs adequate funds so that it becomes easier to hire someone to help with some tasks and give the owner more free time to engage in networking.

She ended the interview by stating her main challenge and giving advice to other, or would be female entrepreneurs. Her main challenge is that she finds it hard to balance the energy and power needed in expanding yet she has little time to implement these ideas so as to keep her clients from going somewhere else. For the advice part, she said that it is really good to make time and meet others because although at times this can lead to competition, there is more to gain from cooperating.

*Interviewee F: Individual Analysis*

From the interview it seems clear that interviewee F was pushed into full-time entrepreneurship due to a sickness that made it impossible for her to continue carrying out her job as a midwife. Being driven to have fun and also challenge herself, interviewee F came to a decision to go back to school and study something that she felt could enable her to start a business in the same line of work.

Besides her strong-ties networks, interviewee F also receives great support and advice from different weak-ties connections she has established. She tried to stay to keep in touch with all her networks given that she understands their importance which is evident in the benefits she gains from them. She ended by advising others to make time and meet different people because there is more to gain from co-operating with other people.

5.7 Interviewee G: April 27th 2017

Being 11 years in business this year, the interviewee started her first own company after finishing her studies in entrepreneurship and creative industries. After graduating, she received an attractive job opportunity, but decided to return to her home region and start her own business instead.

“I don’t know how I come up with the idea that I have to have my own business, but at some point, I knew that it was the only way I wanted it to be…. I think it is a way to be happy to have your own thing and build your own thing… I just knew for some reason that I had to go home…. If I would not start it now, I would not do it. Maybe I don’t have the guts to do it later, so I had to do it now when I had the strength and the energy to do this. At that time, I was 26.”
Currently, she is involved in three different kind of businesses, started at different times. Her very first business was within tourism, arranging guided tours, as she felt that being with people and in nature was close to her heart. She said that having not had any prior knowledge regarding the business, she ended up doing extensive research in the area, which involved meeting a lot of people.

“\textit{It was just the only branch that maybe here I have something to share. I don’t know anything else... I wanted to have a story to share so I read a lot and interviewed a lot...I started to find the information, and talked with lot of old people who knew about history...I learned and collected lot of information.}”

During the years, through pivotal business opportunities, her business turned into event planning, which is a business she is about to leave to dedicate time to other businesses. For instance she entered into real estate with 6 other people she met in an event for local entrepreneurs, another field she did not have prior knowledge of.

“\textit{...in one of the networking events we realized that someone needs to build apartments. Why don’t we do it? We gathered everyone who wanted to take part and for some reason I became part of this like ‘yes, I want to be part of this and I don’t know anything about it.’}”

In terms of support, her spouse has been helping with business when ever needed, and just about the year ago her enthusiasm about entrepreneurship led them to buy a hotel together. Building on that, attitude of her strong-ties networks towards her entrepreneurial career has been approving as they know how she is as a person prone to quick decision-making based on gut feeling, rich with ideas and prefers to set her own schedule. This is why strong-ties contacts were not surprised when she resorted to entrepreneurship. But at the same time her family worries about the stress of self-employment and have been there to calm her down time to time when her life seemed too hectic.

She explains that she has been very active in networking and that her weak-ties networks are composed of both genders. Nonetheless, recently she has taken a few steps back in networking as she has felt lazy and tired of meeting the same people time after time. However she emphasizes the importance of networking in terms of new opportunities as you meet people and talk about business. She is also part of an official network “Företags Bolaget”, which is a collection of local companies that arranges different events and organizes meetings for entrepreneurs and business owners to meet.

“\textit{I know that when you meet other people you meet new jobs. There are entrepreneurship parties, Friday breakfasts. These kinds of things. Almost every time you meet someone: ‘Oh yes, I am going to contact you about this...we have an idea’...it leads to business.}”
She emphasized however, that in these weak-ties groups there are people who are more like-minded and share her goals with whom she tends to share more personal and detailed information with, which makes those relationships highly valuable for her. Similarly, she highlighted the fact that even though she could have started her business anywhere else, she feels that doing it in her home region has been a facilitating factor especially in terms of pre-existing contacts, both strong-ties and weak-ties contacts.

“...you need contacts, you need help and know who to call and where to find good people to work with and for. Of course, it is easier if you have good networks from the start. Also, you have to be very active in getting them. “

Financing her business was not an issue, but in the beginning of her entrepreneurial career she was rather surprised how easy it was to acquire beneficial information for the business. The local companies she contacted and interviewed, companies that she is still in contact with, were more than willing to share, which was something she did not expect to happen when she started off her career.

“I contacted so many different people and different companies, and I thought that companies would not want to share with me because they would think that I would be their competitor. But it was the other way around...I got a lot of information but I also think that when you show interest in someone’s profession then they are eager to share with you...Most people get a lifted up because of it.”

Interviewee G: Individual Analysis

As a former entrepreneurship student, interviewee G decided to venture in entrepreneurship because this is how she wanted it to be and even believed it to be the way to build her own thing and be happy. Taking into consideration her educational background, the interviewee arguably became an entrepreneur for the purpose of self-fulfillment and independence, which makes her a classic entrepreneur.

Interviewee G seems to be very active in her networking activities, both with strong and weak-ties, and this is not surprising given that relationships pay a big role in her business. They are the fuel that drives her business through providing her with vital information and more business opportunities. However of recent, due to the feeling of stagnation because of meeting the same people time after time, she has taken a few steps back from some of her weak-ties networks. Furthermore, she has resorted to sharing more and in details with people she considers to be like-minded in these weak-ties networks.
5.8 Interviewee H: April the 29th 2017

Six years ago, Interviewee H started her own ice cream factory in a response to the struggle of finding a job that would reflect her previous experience and educational background in Communication. The interviewee wanted to create a business that is fun, vivid and enjoyable and thereby came up with ice cream. Having no previous experience regarding the matter, the interviewee started off by borrowing the needed equipment, learning some recipes from a chef friend and keeping a blog so that people could follow her path. Becoming an entrepreneur for her was a way to become in charge of her own destiny, and stepping out from the cycle of applying for many jobs, running to interviews and continuously rearranging family time based on that.

