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## Thesis

**“I don’t know if it’s because we’re women...”**

Exploring the Relationship of Gender and the Signed  
Language Interpreting Profession

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the signed language interpreting profession and its relationship to gender in a Finnish context. Research on gender and signed language interpreting is scarce, and therefore the aim of this study is to go some way in filling the gap, with a specific focus on the signed language interpreter's role and prestige. In addition, this thesis provides suggestions and evidence based support for future research. The theoretical framework draws from gender studies and feminist research as well as studies from the field of translation and interpreting. Previous research on gender segregation, work and the translation and interpreting field indicate that signed language interpreting, as a female predominant profession, faces issues regarding gender bias, sexism and harassment as well as low prestige. The data for this thesis was collected through two focus groups and analyzed using the template analysis method. The findings imply that the signed language interpreting profession is profoundly impacted by the gender structure and that Finnish female Sign Language interpreters experience role constraint when facing inappropriate advances. The research also reveals issues with the prestige of Finnish female signed language interpreters when viewed by lay people and especially from the institutional level. This thesis also utilizes the theory of gender as social construct and offers a view on how signed language interpreting can be examined through it. The research has been conducted within a Finnish context and through qualitative methods focusing solely on the perspective of female interpreters, and as such cannot be generalised without further and broader research.

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Keywords: Sign Language interpreters, gender structure, gender effects, professional identity, prestige, sexism, harassment

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## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis embodies the results of my own work and has been composed by myself. Where appropriate within the thesis I have made full acknowledgement of the work and ideas of others or have made reference to work carried out in collaboration with other persons. I understand that as an examination candidate I am required to abide by the Regulations of the University and to conform to its discipline and ethical policy.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The field of interpreting is predominantly female and as a part of this field, so is the signed language interpreting profession (Napier & Barker, 2003, p. 22 ; Madden, 2005, p. 21; Pöchhacker, 2016, p. 164). However, research on gender and interpreting is scarce, and gender is most often mentioned as a side comment and a future prospect of study. The discussion of the interpreter's role has seen evolvment and shifts of paradigms, but gender is yet to be addressed as factor to be considered in its descriptions (e.g. Roy, 2000). Moreover, it is said, that the conduit model of interpreting still prevails even though newer concepts have been argued for some time (Dean & Pollard, 2018).

The existing research on gender mainly concentrates on impact of gender on discourse (MacDougal, 2012; Morgan, 2008; Levine, 2007; McIntire & Sanderson, 1995), whereas research focusing more on the interpreting as a profession and experiences of interpreters themselves has seen only a few studies discussing topics such gender and prestige, harassment, gender identity and impact of gender on interaction (Gentile. 2018; Spânu, 2009; Artl, 2015; Brück, 2011). There is a need for more research on the sociology of interpreting is needed for a more thorough understanding of the field (Brunson, 2015; Angelelli, 2004b). Gender, enacting as a social construct in our society and as a primary frame through which people categorize themselves and others, impacts different areas of life to a great extent (Ridgeway 2011; Risman 2018a; 2018b; 2004). Its effects on interpreting should not be overlooked but instead researched in growing numbers. My own experiences at work and anecdotes of colleagues, and the increase of feminist topics in social media, such as the #me too-movement ("History & Vision," n.d.) were drivers for my growing interest in researching the signed language interpreting field and gender.

As a Finnish signed language interpreter, I contextualize my research in the Finnish signed language interpreting system, but make use of transnational and interdisciplinary research on gender and interpreting. Spoken language interpreting and signed language interpreting share much of

the theoretical background and have a similar history in the paradigm shifts on the interpreter's role, although differences lie in language modalities, range of interpreting settings and lengths of client-interpreter relationships (Napier, Mckee & Goswell, 2010, pp. 4-5). Likewise, national variation in gender equality exists, but research on gender-segregated work reveals similar inequalities and discrimination towards women happening worldwide ("The Global Gender Gap Report," 2018; Kalev & Deutsch 2018; Kinnunen 2001; Williams 1992). Although some of the literature in this thesis discusses directly the Finnish context, most of the theory originates from international sources.

### **1.1 Aim and objectives of the research**

Because research on gender and interpreting is still scarce, my overarching aim for this thesis is to identify areas of gender impact in the signed language interpreting profession, with a focus on two objectives:

1. How does the signed language interpreter's role operate in situations impacted by gender?
2. What factors affect the perceptions of prestige of the Finnish female signed language interpreter by lay people?

My method in addressing these research questions and the aim is a template analysis of data collected from two small focus group discussions, with Finnish female sign language interpreters as the participants. The analysis and discussion of the data is done in reference to research relating to gender, interpreter's role and the existing relevant studies from the interpreting field.

### **1.2 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is organized in a common research structure where I first introduce the relevant theoretical basis for the study. I begin with the topic of gender and how it is defined as a structure, following with a closer examination of gender in interaction and work settings. Consequently I move on to describe the interpreting field, the interpreter's role and attributes concluding in relevant research relating to the topic of this thesis. After the



literature review I set the research by identifying the research gap and revisiting the main points of my theoretical framework, aim and objectives. The chapter also includes methodology, elaborating my position, standpoint, means of data collection and analysis. I have combined analysis and discussion into one chapter in which I familiarize the reader with the main findings of the data and explain my interpretation of the relationship of gender and the signed language interpreting profession. The final chapter of the thesis is the conclusion where I readdress my research questions, discuss limits of the study and propose topics for further research.

## **2 GENDER**

This opening chapter and its first section introduces the concept of gender as a structure, which I apply as a theoretical lens in examining the impact of gender on the signed language interpreting field. The following sections look more closely at gender impact on an interactional level, describing how gender is applied as a frame in our interaction with one another. The chapter concludes in examining gender and work and the gender bias, sexism and harassment in the work-life context.

### **2.1 Gender as a social structure**

When discussing issues relating to gender, it is first important to define what I mean by gender. Within this thesis, I have adopted an understanding of gender following the example of feminist and gender studies theories. This means, that instead of talking about a biological binary difference between male and female reproductive organs, I understand gender to be mainly a social construct which is socialized to us from childhood and which we ourselves together with society continue to produce and reproduce through our actions and expectations.

According to West and Zimmerman (1987), sex is defined by socially agreed upon biological criteria, according to a person's chromosomes or reproductive organs. A person is placed in a sex category, based on these biological criteria, but this placement in a certain category is then sustained in everyday life by social norms and culture, which uphold a person's membership in that category (p. 127). "In this sense, one's sex category presumes one's sex and stands as proxy for it in many situations, but sex and sex category can vary independently; that is, it is possible to claim membership in a sex category even when the sex criteria are lacking (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127)." Gender, in comparison to sex and sex category, is a person's activity, behavior and conduct, situated in the society and interpreted through normative conceptions. In other words, according to West and Zimmerman (1987) gender is the act of performing and "doing" social

interaction which announces to which sex category you belong, and it is a product of social construction.

Risman (2018a; 2018b; 2004) proposes a theory of gender, where it is not only seen as one's personal identity, but as a social structure existing outside the individual desires or motives. It is based on the fact that gender acts as a social mechanism of differentiation and upholds inequality at the foundation, and it can be scrutinized at the same level as politics and economics. Gender acts as a construct that both restrains and impacts our perceptions of self-interest, and within which we evaluate our advantages and deprivations in contrast to similarly situated others. (Risman, 2018a; 2018b; 2004.) When the society so rigorously divides people in to two, male and female, a problem arises, because we tend to compare our situations to the gender we're assimilated to and are more unlikely to compare or recognize the choices available to another gender. "The social structure is not experienced as oppressive if men and women do not see themselves as similarly situated" (Risman, 2004, 432). This means that we do not all see the same palette of choices before us, but fail to recognize it, because we find it hard to even compare our starting point due to being situated differently in the society as a consequence of gender categorization.

However, this gendered social structure is not something outside of human creation, acting on individuals at its own accord in a one-way direction. In fact, it is created, upheld and acted upon by people. It is in these actions and choices of people that room for change lies, and where attention should be centered: "because so much of social life is routine and so taken for granted that actors will not articulate, or even consider, why they act" (Risman, 2004, 432). Risman (2004) encourages reflexivity of individuals to enable impact on the gendered structure:

My aims are to bring women and men back into a structural theory where gender is the structure under analysis and to identify when behavior is habit (an enactment of taken for granted gendered cultural norms) and when we do gender consciously, with intent, rebellion, or even with irony. When are we doing gender and re-creating inequality without intent? And what happens to interactional dynamics and male-

dominated institutions when we rebel? Can we refuse to do gender or is rebellion simply doing gender differently, forging alternative masculinities and femininities? (p. 433).

Where then, in our lives, are the opportunities for reflexivity and possible impact? As the aforementioned describes, gender is a social structure, which operates in an all-pervasive way in our social actions and society. According to Risman's (2018a) theory, the impact of gender categorization is stratified, and it occurs in three levels: individual, interactional and macro level. Furthermore, it affects at two dimensions, a material and a cultural dimension (Figure 1).

Material impacts on the individual level are towards the physical body, the habitus of a person and how they choose to represent and display physically the gender that they identify as. The cultural impacts on the individual level refer to the notion of ourselves, the way we behave and were socialized when we grew up. (Risman, 2018a.) Mason (2018) explains that a gendered appearance is taught to us through upbringing and the surrounding society, market and media, that teach a certain way of appropriate appearance for girls and boys, women and men and objectifies the female body.

Women themselves may participate in this socialization process, holding themselves and one another accountable to bodily norms that place a premium on appearance. At the same time, such surveillance is reinforced externally through a variety of social institutions and interaction rituals. (Mason, 2018, p.100.)

Risman (2018a) reminds us that the choices that individuals make regarding their displays of gender, whether bodily or behavioral, are simultaneously made under the influence of the larger gendered social construct and out of free agency, that would also allow people to act against the social norms which define gendered displays (p. 34).

On the interactional level, material aspects include the representation of genders in any setting and the access to different social networks based on their gender. An example of this is a disproportion of women in leadership

positions or the general segregation of work into male and female dominant fields. Cultural aspects of the interactional level are the stereotypes, biases, sexism and expectations that people frame their interaction on, even if they do it unintentionally. “Actors often behave without thinking about it, simply following habits that come to define the cultural meaning of their lives” (Risman, 2018a, p. 35). Stereotypes attached to gender, which are part of this level, include women being more empathetic and nurturing and men more agentic (Risman, 2018a, p.35). This means that “the cultural stereotypes that each of us face in every social encounter are different based on our presumed sex category” and our “doing of gender” is manifested through the interaction with one another (Risman, 2018b, p. 37). As Mason (2018) stated, the expectations are upheld, not only in the interaction with others but within institutions (p. 100).

The macro level’s material dimension looks at the distribution of resources, organizational practices, institutional rules and legal regulations. The cultural impact on macro level can be seen, for example, in ideologies mirrored in cultural beliefs such as an assumption that men are the breadwinners of the household and women are the homemakers, in how support for maternity leave is provided or in how jobs and positions are defined (Risman, 2018a; Risman, 2004).

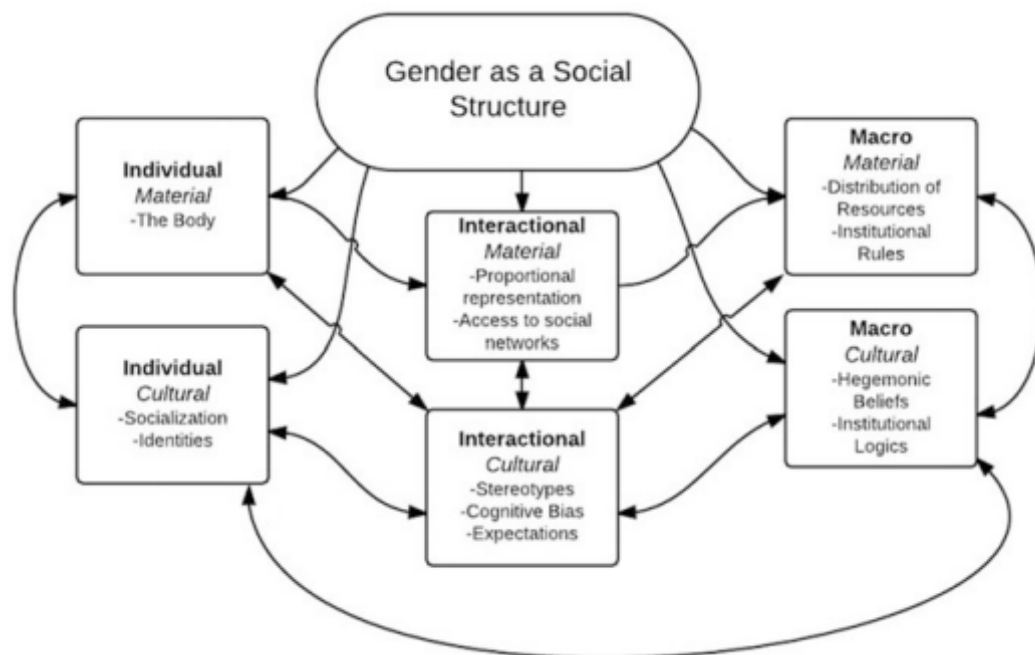


Figure 1. Gender as a social structure (Risman, 2018a, p. 31)

As seen in Figure 1, the levels of gender stratification are in interplay, where a change in one level can impact others, as in a complex cycle of dynamism (Risman, 2004, p. 435). When we wish for change to happen at the gendered structure, it does not have to be directed at just one of the levels or one level prioritized over another. In Risman's (2004) opinion, it is unnecessary and impossible to attempt predicting where change would best be targeted at, "because human beings sometimes reject the structure itself and, by doing so, change it. --- Instead, the feminist project is better served by finding empirical answers to particular questions and by identifying how particular processes explain outcomes in need of change " (p. 435). Despite change being an ongoing need in a society where inequality still exists, we should not only look at the causality of action and inequality, but also recognize instances where gender equality does occur or a change has had positive impact (Risman, 2004, p. 435).

When it comes to the scope of this study, my attempt is to identify areas where the gender structure impacts the signed language interpreting profession at these different levels. The work of a sign language interpreter is situated at the heart of interactions and the general work life conditions are contingent on decisions made at the macro level institution. It is therefore logical to look at the interactional level more closely to see how gender defines our expectations and own behavior during encounters with others.

## **2.2 Gender in interaction**

When in interaction with one another, people continuously categorize each other and make assumptions and expectations of their behavior in order to then adjust their own actions accordingly. The human species rely on social action, and this happens by coordinating one's actions with others. Therefore, we categorize and define others to enable this coordination to happen. (Ridgeway & Krichelli-Katz, 2013.) We share beliefs and structures, a common cultural knowledge, which we use to navigate our encounters. These shared beliefs are included presumed differences about sex categories. In social interaction, gender is one of the primary frames, among class, age and race, through which we categorize one another (Ridgeway, 2011; Ridgeway &

Krichelli-Katz, 2013). In fact, it seems to be the first category we apply as we encounter others, after which other frames for distinction follow (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p. 514) According to research, sex categorization is automatic, even though other ways of defining the other would be available (Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999, p. 192). This habit may seem a natural act but research has proven that it is a social process (Ridgeway 2011; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Ridgeway & Krichelli-Katz, 2013). Categorization happens during social interaction, which can mean interpersonal settings but also intrapersonal settings in which one needs to consider the expected reactions of others when deciding on their own actions (Ridgeway & Krichelli-Katz, 2013, pp. 294-295).

