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Breaking 'The Man Code': The motivations and experiences of men working as British Sign Language Interpreters in the United Kingdom

Paul Anthony Michaels

Abstract

Research on British Sign Language (BSL) Interpreting has emerged from the wider field of interpreting and translation studies and deaf studies. Early attention to linguistic aspects of interpreting has been followed by research exploring psychological, sociological, and cultural issues in interpreting, with recent attention being drawn to the gendered nature of the interpreting profession. This study of men in the predominantly female profession of BSL interpreting draws on the sociology of work and the sociology of gender to explore the motivations of men to join the profession and their experiences of working as interpreters. It builds on evidence and argument about the experiences of men who work in predominantly female professions as well as recent studies of gender-based motivations of men, and women, to become interpreters of spoken languages. Data were collected through 25 semi-structured interviews with men registered as BSL interpreters, complemented by a Facebook focus group with a further 13 registered interpreters. Analysis of the data revealed interesting insights into initial exposure to sign language, as well as intrinsic and extrinsic factors influencing decisions to become interpreters. Chiming with literature on men in predominantly female professions, the most prominent experiences related to i) gender preferences for co-working, ii) perceptions of, and ease with, sign language interpreting as a caring as well as a technical (in this case linguistic) profession, iii) pay, and iv) sexuality and stereotyping. While there were similar findings with studies of men in other predominantly female professions such as the inclusivity for LGBTQIA+ people, there were some notable contrasts including the greater number of freelance interpreters thereby challenging career acceleration and remuneration norms found in other predominantly female professions, as well as the significant connection to the deaf community which shapes the work of an interpreter. This study contributes new insights and understandings to this field of study within the sociology of work, interpreting studies and deaf studies. The thesis concludes by

making recommendations for: i) sign language interpreting policy and practice to embrace the linguistic and cultural needs of deaf people and ii) future research on further aspects of sign language interpreting.

Breaking 'The Man Code': The motivations and experiences of men working as British Sign Language Interpreters in the United Kingdom

Paul Anthony Michaels

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Sociology

Durham University

October 2023

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Acknowledgements

The writing of a PhD is often described as a marathon and not a sprint and although marathon runners are often surrounded by people, they are running as an individual. I feel like I could not have run this marathon without people by my side every step of the way.

I must first and foremost thank my two academic supervisors, Helen Charnley and Dr Alison Jobe. They have both dedicated so much of their time to support me on this journey and have been a constant source of motivation, critique, inspiration, and kindness in equal measures.

Without the 38 research participants giving up their time and share their perspectives, this study could not have happened.

I have met several PhD students along the way who have provided me with both the support and respite needed while in the office at No. 32 and online when the pandemic hit. It must be said that Fizz Fridays with Karel, Hester, Verity, Sophie, Chong, Hooney and others at the Dun Cow were so much better than zoom chats... A special mention must go to Alice. The journey would not have been the same without you!

My family have always supported me in whatever I have chosen to do, and this PhD journey is no different. Huge thanks go to Dad & Trudy, Stephen & Bev, Lucy & Kieran, my Aunts, Uncles and Cousins. Also, my two Godson's Kurtis and Finn.

My interpreting friends have always been important to me, and I thank them for their continued support. Paul Pryce-Jones was in Brighton at the Level 3 interview and Bibi DaLacey-Mould was there at the Christmas drinks = the beginning of Three Musketeers! Sharan Thind is always on hand to go for coffee and cake - lots of cake! My 'Randoms' - Paula Cox, Vicky Pannell and Marie Pascall will always be there. The Scattterday's - you crazy lot! I have also met so many other interpreting colleagues in the UK, Europe and Worldwide through organisations such as ASLI, efsli and WASLI (too many to mention)!

My non-interpreting friends are just as important to me - from way back when - Donna Christian, Natalie Williams, Mark Dickinson, Kieren Tidd, Mike Ashman, Terri Dean and George Williams. Always fun times!

The Scholars and Platman's - my extended family have always been keen to know how this journey is going. Thank you especially to Fran, Emma, Mel, David and Jeff.

Thanks go to the support staff in the Department of Sociology. Thank you for everything you do for all the PhD researchers.

Other people from Durham University have been with me on this journey. Judith Tate-Collins and Granville Tate - I'm sure you know I think of you often. Paul Hann, thank

you for the conversations and words of support. Maria Turner - you've seen the pig fly!

Supervision hasn't only been academic, and I thank Lydia Teague and Dr Jules Dickinson for your words of wisdom (and the books, Jules).

Someone who has always been there for me is Alex. He had no idea what he was signing up for 10 years ago, I'm sure! Thank for absolutely everything - the unending love, support, and encouragement to achieve everything I do.

There are some people who are not here to see this achievement - My Auntie Dot, my grandparents Eileen, Christy, Leah, and Isaac (Joe), my Uncle David and Auntie Marilyn, my cousin Caroline, my friend Stuart and most importantly, my Mum.

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 Chapter introduction

This thesis presents the first in-depth study of the *motivations* and *experiences* of men working as British Sign Language (hereafter referred to as BSL) Interpreters in the United Kingdom, a job typically undertaken by women¹. Shen Miller and Smiler (2015, p. 269) articulate the importance of studying men in predominantly female professions² as furthering our understanding of the workplace in general, as well as the ways in which men experience, understand, and navigate challenges to their masculinity. Moreover, expanding our knowledge of men in predominantly female vocations has important theoretical implications for theories addressing gender-based equality and power dynamics, the psychology of men and masculinity, and intersecting identities (or intersectionality). Complementing literature focusing on women in predominantly male professions (c.f. Hakim, 1996, 2004; Kanter, 1977; Marshall, 1984,1995) there is a growing body of work on men in predominantly female professions, particularly nursing, primary education, social work, and librarianship (c.f. Abu et al., 2019; Appiah, Appiah and Lamptey, 2021; Clifton, Crooks and Higman, 2020; Collinson and Hern, 1994; Diaz et al., 2022; Feldman et al., 2023; Galley, 2020; Macias and Stephens, 2019; McGrath, 2021; Punshon et al., 2019; Simpson, 2004, 2009, 2011, 2014; Williams, 1993, 1995b; Younas and Sundus, 2018). By contrast there is little research on gender and interpreting of spoken languages and this is the first study of men working as BSL interpreters.

In this chapter I provide the rationale for the study from a personal and academic perspective. I outline the research aims and questions, offer an overview of the development and significance of sign language interpreting and interpreters for deaf individuals and the wider deaf community before explaining the context of British Sign Language. The final section sets out the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Personal motivation

My motivation for embarking on this study is strongly rooted in my own experiences of

¹ Terminology varies between and within publications and this thesis includes female/women and male/men.

² Terminology varies between and within publications to include predominantly female/female dominated professions/occupations/vocations.

being drawn to the sign language interpreting profession, my journey to qualification, experiences in the role of a qualified (hearing) interpreter of BSL, and earlier academic study in the field. These experiences have supported continual reflection throughout the study from identifying the focus of the study, to searching the literature and through to drawing conclusions and recommendations.

In the late 1940s, my father grew up with two deaf cousins in a family of four siblings. The two deaf sisters attended a residential school for Jewish deaf children in London, where they were taught using the oral method (Valentine and Skelton, 2007). As one of my cousins has recently told me: my mother fought with the school for all of us to be able to use BSL (personal communication). They emigrated to California in the 1960s, and I was about ten years old when I first met the two sisters on a return trip to London to visit family and friends. They were both profoundly deaf but had followed different paths, the younger choosing to use their voice more and rarely using sign language while the older had become an American Sign Language user. I recall somehow being able to communicate with her through gesture but was unsure why this felt so natural as I had had no exposure to deaf people or sign language prior to this experience.

In 1999, I visited the older sister in Los Angeles and once again found myself able to communicate relatively effectively using signs and gestures. Shortly afterwards in December 2000, chatting with another cousin at my mother's funeral, I became aware that my two-and-a-half-year-old niece, Lucy³, may be deaf. She did not respond when called but responded positively to touch and eye contact. A few weeks later, it was confirmed by doctors that she was profoundly deaf. Her parents were pragmatic, sought support from their local authority and were assigned a private tutor to teach them BSL so that they could begin to communicate effectively with her through sign language and start to teach her some basic BSL before she started pre-school. I picked up snippets of BSL from them at that time and quickly realised that this was going to be the way that Lucy would communicate growing up. So, in September 2001 I began my journey from BSL stage 1, but at this stage, although there were only three men in the class of approximately 12, I was unaware of the gender dispiriting in men learning sign language and become qualified interpreters, as I did in February 2011.

³ Ethical consideration has been observed and permission was sought, and it was agreed I could use Lucy's real name in this thesis.

1.2.1 Language status

Progressing steadily through levels of learning, I achieved level 3 in BSL when my assessor asked what I planned to do in the future. I had started working as a Communication Support Worker (CSW⁴) and I had toyed with the idea of becoming a qualified interpreter because of the freelance nature and the variety of work available. When I told him so, his signed response was “Pigs might fly”. Temporarily discouraged I had a serendipitous meeting with the late Judith Collins at a conference for the Association of Communication Support Workers in 2007⁵. Judith was course leader for the Diploma in Interpreting with the Deaf Community at Durham University alongside the late Granville Tate and Paul Hann. With Judith’s encouragement I went on to complete a Postgraduate Certificate in Advanced BSL and Related Studies which focussed on the linguistics of BSL. At that time, it was the highest level of BSL, equivalent to the Level 6 qualification (Signature, 2022a) offered currently. Equivalent to an undergraduate degree, this is the level required to start training as an interpreter. I moved on to an interpreting course in October 2007 and while acknowledging the complexities and variations inherent in BSL, 15 years later I consider myself to be a fluent user of BSL and therefore bilingual.

1.2.2 Interpreter qualifications

Coming from a working-class background with parents who both had a strong work ethic I did not grow up with aspirations for a university education. After leaving school in 1988 I had enrolled on a 2-year National Diploma in Hotel, Catering, and Institutional Operations, moving on to a Higher National Diploma in Hotel Management, which I enjoyed and completed successfully in 1992. Fast forward fifteen years and I found myself in the rather unfamiliar world of university, motivated by my understanding that my skills as a communication support worker (Signature, 2022b) were not sufficient to be able to interpret between English and BSL to a level that would meet the needs of clients. By 2009 I had successfully completed the Postgraduate Diploma in Interpreting

⁴ For information on the role of a CSW, please see: <https://www.signature.org.uk/communication-support/#:~:text=The%20aim%20of%20the%20certificate,specialist%20learning%20support%20practitioner%20role>

⁵ For information on the Association of Communication Support Workers, please see: <https://www.batod.org.uk/information/history-of-adept>

with the Deaf Community at Durham University and was eligible to register with The National Registers for Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD)⁶ as Junior Trainee Interpreter. I then embarked on a further Postgraduate Diploma in Interpreting and Translation at the University of Central Lancashire delivered at a satellite site by SLI Limited under the direction of Peter Llewellyn-Jones, successfully completing in 2011. This enabled me to register with the NRCPD as a fully qualified BSL interpreter.

1.2.3 Wider experience

Since qualifying as a BSL interpreter I have continually developed my skills within interpreting but have also drawn on other skills to support my own personal and professional development as well as supporting the development of others. I am a professional supervisor offering interpreters a safe, confidential, and non-judgemental space to discuss issues, emotions and dilemmas which occur within their roles. Gender disparity is also evident in this arena with a minority of supervisors being men as shown, for example on the website of labyrinth supervision (labyrinth supervision.com) I am also an NRCPD trainee sign language interpreter (TSLI) supervisor and meeting trainees regularly to ensure they are following their professional development plans, continually developing their professional competencies and ethical practice. As a qualified assessor of TSLIs I work with interpreter training providers as part of their freelance assessor teams and have begun to undertake some teaching responsibilities with one of the providers. In these arenas I continue to find myself in a small minority of men. After publishing a few articles in NEWSLI, the quarterly magazine published by the Association of Sign Language Interpreters (ASLI) (see <https://asli.org.uk/about/newslimagazine>), I responded to a call for Editorial Advisory Group members. Within that role, I liaise with the editor of the magazine to identify potential contributors and relevant topics of interest in the profession. I am currently the only man sitting on this advisory group.

1.2.4 Continuing development

I had imagined that two postgraduate diplomas would mark the end of my academic

⁶ The National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind people. See: <https://www.nrcpd.org.uk>

journey. However, attending the first European Masters in Sign Language Interpreting (EUMASLI - eumasli.eu) Colloquium in Salerno, Italy, in September 2011, at which students present the research explored in their MA theses, I was so inspired that I explored how I might undertake further study. Professor Graham Turner suggested I undertake a master's degree by research and was encouraged (again) by Judith Collins to do this under her supervision at Durham University. The result was 'A Study of the Identity, Culture and Language of a Sample of the Deaf Gay Male Community in Britain'⁷ (Michaels, 2015a).

1.2.5 Finding a disciplinary home

My choice of focus for this doctoral study developed from earlier research I undertook at Durham University on Gay Sign Variation (GSV) (Michaels, 2010, 2015b), and my MRes (Michaels, 2015a). Both were influenced by the sociology of languages and communities. Having explored the views of deaf gay men's experiences of BSL interpreters use of GSV, I developed my interest in connected questions of men's involvement in BSL interpreting more broadly.

Further encouragement from Judith led me to an application for doctoral study in the Department of Languages and Cultures. However, sadly, two weeks after submitting my MRes thesis, Judith passed away. Reflecting on possible ways forward I realised my proposed research topic was neither focussing on linguistic aspects of BSL nor the process of interpreting. A short journey through discussions in the Business School led me to the Sociology Department which has allowed me the latitude to explore the multi-disciplinary and multi-focussed topic of men in BSL interpreting and to build on earlier experiences of research: i) the deaf gay community (Michaels, 2010, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Michaels and Gorman, 2021); ii) the incorporation of neurolinguistic programming in interpreting practice (Best and Michaels, 2016); iii) professional supervision for interpreters (Michaels, 2018a); iv) men interpreting in mental health settings (Michaels, 2018b), and v) entrepreneurship of interpreters (Michaels, 2022).

1.2.6 The impact of personal motivation on this study

In undertaking this research, I am conscious of my own identity and journey as a white,

⁷ For a copy of this thesis, please see: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/11014>

gay, male, hearing, BSL interpreter, with a particular path to interpreting, and the influence this has necessarily had on my approach to the research (Napier & Leeson, 2016). I acknowledge that my own position will have influenced my actions and thoughts, which I have attempted to make explicit in the interests of transparency. My positionality is discussed further in section 3.2.2. In the following section I outline the academic rationale for the study, a newer area of exploration that has broadened my knowledge and appreciation of how my own interpreting experience and practice can be understood by reference to theoretical insights into interpreting.

1.3 Academic rationale

While there is a growing body of work on men in predominantly female professions, the bulk of the literature published in the English language stems from the UK and USA and focuses on two main professions - nursing (e.g., Harding, 2009; Holyoake, 2001, 2002) and teaching (e.g., Cushman, 2005; McGrath 2021). Much of the research focuses on recruitment and retention. By contrast, within the sphere of translation and interpreting studies, research on the interpretation of spoken languages has focussed primarily on conference interpretation, with only embryonic interest in gender. More acute still is the lack of research output relating to sign language interpreting, another predominantly female profession. Given my own background and experience I was keen to explore BSL interpreting through a gendered lens, focusing on men as a minority within the profession.

The sign language interpreting profession is situated within the broader translation and interpreting profession that potentially works with over 7000 spoken languages worldwide with just 23 spoken by more than half of the world's population (Eberhard, Simons and Fennig, 2022). Interpreters work in various settings: legal (police, court, and immigration), community, business and conference, political arenas, and conflict zones. Commonly undertaken in person, the coronavirus pandemic increased demand for online interpreting (De Meulder, Pouliot and Gebruers, 2021). Considering the broad and diverse needs for translation and interpreting, it is not surprising that these are growth areas (Institute of Translation and Interpreting, 2022). And while within this broad sphere of interpreting, sign languages form a minority, there are reportedly more than 300 used by 70 million deaf people worldwide (United Nations, 2022).

At the time of writing this thesis, I have been working as an interpreter for fourteen years and accompanied many discussions with colleagues and clients regarding men in the profession. There have been presumptions that most male interpreters are children of deaf adults (CODAs), from a religious background and/or gay. There are also common assumptions that as a man working in a predominantly female profession, I must enjoy similar privileges as men working in other predominantly female professions such as nursing and teaching, including accelerated career progression and higher pay. However, I do not have deaf parents, although I do have a deaf niece. I do not come from a religious background, although I was baptised as catholic. I do identify as gay but have many male interpreting colleagues who do not. The purpose of sharing these experiences of stereotyping is to underline the power of prejudicial views in the absence of any evidence and to underline the importance of seeking empirical evidence of men's motivations to become, and experiences as, sign language interpreters. As Angelelli (2008, p. 153) asserts: 'Without empirical research, practice will continue to be based on opinions and personal experiences rather than on empirically tested and informed theories. The more research produced and disseminated, the more opportunities to share findings and inform practice, which strengthens dialogue between theory and practice'.

Research on language interpreting began in the 1950s and mostly consisted of papers documenting the experiences of practitioners. Since then, a series of 'turns' in academic research: linguistic (Baumann, 2008) psychological (Napier, 2011), cultural (Rudvin, 2006) and sociological (Angelleli, 2014) have seen a widening of perspectives from which interpreting can be viewed and understood (Pöchhacker, 2016).

Research on spoken language interpreting has only recently begun to explore questions of gender imbalance - particularly men's motivations to become spoken language conference interpreters (Ryan, 2015) - and how this differs from women's motivations (Hickey, 2019). Both these studies revealed interesting insights into gender differences and male privilege in the profession. Other studies have generated knowledge about the linguistic implications of gender mismatch between client and interpreter (Weber, Singay and Guex, 2005), status (Gentile, 2018; Ryan, 2015) feminisation of the profession (Hickey, 2019; Ivanchenko, 2017), and the 'self' (Angelelli, 2004; Boley, 2015). These themes are all addressed further in the review of

the literature that follows this chapter.

Turning attention to sign language, the landscape stretches across more than 300 sign languages used by 70 million deaf people worldwide with more than 80% of those deaf people living in what the United Nations describes as developing countries (United Nations, 2022), also referred to as the Global South. Research focussing largely on Western, or economically developed, countries has included: demographics and family background of interpreters (Cokely, 1981; Mapson, 2014; Napier et al., 2021; Williams, 2015), educational interpreting (De Meulder and Haualand 2021; Knox, 2006; Seal 1998; Winston 2004), legal settings (Napier and Haug, 2016) linguistics (Nicodemus 2009; Nicodemus et al., 2017; Sandler, 1999, Stone, 2009), medical interpreting (Metzger 1999; Sanheim, 2003), psychology (Seal, 2004), sociology (Turner, 2006), remote interpreting (Skinner, 2020) and workplace interpreting (Dickinson, 2017). However, research on gender and sign language, specifically on men in this predominantly female profession, is conspicuous by its absence. This thesis represents a timely attempt to begin to fill this gap in knowledge. There are increasing numbers of people training to become BSL interpreters and an increase in the number of men joining the profession. While there is some initial evidence of gender disparities within the profession (Napier et al., 2021), including different kinds of assignments, working patterns and remuneration, there is very little evidence about why men are joining this predominantly female profession.

My interest in these questions was sharpened by a blog (Boley, 2015) entitled 'Isn't that a Job for Women?' In which he expressed frustration about the general assumptions made about men's unsuitability for sign language interpreting, and a sense that men's difficulties in expressing emotion might lie behind their reluctance to become interpreters. Referring to his own experience he explained:

I've had many hearing people come up to me after my interpreting assignment and say they loved my facial expressions. I always feel a bit odd inside when I hear this. They say it as a compliment, but I often feel embarrassed as if I somehow broke the man code of emotional display. Maybe you've noticed that in an ASL classroom it is often the guys who struggle with facial expressions and NMMs. For men, displaying emotion is associated as a sign of weakness, so we hold it back as much as possible. Maybe this personal pride

is what holds some men back from the interpreting profession.

I was struck by the way he was 'embarrassed' at using facial expression, a linguistic feature of BSL (Sutton-Spence & Woll, 1999) and the notion of breaking the 'man code of emotional display'. In a professional setting, 'man code' can refer to a set of standards and guidelines that are perceived as conventionally masculine, such as an emphasis on rivalry and success (Berdahl et al., 2018). Within popular culture, the term 'man code' (sometimes referred to as Guy Code and Bro Code⁸) refers to an unwritten set of guidelines or 'bromandments' (Serai, 2023) to guide men's behaviour, such as avoiding dating a friend's ex-girlfriend or keeping a friend's humiliating secrets to themselves (Urban Dictionary, 2023). An alternative view of the man code can be seen in *The Man Code: Unlock the Secret* (Swanberg and Smith, 2013) which educates men on forming and mastering real and intimate relationships by way of a set of numbers ensuring an individual is taking a desired course in life and one which God intends.

Taking a more critical approach, Keith (2021) examines how detrimental attitudes and behaviours impact on both women and men, society, and culture; how boys and men are socialised to consider women as inferior and primarily sex objects. Keith (2021) offers a framework for understanding how patriarchal forms of religion and politics, as well as popular culture and social institutions, replicate and promote this particular style of masculinity. Wide recognition of unhealthy forms of masculinity have led to the (limited) development of health promotion programmes for young men to encourage healthy masculinity identities (Gwyther et al., 2019), and popular culture in recent years has seen the emergence of the 'bromance', 'an intimate same-sex male friendship based on unrivalled trust and self-disclosure that superseded other friendships [and by which] young heterosexual men are now able to confide in each other and develop and maintain deep emotional friendships based on intimacy and the expression of once taboo emotional sentimentality' (Robinson, White and Anderson, 2019, pp. 856-857).

⁸ Men's behaviour towards their male 'buddies' is governed by a set of unspoken standards known as the 'Bro Code'. Similar to the 'Girl Code' (see <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Girl%20code>), it is a code of conduct between two 'guys' that addresses a variety of behaviours, such as how to approach strangers and how to relax with your best friends. The Bro Code is a collection of rules that purport to explain how males ought to act. Barney Stinson (see: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0460649/characters/nm0000439?ref=ttfc_fc_cl_t4), a character from the television series *How I Met Your Mother* (see: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0460649>), coined the phrase and made it popular. The Bro Code is a code of conduct for men, or more precisely, for 'bros', in the friendship realm. See: <https://www.today.com/health/cracking-guy-code-rules-men-i541887> and <https://www.mensxp.com/relationships/friendship/21638-all-you-need-to-know-about-the-brocode.html>

1.4 The significance of sign language interpreting and interpreters

Before embarking on a search of the literature to identify existing knowledge about sign language interpreter motivation and experiences, I offer a brief account of the need for sign language interpreters and the roles they fulfil, not only for deaf individuals but for deaf communities, the hearing people with whom deaf people communicate with, and for wider society.

According to the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD)⁹ (2016), there are 70 million deaf people worldwide. The Federation's emphasis is on the human rights of deaf people around the world through:

- Improving the status of national sign languages
- Better education for Deaf people
- Improving access to information and services
- Improving human rights for Deaf people in developing countries

In the UK context several charities support deaf people. The largest and best known for sign language users being the British Deaf Association (BDA) and the Royal Association for Deaf people (RAD). The BDA is a deaf-led campaigning organisation working directly with deaf British Sign Language users with a focus on 'empowering Deaf people to achieve access to their local public services. This is carried out through projects delivering individual and community advocacy' (British Deaf Association, 2022). The RAD provides services for deaf people, their families, and support to professionals and businesses to deliver services and improve accessibility for deaf people. (Royal Association for Deaf People, 2022). Other national charities focusing on the deaf community include the Royal National Institute for Deaf people (RNID) and the National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS) as well as several local charities working with deaf people in specific regions.

There are approximately 1.8 million people recognised as deaf or hard of hearing in the UK (Gov.UK, 2021) but they are not all BSL users. Turner (2020) calculates that

⁹ An international, non-governmental, umbrella organisation comprising national associations of Deaf people was established in 1951 during the first World Deaf Congress in Rome, Italy.

there are somewhere between 40,000 and 70,000 deaf signers in the UK, based on examination of the 2011 Scottish census figures. Yet the distinction between the two largest UK charities illustrates key questions about how deafness is experienced, and how it is understood. The exclusionary practices of a majority hearing world, in which deaf people are perceived as having impairments that can be ‘fixed’ to allow the deaf person to adapt to the hearing world, have been articulated and challenged through the articulation of deafhood (Ladd, 2003). This moves beyond deafness as hearing loss and has propelled recognition of the ‘deaf community’ with its own language and culture, constituting a linguistic¹⁰ and cultural minority. Oppressed by users of majority languages and cultures, fostering a collaborative deaf community allows deaf individuals greater opportunities for sharing experiences and developing a positive sense of self (Woll and Adam, 2012) within a supportive environment. A recent example offering a stark image of the denial of deafhood can be found in a study of deaf prisoners required to engage solely with hearing prison staff (Kelly-Corless, 2022).

Pöchhacker and Shlesinger (2002, p. 3) have described interpreting as ‘interlingual, intercultural oral or signed mediation, enabling communication between individuals or groups who do not share, or do not choose to use, the same language(s)’. And Roy (1992, p. 22) refers to the interpreter's role in the process as ‘an engaged one, directed by knowledge and understanding of the entire communicative situation, including fluency in the languages, competence in appropriate usage within each language, and in managing the cross-cultural flow of talk’. Sign language interpreting has also been described more generally as a complex linguistic, social, cognitive, and cultural process, with interpreters perceived variously as a conduit, communication facilitator, helper, bilingual/bicultural specialist and sometimes as co-participant. An interesting and wider role for sign language interpreters, as allies, relates to the potential for their involvement not only with the linguistic aspects of deaf people’s lives, but also with deaf culture (Shaw, 2014) and the associated struggle for recognition and civil rights (Halley, 2020).

In contrast to conference interpreting, interpreters in community settings are often the

¹⁰ After 19 years of campaigning, BSL became an official language of England and Wales through The British Sign Language Act 2022. BSL must be promoted by the government and used to make it easier for people to use it in their dealings with government agencies. The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 preceded this.

only bilingual and bicultural person/s in a particular situation and the choices and actions they make and take, or do not make and take, have the potential to influence the lives of other people involved in interactions (Swabey and Gajewski Mickelson, 2008). Recognition of the influence of interpreters to shape understandings between the people for whom they are interpreting, together with questions of privacy, sensitivity, gender, and age appropriateness, led to a move away from reliance on informal interpreting by social workers and CODAs (Napier, 2004) towards the professionalisation of interpreting with identified competences and qualifications with practice informed by a Code of Ethics (Pöchhacker and Shlesinger, 2002, p. 1). There are further challenges in achieving understanding between hearing and deaf people that focus on the status of the interpreter as hearing or deaf. While this study, undertaken by a hearing interpreter, centres on hearing male interpreters, there is widening acknowledgement of the advantages offered by interpreters who are themselves deaf, working in relay with hearing interpreters. Sharing cultural values and experiences, they are able to achieve more accurate understandings of linguistic nuance for deaf people. With increasing numbers of deaf interpreters in the UK and an increase in the number of deaf academics (O'Brien, 2020) a similar study of deaf interpreters by a deaf researcher, to provide insights into the similarities and/or differences between hearing and deaf male interpreters, may be possible in the future.

1.4.1 British Sign Language: Setting the contemporary scene

Following several academic and non-academic surveys, offering snapshots of the make-up of the sign language interpreting profession in the UK since 2002, The 2021 Census of Sign Language Translators and Interpreters in the UK (Napier et al., 2021) identified the typical interpreter as a hearing, straight, white, British woman aged 44 who is non-religious, has caring responsibilities, is self-employed and resides in England. She works predominantly as an interpreter (more so than translator), qualified through the academic or vocational training system (or a combination of both), is currently registered with the NRCPD and a member of the Association of Sign Language Interpreters (Napier et al., 2021 p. 60). At as 10th November 2022, there were 1637 sign language interpreters registered with NRCPD, 102 with RBSLI¹¹ (102)

¹¹ Regulatory Body for Sign Language Interpreters and Translators (RBSLI). an independent, voluntary regulator established in 2015. See [RBSLI – Regulatory Body of Sign Language Interpreters & Translators](#)

and 56 with SRLPDC¹² (56) totalled 1795. However, interpreters can apply to be on more than register and, there are many interpreters not registered with any registration body as registration is voluntary and not mandatory; an issue discussed further in section 2.3.5.

There are currently two routes for hearing interpreters to achieve qualified status within the UK: university and private interpreter training organisations. Once qualified, there are numerous domains an interpreter can work in. The NRCPD encourages registrants to advertise the assignments they are prepared to undertake. These include but are not limited to education, leisure, mental health, health and social services, theatre, arts, and television, legal and quasi-judicial, employment, and other specialisms. This range of interpreting areas immediately conjures suggestions of challenges in conveying meaning where, for example, specialist technical or age-appropriate vocabulary are involved or where the communication event is likely to involve the expression of emotion, demonstrating the pivotal role of interpreters whose own values, experience and performance may vary considerably. In problematising sign language interpretation as the accepted response to enabling deaf people access to services, recent research has pointed to the institutional nature of sign language interpreting (De Meulder and Hualand, 2021) and attention drawn to the value of familiarity between a deaf person and their interpreter and the importance of preference and choice over the use of assigned interpreters (De Meulder, Napier and Stone, 2018; Mapson and Major, 2021), choices that are not evenly distributed across interpreting situations.

Interpreters are encouraged to continually develop their professional practice with the aim of keeping professional skills up to date and developing competence and performance skills. The NRCPD requires twenty-four hours of continuing professional development (CPD) per year to maintain registration. The development activities must either be a combination of structured/recommended activities organised by associations, employers, training providers or other organisations, and have stated learning outcomes, or unstructured/individual activities without stated learning outcomes, but reflections, that facilitate the achievement of CPD objectives and

¹² Scottish Register of Language Professionals with the Deaf Community. See [Scottish Register | SRLPDC \(thescottishregister.co.uk\)](https://www.thescottishregister.co.uk)

develop professional practice¹³.

Complementing regulations designed to ensure high standards in interpreting, are measures to protect interpreters. The sign language interpreting profession became unionised in 2014 with the formation of the National Union of British Sign Language Interpreters (NUBSLI)¹⁴ representing 40% of the interpreting profession. NUBSLI is a branch of UNITE, the UK's second largest union and supports NUBSLI in the development of interpreter fee guidance, guidance documents to support interpreters and the communities they work with, resources for interpreters to use and campaigns to support interpreters.

In drawing parallels to other predominantly female professions such as nursing and teaching, the sign language interpreting profession in the UK is non-regulated by the government. However, there have been discussions within the profession as to whether lobbying can take place to protect the status of the profession and seek statutory regulation of communication and language professionals (National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People, 2022).

The NRCPD maintains and develops a voluntary register of communication and language professionals which increases standards and safeguards the public, ensuring that interpreters and other language professionals have the necessary training to carry out their duties safely and reliably. Once registered the interpreter must follow the NRCPD Code of Conduct and can be removed from the register if such requirements are not met. Nothing, however, currently prevents those who are removed from the register from continuing to practise. If interpreters were subject to statutory regulation, it would make it unlawful for unregistered individuals to practise, raising standards and strengthening public safety.

1.5 Research aims and questions

This thesis aims to further understandings of the motivations and experiences of men in British Sign Language interpreting, a predominantly female profession. In doing so

¹³ For more information on CPD see: <https://www.nrcpd.org.uk/continuous-professional-development> and <https://rbsli.org/cpd>.

¹⁴ For more information on NUBSLI see: <https://www.nubsli.com>.

it seeks:

- To establish the motivations of men entering the profession, including the ways in which they are first exposed to sign language and the influence of that exposure in progressing to become BSL interpreters.
- To develop understanding of how interpreters who are men, as part of a minority, experience working within this predominantly female profession.

This is the first study of an unexplored topic, a study that will make an original contribution to the existing literature on men in predominantly female professions by focusing on the sign language interpreting profession in the United Kingdom and providing a platform from which other studies may follow.

The research questions that underpin the literature review and the empirical study are:

1. What are the motivations for men to become British Sign Language interpreters?
2. What are the experience of men in the predominantly female profession of British Sign Language interpreting?

1.6 Structure of the thesis

In this introductory chapter I have outlined the personal and academic rationales for this study, presented the research aims and research questions, provided an overview of the development and significance of sign language interpreting and interpreters in the context of British Sign Language. These elements provide the background against which this study has been envisaged. In the following chapter (2) I provide a review of the literature relevant for this study that spans several disciplines that have sought to: i) explain the phenomenon of men working in predominantly female professions; and develop understandings of gender in spoken language interpreting and sign language interpreting in particular. Chapter 3 describes the methodological background and methods adopted for the identification of the research samples, the collection and analysis of empirical data, and the ethical considerations relevant for this study. Chapters 4 - 7 present the findings from 25 interviews with individual male interpreters and from a Facebook focus group designed to encourage more nuanced

understandings by encouraging exchanges between a further 13 interpreters. Chapter 4 focuses on initial exposure to sign language, followed in chapter 5 by motivations to become an interpreter. Experiences of working as sign language interpreter are presented in chapters 6 and 7. Firstly, chapter 6 focuses on the experience of men working within BSL interpreting and focuses on: gender preferences in co-working as interpreters, perceptions of interpreting as a linguistic or a caring profession, and remuneration, followed by experiencing BSL interpreting as a man which includes male status, gender roles and norms, and sexuality. Chapter 8 brings the thesis to a conclusion, summarising the main findings, highlighting unique theoretical insights, reflections on the study, implications for policy, practice, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2, Part 1 – Gender in predominantly female professions

2.1 Introduction

Aiming to understand the motivations for men to become British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters and their experiences of working within what is a predominantly female profession across Europe (de Wit, 2017)¹⁵, this literature review first draws on areas of evidence and argument about men in predominantly female professions in general. I begin by explaining the search strategy before outlining existing knowledge about ‘predominantly female professions’, the motivations and experiences of men working in these professions. The chapter ends with a summary of the key findings related to men in predominantly female professions.

2.2 Search strategy and rationale

Google Scholar¹⁶ (2022) was used to initiate searches for peer reviewed articles, key journals, book chapters, books, and other resources. In addition, I undertook a citation search of key articles and authors followed up from reference lists. I also received recommendations from others - supervisors, colleagues, and peers - which produced further relevant resources including unpublished postgraduate theses and discussion forums. As this interdisciplinary research is situated within the sociology of work, gender studies, interpreting studies and deaf studies, key sources were explored in a variety of academic journals focusing on these areas (see Appendix 1).

I also utilised Researchrabbit¹⁷ (Konik, 2021) to identify relevant research not captured by Google Scholar. This wide range of sources, located in different academic disciplines and professional fields, presented a perplexing multiplicity of theoretical and methodological approaches underpinning studies of men in predominantly female

¹⁵ However, it is recognised that International Sign Interpreting at conferences is undertaken predominantly by men (de Wit, Crasborn and Napier, 2021).

¹⁶ Google Scholar provides a simple way to broadly search for scholarly literature. From one place, you can search across many disciplines and sources: articles, theses, books, abstracts and court opinions, from academic publishers, professional societies, online repositories, universities and other web sites. Google Scholar helps you find relevant work across the world of scholarly research. (About Google Scholar, 2022)

¹⁷ Research Rabbit is software aimed at academics, to help them discover papers relevant to their research. [It] scans the publicly available information about what different papers are about and who cites them and who they’re cited by. This lets the software identify what works are similar to each other and therefore likely to be useful to you if you’re trying to get a comprehensive understanding of scholarship in a particular subfield.

professions, also referred to in the literature as 'female dominated' and female concentrated' professions/occupations. Writing just over a decade ago Halford and Strangleman (2009) argued that the study of work had become largely 'disembedded from wider social theory ... eclipsed by other concerns within the sociological mainstream' (Halford and Strangleman, 2009, p. 812). But they underlined the importance of sociological studies of work given the links between work and other key concerns in contemporary societies that become subject to public debate as patterns of work change and new forms of work emerge. Exploring theoretical influences on the sociology of work they highlight the historical influences of Durkheim, Marx and Weber on understandings of social change, class and capitalist modes of production, bureaucracy and rationalisation respectively, and the later influences of feminist theory and intersectional approaches widening the field of enquiry beyond labour process theory. These developments have been reflected in the emergence of new journals such as *Work Employment and Society* and *Gender, Work and Organisation* in the 1980s and 90s (Halford and Strangleman, 2009, p. 816).

Sociologists' interest in structural issues relating to men working in predominantly female professions is complemented by the interest of psychologists in individuals' motivations, attitudes, and values in relation to work. Focussing on self-employment - particularly relevant for a study of BSL interpreters who are, largely, self-employed - Warr and Inceoglu's (2018) psychology-based study of work orientations, well-being, and job content of self-employed and employed professionals suggested that sociology could benefit from considering models and findings from psychology research and vice versa. While psychological research can shed light on individual variations in work orientation, job content, and well-being, sociological study can shed light on the larger social and economic framework in which work occurs. For this study, this implies an understanding of the gendered nature of work and the organisations in which much work takes place.