“I thought that this time I will not want to focus on so much how to get a job. I mean running to all those interviews, my husband coming home early to be there for the kid because I was gone...So I just decided that I’m going to have to do something about this. Take care of my own career, and destiny... So that is how I started: ‘Yes, I’m going to build my own brand! What is it going to be? I want something fun that people like and can get enough of...Yes, I going to start to make ice cream’, without actually thinking about the logistics in it. "

The work-life balance has not so far been working, as she can easily work 60 hours per week. However, she thinks that she has still been able to do more than what would have not been possible with regular employment, such as leaving work earlier for kids. She however receives a lot of support from her strong-ties especially her husband in regards to emotional support and domestic responsibilities.

“My husband is very supportive. When I said that I’m going to start an ice cream factory, he just said ‘oh, ok.’...He has been quite successful...He has been doing quite a lot in his business and company so it was my turn at that point...He has a full-time job and he does most of the work at home, so you can imagine how much I work. I work probably 12 hours per day during the weekdays and maybe 4 hours each day during the weekend...”

Similarly, she is explained that she has received lot of support from her friends. For instance, when she needed to learn how to make ice cream she got help from a friend who knew how to do that. In addition to that, her friends are purchasing her products and actively sharing links online to make the brand more known. Also, whenever her company launches new flavors, neighbors and children are usually given the products for testing. However, she mentioned that because of being busy at work, she is not able to physically meet with some them and now uses virtual means as Facebook and to stay in contact.

In the beginning the company was financed solely by the interviewee and her husband but as more investments were needed, the weak-ties connections were contacted and four people, she knew in
advance, bought shares from the company and additionally, the company did crowdfunding to raise more capital for the company. The interviewee did not approach any organizations supporting entrepreneurs due to lack of time, however she concludes that maybe she should have had but she did not have enough self-esteem when it came to her business. Banks were not interested in financing the business and therefore crowd funding turned out to be the most appealing option.

The interviewee has not been actively involved in any official business networks other than a few she reached out in the beginning when she needed to acquire business knowledge and more connections. Her low involvement in weak-ties networks has been due to lack of time and not being good at networking. Nevertheless, she mentions the importance of networking and also points out her own flaws regarding the matter, referring to the fact that she did not utilize the benefits of being in these networks as she should have had. However, she received vital tips from organizations that support entrepreneurs at start-up stage.

“I am not that good at using my networks and that is because I never really have the time. I probably could have grown my business if I had networked more...When I started, I was in a few networks trying to know how to solve things and know what to do, but then I have been too busy to network, which is bad. You should always network and meet people, have different groups...Sometimes I have been in individual meetings with ALMI or Företagares Centrum but never in an actual network for long.”

Interviewee H: Individual analysis

Frustrated by not getting a job in her area of expertise, interviewee H decided to become a full-time entrepreneur of a business she considered fun, vivid, and enjoyable. For her this was also a way to take control of her own working life and end the struggle in the labor the market. In other words, taking the above into consideration, interviewee H was push to start her own business and therefore categorizes as forced entrepreneur.

Because of lack of time, not knowing how to network, and considering the reason as to why she went into self-employment, interviewee H seems to be passive at networking with her weak-ties connection despite acknowledging the importance of networking. For that reason, she mostly relies on her strong-ties networks but however, for some of the contacts within these ties she has resorted to keeping in touch virtually.
Interviewee I is a full-time entrepreneur who is active involved in several projects. Having her background in Health Science and studying several other topics besides that, she describes herself to be a one sort of “Jack-of-all-trades” person, who is involved in many different projects and doing lot of different things. Due to her specific knowledge on the relationship between health, leadership, and working places, she was requested to deliver workshops, lectures, and online trainings. In addition to that, she has written books related to the same topic.

Being not sure of why she became an entrepreneur, she mentioned that “...it just happened...” when people became familiar with her knowledge and started to ask her to share her knowledge. She has a determined nature and therefore, her being active in many projects has not been a matter of wonder to her family.

“It is not a straight line to whatever you want to achieve...I like to refer to the heart rate signal. If it is flat, you are dead...I have always been doing it in one way or another, so I think they were not surprised... I don’t think it matters whether you are employed in our own business if you can do what you want to do...”

She is triggered by simply doing things that are beneficial to other people, and she especially enjoys mentoring and seeing her impact on other people

“I like putting smile in other people’s faces...I like the idea of increasing people’s empowerment...and it is very interesting to see the effects and seeing things taking off...[and] ...I think that is one of my paybacks from doing it.”

The support of her strong-ties contacts, at times, has allowed her to accomplish many things. The needed resources, she has acquired by bootstrapping, and relying on diverse entrepreneurship programs in her weak-ties networks. In regards to finance however, she funds her business on top of what she attains from her strong-ties contacts. She has not reached out to entrepreneurship programs because the process is complicated.

“I finance myself...but of course I would not have been able to do it without family and friends helping...It is too complicated with entrepreneurship programs and it is always connected to some kind of competition. I guess I don’t have enough patience.”

However, when it comes to business related ideas, which she can obtain from anywhere although, she is usually careful with pitching or sharing her ideas with others to avoid her ideas from getting killed. She just does them and is not that concerned with measuring success in any specific way. The interviewee is an active networker and a member of several weak-ties networks as networking for her is the source of business. When it comes to maintaining these networks, different social media channels have turned out to be inevitable for her. She is also very generous about
connecting with people and that making a difference between “official” and “unofficial” networks is not applicable to her. In her point of view, as an entrepreneur your private life and working life are intertwined.

“I believe in givers gain. I’m one way trying to help people. When I’m meeting people, I’m thinking ‘Hmm, she should benefit from meeting this person…you need to have like-minded people around you…You meet people, they turn out to be your friends and vice versa…you discuss both work and private life…You cannot separate those two. Especially not as an entrepreneur, which is a lifestyle.’”

She is also active in arranging and participating different business events however, for her to commit herself to specific events on a weekly basis is challenging due to the mobile nature of her work.

“I was asked to be on one network, but it is just impossible because I move around a lot and meet people all the time…and not always in the same city. It would be a different thing If I would have a more permanent business location.”

By arranging an event, people from her current networks, both strong-ties and weak-ties, tend to participate as well due to their interest in what she is doing. She thinks it is important to always take the opportunity to build your networks when there is the possibility to do so.