Not only do we categorize others but we categorize ourselves as well, “because they [the categories] provide an initial basis for deciding “who” the other is, who we are in comparison, and therefore how each of us is likely to behave.” (Ridgeway & Krichelli-Katz, 2013, p. 298). As we “do gender” in our everyday interactions, as West and Zimmerman (1987) have expressed, others read our actions as cues that enable categorization and reciprocally we do the same. The significance of categorization (and therefore relying on socially constructed stereotypes) varies from minimal to substantial depending on the context that we interact in (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p.516; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999, p. 200). Ridgeway and Krichelli-Katz (2013) assert that gender (or race) becomes more significant the more it stands out in the situation, acting as a factor for differentiating between people and if it is somehow relevant to the goals of the setting. Categorization also happens more often in settings where the other stands out as more prototypical of that category (299). In other words, categorization through the gendered frame gains more attention in settings where the demographics are not balanced gender wise, in settings where gender has some sort of relevance to the events in the settings or when someone can be clearly assimilated with the stereotype of their assumed sex category. The more significant the categorization, the “more a perceiver’s responses will be biased by widely shared gender and race stereotypes” (Ridgeway and Krichelli-Katz, 2013, p.299). Consequently, these beliefs may be transformed into beliefs about inequality and gender status (Ridgeway 2011, 33-34).

Before moving on to interpreting specifically, the final section of this chapter will look at work life, gender segregation in labour and gender bias, sexism and harassment happening at workplaces.

### **2.3 Gender and work**

Work has historically been organized around gender, where men have been the “breadwinners” of the families and women’s share has been housewifery and motherhood (Laperrière & Orloff, 2018, p. 299.) Even after women began working, their jobs were often thought of as second-class work, as Kinnunen (2001) states, saying that according to sociological labour market theories, women tend to be placed in secondary labour market jobs (p. 18). The order of segregation may seem natural, but according to Kalev & Deutsch (2018), it is a “product of historical processes, related at their core to the industrial revolution and the modern organization of work” (p. 258). Segregated work is one of the primary factors in upkeeping gender inequality in today’s world (Kalev & Deutsch, 2018; Laperrière & Orloff, 2018). Laperrière and Orloff (2018) assert, that these inequalities manifest in aspects such as sexual harassment, gender status beliefs, access to power in politics and work life as well as the gender norms which still continue to shape preferences and gravitations to men’s and women’s work (p. 230).

Male-dominated fields tend to get a higher level of pay than female-dominated fields, but interestingly, even female-dominated fields and fields with equal demographics of genders still show evidence of better pay for male workers. This fact extends over governmental positions, municipality positions and the public sector, private sector, entrepreneurship and employee level (Kinnunen, 2001, p. 20). The wage gap and gender inequality of workplaces have been tried to explain with numerous theories and reasonings, stating that women and men invest in different skills, other prioritizing domestic work versus paid work. Childhood socialization to women’s and men’s educational and career choices tries to explain this gravitation, while other reasonings lean towards employers’ biases and discrimination. Sociology argues, in addition to individual impact, that the gender structure of the society creates inequalities (Kalev & Deutsch, 2018, pp. 259-261).



Williams (1992) study concentrates on gender discrimination and whether men entering female dominated fields experience similar forms of oppression as women in predominantly male fields have been shown to be subject to. According to Williams (1992) these forms are: legal, informal and cultural discrimination, meaning issues with hiring or promotion, sexual harassment, sabotage and hostility or gender-based stereotyping which undermines their ability to perform their work (p. 254). The findings of her research reveal that men in female occupations are not equally subject to discrimination but actually mainly gain advantage from their situation (Williams, 1992, p. 257). The discrimination that men experienced was in the attitudes of the "outside" world towards their choice of profession. Men in predominantly female professions can be labelled as homosexual, asexual, wimpy, feminine and passive. In elementary school teachers' case, they are also at a risk for being suspected of pedophilia (Williams, 1992, p. 261). The negative attitudes of the public can be a factor in preventing men from entering female dominated fields, but in the end, the scarcity of men in the female occupations turns into an advantage. Williams refers to the "glass ceiling" that women have reported in trying to advance their career in male dominant fields and contrasts the metaphor with a "glass escalator" that men in female occupation can experience, that moves them from employee level to administrative positions:

The negative stereotypes about men who do "women's work" can push men out of specific jobs. However, to the extent that they channel men into more "legitimate" practice areas, their effects can actually be positive. Instead of being a source of discrimination, these prejudices can add to the "glass escalator effect" by pressuring men to move out of the most female-identified areas, and up to those regarded more legitimate and prestigious for men. (Williams, 1992, p.263).

The unequal distribution of power positions in many workplaces is a form of gender bias and it creates many issues at workplaces. The power positions of many workplaces are imbalanced in gender: a segregation of men

in higher status, high paying jobs and women in lower status, lower paying jobs (Wynn & Correll, 2018, p. 509).

When stereotypes and gender biased thinking affect workplace settings, they may impact recruiting decisions and promotions, distributing assignments, evaluations, compensations and the everyday interaction. Gender bias is defined as “an error in evaluating performance, skill or potential. In evaluating performance, bias leads to lower assessments for some and more lenient ones for others—despite the same qualifications and level of accomplishment“ (Clayman Institute for Gender Research, 2017). Plowman (2010) notes that the gendered relations and the positions of women and men in organisational hierarchy as well as sexist jokes, behaviours and attitudes are often regarded as typical gender norms and often not even seen as a problem. The gendered attitude has seeped into the workplace hierarchies and cultures in such a way, that we become oblivious to the problems they create (Plowman, 2010).

In addition to sexist behavior, workplaces are a territory where sexual harassment can occur. When talking about sexual harassment, I mean verbal or non-verbal as well as physical behavior that is sexual in nature; violating personal privacy potentially creating a hostile, intimidating and degrading atmosphere (Miettinen, 2018, p.8). Moreover, “the experience of harassment has negative effects on women’s wellbeing, performance at work and career attainment” (Kalev & Deutsch, 2018, p. 262). Sexism, as a distinction from sexual harassment, consists of action and attitudes which display gender segregation and discrimination (Miettinen, 2018, p. 3).

When looking at the Finnish context, Finland is one of the most gender equal countries in the world alongside other Nordic countries Iceland, Norway and Sweden (The Global Gender Gap Report, 2018). According to Julkunen (2010), Finland succeeds in areas of political positions, education and health. However, economic gender inequality, meaning a wage gap and unequal distribution of leadership positions in the workplace, is a key factor in preventing Finland reaching first place (p. 12). The Nordic labour market is clearly segregated in many fields into men’s and women’s work, which can be seen as a contradicting factor in otherwise generally equal societies (Julkunen, 2010, p. 130). In Finnish context, a survey of sexual harassment

and sexism, was conducted in ten member associations belonging to Akava - Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland. The results revealed, that every fifth respondent out of 8,106 reported witnessing some form of sexual harassment and that women and age groups under 40 years were more likely to be subject to it. Sexism at workplaces was reported more by women than men, with younger employees reporting more experiences of sexism than older employees (Miettinen, 2018, p. 47). Finnish sign language interpreters' and the Finnish translators united association Kieliasiantuntijat ry is a member of a union belonging to this umbrella confederation (Kieliasiantuntijat ry, n.d.).

This chapter has given an overview of gender impact in society and more closely in work-life. The gender structure is pervasive, shaping our interaction and socialization. The effects of gender structure can be seen from our very being to encounters with others, our gender identities and chosen methods of displaying it. Gender is present as a primary frame for interaction and gendered biases mould our thoughts and can lead to stereotyping, discrimination, sexism and harassment. Whether discussing the impact of the gender structure as a whole or gender related issues in the workplace, it is undeniable, that signed language interpreting, a clearly gender segregated profession, must experience gender impact to some extent. The following chapter shifts our focus to the field on interpreting and explores the identifiable factors of gender impact.

### 3 INTERPRETING

This chapter will give an overview of what interpreting is, how it is organized in Finland and how and what is meant when talking about the interpreter's role. The demographics, genderedness of the work and attributes of interpreters are also discussed. The chapter concludes with an overview of relevant research in the translation and interpreting field relating to the matter of gender.

Interpreting is a linguistic and social act of communication, where the interpreter is generally the sole person in the situation with an understanding and knowledge of the entire communicative situation (Roy, 2000). Interpreters are needed as the third party to compensate for the absence of a common language, using their knowledge to allow the participating parties to understand each other as well as possible. In order to produce and manage the interpreted communication, the interpreter not only relays and renders messages back and forth, but continuously makes decisions in response to linguistic and human factors (Napier et al., 2010; Roy, 2000). Signed language interpreting belongs to the wider field of translation and interpreting, where interpreters and translators main task is the message transfer between languages (Dean & Pollard, 2018, p. 37).

Both spoken and signed language interpreters may work in an array or different settings. Signed language interpreters' primary settings include national and international conferences, community, medical, legal, business and educational settings (Dean & Pollard, 2018, p.37.) The clientele varies from Deaf, hard of hearing, DeafBlind, and also includes the hearing participants in the interpreted settings. Whether it is work at a conference or doctor's office, signed language interpreters hold high professional integrity.

Providing the service entails the interpreters to undergo training and to follow and understand the ethical codes of conduct which lay at the foundation of their professionalism. The level of training, and ethical codes of conduct vary from country to country, but are at the core of the professionalism. Professional demeanor is expected during the entire interpreted event to create an understanding of competence and trustworthiness. (Demers, 2005,

p.209). Madden (2005) describes signed language interpreters as diligent workers, who tend to give up recognition of their self in order to avoid any interference in their interpretation and to enable full empowerment of their clients (p. 27). Interpreters' devotion to their work, according to Madden (2005) is evident in the idealism of a superhuman, to the extent that interpreters' own occupational health may be risked (p. 26).

It is evident, that signed language interpreters value ethical and trustworthy demeanor. Trustworthiness is especially pronounced when working with DeafBlind clients, who are at a very vulnerable situation as easily exploited and discriminated by others (Västilä & Kovanen, 2012, p. 100). Pölonen (2006) notes that the trusting relationship between the interpreter and DeafBlind client is mutual and operates both ways; each responsible for treating each other with respect (p. 146). Her notion can be extended to apply to all relationships with clientele. Trustworthiness and respect need to be in balance for a smooth cooperation.

When discussing how professional interpreting services are provided to the clientele, it must be noted that the service provision varies from country to country, just as length and form of interpreter training. In Finland, signed language interpreters are trained in a four year programme organized by one of the two universities: Humak University of Applied Sciences and Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (Martikainen, 2016, p. 13). Signed language interpreting in Finland is a free, government provided service administered by the Social Security Institution of Finland (Kela) that accounts for approximately 90% of the total work of the Finnish sign language interpreters. Other institutions that purchase interpreting services, are some of the public authorities, that are required to accommodate linguistic needs as stipulated by legislation, and some communities, companies, religious congregations and schools. Finnish sign language interpreters are either employed to companies or are entrepreneurs themselves, from which Kela then procures interpreting services. Due to drastic shifts in interpreting service provision responsibility from municipalities to Kela and the resulting tendering of providers, the most common form of work contract is a so-called zero-hour-contract that reimburses the interpreter on an hour-by-hour basis (Huusko, 2017, p. 5-6). Putkonen's (2018) survey reveals a growing frustration in the field of Finnish

sign language interpreting on the changes in interpreting provision and its negative impact on the daily lives of interpreters:

Workdays have changed to even more scattered. The interpreter must change location numerous times during the day. Commute and travel time have lengthened but compensations have decreased. On the other hand interpreters are assigned to local customers. This means that the clientele has dwindled to a very small group and work spectrum has changed to more unilateral. Some respondents have been suggested to move to a different location but due to personal reasons it is deemed impossible. All over working conditions have weakened.” (Putkonen, 2018, p.17. My translation - K.V.)

The current situation in Finland is monitored, as Putkonen (2018) states the survey being a part of a longitudinal study researching the impacts of very recent and radical changes is the Finnish sign language interpreting provision (20). Regardless of interpreter trainings and provision models differing from country to country, spoken and signed language interpreting share similar histories in how the profession and more precisely the role of the interpreter has been seen. The next section will elaborate on the past paradigms and discusses the current views on interpreter role.

### **3.1 The interpreter’s role**

The interpreter’s role, both in spoken and signed languages has undergone paradigm shifts as research has developed and the profession matured. The early days viewed interpreters as helpers. Within the sign language community, the hearing family members, welfare and religious workers or teachers of deaf schools, were often those interpreting without any professional training. As interpreting professionalized, and understanding of the cultural and linguistic rights of minorities and research on signed languages evolved, a new concept of interpreter role emerged which rendered the interpreter a telephone-like conveyor of messages. (Napier & Goswell 2013, p. 3).

The machine like conduit model was developed after studying conference interpreters who worked from booths. The conduit model requires the interpreter to be impartial, a solely telephone line-like renderer of messages. The aim of the model was to empower the deaf client and to underpin the neutrality of the interpreter, but it had negative consequences of depersonalizing the interpreter and creating confusion amongst participants (Llewellyn-Jones & Lee, 2014, p. 26-27; Pöchhacker, 2016, p. 169-170; Metzger 1999). The interpreter was not seen as a person present in the interaction, but as someone invisible-like, confined strictly within a role from which she should not step out of. For example when directly addressed, the interpreter might not respond at all, trying to hold on to the illusion of not being a participant, which in turn results in confusion and was actually regarded as rude behavior. In addition to this, the conduit model also left very limited strategies for the interpreter to coordinate the interaction in the interpreted situation smoothly (Llewellyn-Jones & Lee, 2014, 26-27). The code of ethics, likewise, was inspired by the requirements of conference-style interpreting where interpreters work out of sight and without any interaction from their booths. "For this type of interpreting work, the tenets of rigorous impartiality and interpreter neutrality are logical and realistic as conference interpreters are "disembodied voices": heard but not seen by either side" (Napier & Goswell, 2013, p. 3). Pöchhacker (2016) describes the conduit model's negative impact as prescribing the interpreter as a non-person (p. 169). This proved to be an impossible role to obtain as signed language interpreters (and community interpreters) do not work from separate booths like spoken language conference interpreters, but in face-to-face interactions which have cultural, situational and personal influences (Napier & Goswell, 2013, p. 3).

As the conduit model was eventually recognized as impossible and harmful, a new model emerged. The role of a community facilitator evolved out of the understanding of the complexity of the interpreter's work. This role accounted for the linguistic, socio-cultural and interactional factors in the interpreted settings (Pöchhacker, 2016, p.170; Llewellyn-Jones & Lee 2014, p.29). Closely following the community facilitator model another concept was introduced. The bilingual-bicultural mediator, that acknowledged that all participants in the interpreted situation, including the interpreters, are not only

language users but also representatives of cultures (Llewellyn-Jones & Lee, 2014, p. 29). The seminal works of Roy (1993) and later Wadensjö (1998) and Metzger (1999), argued for interpreters as active participants in the interaction of interpreted situations. As an active participant, the interpreter does not only manage the conversation and make informed decisions in interpreting choices, but as Roy (2000) states, the primary participants of the interpreted situation also view interpreters as participants of the situation and frequently engage them in conversation. Interpreters are seen as “capable human beings who can answer and ask questions” (Roy, 2000, p. 107). Angelelli (2004b) also notes, that interpreters are “persons embedded in a society which possesses its own values, cultural norms, and societal blueprints” and likewise, as any other person, also incorporates their individual views and perceptions in the interactions (p. 2). By accepting this, the ideal of a neutral interpreter is also revoked, as the interpreter’s self is also present in interpreted communicative events just as other social factors such as class, gender, age and ethnicity (Angelelli, 2004b)

The discussion of the interpreter’s role has been ongoing, with contributions by many academics such as Turner’s (2007) metaphor of quantum interpreting and Llewellyn-Jones and Lee’s (2014) concept of role-space. Despite the advances in our understanding of the complexity of the interpreter’s role, the shift from the conduit interpreter role has been slow and according to researchers such as Roy 1993 and Clifford 2004, “attempts to unseat the conduit metaphor as the predominant, normative role metaphor in community interpreting have failed” (Dean & Pollard, 2018, p. 47). Madden’s (2005) findings support this, revealing that her research participants still view their work role “as conduits or channels to communication” (p. 7).