These debates about the generation of knowledge in the field of work encouraged me to keep an open mind in constructing a review of the literature to inform the most effective approaches to my own study of the motivations and experiences of men in the predominantly female profession of sign language interpreting and make an original contribution to knowledge about men in predominantly female professions

(Shen-Miller and Smiler, 2015).

2.3 Analogies between nursing and sign language interpreting

2.3.1 Introduction

Literature on men in predominantly female professions globally focuses on a range of professions including nursing, care work, dental hygiene, hairdressing, social work and teaching (see Appendix 2). Of these, nursing has generated the largest body of knowledge and offers several significant analogies with sign language interpreting, lending itself as a helpful site for comparison and contrast in this study of male BSL interpreters (see Appendix 3). Responding to Warr and Inceoglu's (2018) argument that insights into employment would benefit from cross fertilisation between sociological and psychological research, I explore nursing, interpreting and deaf studies literatures drawing on sociological and psychological concepts. In this section I outline similarities between: i) men as sign language interpreters and nurses and ii) their fields of work. This is followed by iii) identification of themes emerging from research into men in nursing that can inform this empirical study of men in BSL interpreting.

2.3.2 Men as nurses and sign language interpreters

In drawing analogies between men in nursing and sign language interpreting I identify similarities in i) the evolution of the two professions, ii) developments in the characterisations and characteristics of nurses and interpreters as these occupations moved towards professionalisation, iii) required skills, and iv) personality traits.

2.3.2.1 Professional evolution

Forms of nursing and interpreting existed long before either were recognised as professional occupations. One significant analogy between nursing and sign language interpreting is the early involvement of men in caring for people who were sick, wounded and dying in religious and military capacities (Evans, 1997a) before nursing became a formalised role in the mid to late 19th century when Florence Nightingale established nursing as an occupation undertaken predominantly by women. Early

interpreters for deaf people were often children of deaf parents (Hall & Guéry 2010; Moroe & de Andrade, 2018; Napier, 2021; Singleton and Tittle, 2000) but also members of the clergy and missionaries who were men, as well as hearing people socialised into the deaf community (Bidoli, 2016; Brunson, 2004; Singleton & Tittle, 2000; Stone, 2005). As with nursing, sign language interpreting has gradually moved from voluntary, informal status to the development and adoption of formal training and qualifications¹⁸ (Adam, 2022) and registration (Napier, 2004). The development of formalised roles in these recognised occupations has seen the predominance of women as nurses and interpreters. In March 2022, only 11% of registered nurses in the UK identified as male (Farrah, 2023) while in 2021, only 16.81% of registered BSL interpreters were men (Napier et al., 2021).

We must exercise caution in drawing analogies between nursing and sign language interpreting, recognising a key difference between these two professions in the UK context. It is mandatory for any nurse who wishes to practise in the UK to register with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), an independent body that sets professional standards, regulates the profession, and has powers to discipline and deregister individuals judged to be unfit to practise. By contrast, contemporary arrangements for the registration of BSL interpreters are voluntary. This means that anyone can claim to be an interpreter regardless of any training and qualifications, or none, in BSL interpreting¹⁹. This key difference has implications for recognition, by the public and by government, and for the status of the profession. While there is a requirement for registered interpreters to undertake continuing professional development, there are no requirements for revalidation, compromising the development of a career structure, a factor that may have some bearing on motivation to become a BSL interpreter.

2.3.2.2 Characterisation

Early characterisations of nurses spoke to a vocational role: ‘angel of mercy’ ‘paragons of virtue’, ‘doctor’s handmaiden’ (Stanley 2008; Rezaei-Adaryani et al., 2012 cited in Cowin & Johnson, 2015 p. 2912). Similarly, early sign language interpreters, ‘primarily

¹⁸ Following the establishment of the Joint Examining Board and subsequently, the establishment of the Deaf Welfare Examining Board (DWEB) in 1928. This qualification allowed admission to the Institute of Social Welfare, which was a professional body enabling them to work with deaf people in deaf clubs and centres around the UK

¹⁹ The National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD) are advocating for the long-term aim of statutory regulation of the profession (see [NRCPD | Standards | Statutory regulation](#)).

untrained volunteers', were seen as 'Benevolent Care-Taker' (Witter-Merithew, 1999, p. 56). Just as images of nurses have evolved to 'healthcare professional', 'good communicator', providing empathy and care (Kret 2011; Griffiths et al., 2012; Randall & Hill, 2012; Rezaei-Adaryani et al., 2012 cited in Cowin & Johnson, 2015 p. 2912) so too have sign language interpreters come to be recognised as accountable practitioners upholding professional standards (Stone, 2013).

2.3.2.3 Skills and abilities

In the field of nursing, Kennedy, Curtis and Waters (2014, p. 143) identify a key skill as the ability to 'develop a rapport with individuals from all age groups, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, in time-critical situations, and often at a time when these individuals are most vulnerable'. The ability to develop rapport with diverse deaf individuals in diverse circumstances is also important for sign language interpreters (Mapson and Major, 2021) particularly when working in health and mental health care (Nonaka, 2016; Ackroyd and Wright, 2018) criminal justice (Napier and Haug, 2017) and child safeguarding (Oram, Young and Cartney, 2023) settings in which deaf individuals may be particularly vulnerable. Cultural awareness and, by association, the development of self-awareness are further skills required in both nursing (Hultsjö et al, 2019) and sign language interpreting (Napier and Barker, 2004). As Stone, Roy and Brunson (2023, p. 285) explain, interpreters are 'responsible for transmitting culture and context' and familiarity with client and context results in an enhanced quality of interpretation (Mapson and Major, 2021). Cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity and cultural competence are commonly discussed as vital skills in the nursing literature (Sharifi et al., 2019). As well as developing awareness of diverse cultural norms and needs associated with the ethnicity, age, gender, religion, social class, dis/ability, sexual orientation, and other markers of cultural identity of the deaf individuals with whom they work (Olson and Swabey, 2017), sign language interpreters, particularly hearing interpreters, must also embrace an awareness and understanding of deaf culture (McDermid, 2009). The associated development of self-awareness is key to understanding the dynamics between deaf individuals and nurses or sign language interpreters, helping in the recognition of relative positions of power and privilege and experiences of, or potential for, oppression (Walter, 2017; McDermid, 2009).

2.3.2.4 Personality and disposition

With links to job performance and job satisfaction (Johnson, 2004) personality traits and disposition have been explored in both nursing and sign language interpretation (Schein, 1974 cited in Bontempo et al., 2014). In nursing, specific personality traits are associated with effective performance in different specialty areas (Kennedy, Curtis and Waters; 2014). McDermid (2009, p. 108) identifies attributes of effective sign language interpreters. As well as being personable these include being 'a good listener, friendly, and not angry', outgoing, willing to be the centre of attention at times, autonomous, not prone to perseveration, not anxious, discreet, impartial, self-policing, objective and flexible. Further studies of personality and disposition among nurses and interpreters have revealed higher levels of openness to experience, agreeableness, and extraversion among emergency nurses than in the general population (Kennedy, Curtis and Waters, 2014, p. 144). And extraversion was also identified as a necessary personality trait for sign language interpreters by McKee and McKee (1992, p. 147). Further exploration of personality types of sign language interpreters by Bontempo et al., (2014, p. 36) found that 'good general mental ability ... self-esteem, conscientiousness, and openness' were all predictors of interpreter self-rated competence. In the same study emotional stability was identified as a desirable quality (Bontempo et al., 2014, p. 36) echoing research in nursing that argues the importance of emotional stability in promoting patient safety by reducing adverse events (Teng, Chang and Hsu, 2009).

2.3.3 Men in female dominated fields of nursing and sign language interpreting

Although nursing and sign language interpreting are predominantly female professions there are some specialist areas within each profession where men have greater visibility than women. Williams (1995b p. 8) writes: when men enter nursing, they are treated differently from women channelled into certain male-identified specialties and pressured to perform specific job tasks that are identified as 'manly'. Similarly, Evans (2004) explains that men have long been associated with mental health nursing and have been channelled into masculine-congruent specialties and leadership positions in which they can express their masculine gender identity (Snyder and Green, 2008). Male sign language interpreters are also disproportionately represented in

mental health settings (Michaels, 2018b; Napier et. al., 2021). Such 'male areas' in nursing are said to increase opportunities for masculine companionship, reduce stigma and provide support in the wider work environment where men are 'at greater risk of being unsupported, devalued, viewed as anomalies and gay' (Evans and Frank, 2003 p. 279). By contrast, in areas of nursing such as midwifery, male nurses are very rare (Nursing and Midwifery Council, 2021). A similar picture emerges in sign language interpreting with male interpreters being less likely to work in intimate medical settings with deaf women (Brück, 2011; Weber, Singy & Geux, 2005).

Just as with nursing where, it is argued (Snyder and Green, 2008), men gravitate towards specific areas of 'gender appropriate' work characterised by technical expertise rather than caring aspects, sign language interpreting is characterised by men's involvement in specific areas of work that arguably have a higher public profile attracting higher status (Napier et al. 2021). Examples include TV, conferences mental health and legal work which commonly attract higher rates of pay.

2.3.4 Emerging themes

A number of themes emerging from the nursing literature offer strong potential for this empirical study designed to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations and experiences of men in sign language interpreting;

- Contrasting perceptions of nursing as a caring or technical profession and implications for men's roles within the profession.
- The gender pay gap, recognised generally across the labour market, and acutely within predominantly female professions, placing men at an advantage in terms of pay compared to their female colleagues (Punshon et al., 2019). This connects to the status of men as a minority in predominantly female professions. Men often benefit from being afforded special treatment resulting in assumptions of advanced leadership that benefits career advancement (Simpson, 2004). Simpson also notes the likelihood of male nurses being mistaken for doctors and by implication being more highly revered than their female counterparts. Such questions of status align with evidence that men in sign language interpreting undertake more high-profile,

public facing assignments (Napier et al., 2021) influencing the status they are afforded by deaf people and the public.

- Gender stereotyping and societal expectations regarding how men and women should behave, express themselves, and interact with others according to their gender. These gender norms play out in the workplace (Ellemers, 2018; Simpson, 2011) including nursing, and lend themselves to exploration in the context of the sign language interpreting profession.
- Intersectionality. In female dominated occupations men are often assumed to be gay and this is evident in the field of nursing (Harding, 2007; Jamieson et al., 2019). However, gay men are often invisible in their representation, despite making up a significant subset of the nursing workforce (Eliason et al., 2011). In the case of sign language interpreting, gay men, and other members of the LGBT+ community, also make up a significant subset of the workforce (Napier et al., 2021) lending potential for this study of male BSL interpreters to reveal insights into the experiences of gay men in BSL interpreting. This observation is a helpful reminder that while the gendered nature of nursing and sign language interpreting stands out as the dominant analogy, the strong focus on gender in theoretical thinking about gendered organisations (Acker, 1990) offers an incomplete story (Britton and Logan, 2008) since inequalities also derive from race and class (Acker, 2006) as well as other social divisions such as sexual orientation.

These themes have been subject to academic scrutiny through a variety of theoretical lenses presenting a picture of interrelated structural and individual factors in offering explanations of men's motivations for entering, and experiences of working in, predominantly female professions. In the following section I address broad questions of gender in the workforce (2.4), before examining men's motivations (2.5) and experiences (2.6) of working in female dominated professions.

2.4 Gender at work

I start by outlining the gendered nature of the wider labour market before considering theoretical argument and empirical evidence about the production and reproduction of gender inequalities between and within occupations/professions including those

dominated by women. The overall picture of the labour market in the UK is one of gender segregation with men predominating in higher paid sectors of work and senior positions in key industries while women are predominant in lower paid sectors of administration, retail, cleaning, catering and caring (Kamerāde and Richardson, 2018). The result is a gender gap reflected in annual income²⁰ and lifetime earnings²¹.

Specific attempts to address this gap, for example through increasing women's representation in FTSE 100 boardrooms (Brahma, Nwafor and Boateng, 2021), have seen some limited success and in 2022 the government claimed a 'sea change' with nearly 40% of FTSE 100 positions held by women, compared with 12.5% 10 years earlier. But while there are indications of the gender gap narrowing more generally, the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings in 2022 ([Gender pay gap in the UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)) shows a continuing gap of 8.3% for full time employees and 14.9% for all employees. This picture is complicated by a myriad of structural factors (Buchanan, Pratt and Francis-Devine, 2023; ONS, 2017)²² and diverse employee characteristics that contribute to continuing gender disparities in employment. Here I explore theoretical explanations for the persistence of the gendered labour force (Ridgeway, 1997), explanations linked to deeply embedded societal values about the roles and status of men and women, further complicated by the intersection of gender with other social divisions including, but not limited to social class, ethnicity, and age.

Presenting a theory of gendered organisations, Acker (1990) argued that organisational structures are underpinned by assumptions about gender that lead to dominant imagery of the disembodied, 'ideal' worker: male, white, middle class and heterosexual (Britton and Logan, 2008). Conceptualising organisations as essentially gendered entities Acker argued (1990, p. 146) that questions of advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action, and emotion, meaning and identity rest on distinctions between male and female, masculine and feminine. This leads to:

²⁰ Average annual income of women in the UK was £27,031 compared with £30,049 for men representing a gap of £3018 or 10%. In this period 32% of women, compared with 19% of men, fell in the lowest income category of less than £15,000 per annum (Oreffice and Quintana-Domeque, 2021),

²¹ In 2019²¹, average life time earnings were calculated at £643,000 for men and £380,000 for women ([Human capital estimates in the UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#))

²² The labour market is also subject to the impact of changing demographic patterns, emerging technologies and 'shocks' such as the coronavirus that led to rapid changes in patterns of work (Chung et al. 2021). This particular change is beyond the scope of this study in which data were collected in 2019.

gendered divisions of labour that conceptualise skilled work as men's and unskilled work as women's; the use of symbols and images that 'explain, express, reinforce or sometimes oppose these divisions' (Acker, 1990, p. 146); and interactions between men and women that place men as actors and women offering emotional support (redolent of male and female nurses' respective associations with technical and caring aspects of the profession). In turn these effects contribute to the development of gendered identities linked, among other choices, to 'appropriate' forms of work. Applying a critical feminist lens in her work, Acker also argued that the gendered nature of organisations has been reproduced, consciously or unconsciously, through socio-cultural expectations surrounding men and women in the development of organisational theories and research into organisations.

The gendered nature of the labour market in the UK is heavily influenced by inequalities between and within different sectors, men dominating in better paid areas of work (ONS, 2017) and in more senior positions when working alongside women. These inequalities persist despite the introduction of anti-discrimination and equal pay legislation (Petrongolo and Ronchi, 2020; Polachek, 2021). Exploring these continuing disparities empirically, Skeggs (2014) has argued that the value of women's work is determined by wider social values. Professions and occupations dominated by women are commonly considered to be typified by 'feminine' skills and attributes of empathy and showing support (Cottingham, 2014). Skeggs' (2014) analysis is informed by the context of contemporary neo-liberalism under which labour is commonly conceptualised as an asset to be exchanged in pursuit of self-interest. Pointing to the relationship between value and values, and focusing particularly on women's roles as caregivers, she argues: 'care work is not valued as work, for it is seen as work that women provide because ethically they cannot but care' (Skeggs, 2014 p. 12). Based on the findings of a series of empirical studies, Skeggs articulates the production of values and value through social relationships, identifying different 'value practices' including values that are generated in opposition to the logic of capital. These values of care, rather than exchange, lie at the centre of the 'public political economy of calculative rational masculinity' (Skeggs, 2014, p. 15). This concept is creatively captured by Berdahl et al. (2018) who refer to work as 'a masculinity contest' characterised by competition for higher status, power and privilege achieved through hegemonic masculinity and privilege acquired through intersecting identities based on

class and race and influenced by heteronormativity.

Turning to the case of nursing, Meadus (2000, p. 11) challenges the notion of exclusive forms of masculine and feminine work arguing that 'Even though women and men are socialized differently, both genders have the caring and nurturing characteristics required for nursing. However, societal attitudes have aligned these traits exclusively to the female gender'. The strength of societal attitudes can be seen in the Jamaican context where Adeyemi-Adelanwa et al. (2016) found that patients' negative attitudes towards male nurses in general, contrasted with their positive experiences when cared for by a male nurse, indicating a disconnect between expectations and experiences. Similarly, in Pakistan, Younas and Sundus (2018) found that patients' positive experiences of care by male nurses contrasted with more general negative attitudes towards male nurses, influenced by socio-cultural expectations of men.

These findings offer examples of the role of socio-cultural norms in creating gender stereotypes that influence attitudes towards men in predominantly female professions. Pease (2011), writing from the field of social work in Australia, urges us to beware of stereotypical generalisations about nurturing, caring, intimacy and love that are associated with particular professions and lead to perceptions of men's unsuitability for these areas of work. These stereotypes, he argues, reproduce patriarchal discourses, and sustain gender inequality.

2.4.1 Gendered work and the gender pay gap: Inequalities between and within fields

Gendered work, sometimes referred to as sex segregation at work, refers to the dominance of men or women in a particular occupation and is often associated with women's participation in lower paid occupations resulting in a gender pay gap. As noted above, Acker (1990) pointed to the role of organisations themselves, and early researchers of organisations, in creating and reproducing oppressive conditions for women in work by assuming gender neutrality of organisations and failing to interrogate key questions through feminist lenses. The creation and re-creation of the 'ideal' worker: male, white middle class and heterosexual is achieved through early socialisation of children, educational institutions that inform the aspirations of adolescents and decisions throughout the life course (Jacobs, 1989). In turn, societally

prescribed roles for women are reinforced through family and employment policies that have been developed around the idea that women should be responsible for the domestic sphere including care of children and older parents, resulting in interrupted periods of work and greater engagement in part time work that is associated with lower remuneration, fewer opportunities for training and career advancement (Buchanan, Pratt and Francis-Devine, 2023). Women remain routinely underrepresented in more highly paid work sectors such as law, medicine, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and maths) industries and even when they do work in these fields, they experience lower levels of remuneration (Begeny et al., 2020).

The concept of the glass ceiling that blocks women's progression in the workplace (Purcell et al., 2010) contrasts with men's privilege in female dominated occupations where they may ride a 'glass escalator' (Williams, 1995b, 2013), being promoted to more senior and managerial positions attracting higher pay. However, as Williams (2013) has argued, we must be mindful that privilege and oppression in employment go beyond gender as they intersect with other social divisions including race, class, and sexual orientation. While these inequalities may not be immediately obvious in occupations dominated by women, for example social work (Pease, 2011; and Furness, 2012), more detailed analyses repeatedly show that men are disproportionately represented in senior and managerial roles (McPhail, 2004).

Behind Acker's notion of the 'ideal worker' and Skegg's analysis of the valuation of the types of work more commonly undertaken by women, lies the concept of hegemonic masculinity, defined as:

The configuration of gender practice, which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Connell, 1995, p. 77).

While the concept of hegemonic masculinity is contested, drawing attention to alternative, more equality-oriented forms of masculinity (Christensen and Jensen, 2014) the effects of patriarchy can be seen across private and public spaces from families to workplaces (Bermúdez Figueroa et al., 2023), reproduced through education and training systems, and in the labour market (Kleinert et.al., 2023, p. 296).

And digging deeper into the everyday manifestations of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity, Hegewisch and Hartmann (2014) have argued that jobs which are viewed as women's work are frequently underpaid simply because women do them.

Reflecting the gender pay gap between and within professions (Olson, 2013), pay and opportunities for progression are presented as a primary concern influencing men's choices when considering predominantly female professions. For example, Rolfe (2006) explains that men are deterred from work in the childcare sector because of the poor pay and career opportunities. But even in areas where men's competence is acknowledged and they enjoy higher levels of pay than women, for example among dental hygienists in the USA, their experiences of discrimination and gender stereotyping by patients, co-workers, and employers, together with isolation, identity issues and a lack of role models have resulted in men's desire to leave the profession (Diaz et al., 2022).

2.4.2. Reproducing the gender pay gap through gendered stereotyping and intersectional oppression

In what can be described as a negative reproductive cycle, women's positions in the labour market, in lower paid and lower status jobs, attract negative stereotypes which translate into the ways in which men view women and how women view themselves and other women (Acker, 1998). Believing that women need to be at home to raise children remains a persistent stereotype in discussions about women and employment. As Scott, Crompton and Lyonette (2010, p. 2) assert, 'one of the most significant elements of the way traditional practices are embedded in our social institutions is the persistence of the ideology of domesticity, in which the work of caring and nurturing is normatively assigned to women'. And as Skeggs (2014) reminds us, women's work is widely held to be of less value. Despite some movement in these traditional views and some small reductions in the gender gap, sharp gender-based differences remain both between and within occupational sectors.

Beyond gender we can see other sources of oppression in the labour market. Social class, despite redefinition of categories over time, has been broadly conceptualised in terms of occupation and associated levels of pay. The 'Goldthorpe class schema', created in 1987, consisted of seven categories ranging from managerial and higher

professional, to semi-routine and routine jobs such as shop assistants, call centre workers, drivers and cleaners (Watson, 2017). These less-well paid occupations are frequently undertaken by women and people from ethnic minorities providing an example of the intersection of gender, class, and ethnicity. Here opportunities for upward mobility are restricted by insufficient access to resources, both financial and often time due to caring responsibilities in the home, to enable further education or skills development. By contrast, women in professional or managerial roles within the workplace are more likely to be in full time, continuous, well-paid employment than women employed in routine or manual employment (Crompton, 2006), enabling them to access a range of services such as day care for children, in turn allowing them to sustain their advantage in the workplace. This contrasts with women who take time out, or accept part time jobs with lower status, pay and fewer prospects (Scott, Dex and Joshi, 2009).

The intersection between age and gender is complex varying over time in response to demographic change, the demands of the labour market and shocks such as the coronavirus (Chung et al, 2021) as well as changes, or resistance to change, in societal views of women's roles in the domestic sphere. In 2010, Scott, Crompton and Lyonette identified that younger women earned higher levels of pay than older women and that younger women were more like younger men in their experiences of the labour market. However, societal expectations that position women as being principal carers of children, often lead to women taking career breaks relatively early on in their careers which can impact their potential earnings later in their careers and over the entire course of their working lives.

There are, of course, other sources of oppression beyond gender, ethnicity, and class. But this brief consideration of the dynamics of intersectional oppression and privilege creates an interesting challenge in the study of (largely privileged) men working in (largely less privileged) occupations in which women predominate. What attracts men to such occupations? How do they negotiate their lack of fit with Acker's notion of the ideal worker? How does society value the work of men in female dominated 'caring' professions?

This section has identified prominent themes arising from research on gender in

predominantly female professions and occupations. A gap in the literature is any consideration of self-employed men as is most common in sign language interpreting. The following sections focus on men's motivations and experiences of working in predominantly female professions before moving on to address how these literatures can inform understandings of men working in spoken language and sign language interpreting.

2.5 Men's motivations for working in predominantly female professions/occupations

Attention to intersectionality is important in exploring men's motivations for working in predominantly female professions/occupations. In understanding the place of men in 'feminised' primary education, Skelton (2012) argued that a shift in theoretical perspective, from the simplistic: women are caring and nurturing while men are competitive and effective disciplinarians, to a feminist post structuralist view that gender interacts with race, social class and age among other markers of identity such as sexuality, could help develop understanding of the variety of masculine positions shaped by diverse characteristics and experiences.

Acknowledging a range of practical and social constraints on decision making, men may gravitate towards 'traditional' occupations such as vehicle technicians/mechanics, carpenters and joiners, electricians, and electrical fitters, or may be attracted to 'non-traditional' occupations dominated by women such as nursing, early years childcare, primary school teaching, secretarial and administration (Bagihole and Cross, 2006). Evidence suggests that men may, or may not, be aware of the gendered construction of their chosen occupation (Bagihole and Cross, 2006; Cross and Bagihole, 2002) leading to questions about motivations to work in particular occupations. Motivations are commonly classified in the literature as intrinsic and extrinsic (see eg. Bergmark et al., 2018), broadly representing personal enjoyment and fulfilment, and external influences respectively. Commonly identified drivers of occupational choices include intrinsic factors such as personality, and extrinsic factors such as life experiences, the influence of others, media portrayal of occupations, pay and financial security. These influences may reinforce each other or create tensions where different factors attract and deter from particular occupational choices. And choices may be further complicated by unplanned circumstances such as unexpected unemployment or a

desire to move away from current employment, leading to pragmatic and opportunistic choices to enter a particular profession at a particular time (O'Connor, 2015).

2.5.1 What attracts men to work in predominantly female professions?

Personality traits such as altruism (Feigin et al., 2014), and the drive for self-actualisation (Zysberg and Berry, 2005), represent intrinsic motivational drivers explaining the desire to undertake roles that are commonly associated with female occupations such as those involving caring and helping (Appiah, Appiah and Lamptey, 2021; Ashkenazi et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2017; Harding, 2009; Jones, 2015; O'Connor, 2015; Twomey and Meadus, 2008; Whittock and Leonard, 2003; Wilson, 2005). This seems to be particularly the case where motivation to 'make a difference' is evident (Jones, 2015; Rajacich et al., 2013). But for many, occupational choice is more simply the opportunity to follow a career path in something they are interested in, for example librarians' enjoyment of dealing with books, teachers' enjoyment of working with children, and cabin crew enjoying travel and meeting people (Simpson, 2004).

Life experiences, both positive and negative, have been shown to influence men's decisions to enter predominantly female professions (Galley, 2020), and Labra, Bergheul and Turcotte (2017) argue that character building experiences influence occupational choice. The idea of a 'calling' or vocational choice emerges here with individuals wanting to 'give something back' because of their earlier life experiences (Harding, 2009), such as helping to care for sick parents or grandparents in the home environment (O'Connor, 2015), experiencing a serious illness (Rajacich et al., 2013) or receiving care (Wilson, 2003).

The positive influence of parents' occupations or those of other close family members provides alternative motivations for men to enter predominantly female professions (Appiah, Appiah and Lamptey, 2021; Galley, 2020) through direct discussions (Labra, Bergheul and Turcotte, 2017; O'Connor, 2015; Rajacich et al., 2013; Yi and Keogh, 2016), encouragement, positive reinforcement (Wilson, 2003) or, more simply, through familiarity with the roles (Whittock and Leonard, 2003). A personal relationship with someone already working in a predominantly female profession also features

prominently in the literature as a positive influence (Harding, 2009; Wilson, 2003). The influence of careers advisors or those in similar roles (Zamanzadeh et al., 2013) is seen as more tenuous (O'Connor, 2015; Whittock and Leonard, 2003) reflecting the socially constructed perceptions of careers advisers about gender-based occupations.

Media portrayals of particular occupations offering exciting and exhilarating roles (Zamanzadeh et al., 2013) have also been cited as important influences on occupational choices. Yet this seems to be an underexploited area. For example, echoing the lack of positive media images of women in computer science (Cheryan et al., 2013), argues there are few popular images for men aspiring to a nursing career to connect with their own sense of the job, with some film portrayals even being considered offensive (O'Connor, 2015).

Despite lower average pay, some men are drawn to what they see as the financial and job security rewards of predominantly female professions such as nursing and teaching (Appiah, Apia and Lamptey, 2021; Harding, 2009; Hollup, 2012; Simpson, 2004; Twomey and Meadus, 2008; Zamanzadeh et al., 2013; Zysberg and Berry, 2005; Wilson, 2005). While security generally relates to regularity of income, it is also associated with opportunities for progression and promotion (Baljoon et al., 2018; Litosseliti and Leadbeater, 2013; Simpson, 2004, 2005; Skelton, 2003; Twomey and Meadus, 2008). Exploring other 'pull' factors, including the 'glass escalator' (Williams, 1992; 2013) that describes men's rapid progression and promotion in predominantly female professions, Lupton (2006) concluded that while some men in female concentrated occupations do experience the glass escalator effect, most do not. And he drew on wider evidence suggesting the majority of men entering female concentrated occupations were not there by choice.

An example of overlapping intrinsic and extrinsic motivations is described by Baljoon et al. (2018) who highlight work engagement and supervision in nursing as motivational factors. Yi and Keogh (2016) found that male nurses were motivated to choose the profession because they had positive perceptions of the profession. And Twomey and Meadus (2008) have argued that if individuals feel a profession has a positive image, then they are attracted by the people they believe they will meet in that profession.

As Macias and Stephens (2019, p. 164) argue: gender issues are more complex than

they would seem in a mainly female-dominated profession. Taking an intersectional approach in research on men's motivations for, and experiences in, predominantly female professions has challenged earlier understandings and created new springboards for developing further understanding. Much of this section has drawn on literatures in the fields of nursing with insights from teaching, and social work where work is conducted as part of large organizations with formalised structures and hierarchies. Yet men also work in smaller units of work such as hairdressing, where feminised performance is often misinterpreted as being gay, rather than being seen as men at ease with a different kind of masculinity (Robinson et al., 2011). This reminds us again of the power of hegemonic masculinity that colours the ways in which men are perceived by women and by other men, as well as the ways in which they behave, in predominantly female work settings.

2.5.2 Deterrent effects

While demonstrating a range of motivations drawing men towards predominantly female occupations, research also addresses factors that deter men from entering these professions. Litosseliti and Leadbeater (2013) argue that seeing a female relative in a role within a predominantly female profession can reinforce men's perceptions that the role is not for them, while family attitudes, often based on popular imagery, may lead men to believe particular occupational roles are not appropriate (Erden, Ozgun and Ciftci, 2011). More widely, factors that are likely to deter men from entering a predominantly female professions include low status, the costs of training (Ashkenazi et al., 2017; La Rocco, 2007) or retraining in cases of switching professions (Chen et al., 2017), and low levels of pay (Chen et al., 2017), particularly when compared with alternative occupations (Dill, Price-Glynn and Rakovski, 2016).

Perceptions of threats to masculinity held by peers and parents have also been identified as deterrents (Harding, 2009; O'Connor, 2015; Poliafico, 1998). Abu et al., (2019) reported mothers of male nurses in Saudi Arabia refusing to tell their friends that their sons are nurses (Abu et al., 2019, p. 9) while in Ireland, O'Connor (2015) found schoolboys fearful of being mocked or threatened with physical violence if they shared their decision to apply for nursing as a career. An interesting exception to cultural perceptions of nursing as 'women's work' can be found in Mauritius where, influenced by specific origins and socio-cultural conditions, nursing is neither

considered women's work, nor an extension of women's domestic roles. With the title of 'nursing officer', recruitment is strong among men who make up nearly half of the profession and has shifted nursing into a masculine sphere with positive impacts on the profession (Hollup, 2014). This exception aside, strongly embedded cultural norms associated with highly gendered occupations act as strong deterrents for men considering work in predominantly female occupations. In part this is explained by not wishing to be associated with feminine traits but also by concerns about capability in demonstrating the necessary skills and traits, traditionally associated with women, including compassion, sensitivity, empathy and expressing emotions (Labra, Bergheul and Turcotte, 2017).

A further deterrent to men's involvement in predominantly female professions relates to public perceptions of men as a threat in employment situations where they have access to children and vulnerable adults. This has arguably affected men's willingness to enter professions such as teaching, fearing suspicion of ulterior motives for entering the profession and unfounded accusations of child abuse (McGrath, 2021; Sargent, 2000; Skelton, 2003) that could have career ending consequences. Similarly, in the field of nursing, Wilson (2005) has argued that men may be perceived as an overt sexual threat.

In the following section I move on from men's motivation and resistance to work in predominantly female professions to explore the literature on the experiences of men who do enter these professions.

2.6 Men's experiences of working in predominantly female professions

The literature on men's experiences of working in predominantly female professions is wide ranging, addressing questions of masculinity, identity, economics, relationships, positive and negative treatment, men's roles, and the strategies they adopt when working within a predominantly female profession (Shen-Miller and Smiler, 2015). The academic disciplines and theoretical perspectives that inform understandings of these questions are also wide-ranging reflecting individual and structural factors, sometimes combined in interdisciplinary approaches (Halford and Strangleman, 2009). Here I focus on the themes with greatest salience for the empirical study of sign language

interpreting that follows:

- Masculinity, highlighted in the literature as being subject to compromise for men working in predominantly female professions.
- Effeminacy and sexuality, which both have implications for working relationships and professional image.

As Williams and Dellinger (2010) assert: 'Organizations are constituted in and through gender discourses; they are built on binary logics of masculine/feminine and heterosexual/homosexual; they produce gendered and sexual identities' (Williams and Dellinger, 2010, p. 2). Cutting across these areas are themes of identity and personality, gender roles and stereotyping, status, and privilege, pay and progression, as well as workplace environment.

2.6.1 Masculinity

Masculinity, an elusive and complex notion (Perra and Ruspini, 2013) is a social construction concerning the position of men in a gender order (Connell, 1995). Definitions of masculinity vary in precise vocabulary. For example, 'simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture (Connell, 1995, p. 71); 'values, experiences, and meanings that are culturally interpreted as masculine and typically feel "natural" for or are ascribed to men more than women in the particular cultural context' (Alvesson, 1998, p. 972); or more simply as 'not femininity' (Connell, 1995, p. 70). Masculinity is also conceptualised as an outcome or product of social processes as opposed to an amount that one person may possess (Kerfoot and Knights, 1998, p. 11), while Connell (1993), notes that masculinities are multiple, based on discourse and practices that influence organisational practices (Collinson and Hearn, 1994).

Lupton (2000, p. 45) argued that 'working with women restricts opportunities to reinforce masculinity in the work environment' as ability to confirm masculine identity is limited under pressure to conform to feminine ways of working. O'Connor (2015) argues that male nurses attempt to distance themselves from traditional motivations for choosing nursing such as caring and vocationalism, and this may affect men's

desire to ride the 'glass escalator' (Williams, 1995b) taking them to higher paid positions within the workplace. Men who work in historically male-dominated sectors are frequently seen as more competent or more masculine than men who offer care within a working environment. As a result, men who do provide care for others may feel stigmatised and their masculinity compromised particularly in terms of their capacity to fulfil wider social expectations of supporting their families financially (Gull & Uskul, 2019).

However, others have argued that men gravitating towards roles within predominantly female professions are able to reinforce their masculinity, for example male nurses adopting managerial positions, working in areas where there is a significant use of technology such as intensive care, accident and emergency and theatre, or areas without significant intimate personal contact such as psychiatric nursing (Heikes, 1991; MacDougal, 1997; McLaughlin, Muldoon and Moutray, 2010; Williams, 1989). There are exceptions such as a Canadian study by Villeneuve (1994), who found that men were not avoiding clinical areas requiring intimate touching and Jamieson et al. (2019) who identified individual male nurses resisting hegemonic masculinity and actively engage in 'undoing' gender. But these were exceptions and little change has been observed in male nurses carving out niches through distinctive forms of care that allow the maintenance of masculinity within a feminine context (Williams, 1989; Jamieson et al., 2019).

Such specialisms as described above are thought to eliminate sex role conflict (Evans 1997b; Robinson, Skeen & Coleman, 1984) for men attempting to assert their masculinity in predominantly female workplaces. Recognition of specialist 'male' areas of work can have the effect of attracting more men, increasing opportunities for masculine companionship among colleagues with shared interests and experiences, reducing stigma and providing support (Evans and Frank, 2003). Working in a supportive environment in which stigma is reduced can also be achieved by men working in predominantly female professions using language to establish and maintain a group collective with colleagues of varying identities, based on the common experience of working within the profession and signified through the use of a common linguistic repertoire (McDowell, 2015b) which can de-gender gendered environments (McDowell, 2020). A supportive environment is especially important for additionally

minoritised gay men in the workplace (Rumens, 2010).

Akin to the creation of masculine spaces through specialist areas of work, is the idea of men performing what are perceived to be masculine tasks such as lifting and carrying bulky and heavy items, intervening in violent situations, and avoiding feminine aspects of a role (Evans and Frank, 2003). Men appear to view providing care as a problem that needs to be rectified and solved. They seem to search for practical solutions and have the reputation of concealing their feelings about providing care; instead concentrating on the practical side. In the feminine sexually encoded occupation of massage therapy, Hancock, Sullivan and Tyler (2015) found that male therapists emphasised their heteronormative masculinity by wearing medical 'scrubs', decorating their offices with medical images, and using anatomical terminology when talking with clients, in order to avoid being seen as predatory. This did not entirely protect male therapists from prejudicial views about the suitability of men for work involving bodily touch in this profession where, unlike nursing and teaching, clients are able to choose their therapist.

More broadly, the actions and behaviours of men in distancing themselves from the more feminine, caring, aspects of their occupations can lead to perceptions of their unsuitability for predominantly female professions. As McKinlay et al. (2010, p. 349) explain in their study of student nurses' gender-based accounts of men in nursing, while rejecting prejudiced images of male nurses as gay or macho (in the case of psychiatric nursing) the students embraced an alternative prejudiced image of men in nursing as being less suited to the 'mundane and unpleasant chores' involved in nursing where such chores are viewed as caring, women's work and not men's.