In her point of view, female entrepreneurship in Sweden is well acknowledged and women have a great mentality of getting things done, and delivering work that is of high quality. Since women have started to enter the working life, fill positions in top management and become entrepreneurs, they have had to learn “another language”.

**Interviewee I: Individual Analysis**

For interviewee I, entrepreneurship just happened following the demand for her specific knowledge. She has become a “Jack-of-all-trades” who is involved in multiple projects, enjoying having an impact on other people and making things happen. It can be said that in the beginning she was pulled to entrepreneurship because there was a need for her skills, however, nowadays she is more of a classic entrepreneur enjoying the independence that comes with doing things one enjoys and likes.

It seems that networking comes as a natural part of her work, and it is not surprising that she is also active in arranging networking events, and connecting other. To her it is always important to take the opportunity to build networks whenever possible. However, at times it is hard for her meet up with her connections due to the mobile nature of her work. She is emphasizing the importance of being with like-minded people, and for her there is no difference between strong-ties and weak-ties as being an entrepreneur is a lifestyle.
6 Discussion

In this part, we discuss the themes that have emerged from our findings with the help of the theories presented in the literature review. By coding the empirical data, we have detected most frequently occurring themes that are in importance to delivering the purpose of this study, namely “What role can networks play in advancing Female Entrepreneurship?” and further “What hinders female entrepreneurs from using weak-ties networks?”. Before going into details, in the table below the most frequently emerging themes have been summarized and divided between knowledge factors and support factors. The interviewees are represented by letter on the left side of the table and strong-ties (S) and weak-tie (W) are referred to with their first letter. For instance, it could be read from the table that interviewee A uses both strong-ties and weak-ties to get feedback.

(Figure 2): Summary of the findings.
6.1 Knowledge Factors

6.1.1 Feedback

Strong-ties

From the empirical data strong-ties, especially spouses and close friends, seem to be the first people nascent entrepreneurs approach when searching for feedback on their ideas and if they need the functionality and viability of the ideas tested regardless of the type of business they may be in. This may be, as interviewee I said, due to fear of getting their ideas killed at an early stage. The empirical findings show that because they know the entrepreneur as a person, the spouses and close friends positively support the entrepreneurs’ ideas right from the start to encourage the entrepreneurs to continue working on the ideas to turn them into actual products or services. On this matter, interviewee A however, gave an indication that strong-ties connections may at times not give genuinely feedback on the ideas because they tend to focus on the person rather than the idea. It is for this reason that she decided in the beginning of her entrepreneurship to turn away from her strong-ties contacts to weak-ties ones to obtain a genuine feedback.

6.1.2 Advice

Strong-ties

The findings also show that entrepreneurs get a lot of advice from their spouses, in some cases owing to the fact that some of them either have business background or are entrepreneurs themselves. For instance, interviewee D reported to get advice from her father but even more importantly from her cousin’s wife who also runs a similar business. Because their businesses are similar, they often communicate and share ideas on how to handle different issues regarding their businesses. At a very broad level, these notions could be argued to be in line with Johannisson (2000) who concluded that social networks can provide entrepreneurs with guidance. However, the theory is not taking a stand on strong-ties networks separately, regarding the matter.

From the empirical data it seems that female entrepreneurs indeed use their strong-ties to access information, knowledge and opportunities, however the information and knowledge they are drawing are mostly related to advice and feedback that can be used in product development. Even though the theory suggests that entrepreneurs try to compensate their lack of knowledge by aiming
at interacting with people possessing complementary qualities (Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Mosey & Wright, 2007; Liñán & Santos, 2007), this may not be purely applicable to strong-ties. Strong-ties can provide an entrepreneur with an easy and inexpensive access to support product development and this may be as Granovetter (1985) claims that support from family and friends is argued to be more economically reliable as it is accessible and rich in details and accuracy. Aldrich et al. (1995) further explained that in strong-ties there is an unspoken reciprocity between the member and as Arregle et al. (2013) noted, trust reduces opportunism and uncertainty concern, which can in turn lead to an easy and flourished way of sharing knowledge and resources (Jones et al., 1997; Dekker, 2004; de Beer et al., n.d.)

6.1.3 Knowledge and Skills

Weak-ties

The findings have brought to light that female entrepreneurs actively engage with different weak-ties networks whenever they are in need to acquire new knowledge and information needed to succeed in a new area of business, especially at the early stage of their entrepreneurial career. Due to lack of prior knowledge or experience in the businesses and projects some got involved in, some of the interviewees decided to reach out to various weak-ties connections they believed to be in position to provide the needed knowledge and skills. For example interviewee G compensated her lack of knowledge by doing research and conducting interviews with the local people and businesses in order to build a proper knowledge base upon which she could build her business on. With that said however, it seems from the findings that even those female entrepreneurs with existing knowledge base in an area can still reach out to their weak-ties networks for complementary skills. Interviewee C, for instance, started her company with a friend of a friend who she says without his knowledge combined with her knowledge the company would not exist. In support, old findings showed that nascent entrepreneurs tend to lack the important skills and knowledge needed due not having prior experience in running a business (Shane, 2000; Vohora et al., 2004) but this can be compensated by interacting and cooperating with other people possessing the complementary skills and knowledge (Davidsson & Honig, 2003; Mosey & Wright, 2007; Liñán & Santos, 2007).

From the empirical finding, it is clear that women are neither restricted to become entrepreneurs only in fields in which they have experience and knowledge in nor limited to only employ their strong-ties networks, as stated in theories. Rather, female entrepreneurs are ready to approach and
co-operate with weak-ties networks as well to obtain relevant information and knowledge they may be lacking to succeed in their entrepreneurial ventures. However, their being active in approaching and engaging with their weak-ties connections appears to depend on their goals and motives in terms of entrepreneurship. The results of this study indicated that it is important to have in one’s weak-ties networks people with good values, like-minded, and with similar goals in order to avoid conflicting aims and sharing of irrelevant resources. According to Shane (2000) being part of networks made of such people to a great degree assures the provision of relevant resources. However, the findings also reported differences in the easiness and experiences of acquiring information and knowledge from weak-ties networks. For some, such as interviewee G, it was surprisingly easy while others, such interviewee A, struggled with finding experienced people who were interested and willing to contribute in the share of knowledge. With this however remaining constant, according to the findings female entrepreneurs who are more driven by growth and self-fulfillment tend to be more active in approaching weak-ties networks of people with good values, like-minded and with similar goals to extend their knowledge base so as to succeed in the venture.