As Dean and Pollard (2018) assert, the conduit model as a metaphor that depicts the interpreter’s role persists, manifesting for example in the ethical codes which are mostly formulated as prescriptive norms. They result in restrictions which “do not provide sufficient guidance regarding the specific situations interpreters face on a day-to-day basis” (Dean & Pollard, 2018, p. 50). Evidently, the role of the interpreter is still a matter on interest and concern. Theory and practice do not seem to find have found balance yet and



normative metaphors of conduit type of interpreting prevail amongst interpreters.

To have a full understanding of what the interpreter is and consequently how I relate gender to have an impact on the profession, in my opinion, it is necessary to understand both the role that interpreters embody as well as to know the demographics and attributes of the profession. The following section discusses these matters.

### **3.2 Gender demographics and attributes**

According to research, a typical profile of a signed language interpreter in Western countries is: white, female, self-employed, second-language learner of a signed language, working part-time and falling into an age-range of 30-40 years (Napier & Leeson, 2016, p.215). Surveys conducted in USA, Australia, Canada and the UK produce similar statistics of the ratio of female and male interpreters in the field (Napier & Barker, 2003, p.22). Previous studies by Cokely, Kanda, and Schein and Yarwood offer probable ratios of three or four female interpreters to every male interpreter (ibid.). No statistical ratios of the Finnish sign language interpreters demographics exist, but the larger number of women in the field is a commonly recognized fact (e.g. Napier & Goswell, 2015, p.5; Madden 2005, p.21), and it is stated for example by Putkonen (2018) that the profession in Finland is female predominant (p. 18). According to Pöchhacker (2016) the field of conference interpreting has undergone feminization (p.164). This means that the profession has started off as a predominantly male profession but throughout time and changes in the profession the ratios have shifted to predominantly female whereas the signed language interpreting profession emerged from the helper / service field that was considered “women’s work” (Stewart, Schein, & Cartwright, 1998,174). The same assumption is made by Frishberg 1990 and Humphrey and Alcorn 1996, suggesting that signed language interpreting is often compared to other professions where women hold the majority, such as nursing or teaching (Napier & Barker, 2003, p.10). The belief that women are better at languages and generally encouraging women to take part in physical activities that train fine body movements (such as dancing and gymnastics) are also given as

explanations for women gravitating to the profession (Napier & Barker, 2003, p.10).) These statements resonate with notions of a gendered structure and the socialization of gender, where society, upbringing and expectations raise people to obtain certain aptitudes and dispositions (e.g. Risman 2018a). Madden (2005) asserts:

Given that signed language interpreting has grown out of the welfare/counseling arena, the occupation may be viewed as an appropriate choice for women because the caring connotations attributed to this type of work fit with the cultural view of women as carers and nurturers. Caring and communication are often seen as natural for women, hence not part of a job (p. 25).

Because the profession of signed language interpreting is regarded as belonging to the women's' field, the attributes of a professional interpreter seem similarly gendered. Generally appreciated attributes are: bicultural skills, relating to and involving yourself with the Deaf culture, openness in sharing personal information and reciprocal activities, and a general willingness to adapt and bridge cultural gaps. Skills such as an ability to navigate social situations and different dynamics, aptitude for emotional work and intellectual skills are mentioned as the priority accomplishments in the makeup of a good interpreter. Although the perspectives on attributes differ depending on the relationship each person has with the profession, i.e. whether they are consumers (Deaf or hearing), researchers, teachers or practitioners themselves (Napier et al., 2011, pp. 51-55).

In order to interpret, the interpreter needs bilingual skills, but according to Napier et al. (2011) the signed language interpreter should also possess knowledge of the cultures between which she is interpreting. The interpreter should hold a "good attitude" towards the Deaf community; a trait that is especially valued by the Deaf consumers of interpretation. A good attitude is measured by how the interpreter relates to people in the Deaf community, the respect that she shows to the community and "personal dispositions such as genuineness, patience, humour and warmth" which are regarded in contrast to negative attitudes of the majority hearing population

(p.52). Emotional skills include aptitude for recognizing and controlling our own emotions, self-motivation, empathy and ability to maintain good relationships with people. An emotionally stable interpreter is likely to be a successful one. Flexibility and a mention of thick skin is mentioned as well, meaning abilities to go with the flow, enduring embarrassing moments and withstanding heavy emotions. (Napier et al., 2011, pp. 56-57). Koskinen (2018) agrees with this, stating that a community interpreter's work is affective work, where controlling one's emotions is a skill to value.

Ability to read and mediate emotions, while keeping the interpreter's own emotions hidden and vacant, is actually often related to the ideal of an impartial interpreter (Koskinen, 2018, p.165). Koskinen (2018) continues to analyze this ability to control one's emotions in contrast to the Finnish ethical codes of conduct for community interpreters where section 7. stipulates: "The interpreter is an impartial mediator who will not let her feelings, attitudes or opinions affect their work. She will respect her clients' independence and autonomy" (Asioimistulkin ammattisäännöstö, n.d., my translation - K.V.).

Even if the interpreted situations are against the interpreter's moral standards or ethics, she should not express this in any way, but remain neutral. The interpreter can be said to wear a sort of a mask, a metaphor coined by Anthony Pym, at all times during work, which allows the interpreter to hide her true feelings and be able to perform her assignment (Koskinen, 2018, p. 168). Madden's (2005) notions of sign language interpreters' "overwhelming orientation to work" resonates with this, as she asserts that remaining in the interpreter's role "leads to the tendency to deny the validity of their own needs" (p. 27). Although the interpreter is required proficient linguistic skills, the impression is that an aptitude for emotional intelligence and interpersonal and communication skills seem to rise to a more important position (Llewellyn-Jones and Lee, 2014, pp.135-137).

Most of the attributes and abilities required of interpreters fall in to the category of soft skills, which have been commonly in our society associated with women (Hong, 2016, p.4). As our society operates within a gendered structure, masculine and feminine are often thought of as two opposing concepts, where attributes like aggressive / passive, rational / emotional, dominant / warm and agency / social sensitivity are thought to be within the

same binary, the former being associated with male and the latter, female (Hong 2016; Williams & Tiedens 2015) In this light, many of the attributes and role descriptions of an interpreter can fundamentally be said to be stereotyped as feminine traits and conforming to the ideal of a woman, as can be seen evident in Madden's (2005) citing of Boreham, Hall, Harley and Whitehouse, 1996, in stating that women are typically expected and taught to be accepting, accommodating and pleasant, and tend to work in situations where loyalty to the employer is highly valued (p. 22). Madden (2005) also asserts that in following the conduit model ideal, signed language interpreters are rendered submissive (p. 7)

Wolf (2006) follows a similar trail of thought, describing the translator as submissive and subservient, a person who works efficiently, punctually, silently and invisibly (p. 136). The combination of conduit model type of prescriptive norms, role attributes and gender bias can be therefore said to uphold an image of interpreting as a feminine, subservient, profession, profoundly influenced by gender.

Within this and the previous section I've elaborated on the role conceptions of an interpreter and the attributes which are generally assumed as signs of a professional interpreter. To further understand how gender and the signed language interpreting profession are entwined, it is necessary to look at past research on the subject. The next chapter elaborates on the research done on gender and the translation and interpreting field.

### **3.3 Research on gender**

Research related to gender and sexuality in the interpreting field is still scarce. The fields of research that academics have been interested throughout the signed language interpreting profession's history, are areas such as accuracy of interpreting, end product of interpreting, strategies, occupational stress or burnout, clientele and relationships, as well as the impact of the presence of a signed language interpreter (Napier & Leeson, 2016, p. 197; Brunson, 2015, p. 130). Topics relating to interpreters as a social and professional group started to find more ground after the sociological turn of the 1990s, when the agency and social factors relating to the profession became more of a topic of

interest (Angelelli, 2012). However, according to Brunson (2015) the social factors which impact the profession of signed language interpreting have not yet been studied wide enough, although they would greatly benefit the profession in understanding a larger context within which all signed language interpreters operate (p. 131).

Our “kinship” profession, the translation field has seen a larger body of research related to sociology, and gender has been a topic since the 1970s, when the Western societies experienced a general rise on women’s movement and LGBT movements as well as a shift to the post-structuralist paradigm to social identities (Baer & Massardier-Kenney, 2015, p. 83). Such research included topics on historical biographies of women translators and their struggle in a patriarchal system and gender inequality, translating gendered language and how translations can weaken the visibility of gendered constructions in discourse, the possible influence of the translator’s gender on the target text and feminist theories of translation (see Baer & Massardier-Kenney, 2015, for an overview). Sociological aspects in the translating and interpreting field have also been studied, utilizing Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, field and symbolic capital (see e.g. Inghilleri 2005), but within the scope of this thesis exploring Bourdieu’s concepts was not possible (Pöchhacker, 2016, p. 55).

One contributor to the discussion of gender and translation is Wolf (2006). Wolf (2006) also refers to the 1990s sociological turn in recapping the new approaches of postcolonial translation, ethnographics and feminist translations in the field. She states that the discussion of social implications (e.g. interaction between the translator and the institution, role of social agents and agencies) is still wanting (Wolf, 2006, p.129). Following a questionnaire, conducted in the year 2000 with the aim to explore the state of feminist translation in research and teaching in german-speaking countries and social situation of female translators, Wolf deduced gender questions not to be held in high esteem in departments of translation and interpreting, although some activity or lecture on topics gender and feminism are included (Wolf, 2006, p. 130.) Contrasting Wolf’s notions to the Finnish situation, a revision of the current Finnish interpreting training curricula of the two universities of applied sciences, revealed that only Humak provides a module

where gender is specifically mentioned in gender sensitive work approaches (Humanistinen Ammattikoulu, n.d., Diakonia Ammattikorkeakoulu, n.d.). This would imply that similar to Wolf's (2006) notions, gender questions are not held as priority issues in current interpreter training, although, a curriculum cannot reveal the entire content of topics discussed in each module.

Within the spoken language interpreting field, Angelelli (2004b) is one of the few to incorporate gender as a salient factor in her research. In describing the interpreter's presence in an interpreted situation she states all the social factors which must also be acknowledged: "views on power, status, solidarity, gender, age, race, ethnicity, nationality, socio-economic status (SES), as well as the cultural norms and societal blueprints" (Angelelli 2004b, p. 9). Her research on the interpreters' attitudes and perceptions on their behavior while at work in medical settings did not find any significant differences between male and female interpreters regarding their visibility, establishing trust, rendering the message, cultural brokering and establishing communication rules during the interpreted events (Angelelli, 2004a; Baer & Massardier-Kenney, 2015, 91).

While Angelelli (2004a) didn't find gender a salient factor in her research, other studies and articles have found evidence of gender impact on the interpretation in the field of sociolinguistics (MacDougal, 2012; Morgan, 2008; Levine, 2007; McIntire & Sanderson, 1995.) These studies have demonstrated the effects of gendered styles of discourse and its impact in interpreted situations. The impact of a "feminine" type of discourse is said to have negative impacts on the credibility of the rendered message. This according to McDougall (2012) is due to the internalized assumption of male speech as the norm and women's speech as something deviating from it, stemming from the hegemonic patriarchal and stereotypical view of power and dominance, where women and people with disabilities are usually viewed as inferior. Issues of gender and interpretation require more attention, as Roy (2000) also suggests, recommending research on interaction where female interpreters interpret for men (p. 17). The scope of this thesis however, is on the sociological aspects of gender and the profession, which has seen less research thus far. The most relevant for the scope of this thesis are elaborated below.

Gentile (2018) explores the relation of gender and a self-perceived understanding of the prestige of a conference interpreter. Her findings indicate that female conference interpreters more often perceive their profession as less valued than male interpreters. The results of an online questionnaire confirmed that conference interpreting is still a predominantly female profession with a 75.5% of responds being from women (Gentile, 2018, p. 39). The responses to her question of how interpreters felt others regarded their profession revealed differences across genders. Female interpreters' responses indicated they felt their profession having less prestige than male interpreters: "while women themselves believe that interpreting is a socially important and prestigious profession, they do not think that these aspects are acknowledged to the same extent by non-interpreters" (Gentile, 2018, pp. 39-40). Gentile (2018) states that there is a trend for women interpreters to "stress further the general lack of understanding of the profession by laypeople, who are less willing to pay for interpreters' services" (p. 40). The results also reveal a more pessimistic view of the present situation and future of their profession by women interpreters (Gentile, 2018, p. 22). Gentile's argument can be supported by Burch (2000) who states, referring to ASL-to-English interpreters, that the signed language interpreting profession has a low value in society due partly to the female predominance and low wages (p. 10). However, when Gentile (2018) compared the self-perceived status of male and female interpreters, no significant difference was found as respondents generally felt that interpreting is a high-status profession. A difference in the female respondents ages and opinions did stand out. According to responses, the younger generation of interpreters rated their self-perceived status higher than older interpreters (p. 39).

Spânu's (2009) study reveals professional Romanian women conference interpreters feelings on devaluation of their work. The harassment and sexism perpetrated by their male clients indicate an underappreciation of the conference interpreters' professionalism. Spânu's (2009) respondents expressed facing some form of harassment in their everyday working life, taking place in "either within the actual work setting, during lunches and dinners or outside of it". Her interviewees reported harassment being verbal, sexual jokes, advances and sexist remarks but never physical. Undermining is

also explicit in incidents where the interpreters are asked to perform servicing type of tasks out of their job (Spânu, 2009, p. 39). Disrespect of the professionalism of the female interpreters also reveals itself as the “informants repeatedly stressed that the most frequent type of verbal harassment is being called by their first names and being referred to as “the girls”, regardless of age or level of education” (Spânu, 2009, pp.39-40). The majority of experiences of harassment, according to Spânu’s (2009) respondents, happen to younger, attractive looking female interpreters who express a positive and social attitude towards their clients (p. 48).

The issue of prestige has also been addressed in the translation field, where the findings of Dam and Zethsen (2014) revealed a middling to low prestige for Danish translators. The sense of prestige, perhaps surprisingly was more dependent on translators feeling appreciated, than the more common factors such as education, income and social power (Dam & Zethsen 2014; Gentile 2018). Within the signed language interpreting field, the matter of prestige, and especially the connection of gender and prestige hasn’t received a study of its own to my knowledge. The need for exploring signed language interpreters’ views on the matter would be topical in the light of Gentile’s (2018) and Spânu’s (2009) findings, as well as the acknowledgement that the interpreting profession is thought to have a huge status gap between conference interpreting and community interpreting (Gentile, 2018, p. 21).

As Napier and Barker (2003) state, signed language interpreters do typically see themselves as professionals because of the very specialized skills they have obtained, that could be compared to the way other professionals regard themselves, such as architects, doctors or lawyers (p. 22). Their self-perceived prestige might not however be reflected on the views of non-interpreters, outsiders to the profession. Even though spoken and signed language interpreters share much of the same history and theoretical base, some matters regarding their prestige might differ.

Both spoken and signed language interpreting professions share a similar history, where the first interpreters were persons with a dual cultural identity or a background in immersion to both cultures. It was between those cultures that they acted as mediators. While spoken language interpreters still



continue to mainly emerge from within the ethnic minorities, signed language interpreters now enter the profession mainly through academia, meaning interpreter training, without a need for minority cultural background. (Pöchhacker, 2016, p. 163.) Pöchhacker (2016) points out: “In spoken-language community interpreting, --- interpreter’s belonging to the ethnic minority or migrant culture of the individual client are likely to be subject to reigning attitudes to the cultural Other in mainstream society, with profound implications for the recognition and professional status afforded them” (p. 163). This difference is mentioned in contrast to the fact that signed language interpreters, apart from Deaf interpreters, in the present day situation, stand as representatives of the majority culture responsible for the marginalization of the Deaf society (Pöchhacker, 2016, p. 163.)