Emphasising masculinity in predominantly female domains extends to the notion of masculine performativity using gender discourse. In this way O'Keeffe and Deegan's (2018) study of male teachers in primary schools in Ireland revealed staffrooms as sites for the use of such discourse in practices of control, power, and privilege. Extending knowledge of the ways men perform masculinity in female-dominated jobs, Harvey Wingfield (2010) focused on men of colour in nursing in the USA who encounter prejudice based on both gender and race. Her findings revealed prejudicial attitudes of colleagues based on stereotypes of black men as lacking the skill and intelligence for nursing, and the use of counter strategies by male nurses of colour to emphasise their

caring abilities, their high level of comfort in caring and, importantly, to highlight these abilities as indicators of masculinity, reminding us of the cultural variations in markers of masculinity.

These different ways of emphasising traditional or reconstructed forms of masculinity contrast with men's practices that minimise manifestations of masculinity to avoid conflict or reduce visibility. Examples include avoiding holding doors open for female colleagues and distancing from, or minimising, participation in discussions to avoid the appearance of assertiveness (Kauppinen-Toropainen and Lammi, 1993). As well as intentions to achieve closer alignment with female colleagues and demonstrate suitability for a predominantly female profession, men also engage in distancing to maintain what Kauppinen-Toropainen and Lammi (1993) refer to as 'erotic peace', reducing sexual tension in the workplace and avoiding labelling as sexual aggressors (Evans and Frank, 2003).

In the field of primary education, where women constitute a large majority of the workforce, and in response to attempts to attract more men into primary education with the (flawed – Skelton, 2012) idea of providing role models for boys, Warin (2014, p. 93) points to the 'intransigencies of masculinities' and the entrenched androcentric nature of current Western schooling that values academic attainment above social and relational outcomes, what she refers to as 'educare'. She proposes the inversion, or subversion, of the question of how to create a more evenly gendered workforce to a question that examines the impact on society of educational policy and practice that values educare. Chiming with Williams' (2013) argument about the impact of neoliberal capitalism and echoing Skeggs' (2014) concern about capitalism's disdain for caring values that serve to reinforce the continuity of women as poorly or unpaid carers, Warin (2014) remains pessimistic about the likelihood of such a transformation while educational policy goals remain focussed on the achievement of individual autonomy at the cost of relational outcomes that would strengthen the value placed by wider society on reciprocity and interdependence.

2.6.2 Effeminacy

The strategies adopted by (some) men to preserve their masculinity when working in predominantly female professions (Litosseliti and Leadbeater, 2013), have been

explained, in part, as the result of men's 'fear of feminization through working in a predominantly female profession' (Lupton, 2000, p. 45). However, some men are content to embrace the feminine aspects of their personalities. Robinson, Hall and Hockey (2011) found that men in UK hairdressing considered that displaying femininity contributed to positive relationships with colleagues and clients, leading to improved work performance. And the African American nurses in Wingfield's (2010) study subverted dominant notions of masculinity by promoting their caring abilities as markers of masculinity.

A challenge in developing a critical review of the literature on effeminacy, defined as 'the state of behaving, looking like, or having qualities similar to a woman' (Cambridge dictionary, 2022) is the common conflation of effeminacy with 'sexuality', a term commonly deployed to represent sexual orientation (Schnabel, 2018)²³. Studies from the USA (Williams, 1989) and Australia (Harding, 2007) report heterosexual men's antagonism towards gay men for perpetuating stereotypes of effeminacy which they felt deterred men from the nursing profession. Focussing specifically on effeminacy, a UK study by Jinks and Bradley (2004) identified an increase in the proportion of nursing students who perceived male nurses as effeminate between 1992 and 2002. However, in Israel, Ashkenazi et al. (2017) found that over a 15-year period, male nursing students became less likely to object to effeminacy in male nurses and becoming more tolerant than female students. It is hard to draw firm conclusions from this inconsistent picture, drawn from different cultural settings. But importantly we should take note of the rejection of the 'binary logic underpinning notions of masculinity and femininity as being fixed, dichotomous and stable' acknowledging 'the social constructivist perspective that views these categories as 'multiple, fluid and contingent' (Rumens, 2010 p. 138). To quote Connell (2009, p. 6), 'the great majority of us combine masculine and feminine characteristics, in varying blends, rather than being all one or all another'. In other words, it is somewhat problematic to label men as either only masculine or only feminine.

2.6.3 Sexuality

Literature relating to the sexuality of men in predominantly female professions points

²³ A sentence in the abstract of Schnabel's article on Sexual orientation and social attitudes begins: *Sexuality (i.e., sexual orientation)*.

to challenges associated with stigma and discrimination. Men working in nursing are stereotypically perceived as homosexual (see Ashkenazi et al., 2017). And men following predominantly female career choices have expressed anxiety about the stigma associated with their choice (Lupton, 2000), associated either with homosexuality or, in the case of male teachers, sexual motivation (Simpson, 2004). These anxieties, Simpson argues, can be attributed to hegemonic masculinity, characterised by heteronormativity. Rumens (2007, 2010a, 2010b 2012) has shown how working environments perceived to be unfriendly or hostile have deterred interest from gay men. Non-inclusive policies, homophobic comments and behaviours from co-workers, risks and consequences of being 'outed', as well as insensitive attitudes and behaviours with clients/patients through ridicule, invasion of privacy and physical abuse all contribute to hostile working environments.

More hopefully, the literature offers clues to more positive working experiences for gay men in predominantly female professions, focussing on the gay-friendly environments, a notion underpinned by social attitudes, political, legal, cultural, and organisational factors (Eliason et al., 2011; Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009). Such environments can be nurtured through diversity in the workforce, the use of inclusive language, policies, interactions with colleagues on various levels as well as features of the surrounding community and type of workplace (Eliason et al., 2011). Referring to nursing, MacDougal (1997) suggested that gay men may be attracted to the field of HIV care in nursing because the environment was perceived to be gay friendly.²⁴ However, A small-scale study (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009) of a gay-friendly environment in a UK NHS Trust sounded a note of caution. Despite an LGBT support network offering friendship and intimacy and a happier workplace in which gay men were empowered to self-identify as gay, they were still subject to 'professional norms and discourse of heteronormativity that treated sexuality and professionalism as polar opposites' (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009, p. 765) leading to the conclusion: 'even within 'gay friendly' organizational settings, fashioning a professional identity is a process marked by negotiation and struggle' (Rumens & Kerfoot, 2009, p. 763). Similarly, Cross and Bagihole's study of support for men in non-traditional occupations identified contradictory experiences of: 'positive support from some friends, but also direct

²⁴ With advances in community-based treatments, HIV nursing may no longer constitute a draw. See: <https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/history/hiv-and-aids-timeline>

challenges to their sexuality, and hostility from others' (Cross and Bagihole, 2002, p. 13). The influence of gendered language and discourse in discouraging men from entering female concentrated occupations is clearly articulated in McDowell's (2020) edited book 'De-Gendering Gendered Occupations'. With contributions from language and gender studies exploring workplace discourses, McDowell concludes that achieving a shift from prevailing hegemonic norms about gendered professions can only be achieved through better understandings of how they are linguistically performed, and the professional identities constructed within them. The book offers examples of how language may be used to dispel gender stereotypes and encourage more welcoming and inclusive workplaces.

2.7 Summary

In this section of the literature review I have outlined key themes and theoretical influences in the literature on men's motivations for and experiences of, working in predominantly female professions. Following Warr and Inceoglu's (2018) plea to complement psychological study of work with sociological insights I have drawn on sociological studies of gender and gendered organisations, and of the nature of 'care' and its relationship with gender, in order to locate the study in its wider structural socio-political and economic context. These have revealed the continuing impact of hegemonic masculinity and of neoliberal capitalism in sustaining ideas about gender, work and caring that continue to disadvantage women in the workplace where they experience the negative impact of the gender pay gap and in the domestic sphere where they continue to carry unpaid caring responsibilities. Offering several analogies with BSL interpreting, I have drawn heavily, though not exclusively on the nursing literature to understand the motivations, experiences and behaviours of men working in female dominated professions. This has included an exploration of masculinities, how they are threatened, and how they may be preserved, and the impact of heteronormativity on gay men working in female dominated professions.

In the following section I move on to questions of gender in language interpreting, a field dominated by women (Singy & Guex, 2015; Pöchhacker, 2016).

Chapter 2, Part 2 – Gender in Spoken and Signed Language Interpreting

2.8 Introduction

Following the previous section which aimed to understand the impact of gender in predominantly female professions, this section focuses on questions of gender in spoken and signed language interpreting, widely acknowledged as being predominantly female professions (Singy & Guex, 2015; Pöchhacker, 2016, Napier et al., 2021). Reflecting the evolution of interpreting from spoken to sign language, I start by focussing on gender in spoken language interpretation before moving on to questions of gender in sign language interpretation, the specific area of my empirical study. The chapter ends with a summary of the key findings and confirmation of the research questions that inform the methodology and methods employed in the empirical stages of this study.

Literature on gender in spoken language interpreting, whether Conference Interpreting (CI) or Community/Public Service Interpreting (C/PSI)²⁵, is thin (Defrancq et al., 2022; Singy & Guex, 2015). CI describes interpreting in high-level formal meetings and negotiations, it is mainly simultaneous interpretation undertaken by practitioners with intensive initial training tailored to these skills and settings and working within a framework of norms and conditions (Setton, 2010). In contrast C/PSI makes services accessible to people or groups in society who cannot interact with service providers in the official or majority language. Medical and health, social services, legal and criminal justice are examples of typical C/PSI settings and require sensitivity to the context as well as skills in language interpretation (Hertog, 2010). CI and C/PSI are not mutually exclusive, and some interpreters work in both settings.

As outlined in section 2.3.2.1, spoken and signed language interpreting are professions that, having originally been dominated by men, have undergone a process of feminisation (Pöchhacker, 2016; Singy & Guex, 2015), the result of changes in societal norms and attitudes towards gender roles and work, increased access to

²⁵ In Europe and the US, community interpreting is frequently used. The UK frequently uses public service interpreting. Other terms used include dialogue interpreting, conversation interpreting, liaison interpreting, culture interpreting, and community-based interpreting.

education and training for women, changes in the economy and labour market, the perception that certain professions are more suitable for women, such as healthcare and education, or the perception that certain professions are less suitable for men (see Ch 2). When feminisation occurs within a profession, the nature of the profession can change (Adams, 2005) and gender specialist areas can be created (Lindsay, 2005).

Exploring sex and gender in conference interpreting, Defrancq et al., (2021) trace early studies of gender in linguistics to Lakoff (1975) with developments in gender and translation studies in the late 1980s and research on gender in interpreting making a relatively recent appearance beginning with the work of Angelleli (2008). These developments reflect growing awareness and acknowledgement of the relational aspects of interpreting, with interpreters as fully fledged participants in the interaction whose identities, ideologies, and gender identities do not suddenly disappear when they take on the role of interpreters (Singy & Guex, 2015; Defrancq et al., 2021, p. 415). Fragmented research from a range of academic disciplines has revealed gendered patterns in interpreting, strengthening the call for new and better targeted research in this area of knowledge (Defrancq et al., 2021, p. 423). In the following sections I outline different perspectives that have contributed to contemporary understandings of gender in spoken language interpreting. I focus in turn on i) gender imbalance and the feminisation of the profession, ii) motivations to join and, iii) experiences in, the profession. These areas are inextricably linked, and the structure of this section seeks to explicate each of these aspects of gender in spoken language interpreting while also illustrating the connections between them.

2.8.1 Gender imbalance and the feminisation of spoken language interpreting

Despite wide acceptance of conference interpreting as a feminised area of work, there has been little research to understand the causes of feminisation, beyond stereotypical assumptions about the nature of the skills involved in women's work and about opportunities for work that suit women's responsibilities.

Observing the preponderance of women (69%) as conference interpreters in the European Commission's Directorate General for Interpreting, Ryan (2011) set out to explore the perspectives, experiences, and motivations of experienced male

conference interpreters in this feminised field. Using quantitative and qualitative research methods she found nearly all research participants were aware of the gender imbalance within interpreting. The majority believed the predominance of women was linked to a heightened female ability to interpret and to be invisible as well as superior skills in multitasking, allowing them to listen and speak at the same time. In addition, the flexibility of the profession offered part time work, more prevalent among women in the workplace (Buchanan, Pratt and Francis-Devine, 2023). Ryan (2011) also referred to stereotypical views of women's sense of service and attributed women's alleged greater language skills as the result of long held educational practices that result in boys being less likely to pursue languages. However, Clarke and Trafford (1995) observed that foreign language learning at school was more likely to be associated with (higher) socioeconomic status decreased gender inequality, opportunities for travel and interaction with speakers of languages other than English, and perceptions foreign language learning as offering an advantage.

In a counterpart study following Ryan, Hickey (2019) sought to balance male interpreters' views with those of interpreters who were women and revealed a rather different picture. Those interpreters expressed motivations driven by i) the desire to express their language skills, ii) a desire for stimulation and personal development, iii) the wish to join a meaningful and prestigious profession, and iv) to gain a sense of freedom associated with travel and flexibility. This sense of autonomy and flexibility was also found to be enjoyed by freelance translators in a study conducted by Fraser and Gold (2001).

Men's motivations for taking up spoken language interpreting are considered in more detail in the following section but referred to here by way of illustrating the contrast with women's motivations in this feminised field. The studies by Ryan and Hickey showed some overlapping motivations, notably the flexible nature of the profession, and to gain a sense of meaningfulness. They also showed that, while valued by both men and women, remuneration was less important to women interpreters. This may be because more women undertake part-time work because of caring responsibilities, where the earnings may be in addition to a partner who is working full-time, but it is recognised that this part-time work may generate lower pay than full-time work. (Buchanan, Pratt and Francis-Devine, 2023; Napier et. al., 2021). One area of clear difference was the

absence among women of moving on from a previous tedious area of work that featured as a motivation for men to become interpreters.

The relevance of gender is heightened when interpreting takes place face to face. Here the identity and participation of the interpreter is brought to the fore raising questions of gender matching. Most attention in this sphere has been paid to situations involving people perceived to be vulnerable in high stakes contexts such as medical encounters (Cho, 2021), police (Monteoliva-García, 2020) or immigration (Mason and Ren, 2012) interviews. Preference for similar contexts have also been found among male BSL interpreters (Napier et al., 2021)

Weber, Singy and Guex (2005) carried out a study in Switzerland to explore beliefs and experiences about the importance of interpreter gender in medical encounters with migrants. Focus groups and interviews were held with i) novice and experienced interpreters, ii) patients from Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania who had, and had not, worked with interpreters in medical consultations, and iii) medical professionals. None raised concerns about the linguistic implications of a gender mismatch within any given interaction, and patients without experience of interpreted communication felt that the gender of an interpreter would have no importance in the interaction. By contrast, most of those who had experienced interpreted communication felt that working with female interpreters, and female medical practitioners, would facilitate greater understanding for women patients, reducing difficulties in discussing issues of intimacy including sexuality. This supports the stereotypical image of women as more caring and nurturing than men (Scott, Crompton and Lyonette, 2010). In contrast, participants felt that men may feel constrained in discussing issues such as AIDS prevention in the presence of a female interpreter. The overall picture was that gender matching is vital when discussions involve particularly sensitive matters including sexuality, AIDS, rape, and intimate partner violence. And similar conclusions in an Australian study of interpreting in the field of child protection (Sawrikar, 2015) suggests strong potential for the wider generalisation of these findings. However, in the Swiss study, interpreters were clear that an un gender matched interpreter was better than no interpreter, a position understood by the authors as an indicator of the weaker position of interpreters vis-à-vis professionals who did not always value their presence, and an attempt to justify their value. The potential for the exclusion of interpreters by more powerful

professional's rings alarm bells given the role of interpreters in facilitating access to public services, defending the human rights of migrants, and defending democracy itself (Gentile, 2014).

2.8.2 Motivations to become a spoken language interpreter

I have touched on men's motivations to become conference interpreters in the previous section to illustrate the contrast with women's motivations in this feminised area of practice. Using an online self-completion survey with 259 interpreters working in multiple language combinations, followed by interviews with experienced interpreters, Ryan (2015) identified four key motivations: remuneration, flexibility, excitement, and meaningfulness. These reflect a mix of extrinsic and intrinsic drivers. While remuneration was important for the majority it was not as important as the flexibility offered by freelance work which was a critical feature in this career choice. The third motivation, excitement, related to a sense of tedium with earlier employment and was closely associated with the search for meaningfulness, a strongly intrinsic motivation concerned with self-actualisation (Zysberg and Berry, 2005). Similarly, intrinsic motivations (e.g. enjoying the job), along with mastery (e.g. continually enhancing professional skills and knowledge) and ideal self (e.g. professional recognition) were found to be significant motivating factors among translating and interpreting graduates in Hungary (Horváth and Kálmán, 2020).

With no further, readily identifiable, evidence of men's motivations for conference or, indeed, face to face spoken language interpreting, I turn next to men's experiences of work in spoken language interpreting.

2.8.3 Experiences in spoken language interpreting

Analyses of gendered experiences in spoken language interpreting reveal key themes of status and prestige, power, and privilege, that serve to disempower or empower practitioners to use their agency (Diriker, 2011) and their 'self' in the practice of language interpretation. The male conference interpreters in Ryan's (2015) study felt that interpreting was a skill mastered by few and could therefore be considered to have high status. This is perhaps reflective of the way men redefine their role to align more closely with their masculinity and avoid sex-role conflict (Evans 1997b; Robinson,

Skeen & Coleman 1984). They saw themselves as privileged, with easier entry to, and progression within, the profession than women, benefitting from the 'glass escalator' effect (Williams 1995), and they felt they were often preferred by clients. This perception of high status however was expressed rather differently by women conference interpreters in Hickey's (2019) counterpart study in which the gender imbalance was perceived not in terms of [greater] numbers [of women] but in terms of power among the male minority.

Gentile's work (2018) on professionalisation and status among interpreters, including an international survey of over 800 interpreters, found that both male and female conference interpreters believed that conference interpreting is a high-status profession, enjoying high levels of prestige within translation and interpreting studies. However, like the respondents in Ryan's (2015) study, there was evidence of thinking that the status of conference interpreting had declined since it was founded (Gentile, 2018) with women interpreters believing their status to be lower than that of men, reflecting wider societal attitudes that ascribe higher status to men in the workplace than women (Simpson, 2004). Pöchhacker (2002) similarly found that conference interpreters felt the prestige of their profession had declined over the years, a view reinforced by Hickey's (2019) study of women in conference interpreting who reported a decline in working conditions and prestige.

Gentile (2018) links these changes and beliefs to the feminisation of conference interpreting, a process associated with underestimation of work undertaken and women's own underestimation of their skills (Cortina and San Román (eds), 2006). Interestingly, Gentile (2018) found that women's age influenced perceptions, with younger women continuing to see interpreting as having high status, though educational achievement made no difference in perception. More generally, she found that women interpreters felt that people outside the profession did not see interpreters as having prestige and social value.

More recently Giustini (2021, 2022) has reported the findings of in-depth interviews revealing feminisation of spoken language and conference interpreting in Japan. Here women have been using linguistic skills to move into interpreting in the hope of avoiding gender discrimination in regular employment. Their perceptions and expectations were of a feminised industry characterised by gender equity and prestige,

promising flexibility to support work and family life balance, and the potential to develop a sense of individuality to support career growth. However, they found that interpreting is not immune from gender stereotyping and occupational segregation, dashing their hopes of moving towards gender equality in what Giustini (2021, p. 543) refers to as a 'professional chimera'. In a society that continues to be heavily bound by gender constraints, the female interpreters found that clients expected them to be subordinate and agencies monopolised employment opportunities which are largely temporary resulting in societal views of interpreting as insecure and unrewarding.

This brief account of spoken language interpreters' experiences of status and prestige, power and privilege offers a rather pessimistic view of the profession, particularly for women. Gentile (2018) has described interpreting as both a profession and a semi-profession requiring a form of legal protection of the title and stricter control of those who enter the profession. Interpreting, she argues, is fraught with contradictions brought about by strong competition, lowering of fees, rapid technological change, the increasing use of English as a global language and complex labour markets, threatening interpreters' perceptions of their professional status and identity that has become increasingly varied and blurred with tasks going beyond the act of interpreting.

These features share much in common with other areas of professional practice that have been subject to the de-professionalising impact of global neoliberalism. In these circumstances, however, Sawyer et al. (2009, p. 377) conceptualise community based human service professionals as actors negotiating changing structural conditions, not simply as individuals acted on by changing structures. The use of agency in spoken language interpreting manifests in many ways that locate the professional self as a product of the interpreter's characteristics, life circumstances, education, training and so forth that inform their values and attitudes. Angelleli (2004), interested in the relationship between interpreters' social background and their self-perception along the visibility/invisibility continuum, found 'a relationship between background factors such as age, income and self-identification with dominant or subordinate groups, and the perceptions that interpreters have about their role' (Angelleli 2004, p. 82). Interestingly she found no significant difference between men and women suggesting that male and female interpreters perceive their roles similarly.

2.8.4 Section summary

This section has focused primarily on spoken language conference interpreting as a predominantly female profession with relevance for the later study of men in the predominantly female profession of sign language interpreting. It is important to note that there is a dearth of literature on C/PSI which is symbolic in the way it is perceived as having less status than that of conference interpreting. This is also noteworthy when we consider the environments of C/PSI being healthcare or social welfare settings which are those which are described as being more aligned to environments where women will work. Components examined in this section have been gender imbalance and the feminisation of the profession, motivations to become interpreters and experiences of status and prestige, power and privilege, agency, and the use of self in language interpretation. In the following section I address a similar range of issues in relation to sign language interpreting which is the focus of my empirical study.

2.9 Gender and sign language interpreting

2.9.1 Introduction

Women have long since been devalued in the workplace (Crawley, 2014) so it is no surprise that the limited research on sign language interpreting, a predominantly female profession, reflects this state of affairs. The paucity of literature on gender and spoken language interpreting is even sharper in sign language interpreting that has been described as ‘a profession in the making’ (Leeson and Sheridan, 2019, p. 526) with published data in the field of sign language interpreting only starting to appear from the 1960s (Roy and Napier, 2015, p. 1). The theoretical landscape is, nevertheless, broad. Leeson and Sheridan (2019) outline theoretical influences on specific behaviours of sign language interpreters. Examples from the interconnected fields of psychology, linguistics and pragmatics include relevance theory that considers how interpreters ‘repair’ ambiguities or underspecified passages, and politeness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987) that addresses devices for maintaining positive relations in interactions, sometimes referred to as ‘saving face’, an expression that readily reminds us that politeness manifests differently in diverse socio-cultural settings. The use of the body, especially the explicit use of the face and hands in sign language, together with interpretation from and into languages with different vocabulary,

grammar, and syntax, further complicated by regional variations, demonstrates the strong potential for mis or re-interpretation, influenced by interpreters' own positions and characteristics.

Other theoretical influences from psychology, anthropology, and a range of sociological approaches that support understanding of structural factors, have underpinned thinking about sign language interpreting, from aptitude for interpreting (Bontempo and Napier, 2011; Bontempo, 2012; Bontempo et al., 2014; Pöchhacker and Liu, 2014) to influences on interpreting practices. This is something I have addressed in the introduction to this thesis, outlining my own position as an interpreter approaching this study of men in a predominantly female profession.

Empirical studies span demographics (Napier et al., 2021), motivations and routes into interpreting (Cokely, 1981; Mapson, 2014;), gender and the interpreting process (Artl, 2015), linguistic differences and power dynamics (Brück, 2011), lexico-grammatical choices (Nicoloso & Heberle, 2010), gendered communication and speaking styles (Mayo (n.d.)). Together these open windows onto the wider arena of gender, motivation, and experiences in sign language interpreting.

2.9.2 Gender imbalance in sign language interpreting

As Napier et al. (2021, p. 16) explain, sign language interpreting is a majority female profession with a consistent pattern emerging across surveys internationally, suggesting 84-86% of interpreters identify as female. This finding echoes the findings of Bontempo and Napier (2007) showing a static picture over the past two decades. Explanations offered for this evident gap have been associated with stereotypical views of women and female professions, characterised by 'helping', aptitude for languages, and opportunities for part-time work. However, as Bontempo and Napier (2007) argue, there is no empirical evidence to support the applicability of these explanations in sign language interpreting, despite interest in questions of privilege, power, and representation (Napier et al., 2021, p. 12).

2.9.3 Motivations for sign language interpreting

Just as there has long been a demand for greater numbers of sign language

interpreters to meet the interpreting needs of the deaf community (Kyle et al., 2005; Bontempo and Levitzke-Gray, 2009; Bontempo and Napier, 2011), there is a persistent predominance of female interpreters in the profession but there are still demands for more female and male interpreters in general (Bontempo and Levitzke-Gray, 2009; Brien, Brown and Collins, 2002; Burch, 1997; Jones, 1995; Kyle et al., 2005; Mapson, Crawley and Waddell, 2019; McDermid, 2009; Napier et al., 2021; Townsend-Handscomb, 2018) as well as in specific areas such as conferences (Bontempo and Levitzke-Gray, 2009) educational settings (Bontempo and Levitzke-Gray, 2009; Jones, 1995; Jones, Clark and Soltz, 1997;) employment settings (Napier et al., 2021) indigenous Australian settings (Bontempo and Levitzke-Gray, 2009) and on video relay services (Brunson, 2011, 2022). In 2002, a study carried out on behalf of the UK Department for Work and Pensions by Brien, Brown and Collins (2002) noted a demand for male interpreters specifically:

The shortage of interpreters made it impossible for agencies to offer clients a choice of interpreter in the majority of situations... The setting in which choice was most frequently expressed was in relation to the gender of the interpreter for hospital/doctor appointments. Agencies reported they were usually able to meet such requests despite the fact that interpreting was a predominantly female profession and therefore there was a shortage of male interpreters (Brien, Brown and Collins, 2002, p.143).

In the same vein, in 2009 McDermid reported that 34 educators from nine interpreter education and deaf studies programs in America and Canada commented on the preponderance of female students, nine referring to limited acceptance of men into each cohort, with only one participant having a sense that the number of male students was increasing.

Exploration into the family backgrounds of interpreters began in the early 1980s with Cokely's survey of participants at a Convention of Registered Interpreters for the Deaf in the USA. This marked a first attempt to understand the makeup of the profession so that 'when correlated with performance, proficiency, and aptitude measures, [the data] will yield invaluable information for screening, training, and evaluating interpreters' (Cokely, 1981, p. 261).

A key area of interest has been interpreters' own childhood experiences of deafness in the family with implications for the development of training and professional qualifications in sign language. Interpreters who have grown up with, or close to, deaf family members are commonly referred to as heritage signers, or in the case of having one or more deaf parents, children of deaf adults (CODA) (Polinsky, 2018; Pichler et al., 2018). They are often referred to as 'brokers' rather than professional interpreters since they: are usually involved in informal negotiation for one or both of the parties for which they serve as a liaison, mediating communication rather than merely transmitting it; and second, there exists an unequal power relationship between the broker and the agents, usually one in which the broker (a child) is normally under the authority or supervision of one of the beneficiaries. (McQuillan and Tse, 1995, p. 195).

Informality and power imbalance are key considerations in child language brokering. In the US context, Singleton and Tittle (2000, p. 229) suggested that daughters (especially elder daughters) are more likely to adopt the family interpreter role following expectations of girls as being more nurturing. Interest has also been shown in gender and birth order of heritage signers, but despite a long-held assumption that the eldest or youngest child of deaf parent(s) was more likely to become a sign language interpreter, a range of surveys²⁶ in the USA (Cokely, 1981; Williams, 2015) and the UK (Mapson, 2014; Napier et al., 2021) indicate this is a misassumption. In contrast to Singleton and Tittle's (2000) claim about the greater likelihood of daughters taking on interpreter roles, Napier's (2021) mixed methods study of language brokering in Deaf-Hearing families, found 'a fairly balanced percentage of eldest children across female and male respondents' with age, confidence and personality being more important factors' (Napier, 2021 p. 168). Preston (1992, p. 131) found that 'Many first-born informants cited their hearing status as their parents' first real opportunity to interface with the hearing world. The role of interpreter or cultural link was most likely to fall to the first child'. However, one research participant explained that he had an older sister but that he was the one who was expected to interpret for his deaf father because his father 'decided that the men should do the work, not the women. In our family, interpreting was a *job*' [original emphasis] (Preston, 1992, p. 134). It is, of course, important to recognise that research findings may be influenced by national and

²⁶ With varying sample membership that makes any valid comparison impossible.

cultural contexts and may vary over time so caution must be exercised in making any generalisations about the intersectional characteristics of sign language interpreters.

By contrast with knowledge about family members becoming and acting as interpreters there is no discernible evidence about the motivations of interpreters who have not had previous close contact with deaf relatives or other deaf people which would support the argument that not all male interpreters come from a deaf family. Some studies appear at first sight to be promising. For example, Marton and MacIntyre (2022) studied motivations among hearing learners of Finnish Sign Language but went on to concentrate their analysis on the largest part of their sample who neither had deaf family members nor had participated in interpreter training.²⁷ De Meulder's (2019) study of motivations to sign focuses on the benefit and disbenefits to the deaf community of outsiders learning to sign for intrinsic reasons. And Seal's (2004) study of psychological testing of sign language interpreters focussed on motivation as a predictor of interpreting performance. While disappointing, the gap in understanding here reinforced my interest in exploring the motivations of men to become sign language interpreters.

2.9.4 Gendered experiences in sign language interpreting

The literature informing understandings of experiences in sign language interpreting reveals key themes of power, gender and care, how they are performed and enacted. In structuring this section, I address each of these in turn.

2.9.4.1 Performance of Power

Questions of power in sign language interpreting have been subject to a variety of debates. One has concerned the question of power dynamics in language and connections with gender, particularly in cross gender interpreting. Focussing on the power of male language, its impact on women and its impact on the interpreting process Brück (2011, p. 2) noted that 're-framing a male message into female language would eventually change the message' and subsequently sought to understand the strength of the influence of gender difference on interpreter-mediated communication. Her Austrian study consisted of a survey to a target group of 88 interpreters (82 women

²⁷ N=173. 92.5%female.

and 6 men) and she received 35 responses (32 women and 3 men) a greater percentage of men from the target group returning responses (50%) compared to women (39.02%). She explored interpreters' awareness of the influence of their gender when interpreting, experiences of interpreter gender constituting an advantage or disadvantage for the clients they were working with, the adoption of strategies to counteract any negative effects of their gender on the social status of clients and, finally, the impact on deaf people of sign language interpreting as a predominantly female profession. All 35 of Bruck's respondents believed interpreting across genders did have an influence on interpreting assignments. The strength of the influence varied depending on the subject matter, with all respondents indicating the influence was strongest when discussing medical matters. Particular challenges were encountered when faced with traditional role expectations, for example when a female interpreter was not considered competent to undertake the role or was assigned a role other than that of professional interpreter. Other challenges linked to cross gender interpreting included clients' development of sexual attraction to the interpreter or irritation with them. Embarrassing medical or therapeutic settings constituted particular difficulties particularly if the client was expected to undress or talk about their sex life. Female interpreters were considered to have created distractions in otherwise all-male environments and the gender mismatching of voice could cause confusion for a hearing audience. In such circumstances, interpreters attempted to reduce the impact of their gender by adopting neutral behaviours or clothing and focusing on more professional behaviours, rather than by amending language choices. We see here that while interpreters can hold positions of power in relation to their clients, they can also experience the exercise of power as they are expected to change their behaviours to reduce conflict. This appears to be more evident in the expectation that female interpreters must defer to judgements about their competence or to the expectations of male audiences.

The picture here is one of higher status and greater potential for exercising power as male interpreters. Despite being in the minority, male interpreters have higher publicly visibility undertaking higher status work such television and at conferences (Napier et al., 2021). This has the effect of boosting confidence which in turn reinforces status and associated levels of power. By contrast, female interpreters are expected to demonstrate prosocial helping behaviours as well as strong performance to be seen

as self-confident, and yield influence (Guillén, Mayo and Karelaia, 2017).

Working with individuals, interpreters have the power to adapt their interpreting style and use of language. Morgan (2008) offers such an example in writing about her experience as a designated interpreter working with a deaf male mid-level manager in a large organisation. Observing that the manager was treated differently to other managers in terms of the seriousness with which colleagues responded to his direction, Morgan reflected that her style of interpreting employed 'elements of powerless language and communication rituals common to the discourse of women' (Morgan, 2008, p. 68) in order to connect with her client. She went on to encourage both female and male interpreters to recognise and examine their own conversation styles and rituals to ensure they match each client in 'an attempt to express sameness as a way to connect' (Morgan, 2008, p. 78). This, arguably benevolent, use of power to adapt style of interpreting to better connect with the client suggests the constructive use of power. But we must bear in mind that interpreters' styles of interpreting can have a range of effects. For example, Harvey (2003) wrote: cross-cultural exchanges between deaf and hearing persons are replete with unintentional misunderstandings and even purposeful acts of oppression. Deaf clients who are free to choose interpreters may also exercise some, limited power, in their choice of interpreter. A study in the Netherlands (de Wit and Sluis, 2014, p. 1) found that the primary concern in deaf people's choice of interpreter was in achieving 'a faithful and understandable interpretation' with interpreter familiarity with the setting/subject matter of the interpretation being of secondary importance.

While the performance of power in interpreting has undeniable links with gender, there is much evidence about the performance of gender that has few or fewer implications for the exercise of power.

2.9.4.2 Performance of Gender

The way male and female interpreters 'perform' the interpreting task from a gender perspective and the differences between men and women has been explored by Nicoloso and Heberle (2012). They found that female interpreters use greater

explicitation²⁸ contextualised information, give extra details, use modulation and emphasis to complement the information they communicate and also spend more time in their interpretation. By contrast, men tend to be more direct, use more literal translation and transposition²⁹ reflecting a preference for more economical lexicogrammatical choices and text structure. They use omission and implicitation to deal with what they feel to be irrelevant data resulting in the use of less time to communicate the same information translate the same passage (Nicoloso and Heberle, 2012, p. 109). These differences echo gender differences observed in other work contexts, for example nursing, where women are perceived as paying greater attention to caring aspects of work while men focus on technical aspects (Skeggs, 2014; Snyder and Green, 2008).

These, and other process practices within interpreting, are affected by the interpreter's gender and can have an impact on the way deaf people are perceived by hearing people, although these perceptions in themselves vary with the hearing person's gender, age, geographical region, and familiarity with interpreters (Jones, 2017) Artl (2015, p. 61), in a study of gender-related traits of interpreters, refers to female interpreters 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'. Male and female interpreter choices about interpreting style also show differences that can have an impact on the accurate representation of information being transmitted. This can work both ways in that a female interpreter may not reflect a dominant male linguistic style and a male interpreter may not reflect a graceful female linguistic style (Mayo, n.d.).

While male and female interpreters may value or possess similar traits and characteristics, female interpreters experience gender identity oppression in ways that male practitioners do not, particularly in relation to their bodies and expressions of femininity. Female interpreters have been described as assuming 'a very submissive, apologetic role' and it is argued that they possess 'Soft skills, which are stereotypically associated with feminine skills', but which are 'mandatory for quality interpreting

²⁸ Understood as a shift in translation from what is implicit.

²⁹ Transposition involves a shift from one grammatical category to another, while still preserving the meaning. This translation technique is often necessary between languages with different grammatical structures as is the case between English and BSL.

through cognitive and linguistic skills'. (Valentin, 2019, p. 75).

Taking a poststructuralist view that suggests language and discourse perpetuate gender stereotypes through everyday talk, either through the doing of one's assigned gender or one's gender identity MacDougall (2012, p. 31) argues that the important question is not 'if' but: 'how interpreters use such gendered features to "do gender" while interpreting'? This stresses the importance, particularly in training programmes, of facilitating interpreters' awareness of gendered language and communication styles in order to increase the accuracy of interpretation in mixed-sex interpreter-mediated events because of the impact this can have on discursive practices. Doing so would avoid reproducing oppressive forms of language when interpreting (MacDougall, 2012). This is particularly relevant given the predominance of female interpreters who may often find themselves interpreting for male presenters. Mayo (n.d. p. 10) explains: 'By both Deaf individuals and interpreters knowing the effects of gendered language, Deaf individuals can competently engage in gender relevant situations and interpreters can adjust their linguistic style'.

2.9.4.3 Everyday experience of being a sign language interpreter

My own experience as a sign language interpreter has been both thrilling and fulfilling, but it also brings many challenges. Interpreters can work in a range of settings, such as healthcare, education, legal and government organisations, showing how working conditions can change day to day. This can feel like starting a new job every day of the week – getting to grips with workplace etiquette, meeting new team-members and learning new things. This can add to the excitement of the role but equally be quite anxiety inducing. Sign language interpreting requires multiple skills and places linguistic, environmental, interpersonal, and intrapersonal demands on interpreters, resulting in its recognition as a stressful occupation (Dean and Pollard, 2001). Acting as linguistic intermediaries between hearing and deaf people necessitates proficiency in English and BSL, languages with different structures and modes. The process of interpreting can be both stimulating and cognitively exhausting since interpreters must be able to communicate clearly, faithfully, and truthfully and may need to modify their interpreting style to suit their clients. When interpreting in difficult situations such as with angry participants or in sensitive situations, the process and the job can be extremely challenging. In such circumstances interpreters must maintain composure,

professionalism and strive to do no harm. Conveying 'bad' or 'difficult' news or information can be stressful and while the ability to be adaptable and flexible is an important skill for interpreters, accuracy in interpretation is vital to avoid misunderstanding between the deaf and hearing people involved. Interpreters are also cultural mediators between deaf and hearing worlds and must understand the effect of both cultures on the interpreted interaction and how that can contribute to the success or failure of communication. Where interpreters fall short of a high level in this multiple skill set it can leave them grappling with a sense of failure and in need of support (Chin, 2019).