6.1.4 Opportunities, Customers, and Business Partners

Weak-ties

Furthermore, based on the empirical data weak-ties networks can provide one with new business ideas and job opportunities. By interacting with people with different backgrounds, in regards to business and industry, some of the interviewees mentioned that it is possible for female entrepreneurs to spot new business opportunities, markets, and business partners. For example interviewees G and I, who are very active in extending their strong-ties and weak-ties networks, emphasized that for them the importance of networking is embedded in the idea of discovering new opportunities. Interviewee G for instance said that “I know that when you meet other people you meet new jobs...Almost every time you meet someone.” By the same token spoke interviewee I who said that networking with different people is a source of business for her. This might however be because interviewees G and I are dealing in businesses that require them to meet different people on a regular basis. In regards to new ideas, interviewee B got the initial idea to start a business from a company with which she had worked with during her studies and now she is venturing in different projects with her business partner she happened to meet while traveling. Almost in the same way turned things out for interviewee C who also met her current business partner by accident. According to Burt (2005) and Martinez and Aldrich (2011) this is especially
true with weak-ties networks because the meeting of diverse groups of people involved can enable the flow of wide range of sources of information and different perspectives, hence helping in the discovery of new ideas, and to organize relationships needed to get projects in motion (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986). With that said however, it could be argued that in some industries having networks is more vital than in others, meaning that female entrepreneurs in business areas that greatly rely on relationships and interactions need to be very active and alert in acquiring new contacts. Regardless of that, it is of importance to make connections with people or organizations that can provide resources relevant to one’s entrepreneurial venture. On that point the interviewees emphasized the need to be selective in the networks one establishes, the level of engagement one puts in, and the time one spends as a member.

6.2 The Support Factors

6.2.1 Financial Support

*Strong ties*

From the findings, strong-ties contacts, specifically spouses, play the biggest role in regards to the funding of new female entrepreneurial ventures. They can contribute either directly by owning the company in partnership or indirectly by acting as the sole financial supporter of the household before the female entrepreneur’s venture stabilizes. For example, interviewee E who owns the business in partnership with her spouse explained that because her husband has a well-paying job, she has been able to concentrate on stabilizing her business without much worry of their home economy. By the same token interviewee F mentioned that without her husband’s financial support she would have not been able focus on her own business. Similarly interviewee H who recently opened her business up to public investment in form of a crowdfunding also disclosed that it was she and her husband who funded the business in the beginning before they brought in their families and friends. The reason behind this could be because of trust, as observed by Jack (2005) that the ongoing relationship leads to trust which makes the parties able to have discussions and reduce uncertainties. The interviewees trust their spouses, and the funds they get from them come with no economic costs and liabilities attached, as observed by Granovetter (1985). Furthermore, the common reliance on spouses for financial support in this context could be due to what Ahl et al. (2014) mentioned. They said that regardless of the welfare state, an entrepreneur is running a double risk as unemployment benefits are tied to monthly income. Therefore, it could
be argued that the financial support provided by the spouse plays an important role in protecting the household’s economy, and thereby facilitating and enabling the entrepreneurial process.

**Weak-ties**

Only after approaching strong-ties did interviewees report moving towards weak-ties for funding. One of the main reasons cited related to this matter was problems related to getting funding through “official” channels other than friends and family, even though extensive initial investments from their personal savings had been made. This notion is against what theory has said related to the matter. Namely, nascent entrepreneurs are claimed to often lack the needed skills, experience, and the ability to give collaterals (Cassar, 2004), which makes convincing the institutions that give loans and grants challenging (Martinez & Aldrich, 2011). However, with interviewees B and H the case was the opposite. In spite of having made extensive personal investments, interviewee B stated that applying for funding in her case involved lot of asking and begging and a long waiting before getting any funding. Interviewee H in turn recalled that banks for instance did not show much interest towards her ice cream business, and therefore crowdfunding appeared to be the way out for them. From the findings it seems that these institutions feared to invest in these ventures because these interviewees had no prior experience in successfully running a business. For interviewee D, who together with her spouse already had a business up in running and had established relationship with a bank, such issues did not come up with the banking system when she applied for funding. It can be argued that experience and the relationship that she had with the bank prior ensured the service to be more personal and the process to be more straightforward. By the same token, it could be argued that maybe applying for funding from another bank with no pre-established relationship would have brought in similar problems to interviewee D.

**6.2.2 Emotional and Operational Support**

**Strong-ties**

It was highlighted by all of the interviewees that the support of family and friends is very substantial, especially the roles played by spouses, which many have greatly acknowledged. For instance, interviewee B disclosed that her family, that is to say spouse and kids, gives her a lot of encouragement by showing a lot of interest in all the projects she takes on, something that boosts her confidence and willingness to take all measures to see the projects succeed. She added that
her husband gives her advice on different issues with her projects and that he is also very helpful at home with the kids. Similarly, interviewee C brought forward that her husband is probably more dedicated to housework than she is, and that they discuss about business related matters a lot. These observations can however be argued to be as a result of, one, the social system and values of the country they live in, as described in the empirical frame of reference. In Sweden, where the interviewees live, both men and women have equal rights and they are all expected to take on equal obligations and responsibilities in all matters, especially in regards to domestic responsibilities. Secondly, it might be about giving each other equal opportunities. The husbands of the female entrepreneurs in this study were reported to have good solid jobs and businesses for quite some time, and so it probably was time for the wives to take turn. This was explicitly pointed out by interviewee H who said about her husband that “He has been quite successful...He has been doing quite a lot in his business and company so it was my turn at that point...”