Expressions of oppression towards the Deaf society are audistic or ableistic attitudes. Audism is understood as a discriminatory attitude and belief of superiority by a person based on their ability to hear (Napier & Leeson 2016, p.56) where as ableism is discrimination and exclusion towards people with mental, emotion and physical disabilities (Hehir 1991, p.3). These discriminatory attitudes, audism and ableism, stemming from ignorance and lack of knowledge, seem to reverberate in attitudes of people outside the profession who sometimes mistake signed language interpreters as helpers or signed languages as inferior to spoken (Napier and Leeson, 2016, pp. 190-191).

There is still a tension in that the status of sign language interpreting is frequently misunderstood by the wider community. This may follow on from the fact that many people still misunderstand that sign languages are rich, complex languages of equal status to spoken languages --- So, if sign language interpreters are ‘just flapping their hands about’, isn’t it easy? (Napier & Leeson, 2016, pp. 190-191)

The comments made by people outside the profession or Deaf culture seem to embody the “Tiny Tim”-effect, where the dominant culture sees people with disabilities childlike, dependent and in need of charity and pity (Hehir 2002, p.4), which then consequently may distort the view on signed

language interpreting being something done out of pure good will. McIntire and Sanderson (1995) draw a connection between this attitude and the genderedness of the signed language interpreting profession stating:

As interpreters, we need power. Because most of us are female (male RID membership is outnumbered 6:1), most of us start at a disadvantage. We are not saying that it is necessarily a disadvantage to be female in any absolute sense. Rather, in US society in general, being female means one enters most situations as a relatively disempowered person. In addition, although deaf people increasingly view themselves as a cultural minority, society in general views deaf people as 'handicapped' and therefore lacking power. (p. 102)

Jones (2017) follows a similar trail of thought in her study, stating the dearth of research on the compounding effects of gender bias and audism (p. 29). Her hypothesis, built on anecdotal evidence gathered from colleagues as well as her own, was on the remarked evidence of gender influence on interaction during interpreted events. However, the data collected in Jones' (2017) study did not find clear evidence of gender bias, although the data did imply that "male Deaf presenter with a female interpreter may be viewed as less intelligent, trustworthy, friendly, and authoritative—especially when interacting with certain demographic groups" (p. 56). The results were not conclusive enough to lay ground for arguments, but as Jones (2017) infers, changes to the methodology might reveal different results. Nonetheless, her findings did reveal another unexpected factor: 44 % of the participants of Jones' (2017) research "indicated that they were confused and/or distracted by the use of ASL or the interpreting process" (p. 72). Jones (2017) notes the lack of research on customer orientation for hearing and deaf consumers, meaning information about interpreted interaction and the process of working with an interpreter and suggests this should be a factor to consider (p. 56). Madden's (2005) research confirms this to some extent, asserting that signed language interpreters feel a need for more consumer education (p. 25). While no connection is drawn between customer orientation and mitigating gender

bias, sexism and harassment, explaining the interpreting process and interpreter's role to consumers might offer an approach to combating them.

The situation of harassment is regarded as a norm within the interpreters and their coping method for such behavior is to refer to them as funny stories, "laughing it off" as well as trying to decline any attempts gently and politely (Spânu, 2009, p.49, 52). One of the main reasons for not acting more drastically to unwanted behavior is the hierarchical manner in which interpreting work is allocated in Romania, where the client holds an upperhand in decision making, making harassment tolerated rather than reported (Spânu, 2009, pp. 1-2). The importance of "public relations", in maintaining customer relations and finding new working opportunities prevails over reporting unwanted behavior. Tolerance of sexism, flexibility with working hours and performing tasks external to interpreting are continuously required of women interpreters in Romania (Spânu, 2009). Considering the remarks of age being an "incentive" for sexist comments and the hierarchical power relations in Romania, Spânu (2009) states:

This may indicate that young female interpreters in particular are more willing to compromise in order to access the market and that once they are more established in this profession they tend to refuse assignments for personal or moral reasons, they start educating their clients in matters such as payment, working day, work conditions, and services they provide (pp. 50-51).

While the harassing actions towards women interpreters is harmful in its own account and creates an unequal working environment where the interpreters are in a very vulnerable state, also "the tolerance and lack of assertiveness [by the female interpreters] reinforces the gender inequalities within the labour market" (Spânu, 2009, p. 8).

Artl's (2015) and Brück's (2011) research identified problems which can be said to stem from the stratification of gender in our society and the way that gender bias influences our interaction. The sign language interpreters' replies bring forth issues of stereotypical gender expectations and mitigation of a female interpreter's proficiency. Finding sincluded mentions of sexual

attempts from participants of interpreted settings, i.e. clients, a shift in the dynamic and/or unwanted attention to the interpreter because of her gender (Artl 2015; Brück 2011.)

Brück's report reveals that all participants of her pilot study questionnaire thought their gender had an impact on the dynamic of interpreted events. 18 out of 26 respondents of the questionnaire state they believe female predominance has negative impact on the attitude towards the profession, it being wrongfully considered a 'helper' or 'caretaker' profession. They also connect female predominance with the low compensation of the work. Artl's (2015) significant finding relate to the individual gender identity of female interpreters. Her interviews with three female interpreters and two male interpreters reveal that female interpreters are more impacted by gender expectations and biases. Unwanted sexual advances, an attempt to blend in with the participants and very careful consideration of how much femininity a female interpreter can show, appear to be a specific issues that only female interpreters face: “--- Female practitioners are making these considerations on a regular basis to determine an appropriate amount of femininity to present within the spaces they are working“ (Artl, 2015, p.60).

Inspired by Artl's (2015) study on interpreter's gender identity my own pilot study (Valentin 2018) sought to discover how gender impacted Finnish sign language interpreters. The findings of my pilot study, gathered through solicited diaries from three Finnish female sign language interpreters, implied that similar findings were true for the Finnish context as well. The interpreter's identity relating to identity evoked thoughts, especially regarding expressing one's personality through appearance. Participants also discussed experiences of sexism and harassment as well as the helper-view that some lay people outside the profession held on their profession. Also within the Finnish context, Pohjolainen-Helminen and Suviala (2013) found evidence of interpreters (their respondents aged from 25-29 years) facing sexism and harassment in their work, some even on a weekly basis. The similar findings presented thus far, indicate that issues with gender bias, prestige and harassment are experienced by signed language interpreters transnationally.

The relationship of gender and signed language interpreting has seen surprisingly little research thus far. The field of translation can be said to

outrun the interpreting field by many years regarding both sociolinguistic and sociological aspects of gender. Gender has started to spark interest in the interpreting field, but a wider array of perspectives and studies is still wanting. The impact of gender on discourse and interaction has drawn most of the interest, while aspects regarding the profession and interpreters' experiences dwindle down to a few papers.

It is clearly evident from the studies of Gentile (2018) and Spânu (2009) that female interpreters feel their profession is not always held with prestige by lay people. Research on women's work underpin the gender bias that holds female predominant work generally at a lower position than professions dominated by men (e.g. Clayman Institute for Gender Research, 2017, Wynn & Correll, 2018, Williams, 1992, Kalev & Deutsch, 2018, Laperrière & Orloff, 2018, Ridgeway, 2011). The findings of Artl (2015), Brück (2011), Valentin (2018) and Pohjolainen-Helminen and Suviala (2013) indicate that female signed language interpreters experience gender oppression and bias through sexism and harassment and their very existence as a female in interpreted settings impacts the dynamics of interaction and them as individuals. It is evident, that signed language interpreting profession needs more research on the different aspects of gender impact to identify where the most pivotal areas are, in order to inflict possible change.

This chapter has given an overview of what interpreting and more specifically what sign language interpreting is, with a specific focus on the role conceptions and interpreter attributes. The final part of the chapter introduced research on gender and translation and interpreting field which are significant for the scope of this thesis. The next chapter will start with explaining the identified research gap, continuing with pinpointing the prominent aspects of the theoretical framework of the literature review. It will then revise the aim and objectives and move on to the methodology where I explain my position and standpoint as a researcher and describe the ways used to attain and analyze the data for this research.

## **4 SETTING THE RESEARCH**

This chapter reasons the research gap that my thesis attempts to go some way towards filling. I also explain the main theoretical framework used to analyze the data gathered for this research as well as elaborate on the aim and objective. I then move on to explaining my positionality and standpoint as a researcher within the context of this thesis. The chapter concludes with the methodology, introduction of participants and the template analysis format.

### **4.1 Research gap, theoretical framework, aim and objectives revisited**

Gender and its relation to stratification, segregation, discrimination and oppression has been researched by numerous academics, to such extent that introducing all research within the scope of this thesis is impossible. Studies have shown the impact of gender on our identities and interaction, gender bias and gendered expectations operating in our society. Work-life especially can be highlighted as a stage where gender bias and oppression manifests. (Risman, 2018, 2004; Mason, 2018; Ridgeway, 2011; Ridgeway & Krichelli-Katz, 2013; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Kalev & Deutsch, 2018; Williams, 1992; Clayman Institute for Gender Research, 2017; Julkunen, 2010; Laperrière & Orloff, 2018.) Research on interpreting, both spoken and signed languages has looked at the accuracy of interpretation, end products, clientele and role of the interpreter but has been lacking a sociological outlook on the profession (Brunson, 2015). Angelelli (2004b) agrees, stating the lack of incorporation of interdisciplinary research such as Linguistic Anthropology, Bilingualism, Feminism, Sociolinguistics, Social Psychology, Sociology, or Translation Studies. In a state where a lack of perspectives exists, Angelelli argues that the lack of interdisciplinary insights and theory hinders the process of interpreting theory to such extent that the field's research operates within a closed circle. Within the circle associations, practice and interpreting education feed each other in a cycle that shuts out most of the interaction with theory and research from outside the field (p. 23).

Interpreting continues to live by rules that are seldom questioned, practitioners continue to worry about accurate transmission of the

message, and the field fails to contextualize the interpreter and the message and its transmission. The notion of interpreting (like any other type of communication) as a manifestation of some kind of interpersonal relation has been largely ignored, and the contributing social factors (e.g., ethnicity race, genderage, status, power, or solidarity) that may influence the message and its transmittal during an interaction have seldom been taken into account. (Angelelli, 2004b, p. 24)

As an extension to Angelelli's (2004b) notion, I argue that the entire profession, not just the interpreted events, should be examined with a sociological lense to understand factors impacting the interpreter, and within this thesis' scope, the Finnish sign language interpreter. The aim of this thesis is therefore to explore the relationship of gender and the signed language interpreting profession in a Finnish context through a lense relying on theories from sociology and gender studies. Research regarding aspects of gender impact in the interpreting and especially in the signed language interpreting field are still scarce, but the initial findings thus far show evidence of impact in the areas of individual experiences with gender identity, perceptions of prestige of the profession and gender bias, sexism and harassment.

My hypothesis, regarding the role of the interpreter and the impact it has on our decisions to act and react in interactive situations, especially when confronted with sexism and harassment, has emerged from the descriptions of interpreter's role, data from research on signed language interpreting and gender and literature stating how women are often viewed in work life (Dean & Pollard, 2018; Llewellyn-Jones & Lee, 2015; Stewart, Schein & Cartwright, 1998; Napier & Barker, 2003; Hong, 2016; Williams & Tiedens, 2015; Arti ,2015; Brück, 2011). In addition to this, the findings of Gentile (2018) and Spânu (2009), supported by Burch (2000) and McIntire and Sanderson (1995) indicate that the interpreters' perception of prestige by lay people and the connection with gender and prestige require more attention. By making use of Risman's theory of gender as a social construct (Risman, 2018a; 2018b; 2004) I attempt to contextualize gender impact on individual, interactional and macro level in signed language interpreting profession. I draw on research of

gender and work as well as identified literature from the field of translation and interpreting to identify whether the data gathered for this thesis can be assimilated with findings pinpointed thus far. In addition, my intention is to bring forth new perspectives to add to the body of research regarding sociological aspects of interpreting and gender.

#### **4.2 Researcher's positionality and standpoint**

In order to validate my research it is important to elaborate on my positionality and standpoint. Contextualizing the research and making the researcher's standpoint clear to the reader enables the readers to understand how researchers are located within conversations and explains the person's rights, duties and obligations in respect to the topic (Van Langenhove and Harré, 2010). This means clarifying power relations, competences and moral standings of the researcher in relation to the study (Van Langenhove and Harré, 2010, p. 465)

Within this thesis, my position is best defined as a practisearcher, a practitioner-cum-researcher with an aim to approach issues arising from my own area of work from a more scientific perspective (Gile, 1995, p. 15). I am a white, 31 year old female Finnish sign language interpreter, with six years of working experience, and comparable to participants of the sample groups that I am studying within this thesis. My initial drivers for conducting this research, stem from personal experiences and observations, which I have wanted to study more objectively and scientifically.

Epistemically, I take on a feminist standpoint, where I regard all knowledge to be socially situated:

The social situation of an epistemic agent—her gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and physical capacities—plays a role in forming what we know and limiting what we are able to know. They can affect what we are capable of knowing and what we are permitted to know. (Bowell, n.d. para 7)

Feminist standpoint argues that people in a marginalized or dominated position are epistemically at an advantage to produce new



information; correcting existing falsehoods and revealing suppressed truths. “Standpoints make visible aspects of social relations and of the natural world that are unavailable from dominant perspectives, and in so doing they generate the kinds of questions that will lead to a more complete and true account of those relations.” (Bowell n.d. para 16.) Revealing these new aspects and problems can then consequently become research agendas or policy issues, and hopefully as an end result, inflict change through examination of beliefs, prejudices and biases “that will lead to a more complete and true account of those relations.” (Bowell n.d. para 16.)

Feminist standpoint is not without critique, it has been accused of “proposing a single, monolithic feminist standpoint --- arising not from ordinary women’s lives but from the lives of relatively privileged, mostly middle-class, mostly white, women academics” and claiming socially situated standpoints of falling back on relativism (Bowell, n.d. para 32). However, I find it a necessary disposition in touching subjects that are little researched and hard to produce tangible data from. Therefore we should accept that the vantage point, that female sign language interpreters as individual sources of data provide, is valuable to researchers. To validate the research, transparency and reflexivity must be exercised in describing the methodology and analysing the data. We must also understand that building a comprehensive body of knowledge on the subject of gender and interpreting requires contributions from many researchers with combinations of qualitative and quantitative methods. This study suggests a piece to the puzzle that others can continue to build to gather epistemologically sound evidence.

### **4.3 Methodology**

#### **4.3.1 Focus groups and participants**

In order to gather data for the research part of this thesis, I chose a qualitative method to be able to give voice to the participants. As Creswell (2007) describes, qualitative research happens in a “natural setting, sensitive to people and places under study, and [produces a] data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes” (p. 37). Following the modern trends of qualitative research, interpretation of data and situating the study

within the wider contexts of political, social and cultural structures was my aim as a researcher (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). By natural settings, I mean interaction face-to-face with my participants, gathering the data through talk, in this case, through two separate focus groups. Focus groups are open-ended group discussions, where the discussion is facilitated by the researcher and it revolves around a particular topic. They are convenient in generating a lot of data through a hybrid form of interview and discussion, where general and specific questions can be alternated. (Hale & Napier, 2013, p. 104).

The participants were mainly recruited via an informal Facebook group, where an announcement of the research was posted with a tentative schedule for the date of the focus group. This Facebook group was chosen because of steady activity in professional discussions, indicating that interpreters who were a member of this group seemed inclined to comment on issues relevant in the field. The member amount of 560 people also seemed to reach a considerable amount of interpreters in Finland. In addition to this announcement in the Facebook group, I also used convenience sampling, making use of my own connections and social networks (Hyers 2018). Both methods of recruiting resulted in six participants, four in the first focus group and two for the second focus group. The initial plan was to hold one large focus group session with eight participants as an ideal number is usually stated as 6-10 or even 12 participants (Hale & Napier, 2013, p. 105). Due to scheduling inconveniences and other obstacles, two small focus groups were held instead and with a smaller number of participants on both occasions, more room for discussion and expressing of each participant's opinions was left.