With increasing experience come opportunities to interpret in more diverse and specialised interpreting services, such as mental health or legal interpreting and complimentary roles such as professional supervision, training and assessment, adding to job satisfaction and a sense of self-worth. And opportunities for freelance work can act as a counter-balance to stressful work by allowing autonomy in determining working patterns and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. This can provide a sense of longevity to the role because of the possibility of varying workload. Overall, the literature paints a picture of everyday experiences of sign language interpretation as, by turns, demanding, challenging, stressful, but also rewarding (Humphrey, 2015).

2.9.5 Section summary

This section exploring the literature addressing gender and interpretation of signed language demonstrates an area meriting further attention. The embryonic evidence and argument provide a springboard for the exploration of new and/or more nuanced aspects of the ways in which the dynamics at play in interpreting processes are affected by the gender of the interpreter and in turn may affect the interpreter. A particular gap in any deep understanding relates to the motivations and experiences of men in becoming and practising as interpreters. Attempts to disrupt stereotypical views of women's predominance offer encouragement to explore these areas in the empirical study that follows.

2.10 Chapter summary

This review of the literature has provided an analysis of existing evidence and theoretical argument with the potential to inform a study of men's motivations and experiences in the sign language interpreting profession. Starting with an exploration of gender questions in female dominated occupations, before moving on to spoken and signed language interpretation, it has revealed a number of theoretical and empirical insights into men's experiences in nursing as well as other female dominated fields of work. And it has revealed insights into conceptual areas of importance in and spoken and signed language interpretation. Following Warr and Inceoglu's (2018) plea to complement the dominant use of psychological concepts and theories in studies of work, with sociological insights, I have drawn on sociological theories of gender and gendered organizations (Acker, 1990; 1998) masculinities in organisations (Berdahl et al., 2018) as well as work on societal values and the value of 'care' (Skeggs, 2014) that articulates the persistence of feminised care work (Cottingham, 2014). Elements of these gender-based arguments are evident in spoken and sign language interpreting. Yet there remain gaps in evidence of understandings of men's motivations for, and experiences in the sign language interpreting profession.

In the introduction to the thesis, I introduced the notion of 'the man code'. In an expression born of frustration in the face of stereotypical assumptions about men's suitability as sign language interpreters, and his own experience as a male interpreter who had received compliments about his ability to convey emotion through facial expression that forms an integral part of signed language, Boley (2015) felt he had 'broken the man code' of emotional display. In digging deeper into the motivations and experiences of men in BSL interpreting there is potential to develop new insights into the idea of 'breaking the man code'.

Because there is so little research in the area of men as interpreters, I am encouraged to keep the research questions broad, mirroring the broader aims of the study.

- 1. What are the motivations for men to become British Sign Language Interpreters?
- 2. What are the experience of men in the predominantly female profession of British Sign Language interpreting?

In the following chapter I turn to consider the research design, methodology and methods best suited to address these questions as well as ethical issues informing the conduct of the research.

Chapter 3 - Research Design and Methods

3.1 Introduction

The literature review has highlighted the motivations for men to enter predominantly female professions such as nursing and primary school teaching, and their experiences of working in them. This chapter focuses on the research paradigm, research design, methods of sampling, data collection and analysis, and ethical issues. It also contains reflections on the research process, considering the limitations and challenges faced throughout.

3.1.1 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is a worldview or philosophical framework that governs the research process and includes ideas, beliefs, and prejudices. The research paradigm influences how the research will be done, the framework into which a discipline's ideas and practises fit to form the research plan. All aspects of the research plan are guided by this foundation, including the study's goals, research questions, measures employed, and analytic procedures. In general, positivist research paradigms are associated with quantitative studies, while interpretivist research paradigms are associated with qualitative investigations (Ulz, 2023).

The interpretivism paradigm asserts that there are various realities rather than a single one. Only through understanding the meanings that individuals place on behaviours and events can knowledge be generated. Constructivism, like interpretivism, acknowledges multiple realities within which actors construct their own understanding of the world through experiencing and reflecting on those experiences. Constructivist research seeks to understand the meanings that people attach to those experiences, experiences that are most affectively accessed through qualitative research methods such as interviews (Ulz, 2023).

3.2 Methodological considerations

Decisions about the most appropriate design and methods to address the research questions were influenced by my desire to capture individual stories of motivation and experience of the research participants, described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p. 6)

as 'how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences'. This led me to adopt a qualitative approach allowing for deeper exploration of the complex phenomena of men working in a predominantly female profession, providing rich and detailed insights into participants' motivations and experiences as well as capturing the contexts in which these motivations and experiences are enacted and offering a deeper understanding of the social and cultural factors influencing men working in sign language interpreting. Interviews in particular are conducive for building rapport with participants, supporting more candid responses.

I am, however, conscious of disadvantages associated with this qualitative approach, including: i) not being able to generalise the findings which are based on a non-representative sample of male interpreters, ii) the time-intensive nature of individual interviews, their transcription and analysis; and iii) the potential for researcher bias in the interpretation of the data generated in the interviews.

There are several methods that can be used in qualitative research, including case studies, ethnography, field research, focus groups, observation, in-depth interviews, structured interviews, and semi-structured interviews. I decided upon in-depth semi structured interviews because the interviewee is encouraged to talk freely about specific pre-determined topics. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topics of interest by asking probing follow-up questions to gain greater understanding of any particular matter. Therefore, the interview could be adjusted to get detailed and insightful information on men's exposure to BSL, their motivations to become an interpreter and their experience in the profession as well as gaining useful and relevant insights from fewer participants who I could interview in informal environments.

I also decided to use a second method of data collection - an online focus group via a social media platform. The rationale here was to offer an alternative way for men who could not or did not want to participate in a semi-structured interview to be involved in the research without adding significant costs in terms of time or management.

In seeking to understand the motivations and experiences of men working as BSL interpreters, one aim of this research is to develop theoretical insights in the field of men working in female dominated professions. The research might therefore, at first

glance, be perceived as taking an inductive approach (Bryman, 2016). However, this study adopts a pragmatic abductive approach (Timmermans and Tavory, 2022) that appreciates the researcher's existing knowledge of the field and the impact this has on data analysis and interpretation. As Timmermans and Tavory (2022, p. 15) explain, the researcher 'starts with an observation and seeks a likely explanation' based on the knowledge they have. With over 14 years' experience as a BSL interpreter I have inevitably come to this research my own thoughts about being a male interpreter and expectations about the experiences my research participant's may share. The impact of my own position on the research is discussed in greater depth in section 3.2.2.

3.2.1 Data collection methods

The primary data collection method was individual semi-structured interviews. Relevant topics were covered by a list of questions and prompts devised to encourage elaboration. This method provides enough structure to be able to ask the same questions of each participant but enough flexibility to probe a response as the interview evolves which encourages an interview which is interactive in nature (Legard et al., 2003; Myers & Newman, 2007). For those individuals who did not want to partake in a one-to-one interview but still wanted to contribute to the research, a secondary data collection method was an online group. This was achieved through a closed group³⁰ on Facebook (section 3.7).

When inviting participation in the study (see 3.3), I offered a choice of individual in-person interviews when travel permitted, individual online interviews where time commitments or travel considerations prevented an in-person interview (Wurm & Napier, 2017) and an online focus group for those who were unable or did not wish to partake in an individual interview.

Through surveys, observational studies, and other informal talks with people, it is rare to produce and record insights of this depth and level of focus which interviews can offer (Forsey, 2012). Where individual interviews are not possible, there are several practical benefits in supplementing data collection through an asynchronous online focus group on a social media platform compared to a traditional in-person focus

³⁰ Groups on Facebook are sometimes referred to as 'secret' (see: Medley-Rath, 2019 and Thrul et al., 2017) or closed (see Bar-Ilan, Gazit and Maichai-Hamburger, 2020).

group. Advantages include geographical flexibility allowing participants to join from anywhere, thereby eliminating the need for them to travel which can be time consuming and costly. Also, considering the differing working patterns of BSL interpreters compared to those who may work a traditional working week, participants were able to contribute at any time because they could access the group online when convenient and have time to process the questions and consider their replies. Further advantages lie in avoiding the need to pay for room hire or refreshments, and not having to spend time transcribing the data since it is already in written form (Lijadi and van Schalkwyk, 2015; Stewart and Shamdasani, 2015).

While semi-structured interviews and an online focus group were the methods selected to address the research questions, other data collections methods were considered, including arts-based methods. These are generally used to encourage participants to open up more easily when subjects discussed can be difficult to put into words and can include poetry, theatre, pictures, films or graphic novels. However, it is not the art itself which is the data but more so the description or explanation of it by the participant. The reason these methods were later discounted was because I felt they were less likely to achieve the breadth and depth offered by semi-structured interviews. This decision was supported by the fact that within the pilot interviews, discussion was free-flowing, and relevant data were easily collected.

3.2.2 Positionality and power as an insider / outsider 'practisearcher'

As a practicing interpreter and researcher, I identify as a 'practisearcher' (Gile, 1994; Shlesinger, 2009; Napier, 2011; Hale & Napier, 2013; de Pedro Ricoy & Napier, 2017). Gile (1994) documented the rise of a group of practising interpreters becoming researchers. These were mostly members of the *École Supérieure d'Interprètes et de Traducteurs* (ESIT) in Paris and completed doctoral theses between 1979 and 1990.

'A number of ideas on the process of interpreting, developed mostly by the ESIT group in Paris, crystallized into a dogma and gained weight in the community of practitioners cum researchers (hereafter "practisearchers"), most of whom were also interpretation teachers.'
(Gile, 1994, p. 150)

This intersection between practitioner, researcher and teacher was also discussed by Shlesinger (2009) who explored the interface between research and practice in both spoken and signed language interpreting within ten issues of the journal *Interpreting*³¹ between 2004 - 2008. She highlighted that 50% of the papers centred on pedagogical issues which are beneficial in the teaching of trainee interpreters. She introduces practisearcher's into the mix when she says, 'the divide is being crossed not only between practitioners and researchers but also between practisearcher's and teachers, who seek ways of harnessing research to improve their methods of imparting the elusive skill of interpreting' (Shlesinger, 2009, p. 8).

Napier (2011) has identified the humble beginnings of descriptions of personal experiences by community interpreters, to more formal 'practisearcher' research and publications on disciplines such as linguistics, sociology and psychology encompassing research in the fields of education, medical, legal and workplace interpreting. When considering the insider/outsider status of a 'practisearcher', it is useful to share Dwyer and Buckle's (2009, p. 55) explanation that an insider researcher is someone 'sharing the characteristic, role, or experience under study with the participants and an outsider is someone who is 'an outsider to the commonality shared by participants'.

In the introduction to this thesis, I explained my own position as having sign language and interpreting qualifications as well as my registration as a qualified BSL interpreter registered with the NRCPD. This positions me as an insider with the research participants, many of whom share the same level of qualifications and employment and, like me, are also men. As Wurm and Napier (2017, p. 103) assert, 'The researcher's background, perspective, methods, as well as the contexts in which they work shape the outcome of any research project'. However, I may also differ from participants' experience in terms of initial exposure to sign language, motivations to enter the BSL interpreting profession and experiences within the profession. Any differences position me not as an outsider but on the periphery.

The multiple and diverse identities of a researcher can affect participants' perceptions of them as an insider or outsider. In his research on youth culture Hodkinson (2005)

³¹ See <https://www.jbe-platform.com/content/journals/1569982x>

recognises that ‘the prominence of particular elements of identity fluctuates back and forth according to context and audience’ (Hodkinson, 2005, p. 133). Such fluctuations influenced how much, and when, I felt an insider or an outsider at different stages of the research process. Insider/outsider positions also had an impact on the risks and benefits in the processes of data collection and analysis. Although I wished to minimise any influence on what research participants felt comfortable to share with me, it is recognised that they were more likely to speak freely with someone with whom they shared a connection (Jamie and Pattison Rathbone, 2022), a positive benefit of being an insider.

My different identities researcher and practitioner raises questions of power relations with research participants. The interaction between me, as a researcher, and the research participants involves power. The impact of insider/outsider status on research participants can influence the dynamics and outcomes of interviews. It is possible that insiders might gain deeper insights due to the shared understanding of the topic or situations, as is the case with me being an interpreter. I felt that being an insider achieved this deep insight because of the level of insight shared by the participants as well as being able to understand the nuances of what they were sharing. However, outsiders might offer fresh perspectives which, because of my shared experience and assumed knowledge of what participants were sharing, contained nuances I may have missed. Similarly, outsiders may miss nuanced insights because of the challenges in understanding them.

However, without the participants ‘providing perspectives, opinions, and insights, which exemplify, corroborate, adapt, add to or dispute existing theoretical knowledge’ (Wurm and Napier, 2017, p. 102), I would not be able to address my research questions. Respecting their contributions, I recognise the need to be aware of power I had in analysing and interpreting the data, which could influence the knowledge emerging from the research.

Researchers have considerable freedom in depicting the participants and their contributions in research outputs. As both an insider and outsider, I needed to consider the implications of my position, striving to remain faithful to the contributions of participants and transparent in articulating and reflecting on the research process.

3.3 Sampling

To find research participants to take part in the research, I drew on the NRCPD, RBSLI and the SASLI (now known as the SRLPDC - see the next paragraph below) registers³² as a sampling frame to create a comprehensive list of registered male sign language interpreters working in the United Kingdom to whom to send an invitation to participate in the research. These registers are available for the general public to view online. At the time of the sampling process, the three registers had slightly different criteria in that the NRCPD and SASLI³³ were open to trainee sign language interpreters (TSLI) and fully qualified sign language interpreters (RSLI) while RBSLI were only open to fully qualified interpreters at the time.³⁴

The greatest number of male sign language interpreters were registered with the NRCPD, so I started with that register and used the search facility to find all RSLIs and TSLIs. There were two methods enabling me to search for a communication professional. The first was to either enter a postcode and then select the type of professional from a dropdown list as follows:

- Interpreters for Deaf-blind People
- Sign Language Interpreters
- Lip-speakers
- Speech to Text Reporters
- Sign Language Translators
- Notetakers

The other method was to search by name or badge ID number. As I wanted to find multiple registrants with a wide geographical spread, for purely pragmatic reasons I used my own postcode to start the search. This resulted in a list of interpreters living closest to my post-code appearing at the top of the list and interpreters living furthest away appearing at the end. This simply allowed me to see the geographical spread of

³² NRCPD (www.nrcpd.org.uk), RBSLI (www.rbsli.org), SRLPDC (www.thescottishregister.co.uk)

³³ SASLI was both a registration body and a membership association. However, in April 2019 the board of SASLI announced that because of a loss in funding in 2018, the organisation initiated the separation of the registering and membership parts of the old association (Sasli.org.uk, 2019). With this came a name change to the Scottish Register of Language Professionals with the Deaf Community (SRLPDC).

³⁴ RBSLI have since changed their criteria and trainee sign language interpreters are now allowed to register with this body.

registered interpreters including those geographically closest to me offering a greater chance of an in-person interview. At the end of the first page, I was able to opt to include Trainee Sign Language Interpreters (TSLIs) and refresh the search, which I did as I wanted to capture both trainee and fully qualified interpreters. This resulted in 39 pages of results. One issue with the NRCPD website is that I could not filter the search by gender, so I had to view each of the 39 pages to identify male interpreters indicated by first name. For names which were unfamiliar to me and therefore difficult to determine gender, I undertook google searches to identify the information I needed.

Having completed this exercise that yielded a substantial list of 253 male interpreters, I thought I had captured all the male sign language interpreters registered in the United Kingdom. However, I attended the ASLI Annual General Meeting on 6 October 2018 and sat next to someone I realised was not on the spreadsheet I had created. As a result, I re-checked the NRCPD directory under the search method of 'name' and I realised this individual had decided not to advertise his details. This prompted me to consider other male sign language interpreters on the register who also may also have decided not to advertise their details and contemplated how I might capture them.

I realised I had to then check the register by interpreter name, but without knowing every male interpreter in the UK, I had to think of a way to find them. I decided to search registrants by separate vowels - firstly only 'A' then only 'E', only 'I', only 'O', and only 'U'. As of October 2018, I was presented by the following number of pages presenting interpreters with that vowel in their name:

A - 131 pages

E – 120 pages

I - 92 pages

O - 78 pages

U - 32 pages

For example, my name contains the vowels 'A', 'E' 'I' and 'U' - P A U L M I C H A E L S - which meant my name appeared on the results page for these four vowels. The problem with this search method was that I could not look for sign language interpreters exclusively, so I also saw all other communication professionals registered with the NRCPD such as Lip-speakers and Speech to Text Reporters. In addition, many male

sign language interpreters, like myself, have more than one vowel in their name, so I repeatedly saw the same people appearing in the results. This was an extremely time-consuming activity did lead to the identification of a further 22 interpreters to contact. One limitation to this process was that names without vowels such as Glynn and Rhys were excluded so I checked the register when I discovered such a name and found no new interpreters.

Both the RBSLI and SASLI registers were much easier to search because at the time of the search, RBSLI had just 45 members to scroll through and SASLI had a search by gender facility which identified 18 male interpreters.

To ensure that as many male sign language interpreters as possible had been identified, I searched additional places including the two membership associations in the UK: ASLI (2022) and Visual Language Professionals (VLP) (Visual Language Professionals, 2022). I searched their websites to see if I could find any male sign language interpreters that had not previously been identified. The two membership associations have differing criteria for membership. ASLI's membership categories are Full Membership for RSLI and Associate Membership for TSLI. At the time of the search, VLP was only available for RSLI to join. Both membership associations are open to interpreters throughout the UK to join. If the interpreters were not listed there, I searched on social media including Facebook and LinkedIn to see if I could find male BSL interpreters to contact and was successful in contacting eight more male BSL interpreters this way. I appreciate that this was an extraordinary undertaking, but it was done with the intention of achieving the greatest number of potential participants as possible. The process of recruitment to the study is discussed in the following section.

3.3.1 Recruitment

To establish if interpreters were willing to take part in the research, I created an expression of interest form (see Appendix 4 and 5). I used Google Forms as a free, quick, easy, and versatile tool with which to create a form and send it by email to all the addresses I found for the male interpreters on the various registers, which made up my sampling frame. Their responses via Google Forms had the advantage that details could immediately be exported to a spreadsheet and saved in the cloud or emailed and either printed or kept locally on a computer.

A further benefit of Google Forms is that the form and results appear on the same page in two separate tabs titled 'Questions' and 'Responses' so one can see the completed forms delivered in real time (see image 1 below). I finalised the form on 5 October 2018 and sent out the first batch on the same date. One downside to using Google Forms is that there is a limit to the number of emails that can be sent out in any one 24-hour period. In total I sent 274 expression of interest forms and received 72 responses by deadline of 21 October 2018. As I had received a substantial number of responses from a wide range of locations throughout the UK, there was no need to extend the deadline.

Within the responses tab there are two further tabs titled 'Summary' and 'Individual'. Under the summary tab I was able to view a bar chart showing the number of respondents expressing their willingness to be involved or not (see Appendix 6). Two interpreters ticked both 'Yes' and 'Maybe' so I considered them to be a 'Maybe' and not a 'Yes', until such time that I had an opportunity to explain the research and their potential involvement, to enable them to make an informed decision as to whether they would like to participate or not. The respondents' preferences for a one-to-one interview or to participate in the Facebook group are shown in Appendix 7. The participants were only included in one data collection method. In other words, no-one who took part in an interview was in the Facebook group and vice versa. I was able to view each person's completed form in the individual tab, an example of which is in Appendix 5.

The breakdown of areas that respondents live in was as follows:

England	57
Wales	3
Northern Ireland	1
Scotland	10
Spain	1
TOTAL	72

Table 1: Research respondents country split.

The image below shows a map of the locations where the respondents who expressed

an interest were based.

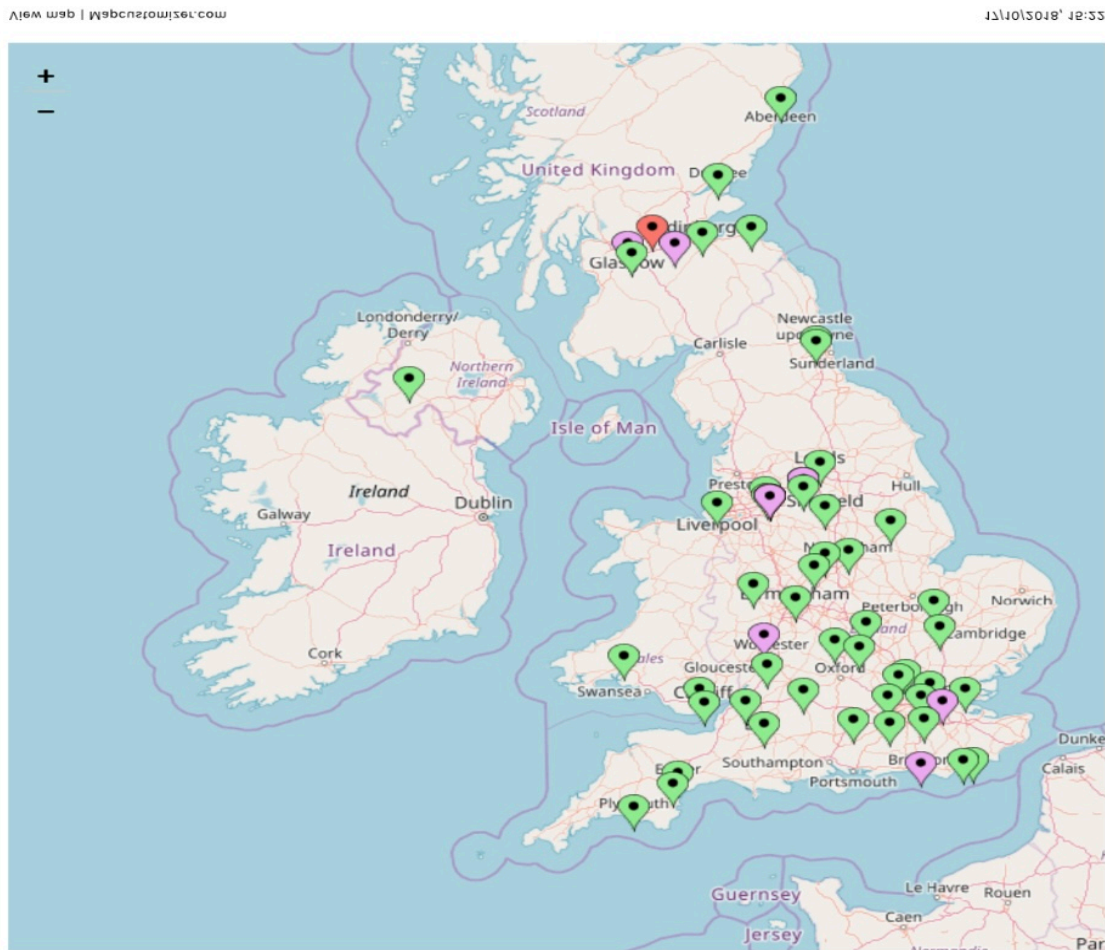


Image 1: Geographical locations of responses. Key: Green - Yes, Pink - Maybe, Red - No

3.3.2 Research participants

Of the 37 interpreters who expressed an interest in participating in a one-to-one interview, I was able to achieve interviews with 25 individuals. This was because eleven did not respond to the interview dates offered and one became unwell and was unable to participate.

Of 24 respondents who agreed to participate in the Facebook group only 16 accepted the invitation to join the group when it was set up. This number reduced further with only twelve contributing to the Facebook group. However, one additional participant sent answers to the questions posed in the group via email later. His responses are included as part of the Facebook data.

Below is a list of the interpreters who took part in the study. The names have been anonymised using pseudonyms (see section 3.5.3). No further demographic information has been included in order to avoid the risk of identifying individuals owing to the small numbers of male interpreters throughout the UK.

Name	Region	Data collection method – 1:1 or Facebook (FB)
Albie	South-West	FB
Alfie	Scotland	1:1
Archie	South-East	1:1
Arlo	Scotland	1:1
Arthur	North-West	FB
Bobby	Wales	1:1
Carter	Wales	1:1
Charlie	North-East	1:1
Edward	London	1:1
Elijah	South-Central	1:1
Ellis	Midlands	1:1
Ethan	South-East	FB
Freddie	South-West	1:1
George	West-Midlands	1:1
Harley	London	1:1
Harrison	London	1:1
Harvey	South-East	1:1
Henry	Scotland	1:1
Hugo	West Yorkshire	1:1
Isaac	East Midlands	FB
Jacob	South Yorkshire	1:1
Jake	London	FB
Jaxon	North-West	FB
Jenson	South-West	1:1
Joshua	South-West	1:1
Jude	East of England	1:1

Louie	East Midlands	FB
Noah	South-West	1:1
Oliver	North-East	1:1
Ollie	West Yorkshire	FB
Reggie	East Midlands	FB
Riley	South-West	1:1
Rory	Wales	FB
Sebastian	East of England	FB
Teddy	East of England	FB
Theo	Overseas	1:1
Toby	London	1:1
Zachary	North-West	FB

Table 2: Research participants name, region, and data collection method.

It is possible to say that all participants were hearing interpreters and only one participant was from a minority ethnic group³⁵ reflecting of the lack of ethnic diversity in the profession where almost 90% of interpreters are white. (Napier et al., 2021, p. 34).

3.4 Pilot interviews

Taking advantage of my own participation in international conferences, I conducted pilot interviews with male sign language interpreters in Australia and New Zealand. Despite the different geographical and cultural context, English is a common language in both countries and British Sign Language and Australian Sign Language (Auslan) are ‘closely related’ (Johnston and Schembri, 2007) and the percentage of male interpreters registered in Australia is similar to that of the UK (Napier and Barker, 2003

³⁵ As this research focuses on hearing interpreters only and did not include deaf interpreters, who are recognised as valuable and who are increasing in numbers within the profession. I recognise that these are areas that warrant further exploration which, if undertaken, would add further insight from a different perspective into men in BSL interpreting. Both areas have been identified as recommendations for further research (see section 8.8). There are now several interpreter training courses available to deaf people to become qualified interpreters or translators. In addition, the NRCPD have expanded their Registered Sign Language Interpreter (RSLI) and Trainee Sign Language Interpreter (TSLI) categories. The new specialism in the RSLI/TSLI category is Relay-Intralingual. The NRCPD describe Relay/Intralingual Interpreters as ‘Deaf professionals who work with Deaf people with specific or complex language needs, such as a learning disability, mental health condition, idiosyncratic or non-standardised sign language use, or limited language development. A Relay-Intralingual Interpreter will work intralingually within British Sign Language and broker communication between the hearing British Sign Language/English Interpreter and the Deaf client, in order to ensure that the Deaf client understands the message being communicated. They adapt what the hearing British Sign Language/English interpreter is signing, into a native variation of British Sign Language for the Deaf client, together with the Deaf client’s response for the hearing interpreter.’ (NRCPD, 2021)

cited in Napier, McKee and Goswell, 2006, p. 170). Figures from January 2020 showed 70 male sign language interpreters representing 15% of registrants with the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI, 2020) while in the UK male sign language interpreters represented approximately 19% of the total registrants. Further similarities lie in the provision of university-based interpreter training and registration of interpreters (Napier, 2004).

As well as posing specific questions related to predominantly female professions in general and to sign language interpreting specifically (see Appendix 8), I also encouraged the interviewees to talk freely about anything they wanted that was relevant to their experiences.

I undertook nine interviews ranging from 34 to 79 minutes with an average time of 57 minutes. I recognise this is a large number of pilot interviews to test the clarity, relevance and effectiveness of main questions and prompt questions.

I found the use of 25 questions (see Appendix 8) resulted in what was more like a structured, rather than a semi-structured interview and did not offer sufficient freedom for the interviewees to share their personal situations and experiences. A number of closed questions similarly were not conducive to eliciting motivations and experiences. Additionally, I recognised that some questions may be constructed as leading. These useful learning points allowed me to change my approach in the interviews with the male BSL interpreters in the UK and my questioning style was much more open with questions beginning with openings such as 'Tell me about...', 'What are your views on...?' and 'Share some examples of...'

The pilot interviews also resulted in reordering and regrouping of questions to make for a smoother journey through the interview, starting with working in a predominantly female professions in general and then moving on to working in the sign language interpreting profession. Overall, the pilot interview process proved to be an extremely helpful exercise in developing my own skills in interviewing thereby leading to more relevant data elicitation.

3.5 Ethical considerations

3.5.1 Introduction

The Durham University (2017) *Research Integrity Policy and Code of Good Practice* was followed when designing and undertaking the research. Part of the ethical process requests that the researcher considers the following points when conducting research:

1. Does the study involve participants who are potentially vulnerable?
2. Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent (e.g., covert observation of people in non-public places)?
3. Could the study cause harm, discomfort, stress, anxiety, or any other negative consequence beyond the risks encountered in normal life?
4. Does the research address a potentially sensitive topic?
5. Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?
6. Are steps being taken to protect anonymity and confidentiality?
7. Are there potential risks to the researchers' health, safety, and wellbeing in conducting this research beyond those experienced in the researchers' everyday life?

Ethical approval to begin data collection was granted by Durham University on 22 February 2018 and no further ethics applications were submitted after that date.

3.5.2 Informed consent

A participant information sheet and consent form were e-mailed to all participants prior to their planned interview or participation in the Facebook group. Some returned the signed forms, and some did not. Therefore, at the beginning of each one-to-one interview, participants were asked if they had read the information and if they agreed to proceed with the interview, thereby offering verbal consent to proceed. This consent was captured on the recording of the interview. In the case of the Facebook group, the

participation information sheet and consent form were emailed to each participant and acceptance of the invitation to join the group represented consent to participate in the research project.

3.5.3 Anonymity and confidentiality

The BSL interpreting community in the UK is a small community and because of the minority status of men within the profession, achieving anonymity presented a challenge. This research examines the initial exposure to sign language and interpreting and therefore, research participants shared their personal journeys. As Salmons (2016, p. 78) advises: 'direct quotations or demographic characteristics may make it possible for readers to identify the person being interviewed' particularly if these experiences had been shared by the research participants with people outside of the research environment. Consequently, some readers of this thesis could potentially identify individual research participants.

To promote anonymity, all participants in one-to-one interviews and the Facebook group were assigned pseudonyms. The website bounty.com was used to identify the most recent list of the top 100 most popular boy's names in 2018. This list included some names of interpreters who were known to me within the profession, so these were eliminated from use, regardless of whether an interpreter with that name was interviewed or not, to avoid any confusion. This resulted in 28 names from the list of 100 not being available for use as a pseudonym. I did change two of the names throughout the process after initial allocation because I became aware of interpreters with a pseudonym I had used. It is acknowledged that the names used in this thesis may be the real names of interpreters who register in future, and readers should not make assumptions that those interpreters are participants of this research.

Anonymity within the Facebook group would have only been possible if each participant created a new anonymous profile with a false name which was not reasonable to ask the participants to do. Therefore, to reduce the possibility of a breach of anonymity or confidentiality, the following conditions were included in the consent form directed to the participants in the Facebook group as follows:

- I understand that what is discussed in the forum will be kept confidential³⁶, but if I feel that I or somebody else is at risk of serious harm, I will discuss this with the researcher who may need to disclose this to relevant agencies.
- I confirm that any comments I make on the forum will not include the names of any other individual to protect their anonymity.
- I will not discuss the identities of participants or anything they express with anyone else outside of the forum and I understand that the researcher has asked the same of all members, but that this cannot be guaranteed.

In addition, measures were put into place to ensure that any organisations the interpreters worked with, names of people they were connected to and places they lived or worked in were kept anonymous. However, it is recognised that full anonymity could not be entirely guaranteed and as such, research participants were offered the right to withdraw (section 3.5.4).

Due to the two methods of data collection being used - one-to-one interview and a Facebook group, the confidentiality of an individual taking part needed to be treated differently. With respect to the one-to-one interview, there was no discussion at any point with any of interviewees as to who else was being interviewed. However, within the Facebook group it was more difficult to keep individuals and their comments confidential. For that reason, the consent form included agreements to maintain anonymity of fellow participants and confidentiality of their contributions to the focus group.

Research participants were asked to confirm that 'I will not reveal the identities of participants or anything they express with anyone else outside of the forum. I understand that the researcher has asked the same of all members of the forum.' Even though there was no guarantee of this being maintained, a practice of 'limited confidentiality' was applied to the group in that every effort was made not to break confidentiality (Sim and Waterfield, 2019).

³⁶ I noted through the writing process that it is the linking of personal information that might identify the person that is to be kept confidential.

3.5.4 Right to withdraw

Participants were made aware that they were not obliged to answer any of the questions asked in the interview or respond to questions posed or comments made on the Facebook group if they did not want to, and that they could withdraw from the research entirely at any point without explanation. This was expressed in the two different participation information sheets (see appendix 9 and 10) and the consent forms (see appendix 11 and 12). In addition, participants were informed that they could withdraw any specific comments made up to 28 days after receiving their interview transcript or the closure of the Facebook group with no repercussions, and these comments would be deleted from the transcript.

All interview participants were provided with a digital transcript of the interview which gave them the opportunity to check and to remove or amend specific quotes or entirely withdraw from the research. Transcripts would also serve for their own records. Only one person provided feedback via email regarding their transcript and highlighted five points they wanted to change. Two were grammatical corrections, two related to place names that had been mentioned and one related to a term they used for a group of people which they felt, had it remained in the transcript unchanged could 'inflammate some readers of the transcript, especially if they identify that [NAME] is me.' I reminded them that place names and people's names and identifiable information would not be included in the thesis, and I gave them the opportunity to tell me what they wanted the wording to be changed to.

3.5.5 Safeguarding and disclosures

I was aware that throughout the interviews and the Facebook group, there may have been instances where a safeguarding concern may have been identified or a research participant may have disclosed something that would require me to report this to authorities such as the police or social services. The consent form highlighted:

I understand that what is discussed in the forum will be kept confidential to group members, but if I feel that a comment suggests a risk of serious harm to any research participant or service user, I will discuss this with the researcher who may need to disclose this to relevant agencies.

This statement referred to the safeguarding of individuals within and outside of the group. There were no comments made which required this to happen. And at no time in time in any of the interviews or on the Facebook group did this arise.

3.5.6 Risk and vulnerability

In line with ethical practice, I considered the personal safety of the participants as well as my own. The participants were not considered 'vulnerable' as they were all adults who had voluntarily consented to be involved in the research. The one-to-one interviews took place in various locations around the UK either in person or via online platforms such as Skype, FaceTime and Zoom. When meeting in person, in the interest of researcher safety, I informed a third person of my location, and I confirmed when the interview was completed. However, all in person interviews took place in public locations, so the risks to researcher or research participant were minimal.

Although there were no physical risks to the interpreters taking part in interviews, emotional risk was duly considered. Possible interventions such as signposting to counselling services were thought through and discussed within my supervisory team. It was deemed that as the questions posed to the participants were not particularly sensitive and as all the interpreters were adults who had the right not to answer questions, the risk was felt to be low.

3.6 Conducting and analysing individual interviews

Meriam and Tisdell (2015) describe interviews as being on a continuum from highly structured/standardised to semi-structured to unstructured/informal (Meriam and Tisdell, 2015, p. 110). The structure most suitable for this research was that of the semi-structured interview designed to be more flexible and conversational., allowing for structured and unstructured questions. This allows the interviewer to ask many of the same questions to all participants generating comparable data across all participants while also offering the interviewer the opportunity to explore 'fresh insights and new information' (Meriam and Tisdell, 2015, p. 111). The use of such interviews in my study was an effective way to address my research questions by hearing participant's own accounts and stories of becoming and being interpreters.

The twenty-five individual interviews were conducted between February 2019 and September 2019. To include interpreters from across the UK and given limited resources, I conducted three interviews in person, 21 using online methods (Skype, FaceTime or Zoom) and one on the telephone at the request of the research participant. For interviews that took place in person, one was conducted in a library and two were conducted in a café.

I recorded all interviews onto multiple password-protected electronic devices to safeguard against technological failures. If the interview took place online, this was mostly done through Zoom. In that instance, I would do what is known as a 'local recording' on the software itself. This recording can then be uploaded and kept. At the same time, I would also use my iPad or mobile phone to record an audio file of the meeting as back-up, should the video recording fail.