With that said however, it is not only immediate family members that provide emotional support within the strong-ties connection, friends also play a big role. Friends can act as a source of comfort, market, and advertisement to their friends in entrepreneurship according what these interviewees have experienced. According to Arregle et al. (2013) networks can provide entrepreneurs with emotional backing, advice, motivation, and encouragement but what they did not clearly indicate, but was found in the empirical findings is that, family and friends can at times show discouragement which can have a negative impact on the entrepreneurial process. Due to the commitment and solidarity connected to their relationship, strong-ties at times tend to worry about the risks involved in entrepreneurship and in turn try to discourage their loved ones from pursuing it, taking it as a way of sparing them from the pain. For instance interviewee A reported that even though she has received lot of support in regards to her business idea from her closest, they have also shown reluctance towards the thought of her starting her own business. At times when things get tough, her husband quickly reminds her that she can quit whenever she feels like.

**Weak-ties**

According to the empirical findings female entrepreneurs also obtain support from their weak-ties networks. For instance interviewee A turned to weak-tie networks in search for support for her business idea. She was hoping to find people who would look at her business and not who she is as a person, and that was one of the reasons why she decided to contact professionals and organizations supporting entrepreneurship. The reason for this action is not clear per se, however, it might be that interviewee A wanted to attain support based on critical analysis of her business idea but not based on the familiarity embedded in strong-ties contacts. Granovetter (1973) has
found that weak-ties can provide an entrepreneur with a critical analysis on the project throughout
the venture phases. It seems that in certain occasions it can be challenging to get objectivity from
strong-ties networks, and that lack of objectivity could explain why at least emotional support
from strong-ties networks is sometimes limited. Building on this, it makes sense to turn to weak-
ties where parties are engaging only occasionally to exchange information when it is needed, as
declared by Katz and Williams (1997).

6.3. Hindrances

With different researchers indicating that women's networks tend to differ from those of men
(Bird, 1989; Brush, 1992; Rosa and Hamilton, 1994), in size, composition, formation, and
management, the need rose up to explore what hinders female entrepreneurs from having and
utilizing wider weak-ties networks. In this part this matter will be discussed with the interrogation
of both old and new findings.

6.3.1 Lack of Time

According to the empirical findings, the main factor that hinders female entrepreneurs from
having bigger networks of not only family and friends is the lack of time. On this issue,
interviewee C said that although she herself has a big network, she however believes that this is
common in women due to lack of time. She added that because women tend to do more at home,
that leaves them little room to engage in extending their networks. This issue has been a topic of
many discussions and many studies have agreed with interviewee C. For example, Munch et al.
(1997) and Hunt (1983) found that, due to domestic responsibilities women tend to be confined
at home and hence with little time to establish bigger networks in comparison to their male
counterparts. Logically, this is understandable because as interviewee C said, one can only use
what one has. If one has limited time to take care of the children and the whole household on top
of having a business to run, then it would be very difficult for one to actively engage in widening
one’s weak-ties networks. In contrary to this however, some of the other interviewees said that
their lack of time was because of being too busy at work rather than at home. For example,
interviewee D mentioned that she is very interested in forming a group with fellow shop owners
on her street however, this has failed since they are all so busy with work given that they are all
sole proprietors. Similarly, interviewees A, E and H reported facing the same issue. Interviewee
H even added that at times she ends up working close to 60 hours a week. Moreover, for her,
having a lot to do at work has gone as far as even affecting her ability to physically meet with some of her strong-ties contacts. She has nowadays been forced to employ virtual means in order to stay in touch with some of them. This new observation might however be because the study has been conducted in Sweden where there are policies in places that can help take part of the domestic responsibilities away from women when needed. Also in this context, it is more of a norm for both men and women to equally take on domestic tasks. As mentioned before, in Sweden men and women have the same obligations and rights (Statistics Sweden, 2014) and this extends to all aspects of life. This means that women do not always have to worry about rushing home after work to take care of the domestic needs of the household. Furthermore, the provision of gender neutral parental leave and childcare in Sweden implies that women can rely on their spouses and child care institutes in regards to looking after their children when busy with work. For the above reasons, it is not surprising that these interviewees reported receiving a lot of support and help from their spouses, both in connection to domestic tasks and the business.

6.3.2 Failure to find like-minded people

The second reason for having smaller networks according to our findings is the failure to find groups of like-minded people. During the interviews, it came to light that the participants found it very important to be in contact with people who share their values, line of business, experiences, expectations, and goals. Having networks made of such people assures the provision of relevant resources to a great degree and as Shane (2000) and Vohora et al. (2004) concluded, in order to discover and act upon new opportunities, and eliminate uncertainties one needs a network that can provide the relevant resources the entrepreneur may be in lack of. However, in agreement with what the interviewees reported, once a network stops serving its purpose and becomes less beneficial to an entrepreneur either due to changes in the needs of the entrepreneur or the members of the network, then the logical action to take is to move on to a more valuable network. On this matter Garnsey (1998) and Stam et al. (2014) added that, once the goals and status of the entrepreneur evolve there is always a necessity for new network connections. For instance, interviewee C said that she prefers to be in contact with people with good values, similar experiences, and those that can make things change for the better for her but if any of the above changes, she moves on to another network. Interviewee B is currently facing this issue because many of the women’s groups she has been to seem to focus on other things rather than business and strategic thinking, and this is now negatively affecting her willingness to keep on taking part in these networks. It seems like many would rather have just a few networks as long as they are in accordance with their goals and expectations.
6.3.3 Having a low drive for growth

From the results of this study, it is seems that the interviewees who were not pushed into self-employment and those looking to grow their business are more active in extending their networks. According Holmquist and Sundin (1989) and Kirkwood, (2009) respectively, pull-factors are motives connected to new, attractive opportunities, yet push-factors are related to negatively charged circumstances, associated with negative personal and external factors. Following the observation of Sharafizad and Coetzer (2016) that understanding the one’s motivations for self-employment can aid in understanding one’s network content and behavior in this specific network, the goals of the interviewees were carefully studied because individuals tend to develop and maintain relationships that have the potential to assist them in their business goals. This careful assessment showed that interviewees B, G, I, C are in a bid to grow their businesses and driven to succeed, they have established a number of connections they turn to for different kinds of support they need. For the interviewees who turned out to have been pushed into entrepreneurship because of lack job opportunities and sickness, such as D, H & F, their responses indicated a lower desire for business growth. For most of these interviewees, self-employment seemed like something they resorted to so as to have an employment. This corresponds with Vroom’s (1964, cited in Renko et al., 2012) expectancy theory where it was concluded that one’s expectations and goals play a vital role in shaping one’s motivation and actions. In regards to this study, this means that one’s networking activities depend greatly on the goals and expectations one has, and from our findings there is surely truth to this. Taking interviewee H as an example, she got frustrated with not finding a job she wanted and as a result decided to start her own business to be in charge of her own career and destiny. She has had problems with making time to work on building more connections and has now become less active in this area. To some, this can be taken to imply that she maybe feels that she reached the level of growth she was aiming at and feels no need to reach out to more networks. On the other hand, interviewee G reported to be very active in networking as she is expecting to withdraw multiple benefit for her business.
6.3.4 Having a small network prior to self-employment