All participants were female, as required in the recruiting announcement. They were familiar to me from worklife to varying degrees of acquaintance. The participants' working experience varied approximately from 5-15 years and their ages from approximately 30-45. Their clientele varied from Deaf, hard of hearing to DeafBlind and used working languages from Finnish Sign Language to Finnish and English. Two of the participants were no longer working as interpreters, but had left the profession quite recently and were still actively interested in the field and willing to participate. The rest of the participants worked half to full-time as interpreters in the Southern

areas of Finland. Very detailed descriptions of participants are not possible due to sensitivity of anonymity and they are also given pseudonyms to respect the privacy of each person. Participants of focus group 1 were given names: Laura, Irene, Ellen and Jane, and participants of focus group 2 the names: Norma and Veera.

The participants were given brief information about the topic of the focus group beforehand and they were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix A). In addition to this, all direct quotes with their English translations, translated by me, were sent for a review to each participant and adjustments to comments made in mutual understanding if needed for clarity of concealing private facts. Participants also received movie tickets as token of gratitude for taking part in the study.

#### 4.3.2 Semi-structured interview, research assistant and transcription

The focus group discussion was conducted following rules of semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview has a time limit defined by the interviewer and a set of prompt questions to guide the discussion. However, flexibility in responses, reactions to others' replies or to explore some topics more in depth than others is possible. This is also the advantage of the focus group, where responses of the participants are inspired by the comments of others and may trigger thoughts that might otherwise not come to mind (Hale & Napier, 2003, p. 97-98, 104-105).

Prompt questions for the focus groups were designed after the structure of Risman's theory of three levels of gender impact (2018a; 2018b; 2004), as well as themes and some quotes that emerged from my pilot study and from relevant literature (Appendix B). Some modification to structure and planned questions happened in both focus groups due to natural flow of participants' comments and interests.

The first focus group was held as a face-to-face conversation with a video camera and a separate voice recorder. As recommended, a research assistant was present during the discussion to tend to the equipment so that I as the researcher could focus on facilitating the discussion itself and writing down notes (Hale & Napier, 2003, p. 105). The second focus group was held

through Skype and was both audio recorded and screen recorded so that there was no need for an outside person to mind the logistics during discussion. Audio data from both focus groups were sent to an external transcriber. Both the research assistant and external transcriber were asked to sign confidentiality forms (Appendix C) and participants were informed of the use of external people during the data processing phase.

Although it is recommendable that the researcher transcribes their own data, as the transcription conventions depend on how the researcher wants to analyze the data. With natural occurring speech, as was the case with the focus groups, the transcriber may choose how detailed for example pauses, overlapping speech, pitch, volume and other factors are wanted (Hale & Napier, 2003, pp. 139-140). In this case, the use of an external transcriber was due to physical medical issues. The transcribing conventions were agreed on together, where the emphasis was on accurate transcriptions of meaning and phrasing but with less regard on paralingual factors. Simultaneous turns of speech were marked as overlapping incomprehensible speech, clear changes in volume marked with capital letters and laughter or references to gestures indicated in brackets.

#### 4.3.3 Template analysis

The results were analyzed using template analysis, a form of thematic analysis that is a flexible tool when wanting to use prefigured themes as well as allow for new emerging themes. It is especially convenient for textual data, such as the transcribed data from my focus groups. (Brooks, McCluskey, Turley & King, 2015) The template analysis does not require a particular philosophical assumption as it is not a methodology in itself, nor does it give specific instructions on how to interpret the research data (King, 2015, 03:16). Its strength is combining a priori themes with emerging themes and a process of evolving a final theme template through analyzing and reanalyzing the data (Brooks et al., 2015). Therefore it was the most convenient tool for analyzing my data, as I had developed theories and some presumptions through conducting my pilot study (Valentin, 2018) and reviewing the literature.

The template analysis starts with some a priori themes, which can be categorized into hard and soft themes. Hard themes emerge explicit from theory, whereas soft themes are topics, which the researcher finds interesting, but are not strictly defined (King, 2015, 8:25). The actual process of the template analysis starts with familiarizing oneself with the data, followed by a preliminary coding of themes where the a priori themes are used with or without other emerging themes. All the themes, both a priori and emerged are tentative and may be modified or eliminated during the process. The themes are then clustered with narrower themes under broader themes and an initial coding template is created. The template is then applied to all data and modified until a unified and sensible coding system is created. (Brooks et al., 2015, pp. 203-204). The form in which the template is presented can be shown as hierarchical layers but it is not necessary as themes may impact and interact with one another in ways that are not hierarchical. Therefore a mindmap layout of the template analysis is also an appropriate way to present the themes on the template. (King, 2015, 19:57)

In my own analysis, I first started with both hard and soft a priori themes. The hard themes were the broad topics of individual, interactional and macro level. Soft themes included the themes: surprising and significant, expected and significant, unique opinions and topics relating to differences between men and women. These were color-coded and the first round of analysis was done by hand. During the first round, I added emerging themes as margin notes. (Appendix D). After this round, I moved on to work via Google docs and utilized its online word document and the commenting tool. At this stage I modified and unified some of the themes and created a new document with the themes as titles, under which I moved each comment found relevant in the transcriptions. Some comments were situated under more than one theme. I then created a mind map where all themes were clustered under broader topics and created a cleaned version, showing only the broad topics for the final template (Appendix E). These final themes were then organized as themes and sections for the analysis and discussion part of this thesis.

This chapter has elaborated the gap in the research that I have identified. My theoretical framework has been revisited and the research

questions revised. My position and standpoint as researcher has been declared and in the final section I have explained the methodology of my data collection and analysis. The next chapter will introduce the results of my two focus groups accompanied by an interpretative discussion.

## **5 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter includes the main findings of the focus group discussions combined with an interpretative discussion. The significant themes that emerged from the data are introduced in sections 5.1 - 5.3, whereas section 5.4 will explore the findings utilizing the gender structure (Risman 2018a; 2018b; 2004) in order to provide a clear overview of the stratified impact of gender.

### **5.1 Signed language interpreter's role**

To start of the analysis, I begin with the signed language interpreter's role as the implications of how the role is understood impact many areas of the identified topics in the focus group discussion. The signed language interpreter's role is complex. As active participants in an interactive interpreted situation, interpreters hold great power over the course of the discourse at hand, not only mediating what is said but also doing culture brokering, managing turns of speech and making constant decisions of how things are said and what is left out (Roy 2000; Napier et al. 2010). Descriptions of a proficient signed language interpreter illustrate a very demanding profession, where people skills, pressure, quick reactions and cognitive skills are at constant use (Napier et al. 2010, pp. 51-62; Madden, 2005, p. 28). The concept of an interpreter's role has seen paradigm shifts throughout the years, but studies have shown that the conduit model prevails in everyday norms and language (Dean & Pollard, 2018). This is why I wanted to first find out how my participants viewed the role of a signed language interpreter.

Most of the focus group participants describe the interpreter as a facilitator of communication and culture, who represents their client (usually referring to their Deaf client) through their actions and to some extent even through their chosen attire. They emphasize that the interpreter must strive for impartiality, even if they recognize that due to the interpreter's own personal opinions it can be difficult at times. The notion of a neutral, invisible-like interpreter is rejected, as many of the participants also mentioned very clearly

that it is a known fact that the interpreter is present in the situation and impacts it with her presence:

Norma: In my opinion, invisibility is something you can completely scratch off. My goodness, the interpreter is never invisible, on the contrary, the interpreter is very visible. But how you choose to portray that role, in that you have to be as impartial as possible. It is not easy being impartial, because as a human being you always have an opinion and your own moral and ethics that impact you, but the interpreter is visible and strives to be a professional in a way that she will not take sides.

Overall all the participants had quite a similar view on how they perceived the interpreter's role. In their descriptions of what they knew about the reality of interpreting and expectations from education or clients, they recognized and reject the cognitive model as being something that they do not aspire to anymore. However, the interpreter training is mentioned as a place where a conduit model type of role is still enforced on the newly graduated. It is through working experience, that the participants have later discarded it, starting to unlearn this type of behavior.

Jane: --- I had the same situation, that after graduation school I had the feeling that we had to be a certain way, that you can't let anything show' and I strongly disagreed. Even if I'm being very cordial, I want to mirror my client, how they are behaving, do they want something extra from me. --- But I can still be me, myself, positive, and how I'd meet new people in my private life. It's just my workplace, where I interpret --- I don't have to take on that 'mode'.

Veera: --- There's a certain requirement of invisibility, that emerges from our training, the 'no smell, no taste'-feeling, and people have very different opinions on that. I've noticed that the idea still sits very tightly with the recent graduates from [name of university] ---

The interpreters assume a very devoted, professional role, abiding by the ethical codes of conduct to create an atmosphere of trust and



professionalism, reflecting Demers' (2005) observations (p. 209). The comments of the participants show not only the strong connection of interpreter's role to duty and devotion but also to the submissive attitude (Wolf 2006; Madden 2005). A frustration with the assumed submissive attitude is evident in the participants' comments either as direct comments, or implied through describing reactions and actions, or not taking action.

Irene: --- Our submissive attitude. Only a few interpreters are such that go to their assignment and state that 'I am a professional, this is how I operate so how should we continue?' --- many of us take on a submissive role, what even just non interpreting women don't need to have but traditionally we have it.

Jane: I'm often irritated by the fact that we are so apologetic. And that we can't say that you can't treat me this way. --- I don't know if it's because we're women or not but this attitude that people [interpreters] have is something that was bestowed upon us at school, that 'you must be apologetic and like wall flowers'.

Although the replies imply that the participants believe interpreters easily fall in to a submissive role, they also state that this is not the type of work role they would want to embody. It is evident in most participants' responses that they want to perform professionally but wish to maintain a more proactive demeanor and one's own personality. Jane states that she has deliberately taken on an attitude where she will not hear any "stupid comments". She goes in as a professional, greets people and is friendly if possible but refuses to act submissively. Most participants indicate that it is easier and more fluent to perform work when allowed to show their own personality during work, except for Laura, who states feeling more comfortable in an "interpreter role" that she has as a separate identity from her private life. The replies of those participants, who wish for their personality to be allowed, associate it to being recognized as a human being, not only an interpreting entity, a conduit. It would seem, that the participants are conscious about the looming conduit role, as reminiscent of interpreter training, client expectations and perhaps expectations from colleagues.

When it comes to dedication to work, the participants revealed a strong willingness to display professional conduct. A passion for doing their work as well as possible, a mutual understanding of prioritizing their client (most often referring to their Deaf client) and the work at hand overrode everything else affecting the situation.

Laura: I think this is something stemming from our training --- the important thing is the interpreted event and the interpretation. That people [the interpreters] put themselves aside to get the job well done.

The devotion to work and their clients' right to information is something they all aspire to, but in this prioritizing of work and selflessness also lies contradictory and problematic issues of the role as a constraint and as a shield.

#### 5.1.1 The interpreter's role as a constraint and shield

When discussing harassment and sexist behavior (elaborated in more detail in section 5.2) the interpreter's role is a relevant factor. Interestingly, the interpreter's role seemed to be regarded as restraining but also as the only probable option of coping and shielding oneself from negative situations. As a restrictive mechanism, the role imposed a moral wall, depicted in the participants' responses of prioritizing work and the client's (usually the Deaf client's) best interest over self-care and dignity. On the other hand it provided the only option of coping, as the best defense for the interpreter was to interpret everything even more diligently and carefully. If we first examine the restraining aspect of the interpreter's role, the participants comments reveal the struggle and confusion that happens when unwanted and inappropriate attention is directed towards the interpreter:

Jane: I've been a situation, where it wasn't my client, but a drunk from the table next that sat down next to me and started chatting. I continued to interpret for a while and then I realized that I don't really need to interpret this, I can just be myself and ask this person to leave, tell him I'm working. --- I've thought about it afterwards, why I

keep on interpreting when someone comes to bother be. I'm just too kind. I just interpret all inappropriate things said to me. Eventually I said something to this person, but even at that moment I was still stuck in my interpreter's role, thinking 'I'm just an interpreter here'.

Ellen: In normal life I often would just leave the situation, I don't want to stay and argue. As an interpreter I don't have the option to just leave. I've never left an interpreting assignment. I just need to deal with the problem in another way.

The high morale for interpreting everything and prioritizing the clients' needs above the interpreter's own needs creates a constraint. A radical example of this is Laura's story:

In that moment, yes, I'd say that I prioritize work, if I'm in that interpreting-mode. There was a time when a thing happened, it wasn't anything sexual, but an aggressive person, and it took me some time to realize that I'm actually in danger here, that this person will probably assault me because I was interpreting him and he was screaming 'don't you fucking interpret me, get the fuck out of here!'. I just kept on interpreting and then realized this person swung a chair... I just didn't register it. I just thought that it's good for my client to know that this person is very angry and that he is yelling and dislikes the interpreter. --- The same would probably happen if someone would comment saying things like 'nice ass, good boobs' I assume I might just keep on interpreting and then be like wait a minute...

Other participants' responses are in line with the way they often say they prioritize work over reacting to unwanted behavior. Deaf clients' right to information and the duties and role of the interpreter seem to deeply engraved to our brain, that even in hazardous situations as the described above, it is possible that the interpreter will continue to perform her duty rather than react and defend herself. From this perspective, the impacts of conduit like thinking do still affect the interpreters' actions. Madden (2005) addresses this as well:

The conditions of their labor process undermine their professionalism and their OHS [occupational health status] status. In this potentially isolating employment situation, signed language interpreters tend to give up on recognition of their self (in fact, many strive to be invisible and seek to be ignored as participants in the situation). Interpreters function, by their own definition, as conduits or facilitators of communication only — who do not take part in or attempt to influence the situation. This overwhelming orientation to their work and clients leads to the tendency to deny the validity of their own needs, particularly with regard to their health and safety. (pp. 26-27)

As Dean and Pollard (2018) explain, the ethical codes, which are designed to protect the service-users, are taken as overly prescriptive. When compounded with embodying the assumed interpreter's role and aspired attributes, together they may result, in extreme cases, in the interpreter not being able to defend herself. She is restricted by the beliefs of what she should be, dissolving the self. "Recognizing the powerful influence that role metaphors have had in the way the interpreting profession thinks about ethical behavior is a vital aspect of understanding the broader development of ethical thought in community interpreting" (Dean & Pollard, 2018, p. 47).

The interpreter's role, though restraining and perhaps exactly just because it acts in such a restraining way, also seems to be the only outlet for shielding oneself in uncomfortable situations. When faced with inappropriate behavior, negative comments or other discomfoting comments, the way to cope with these situations is through interpreting and sticking to the interpreter's role even more rigorously. Interpreting inappropriate comments is evidently the way for the interpreters to "call out" bad behavior, to make it visible, audible and known to all participants in the situation.

Irene: Even if the comment is directed at me, I just interpret that even more pedantically and precisely, that's my defense. --- it was not so long ago when a client... I know he didn't mean to be rude, but he said: 'Alright, interpreters, get out of here. We're done here.' And we

interpreted that and --- then he suddenly realized it himself, 'okay, that might have come off the wrong way'.

The interpreted situation is delicate and calls for good people skills to navigate both discourse and social conventions (Napier et al., 2010, pp. 55-56). Some of the participants, in addition to discussing the restraints and coping mechanisms, also mention their rapport with their clients as a factor that impacts their decision making and reactions.

Norma: In my opinion it is extremely difficult [to react], because at the same time you might destroy the trusting relationship that you've managed to build. --- I think they are extremely sensitive and difficult situations to intervene. They are things that people easily get offended about and often it's made to be the interpreter's fault, like so many other things.