The interview questions were derived to encourage free expression of motivating factors, routes to interpreting, experiences within the profession, with further questions designed to illuminate themes emerging from the literature on men working in predominantly female professions. I also prepared prompt questions to encourage further elicitation of brief responses. Questions can be seen in Appendix 12.

Once each interview had been completed, I uploaded an audio version of it to ExpressScribe, a professional audio player software designed to help transcribe audio recordings. The benefit of using this software is that it features variable speed playback to capture the spoken word more easily. I listened to the audio recording via headphones and simultaneously re-spoke the dialogue which was recoded onto my iPad using an app called 'Dictate' which was then saved to a file, and I emailed a copy to my university email account. This did not produce an entirely accurate transcript, but it did provide a base from which to re-listen to the audio recording and correct any mistakes. This was a particularly effective use of time.

Once the transcripts were reviewed, corrected and complete, they were uploaded to the computer software Nvivo to begin the process of thematic analysis, 'a systematic approach for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns – themes – across a dataset not tied to a particular theory' (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p. 228). Using this method, I was able to see what themes emerged for the interpreters.

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe a step-by-step guide to the process of thematic analysis as follows:

1. Familiarising yourself with your data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

I was very familiar with the data because I had undertaken the interviews. I then engaged with the data a second time through the 're-speaking' exercise using ExpressScribe and capturing what was said on my iPad through the Dictate app to create a verbatim account of each interview. The third level was to re-listen to the interview on ExpressScribe and correct any errors. This exercise sometimes involved re-listening to the recording at points where words were barely audible. This phase also considered pauses in speech, pace, tone, and emphasis to offer as accurate a representation as possible.

The second phase of generating initial codes was achieved by following Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 89) advice to 'work systematically through the entire data set, giving full and *equal* (original emphasis) attention to each data item, and identify interesting aspects in the data items that may form the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set'. I read the transcripts thoroughly and identified as many potential codes as possible, extracting quotes to support the codes. I was careful to include contradictory views to identify inconsistencies in experiences. This phase of data analysis generated 78 main codes and numerous further sub-codes.

I then progressed to phase three, searching for potential overarching themes from the long list of codes I had generated. In this phase, I found it useful to create a spider diagram of the codes and an example is shown below.

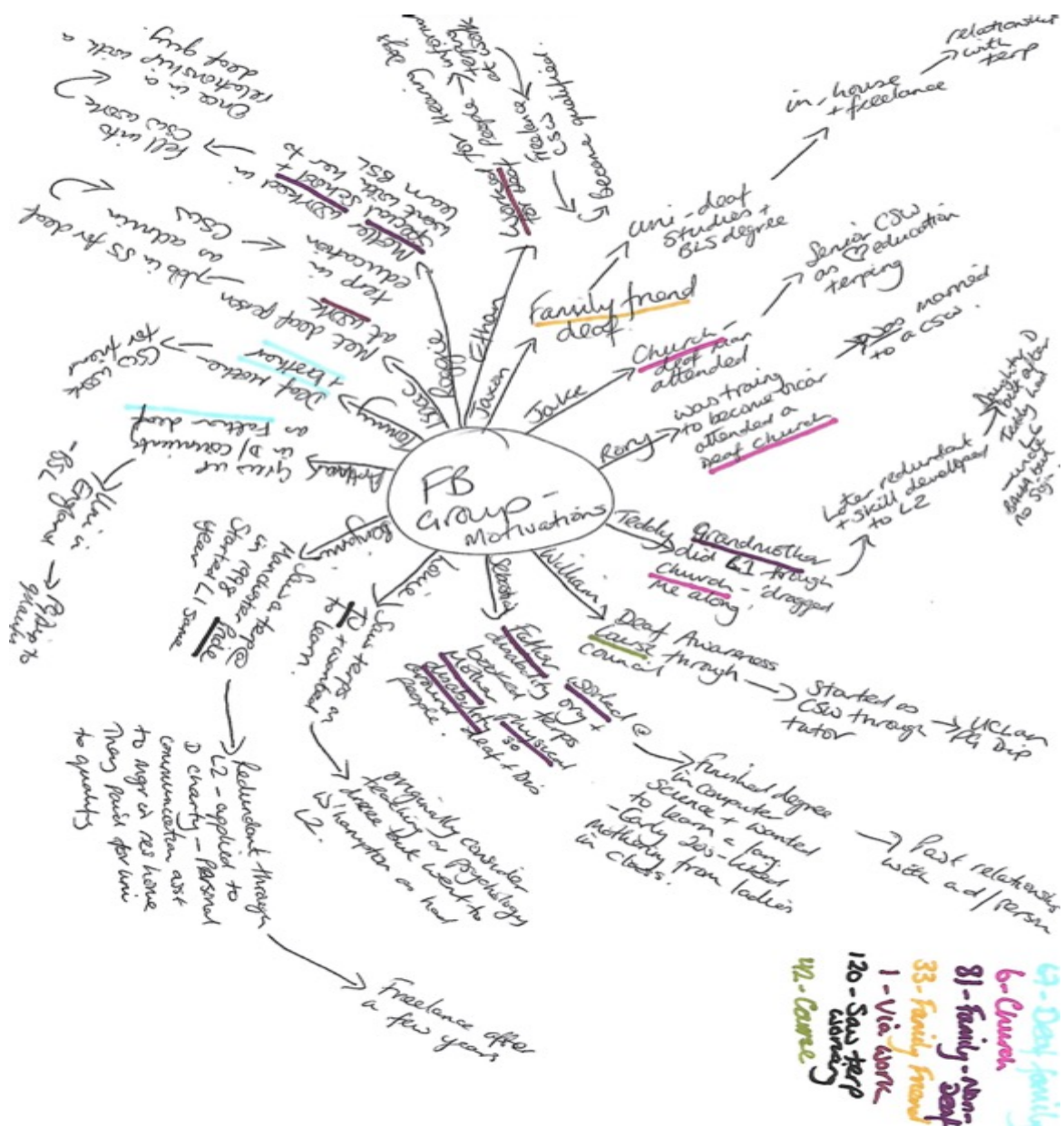


Image 2: Spider diagram example

Using the spider diagram, I was able to identify potential connections between codes to create overarching themes and sub-themes.

Moving on to phase four, I was able to identify themes which, although notable, did not warrant extensive discussion in the thesis or which could be merged with other similar themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) recognise that at this phase ‘you consider the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set, but also whether your candidate thematic map ‘accurately’ reflects the meanings evident in the data set as a whole (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 91). I was able to see where the potential themes would fit together to tell the story of the motivations of participants to enter the BSL

interpreting profession in the UK.

In phase five, my aim was to name and define the themes to ensure they told the story of the data in a way that addressed the two research questions and begin to fill the gap in knowledge surrounding the motivations and experiences of men in BSL interpreting in the UK. This phase focused on identifying the essence of the themes and the relevant and interesting data emerging from the interviews. After these phases were complete, I was able to begin to write the findings chapters offering a 'concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell within and across themes' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 93).

3.6.1 Interview reflections

As a male BSL interpreter, I recognise that my insider status afforded me privileged access to the sample of participants, and this helped me to recruit a significant number of research participants and to facilitate the interviews. Many of them expressed how interesting the research topic was and they were keen to take part. It could be argued that the research participants saw me as like them - a male interpreter - which created early rapport. I felt this enabled the participants to speak candidly and we spoke the same language when it came to knowledge of the deaf community and interpreting, meaning there was little need for clarification on either part resulting in interviews that flowed well.

I was aware of my duty as a researcher to adopt a critical approach to the information I was given in the interviews and should neither support nor reject the views. I did find myself sometimes agreeing with participants and even sharing some of my own experiences with some of them. At the time I felt this was appropriate in the rapport building I was looking to achieve with the participants I did not know and showing solidarity with those I did. However, I am aware of the impact this may have had on the information these interpreters shared (Harvey-Jordan and Long, 2001). This may have prevented participants from being explicit and restricting the extent to which I was able to explore issues raised in the interviews because of my assumed knowledge of the subject. There was potential for participants not to disclose thoughts, feelings, or emotions for free of being judged by a fellow interpreter. Although I felt this did not happen, I cannot be sure this did not occur.

I found the interview process enjoyable. It was interesting to hear what each participant had to say about their exposure to sign language and how that, and other factors led them to pursue a career as a BSL interpreter. I did find that at times, I forgot that the conversation was to elicit data and it felt more like a conversation about interpreting. There are advantages and disadvantages to this in that the research participants felt, it seemed, comfortable to discuss the topic but that led to the possibility of me not probing further because of my assumed knowledge of what they were telling me.

Some of the research participants also seemed to benefit from the interviews. At the end of the interview with Edward he said, “*You’ve given me things to think about*” and Henry who offered one of the longest interviews said “*Nice talking to you. Thanks. Thanks for listening (laughter)*”. I appreciated each and every person who gave up their time for the interview, even perhaps especially, when the individual remained unaware of the value of their input. Harvey’s interview concluded:

Harvey: You’ve got to transcribe all of that bollocks (laughter). For how many people?

Paul: It’s not bollocks! It’s very useful information.

3.7 Conducting and analysing the online focus group

Facebook was set up to ‘Give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together’ (Facebook, 2019). As Boyd & Ellison (2008) state, ‘most [social networking] sites support the maintenance of pre-existing social networks, but others help strangers connect based on shared interests, political views, or activities’ and it is for this reason that Facebook was chosen as a platform to establish a group. It enabled me to host an online group of male BSL interpreters in discussions around their motivation to enter the BSL interpreting profession and their experiences in the profession for those unable or unwilling to participate in an online interview. In other words, it increased inclusivity. Those who expressed an interest in the group were a mix of male BSL interpreters who were known to me either in person and on Facebook or only on Facebook. This supports Boyd & Ellison’s (2008) notion of some of the men being a part of my pre-existing social network and others being connected because of

our shared interest in sign language interpreting through Facebook groups dedicated to sign language or sign language interpreting. However, it is important to note that I did not discriminate against anyone wishing to join the group. I did not give preference to those individuals I had a personal contact with over those I did not.

The group was created on 10th July 2019 and posed 7 questions which were:

1) Tell me the story of how you decided to become an interpreter. a. How long have you been an interpreter? b. Do you have any Deaf family? c. How did you enter the profession? d. Are you in a relationship with an interpreter/Deaf person? (Asked 12.07.19).

2) Tell me about your views as to whether being a male interpreter has been to your advantage or disadvantage and share your examples. (Asked 14.07.19).

3) Tell me your views on the notion that men hold the more prominent positions within the SLI profession. (Asked 15.07.19).

4) Do you tend to work more with other male or female interpreters? Do you have preference? Tell me why. (Asked 17.07.19).

5) Did you consider that you would be in the minority when entering the profession and therefore possibly experience issues of gender inequality and potentially feel isolated from male camaraderie? (Asked 19.07.19).

6) Do consider interpreting to be a caring or a linguistic profession? How do you describe it to people who do not know about the profession? (Asked 23.07.19).

7) Tell me your thoughts on pay. Do you feel you earn more or less than your female counterparts? (Asked 07.08.19)

The first question was posed on 12th July 2019. This gave two days for the interpreters to accept the invitation to join the group and read the description of the group. The last question was posed on 7th August 2019 and on 22nd August 2019 there was a post informing participants that the group would be closed on Monday 26th August 2019,

thereby giving them an opportunity to contribute any other comments they may feel relevant.

The group was set as 'secret'³⁷ on Facebook and only invitees were able to join. Only current members were able to see who was in the group, what members post and stories about the group on Facebook (e.g., News Feed and search). Current and former members, if they chose to leave the group, would see the group name, description, group tags, group location find the group in search thereby enabling them to make comments within the group. If someone decided to leave the group and no longer partake in the research, I would have needed to block them, but no-one decided to leave the group, so this was not necessary.

If searching for a group on Facebook, it is possible to see a list of the members of the group even if you are not a member. Therefore, I chose a group name without the generic search terms 'male' or 'interpreter' reducing the possibility of the group being located by individuals who had not been invited to be members. As Facebook does not offer the facility to be able to assign yourself a pseudonym, members of the group were able to see the comments that others posted which is a deliberate aspect of online focus groups to promote discussion. Information could have been used outside the closed group, but as part of the consent form participants were asked to undertake not to share information outside the group.

The last question was posed on 7th August 2019 and the group closed on Monday 26th August 2019 giving participants 19 days to add any further comments. On 22nd August 2019, I posted one last question:

- I wanted to say thank you for your comments within the group. I will be closing it on Sunday 26th August. Before I do, is there anything else you would like to add about being a male interpreter that has not been covered so far?

The aim of this last posting was to offer a further 4 days to post any final comments. This produced three comments relating to topics which had not been covered in the

³⁷ Secret is the term Facebook uses for groups offering the same level of privacy as closed groups, but they are invisible meaning no one can search for secret groups or request to join them. The only way to get access to a 'secret' group is to be invited. Everything shared in a secret group is visible only to its members.

discussions. After the closing date, I downloaded a copy of all comments and saved them as a PDF document in case there were any problems accessing the data on the Facebook platform after the closing date.

I then created an Excel spreadsheet as follows:

Date	Question	Seen by	Comments	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	→
Name							
Pseudonym							
12.07.19							
14.07.19							
15.07.19							
↓							

Where there was a response to a question by a research participant, it was placed in the corresponding cell on the spreadsheet. If there was a response to a specific comment by another research participant, this was also included in that cell, but it was highlighted in bold to identify that it was a comment made by a different research participant.

Once I had all the data collected on one spreadsheet, I then created individual Word documents which related to the individual questions asked. This meant that I was able to capture all the comments relating to each question on one document. I also created a back-up Word document with the total data so that I was able to refer to that if needed. I was then able to upload that document to Nvivo to begin the coding process in the same way that was done for the one-to-one interviews.

Like the interview data, the responses were collected from the online discussions, and uploaded to Nvivo to begin the process of thematic analysis. I was not as familiar with the data as the interviews as I was not actively involved in the discussions on the online focus group, other than posing questions and moderating. I read the responses thoroughly and added comments to the codes that had been created for the interviews. Where relevant, I created new codes in Nvivo based on unique topics discussed in the online group. This online data contributed to the themes identified from the interviews

and was treated as having equal value and contribution to insight.

3.7.1 Online focus group reflections

As noted earlier, there were 17 people within the group but only 12 made comments and while the twelve active participants responded to questions I posted, only three were more positively active by responding to the posted questions and commenting on others' responses. Therefore, the volume of data collected in the group was not as great as I initially expected and using Facebook as a data collection method left me feeling that the group had not achieved the full and open exchange of discussion around motivation and experience. By comparison, the one-to-one interviews offered far greater depth and breadth of data. On reflection, I feel that for the type of research I was conducting, which was to explore people's individual experiences, the Facebook group was not best placed to achieve that. I felt the opportunity to have open dialogue was not as effective on a digital platform in comparison to the face-to-face interviews. The gendered use of Facebook (Shepherd, 2016) may be a contributing factor, in that men may not use Facebook as much as women and therefore, the use of Facebook to gather data may be a more appropriate platform when gathering data from women.

3.8 Limitations, challenges, and methodological considerations

Even though at the end of the one-to-one interviews and the Facebook group I offered participants the opportunity to contact me should anything come to mind regarding their motivations and experiences that was not covered in the interview or group, no-one chose to make contact to add further comments. If I were to repeat the exercise, I would also consider conducting more than one interview with participants to collect longitudinal data. If I were meeting with the male sign language interpreters for follow-up interviews, they would be continuously considering and reflecting on their position within a predominantly female profession. This constant questioning may have provided me with data that was evolutionary and reflective of societal or attitudinal changes, rather than fixed in a moment in time. Additional data would be one advantage, but potential participant fatigue and subsequent attrition of research participants would be a disadvantage, besides the almost certain unsurmountable challenge of completing the study within the norms of PhD study periods.

Despite consideration of yet further data collection, one of the challenges faced with this study was the management and processing of the volume of data collected. As previously mentioned, I gleaned over 250,000 words of data between the one-to-one interviews and Facebook group. The process of transcribing and coding this amount of data was extremely time consuming but valuable to identify themes within the data. Keeping focus on the main themes was a challenge as I was tempted to discuss themes which, although interesting, did not offer enough information to warrant theme of their own.

If I were to repeat the exercise, I would consider the use of more creative methods of collecting data in future research I undertake. These can often provide research participants with an alternative way of expressing themselves and might have increased access to the study, widening the pool of potential participants, though it may also have discouraged others. I only gave research participants the opportunity to express themselves through the spoken or written word and this may not be the preferred method for some research participants.

3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has explored the methodological and ethical considerations of undertaking this research to best address the research questions outlined in section 1.3.1. Both the one-to-one interviews and Facebook group data collection, analysis and reflections have been explored and a recognition of the limitations of the study have been highlighted.

A critical analysis of the data emerging from the interviews and the Facebook group is presented in the following four chapters focusing respectively on: initial exposure to sign language (chapter 4), motivations to become BSL interpreters (chapter 5), working within the sign language interpreting profession (chapter 6) and the male British sign language interpreter (chapter 7).

Chapter 4 - Findings: Exposure to sign language

4.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter centres on the findings relating to first research question which seeks to determine the motivations for men to become BSL interpreters, in particular identifying how they were first exposed to sign language. Three main forms of exposure emerged:

- A relationship with a deaf person or a hearing person
- An activity or an event linked to the deaf community
- The observation of sign language interpreters working or of sign language in practice

These experiences had varying degrees of impact on the interpreters and contributed to what eventually led them to undertake further study to enter a career as a sign language interpreter. Their motivations can be categorised into the two commonly classified themes (see e.g., Bergmark et al., 2018):

- Extrinsic
- Intrinsic

Hennessey et al., (2014 p. 1) explain extrinsic motivation as ‘the motivation to do something in order to attain some external goal or meet some externally imposed constraint’ and intrinsic motivation ‘to do something for its own sake, for the sheer enjoyment of the task itself’.

4.2 Variety of situations

What stands out from the findings is the variety of situations in which the research participants were first exposed to BSL. Analysis of the data identified three main situations linked, respectively, to a person, ii) an activity, event, or iii) observation of BSL.

Personal contacts included:

- A deaf parent
- Other deaf family member

- Hearing family member who could sign
- Family friend who is deaf or hearing and could sign.

Activities/events included:

- Church
- Work/volunteering
- Hobby or participation on a course
- Random meeting

Observations included:

- The use of sign language
- BSL interpreters working

The following section in this chapter will explore each theme, drawing on interpreters' individual stories. Their experiences varied and it was not always easy to categorise a specific moment or event that motivated them to develop their skills in sign language to eventually train to be an interpreter. An example of this is with Edward whose mother had a good friend who had deaf parents. He saw this friend interpreting for her parents in church and so he fit the categories of family friend who is deaf or hearing, church and observed sign language in practice.

The first major theme - personal contacts - included categories relating to family members or friends who were either deaf or hearing. These included parents, other deaf family members, hearing family members with a connection to sign language in some form and family friends who were either deaf themselves or hearing with a connection to sign language.

4.2.1 Deaf parent

Of the thirty-eight participants in my study, only two disclosed having both a mother and father who were deaf³⁸. Two further participants had deaf mothers and one had a deaf father. Harrison, whose mother was deaf, and he said:

³⁸ Although Harrison, who had two deaf parents, had little to no contact with his father growing up.

So, my mum was deaf, I didn't have my dad around. I lived in a house with my hearing grand-parent's downstairs who didn't use sign language at all and my mum who pretty much only used sign language. So, from a very, very early age, way before I can remember, I would have been language brokering between my mum and her parents on a daily basis and that was both normal and fairly mad, you know, that, kind of, combination of how do people end up in the situations and yet that's just part of my normal upbringing.

Importantly, Harrison emphasises using sign language from a “very, very early age” which suggests his first language with his mother was BSL, and he explains that he cannot remember a time where he wasn’t using sign language.

Arthur, whose father is deaf, wrote as part of the online focus group: *“I acquired a foundation of fluent BSL in my youth via family and family friends”* demonstrating the breadth of influences on a young person growing up with deaf parents. Albie had a different family dynamic, simply explaining in the Facebook group that his mother and brother were deaf, and *“BSL users”*.

Evidence of connections between childhood acquisition of sign language and becoming a professional interpreter has been researched since the early 1980s when Cokely (1981) surveyed participants at the 1980 Convention of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) in Cincinnati, Ohio, USA. Of 160 respondents, 38.6% had deaf or hard-of-hearing mothers and 37.9% had deaf or hard-of hearing fathers (Cokely, 1981 p. 264). 40 years later, the 2021 Census of Sign Language Translators and Interpreters in the UK (Napier et al., 2021 p. 38) found that of the 213 (30.9%) respondents who had a personal tie to the deaf community, 137 (19.8%) had a connection that was either ‘Mother & Father’, ‘Mother Father +’ or ‘A mother or a father’.

Deaf BSL Connection	Total	%
Mother & Father	81	11.7%
Mother Father +	50	7.2%
A mother or father	6	0.9%
	137	19.8%

Table 3: 2021 ASLI Census deaf family connection.

Hearing people from deaf families who have grown up in an environment where sign language was used as a first or preferred language are known as 'heritage signers' (see: Chen Pichler, Lillo-Martin and Levi Palmer, 2018). With the development of the first Interpreter Development Programme for Heritage Signers by BSL First (see: bsfirst.com) the number of heritage signer interpreters is likely to increase in the coming years from the 19.8% recorded in the 2021 Census (Napier et al., 2021, p. 38).

Mapson's survey of registered interpreters (2014, p. 14) found the overall proportions of UK interpreters with deaf parents was 13% but significantly higher for male interpreters at 24%. In this qualitative study of 38 male interpreters only four had one or two deaf parents (10.5%), though it would be misleading to draw any inference of declining patterns based on study with small numbers and participation based on interpreters' interest in taking part in an interview or online focus group to share their motivations for becoming an interpreter and their experience in the profession.

Hearing people with one or more deaf parents have traditionally been known as CODA's (Children of Deaf Adults); a term first coined by Millie Brother, the founder of CODA International, in 1983.

Research has shown that approximately 90% of the children born to Deaf parents are hearing. I was one of them and set out to organize our widely dispersed group. My life was full of constant movement between Deaf and hearing worlds. I felt comfortable in both but not fully immersed in either. The CODA world would become my third option where I felt balance between my Deaf and hearing cultural experiences. (Children of Deaf Adults, Inc, 2020).

However, some children of deaf parents do not use the term CODA. Jude explained: *"I'm not a very big CODA, I don't... yeah... that's not me"*. Napier (2021, p. viii) has similarly explained 'I am not comfortable using the term [CODA] because of the connotations associated with it. I prefer the term *People from Deaf Families* (PDFs) (original emphasis) as I feel that this term is more encompassing in terms of hearing and deaf people that use sign language every day in families that may have a combination of deaf and hearing members.' The connotations referred to are children having to take the responsibility of caring for their parents from a young age through language brokering. This is the situation Harrison grew up in with a deaf mother and

hearing grandparents being hearing, although he did refer to himself as a CODA during our interview.

When a spoken language used at home is different to that of the wider community, it is often referred to as a heritage language, handed down from older members of the family. Younger members of the family may also attend extra-curricular community heritage language schools, environments where children and young people will learn and develop the home language as well as cultural traditions related to the community (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). In the absence of such schools for the deaf community, hearing children of deaf parents who are immersed in the deaf community must learn the language and traditions from their parents and their parents' networks. 'Heritage signer' has become the recognised term and Napier (2021, p. 8) suggests that 'all deaf and hearing people who acquire a sign language at home are considered as heritage signers by virtue of the minority language status of sign languages'. This term has therefore been adopted by Napier in preference to the widely known 'CODA' because it adopts the broader sociocultural view (Compton, 2014).

Although Harrison nor any of the research participants with deaf family members refer to themselves as heritage signers, this description fits Harrison well. He is a member of 'a sub-group of people in minority signing deaf communities: those people, either deaf or hearing, who have grown up with one or two deaf parents and use sign language at home as their primary language' (Napier, 2021, p. 1). Although Napier identifies that this is used as their primary language, in Harrison's case, he also had his grandparents in his household, so he may have developed bilingually, using both British Sign Language and English.

It is recognised that young people with one or both deaf parents will also use sign language as a means of aiding communication between their parents and hearing people. Harrison used the term "*fairly mad*" when he described this happening between his mother and her parents. Later in the interview he went on to say that "*as a person who grew up with deaf parents, I started signing and interpreting and brokering quite young.*" In this statement, he is making a distinction between signing which would have been with his mother and her network of friends, and interpreting and brokering with extended family members and other hearing people with whom his mother was interacting. Through extensive research over four years with 150 men and women who

grew up with deaf parents throughout the United States, Preston (1996) demonstrated how children of deaf parents often 'become the cultural link between two often separate worlds'.

It is recognised that those who grow up with deaf parents often 'become the cultural link between two often separate worlds' as is explained by Preston (1996), who undertook extensive research over four years with 150 men and women throughout the United States, who grew up with deaf parents. The experience that Harrison describes above is reflective of how the two worlds that Preston describes can be so close in physical distance and yet so far from a communication perspective.

In summary, having a deaf parent was one of the reasons the male sign language interpreters were first exposed to sign language and in the case of the participants in this study, the foundation of BSL happened at an early age and is arguably one of the reasons they then went on to undertake a career as a sign language interpreter. A parent's career was an influence expressed by some men who undertook a career in a predominantly female profession (Appiah, Appiah and Lamptey, 2021; Galley, 2020) (section 2.5.1) and similarly, a parent being deaf had had an influence on the career choice of some male interpreters.

4.2.2 Other deaf family member

Besides parents, other members of family networks may be deaf as was Albie's situation, having both a deaf mother and deaf brother. Other participants had deaf siblings (Oliver and Hugo) or other extended family members (Archie - cousin and Teddy - daughter).

Oliver experienced growing up with deaf siblings and he explained:

I have two deaf siblings. I have an older deaf brother and a younger deaf sister, but I've also got an elder hearing brother as well. I'm in the middle of the two deaf siblings. So, it's [sign language] always been around... I'd always been involved with my brother and sister going to the deaf clubs as a kid and very much with them rather than the hearing brother.

It is evident that growing up, Oliver felt he had more of a connection with his deaf siblings than his hearing sibling and he fits Napier and Leeson's (2016, pp. 176-177) recognition that 'there are people who grow up in families with older siblings or other family members who are deaf, and therefore they too may have grown up using sign language on a regular basis and would consider themselves to be bilingual'.

Hugo also had an older deaf brother:

I grew up with a deaf brother so sign language for me is, because I was the youngest sibling as well it's, youngest sibling. I was thrown into it, if you know what I mean like, I had no choice (laughter). I had to learn this crazy language just to communicate with me brother. So, that from the get-go was how I got into signing and the deaf world so to speak. I was thrown into it. Or born into it. Whatever you want to say.

As the younger sibling, Hugo was exposed to BSL from day one when communicating with his brother, which would have been natural for him, even though he describes it as a "crazy language".

Other participants had deaf relatives in their wider family network, for example Archie:

So, going right back to the beginning, my cousin is deaf, so I grew up with the knowledge of sign language, but I never grew up with a desire to become an interpreter... You know, [she] is just my cousin you know. To us, sign language wasn't a big deal it was just what we communicated with. It was just a part of life, it wasn't a skill, it was just what we did. And to be honest I'm the only one in the family who really signs well, if that makes sense. Even [her] mum and dad, well her dad doesn't sign at all, that's a whole different story but it's always been home signs... [She] is exactly the same age as me, we're 14 days apart [and she] and I have such a connection but it's through the language. [She] will tell me stories and my wife and I will be on the floor laughing because she has such humour and a way of expressing herself, that even her own family don't have access to... so it was just something we did and yeah it was a skill that happened to be there and yeah, I decided to use it.

The combination of closeness in age and the connection that Archie and his cousin

had played a part in him developing his sign language skills.

As highlighted in the previous section, the 2021 Census of sign language Translators and Interpreters (Napier et al., 2021, p. 38) found that of the 213 (30.9%) respondents who had a personal tie to the deaf community, 123 (17.8%) had a connection that was either 'Siblings', 'Siblings +' or 'Other family/personal connections' including grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, step relatives, sons, daughters, and non-biological relatives etc.

Deaf BSL Connection	Total	%
Siblings	34	4.9%
Siblings +	9	1.3%
Other family / personal connections	80	11.6%
	123	17.8%

Table 4: 2021 ASLI Census extended deaf family connection.

These figures for siblings have not changed a great deal from Cokely's (1981, p. 265) research where he found that 5% of respondents had a deaf sister and 4.4% had a deaf brother. However, he found that deafness in the extended family such as aunts, uncles, and cousins, was reported by 29.4% of respondents which appears higher than the figures above for 'Other family / personal connections', but this cannot be confirmed as the number (n80) does not distinguish between family and personal connections.

In a blog post, Napier (2014) suggested the use of an all-encompassing convention People from Deaf Families (PDFs) 'which includes deaf or hearing people that have grown up using sign language regularly with one or more deaf members of their family. This term includes both deaf and hearing people, and also does not distinguish between children or adults, and does not focus only on people that have deaf parents'. Napier argues that 'we need to more broadly consider the languaging practices of people who have grown up with sign language, maybe not with parents, but with siblings or other extended family members; or hearing signers who have relationships with deaf signers and therefore use sign language every day' (Napier, 2021, p. 15).

This encourages me to reflect on my own experience of using sign language within the family. Although I met my father's deaf cousins in London when I was a young child

and subsequently spent a few days with them in Los Angeles when I was 28, those encounters were not a motivating factor for me to learn sign language. It was in early 2001 when my niece was diagnosed as profoundly deaf that was the pivotal moment. It was then that I knew I would need to know some level of sign language to be able to communicate with her. As time and my language skills progressed, I did find myself as a language broker in the way that I was 'facilitating communication in the same way as interpreting' but also a 'co-participant' in the interaction and having to 'make moment-to-moment decisions about what information to convey and how' (Napier 2021, p. 19).

The 2021 Census of Sign Language Translators and Interpreters (Napier et al., 2021, p. 39) reports a number of further connections between deaf and hearing interpreters with signing and non-signing deaf parents, siblings, other family members or those with close family ties. Even where the connections were with non-signing and close friends, there were elements of their lives, as people with a degree of hearing loss, that influenced census respondents in becoming involved with the deaf community.

From a sociological perspective, links to BSL, whether strong through fluent and regular use, or tangential simply through acquaintance with deaf individuals, can act to connect or bond individuals within conventional families connected by blood ties, or within wider forms of family. In this way the use of, or connection with, BSL can be understood as a form of family practice. Describing family practices as the concept of holistically understanding the nuances of complex family life, relationships, and dynamics through interdisciplinary lenses, Morgan (2011a) argues that family practices are fluid and open to new understandings by moving away from standard sociological collectivities, to emphasise doing and concern with the everyday (Morgan, 2011b). An example of alternative notions of family based on membership of marginalised groups is 'families of choice' (Weeks et al., 2001) describing the formation of close supportive friendship networks where families of birth do not offer such support. Weeks et al. (2001) refer here to families of choice created by people of sexual minority groups experiencing rejection by their families of birth. In the case of deaf individuals, the formation of a 'deaf family' based on shared knowledge of sign language and deaf culture provides a space for a different form of family practice.

Illustrating this point, Kusters, De Meulder & Napier (2021) describe change and growth in language practices among four different deaf-hearing multilingual families

who interacted intensively on a daily basis during a holiday in India. Language use in the group shifted throughout the holiday as some signs and words became known by more members of the group resulting in language use becoming more diverse instead of converging towards commonly known or used signs/ words. There were also shifts in language and language practices by some members of the group, which were not common in their individual households, emphasising the ever-changing family language practices of deaf and hearing families which are influenced by different language backgrounds and biographies, age and generational differences, family practices and hearing status.

4.2.3 Hearing family member with a connection to the deaf community

The previous two categories focused on family members themselves who were deaf, whereas the next two categories relate to family members who have a connection to sign language and the deaf community or who have a friend who is deaf.

Four participants were exposed to sign language because of a hearing family member and their connection to sign language. Teddy wrote *"I lived with my gran as a teenager. She decided to do a level 1 [BSL] course through her church and after she realised, she'd need to practice at home she dragged me along"*. It appears that because this was not led by him, but his gran, his sign language learning could have ended there. However, he continued to write that *"8 years later I was made redundant & decided to see what other skills I had. Set out to get my level 2 [BSL] & got hooked"*. The life-changing event of being made redundant prompted Teddy to develop his sign language skills. It would have been easy for Teddy to seek employment in the field he had been made redundant in but instead he pursued a completely different career path.

Sebastian's hearing parents first connected him to sign language. He wrote, *"my father worked at a disability organisation and always booked terps, [interpreters] been lovely since co-working with then [sic]"*. Similarly, Harley was first introduced to sign language via his father. He said *"He worked for a charity, and they had a branch that was for deaf people as well. So, I did have some interest from going to his office, I would meet... there was an interpreter there and, but it wasn't really his job it was somebody else did it. So, I was kind of vaguely aware of sign language and I used to have like the sign*

language alphabet like there was a leaflet or something I had in my house, and I think that was maybe the first seed”.

Motivations of men to follow particular professions have been seen to be influenced by knowing individuals in similar roles (Harding, 2009; Wilson, 2005). In this study, Sebastian explained that although he had no deaf family, *“I did however have a physically disabled mother. So, I grew up around disabled and deaf people”*. Sign language interpreting was not something he first considered as a career:

I never intended to become an interpreter. I finished my degree..., started working and wanted to learn another language. Originally, I was going to choose Italian but thought I'd try BSL when I seen [sic] it in the prospectus. Started and I was the only male in the class, I was mothered by middle aged ladies which I liked. Being in my early 20s having older ladies mother me and say how good I was spurred me on to continue learning.

Like Teddy, Reggie first went to a sign language class with a family member who wanted to learn sign language. He wrote *“My mother used to work as a nursery nurse at a special school and wanted to learn to sign. I was 15 and went along with her... fell in love with the language and... went to Preston³⁹ and completed level 3 there”*. Similarly, Joshua’s mother was involved in the church and used to sign to a deaf man there. Joshua remembered: *“She was quite keen for me to learn. So, there were a few classes that would happen in the evening, at church, and I was sort of dragged along to them actually, when I was younger and then I found that I guess my mum sort of struggled with learning sign language, but I found it relatively easy, so I just carried on and then just really, from there, I just kept learning.”*

In all four situations where interpreters with hearing family member connected to sign language, the influence was via a female. Both Teddy’s grandmother and Reggie’s mother wanted to learn sign language and wanted them to join for company, because of her physical disability, Sebastian’s mother spent a lot of time around deaf and disabled people, and Joshua’s mother wanted him to learn because of her involvement in the church.

³⁹ When Reggie refers to Preston he is indicating the University of Central Lancashire who have provided BSL and Deaf studies courses for many years. See: <https://www.uclan.ac.uk/subjects/bsl-and-deaf-studies>

Only Sebastian and Harley mentioned the influence of a man (their hearing fathers) as a possible, even though indirect, influence in their decision to learn sign language. Sebastian did, however, emphasize the fact that he was the only male in a classroom full of females learning sign language and he enjoyed it when they 'mothered' him and praised his skills. He enjoyed this treatment, and admits it was a factor that 'spurred' him on to continue learning sign language.

4.2.4 Family friend who is deaf or hearing

Another way some interpreters were initially exposed to sign language was by having a family friend who was deaf. Ellis said *"I grew up, my best friend [male] was/is deaf. So, although there was no deafness in my family, I was around it, so I could sign"*. Similarly, Bobby grew up around deaf people and explained *"I already knew sign language from being a child and I had deaf friends"* [male and female]. The experiences of Ellis and Bobby show that the early influence of having deaf friends, male and female, had an impact on their desire to formally learn sign language.

Jaxon was slightly different in that it was a friend's mother that he first knew: *"I was always interested in sign language growing up as my friend's mum was partially deaf and taught me some"*. The fact that Jaxon's friend's mum taught him some sign language when he was young, piqued his interest to develop his knowledge later in life.

It was through a friend of Edward's mother that he was exposed to sign language:

My mother had a good friend who had deaf parents, so they were, this woman was a family friend of ours and I met her parents on a regular basis. She used to interpret for them at the same church that my parents used to go to. I grew up in that kind of family. And I was fascinated by the way in which she communicated with her parents and I, I suppose that was a catalyst in, in the kind of being drawn to it [BSL].

Edward is a prime example of an interpreter exposed to sign language in more than one way. He had the connection through a friend of his mother and in addition through

'Church' (section 4.2.5) where he 'Observed sign language in practice' (section 4.2.10).

Henry recalled meeting a deaf person:

I have no background or history into this whatsoever apart from having a very short recollection of meeting a lady who we used to call Auntie Jean, but she wasn't an aunt, but she was related to one of my grandmothers and she had a sister who, I must've been about, I don't know maybe 9 or 10 and I was taken through to the front room of the house one day and we were sitting having tea and there was this lady visiting who was Jean's sister and she happened to be profoundly deaf. I was just amazed that my auntie fingerspelling to her I would have to say and at great speed and I couldn't communicate with this lady at all, but I just remember that she was very smiley and touchy and really lovely, lovely, lovely, warm, warm, person. But that was locked away, away in the past.