According to our findings, female entrepreneurs may at times have smaller networks because of having a small network prior to entrepreneurship. Clearly, as observed by Cromie and Birley (1992), the people one knows and the positions one occupies before self-employment play a great role in determining how one’s networks are to turn out during entrepreneurship. In this study, the interviewees who seemed to mostly struggle with building networks were also the ones whose past employment did not give much room for interacting with many other people. For example, interviewee D worked as teachers for years and only her friends and family knew that she could sew dresses before she opened her shop. Similarly, interviewee H was unemployed for quite some time and she mostly relied on her friend and spouse for advice before she decided to launch her business. Because they did not know many people to turn to in the beginning, these two have continued to keep their networks simple and close. Unlike interviewees D and H, interviewees B, C, G, and I knew many people before they became entrepreneurs and as a result, their networks have continued to grow because, as according to theory, the more frequently one involves with other people the more easier it becomes to establish more contacts (Cromie & Birley, 1992). As mentioned in the findings, interviewee B was a researcher prior to self-employment and this opened doors for her to meet many people including the client who inspired her to start her own business, interviewee C was in the entertainment business and through this she managed to meet many different people while traveling throughout the country and finally, interviewee I’s unique education and experience made her to stand out and many people reached out to her in need of her unique knowledge. Not surprising is that these are the very interviewees who did not report that time affected their ability to network. These interviewees seem to well understand the values of being part of wider networks and this is portrayed through their active involvement in networking. For these interviewees, networking is inevitable because it is a source of business and new ideas. With a belief that givers gain, some at times also go as far as arranging networking events and leading networks so as to help other people connect, hence widening their networks as well in the process.

6.3.5 Lack of networking skills

Another factor the study showed to be the reason for having smaller networks was that some female entrepreneurs lack the skills needed to build a large network. A good example is interviewee H who mostly relies on a few of her significant others due to, as stated before, not having time to join other networks, but also not knowing how to use the weak-ties networks. She said that “I am not that good at using my networks and that is because I never really have the
time. I probably could have grown my business if I had networked more... Sometimes I have been in individual meetings with ALMI or Företagares Centrum but never in an actual network for long.” As Cromie and Birley (1992) stated that, establishing relationships with different people is an action-based activity that requires putting in effort, and showing interest in wanting to develop them. Implying that those who often interact with others often become good at building relationships. The results from the study indicate that the more energy one puts in getting to know other people and groups, the bigger one’s networks get. This is evident from interviewees G and I who are very active in networking and strongly preach that one needs to have good people to contact when needed. From their responses, it appears that to be able to have an extensive diverse network one needs to also understand that for entrepreneurs networking is inevitable.

6.3.6 Changes in the environment

It was also highlighted in the interviews that it is possible to reach a point where you meet the same people time after time, and therefore particular networking events for instance, may be less prioritized. Interviewee G for instance, has lately decided to take a few steps back, feeling lazy and meeting the same people all the time. These type of situations are also recognized in theory that claims individuals’ networks alter due to internal factors that can be related to the entrepreneur’s life direction, well-being, and resources needed (Garnsey, 1998; Stam et al., 2014). In other words, this means that as entrepreneurs’ status and goals evolve, there is a need to acquire new contacts. For instance, both interviewees A and C mentioned explicitly to have altered their networks in accordance with their needs and wants. Interviewee A described that “When I started as an entrepreneur I felt that I was alone so I was asked if I wanted to be part of this group of female entrepreneurs....” But then again, she has been struggling staying in particular networks if people do not share the same goals with her, which is an issue confronted by interviewee B as well. For interviewee C, it has been more about new opportunities that has led her to expand her networks. “It would be easier to stick on one thing and be happy with that but I have always wanted to push the bar. Even with work, I won’t settle just to be part of the team.” Theorist are explaining that over time, entrepreneurs end up not being so dependent on one network, but rather they are willing to trade in their social capital for human capital (Lavie, 2006; Elfring & Hulsink, 2007; Martinez & Aldrich, 2011). In contrast, some of the interviewees did not mention having a need to alter their networks for any particular reason, but instead praised the groups in which they are in. For example, interviewee F is in a group of entrepreneurs with whom she gets inspired about business with.
6.4 The Relationship between Strong-ties and Weak-ties Networks

(Figure 3): Summary of the Analysis

Summarizing the discussion above into a visual model, it seems that with knowledge factors, interviewees tend to approach their strong-ties prior to weak-ties. Moreover, if the desired knowledge is not attainable through strong-ties interviewees move to their weak-ties, but not back to strong-ties as their primary source. When it comes to support factors, female entrepreneurs can
be understood to move between strong-ties and weak-ties depending on the situation they are in. Also, it was discussed that there are hindrances influencing the movement towards weak-ties.