The balance between ethical and diligent interpreting, while maintaining a feeling of self-dignity or safety, seems to be a continuous effort for interpreters. Most often the way to solve an issue of inappropriate behavior is to interpret what is being said, leaving reacting for the interlocutors of the interpreted event. The role of the interpreter is not only a role of power and privilege, but also a role of contradictions and restraint, where duty and rapport over the self seem to prevail (Madden, 2005). Although interpreting is a profession, where the mask of the interpreter, a selfless identity is the expected norm (Koskinen, 2018, pp. 173-175), maintaining a feel of oneself, rises as an important issue to participants who describe the importance of being present in their work with their own personality. One outlet of personality and self-identity is appearance, which inspired a lot of discussion amongst the participants of the focus group discussions.

### 5.1.2 Interpreter appearance

The interpreter's appearance is something that seems to prevail as a topic of discussion. Artl's (2015) findings revealed how female interpreters in comparison to their male colleagues pay more attention to their physical appearance in choices of clothing, makeup and other aspects of physical

presence in order to avoid unwanted attention or to blend in with the participants they were interpreting. My reasoning to address this topic with my participants were the findings of Artl (2015) and the findings of my own pilot study (Valentin 2018) where participants agreed appearance to be a significant factor. In addition to this, my second driver for discussing the issue of appearance, are the common expectations for women's appearances (e.g. Risman, 2018a; Risman, 2018b; Mason, 2018).

The discussion about appearance seemed to inspire a lot of comments from the participants, indicating that they gave the matter quite a lot of thought, although it was not directly mentioned by all. As Irene stated, the topic of interpreter appearance seems to "always be in discussion". When asked directly, participants from focus group 1 felt that they were not bound by gendered norms or pressured into a certain type of appearance. Artl's (2015) notions of female sign language interpreters' need to suppress their femininity did not get direct support from group 1. However, the group agreed that smart working attire was expected of an interpreter and that revealing clothing was not appropriate for interpreting assignments. Generally, group 1 felt that norms regarding interpreter appearance have been lifting and more diversity in appearance is allowed amongst interpreters. Most comments about choosing appropriate clothing were made in accordance to professional choices as in avoiding distracting patterns and such.

Laura: I do think that there is a certain interpreter look and I do think about my appearance quite a lot. But I think the scale is wide, there isn't one box that you need to fit. For example someone has mentioned a 'jacket suit', but I don't think so, it's probably been a requirement 10-15 years ago.

Participants from focus group 2 had a somewhat different view on the subject of interpreter appearance. Veera did not feel a pressure regarding gender norms in her appearance, but acknowledged that gendered appearance norms exist in our society and in the signed language interpreting profession as well:

I don't feel that I need to suppress or enhance any part of myself. I look so generic and like to wear makeup and my hair is a natural color and so on. So what I naturally look like is something that matches what is expected from an interpreter. But probably, I believe, those who feel like they want to look different or like certain type of things and aren't as ordinary as I am, they, I believe, might feel a need to look a certain way.

Norma expressed a confirmation to this speculation:

The interpreting profession really impact my dressing a lot. You could say that I have two totally different identities, that I have an interpreter's closet and then privately a completely different set, that's how it just its. I never wear my piercing at work. --- I feel that [interpreter appearance norms] do restrict personality. --- I've learned that I don't fit in it as myself.

Group 1 also brought up the matter of interpreting for (Deaf) clients of different cultures and how respect for dress code might be something to consider when interpreting for them. Looser fitting clothes, that don't reveal as much curve or femininity and longer sleeves were mentioned as something to be noted. While the participants of group 1 stated that this was only done in regard of respect of the other culture, Veera's comment provides a more gendered perspective:

--- Men on the other hand, I doubt shops sell shorts that men would even need to think about whether they are the length that wouldn't be appropriate for work.

As we are socialized to embody and display our gender in a certain way, it may be hard to see an alternative to it. Although Mason (2018) states the feminine embodiment of being in constant awareness of the body's vulnerability and as an object of desire (p. 96), the participants for most part did not feel pressurized by it:

Irene: I don't feel pressured by it, not from being feminine or from looks I would receive.

When discussing the origins of the appearance expectations and role expectations that interpreters face, participants mention interpreter training and clients. Interpreter training is described as upholding a more conduit like image of the interpreter role as well as creating appearance prescriptions to graduating signed language interpreters. For example both Veera and Norma mentioned the impact of interpreter training in prescribing norms for interpreter appearance, which they both rejected and expressed dressing more casually than what training had taught them. In addition to interpreter training, the participants also mention clients (commonly referring to their Deaf clients) expectations of interpreters, even though they all state that they don't accept clients defining their appearance or defining their role.

The question of appearance evoked a lot of discussion. Even when most participants expressed they didn't have any negative experiences regarding expectations about appearance, their analyses of appropriate attire, the expression of one's identity through appearance and considerations about makeup, high heels and other feminine attire do imply that Artl's (2015) statement is applicable in Finland as well. “--- Interpreters are making decisions about their bodies, their femininity and about the impact of their femininity on their professional environments as a typical consideration of their work” (Artl, 2015, p. 61). It would be hard to imagine a society without any cultural expectations and it is not my aim either.. It is, however, important to acknowledge that even within ordinary day-to-day choices, the gendered expectations impact us.

We cannot interact with one another without our primary frames that enable us to coordinate our actions with others. The frames are the cultural map for our interaction, but as Ridgeway (2011) states, the expectations, that we create when categorizing people through the frames, can be harmful (pp. 33-34). As already briefly mentioned with the constraint and shield of the interpreter's role, it was mainly discussed in relation to sexism and harassment. The next section will discuss the participants' experiences on gender bias, sexism and harassment.



## 5.2 Gender in interaction

### 5.2.1 Dynamics and gender bias

As gender is one of the primary frames through which we automatically categorize one another in interaction (Ridgeway, 2011; Ridgeway & Krichelli-Katz, 2013; Ridgeway and Smith-Lovin, 1999), it is clear that an interpreted event is no different. The significance of categorization and differentiation depends on the context of interaction, the relevance of gender demographics and how clearly people are distinguishable to display prototypical gender (Ridgeway & Krichelli-Katz, 2013, p. 299). Therefore, when the focus group participants discussed their impressions on whether the gender of the interpreter impacted the dynamics of interpreted situations, the replies varied from interpreter gender having clear impact to no noticeable impact at all.

The most clearly, mutually agreed situations, where gender was considered very relevant from the clients' perspective, were intimate medical settings, or other settings where nudity is possible such as dressing rooms and sauna. Artl's (2015) and Brück's (2011) findings confirm this, as their participants discussed same genderness as easing the intimate situation. Intimate settings and medical settings and a mention of phone call interpreting seemed to be the only two very clear settings in which the participants of my two focus groups at first thought gender would be a significant factor. The participants' replies on male dominated settings, however, began to reveal the impact on dynamics where the interpreter's gender is noted through comments that show gender bias, sexism and in some cases direct sexual harassment.

As is already established in research on interpreter's role, the interpreter not only influences the rendered message, but also the entire event by being present as a person. The interpreter is noticed as a human being, a participant in the interpreted situation (Roy, 2000). As a consequence, the interpreter's presence and her gender influence the settings. This is evident in the responses of Brück's (2011) participants, whom all acknowledged a gender impact during their assignments. The participants of my focus groups were not as direct in admitting gender impact in all

situations, but certainly acknowledged it in some of their assignments. In fact, the gendered presence of an interpreter had such an impact on the dynamics of the settings that interlocutors began to filter what they say:

Irene: I've noticed, that sometimes when interpreting get together during evenings or such, that sometimes when they joke they might glance at me, thinking 'how did the woman in this group react to this', that sort of thing. They're like 'can we continue or was that enough for the interpreter'

Jane: If someone says a, well not even a dirty joke, but something like that and then they realize that 'oh shoot, the interpreter is listening', if I'm just generally interpreting what's being said. And then I notice that thought flash in their faces that says 'she's a woman, oh no she'll be offended, DON'T INTERPRET EVERYTHING I SAY'. I think it's related to the fact that the interpreter is a woman, that if it would've been a man interpreting, the [client] could have been like 'haha, wasn't that a good joke' but instead they think 'Crap, the interpreter is a woman'.

Norma also notes, that in instances where the interpreted discussion is somehow offensive, sexual or similar the general assumption might be, that male interpreters endure more or that they are assumed to endure more than female interpreters.

Participants from focus group 2 also discussed the matter of 'giving space' to female interpreters. They both identified a recurring problem, where the female interpreter's interpreted comments are regarded as less important than what men say, even if the Deaf client is a male himself. A similar observation was made by a participant of my pilot study (Valentin, 2018), which, I first took as a unique opinion, but as these current results imply. it is a more widely experienced phenomenon. The subject of 'speech space' for female interpreters would require more attention as these occurrences of disregard for the female interpreter's rendered messages imply a gender biased, sexist way of valuing comments of men over women's. Even if it is often unintentional, it never the less reflects the way that gendered hierarchies

are socialized and assumed within a society that abides by gendered structures (Risman 2014; 2018; Wynn & Correll 2018).

Male privilege in the working field was also discussed and speculated amongst the participants. A general opinion seemed to be, that male are more valued and wanted due to the female predominance in the field. This was especially related to DeafBlind clients, who need a guide interpreter in intimate settings. Ellen also mentioned the different expectations for male and female interpreters working for DeafBlind clients:

Maybe a DeafBlind assignment, where they'd require that the female interpreter use lipstick and nail polish for visibility, but a man could just as well interpret the assignment without these requirements.

The participants speculated on a stronger position in recruiting, where a male interpreter would stand out and was at a better position to negotiate better pay and benefits. Male signed language interpreters were also described as being more assertive in their professional attitudes and more prone to starting their own businesses. When discussing the fact of 'space' given to female signed language interpreters while voicing, Veera and Norma stated, that they had noticed a difference with regard to how their utterances were given attention in interpreted settings when working with a male interpreter as a teamer.

These speculations and observations were not possible to verify within the scope of this thesis, but as Williams (1992) has shown, male advantages in female dominated fields exist and manifests in areas such as recruiting and climbing up the career ladder to better positions. The matter of male privilege in the signed language interpreting field is left as a proposition for further studies, as within the scope of this study, the evidence could not beyond speculation.

### 5.2.2 Sexism and harassment

When the topic of sexism and harassment came up, the participants expressed that severe or very noticeable forms happened quite rarely. However, similar to Spânu's (2009) findings, the participants did mention often

being referred to as “girls, interpreters girls or girls who interpret” or that they are given nicknames.

Veera: Some of the hearing men had given me a nickname and they were joking, saying things like ‘Oh, nice, the Warrior princess, we haven’t seen you in a while, you are the prettiest of all the interpreters.

Calling interpreters ‘girls’ or giving them ‘pet-names’ might be thought to be cute and perhaps intended as a compliment but it undermined the prestige and professionalism of the interpreter. When asked where behavior like this occurs in Finnish settings, participants discussed vocational school settings, blue-collar male dominated settings or events where the clients consumed alcohol. Participant’s mostly stated that sexist comments at vocational school are actually perpetrated by the staff and teachers, and in rare occasions by students. The interpreter’s gender, standing out in these events is explained by the evidence, that gender is more pronounced in settings where it is seen as a differentiating factor, such as male dominated interpreted settings (Ridgeway & Kirchelli-Katz, 2013, p. 299).

The participants’ experiences of sexism also include their clients explaining their sex life and sexual interest to the interpreter and commenting on the interpreter’s appearance. This type of talk would already cross the boundary of sexism to sexual harassment, as it may also be non-verbal behavior that is sexual in nature. Actual incidences of clear sexual harassment are few according to the participants. However, they did recall incidents that have either happened to them or to a fellow colleague. Laura described a situation where out of willingness to keep up good rapport and to hide the fact that some of the client’s comments were difficult to understand, she kept on nodding, until the situation escalated:

--- If you keep on doing that confused nodding, thinking what the hell he just said, like I did when a client was telling me something and I wasn’t quite following, and then it just suddenly escalated and he was like “I love you” and I was realized that oh fuck, fuck fuck this is going in a bad direction. The next time we met, he signed something like

this to me [a hand gesture] and I was like 'excuse me?!' and he was like 'DO YOU WANT TO FUCK?'

Laura continues her comment, wondering if she would have reacted immediately to the first comments about her beautiful appearance, so that things might not have escalated. Why then did she not react? I would argue that this is the aforementioned interpreter's role acting as a constraint in addition to trying to keep the good rapport going, even with uncomfortable comments being directed at her. Similarly other forms of sexism, jokes, nicknames and calling the interpreters girls, seem to be pushed aside in order to prioritize work and to fall in suit to the interpreter's role. Similar to Spânu's (2009) findings, the negative sexual advances are laughed off, or politely rejected. While this is in line with what Koskinen (2018) discusses about the interpreter's capital in affective work, meaning controlling one's emotions, the tolerance of such behavior without reaction will reinforce the gender inequalities in the labour market, as Spânu (2009) has stated.

The working experience of the interpreter is entwined with the risk of sexism and harassment, as all the participants of the focus groups agreed. The interpreter training is mentioned in connection with how new interpreters tend to be very cautious of showing any personality during assignments and seem to be following a more conduit type of an interpreter role. Lacking linguistic skills and insecurity are compensated by the submissive attitude, where a new and young interpreter wants to please their clients as much as possible. Koskinen (2018) also notes the role of interpreter training in how ethical decision making and ethical codes are taught. She calls for critical thinking in understanding how to navigate the normative coding, stating that the more experienced interpreters know how to apply and adapt the ethical codes while fledgling interpreters are very literal with them (p.183). As Spânu (2009) noted, harassment happens most often to young, attractive looking interpreters with a positive and social attitude. She also discusses how interpreters are dependent on the good rapport with their clients to attain future interpreting assignments (Spânu 2009, p.35).

Jane: Most of the graduates are also young at age, they don't have much working experience, no experience of how you meet the clients and then there's that confused nodding you do, what each and everyone of us does, when you're not quite following. That makes you lose control of the situation. You're led on, and then the client, or someone else, has more guts to do things.

Irene: And then there's that certain fear of a scandal, you fear that you'll anger the client and he will denigrate you to the signing community, because you don't have that working history yet.

A somewhat unexpected finding, related to sexual harassment, was the comments regarding DeafBlind clients. Two of the participants in the focus groups mentioned experiencing harassment from their DeafBlind clients, a third participant recalled colleagues mentioning negative experiences and a participant of my pilot study (Valentin, 2018) commented on incidences as well, but the matter was not addressed specifically relating to DeafBlind clients at the time. Because of the nature of interpreting for DeafBlind clients, the interpreter is often at a very close proximity to their client either because of guiding physically or giving speech directions or descriptions of the surroundings. Participant's comments reveal a risk of clients exploiting this proximity:

Laura: I've had a few experiences with DeafBlind clients, when I've thought whether they REALLY need come that close or whisper in my ear. Like, 'can't you just keep a little bit of distance, like you did before?'. It has been very uncomfortable for me. I seriously disliked that behaviour.

Norma: It's not happened to me personally but I know colleagues who've experienced something when guiding. They've experienced both [comments and physical harassment]. That they [the DeafBlind clients] exploit the situation, when you're already in such close proximity that the hand might slip to the wrong place, whoops, or that they comment and say things like 'it's so hard to find a partner and

how you already know how to communicate, it would be so easy.' ---  
Also commenting on the appearance of the interpreter sexually.

The participants who had personal experience of harassment from their DeafBlind clients also agreed that it is very difficult to react to inappropriate behavior during a guiding and interpreting. Leaving a client who depends on your guidance in the middle of an assignment is impossible, against their morale. This offers the interpreter little options. The relationship between a person who assists and the one receiving assistance is delicate and builds upon trust, where both parties are responsible for respecting one another (Pölönen, 2006, p. 146). Pölönen (2006) highlights the moral regard for humanity, sensitivity and a willingness to provide equal access as key in this relationship (p. 146). The interpreter performing her work, in an instance of harassment, strives to prioritize work and the client's needs over assaults on her private space, even when the client breaks the mutual trust.