This distant but brief meeting at an early age still had an impact on him as he was able to recall it from such a long time ago. Another interpreter with a memory of a meeting when he was a child was Jenson. He was at school when he first became aware of sign language: *"When I was about eight or nine, a friend's mum came into our class to do some sign language with us... she came into our classroom as, at that time, she was a CSW and just showed us the alphabet and a few signs and that really caught me. So, I guess I just carried that through until I was about 18 or 19, no 20".* This reflection highlights the influence of someone in a particular role can have on a person's motivation to follow a choice of profession (Zamanzadeh et al., 2013a, 2013b).

Harvey was first exposed to sign language later in life, at a party, and explained that:

I suppose, [it] was based on a friend of mine who is an interpreter, and I went to her birthday party and walked in, and everybody was signing, deaf and hearing and I didn't know who I could talk to and who I couldn't, so it was quite frustrating really, as an evening.

Even though he felt frustration at not being able to communicate, he realised that deaf people frequently also experience that frustration and went on to say:

But it was only after that that it sort of hit me that that's what it's like for every other deaf person. Don't know who they can communicate with. "Who's going to have the patience to take the time to have a conversation with me?" And that was the kick up the backside I needed to do, well to start looking for a level one course and luckily there was one at my local college, so that's how I sort of started doing it. I'd never met a deaf person up to that point. The next person I met was my level 1 tutor... I didn't think at that point I wanted to be an interpreter, but I fell in love with the language and met some really fascinating people along the way.

This section has described situations in which participants were first exposed to BSL through hearing family members with connections to the deaf community. In the following section I move on to activities/events in which interpreters were first exposed to BSL. These include involvement with the church, meeting deaf people at work or through volunteering, involvement in a hobby or course, or a random meeting of a deaf person.

4.2.5 Church

Exposure to deaf people or sign language in community activities or events was a way in which six research participants were first exposed to sign language. Teddy went to a sign language course at his grand-mother's church and Edward's mother's friend's parents at church were deaf. Joshua's mother signed to people in church, and he remembered: *"my mum sort of struggled with learning sign language but I found it relatively easy, so I just carried on and then just really, from there, I just kept learning"*.

The church setting was also where Jake first became interested in sign language. He wrote: *"A deaf man walked into my church in the year 2000. I had no connection whatever with deafness or Deaf people prior to that. It started with me sitting with him and writing notes, then I decided to go on a BSL Level 1 course"*. The inaccessibility of church services for deaf people is not uncommon. Writing about the Irish context, O'Leary (1994, pp. 145-146) explained that deaf people in Ireland were mostly raised Catholic, would learn about their religion in school but would then lose access to the church because they were not able to access the sermons in their first language and would have to rely on reading leaflets. Although Jake was also initially providing access to services via written text, wanting to make a difference (Jones, 2015; Rajacich et al.,

2013) he went on to undertake a BSL course so that he could communicate more directly with the deaf member of the congregation.

Also connected through church, Rory wrote: *"I was training to become a Catholic priest after leaving school with a report that said I had, "no ability in languages." I was introduced to the Deaf church in Gravelly Hill and the rest is history. I left the seminary when I got my Stage 1, with no idea of what the future held".* And Harrison explained that his mother went to church *"she was involved in the Deaf Christian fellowship and so I would sometimes interpret there".*

Although the instances described by the research participants were not situations where deaf people as a collective were attending services specifically aimed at deaf people, it is documented that the church has had an influence on the lives of deaf people where welfare services for deaf people were often started in response to demand from the deaf community (Parratt and Tipping, 1991).

4.2.6 At work or volunteering

The world of work and volunteering was also a way in which nine of the research participants were first exposed to sign language. One specific area is the care sector, and this is how Carter learnt some sign language. He said: *"I spent 15 years working in care, housing and homelessness services and I just happened to pick up sign language it was just one of my interests and I went to college, and I ended up working with a couple of people, so my skills were slightly over the normal college attendance type skills".* The care sector was also an area Noah was involved in:

I had a holiday job doing care work and I ended up doing care work at [charity for deaf people] in [South-West England] and so from no deaf experience, went straight to working with my first deaf person which was a deaf-blind man who was as far as I know born profoundly deaf, bright, sign language user but went blind in his early 20s, I think. Properly black blind. And just learning deaf-blind manual alphabet and then suddenly being able to communicate with someone who superficially you really couldn't communicate with was such a, I think, you know, odd and rewarding experience that sort of pressed some sort of button. And he was ace because he taught me lots of sign language because I could just fingers-spell

things on his hand, and he would just happily pass the time teaching me stuff. He taught me ASL [American Sign Language] finger-spelling by just me doing deaf-blind manual letters on one hand and him doing the others on the other hand. It was quite fantastic.

Noah talked about this experience being “*odd and rewarding*” and it lay behind his motivation to develop his sign language skills further. Freddie was also working in the care sector when he was motivated to learn to sign: “*So, I did my level one in [South-West] whilst I was working for [deaf-blind charity], because I'm supporting a boy who could sign, but I couldn't*”. Henry gained employment with young deaf people and reflected that “*I couldn't sign, I couldn't finger-spell, I didn't know if that was going to be necessary and they didn't offer any sign language classes for any new staff*”. He picked up sign language from the young deaf people he was working with and remembers it was “*where I learnt all my mistakes, from the kids, and was a source of amusement as each of them would run rings around people there*”.

The challenge presented by not being able to communicate with deaf service users was enough to motivate these participants to learn BSL, wishing to be able to offer a better service, a situation that bears some similarities with O'Connor's (2015) findings in relation to men choosing a career where there is an element of care based on previous caring responsibilities.

Riley's situation was slightly different in that he was already working within a charity when a deaf person came to access the services offered by the organisation. He said:

I had no contact with deaf people at all before I was 24 and the reason I began to learn sign language in the first place was because I was a housing officer for a young peoples' homeless charity, so I managed six shared houses with a total of 30 people living in those houses, so obviously you would collect rent and support them within, you know, life skills, making sure that they were paying their rent and actually had the skills that they needed to be independent. And then one day my manager came up and said, “oh we've had an application from a deaf boy”, I think he was about 18 or 19 or something like that and they said, “I'm thinking about moving him into a shared house that you manage, would you be prepared to go on a sign language course?” And I, to be honest, if you'd have given me a prospectus at that time and said, “you can pick any course in

this prospectus”, I think sign language would've been one of the last things that I would've picked. I just, I've never been good at spoken language, I just can't remember it, I'm just awful at spoken languages (laughter) but I said “oh, you know if you'll pay for it then I'll give it a go and pretty much from the word go I was just fascinated.

This account is an illustration of an opportunity to learn BSL provided within employment in order to ensure a deaf person could access the service effectively. But it also had an unintended benefit of boosting Riley's self confidence in gaining a skill he imagined he would never have, based on what he viewed as poor skills in learning spoken languages.

Like Riley, Ethan started learning sign language because it was required by his employer. He wrote: *“I started BSL level 1 when I got a job at [charity]. I knew nothing about deaf awareness or sign language. I was keen to start the course when I heard level 1 & 2 were a pre-requisit [sic] for the job”.*

Sometimes, it was a chance meeting at work that led the interpreter to learn sign language. This was the case for Toby, who worked in the financial services industry:

A couple of deaf people came in. They gave me a bit of paper that said 'Please cash this cheque. Thank you' and I just thought well this isn't equal service and obviously speaking from a period, at that time, of complete naivety, I knew that we had the 'purple slashed ear thing', the 'sympathetic hearing scheme' and I thought we must, there must be something we should be doing under that because that's about deafness, these are two deaf people, what is it that we do? So, that was my motivation to start to learn sign language because I just felt it wasn't right.

Similar motivation to learn sign language was noted in research with sign language educators by McDermid (2009, p. 116) in America and Canada. He found that 'Several of the male students who had taken sign language classes, according to one Deaf instructor, already had a good career and did not plan on becoming interpreters. Instead, they were only interested in communicating with Deaf staff or Deaf employees back at their jobs'.

Toby felt the injustice of the inequality that his clients faced was the reason he began to learn sign language. He commented that the organisation promoted a “*sympathetic hearing scheme*” but that it was tokenistic because no-one on site could really communicate with any deaf BSL users.

Elijah was also prompted to learn sign language through work as he remembered:

There was [sic] some deaf students studying at [south coast] Polytechnic as it was in the early days, and I thought it would be useful if I was to learn some sign language. I would be able to communicate directly with the students. And after I did my level one and I met the students again, they told me that they didn't sign and that they were oral. But I didn't know anything about oralism and BSL before I started the level one. It was only after I had done it, but I realise that it wasn't going to be any use to those particular students.

Inaccessible business and services can be a common problem for deaf people who experience social exclusion when attempting to access many services (Hicken, 2004; Sharples and Hough, 2016) despite anti-discrimination and equalities legislation. Witnessing inaccessibility directly, Toby and Elijah acted on their subsequent sense of social injustice which motivated them to learn sign language.

Volunteering was also a way of being introduced to sign language. After finishing a degree in politics and with an interest in social care, Arlo began to volunteer. He said:

I started working as a volunteer at the Centre for Deaf People in [Midlands]. I worked initially just spending a bit of time every week with a, in this instance it was an older guy who had been in institutional care for years and years and years and years and years and I'd play snooker with him and he, it was a sad story, it really was a sad story but like I say he spent the vast majority of his life in a home, institution, for no real reason apart from how he was viewed as a deaf person, back when he was a young lad. From there I started to do more voluntary work.

4.2.7 Hobby or course

Being interested in learning sign language as a hobby was also identified in the data. George noticed a course was taking place locally and decided to join. He explained:

I was at university doing a sociology degree, not knowing what to do with it. In the second year there was a poster on the noticeboard advertising sign Language classes. Just to let you know all of my family are hearing and has no connection with BSL at all. Or deafness. I went along to the sign language class with a friend of mine, enjoyed it, and found that I was okay at it, I would never profess to be the best signer, but I enjoyed it and was okay at it, good at it. My friend eventually quit, but I continued and once finishing university I immersed myself in the deaf community.

George would “never profess to be the best signer” he enjoyed learning and persevered. In contrast, someone who seemed to have a natural flair for sign language was Jacob. When he described his experience of learning sign language was, he said that he took to it “like a duck to water”. It was a bleak time after university that he saw an opportunity to enrol in a sign language class. He said:

I finished an undergraduate degree in arts and education which didn't really give much scope for finding a career. I could've worked as an arts officer in a museum or a gallery but jobs like that work for you. Went back to college started doing sign language and just took to it like a duck to water. It was a really, really positive experience in quite a bleak time because I was signing on at the job centre, so for me that was real “oh, this is really nice, and I like it”. So, that just motivated me, and the journey carried on.

Self-confessed linguist Alfie reflected that after signing up for a class he withdrew because of other commitments. He said that a little while later “[I] signed up for a class, again. Then I was really, really interested. It was more interesting than I expected it to be... Every time I turned around there was something else that was making my little brain explode and it was so cool!” Ollie was at work and first encountered sign language: “In 1990 I went on a Deaf awareness course, offered free by the local council. The Deaf tutor was very engaging and humorous, and I realised that I had really enjoyed the course. He encouraged me to go on a Stage 1 [BSL] course, which

led onto the Stage 2 [BSL]”.

Engaging with BSL as a hobby or enjoyment of the opportunity to attend a course in BSL was described by these participants in terms of interest, fun and enjoyment which led in turn to developing interpreting into a career. This bears some parallels with Simpson’s (2004) findings of men entering careers in predominantly female professions as a result of having an interest in a particular area. Examples included librarians’ enjoyment of reading books, teachers’ enjoyment of working with children and cabin crew’s enjoyment of travel and meeting people. In terms of ‘the man code’ which all seem to go against elements of the ‘man code’ emphasising masculinity and competition, neither of which seem applicable to these career choices, or indeed to learning BSL.

4.2.8 Random meeting

Three research participants encountered sign language through random meetings with deaf people. Edward, as well as meeting his mothers’ friends at church, explained: *“I also have a very early memory of a deaf guy asking me for directions when I was about seven or eight and instinctively knowing that he couldn’t speak properly and was deaf or something, so I did lots of gesturing (laughter) pointing him in the right direction”.* Although this may not have been **the** pivotal moment in Edward’s decision to learn sign language, it is a charming example of children’s capacity for learning and desire for communication. Research suggesting that early instruction in sign language enhances children’s vocabulary development (Daniels, 2009) and increases children’s appreciation of cultural diversity (Brereton, 2008) reinforces the argument for engaging children and young people in learning sign from an early age.

In the building where I worked at that time, there was a firm of architects and model makers. There was a man working there who was a deaf BSL user and one morning just after I’d parked the car, he approached me and pointed at the petrol cap. I realised he was asking me if my engine was OK. At the time motorists in the south of England had been experiencing engine damage because of contaminated petrol at a Morrison’s petrol station. I decided there and then to try and learn some BSL as I’d always been curious about sign language and wanted to learn more so I could communicate better. This man was used to working with non-

signing hearing people although his wife at the time could sign well. I was impressed at his stoic forbearance given that his work colleagues made no effort to sign, and the rest of his hearing family were, in his words, "too lazy to learn BSL". I managed to find an excellent Deaf BSL teacher whom I paid privately for a few months to give me one to one tuition. She later suggested that if I wanted to gain qualifications in BSL I should enrol at college for Level One. That hadn't been my aim at first, but with that encouragement I signed up to start Level One in September 2007.

Isaac's BSL teacher recognised that Isaac had potential to learn BSL. It is difficult to say whether she saw a future interpreter in front of her but encouragement and positive reinforcement from others as well as direct discussions (Labra, Bergheul and Turcotte, 2017; O'Connor, 2015; Rajacich et al., 2013; Yi and Keogh, 2016) are influential in later career choice by men in predominantly female professions, as was found by Wilson (2005).

Cokely (2005, p. 4) notes that, when it came to identifying prospective interpreters, it was often determined by the community themselves:

Members of the Community would determine for themselves whether and when someone possessed sufficient communicative competence and had also demonstrated sufficient trust-worthiness that they would be asked to interpret/transliterate... the community relied on the judgement and experience of its members to determine who could function effectively as an interpreter/transliterator.

This connection between the deaf community and prospective interpreters carries through to the next situation in which participants were first exposed to sign language. This involved direct observation of interpreters at work.

4.2.9 Observed interpreter working

Twelve participants were first exposed to sign language by observing an interpreter working live or on the television. Zachary recalled the impact of seeing an interpreter at work at Manchester Pride. He wrote "*I saw Zane H [a male BSL interpreter]*

interpreting at Pride in Manchester back in 1998. Transfixed how the woman singing moved his hands. That was the August. I enrolled in level 1 that Sept". At the time, he saw a real connection between two people doing their jobs; a singer and an interpreter but did not understand the interpreting process. What he saw and what enthused him was the synergy between the two and this was enough to motivate him to enrol on a sign language course. Of additional relevance here is Zachary seeing interpreting taking place in a gay cultural context, allowing him to observe someone who was like him – a man from the queer community. By seeing 'someone like him' interpreting created an additional sense of desire to be like that person, to be an interpreter and develop a new sense of belonging and identity.

Charlie's chance encounter with interpreting came when he was unemployed and attending a conference with his mother as he had no other plans. He recalled:

[I] went to this conference and one day I was sitting in the conference hall, and I was looking and listening to some things they were saying and I just looked to one side and I saw some people signing and I gathered they were doing interpreting but became a bit fascinated by it and watching it a bit more and thinking "Oh! That's interesting and I wonder what it's like to be able to, to sign and you know, have a conversation in sign language" and some mystery to it really because how could you use a language but not speak?

Harley similarly was first exposed to interpreting at a live event. He said *"They had an interpreter on stage, and I was watching her like, the whole time, the whole day. I was there with my parents and my, I was still in school and my mum, she said, "why don't you go to a night class in BSL?" So, she looked it up and she found one in my area, and I did my level one and I loved it".*

Louie who first saw an interpreter on TV and wrote *"I always wanted to learn BSL after watching interpreters on TV and during college we had to pick an additional activity to do (ideally so that when applying for universities 2 years later it would look more desirable). I decided to go to a night class and learn my Level 1 - with no interest into becoming an interpreter but absolutely loved it and looked forward to going ever [sic] week!".*

Elijah also saw an interpreter on television, but this was on a documentary when he had started to learn sign language as a hobby. He recalled:

I saw a documentary called Julia's baby I think it was about a deaf-blind lady who was due to have a child and doctors and answers were talking about how they would look after the child after it was born because she wouldn't be able to and that's kind of the standpoint of the beginning so it was a fight for her to keep her baby who wasn't even born yet, to prove that she could and when she was in labour there was a deaf blind interpreter working with her in hospital and that made me want to be a deaf-blind interpreter.

Seeing interpreting on television was also referred to by Edward who was watching signed news and by Jenson who had watched See Hear⁴⁰ as a boy. He said: "So, I guess I had this kind of unknown interest in sign language through watching maybe 'See Hear' or whatever was on the television as a kid, catching it on a Sunday, I don't think I set out to actively view it but when it was on, I would always try and watch it".

Alfie, the self-confessed linguist recalled observing interpreters in different settings and being fascinated:

It's a little bit embarrassing but you know I probably was fascinated by the people I'd seen on stage in theatres and on TV screens... I'd just grown-up seeing interpreters around at events and I was fascinated. Partly in a sort of clueless way that everybody else is fascinated and partly you know in a genuine linguistic kind of way.

Similarly, Jacob also saw sign language interpreters on-screen and in theatres and came across a BSL training opportunity while looking for courses to fill time while unemployed. He explained: "Looking through the prospectus I took... sign language because it looked pretty. I just, from the little person in the corner of the screen or the interpreter on the stage, it just looked really lovely. So then went along and then yeah, just carried on with it". The image that he was left with after seeing the interpreters working prompted him to start learning sign language.

⁴⁰ See Hear is a weekly magazine TV programme for the deaf community covering a variety of topics. See: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006m9cb>.

The evident interest and enthusiasm for learning BSL after observing interpreters at work holds some parallels with nursing where one attraction for men results from early experience as a patient and seeing nurses 'hands on' at work (Rajacich et al., 2013).

Three interpreters had previously worked in situations where they encountered interpreters. Freddie did his level 1 BSL whilst at university and got a job in an environment where he was exposed to sign language daily. He recalled:

There was an interpreter in [northern city] who, I think everyone's got a person sometimes you watch someone you go "That's pretty" forget the context, forget what's going across, you just look at it and go "They make it look so easy and that's beautiful" and "Oh, I wouldn't of [sic] translated..." "Oh! I get why you've done that." And at that point obviously I was at a lower level so there was a lot that they were doing that I was going "I would not have done that" but they kind of inspired me to become an interpreter.

Similarly, Riley did have basic sign language skills because of his work but it was when he regularly met sign language interpreters at work that he began to consider the idea of developing his skills in sign language. He explained:

So we used to get interpreters in for the meetings that we held regularly, we had a meeting at least once a week sometimes twice a week and you'd get interpreters coming in to obviously translate for the deaf members of staff and yeah, I just started to, you know, having learnt a fair bit of sign language but not being fluent particularly, just being interested in how they were gonna interpret certain ideas, concepts, you know that kind of thing and just being quite impressed by the way that they did that. At first, I didn't think I had the capability of doing it and back at that time, I don't think I did. But one of my colleagues who was a support worker like me, I think she basically took me under her wing a little bit and was quite encouraging for me to improve my sign language skills and, you know, if I made blatant mistakes or, you know, failed to explain things properly in sign language so it left a bit of confusion, then she would take me to one side and kind of say "Oh, you know, you shouldn't have used that" or "That was the wrong sign or the wrong context" or "Perhaps you could've made it more visual, the way that you were, sort of, trying to get your point across" and I quite rapidly,

I improved, you know, to the point where I felt I was able to study to the next level.

Noah's professional life also resulted in him encountering sign language interpreters on a very regular basis and found their jobs to be enviable which was the prompt for him to develop his skills further and qualify as an interpreter.

These examples offer a clear illustration of the attraction of sign language interpretation to several participants in this study whose entry into the profession was prompted or encouraged by observing interpreters at work. Once again, this speaks to parallels with men's entry to the nursing profession, with a significant attraction being the positive perceptions of nurses and the profession (Twomey and Meadus, 2008; Yi and Keogh, 2016).

4.2.10 Observed sign language in practice

The final situation in which participants were first exposed to sign language was observing sign language being used in practice. Edward remembered "*seeing a group of teenagers, deaf teenagers at Blackpool pleasure beach signing together and I remember really staring at them and being quite fascinated*".

Similarly, Theo explained:

I happened to go to a nightclub with some friends, saw some people signing in the nightclub and people were going "oh, that looks really interesting, oh, why don't we learn that?" and then the beginning of the next academic year, so the September or whatever it was a group of us went to the local adult education college to sign up to, on their sign language stage one course and it ended up with me being the only person on the course.

The strong influence of direct exposure to the use of sign language has recently been illustrated by the successful involvement of Rose Ayling-Ellis in the 2021 series of the BBC dancing show *Strictly Come Dancing*. Rose is the first deaf contestant the show has included and from the very first episode, the British public saw her using sign language and working with interpreters when communicating with the judges, the hosts and her dance partner, Giovanni Pernice. The media reported that 'Rose has inspired

'a surge in people learning British Sign Language' (Lawton, 2021). Equivalent examples can be seen in the USA with deaf people having success on popular celebrity shows and deaf actors starring in popular TV, for example the ABC Family TV show 'Switched At Birth' which also featured other deaf actors including Katie Leclerc, Sean Berdy, Marlee Matlin and Ryan Lane (IMDb, 2022b). The storyline focuses on two teenage girls who were switched at birth and how their lives are drastically changed when they find out. The website *StartASL.com* reported that 'on March 4, 2013, ABC Family aired the first and only television episode shot entirely in ASL. It was a smash hit and the first of its kind. The episode was incredibly moving and inspirational' (Jay, 2021). One comment on the *StartASL.com* website from 'Emily' stated:

I am obsessed with Switched at Birth & have even begun watching the seasons all over again. I have been so inspired by the show, the actors, and all of the sign language that takes place, that I have begun to take classes myself. Thank you for bringing a show like this to the public, where the rest of the world can take more notice of ASL and the deaf community.

These examples are offered simply to illustrate the impact of increasing the visibility of deaf people and the use of sign language in popular culture.

4.3 Chapter summary

This chapter has engaged with interpreters' initial exposure to sign language to underpin their motivation to build on their sign language skills and become sign language interpreters. The chapter has shown how different and varied initial exposure to sign language has been for the research participants and how those experiences have played a part in sparking initial interest to learn sign language or develop existing skills and knowledge developed through family life.

Foregrounding the accounts of participants has revealed a rich picture of the people, activities and events connecting the interpreters with the world of sign language interpreting and the different sites where these connections have been made. Taken together the findings suggest interesting forms of connection. Earlier in the chapter I argued that connections between deaf people and hearing interpreters, within and beyond the (conventional) family can be viewed as a differently developing form of

family practice, 'the deaf family', based on shared knowledge of sign language and familiarity with deaf culture. But of course, hearing interpreters with no, or tenuous, links with deaf people and deaf culture do not suddenly become part of that family. Their attraction to interpreting and commitment to learning draws them into the family of the marginalised deaf community, and with developing knowledge of sign language, its variations and nuances, comes greater knowledge of deaf culture. As Shaw (2014) has argued, this places interpreters in roles as allies, associated with the politics of deaf culture, in seeking recognition and civil rights (Halley, 2020).

The findings in this chapter also reveal something not highlighted in earlier studies, which is the challenge in categorising different forms of first exposure to sign language and how that led individuals to develop their skills and become interpreters. It was clear in this study that some early forms of exposure overlapped or were intertwined. This was evidenced by Edward whose mother had a good friend who had deaf parents. He saw this friend interpreting for her parents in church and so he would fit the categories of family friend who is deaf or hearing, church and observed sign language in practice. However, in telling their stories of initial exposure and later development of sign language skills, participants painted a picture of sign language 'introducers', 'influencers' and 'attractors'. In many, but not all, cases, participants had met someone who can be described as a language introducer. These are people who exposed or introduced BSL to those participants who had not encountered BSL before. This exposure planted the seed of wanting to explore BSL further and expand their knowledge of the language. In addition, there were language influencers who were individuals who provided encouragement and support, feedback, and reinforcement on the language learning journey. An example is Riley's colleague who took him under her wing and encouraged him to develop his skills further. It is important to recognise that 'influencers' also came in the form of employers who prompted individuals to undertake training. And interpreters who came from 'caring professions' including religious organisations, gave a clear sense of being influenced by strong social justice values rather than by influential people. The third group, sign language 'attractors', were those with no direct connection to the participants who observed them while they were signing, either live, on TV or film, or at the theatre. This group included interpreters and deaf people communicating with each other using BSL.

There are also parallels to be found in this study with Simpson's (2004) work. The participants in this study who did not have a family member who was deaf, found they enjoyed learning sign language and were motivated to continue that learning journey (section 2.5.1). They were interested in sign language and the deaf community and found they want to develop that interest into more than simply a hobby or interest and for it to become a career. These participants are similar to Simpson's (2004) participants who followed a career path in something they were interested in - namely the love of books, working with children, travelling, and meeting people.

The next chapter (Ch. 4) goes further to examine the motivations for the research participants to build upon their language knowledge and train to become a qualified interpreter.

Chapter 5 - Motivations to enter sign language interpreting

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter related to the initial exposure to sign language which prompted the interpreters to continue to learn more and achieve formal qualifications in the language. This chapter will focus on the motivations of the 38 research participants to continue to develop their language skills and qualify as BSL interpreters.

McCormack et al. (2021, p. 191) encourage us to reflect on 'why we spend, at a conservative estimate, a quarter of our adult lives working' and they posit that people will each have their personal motivations which will 'focus on issues such as gaining a sense of personal identity, striving for 'something better', developing specific skills, connecting to a social network and, of course, earning money' (McCormack et al., 2021, p. 191). These, and other motivations, were identified by my research participants as motivating factors for pursuing a career as a BSL interpreter. Considering the working patterns of the research participants, they were mostly freelance with interpreting as their only job, a pattern that reflects findings from the 2021 census of interpreters and translators (Napier et al., 2021).

Broadly, there were two sets of motives emerging from the one-to-one interviews and Facebook group - extrinsic which are for the good of others and intrinsic for the good of themselves (Ryan and Deci, 2000). However, like the initial exposure to BSL, extrinsic and intrinsic motivations are not mutually exclusive and data from this study showed that male BSL interpreters can be motivated to become an interpreter influenced by both extrinsic and intrinsic factors. With a focus on gender it would be helpful to contrast men's motivations with what is known about women's motivations to become BSL interpreters. However, among the limited research on women in sign language interpretation (Artl, 2015; Valentin, 2019) questions of motivation are conspicuous by their absence, leaving only research on the motivations of female conference interpreters of spoken languages (Hickey, 2019). As discussed in chapter 2 (2.8.1) Hickey (2019) found that they were strongly motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic factors: i) the opportunity to use their language skills beyond teaching, ii) a search for stimulation and personal development; iii) a sense of importance in joining

a prestigious profession with opportunities to help others; and iv) the sense of freedom and flexible nature of the profession. Comparing these findings with those of male conference interpreters of spoken languages (Ryan, 2015), Hickey (2019) identified similarities between men and women in the search for meaningfulness and the flexibility offered by the profession, a key difference in that some men were motivated by dissatisfaction with previous employment while women were not, and while remuneration was an important consideration, it was less important for women than men. While we might reasonably expect some similarities on motivations to join the profession, the current gap in knowledge confirms the novelty of exploring intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of sign language interpreters and speaks to an opportunity for further research into women's motivations to become sign language interpreters.

Returning to the findings about men's motivations, extrinsic factors included:

Extrinsic factors include:

- Providing access to information
- Providing a better service to deaf people
- Enabling advancement for deaf people
- Facilitating social justice
- Improving language skills
- Remuneration

Intrinsic factors include:

- Desire for a career change or progression
- Personal skills development
- A desire for interaction with deaf people
- Enjoying the flexibility, variety, and amount of work available
- Having pride in the work

5.2 Extrinsic motivations

An extrinsic motivation is defined as when 'an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome' (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 60) which could be an activity that is

done for the good of others rather than for the self and these actions are explored in the following section of this chapter.

5.2.1 Access to information

An example of an extrinsic motivation for the good of others was the focus on such aspects as a commitment to equality and empowerment of the deaf community by providing access to information thereby reducing barriers that the deaf community persistently face. The reason these barriers exist are because there are insufficient hearing signers in society and because there are not appropriately qualified BSL interpreters provided in interactions between deaf and hearing people. Breaking down these barriers and providing access to information in turn empowers the deaf community, resulting in equality and advancement of deaf people.

The recognition that some deaf people do not have access to information in the same way as hearing people do, was a motivation for some of the men to become BSL interpreters. Freddie explained:

For me my job is to assist with communication. Communication and interaction. And that's it. That's primarily what I'm there for. Yeah there are many layers to that but for myself as an interpreter we're there to ensure that two people are able to communicate and understand each other's intentions rather than just the words they choose to use because for me that's a massive part of what we do actually the way, the words someone may use and what they actually (original emphasis) mean by it are two very different things and my job is just to give access to that.

When he began to explain his view, I initially felt that he was expressing a model of interpreting which very much met the criteria for the 'conduit model' in that he was like a telephone giving access to two people talking (Neumann Solow, 1981 p. 6). However, with his emphasis on achieving an equivalent meaning to exchanges, he is aligning this access to information with the model which describes the interpreter as facilitator (Llewellyn-Jones and Lee, 2014). He recognises that there is a distinction between words and intentions and how important it is for him as an interpreter to ensure that both parties are aware of those idiosyncrasies. The facilitation of communication was also highlighted by Arlo when he said: *"I do something enabling and it feels like at the*

end of the day that I have endeavoured to facilitate something positive and that brings huge value to me". Although this is recognised as a facilitation expertise, there is an element of self-gratitude in his action. The use of the expression '*huge value to me*' suggests his interpreting skills add to his self-esteem. This is like Charlie when he remembered interpreting for a counselling appointment and recognised the part he played in the interaction:

It was good to see some outcome at the end where, you know, it's... I mean I am not saying I've helped them because I haven't given them any support, direct support, in that sense, I was the person indirectly doing interpreting but it's good to see that the person has had some sessions, some really good psychological support and they've come out the other end. You feel good about it.

Charlie is appreciating that he is not the trained counsellor and offering the therapy to the deaf person but is cognisant of the fact that without him being there, the deaf person would not be able to access the information and the therapist would not be able to provide their expertise. Harley also enjoys the sensation that, as the result of the interpretation he provides, the deaf client has access to information and thereby achieves something.

I'd rather just go to GP appointment or go to a social work thing because it feels more personal and it's... that's kind of what I like about Interpreting. I like getting to know someone before, and then they're trying to get something done and they get it done and they're happy because they achieve this thing. I think I like, I find that a lot more interesting and more satisfying than just interpreting language, which is useful and people need it too but it's almost the language part is interesting but I am also interested in the connection and the satisfaction of helping someone do a thing. Getting this thing done.

Harley described how he felt happy that his deaf client was able to achieve something for themselves and said because he had played a part in the interaction, "*they get it done and they're happy because they achieve this thing*". He recognised that although he played a part in the success of the deaf client getting what they wanted, it was not him that achieved it but the deaf client because they were able to use him to interpret.

Providing this access goes some way to reducing barriers which the interpreters identified they see on a frequent basis which some were unaware of prior to working with the deaf community. Harvey said:

After starting to mix with deaf people, the realisation of the ridiculous barriers that are still out there sort of made me think "I want at some point to work in this field somehow". I didn't know exactly then how it was going to... I didn't think at that point I wanted to be an interpreter, but I fell in love with the language and met some really fascinating people along the way.

Access was also provided in a more informal way. This is often the case when mixing with members of the deaf community socially. Harrison describes this informal interpreting and providing access to information happening a great deal at home with his mother and recalled:

So interpreting was absolutely integral to growing up. It was, you know, there was no subtitles on TV so I would interpret what was on television, I would interpret with neighbours, with anything that was happening around and as I got older, I would interpret on the phone for mum, she would also have another deaf friends and so I'd occasionally, very informally, interpret with them. She was involved in the Deaf Christian Fellowship and so I would sometimes interpret there. And in some ways for me, the transition was never about becoming an interpreter, well, that's an interesting one actually, I wouldn't have regarded myself as an interpreter at that point. That was just family life, you know. In the same way that you don't regard yourself as a cook because you cook at home.

This was a finding that was quite unique to sign language interpreting in comparison to other predominantly female professions in that there is an identity formation beginning early in the lives of children who grow up in deaf families. Harrison described that he did not view himself as an interpreter even though informal interpreting was taking place when he would relay information on the television or conversations between neighbours and importantly for his mother deaf friends who he describes interpreting 'with' rather than 'for'. Others may not label him as an interpreter or language broker even though that is the role he was adopting. In contrast to children

who have grown up with a parent who is a nurse or a primary teacher, they are unlikely to provide routine medical services or teach. They would not be exposed to the practice of the work they would choose to undertake as an adult, in the same way as children from a deaf family would be exposed to interpreting.

5.2.2 Better service to the deaf community

Some interpreters expressed that they wanted to develop their skills and knowledge and become person-centred qualified interpreters to provide a better service to the deaf community. This relates to interpreters caring about the clients they work with and is explored further in section 6.3 of this thesis. This development of skills and knowledge came from two different perspectives. One was from their own recognition of their own skills and the other was from seeing the level of service the deaf community was receiving from the existing pool of interpreters and feeling that it was not providing the community with the level of service they deserved.

Ellis took some time out from interpreting and when he came back into the profession, his focus was to re-establish his professional skills which he said took approximately 6-7 months and this was recognised by people he encountered. He described focusing all his attention on this activity for the benefit of the community and the service they would receive when he said:

This is human lives at stake here, this is not just me and signing. This is, if I don't get that medication right that could be really serious issue and I pride myself on doing a good job. And hopefully, you know, I've only been back into a little bit but in time being a role model for other interpreters. The signing is secondary is the behaviour and the ethics that's the important bit.

Archie also expressed his passion for professionalism for the benefit of the people he interprets for when he said:

I am passionate about providing a professional and valuable service to my clients whether they are hearing or deaf. Those I work with regularly I try to get to know in a professional and friendly way. I try to remember things that are important to them so that we have topics to discuss when we meet again (when appropriate).

In this comment, Archie recognises that providing a person-centred interpreting experience by remembering appropriate information about the deaf people he works with, means that those deaf people feel valued. He had previously described his strong connection to his deaf cousin and one which was formed through sign language which “*even her own family don't have access to*” because they don't use sign language. So, it is no surprise that he wants to think about creating connections and incorporating that into his practice to make connections with the people he works with. Charlie also shared this person-centred sentiment when he said “*You've just got to think what's the best thing for the client. What's the best way of producing the best product that's going to be understood? And provide a professional service*”.

Carter could see first-hand the affect the on the deaf community who might receive a sub-standard level of interpreting service. He said:

[I was] frustrated by my other half's annoyance and also that expressed by my friends as well about the declining skill set of newly qualified interpreters coming through the NVQ system. The standards are dropping year by year. So, my... it's not that... I don't wanna sound big headed about it, but it was just about me wanting to do something about it and trying to improve the standards. So, you know I've worked for the deaf community for 25 years I thought I had something to contribute, so this is where I am.

The frustration Carter felt was the motivation he needed to do something about the declining standards and felt that the skills and knowledge he had acquired over the years, could be best placed in raising the standards for the benefit of the deaf community. While these contributions show a commitment to providing a high-quality service for deaf people, it is arguably more important to understand what constitutes a high-quality service from a ‘deaf perspective’. Evidence here suggests that the ideal interpreter has been described as ‘flexible enough to switch between interpreter roles; is the deaf person’s ears and eyes to facilitate communication; is professional; has had training; is knowledgeable about communication pragmatics (e.g., register, introductions, turn taking); does not interject their own opinions or reactions; wants to work in a team with the deaf person; someone who is human and not a robot; has a good attitude’ (Napier, 2011).

5.2.3 Advancement for deaf people

Having a professional and high standard of access to information and communication for deaf people ensures that the people within the community can advance in whatever pursuits they wish to follow. Harrison, who grew up with a deaf mother, reflected that he has seen this change in the people he has met over time.

In my life I've seen deaf people move from very mundane jobs to being able to be in professional roles, initially in deaf organisations but now in mainstream society and really, you know, and watching deaf people work with hearing people and the impact that has on hearing peoples' perceptions of what's possible.