In addition that it emerged from the empirical data that there might be a reason to question the dichotomy between strong-ties and weak-ties as indicated by the curved arrows above the model. Firstly, empirical data shows that some of the interviewees have challenged the idea of needing to classify their social networks to be either strong-tie or weak-ties. For example, interviewee I explained that “You need to have like-minded people around you... You meet people, they turn out to be your friends and vice versa... you discuss both work and private life... You cannot separate those two. Especially not as an entrepreneur, which is a lifestyle.” Similar signs were given by interviewee F, who explained that her networks are composed of women and colleagues she considers as friends. Secondly, looking at the definitions given by scholars it may be reasonable to suggest that sooner or later weak-ties can transform into strong-ties. Granovetter (1973) explained that the “strength” of a social tie is a consolidation of the number of times people interact with each other, the intimacy of these interactions, the emotional intensity, and the reciprocal duty that prevails between people. Furthermore, Katz and Williams (1997) explained that it is common for weak-ties to interact only occasionally. Having said that, it could be argued that even occasional interactions may “strengthen” over a longer period of time, meaning that weak-ties are gradually turning into strong-ties, or at least weak-ties are becoming “stronger”. For instance, interviewee G pointed out that she is still in contact with some of the weak-ties she approached 11 years ago when she was in a need of new knowledge on which she would build her business on. Still after all these years she reported to be in contact with some of the companies when in need. Taking into consideration the time span, it can be argued that these relationships must have become stronger and assumingly some kind of trust has been established, which is a common factor for ongoing relationships and strong-ties according to Jack (2005). Inversely, it can be claimed that strong-ties can become “weaker” if the number of times people interact and the level of intimacy decreases. For instance, interviewee H pointed out that she nowadays mostly interacts with some of her friends online due to lack of time. It could be that there is a middle ground between strong-ties and weak-ties, meaning that some weak-ties are “stronger” than others and the other way around. What we know already is that both networks are important in helping entrepreneurs to succeed in their activities (Johannisson, 2011; Gedajlovic et al. 2013).
7. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to, one, understand the role of both strong-ties and weak-ties networks in the entrepreneurial activities of female entrepreneurs, and two, to explore the factors that hinder female entrepreneurs from forming and utilizing wider weak-ties networks. Based on the empirical results of this study gathered through interviews with female entrepreneurs, both strong-ties and weak-ties networks, if actively engaged, play great roles in providing knowledge and support factors needed to advance in entrepreneurship within any field. This means that, with the help of networks women can easily become and succeed as entrepreneurs in unprecedented fields. In regards to the second part of the research problem, it was found that the weak-ties networks of female entrepreneurs tend to be smaller because of lack of time, failure to find like-minded people, having poor networking skills, having a low drive for growth, having a small network before venturing into entrepreneurship and lastly, due to changes in the environment.

Differing from previous findings, the study has showed that spouses are vital in providing funds both directly and indirectly, immediate family provides unlimited feedback, and lastly but not least, widening of weak-ties networks is sometimes hindered by lack of time resulting mostly from being so busy with work rather than domestic responsibilities as theory had concluded. Our explanation for this last observation is that because the study was conducted in Sweden where there is provision of childcare, gender neutral parental leave, and where it is more of a norm for both men and women to take on equal obligations and responsibilities at home. Meaning that, different results might be observed in countries where the social system is different from that of Sweden.

The findings of this study concur with the theory in connection to the dynamic nature of networks in gender composition, size, aim, and that people tend to move from one to another based on their personal goals and expectations. However, it has also been found that the networks themselves also change in type from a weak-tie network into a strong-tie network, and then back as the intensity of interactions and trust changes over a long period. With this said, clear lines need to be drawn between these networks so as to avoid limiting the advantages connected to having wider weak-ties networks while increasing the disadvantages of relying only on strong-ties networks.
8. Limitations of the Study

Easterby-Smith et al. (2015) are emphasizing that the creation of qualitative data can entail limiting factors as well, and aligned with them Eriksson and Kovalainen (2011) are pointing out that the most common concerns are related to access to empirical data. For this study, as we have been in general forced to rely on volunteers as study participants, firstly, people may not see what the benefits is for them in joining the study. Secondly, joining the study can bring in lot of confidentiality issues, and thirdly, joining a study can be perceived as time consuming as people have limited timely resources. Approximately 30 female entrepreneurs and a few entrepreneurial organizations were reached out to and a short introduction letter of the study was sent. Out of the total, 12 female entrepreneurs sent a response and 9 ended up taking part in the study. We believe that with a longer time span, the amount of participants could have been higher. Moreover, we believe that with more time we could had applied a sampling strategy that is more purposive.

Another limiting factor in our study is inconsistency between the interviewing methods. Even though every interview was fruitful and gave us interesting insights, along the interviewing process we came to an observation that by conducting the interview face-to-face it allowed a more personal and in-depth discussion between us and the interviewee. Building on that, we are aware that when conducting an interview over the phone or email, valuable insights may have been missed due to lower level of interaction.

Lastly but not least, the issue of interviewing language was known prior to the study. Both the letter requests for an interview and the interviews themselves were done in English, which might have had an impact on the participation rate and also on the quality of the discussions. More closely, it is possible that some of the entrepreneurs decided not to participate in the study due to it being conducted in another language than their mother tongue. In addition to that, we believe it is possible that the answers given could have been even more in-depth if the interviewees would have expressed themselves in their mother tongue.

9. Implications

9.1 Practical Implications

Networking with both strong-ties and weak-ties is very vital because it can act as a source of new business ideas, partners and client and with the introduction of virtual meeting space, this has
even become more possible than before. For these reasons, entrepreneurs looking to grow their businesses need to consider networking as something inevitable and also acknowledge the importance of making time to actively engage it.

9.2 Implications for Policy Makers

Many of the female entrepreneurs who were interviewed in this study seemed to not be well informed about the support that is claimed to be provided by the government to advance female entrepreneurship. This can be taken to imply that these governmental schemes were not properly communicated to the target audience, and so there is need to revisit the measures used so far in order to ensure that all the relevant information is communicated through the right channels and to the right people. Furthermore, the interviewees seemed genuinely interested in building networks. Meaning that there is high demand for networks and maybe it would be beneficial for all parties if the policy makers could give a helping hand to the people in creating networks that fit their special needs related to time factor, industry, resources needed, gender, and so on.

10. Suggestions for Future Research

Taking into consideration the results obtained through this study, we believe that more comprehensive and representative results could be obtained through using a bigger sample size. Moreover, we took the assumption that the industry in which the female entrepreneurs are operating in does not play a big role. Therefore for future research, industry differences could be taken into consideration. One option would be to focus on one industry and run the same study. Alternatively, focusing on two or three industries in order to allow industry comparisons. Similarly, our respondents were from different cities and from different regions and this might have influenced our results. In the future, studies could be conducted focusing on either one region or multiple regions to make a comparison.