Occurrences of very evident sexual harassment or extremely sexist comments are scarce, according to the participants. However, their comments and anecdotes imply, that some forms of sexism and harassment do happen. Most often participants state that they do not recall details in what was said and done, and usually they cope by trying to ignore inappropriate comments. Similar comments were in the findings of Pohjalainen-Helminen and Suviala (2013) and Spânu (2009).

The participants' acknowledge an existing risk of harassment (and even violence) that is present in the female interpreters' work. Participants of my focus group 1 discussed assignments where they were assigned to a client's home, stating that even though nothing has ever happened to them, it is always a risk and they often take precaution by informing their spouse or partner, asking for a teamer to accompany to the assignment or discussing the safety with their employer before assignments. This is echoed in Mason (2018), where she asserts the feminine embodiment meaning constant self-consciousness and awareness of the body as a vulnerable object of desire and/or violence. This is in contrast to the masculine, which may operate with an unself-conscious ease (96). Because the scope of this study does not allow to explore other perspectives to the matter, I cannot confirm that

interpreter men would not face sexism, harassment and gender bias, but this would be a thought for further studies. However, research of segregated work and male privilege in female predominant fields, confirm that women are at a greater risk of sexism, harassment and gender bias (Williams, 1992). The comments of my participants indicate that bias, sexism and harassment happening during interpreting assignments are regarded as an unfortunate norm, that simply must be endured, laughed off, ignored and forgotten for the most part.

The similarities of my findings with Spânu's (2009) findings for Romanian conference interpreters were surprising for me, given, that on the gender equality scale Finland ranks 4<sup>th</sup> and Romania 63<sup>rd</sup> (The Global Gender Gap Report, 2018). Gender bias, sexism and harassment are phenomena that manifest all over the world within workplaces with negative impact on the victims (Wynn and Correll 2018; Kalev & Deutsch 2018). To regard issues of gender bias, sexism and harassment with ignorance, will furthermore allow such behavior to continue. The inequalities between genders extend beyond bias, sexism and harassment to the prestige of work as well, which will be discussed next.

### **5.3 Prestige of profession**

Research on feminized and female dominant work has revealed that it is regarded with less esteem than work fields dominated by men (Wynn & Corell, 2018; Williams, 1992; Laperrière & Orloff, 2018; Kinnunen, 2001; Kalev & Deutsch, 2018). Moreover, studies such as Burch (2000) state that ASL-to-English interpreting is considered a low value profession and female translators have been regarded with less prestige than male translators (Wolf, ,2006). The linkage of low wages, female predominance, low esteem of translation field and Gentile's (2018) and Spânu's (2009) research on female conference interpreters perceptions of lower prestige of their profession by non-interpreters, reveal an issue on an international level. In addition to this, the findings of Putkonen (2018) depicted negative changes in interpreters' attitudes towards their appreciation, the ability to influence their own work and



working conditions. These results were drivers for discussing the perceived prestige of Finnish sign language interpreters by lay people.

The results for interpreters' perceived prestige of their profession by lay people are complicated. When first asked, participants mostly portrayed a positive opinion on how they felt their profession was esteemed. People's interest in sign language and interpreting was thought to be evidence of respect and regard for their profession. The praise sign language interpreters have received from professionals used to working with interpreters implied that their work is highly regarded:

Irene: I have to say, that people who often work with interpreters of different languages, I've noticed, that they respect us A LOT now a days. For example judges sometimes comment with appreciation how 'this is going so smoothly, it's nice to work with you because you stick to your role.

The participants experienced people's interest in sign language and the signed language interpreting profession to show evidence of prestige. However, the interest is often mixed with praise for the interpreters as helpers, doing charity type of work. The demands of the work were often not understood either, meaning that the true nature of interpreters' challenging work is not noted. The helper view would seem to stem from the "Tiny Tim" effect that causes society to view people with disabilities dependent of help, and childlike (Hehir 2002, p.4):

Jane: --- When people have seen me interpreting it's usually a positive [reaction], like 'wow, amazing, challenging!' But sometimes they sort of baby talk saying 'oh wow, lovely how you just ...' I feel like, it's not maybe understating but it's... childlike ignorant. That they don't understand. Or that I think they don't understand.

Veera: As long as society views people using sign language as hearing-IMPAIRED, whom society needs to help and support, they also probably see interpreters as helpers of these poor disabled people.

The image of a helper stems from the misconception of interpreting work as care-work (Napier & Leeson, 2016, p. 191). Therefore, I asked the participants which other fields or professions they saw their work being comparable to. Their first associations were to nursing, occupational therapist, care work and even social work of the church. These replies were related to how the interpreters thought others saw their profession, but when asked how they themselves thought the job demands compared, professions such as consultant and reporter were given as examples, although some still thought care work was the closest equivalent. On numerous occasions during the focus groups participants brought up the fact that interpreting work is highly demanding cognitive work, which is often lost to clients or outsiders of the field. Their comments would imply, that participants themselves rate their profession as demanding and respectable, but believe outsiders view their work as less respected. All in all, the participants did not report a serious lack of prestige regarding their everyday interactions, the experiences of disrespect such as calling interpreters 'girls' or other displays of disregard were not experienced daily. Mostly, the lack of prestige was felt at the macro level, in how little power the participants had to influence their work and how it was entwined with the current way interpreting services are provided in Finland.

The relationship of Kela and pay level of signed language interpreters was discussed and on this, the opinions of the participants varied. On one hand, some of the participants thought that the pay compared to the demands of the job were not equal, but on the other hand others expressed the pay being adequate with their education and the amount of work they did. Mostly the participants were working on an hourly basis contract, which impacts their work, because of the minimal ability to control the amount of hours assigned to them. This means that in an ideal situation, most participants seemed to perceive the compensation of the hourly rate quite good, but lack of working hours as a negative factor.

Veera: I think the payment level is all right actually, at this moment, just as long as the tendering system operated by Kela doesn't force

the prizes down. And I think the problem is actually more in how work is distributed and divided, so not actually the wages.

Putkonen's (2018) survey on the wages of Finnish sign language interpreters' reveals that the average monthly pay is around 2590 euros, but ranged from 0 to 5000 euros. In comparison, according to Statistics Finland (2019), the mode wage in Finland in year 2017 was 2600-2699 euros a month, with typical professions of this wage group being nurses, social service caretakers, truck drivers and bank officers, while the average wage for all professions was 3087 euros per month. Focus group 1 participants seemed to mutually agree, that an interpreter working full hours daily should be compensated more than 3000 euros. The wage differences between interpreters depend on the company's or entrepreneur's tendering position in Kela's contract list, and the amount of working hours that is allocated by the interpreting mediating center of Kela. This means that the interpreters themselves have minimal impact on their work, and consequently their wages. The participants expressed this lack of influence on their work as frustration and a factor for stress.

Jane also notes, that as employees, interpreters carry too much of the responsibilities of the company. Similar attitudes were portrayed in Putkonen (2018), where interpreters state that they are forced to carry too much of the company's risks and feel that overall working conditions have grown weaker. The survey also revealed criticism towards the trade union, where respondents felt that not enough action has been taken in protest to the changing working conditions (p. 18). The focus group participants also mention the union and the interpreters lack of striking or strongly protesting against the current situation, drawing connections to the female predominance of the field.

Irene: [part of comment removed at participants request] --- female dominated fields all shared the same problem. That they couldn't negotiate fare wages, they didn't know how.

Jane: I feel like the trade union hasn't done a lot for our wages, or that we'd all have common contract terms, so yes I'm quite angry because

of that, the way many companies now stipulate the work contracts. --- There's no one who'd make some noise about it. Just nodding and wondering.

It appears, that on everyday level interpreters generally feel appreciated by most of their clients. They value the positive feedback and interest that people show towards them. Although a few of the participants expressed feeling like the interpreter is often a target of a client's bad mood or unjustly blamed for negative outcomes, the general feeling is that interpreters like their work and have no problem with the majority of their clients. The sexist comments and interpreters being called 'girls' can be thought of as a lack of prestige, as Veera agrees, saying that when such attitudes occur she feels her work and profession are not taken seriously. The other participants do not draw a connection between sexism and a lack of prestige, but I would argue that any occurring sexism stems from gender bias that may also impact general assumptions of how valuable one's work is, as Risman (2018a; 2018b; 2004) explains that attitudes and actions in all levels of the gender structure are impacting one another.

The results of the two focus groups reveal that issues with the perceived prestige by outsiders are most prominent in the institutions, meaning the macro level, as the participants expressed most of their frustration on the institutional processes impacting their work. The lack of prestige reveals itself in the participants' views on working conditions, wage issues and the inability to influence their work. Correlation to other female predominant fields and the issues they face seems evident. The research on segregated work and unequal pay levels are clearly connected with gender (Kinnunen, 2001; Kalev & Deutsch, 2018; Laperrière & Orloff, 2018). Kalev and Deutch (2018) affirm that valuing of professions is tightly connected to the gender demographics: "Jobs become institutionalized as masculine or feminine, and are accordingly viewed as valuable or margin to the bottom line" (p. 262). Moreover, Madden (2005) states, that the signed language interpreters lack autonomy in their work, and managers of interpreters tend to focus on satisfying market needs in most efficient manners, rather than focusing on their interpreters (p. 11)

This is resonant with Putkonen's (2018) survey results that reveal the macro level impact on the feelings of prestige by Finnish sign language interpreters. The current situation with Kela has driven interpreting companies to "do whatever" to attain contracts. Working conditions are directly dictated without true negotiation with employees and it is felt that within a female predominant field trade unions are small and they have accepted the situation without protest. In addition to this, Kela and some of the interpreting companies are blamed for "taking advantage of the kindness of interpreters and the free work that interpreters do when they are on call, do reporting and other office work. Responses show that interpreters are not appreciated and some companies do not take care of their interpreters." (Putkonen, 2018, pp. 17-18. My translation - K.V.)

The building frustration calls for changes to improve the situation. It was very evident from the participants' responses that the main area of change with regard to their work was to gain more ability to influence their own work and to see a change in the current way signed language interpreting services are provided in Finland. This would mean action towards the macro level of impact. As Gentile (2018) presented, her participants believe the low prestige to be due to a lack of acknowledgement and understanding by lay people (pp. 39-40). I see this as a connection to how the interpreter role and professional pride was discussed within the group.

Veera: I'd suggest some sort of enforcement of professional pride. There are interpreters who are proud of their profession but then there are those who... 'I'm just like this, I just go there and wave my arms over there'. Of course, not all have that, whatever the profession, they don't have that drive for their work, but I'd ask for standing tall, saying 'I'm an interpreter, an expert in language and communication', a little more of that attitude

This would call for a change in how the interpreter role is taught in interpreter training and how interpreters themselves reinforce the submissiveness of the profession. An addition of gender related topics would benefit the interpreter training.

In addition to this, the “education of clientele” was also mentioned within the focus groups. Jones’ (2017) suggestion of customer orientation to avoid confusion would be a possible approach in correcting misunderstandings, gender bias and prestige. Risman (2004) states, that when inequality, that has assumed as natural before is pinpointed, organizational change can be created and new opportunities may open up that might otherwise remain closed (pp. 434-435). “Gendered institutions depend on our willingness to do gender, and when we rebel, we can sometimes change the institutions themselves” (Risman, 2004, p. 434.) The “Tiny Tim”-effect and the notion of compounding effects of gender and ableism/audism, should be a joint effort with the work that national Deaf associations, where the general awareness raising and promotion of linguistic and cultural rights would impact the lives of Deaf and prestige of signed language interpreters alike. (Hehir, 2002; McIntyre and Sanderson, 1995)

As is evident from the results of this study, the impact of gender on signed language interpreting profession is undeniable from the way the interpreter’s role is depicted, to the way interpreters’ gender impact interaction in interpreted settings, to the macro level distribution of power and wages. According to Risman (2004), inflicting change in one of the levels may impact other levels of the gender structure as well, as the gender structure in itself is a dynamic structure where each factor contributes to others on different level. I acknowledge that gender is but one of the multiple systems of inequality, that operate in intersection to create different forms of oppression and bias (Scarborough, 2018). Due to the scope of this thesis, it is impossible to study all intersecting aspects. My aim in this thesis has been to focus on gender specifically and the ways its impact is present in the profession of signed language interpreting. The following section draws together this endeavour with discussing it in relation to the gender structure.

#### **5.4 Interpreting and the gender structure**

The gender structure, that has been a topical theory in my thesis, covers three levels of a society: the individual, interactional and macro. In addition to the levels, it operates in material and cultural dimensions. (Risman, 2018a;

2018b; 2004.) When examining the signed language interpreting profession and the way gender influences the experiences of work and professionalism, multiple aspects can be identified. This thesis has concentrated on the professional, sociological aspects, while previous studies on interpreting and gender have mostly investigated gendered discourse (e.g. MacDougal, 2012; Morgan, 2008; Levine, 2007; McIntire & Sanderson, 1995). As gender impacts the very definition of jobs and organizational hierarchies it is important to examine how it impacts our profession as well (Risman, 2018b). Risman (2018b) cites Acker 1992: “the term ‘gendered institutions’ means that gender is present in the processes, practices, images, and ideologies, and distributions of power in the various sectors of social life” (p. 23). Gender is not only about sex category differences between individuals, but stretches to cover power, property and prestige (Risman 2018b, p. 27). To understand that inequalities exist, we should learn to look at our options from the perspective that all people should be at an equal position, but as Risman (2018b) states: “As long as women and men see themselves as different kinds of people, then women will be unlikely to compare their life options to those of men. Therein lies the power of gender”(p. 30).

In order to visualize the impact of gender in the signed language interpreting profession, I have utilized Risman’s (2018a, p. 31) figure on gender as a social construct, and created a version of my own. I have situated the signed language interpreting profession within the three levels and two dimensions in each (Figure 2). The aspects identified in each level and dimension are the ones discussed previously, now located to their respective levels of impact. The abbreviation SLI stands for signed language interpreter.