Advancement of deaf people might be perceived as empowerment through the communicating and connecting skills of interpreters. However, Carter, who had previously worked in the social care sector felt strongly that it was not the responsibility of the interpreter to empower the deaf person and that they should be doing it themselves via the interpreting service they received. He said:

I have a bit of an issue when it comes to 'we should empower them'. Actually, they should be empowered by and of themselves. It's not our job to give them that power, you know we might have information that they might feel useful or we can give that information to them in a range of ways but when it comes to that whole power and control thing, we need to be very careful as a profession not to be seen as... just because we use our voices to give them a voice, we are not the ones that hold the power and the control and actually that should be about deaf people claiming it for themselves and about having knowledge about rights and responsibilities and knowing their rights. Our job really is just to be seen in the background almost, just facilitate that conversation rather than the ones handing the power to them. I do struggle with that issue of power because it's not our job to empower them.

Here Carter shows his understanding of power in personal and professional relationships and without using the word, referred to his role as enabling rather than empowering. This approach is consistent with the social model of disability which

relates to the social exclusion of individuals compared to any physical limitations they may experience. This can only ring true if interpreters are provided to the deaf and hearing community to be able to communicate with each other thereby 'removing barriers' (Shakespeare, 2016, p. 197). Harvey shared the same sentiment as Carter and reflected that *"It's not about helping, it's about information, it's about communication, it's about equality"*.

Being able to provide that access to see deaf people advancing, despite the many barriers in place is something that Harrison emphasised.

I regard interpreting as a real privilege, you know, and actually this is really important for me, I know it's not a gendered thing but watching... in my life I've seen deaf people move from very mundane jobs to being able to be in professional roles, initially in deaf organisations but now in mainstream society and really, you know... and watching deaf people work with hearing people and the impact that has on hearing peoples' perceptions of what's possible and how can they, you know, whatever it is, a social worker working with hearing people has a different impact from a hearing social worker, you know, and I regard it as a massive (original emphasis) privilege to do that job and I enjoy doing it and I enjoy using the skills and knowledge I have.

He went on to describe the privilege of being in a position to train people that he really respected and to be able to *"help other people do the stuff they're really good at and do it well"*. This is something that clearly motivated Harrison to continue working with the people he engaged with in the deaf and interpreting communities.

This notion of privilege was highlighted in a blog post from someone who did not reveal their real name but who called themselves 'Not An Angry Deaf Person'. The post was in response to an interpreter in the US whose ethical choices were in question after providing American Sign Language interpretation 'on a public platform with a large national audience at this specific political moment' (Not An Angry Deaf Person, 2021). The platform was 'Hands of Liberty' (see: <https://www.facebook.com/HandsofLibertyASL>) and the moment referred to is the Presidential election win by Joe Biden in late 2020.

The comment the author of the blog made was: ‘you do not have the absolute right to be a sign language interpreter. Serving as a sign language interpreter is a privilege because we welcome (not always willingly) you into the most private aspects of our lives. If you abuse that privilege, we have the right to ask you to depart.’ (Not An Angry Deaf Person, 2021). The way the author of the blog describes that deaf people do not always willingly welcome interpreters is because they do not always have a choice of interpreter. Although research has shown that deaf people are generally satisfied with interpreters, when they choose their interpreter, or are allocated one with the skills and characteristics they would choose, their understanding of interpreted interaction is significantly higher. And deaf consumers have shared that ‘the key factors leading to comfort in working with interpreters are understanding of the consumer and context, professionalism, and attitude’ (Napier and Rohan, 2009, p. 193). However, it is suggested that the trend is for deaf people who are recognised as leaders may have greater control of the selection of their interpreters than was had in the past and compared to ‘grass roots’ members of the deaf community (Haug et. al., 2017) thereby highlighting potential inequality within the deaf community.

5.2.4 Social justice

Other interpreters also felt strongly that their role goes some way to achieving social justice for the deaf person in a predominantly hearing world. As Arlo described, when he was younger he felt that *“there was quite a bit of injustice out there and unfairness and unhappiness about how life could be”* and he went on to describe that his motivations for BSL interpreting *“are rather more social justice, diversity and inclusion because those are the things that have probably woven their way through this conversation, about how we are and what we want to be”*. It seems that, through his work as an interpreter, he is striving to redress the imbalance that some people face because of their label as ‘disabled’ due to their deafness. Scott-Hill (2014, p. 89) refers to deaf people as those who ‘perceive themselves to be excluded from the dominant areas of social and cultural reproduction by the perpetuation of a phonocentric worldview’. In other words, deaf people do not place emphasis on sound, as the hearing majority do, and do not view themselves as disabled but as a linguistic minority with their own culture.

It was through seeing interpreters working that Harvey realised how important creating

an environment conducive to empowerment to achieve equality for deaf people was. He said: *“I think that it’s not about helping, it’s about information, it’s about communication, it’s about equality”*. Alfie described it as a level playing field when he said *“I’m creating, I’m trying to create opportunities for people on a level playing field for them to get stuff done which other people take for granted and you know I suppose that works for deaf people and hearing people who are trying to work with deaf people and you know, it’s, I’m facilitating things”*. This comment emphasises that Alfie is considering all interlocutors and not just the deaf people involved in discussions.

Archie talked about equality from both a professional and personal perspective:

I like going in and making sure everybody has the same bite at the cherry. Everybody has. My cousin did not have an equal playing field from day one. I think things would be quite different for her if back in those days there was the education possibilities, the therapy possibilities. She didn't get any of that. So, if I walk into a court, I want to make sure that everyone, no matter what side of the dock they're on, has the same opportunity to put their case forward and to let the law do its work.

Archie’s point reinforces the fact that sign language interpreting, for many interpreters, is not simply a job but a vocation which provides deep satisfaction and fulfilment. Satisfaction was also expressed by Harley (section 5.2.1) when he described the satisfaction he got when outcomes were achieved through interpreting at a GP appointment or within social services because his deaf clients *“get something done and they... achieve”* something which they wouldn’t had it not been for the provision of an interpreter.

These contribution underline importance of reflecting on the complex relationships between deaf people and interpreters and what this means for where, if at all, hearing interpreters fit into the deaf community (Miner, 2021). Throughout their training and subsequent working life, interpreters are expected to build relationships with the deaf community to develop interpersonal and intercultural work, which is optimal when trust has been established between the deaf and interpreting communities. Without this connection, the collaborative working between deaf people and the hearing people they are communicating with, described by Alfie above, becomes more challenging.

The important but contested role of trust has been discussed by O'Brien et al., (2023, p. 25) who comment on interpreters' claims that: 'trust is a prerequisite to a successful interaction'. In contrast the research team of seven deaf academics declare 'that 'trust' is not a useful or productive concept for our interpersonal and professional aims'. More useful were interpreters' values, competencies, and performance. This implies choosing interpreters based on their education, their involvement in deaf communities, their understanding of domains and language used in such domains, their political views, their confidentiality, and respect for professional boundaries, as well as their fees charged.

5.2.5 Improving language skills

Some of the interpreters recognised that if they were to be able to offer the level of professional service their clients deserved, they needed to improve their language skills to a sufficiently high standard. Ellis was quite direct when he said: "*I suppose in a nutshell the motivation to be an interpreter was I just wanted to be good at signing*". He went on to say:

The motivation was, I just didn't feel fluent, and I think when you meet CODAs - children of deaf adults - there is something else there and I couldn't quite grasp it and I still don't have that but I'm closer. I'm closer to it. I never fail to tell them that "I can't do what you just did, I don't have that process in my head", I can mimic it, I can mimic it pretty well actually, but I don't have it. It's not there.

Growing up in a deaf household does not necessarily mean that an interpreters' BSL skills will be fluent. Harrison explained that his mother "*was one of these deaf people who thought she should use English for me growing up but actually was fundamentally a BSL user*". She was adapting her BSL to take into consideration that he was hearing. Later in life Harrison improved his BSL and reflected that:

[The] transition to deliberately using BSL was probably more important for me than any sense of becoming an interpreter because that's just what I did. So, embracing in the language was more of a symbolic moment and I was more BSL than my mum in some senses, for a while, and then eventually she became more

BSL.

Harrison's language development seemed slow and steady, but this was not the case for Freddie. He is a person who wanted to get through his language development at a rapid pace by immersion. He reflected that because of his experience as an assistant psychologist working with deaf children, his signing skills were quite advanced:

I had a certificate for level 2 [BSL] but I was signing level 3 – 6 [BSL], more 6 than 3, so I was assessed by 3 deaf tutors who said I didn't need to do the level 3 [BSL] as a combination of the experience I'd had and also the practical learning had been done during my job as an assistant psychologist and also spent a lot of my time in schools observing support, writing observations etc., so I'd gained a lot of foundation that you learn within level 3 [BSL].

Freddie thrived on immersion and his route to qualification was fashioned in this way. He explained:

I was very lucky to get onto the SLI course so I got onto that straightaway and that was at one year course rather than a two year, which then again meant that I had six months focusing on the BSL and then I had a year focusing on the interpreting where I kind of lived, breathed, because I was well aware that other people would have gone to university and done deaf studies, they would have had three years to develop their skills. I didn't have that, and I didn't give myself that time, which I'm okay with because actually I fully immersed myself. So, I think there's a difference between taking your time with it or actively pushing and pushing and pushing.

Isaac found that a more personalised approach to improving his language skills was important to him. *"I managed to find an excellent Deaf BSL teacher whom I paid privately for a few months to give me one to one tuition. She later suggested that if I wanted to gain qualifications in BSL I should enrol at college for Level One [BSL]. That hadn't been my aim at first, but with that encouragement I signed up to start Level One [BSL]".* He found that it was not only the college course that enabled him to improve. *"With the freely volunteered support of native signers with rich BSL, I improved my visualisation and productive skills".* All this was for the benefit of the clients he was

working with. *“I decided that aiming high again was my only option. I don't like doing things by halves, so I ploughed on and on to improve my skills for the sake of the students I work with”.*

The sense of achieving something at a higher level for the benefit of clients was also expressed by Riley. He said: *“At first I didn't really want or think I could be an interpreter, I just wanted to study to a higher level just so that I could do my job better”.* It was only later that he realised he could be an interpreter because of the skills he was gaining.

I enrolled on a level 3 [BSL] course, and I'd say it was level 3 [BSL] where I had quite a few sort of eureka moments where, you know, these concepts that you found quite difficult to understand finally became clear and you know there was quite a few of those cases where “Oh! WOW! Of course. I get it, I get it”. And it was only then that I started to sort of think “Oh, you know, maybe that is something I could do.

Toby's original motivation to learn sign language related to some deaf customers he encountered on a regular basis at his place of work. However, after he started his Level 2 BSL, he changed job location and considered developing his signing skills further.

I had this thing of “Do I continue? What's in it for me?” because my motivation to learn sign language had now changed. The reason for learning sign language is no longer there because there were no deaf people at this new branch. And decided it was a different tutor and it was harder to learn level 2 [BSL], of course, but the tutor was really good, she was brilliant and so carried on with that and just carried on learning sign language for my own personal benefit and then of course when you start learning sign language then you're hanging out with deaf people and it opens up a whole new world of people to meet, places to go, stuff to learn, all sorts of stuff.

So, what started for Toby as an extrinsic motivation soon turned into an intrinsic motivation demonstrating the co-occurrence of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. More of these are examined in the following section of this chapter.

5.2.6 Remuneration

When interpreters first entered the interpreting profession, for many it was because they were going to get paid for something they had a skill in, without really considering this to be a career option. Harrison recalled an incident where he was asked to interpret because someone had seen him interpreting informally for someone:

She said "Oh, I saw you interpreting, could... we need someone for a team meeting tomorrow, do you mind doing it?" So, and I, I kind of, must've looked at her slightly puzzled and she said: "And of course we'll pay you". I was 21, you know. I hadn't gone to university yet because I started late, so no I was 20. So I just went "Yeah, that's fine" and I had no sense whatsoever of this being a job or, you know, someone was basically offering to give me money for something that I do and I, kind of, hoped I didn't make a fool of myself but... So, I went along and did that the next day, I had a level 1 at the time and that's all (original emphasis) I had and within a very, very short space of time I was full-time educational interpreting for [establishment], on a freelance basis but... And it's really difficult looking back that far and remember what my experience of that was and so I can only, kind of, tell stories but once, so first of all I thought it was easy money, you know, it was something I did and someone was willing to pay me, at that time, well for that and that was nice, it was before I went to university so I hadn't even got a sense of my career starting yet.

There were also experiences shared by the interpreters who were describing the need to get paid to do a job because of the simple fact that they need money to live day-to-day. Freddie said:

There are times that you get... I get booked purely because I'm a male and that's useful for me because I have to pay a mortgage and actually, I don't care why am being booked if I'm... within reason... as long as they're happy with it and I'm happy with it then why not?

Freddie is emphasising the need to earn a living, but also pointing to the privilege afforded by being part of the male minority of interpreters. This privileged position is frequently discussed in the literature on men in predominantly female professions in relation to opportunities open to them (Baljoon et al., 2018; Litosseliti and Leadbeater,

2013; Simpson, 2004, 2005; Skelton, 2003; Twomey and Meadus, 2008).

Ethan was in a similar situation needing to increase his earnings. He wrote: *“I was also about to get married and start a family and was thinking about providing for that and getting on the property ladder. Something that was just not possible in the area I was living/working on the wage I was earning at the charity”*. Here, Ethan is considering his role within the home as provider and breadwinner, with a need to bring in sufficient income. Other studies of predominantly female professions have found that while remuneration is an important consideration for all, this may take the form of security rather than level of remuneration which is more important for men than women (Hickey, 2019).

Jenson was also wanting to get on the property ladder and felt that was not going to be possible on the “paltry” salary he was on in a previous role. He said: *“I thought “I’m never going to be able to buy a house at this rate and I knew that interpreting paid better, I didn’t know quite what money you would be on, being an interpreter at that point but I knew it was not as paltry as a [previous role]”*.

Before Freddie became an interpreter, he was in a career which provided him with an income which he was happy with but at the same time, he wanted to change career because he had *“fallen out of love”* with the one he was in. He said *“I was looking for a job, but I didn’t want to start again. I’d already sort of... I’d reached that professional level but also, I felt that I’d reached that income level, I didn’t want to have to go back again, although I did have to for a little while”*.

A short-term reduction in pay was acceptable to him based on the knowledge that remuneration would soon increase once he became a qualified interpreter. He said:

I think part of my reason apart from wanting an income at a professional level, there was also that I was aware of the practical income side of it in that interpreting pays quite well, depending on where you work or what you do and that was one of the things from a more practical sense was there.

It is recognised that the training process to become a qualified interpreter can be a

lengthy and costly one and this was something that Joshua raised.

For me I guess it was always a financial sacrifice... I guess I kind of got to a point where I'd spent so much money learning that I felt I almost felt like I had to achieve interpreter status, just to be able to kind of say I've got it and qualified.

Joshua's attitude was possibly linked to the fact that was not his primary source of income. At the time of the interview, he was working full-time from home on a flexible basis and hoping this flexibility would allow him to interpret around his full-time job.

While remuneration can attract some interpreters to the profession, this was not always associated with job satisfaction. As Jacob explained:

I was doing support work and I was interpreting, the nature of the support work meant that I would start work at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and work till midnight which left me the morning free so I was able to slowly build my experience, my work, as an interpreter, but it got to the stage where I could work eight hours in care or do one GP appointment and I would earn the same amount of money. And unfortunately, that financial side of it, because of the nature of the earnings, meant that I kind of got rid of my old job. Whereas I would much prefer to do support work over interpreting any day. Support work is really enriching and lovely and great, whereas the interpreting work is quite lonely. Kind of a lone ranger. You ride up and then leave and that's it.

For Jacob, support work gave him an enhanced sense of satisfaction, since it allowed him to do what he really enjoyed, as is reported for men entering a number of predominantly female professions such as librarianship, teaching and cabin crew (Simpson, 2004). This focus on enjoyment moves us on from extrinsic to intrinsic motivations.

5.3 Intrinsic

Intrinsic motivation is defined as 'the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence. When intrinsically motivated a person is moved to act for the fun or challenge entailed rather than because of external prods,

pressures, or rewards' (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 56).

5.3.1 Career / Professional development

One intrinsic motivation highlighted was a change or advancement in career. Almost all the interpreters had worked in other fields before training to become a sign language interpreter and these fields were wide-ranging. An example of this is Freddie who had *“fallen out of love”* with his career choice but within that career, because of his attendance at conferences, talks and presentations, he acquired a *“good standing for understanding deaf culture”* which prepared him for the transition to interpreting.

Reflecting on his change of career, Carter explained: *“I think men tend to kind of almost fall into interpreting rather than it be a chosen career. It's something often that comes as a second or third career choice rather than somebody who's 16 going “I want to be an interpreter””*. He recognised that this can be different for people who have grown up with a deaf family member and with his experience as a trainer of interpreters he added: *“Apart from the one guy we've got on our course who brother's an interpreter. I mean he's 22 so obviously it's his chosen career option. But that makes sense for somebody whose parents are deaf but certainly I think anybody - any male interpreter I've met possibly with the exception of one, they've all just kind of fallen into interpreting”*.

Henry also recognised that the male interpreters with deaf family members would sometimes start their career working with deaf people in some form and then transition to interpreting at a later stage. He recognised that this could be *“children of deaf adults or siblings of deaf people”* who have *“gone into teaching, teachers of the deaf or they've been in the social work kind of side of things have come up through that route. Yeah. Yeah. There's not many that come into it new because there weren't pathways there for it. I think that's certainly my feeling”*. However, there are now the pathways for men to become interpreters without having a deaf family member as was the case for many of the men I interviewed for this research.

Alfie was working in the field of deafness, but became disheartened by not being able to work, to what he believed, was his full potential, the result of not having formal qualifications in interpreting:

I enjoyed the work, I enjoyed the people I met there, I started to have more of an idea of some of the social issues but most of the people I had contact with in the first couple of years were deaf professionals, working at that deaf organisation and I worked there for two years, got totally fed up with the job because I had [qualifications] and there I was writing other peoples' emails and on the sly I would go through all of their teaching materials for BSL and kind of just up them a few levels in terms of linguistic content and that kind of thing. And they didn't even say "thank you", (laughter) so I just got really fed up and so I went off and was just a CSW [Communication Support Worker] freelance and I continued doing that until a couple of years ago when I got to be a trainee, finally.

Alfie's account is reflective of Hickey's (2019) research in the field of spoken language conference interpreting where she found men were more likely to move into the field as a result of tedium with previous jobs, a motivation not found among women interpreters. Men not being content with menial jobs is a complex issue which is influenced by a several factors such as societal expectations of men to pursue careers which are seen as prestigious or high-status or in the case of Alfie, the personal aspiration to seek a more challenging role.

Carter had been working in the predominantly female care sector for several years where he picked up and developed his knowledge and skills in sign language. It wasn't until he found himself redundant that he began to consider career options other than within the care sector. He saw an opportunity to meet the needs of the deaf community as a man with considerable knowledge of sign language, because of being in a relationship with a deaf person, when he decided to pursue a career in interpreting. He reflected:

It (the career change) was born out of the frustration of the deaf community wanting more male interpreters, wanting somebody who was aware of that deaf culture and already in the community, rather than having to spend 10 years investing in a newby, in a trainee... frustrated by my other half's annoyance and also that expressed by my friends as well about the declining skill set of newly qualified interpreters coming through the NVQ system. The standards are dropping year by year. So, my it's not that I don't wanna sound big

headed about it but it was just about me wanting to do something about it and trying to improve the standards. So, you know I've worked for the deaf community for 25 years I thought I had something to contribute.

It is evident in Carter's words that he was motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. In one respect, the transition into interpreting was to raise standards for the deaf people receiving an interpreting service but he was also aware that he could gain employment from being within the minority of male sign language interpreters in his region.

Toby was facing overt homophobia in the job he was working in within the finance sector, and this was one of the reasons he decided to change career. He explained:

I was working in a business centre with a particular... idiot as a manager. I was quite an experienced managers assistant working in a business centre, this manager came in, great things were expected from him. His father was a regional director, he was expected to follow in his father's footsteps. A completely ignorant git and I was working in [South Coast] and I think it was the first time that I'd seen such overt homophobia from anybody directly. I mean obviously I'm not naive, I know that it's out there, I see around all the time but in my workplace, I'd never heard anybody or seen anybody being directly homophobic and some of these guys customers were gay guys, some lesbians and he was extremely critical and, yeah, discriminatory in his comments and it was quite difficult because at work I wasn't out. So, because nobody was out, so you'd meet each other when you were going out on the scene but then you went back to going in the closet when you're at work and so loads of, kind of, conflict, all that sort of stuff, deciding I don't actually want to work here anymore, this is really not any good for me, so looked for a way to get out.

Wishing to leave his previous occupation where he felt extremely uncomfortable Toby described developing his language skills in his own time, made possible by a career change into adult education. He was registered as a Trainee Interpreter and realised: "if I wanted to develop to be an interpreter I needed to look to work more in the deaf world". Securing full-time employment offered him the opportunity to gain the experience he needed to become a qualified interpreter.

5.3.2 Skills development

A small number of interpreters had been working in the field of deafness and communicating with deaf people on a regular basis before becoming interpreters. They got to the stage where they felt they wanted to develop the skills they were already working with to a higher level and achieve registered status as a sign language interpreter. This was the case for Riley. *“I realised that I couldn't just sustain my skills with just one person and that I needed to sort of, you know, get involved in, you know, the wider deaf community”.*

Toby also felt the need to interact with more deaf people to improve his skills. He was working in the finance sector and had completed his language development and was looking to leave the finance sector and move into interpreting. He said:

A way out was a one-year contract working at [Adult Education Centre]. I was... by that time I was a trainee interpreter so, with NRCPD and so realised that if I wanted to develop to be an interpreter, I needed to... look to work more in the deaf world. The timing was ideal, so I switched my mortgage from a staff mortgage rate to regular rates, to a regular provider and, yeah, went to work for a year contract with [Adult Education Centre]. Part of that included training to become a qualified interpreter and so I stayed there for about another 4-5 years and then went freelance.

As we can see here, the route to becoming a qualified interpreter is a long one, involving work with deaf people and sign language prior to training to become an interpreter. This required recognition that skills development is not rapid and requires a high level of commitment to hone the necessary skills (Bontempo and Napier, 2007).

5.3.3 Interaction with deaf people

Some of the interpreters talked about the contact and interaction they had had with deaf people which was a strong motivator for continuing to develop their language skills and become qualified interpreters. Arlo said:

[I] was really looking to get into interpreting because I found I wasn't really having very much contact with deaf people... I like the

relationship side of it... all the people that I've worked with and currently work with are very generous and warm, supportive and they have a notion of community and relationship that kind of appeals to me.

Arlo came to interpreting from a background in social work, another predominantly female profession where relationships between professionals and service users are very important. For Harrison, who had grown up with a deaf mother, being part of the deaf community was important to him even when he was not in the deaf community, he had grown up in. He said: “*I went to university, went to the deaf club and so, kind of, stayed in contact there*”. Oliver also described spending time at the deaf club and reflected that:

I'd always been involved with my brother and sister going to the deaf clubs as a kid and very much with them rather than the hearing brother, so I think it [interpreting] was probably going to happen anyway but I didn't think of it as a career. It's [interpreting] always been around and it's something I fell into really. It wasn't necessarily a career choice to start with.

Becoming an interpreter and maintaining that contact with the community he grew up with was a strong motivator for still being involved in interpreting many years later. Charlie described this contact with the deaf community as a feeling of being “*emotionally invested*” in the deaf community. Harrison, Oliver, Jude, and Hugo, who all grew up with a deaf family member, expressed similar views. For these men, interpreting was not simply a job they did for money as it related to the deaf community, an integral part of their childhoods and growing up. Here we see connections between early life experience and the development of careers in sign language interpreting.

5.3.4 Flexibility, variety, and volume of work available

An appealing aspect of the role of sign language interpreter for several participants was the flexible working patterns, the variety of work available and the volume of work available, features also valued by male and female spoken language conference interpreters (Hickey, 2019). There were expressions of joy over the degree of autonomy in selecting interpreting assignments and hours of work.

5.3.4.1 Flexibility

Joshua, who learned sign language because of his mother's encouragement explained:

I guess I kind of got to a point where I'd spent so much money learning that I felt I almost felt like I had to achieve interpreter status, just to be able to kind of say I've got it and qualified. But I don't actually do it full time so I actually work full time from home so I'm quite flexible in that area and so that's why I thought well I may as well get qualified because I can kind of interpret and it can be quite flexible so I can interpret around my full-time job.

This flexibility also allowed Joshua to establish a sign language training company where he co-ordinates the recruitment of students, deals with the administration and will interpret when required. Ellis also spends some time on other activities outside interpreting. He offers tutoring because of his previous experience as a teacher and describes interpreting as something he feels lucky to “dip in and out of”.

In her survey of male spoken language conference interpreters Ryan (2015) had hypothesised that male conference interpreters ‘would not be attracted to the profession for the freelance aspect. However, just over half of the respondents indicated that they did indeed choose conference interpreting partly for the freelance/part-time aspect of the career’ (Ryan, 2015, p. 41). This shows that some male conference interpreters, like sign language interpreters, enjoy the flexibility afforded to them by working in a freelance capacity. This is something many men in other predominantly female professions cannot enjoy either because of what are largely non-negotiable work patterns, many requiring physical attendance during working hours, at both junior and senior levels.

The flexibility that characterises sign language interpreting as a profession is of particular interest to interpreters with caring responsibilities. The 2021 Census of Sign Language Translators and Interpreters (Napier et al., 2021, p. 36) found that 32% of female and 29% of male interpreters had caring responsibilities. Although the percentages for men and women are similar, female interpreters are more likely to work part-time as a result of responsibilities in the domestic sphere, a work pattern that

reduces earning potential and career prospects.

Freddie enjoyed interpreting theatre productions because he can spend more time at home while preparing for the show to help with raising children. He said:

I kind of want to throw the old-fashioned 'man goes to work, woman stays at home and looks after the child' sort a view, kind of, out the window. I'm the one that's more paternal (original emphasis) than her [girlfriend] being maternal (original emphasis). I quite like the idea of bringing up a child with actually, me being there and not just me coming home for dinner and me being the one that's actually there and my girlfriend is also more led towards going back to work not long after. I want to go part time, so I want to be at home more, I want to home-school - things that generally wouldn't be seen as a man's, not job but something that a man would choose to do historically. So actually, things like theatre, I can be at home and if the child eventually go to sleep then I can do a bit of prep, so there are reasons that I'm kind of choosing those domains as well because they fit in with how I want to work professionally but also, I don't want to work as much as work now. That's one of the other reasons. Yeah, I like the idea of being home more rather than being here there and everywhere which is how I am now.

Charlie recognised that flexibility as well as income is related to meeting the needs of the family unit and personal situations when he said:

I think the job lends itself to be able to look after your family well and to be able to pick and choose work and really shape your, your income around what you need in terms of your family commitments. So, you're able to look at your diary and you're able to say, you know, some work has come in, I'll accept work that day, I'm going to have to do something that day for the family, so I won't do that day. And still build in a decent amount of work to have a decent level of income to be able to do what you need to do.

And while Freddie talked about being involved in raising children which he found appealing, what was also important to him was the autonomy to make choices regarding the types of jobs he accepts and the clients he chooses to work with. He said:

One of the perks of being self-employed is no one can force me to work with anyone, so I can say “I don't want to” or “I won't accept the job” and that's just a personal choice. In other realms you kind of have to work with someone because you're told. For me, one of the benefits of being self-employed is that I get to choose, so there are clients that I don't work with because it just doesn't work. We're chalk and cheese. Whether it's on my side or their side and that's one of the benefits of being a self-employed interpreter, is that I get to make that choice, which is definitely what keeps me in the job (laughter).

Female interpreters may not experience quite the same freedom given the constraints associated with caring responsibilities (Napier et al., 2021, p. 36) and may not always have the luxury of choices if needing earn money.

Arlo reflected that there was an element of a systematic approach to interpreting which appealed to him unlike social work: *“in social work, you know, you take it home with you every single day, you know, that caseload never really goes away and the freedom of prepping for an assignment, interpreting an assignment and walking away from it kind of felt, really appealed to me.”* It seems that he can experience some form of closure at the end of the day without having to constantly think about work.

Although many deaf professionals will build a team of 'preferred' interpreters with appropriate skills and knowledge to meet their individual needs, this is often not the case for community assignments (e.g., health and social care) with a large proportion of interpreting assignments come through large multi-language interpreting agencies and smaller specialist sign language agencies. In 2017 the Department for Work and Pensions conducted a Market Review of British Sign Language and communications provision for people who are deaf or have a hearing loss reported that:

Many interpreters felt that agencies are constantly trying to try to drive down fees and costs, ask qualified interpreters to cover more of their travel costs and do not build personal relationships with interpreter or local deaf communities. Many express concerns that the current structure of the interpreting market is dissuading younger people from entering the sign language profession. There is a degree of tension in the market, with avoidance of some

agencies (i.e. interpreters and deaf people refusing to accept or commission work via certain agencies because of concerns about the quality of provision).

Recognising the potential fractured relationships between both interpreters and agencies, and deaf clients and agencies, Bobby was pragmatic saying, *“I know you're at the mercy of the jobs coming in from the agencies and that kind of thing, but I still feel like I'm my own boss in that sense and that just works better for me”*. He recognised that not all this work will come directly from the deaf community and that he must have a relationship with agencies but still feels he can retain a level of autonomy over his practice.

5.3.4.2 Variety

There are numerous situations in which sign language interpreters are needed to facilitate communication between deaf and hearing people. The variety of work available to interpreters is therefore wide-ranging and varied. The NRCPD encourages interpreters to advertise the areas in which they are prepared to accept assignments in (see appendix 13).

- Education
- Leisure
- Mental Health
- Health & Social Services
- Theatre, Arts, Television
- Legal and Quasijudicial
- Employment
- Other specialisms

Within these eight categories are 47 different assignment areas, and this is by no means an exhaustive list. This variety of work available to interpreters offers continued interest and development for interpreters. Hugo recalled a conversation he had with a colleague regarding the variety of work available:

There was one interpreter that I worked with quite a bit recently and they were saying how like they don't just want to be an interpreter

in just medical or an interpreter it just in theatre, like to do all, they like doing court, they like doing theatre and they say like at times they can get bored in court so they're going to theatre and then they get bored of theatre and I'll go and do that and it's just like you know, dip into as many things as they can, just to keep it more interesting and also just because they say you know you can't be, you don't wanna just specialise in one thing, you wanna try and be as good as you can in all these different things as well.

This makes the career more interesting, providing interpreters, with a range of opportunities to use their transferable skills, gain more experience and ultimately offer a better service to deaf people. This resonated with Harley, who reflected on the different types of jobs that he had been doing when relocating from one location to another:

It's very different kind of work than I'm used to, but I like that and there's more of a variety. I miss some of the work I used to do because I used to do lots of social work jobs, I did tons of PIP⁴¹ assess... not assessments, forms, and all sorts of things like that and I haven't done really anything like that here. But I've done other kinds of work that I'd never done in [original location], so it's been good to stretch me a bit and meet different people.

5.3.4.3 Volume of work available

There is a significant volume of work available to registered interpreters because of the number of deaf people needing access to information matched with a shortage of sign language interpreters (Kyle et al., 2005; Bontempo and Levitzke-Gray, 2009; Bontempo and Napier, 2011). As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, it is difficult to determine the exact number of people who use BSL as their first or preferred language, but there was recognition among participants that they were 'in demand' given the limited number of registered sign language interpreters in the UK.

Joshua explained: *"people told me that there weren't very many male interpreters and so we'd be a lot more in demand, so that just motivated me more I think, than anything*

⁴¹ Personal Independence Payment – a UK government scheme which can assist an individual with additional living costs because of a long-term physical or mental health condition or disability and difficulty achieving certain everyday tasks or mobilising because of an individual's condition. See: <https://www.gov.uk/pip>

else". Bobby had a similar experience and remembered that:

A friend of mine was telling me about they specifically wanted to become an interpreter and they told me about it and they actually, I remember the conversation I had now quite vividly, and what was I 20, 19? And they said "there is a lack" or "there is a demand for male interpreters" funnily enough and that conversation did stick with me. It wasn't my main motivation for becoming an interpreter because I didn't become, I didn't decide to become an interpreter then, but that made influence at that time.

This understanding of the demand for male interpreters reflects earlier research on sign language interpreters over nearly thirty years (Bontempo & Levitzke-Gray, 2009; Brien, Brown & Collins, 2002; Burch, 1997; Jones, 1995; Mapson, Crawley & Waddell, 2019; McDermid, 2009; Napier et al., 2021; Townsend-Handscomb, 2018).

Ellis said: *"I guess I always think... consider myself lucky. There's just loads of work you know if you want to make a living it's a good place to do it, though sign language".* Both Joshua and Ellis describe a landscape in which they can accept interpreting assignments because they are men and there is a demand for male interpreters. This in turn means that, as Ellis points out, interpreting can be a fruitful profession for men in terms of earnings as was discussed in section 5.2.6.

Alfie recognised that he had been offered assignments because he was a man and said *'I think that it's probably easier for me to get medical bookings than it otherwise would be because there's less competition for them. And I think sometimes where there are other, other situations it might make a difference with the person taking the booking that you know I'm a guy, but I don't know that'.*

There were also examples of male interpreters being offered interpreting assignments because the assignment was within the LGBT+ domain and it was identified that the interpreter was a member of the community. Alfie offered an example: *"Sometimes the gay thing has been a disadvantage and sometimes it's been an advantage. I know that's part of the reason I keep being asked back to the Queer Film Festival, because I fit in and because, because I'm gay. I think there's some positive discrimination that happens".* In this example, Alfie does not say that he is asked back to interpret the film

festival because of his interpreting skills, but primarily because he is a member of the LGBT+ community.

The medical domain was another area where male interpreters may be requested to work with a deaf male patient simply because of their gender. Noah shared that *“I moved from [city] to [south-west] and so I moved to [south-west] to be an interpreter and I was talking to [south-west] interpreters and at that time there weren't any male interpreters down here at all. They said “Oh, it was lovely to have a male interpreter because sometimes there are men going into hospital and they would rather have a male interpreter”*. Male interpreters may be motivated to undertake such bookings to satisfy some of the extrinsic motivations such as access to information (section 5.2.1), offering a better service to deaf clients (section 5.2.2) because of understanding men's bodies and male issues, and social justice (section 5.2.4) in that Alfie has helped in the process of ensuring that male patients could have access to a male interpreter line with their preferences and arguably meeting their needs more effectively (Jones, 2015; Rajacich et al., 2013).

However, the sense of a need to meet the demand for interpreting, this sometimes conflicts with work life balance. Charlie explained:

Sometimes the hardest thing to do with the job is to say “no” to jobs because you've got to commit to doing other things with your family. And that's quite hard to be strong and rigid about turning work down especially sometimes if you know it's going to be something important. But then you've got something else important that you must do for your family because that's what it is. It's hard to try and stay firm. Because I've thought you know “I'm going to have a day off. I'm not going to do anything that day” and then something comes in that's really urgent, and I've just dropped my thing to do it. And I've done it. At other times I've really regretted it because I've let somebody else down but other times, I've had to be a bit strong and go “no”. I think to myself “this is me as a single guy without any real responsibilities as such”, whereas imagine if I was married and I had three kids and one of them was ill or I had to go and do this and do that, you must be pulled emotionally in different directions about the demands of things at times.

Here Charlie recognises that it is important, at times, to say “no” to consider personal

or family needs and resist the pressure to be 'on call' to interpret constantly.

In contrast to Charlie, Joshua, had a rather different experience:

I thought that when I became an interpreter I would be in massive demand, and I don't think it's quite matched my expectation. Because so many people obviously when I was learning would say "oh, it's brilliant that you're a man and as interpreter's, there's not very many of you" so I don't think it's given me more work, but I do notice that actually people remember my name more. So, I had a situation recently where a man that I hadn't interpreted for at least 2 or 2 1/2 years and he came up to me and he remembered my name and he said "Oh, you're Chris right?" And I was thinking "yeah, how on earth do you remember that?" and he was just saying "oh, you know, it's because you're a man. There's not that many male interpreters so I just remember all the men". And I think he appreciated that because I could see, I think he, I guess, likes to see more men in the profession.

Although Joshua may not feel he is in demand, he is in the fortunate position of being remembered by the people he does work with.

5.3.5 Pride in the work

When I interviewed Ellis, he had recently re-joined the profession after a period away. He described how he had spent a great deal of time revalidating his interpreting skills before coming back to work. Here we are reminded of what he said in section 5.2.2:

I actually did way more CPD that I needed to, and I took about six or seven months, and that's all I did, I stopped work I didn't [do previous job], I didn't do anything else but that. You know I am blowing my own trumpet a little bit but everyone said, "You did it properly" and I said "Yes, yes I did". This is human lives at stake here, this is not just me and signing. This is... if I don't get that medication right that could be really serious issue and I pride myself on doing a good job. And hopefully, you know, I've only been back into a little bit but in time being a role model for other interpreters. The signing is secondary is the behaviour and the ethics that's the important bit.

It is the pride in the high standards that he delivers to his clients that is significant. Where some men working in predominantly female profession feel pride in their physical strength (Ferrari, 2016; Johansson, 2016), in contrast, Noah described how he was proud of his linguistic processing skills when he was interpreting in a difficult situation:

I felt I dealt with it well, I thought I handled it kind of smoothly and professionally and appropriately for the context... So, I felt quite proud of myself for not letting that sort of, you know, knock me off my track.