It can also be of great importance to study sole proprietors and entrepreneurs with employees differently since it came to light during our study that sole proprietors specifically had limited time to engage in networking activities. Such a study could help to highlight the factors that affect entrepreneurs with and without employees.

We also suggest that in future research could be done in form of a longitudinal case study in order to take into consideration the evolvement of networks and the movement from one business stage
to another in the entrepreneurial process. In other words, a case study based on a few entrepreneurs could allow researchers to study the changes in networking activities and behaviors of the entrepreneurs over a long period of time.

What came to light during the interviews, though not elicited in the analysis, are the activities of *Role Playing* and *Turn-taking*. Namely, interviewee A explained that as a sole proprietor, she has had to create coping mechanisms to sometimes get things done. For instance, if she has a list of things that need to be completed, she at times pretends that the tasks are given to her by her imaginary boss who she wants to impress with her work. In that way she completes the task faster. Turn-taking in interviewee H’s household is something that was only briefly mentioned in the analysis, but it might be interesting to look into the matter more deeply. Namely, it could be claimed that there are several other dual-income households with children where turn-taking is taking place. That is to say, households where the parties are taking turns in order for one party to dedicate time and money to build a business, when the other party in turn takes care of the household and protects the family’s economy.
11. Reference List


OECD (2016). Women entrepreneurship key findings: Sweden who wants to be an entrepreneur? *OECD Entrepreneurship at Glance*. March


APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Email to the interviewees

Dear Madam,

We are two Master students from Jönköping International Business School writing our master thesis on Female entrepreneurship in Sweden and especially interested in the role of networks.

Our aim is to ultimately make our own contribution to the field of female entrepreneurship and therefore we are looking for female entrepreneurs who are willing to give us their own perception regarding the matter. We found your name amongst a list of female entrepreneurs who were interviewed by former JIBS students in 2015, and decided to reach out.

The idea would be to conduct individual face-to-face/virtual interviews and ask partly predetermined questions. The questions are open-ended meaning that the interviewee is free to elaborate her answers. We promise to handle your answers with confidentiality and the results will be used only for the purpose of our Master Thesis. If you would like to participate in the study but prefer your name not to be revealed, answers can be used anonymously.

Our hope is to conduct the interviews before the end April, and preferably face-to-face in a mutually agreed location or alternatively over Skype, Face-time or over the phone. The interview questions can be sent to you prior to the interview. The interview is preferably conducted in English. However, Finnish is also doable. The time we would like to interview you is from 0,5h-1,5h.

We are looking for female entrepreneurs of all ages, from all fields, and from companies of all size. Your input would be highly needed and appreciated in order to develop the theoretical field of female entrepreneurship, especially in Sweden.

We would like to thank you for taking you time to read this message and we really hope to hear from you soon. Additionally, we are more than happy to share our results with you as soon as the study has been completed.

Please, let us know if you are willing to participate in our study and/or if you know other female entrepreneurs who would be willing to give us their input. If you have any concerns regarding the study and the interviews, please do not hesitate to contact us.

With Kind Regards,
Mariam Malende and Katariina Väisänen
Appendix 2. Interview Questions

BACKGROUND

1. How old are you? What is your education background?
2. What is your marital status?
3. Do you have children? If yes, how old are they?
4. What kind of business are you in?
5. Which region or city are you operating in? And how is being an entrepreneur in your city?
6. How big is your company in terms of revenue and employees?
7. How long have you been in business? What stage is your business at?
8. Do you own the company alone or with other people?
9. Why did you resort to self-employment? (pulled/pushed, internal/external reasons, …)
10. Who contributed to the starting of your business? For instance, did you reach out to any support organizations, and/or friends and family or other private people.
   a. How did they contribute? Financial, mental or/and advisory support.
11. Do you run your business on part-time or full-time basis? Has there been any transformation from part-time to full-time and if yes, why? How did it come about? If not, are you considering becoming full-time entrepreneur at some point.
12. Do you have any other kind of employment, if yes, how do/did you experience it?
13. Have you faced any challenges in combining work and family life?
14. How has your background influenced your entrepreneurial activities?
   a. Satisfied/dissatisfied with the previous working environment? (in regards to discrimination/glass ceiling)
   b. Studies promoting self-employment
   c. Entrepreneurs in the family. If yes, did it influence your entrepreneurial behavior?
   d. Other factors influencing?
15. How does your family take you being an entrepreneur?

RESOURCES

1. What are the most vital resources in regards your business?
2. Where do you acquire these resources?
3. Do you feel pressure to renew somehow?
4. Where do you get new ideas?
5. Have you experienced any shortage of resources and if yes, did you solve the problem and how?
   a. How would you evaluate the easiness to reach out in this kind of circumstance?

NETWORKS

1. How would you describe your networks?
2. What are your networks composed of and what kind of networks are they?
   a. Male and/or Female
   b. Professionals and/or non-professional (from different backgrounds)
   c. Colleagues and/or ex colleagues
   d. Family members, friends, and/or friends of friends
3. What was the primary purpose of being part of these networks
   a. Do they meet your expectations?
4. How did these networks come about?
Did you start/initiate these networks?
  a. Were you recommended to join it?

5. What is your role in the network? (Are you an active/passive member?)
   - What is there to benefit from networks? Are you more of a receiver or more of a giver?

6. How do you organise resources from the networks? What type of resources do you get from these networks?

7. Has there been any changes in your network(s), for instance, due to life events such as moving to a new city, getting married, divorce, getting children, or other issues etc. If yes, kindly elaborate.

8. How do you maintain these networks? Or in other words, how often do you meet and what do you do? For example, physical/virtual meetings, informal/formal?

FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

1. How do you see yourself as an entrepreneurs?

2. Have you faced any challenges during your career as an entrepreneur? For example, related to work-life balance, expansion, resources? Please, develop on your answer.

3. ...and what do you do to overcome the challenges? Who did you turned to in order to solve the problem.

4. How do you measure your own success as an entrepreneur?

5. How do you see women’s entrepreneurship in Sweden in general?

6. How is the future for female entrepreneurship?

Do you have anything you would like to add or something that you would like to specify?