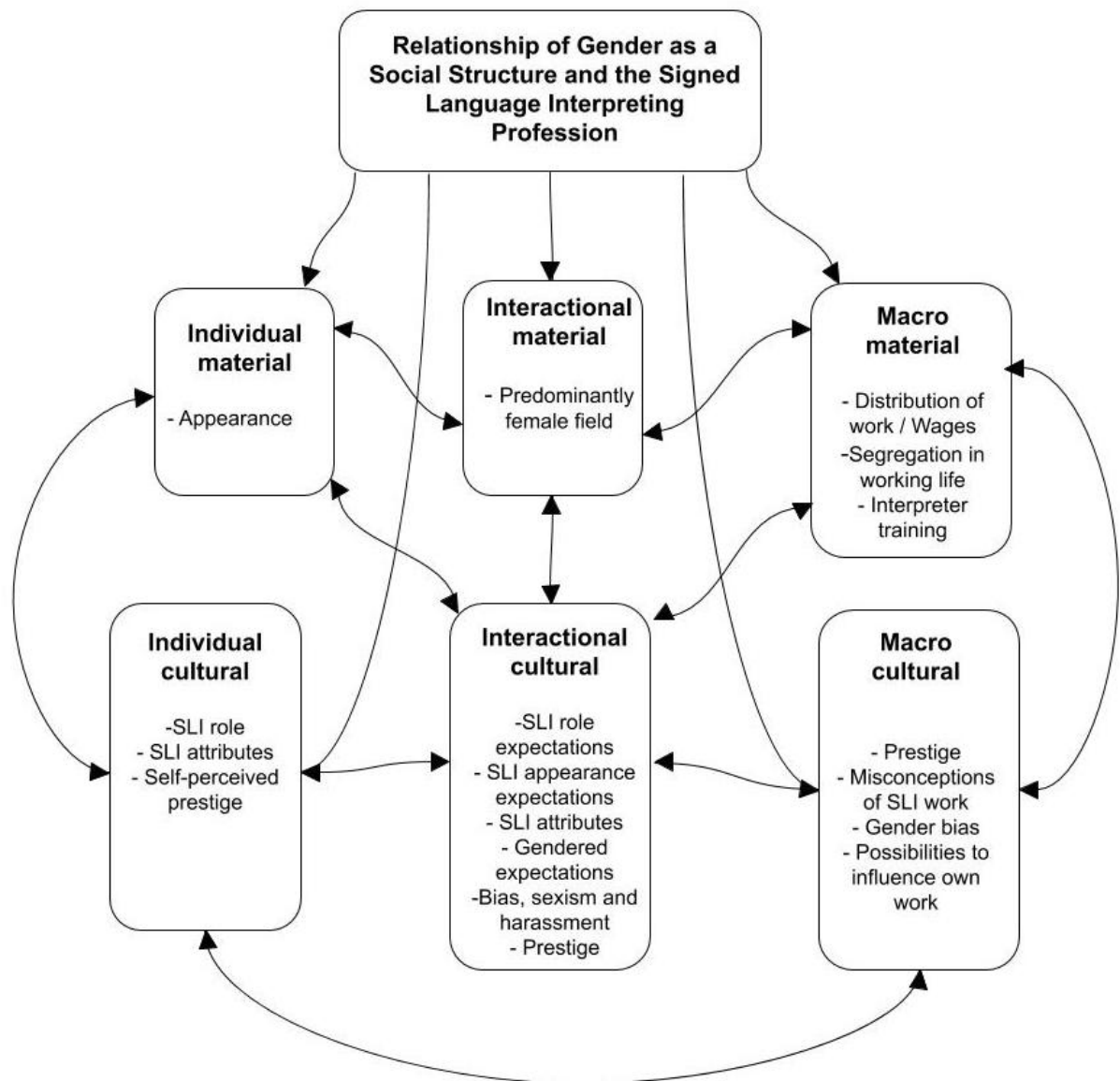


Figure 2. Relationship of Gender as a Social Structure and the Signed Language Interpreting Profession. (Modelled after Risman 2018a, p. 31)

The interconnectedness of different aspects of gender impact reveal the complexity of the gender structure and how it operates. As the figure shows, we can think of gender as a “kind of ghost in the background while other identities and activities are performed in the foreground” (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004, p. 522). For example, the interpreter’s role is impacted in all levels, individual, interactional and macro level. Macro level misconceptions and conduit like expectations influence the manifestation of role constraints on the interactional level, just as reversively individual concepts of the role can be affected and affect conceptions on the interactional and macro level and



perhaps offer more liberal models of conduct. The gendered expectations and prescriptions, donned by the interpreter training and clientele, impact the self-perceived interpreter role and appearance, and likewise, the self-perceived and enacted interpreter role and appearance can influence the understanding in interaction and interpreter training. Similarly gender bias and stereotypes on the institutional level impact how interpreting is perceived as 'women's work', and sexist behavior on the interactive level influences self-perceived prestige of profession by others. The cycle of impacts on different levels all contribute to one another just as Risman (2018a; 2018b; 2004) states, although many of the more observable consequences are on the interactional, everyday level. The created figure (Figure 2) is not final in the sense, that should it be used later on in further studies, it can be filled in alongside identifying new aspects of gender impact.

I have analyzed and discussed the main findings of my research in this chapter. The findings suggest an aspect to the signed language interpreter role, where the prescriptions and norms, that seem to stem from the conduit like behavior that ultimately reflects gendered expectations of a submissive woman, create constraints to the interpreter.

The responses regarding interpreter appearance confirmed previous studies findings and relate them to the stereotypical expectations related to gender. When interpreters conform to normative expectations in their appearance they do not feel pressured, but if one's identity is strongly dependent on alternative ways in appearance, they feel constrained by the expectations.

The results also revealed different forms of gender bias, sexism and sexual harassment. Although participants claim that harassment was not a part of their everyday working life, the responses indicate that gender bias, sexism and harassment do occur from time to time and that most often participants feel constrained by the interpreter role in enacting upon unwanted approaches and comments.

The perceived prestige of the signed language interpreters' profession is linked with the institutional, macro level, manifesting themselves in the distribution of assignments and wages and minimal possibilities to influence their own work. Moreover, the gender bias, sexism and harassment

happening during interactions also contribute to the feeling of disrespect and gender inequality, also influencing interpreters' perceived prestige by lay people. In the light of the revised literature and the findings of this research, I would argue that the signed language interpreting profession is profoundly influenced by gender.

The final chapter will conclude this thesis, reply to the research questions and discuss the limitations of the study and further research recommendations.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This chapter draws together the main findings and arguments of my thesis presented and discussed in the previous chapter, replying to the aim and objectives presented in the beginning of this study. I then continue to discuss the limits of the research, and suggest future actions and topics for further studies.

My personal reasons for researching the topic of gender and signed language interpreting have originated from my own experiences and interest in feminist research. The world wide events of the #metoo-movement (“History & Vision,” 2019) and an overall accumulation of feminism in social media sparked the interest to understand feminist and gender studies theory from a more academic perspective, and to see if I can relate theory to my profession. During my MA-studies, I noticed the lack of references to gender related issues in interpreting, a gap in research so to say. It is a generally noted fact that interpreting and more specifically in this context, signed language interpreting, is a predominantly female field. However, the factors behind this phenomena and the consequences and specific aspects of this phenomena are largely overlooked apart from a few studies, most of which only look at gender and discourse.

My aim for this research was to identify areas in which we can see gender impacting the signed language interpreting profession. Within this large scope I focused my objectives to the signed language interpreter’s role and the perceived prestige of Finnish female sign language interpreters of their profession by lay people. I will first discuss the two research questions proposed and conclude with the overarching aim.

My first question asked how the signed language interpreter’s role operates in situations impacted by gender. The framing of the question is vague on what these situations are; to only discuss harassment would leave out the ambiguous impact of gender to the dynamics of interaction. As I researched the interpreter’s role, attributes and behavioral expectations, I came to the conclusion that the role of the interpreter is based on gendered attributes to a great extent. This was supported by studies claiming the sign

language and spoken language interpreting profession is generally associated to women and to a submissive female role (e.g. Madden, 2005; Napier & Barker, 2003).

The expectations, attributes and conduit like descriptions of the interpreter prescribe the role as submissive. Soft skills, which are stereotypically associated with feminine skills, are highlighted, though cognitive and linguistic skills are also mandatory for quality interpreting. The responses of the participants revealed how they perceived the majority of interpreters to assume a very submissive, apologetic role. When faced with gender bias, sexism and harassment the role of the interpreter seemed to constrain their action, and young, newly graduated sign language interpreters being in more of a risk due to lack of experience. The most effective way to operate in situations of direct sexism or harassment was to interpret even more rigorously, making the offence visible or audible. A surprising finding of sexual harassment in interpreted situations for DeafBlind clients further convolutes the situation due to the vulnerability of the client themselves. In the light of found data, the interpreter's role, in situations of negative gender impact, seem to act as a constraint. Signed language interpreters, embodying the complex role of an interpreter, balance between ethical and diligent conduct while making decisions in maintaining self-dignity and personal safety. The current understanding of the interpreter's role in the working field, seemingly enforced by interpreter training, appears as compelling to the extent that duty and good rapport may prevail over self esteem. A positive gender influence to interpreted settings and the relation to the interpreter's role in such situations was not explored.

The second research question asked for factors that affected the perceived prestige of the Female female signed language interpreter by lay people. Previous research on women's work, segregation, wages and gender inequality both within the translation and interpreting field and outside of it indicated that female predominance and low income levels were factors impacting the prestige of interpreters. The results of this research revealed that the interpreters generally felt appreciated during their workdays. Sexism and harassment impacted their perceptions of prestige but the most prominent influence was from the macro level. The opinions on adequate pay

were not mutual, but the general consensus appeared to be that the hourly compensation in itself was enough, while the distribution of work among interpreting companies and interpreters was seen as disproportional. Shift of responsibility from companies to interpreters and the minimal opportunities for influencing one's work indicated a lower perception of prestige in the macro level as well, and was found to replicate findings of Putkonen (2018). In addition to this, the misconceptions of interpreting as helper work, left interpreters feeling like the demands of their work are not understood and their professionalism does not always transfer to lay people. This was in comparison to clients who often worked with interpreters and seemed to regard signed language interpreters with high esteem. The connection of gender and prestige at macro level can be theorized to stem from general views on women's work as less valuable and the misconception of interpreting as helper or caring work, as the results of this thesis and findings from the literature review indicate (Madden, 2005; Napier & Leeson, 2016; Stewart, Schein, & Cartwright, 1998; Gentile, 2018).

My overarching aim was to identify areas of gender impact in the signed language interpreting profession. The utilization of Risman's (2018a; 2018b; 2004) theory of gender as a social construct enabled me to organize factors arising from the research within the three levels and two dimensions of gender structure, resulting in a figure that presents my reasoning in a visual form. Areas of impact were identified in all levels and dimensions. Due to my specific objectives, most attention was focused on the signed language interpreter's role and prestige within the construct. However, considering the pervasiveness of gender in the conception of the interpreter's role and attributes, impact on prestige, and the major factor of gender as a primary frame in all interaction, I would argue, that the results and literature imply that the signed language interpreting profession is profoundly impacted by gender (as can be supported by e.g. Ridgeway, 2011; Madden, 2005; Stewart, Schein, & Cartwright, 1998; Gentile, 2018; Koskinen, 2018). This argument is visualized in the figure presented in Chapter 5 (Figure 2). As a dynamic structure where all levels and dimensions interact, the gender structure reveals how different aspects are impacted by each other. As I've stated, the figure I created is not a finite image, but can be modified and added to, as

research on the topic of gender and signed language interpreting continues and evolves.

Limitations of the study and propositions for further research are discussed in the following and last section of this thesis.

### **6.1 Limitations of the study and propositions for further research**

All findings in this research are situated within the Finnish context and data gathered from two small focus groups with six participants altogether. As a qualitative study, this research gives the opportunity to explore complex data, situated in a context (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). This research is confined within the Finnish context, and the results cannot be generalized without examining each country's specific situation regarding culture, gender equality and interpreter training and provision. However, my literature review draws theory mainly from international sources, which I've found applicable to the Finnish context as well. This would imply that gendered issues within signed language interpreting could be assumed transnational. The impact of bias should also be noted in my of taking a feminist standpoint and exploring the literature review mainly from a gender research and feminist sociology aspect, which leaves out contradicting perspectives. I also acknowledge that due to the limits of this thesis, the amount of references is also limited. Therefore aspects especially regarding the role of the interpreter could be elaborated upon more extensively than what is possible within the scope of this thesis.

During the focus groups many topics and aspects rose to discussion, but because of limitations of the thesis, I could not explore all of them. One major topic of interest would be the positive exploitation of gender stereotypes in interpreting by interpreters themselves and an investigation of gender capital, i.e. how gendered aspects of a person can be used to advantage and monetary benefits. Another important topic would be to add a male and non-binary gender perspective to the research of gender impact in signed language interpreting. As the role of interpreter training was mentioned in enforcing constraining interpreter role norms and appearance restrictions, attention to the curriculum and training methods would also be beneficial. Quantitative data would add statistical information, identify correlations and

add predictability to the research on gender and interpreting (Hale & Napier, 2013, p. 15).

The results of this thesis may provide useful insight to future studies in Finland and elsewhere in identifying how gender stratification may impact the field of signed language interpreting and more broadly, the translation and interpreting field. It also contributes to the research on women's work done on a larger scale and promotes the sociological, interdisciplinary method of researching signed language interpreting.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### **Information and Consent Form**

#### **Exploring the Relationship Between Gender and the Sign Language Interpreting Profession**

---

My name is Katariina Valentin and I am an EUMASLI student from HUMAK University of Applied Sciences, supervised by Jemina Napier in the Department of Languages & Intercultural Studies at Heriot-Watt University.

My study seeks to explore the thoughts and reflections of Finnish female sign language interpreters on their professional experiences through the lense of gender.

Participants will take part in a focus group discussion held on the xth of x, 6pm - 8pm. The entire session will be recorded with both image and audio for later use in transcribing and analysis. A research assistant is possibly present during the event to tend to the recording equipment and other matters.

The objective of the study is to verify whether themes identified from literature occur in Finnish female sign language interpreters' work life and how they are experienced by the participants.

The researcher will:

- keep all personal details confidential
- original data will only be seen by the researcher (and if necessary supervisor)
- possibly publish some quotes or transcribed examples of comments (no sensitive information will be used)



Data gathered from this focus group discussion is used as material for the MA-thesis produced by Katariina Valentin for her EUMASLI - degree. The thesis will be submitted on the 14th of June 2019, and presented to an audience after approval by supervisors.

All participants will receive an electronic copy of the thesis. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from participation in the research at any time without having to give a reason and without consequence.

Please complete the following questions:

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| I agree to participate in the research project                          | Yes /<br>No |
| I give permission to save and analyse my comments during the discussion | Yes /<br>No |
| I give permission for my contribution to be used in your research       | Yes /<br>No |

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read and understand the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research, knowing that I can withdraw from participation in the research at any time without consequence. I have been given a copy of this form to keep.

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(block letters)

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Focus group discussion prompts:

#### Introductions & Warm up:

- Name, working experience, what company etc, background
- Why did you join the discussion, any initial thoughts on the subject of gender and SLI.

-

#### Areas to be covered:

- How would you describe the SLI role?
  - Is it easy to be in the SLI role? Are you yourself or someone else?
- Individual level:
  - Interpreter appearance, gender differences, age
  - Identity - the identity of an SLI and gender identity overlap
  - Any gender expectations?
- Interactional level:
  - dynamic of settings, gender frames interaction?
    - Do you think the gender of the interpreter impacts the dynamics of interpreted settings? How?
  - What are the attitudes of participants, have you experienced harassment or sexism?
  - SLI role in these situations?
- Macro level:
- How do you feel about the prestige and value of your profession by self and by others?
  - To what other professions would you compare your profession to?
  - Have you experienced the helper-view when meeting lay people? Does it impact your perception of the prestige of your profession?
  - How do you feel about the pay level in SLI field?
    - Is it enough considering to the job demands?
    - Male privilege?
    - Female dominated fields, segregated work?
- Pros and Cons & wrap up
  - If gender impacts our profession. What are the pros and cons of the impacts? Any benefits of your gender?
  - What should be / could be changed?
  - What else should be discussed?

## Appendix C

### Confidentiality agreement

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have been working as a research assistant \_\_\_ / transcriber \_\_\_ for Katariina Valentin during her writing process of her Master's thesis for EUMASLI (Spring 2019). I swear to keep all information that I have been privy to confidential and to not disclose the identities of the participants of the focus groups to anyone.

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### **Template analysis: Template 1: a priori themes**

Individual level - color code RED

Interactive level - color code Green

Macro level - color code Blue

Surprising & significant - color code ORANGE

Expected & significant - color code PURPLE

Unique opinion - color code BROWN

Gender differences / men vs women - color code YELLOW

### **Emerged themes, written as margin notes:**

SLI role

Education

ability to influence

Client attitudes / expectations

Age / experience

SLI appearance

Medical / intimate settings

Dynamics / sexism

Harassment

DeafBlind

Prioritizing work

Prestige

Wages

Comparison to other professions

Helper view

Gender capital

Wanted changes

## Appendix E

### Final template

1. SLI role/ Attributes / Expectations
  - 1.1 Conduit, facilitator, participant
  - 1.2 Constraint & Shield
    - 1.2.2 Interpreter training impact
  - 1.2 Appearance
    - 1.2.1 Individual experiences
    - 1.2.2 Interpreter training impact
2. Interactive level
  - 2.1 Gender impact on dynamics
    - 2.1.1 Gender bias
  - 2.2 Sexism and harassment
    - 2.2.1 DeafBlind
3. Prestige
  - 3.1 Positive experiences
  - 3.2 Helper view / Misconceptions
  - 3.3 Sexism
  - 3.4 Macro level impact
    - 3.4.1 Kela
    - 3.4.2 Possibilities to influence