Noah's experience is another example of where a personal motivation of get something right affects others in relation to the service he is delivering to his clients and therefore for the good of others.

A different perspective of pride discussed by Charlie was the pride his family and friends expressed at him being an interpreter. He shared:

They find it a really unusual thing that I do because sometimes they wanna tell "you know what [name] does...?" and they wanna tell other people because it's a very unusual, not so much the fact that it's an interpreter but that it's a sign language interpreter, so working with deaf people and they sometimes call it "helping deaf people" which I don't really like but that's their explanation of it. So, they do seem to want to tell people. They seem quite proud of the fact that this is the type of thing that I do. And I felt like that I think when I was training.

The family and friends express pride in men's careers, it can have a positive impact on their professional lives even though it is recognised that encouragement of men to undertake 'caring' professions is low because of such things as threats to masculine image (Abu et al., 2019; Harding, 2009; O'Connor, 2015; Poliafico, 1998).

5.4 Gender and motivations

What is it that motivates men in particular to develop their BSL skills to become BSL interpreters? Drawing on psychological concepts of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation,

the data from this study present an interesting picture of motivations that both conform to, and subvert, gender norms. Key elements in this argument are linked to the nature of BSL interpreting as a profession. Combining skilful technical and caring aspects, the BSL interpreting profession is characterised by a high degree of autonomy for its members who for the most part work on a freelance basis, unencumbered by the control associated with employment in hierarchical organisations. This also means they are denied access to institutionalised arrangements for progression and promotion.

In the absence of evidence about women's motivations to take up BSL interpreting as a career, the closest gender comparisons of career motivations are drawn from respective studies of men and women in conference interpreting of spoken languages (Ryan, 2015; Hickey, 2019). These showed that men and women in these professions were motivated by some similar factors, i.e. seeking meaningfulness, and the flexible nature of the profession. However, they differed in relation to attitudes to previous jobs with men citing dissatisfaction as contributing to decisions to move into conference interpreting while this was not the case for women. And while remuneration was important for both men and women it was less important for women.

Theory driven analysis of the data in this study demonstrates an interesting mix of extrinsic motivations linked to the achievement of specific outcomes, and intrinsic motivations to undertake activities that are enjoyable (Simpson, 2004) and bring a sense of satisfaction (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivations included: providing deaf people with access to information, better services and ultimately, the advancement of deaf people in pursuit of social justice for this marginalised and excluded group. Intrinsic skills focused on the interpreters themselves included improving their own skills and remuneration. Intrinsic motivations were also expressed in terms of skills development and career change to be able to have greater interaction with a variety of people on a flexible basis, and to gain a sense of pride in their work.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, motivations overlapped for most participants who had all been introduced or attracted to BSL and influenced to develop their skills through interactions with deaf people and/or BSL interpreters. These attachments fed through in talking about motivations, something Charlie referred to as emotional investment in

the deaf community, view shared by Harrison, Oliver, Jude, and Hugo, who all grew up with a deaf family member.

Delving more deeply into these findings it was possible to identify extrinsic motivations that were both congruent and incongruent with prevailing gender norms. For example, Freddie was motivated by consideration of remuneration factors because of his family responsibilities. Toby on the other hand gave up his better paid job in the finance sector to train as a BSL interpreter. Freddie also conformed to the gender norm, or stereotype, of men's roles as focusing on the technical, insisting that interpreting was simply about achieving effective communication between deaf and hearing people: *"the words someone may use and what they actually mean by it are two very different things and my job is just to give access to that"*. Harley, on the other hand, felt very differently, valuing the relational aspects of interpreting: *"I find that a lot more interesting and more satisfying than just interpreting language"*. Arlo too articulated his intrinsic pleasure in achieving clear communication as: *"something positive and that brings huge value to me"*.

There were also contrasting motivations that spoke to the linguistic and caring aspects of the interpreting role, although resistance to the caring aspects of interpreting were understood by some participants as a matter of role clarity in achieving clear communication thereby enabling deaf clients to help themselves. Harvey's motivation was strongly extrinsic: *"It's not about helping, it's about information, it's about communication, it's about equality"*. Here Harvey is engaging with the politics of deafness (Woll and Adams, 2012), as did Carter, who expressed his views and understanding of the difference between enablement, for example ensuring a deaf person has accurate information, and empowerment which he understands as a process that must be undertaken by the deaf person themselves.

What messages can be drawn from this rather mixed picture linking gender with extrinsic and intrinsic motivations for BSL interpreting as a profession? The strong suggestion is that men demonstrate different motivations linked to their histories and individual attributes, less troubled by structural factors. However, it is important to remember that as a group within the BSL interpreting profession, men are privileged in terms of their minority status and being in high demand. As Ellis explained: *"I*

consider myself lucky. There's just loads of work you know if you want to make a living it's a good place to do it, though sign language". Yet it is not clear whether Ellis recognised his privileged position in terms of gender (McIntosh, 2012) or simply saw that there were plentiful opportunities for all interpreters.

This mixed picture of connections between gender and overlapping intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors, suggests that BSL interpreters may indeed be challenging 'the man code' being involved in a profession associated, for many of its members, with emotional investment through historical connections with deaf family members and friends, even where there are determined claims to be engaging in purely linguistic communication terms.

5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter illuminates motivations of men to become a BSL interpreter following exposure to BSL. Extrinsic motivations related to reasons related to the serving of others while intrinsic motivations were reasons for the good of the interpreters themselves.

The data in this study show that the motivations for men to become BSL interpreters are like some of those described in the literature focusing on men in predominantly female professions. Men in interpreting, like nursing (Meadus, 2000), care for the people they are working with. However, that care is displayed in different ways, and this is discussed further in section 6.3. Where nurses are motivated to care for the physical health of patients and teachers are motivated to care for the intellectual development of their pupils (Bergmark et al., 2018), the male interpreters in this study care about the commitment to equality and empowerment of the deaf community by providing access to information.

A rather interesting perspective to the data in this study relates to the men's connection to the deaf community and the role they play in the deaf community as a collectivist society (Mindess, 2006). The combination of wanting to develop skills to provide better access to information resulting in empowerment and social justice play a large part in the motivation for men to become a BSL interpreter. The role of provider and wanting to meet the needs of others chimes with Wu et al's. (2014) study of male ICU nurses

taking care of dying patients and their families.

An element of autonomy and control over the assignments that male interpreters accept was identified as a motivating factor, also enjoyed by freelance translators in the UK (Fraser and Gold, 2001).

A key point identified in the analysis of the data in this chapter is the recognition that some motivations could not easily be defined as simply extrinsic or intrinsic in nature. Arguably, there is interplay between the two in that an extrinsic motivation such as improving language skills links to an intrinsic motivation such as skills development and both ultimately result in a better service to deaf clients.

The previous two chapters have focused on addressing the first research question 'What are the motivations for men to become British Sign Language Interpreters?'. The following two chapters shift focus and address the findings related to the second research question 'What are the experience of men in the predominantly female profession of British Sign Language interpreting?' Chapter 6 focuses on the working environment (*The experience of men working within British Sign Language interpreting*) while Chapter 7 focuses on the individual (*Experiencing British Sign Language interpreting as a man*).

Chapter 6 - The experience of men working within British Sign Language interpreting

6.1 Chapter introduction

The previous chapters examined how the 25 sign language interpreters who took part in the one-to-one interviews and 13 who took part in the Facebook group were first exposed to sign language and how they were motivated to pursue a career in sign language interpreter, which covered the first research question seeking to be answered. This chapter, and the following chapter, present the data related to the second research question which examines the experiences of men working as sign language interpreters in the predominantly female profession of BSL interpreting in the United Kingdom. The data in this chapter are arranged to reflect three main themes. Firstly, the consideration of any preference for the interpreters interviewed to work with other men versus women who are BSL interpreters. Secondly, whether BSL interpreters who are men view sign language interpreting as a linguistic or caring profession and finally, issues related to remuneration. Following on from this, chapter 7 will further consider three further themes related to the experience of men in BSL interpreting which are status, gender norms and sexuality. The aim of these two chapters is to promote exploration of the themes and build a picture of these experiences.

6.2 Working with interpreters who are men vs interpreters who are women

6.2.1 Section introduction

The research participants expressed opinions as to whether they would prefer to work with interpreters who are women or men. As will be seen throughout this section of the chapter, the comments expressed show that there was a mix of no conscious preference of the gender of their co-interpreter and, in contrast, a few instances where there was a preference. There were discussions around the best person for the job in relation to the support that is offered by the co-interpreter alongside personal connections and dynamics. The nature of the booking in relation to the subject and the other people involved was considered. In addition, the frequency of the opportunity to

work with a co-interpreter was explored, as was the fact that it made a nice change to work with men because of the shortage of interpreters who are men.

6.2.2 Best person for the job

Rory said *“When I create a team for conferences, I seem to end up with a gender balanced team. This isn't a conscious choice, as I will approach the best people (in my circles/opinion) for the job at hand”*. In this practice, Rory is not gender biased and therefore the best person could be a man or a woman. Carter shared this view regarding the skills of the co-interpreter but also highlighted their skills and positive attitude required when working with the deaf community:

I don't have a preference based on gender; I have a preference based on skill sets. I have a preference for working with people I know who work in a very ethically sound way and put the needs of their Sign Language client to the front and I am very much involved in the Deaf community. I live in it rather than working for it. So, the whole concept of that good attitude of the Deaf people refer to as the primary characteristic in an interpreter, definitely. Somebody has a good attitude great if they have skill gaps, I am more than happy to work with them and to work with them on those things, but it's not based on gender.

In this comment, Carter referred to people he knew who have a deeply ethical focus on their work, which is of course if he himself has a high level of ethical practice on which to base his expectations. Since he said he perceived his life as one of living in the deaf community rather than simply working in it, one can hope this is the case. He referred to the attitude of the interpreter and this was something which was highlighted in the research McDermid (2009) found when he undertook research with sign language interpreter instructors in Canada. It was the instructor's opinion that 'Students were expected to demonstrate a positive attitude that incorporated respect and reciprocity' (McDermid, 2009, p. 126). Carter shared the views of several of the instructors McDermid interviewed who said: 'skills were not as important as attitude' and 'the Deaf community would accept even dysfluent signers if they had a good attitude' (McDermid, 2009, p. 120). There is research to show that attitude is a key consideration of deaf people when choosing an interpreter (Napier and Rohan, 2009;

O'Brien et al., 2023). This may be one of the very few times men in interpreting may be (somewhat ironically) following 'The Man Code' which states 'When picking players for sports teams it is permissible to skip over your buddy in favor of better athletes- as long as you don't let him be the last sorry son of a bitch standing on the sideline (Urban Dictionary, 2023) (see number 27 on Appendix 15). A somewhat promising start to the rule was recognising skill over friendship... until it was declared that the 'buddy' may still end up being chosen in favour of someone with better skills which is something that could happen when choosing a co-interpreter for an assignment.

6.2.3 Support

In the comment above, Carter talked about the support he was prepared to provide to someone, and several interpreters talked about the support they received from their co-interpreter. For example, both Zachary and Ollie referred to the co-interpreters' competence and the support they will provide. Ollie said *"I think the demographic is the driver here. The majority of my co-workers are women. My preferences are based on the competence and supportiveness of the co-worker rather than any gender divide"*. Hugo also talked about the support he would like to receive when working and said *"I don't honestly... I don't have a preference. I just want the person that I'm working with to be able to back me up"*.

Harvey felt that interpreters who were women were more supportive than interpreters who were men. *"The differences I have noted in my experience is that female interpreters tend to be much more up for working collaboratively. There are those conversations about "How shall we do this?" and there's more of an element of support and working as a team."* I asked him if he felt that female interpreters were more effective at working in groups than the men and his response was:

In my experience yes. Mainly because of the way that I like to work. I like it to be a co-interpretation. I like to work with somebody. Where possible, sometimes where the information is so dense and there isn't a way of making some sort of collective nice picture. You're just like giving whatever you're hearing and you're not making, processing, you're just giving out, then when you start to flag somebody will take it from (laughter) you but maybe I'm just more comfortable with that knowing that there is somebody there to

support, which tends to be more my experience of female interpreters and the idea of, "I don't care who voices it, if I've missed something, take it, say it". And so, working on sort of equal terms with people.

Here, Harvey described the two interpreters in the team working as one to deliver a good service to the clients involved. He was not particularly concerned about who delivered specific elements of the interpretation if the client received the right information. He was not concerned with 'ego' which is discussed in chapter 7 (see 7.3.5). Support is an important and somewhat admirable element of 'The Man Code' (see number 3 Appendix 15) when it is delivered with the right sentiment. Number 3 of 'The Man Code' states '*Unless he murdered someone in your immediate family, you must bail a friend out of jail within 24 hours*' (Urban Dictionary, 2023) and although an extreme example, just goes to show how support is valued.

6.2.4 Dynamics / personal connection

Hugo talked about his co-interpreter in relation to their personality and he described that he wanted them to "*just be a nice person, do you know what I mean? Like I can't be bothered with agro or I can't be bothered with somebody that's gonna be like... like just chill... like I prefer a co-worker that's chilled out*". Hugo did not specifically describe instances where he experienced 'agro' with his co-interpreter and it appears that he is not making a distinction between men or women in the workplace, but his goal is to go to work in environment which matched his personality, one where he can be laid back and, as he described 'chilled out'. Here, Hugo is explaining that he wanted the dynamics between the two interpreters to be synergetic which he felt would work to the strengths of his personality.

Similarly, Charlie also wanted a working environment which was free from stress.

If I've worked with an interpreter that I know a number of times and they're booked, I quite look forward to that because I know what I'm going to get from that person as a co-worker and they know what they're going to get from me and that hopefully it's going to run smoothly because it always has done in the past. So, you feel reassured by that rather than someone that you haven't really worked with very much, so there's always that wonder, I suppose,

that how it's going to, how everything is going to pan out.

Part of what Charlie described here is the familiarity he has with the interpreter's he works with. In many locations around the UK, with the possible exception of London and the South-East because of it being the area where there is the greatest concentration of interpreters (Napier et al., 2021, p. 63), it is not unusual to meet and co-interpret with the same people because of the geographical location people are usually willing to work in. Additionally, there is generally not a regular influx of new interpreters to the area.

Encouragingly, the numbers of interpreters continue to grow each year but not in significant numbers. The NRCPD publish the numbers of registrants per year as being:

Dates	Total Interpreter's (Qualified and Trainee)	Variance
At 30.07.13	1144	
At 30.07.14	1245	+101
At 30.07.15	1331	+86
At 31.12.16	1365	+34
At 31.12.17	1428	+63
At 31.12.18	1551	+123
At 10.11.22	1637	+86
At 30.08.23	1661	+24

Table 5: Published numbers of NRCPD registrants per year.

Therefore, small numbers of new registrants per year across all communication professional categories in all areas in the UK show how new registrants will soon become known to the interpreter they will be allocated to co-interpret with. As of 10th November 2022, there were a total of 1637 RSLs and TSLs registered with NRCPD (personal communication) and their website showed an updated figure of 1661 interpreters (RSLs and TSLs) at 30.08.23.

6.2.5 Nature of the booking

Regardless of how well someone might know a fellow interpreter, there could still be times where the gender of the interpreter may be a deciding factor in terms of appropriateness to accept an assignment. An example of this would be in a medical setting where information shared may be sensitive. Bobby reflected on this when he said:

I think it would depend on the nature of the assignment... [if] it was a course on, maybe on, I don't know, (laughter) male, I don't know, something to do with male prostate cancer or something, I don't know. But even then, there probably wouldn't need to be a preference.

Singy and Guex (2015) observed that 'Numerous studies have clearly demonstrated the health benefits of using a professional interpreter, and it seems that these benefits may be even more pronounced when there is gender concordance between interpreter and patient' (Singy and Guex, 2015, p. 170). However, midway through his comment, Bobby did a u-turn on his view that a man was more appropriate to undertake a particular interpreting assignment. Although he initially said working with a man or woman co-interpreter would depend on the nature of the assignment, he went on to say that even when the subject matter was of a sensitive nature, such as a course on a specific cancer only affecting men, the gender of the interpreter may well still be irrelevant.

Some of the interpreters did reflect on environments where they were aware that women were uncomfortable working. These tended to be environments where there was a large concentration of men in the workplace. Jake explained a situation he was are of:

There was the issue of a male misogynist electrical tutor who terrorised one of my female colleagues who was the only female in the room. Being male would have been to some advantage there, but advantage to what? Would it advantage the interpreted interaction? Would it advantage the class dynamic? Would it advantage my colleague, who would feel great relief by not being there? As it happened, she was determined to make some good of a bad situation, not only for her own sanity, but for the student's welfare, and to try and fix future situations. She was a real star and really made a difference there.

Here, Jake questioned the difference having a man interpreting would be to people involved - students in the class and the female interpreter - as well as the process of interpreting and the interpreting interaction. It appeared from what he said that his

colleague did not allow the misogyny she had experienced to hinder the service she delivered.

6.2.6 Circumstances

Sometimes, the circumstances surrounding a person being booked for an assignment was a deciding factor. Theo explained:

I have a preference for competent interpreters (laughter). I mean obviously because I'm working in a small team, I'd rather be working with one of the other two people who is a regular interpreter than someone who is an ad-hoc interpreter because I obviously have to fill in a lot more and help them out and then they're not going to be ever quite as up to speed with what's happening. So, and that just happens that the other two regular interpreters are women. So yes, if there was a choice between them and a male ad-hoc interpreter I would always choose them, but I would always choose them if it was a woman ad-hoc interpreter as well.

Theo described how familiarity with the deaf client and their workplace was more important to consider compared to the gender of the interpreter he was going to be working with. This links to the extrinsic motivation of wanting to provide the best possible service to the clients involved in the interaction (section 5.2.2).

6.2.7 Prefer female co-interpreter

From the comments shared by the interpreters, there were only a few expressions of a preference to work with a colleague who was a woman rather than a colleague who was a man. Oliver said:

I get on with the majority of people. I don't really have any angst against anybody really, but you know we all have our own preferences of who we like to work with and other people I think "oh well, fine, I'll work with them no problem. But I'd much prefer it if they gave me him or her". More so her but then I very rarely co-work with another male interpreter. Very, very rarely.

Oliver describes 'very, very rarely' working with another male interpreter, a situation

influenced by the fact that he is based in a region where there are not many registered male BSL interpreters. Alfie described being generally “*more comfortable with women*” than men and when I asked him to elaborate on his disclosure that he would prefer a co-interpreter who was a woman and said:

Mmhm. Yeah. I just find that easier. I've got a lot of anxiety around (laughter) men. Not always but, you know, most of my, most of my friends are women, I did not have good experiences growing up socialising with other boys or very rarely, I did, and you know, and I'm just used to not feeling safe in that situation. So, so it's partly about that and maybe partly just you know that I like talking about knitting and things like that so, that's just the way things are (laughter). I don't mind working with guys but most women, most interpreters are women, so I have rarely had the opportunity to do anything else, I suppose.

Alfie is a gay interpreter and there is research to suggest that there is a level of comfort in interactions between straight women and gay men for reasons such as the ‘absence of gay men’s attraction and mating intentions toward women’ as well as a ‘high level of rapport’ with ‘greater similarity of interests’, and the notion that gay men are ‘more gentle or feminine’ (Russell, Ickes and Ta-Johnson, 2018, pp. 300-301).

This comfort that Alfie experiences matches Simpson’s (2004) findings where she described the ‘comfort zone effect’. In the main, relations with women were seen as positive and a source of comfort. Many of the men Simpson interviewed commented on how much they ‘liked’ women and how they enjoyed their company. The company of men was often viewed less favourably as was expressed by one of her research participants (a teacher) when he said, “men like to posture, show their masculinity and they like to show mine’s bigger than yours...” (Simpson, 2004, p. 358). The comfort zone effect meant that men felt relaxed and at ease working with women and this was often missing when working with men. Women may be perceived as being ‘easier’ to work with in the workplace because of their socialisation and traditional gender roles, particularly in care. This is because women are frequently socialised to be conciliatory and accommodating, which may increase their propensity to avoid conflict and place a higher value on upholding healthy working relationships. However, this can also make women appear less capable or assertive than males, which could impede their ability

to progress professionally (Babic and Hansez, 2021).

Harrison described the comfort of generally being around women as “*emotionally comfortable*” when he said:

I'm more emotionally comfortable with women, I feel it's easier to co-work and that's not, you know, if I'm working, there are colleagues that are men that I really love working with so that's absolutely not always the case and I could name you a bunch of interpreters that I really love working with, but if someone was going to say just, kind of, blind “would you prefer to work with a woman or a man?”, then I would go with the woman on the basis it's more likely to be a comfortable, supportive relationship whereas if they were giving me names I'd be “yeah, I'm happy to work with him and him and him”. And arrogance is not limited to men, you know, there are a number of women that I also wouldn't want to work with but again, it's proportionality, you know, I can name more men that I wouldn't want to work with, as a proportion of the male interpreters who are working, than I would women.

Here, Harrison was not excluding working with interpreters who were men because he stated there were a few he was happy to work with, but he referred to the type of working relationship being “*comfortable*” and “*supportive*”, which he alluded to potentially not feeling if he were working with most interpreters who were men. He may be alluding to a personality mismatch or somehow feeling out of place, especially if he has different beliefs or values to those of men he might work with. This is especially true if he shares Minkin's (2023) view that women are more likely than men to value diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. Isaac was more emphatic when he said: “*On balance, while I hesitate to make sweeping generalisations, I personally often prefer working with women*”.

6.2.8 Frequency

Because the sign language interpreting profession in the UK is made up of predominantly women, the likelihood that an interpreter who is a man will co-interpret with an interpreter who is a woman is relatively high because statistically, there is a ratio of roughly 4 women for every 1 man. In general, interpreters who are men rarely

get to co-interpret with other interpreter who is a man. Alfie recognised this when he said: *"I don't mind working with guys but most women, most interpreters are women, so I have rarely had the opportunity to do anything else, I suppose"*. Harvey recognised that because of the propensity for him to work in community settings, most of his colleagues are women. He said:

Statistically my co-workers tend to be female and also because whether it's relevant or not, the stuff I tend to do tends to be more community type interpreting and whether it's one of those things that male interpreters are less likely to take that sort of work, whether that's a fact or not I'm not sure.

The opportunity for Ellis to work with another interpreter who was a man was so long ago, he couldn't remember when it was. He said: *"I can't remember the last time I went out and co-worked with another male interpreter, female interpreters all the time, yep. No, I can't remember it so long ago. That speaks volumes, doesn't it?"* Freddie amusingly compared interpreters who were men to a rare mythical creature when he said *"I'll probably co-work with a male maybe once a year maybe less than that because it's quite difficult to get us... We're like unicorns sometimes, you know, it's difficult to find them. Getting us together is quite difficult"*.

The lack of opportunities to work with interpreters who are men meant it was sometimes difficult for them to form friendships with other interpreters who are men. Carter said:

I don't have very good... No, I wouldn't say that... I don't have a close relationship with the other male interpreters. One is in [location], so he is kind of 150 miles away anyway, one I see occasionally and co-work with maybe two or three times a year and when we see each other it's great but we don't have a kind of friendship outside of interpreting. And again, you know, the other one who I don't think I've ever co-worked with, I think he has his set of clients which, kind of, are separate from my set of clients, so we very rarely if ever encounter with each other maybe occasionally at an ASLI meeting. So, we don't have friendships outside of that really. Which you would imagine it would naturally occur when I think of my female colleagues, they have friendships they go out

drinking and all of that kind of stuff whereas the blokes are much more kind of stand-offish and individual rather than the collective culture we would assume working, that would come with working in the Deaf community.

Carter recognised the distinction between interpreters who are men and women in that he saw interpreters who are women as much more collegial compared to interpreters who are men and he saw frequency and geography playing a part in this. A large-scale study in the USA (Peterson, 2004) found that women valued friends and relationships, recognition and respect, communication, fairness and equity, teams and collaboration, and family and home significantly more than men. Findings also indicated that men underestimate and are generally unaware of women's work-related values.

Carter described the interpreters involved in sign language interpreting as a collective culture which has parallels to the deaf community who are known for their culture of collectivism. Skyer, Scott and O'Brien (2023) call for deaf people to work together for systemic change and describe collectivism as one of the 'many iconic and beloved aspects of Deaf Culture' (Skyer, Scott and O'Brien, 2023, p. 10). Mindess (2006) described American deaf culture as 'pooling resources, the duty to share information, the boundary between insiders and outsiders, and loyalty to and strong identity with the group' (Mindess, 2006, p. 40). When Carter talked about interpreters who are women, this is the image which might be constructed in one's mind. However, he described interpreters who are men as quite different – "*stand-offish and individual*" – but this is not to say that at moments in time, such as when co-interpreting, men cannot be more collectivist in their behaviour.

Women may appear to be more collegial if they are also working frequently with other interpreters who are women and deaf clients who are women. Elijah described how he might be polite and focused on the job when this happens, and this might create the impression that he was 'stand-offish' as Carter described. Elijah explained "*Sometimes if there's a female deaf person and a female interpreter and I'm the co-worker, it can feel a little bit like females are together, whether they know each other or not. They might maybe feel a little bit more comfortable with each other and I feel that I don't have that. But I just do the job, be polite, get on with the job*". Here Elijah is projecting a sense of isolation and that he does not 'fit in'. This has been highlighted within nursing

where male nurses experience isolation in the workplace (Guy, Hughes and Ferris-Day, 2022; Palazzo & Erikson, 2022; Stott, 2007). It would be interesting to see how his behaviour and the dynamics might be different if he were co-interpreting with another man.

Joshua recognised that although he would mostly co-interpret with interpreters who are women, there had been some opportunities to co-interpret with other men and said *“I’ve been quite lucky actually, well, not lucky, I’d say where I live, well no, it’s generally been quite female, but I have been on a couple of co-working jobs with a man, but it’s surprised me that I’ve been with a man more times than I would’ve expected to”*. Here he is explaining that his expectations are that he might co-interpret with a woman because of the higher numbers of interpreters who are women in the location he lives and works.

6.2.9 Nice change to work with an interpreter who is a man

Edward expressed pleasure at the opportunity to work with other men when the occasion arose, even though these opportunities were rare. He said, *“Sometimes it just feels really nice to work with another man (laughter) because we very rarely do”*. Because interpreting with another man is rare, it can be something that men look forward to. Archie felt excited when interpreting with another man. He said *“I get excited working with another bloke because it doesn’t happen often. So, if another bloke turns up, I’m like “Oh great, another bloke, fantastic.” It’s a novelty”*.

Even though this section has shown that most of the time, men do not have a preference of the gender of their co-interpreter, when they get the chance to interpret with another man, they do like this as it is quite a rarity. This enjoyment in interpreting with other men can be understood in terms of the sense of camaraderie (Banna, 2007) that occurs, particularly for men working in predominantly female professions (Roulston & Mills, 2000; Rumans, 2008a, 2008b; Skelton, 2012; Simpson, 2009, 2014) and support (Rumens, 2010; Smith et al., 2020). This may stem from the alliances that develop as a result of ‘gender policing’ (Keith, 2021) ‘by all those of influence around a boy to maintain a binary, heteronormative version of masculinity that allows for boy-only friendships without any hint of sexual interest (Keith, 2021, p. 87). As Keith (2021, p. 88) explains: ‘your alliances with other boys and men are to be considered primary

over your alliances with girls and women'. Arguably this may lie behind the pleasure expressed by some male interpreters when they have the rare opportunity of co-working with another male interpreter.

6.2.10 Section summary

From the comments above, it is suggested that the research participants do not express a preference for working with a co-interpreter who is a man or a woman and that it is the working practices which are more important than the gender of their colleague. It was expressed that the best person for the job in relation to the skills and support they bring to the interpreted interaction is key. This was succinctly put by Carter when he said: *"I don't have a preference based on gender, I have a preference based on skill sets"*. It was later observed by Harvey that *"female interpreters were more supportive than male interpreters"*. However, there is no further evidence to suggest this gendered perception of interpreters who are women is the norm in the profession and further study would be worthwhile.

The familiarity with the co-interpreter was also a consideration that was discussed in that if an interpreter has worked with another individual previously, they were likely to want to work with that person again, if the experience had been favourable. Similarly, the importance of familiarity of the client to interpreters involved in the assignment also determined the preference and suitability of the co-interpreter which chimes with the findings of Mapson and Major (2021) in their study of interpreters' rapport and the role of familiarity. The familiarity of the interpreter is also of significant importance to the deaf client (Haug et al., 2017; Miner, 2017) 'to ensure that there is a continuity and satisfaction in how they are represented' (Young, Napier & Oram, 2019, p. 361).

The nature of the booking, such as a medical appointment for a male client or an environment heavily populated by men also determined whether it was felt a man may be more appropriate to interpret with another man. However, further evidence from deaf men as to their views of having a male interpreter for such assignments would be required to support or refute this claim. The value of such research can be seen, for example, in testing male patients' perceptions of male nurses. In a Jamaican study, Adeyemi-Adelanwa et al., (2016) found that even though male nurses were negatively perceived by 51% of male patients, only 10% of them had a negative

perception of the actual care they received.

Four of the interpreters expressed a preference to co-interpret with a woman if this were possible. 'The Bro Code' (Serai, 2023) states that 'guys should put his bro's in priority' (see Number 1, Appendix 16) and although within the code it refers to the sexual pursuit of women, the sentiment of putting 'the bro' before anything or anyone is described as a 'founding principle' and 'said to have preceded even the concept of the bro code'. Male interpreters desire to put a female ahead of a male might be seen as contravening this founding principle. But a preference for working with female co-interpreters could also be understood as male interpreters wishing to place themselves in a position of higher status, working alongside co-interpreters likely to be more conciliatory (Babic and Hansez, 2021). But given the greater likelihood of co-working with a woman interpreter, simply because of the ratio of women to men in the profession, working with a male co-interpreter was also experienced more simply as a nice change, adding variety to interpreting experiences. when two men were able to interpret together.

Findings from this study suggest some similarities with other predominantly female profession in that masculine companionship (Evans and Frank, 2003) can be achieved through co-interpreting with men, especially when the interpreters are gay (Rumens, 2010). This reflects gay men's heavy reliance 'on friendship as a source of support for shaping and reinforcing identities at odds with dominant cultural norms that privilege heterosexuality' (Rumens, 2010, p. 137).

The next section of this chapter examines a much-discussed subject within the BSL interpreting profession, the question of whether the sign language interpreting profession in the UK is a linguistic or caring profession, how this relates to the image of care as 'women's work' and how male interpreters negotiate this terrain.

6.3 Linguistic or caring profession

6.3.1 Section introduction

There is often much discussion among interpreting colleagues as to whether sign language interpreting is a linguistic or caring profession. This, in some degree, relates to the origins of the profession, which is discussed in the introduction to this thesis. Not

surprisingly, this was a topic raised by research participants and revealed mixed views. While some felt that interpreting is and should be purely linguistic, others felt interpreting has linguistic and caring elements. Notions of advocacy and empowerment were linked, in different ways, to both caring and linguistic aspects of the interpreting role, those arguing the linguistic case seeing their role in effectively facilitating communication as providing access to information that could then be used by deaf clients engaging in self-empowerment. But more commonly caring elements of the role were seen as being linked with advocacy and subsequent empowerment of deaf clients. While these discussions beg questions about limited understandings of advocacy and empowerment, they clearly focused on questions of gender identity and gender performance of men in the interpreting profession.

These issues link to a more fundamental question: Where do men fit in to the profession? Such uncertainty could be perceived as deeply troubling for men, strengthening claims for a linguistic profession, since broader understandings of the profession as one of 'caring' could be seen as threatening to men's acceptance and inclusion. On the other hand, recognising the caring aspects of the profession they have chosen to work in, including the necessary interpersonal skills needed to work in a people facing profession (section 6.3.3), male interpreters could choose to reflect on their sense of self, acknowledge and develop their capacity for a 'caring masculinity', described by Elliot (2016) as rejecting domination and its associated traits, and embracing values of care. Such a strategy would align with Lupton's (2000) observation that, faced with challenges to their masculinity by working in female occupations, men attempt to align their gender and occupational identities by reconstructing or rationalising the nature of their occupations, or by renegotiation of their own conception of what it means to be a man. Simpson (2014) offers an example of such negotiation in a study of male airline cabin crew who created masculine authority by performing safety and security checks in juxtaposition with looking after passengers, viewed, and devalued, as 'feminine' service. Culturally, predominantly female professions and their associated feminine skills are indeed frequently undervalued (Skeggs, 2014), both culturally and financially. The men in this study have made significant investment, in training, and sometimes emotional investment. They had particular motivations for joining the profession and for those who may have experienced a sense of uncertainty about their gender identity, had found ways to

negotiate identities that aligned with their own sense of masculinity.

I move on in the following sections to explore the sign language interpreting as a linguistic and then as a caring profession in greater depth.

6.3.2 A linguistic profession

Isaac was very clear that BSL interpreting is a linguist profession. He said:

I always considered interpreting to be a linguistic profession. Through learning BSL and studying Deaf history, I naturally became aware of the development of BSL interpreting and the linguistic analysis of the language. If someone shows an interest in what I'm doing, I will describe the process as equivalent to spoken language interpreting.

In this statement, Isaac distances himself from the notion that he is offering a caring role within the interpreted interaction and describes his role to others as linguistic. The practice of distancing from feminine aspects of other predominantly female professions has been previously researched (Cottingham, 2015; Cross & Bagihole, 2002; Irvine & Vermilya, 2010; Simpson, 2004). This is achieved by re-casting job content and enhancing the masculine components of the role (Simpson, 2004) and establishing a more masculine culture within the profession (Cross & Bagihole, 2002). The result of these actions is that men create a higher status (Irvine & Vermilya, 2010) for themselves within the profession and create emotional distance to manage negative emotions (Cottingham, 2015).

Riley was also of the opinion that the profession was linguistic rather than caring:

I think it probably would be linguistic because essentially that's what you're there for. [When] you're saying linguistic profession, then it's clear that you actually have to have some formal training in order to do that. We are interpreting between two separate languages and making sure everybody is on the same page and understanding each other. So yeah, I think I'd lean more towards the linguistic description of the profession really.

By expressing the need for formal training to be a sign language interpreter, he is professionalising the role and with professionalisation comes status, which semi-routine and routine jobs generally do not possess (Watson, 2017) because they are primarily undertaken by women and women have less status and value in the workplace (Skeggs, 2014).

Theo works with many deaf professionals, and he reflected that:

I tend to talk about interpreting as a linguistic exercise rather than a caring one, absolutely. And when people say “Oh, it must be so fulfilling” or whatever, I then tell them who I work with and how high up they are and how they probably earn 10X what they earn (Laughter).

In this comment, Theo is not giving names of the people he works with but the types of deaf professions they are. He is explaining that the deaf people he interprets for are professionals and do not need a ‘carer’ in the workplace. Rather, the deaf person requires someone who will professionally interpret between English and BSL, so that they have equal access to information, as everyone else in the room. With this practice, Theo is aligning himself as a linguistic professional, providing a service to the deaf person, rather than their carer, which is frequently the perception of hearing people. This constant reinforcement of the role of the sign language interpreter to hearing people who may not understand it can take time and George recognised that it has taken a long time for the profession to be seen as a linguistic one.

As a profession seen by those who carry out the profession and perhaps those who are hearing but also aware of the profession, I don’t think it’s seen as a caring profession any longer and I think some of the hard work that is being conducted by ASLI for instance has created that shift from the caring perspective from (sic) [to] a more professional perspective, I think.

Parallels in this shift in perspectives of the interpreting profession have also been seen within the nursing profession in Mauritius. As a result of greater numbers of men joining the profession and the change in grade and title to ‘nursing officer’ the perception of nursing changed from that of caring to ‘curing’ and shifted it into a more masculine field

(Hollup, 2014).

However, one might argue that the profession is still not seen as a linguistic one by many with poor understanding of the role of the sign language interpreter. Having to continually educate people is something that is likely to be an ongoing responsibility for sign language interpreters.

Harrison's perspective was that he was using the language as a 'tool' to do his job, but that interpreting is not necessarily a linguistic profession.

Clearly, it's a language base that I'm using, but I don't know that it's a language (original emphasis) profession any more than teaching is a language profession. You know, I use language when I'm teaching, all the time. You wouldn't call it a language profession. I have a job to do, and I do that job as an interpreter. I have a job to do, language is just a tool.

Harrison later explained how his role is perceived by others as the deaf person's "mate" and doing "pretty stuff" because they think sign language is pretty. Others thought he did a "really, really difficult job". This goes to show how perceptions of the interpreter and their role varies significantly depending on how informed the hearing person is about interpreters and the interpreting profession. That some of the hearing people Harrison meets think that interpreting is 'pretty' and some describe it as a 'really, really difficult job' frames the role in different ways. In one respect being 'pretty' frames the job as feminine, while doing a 'really, really difficult job' frames it as masculine.

6.3.3 A linguistic profession with caring attributes

Many of the interpreters I interviewed held the view that there was a significant 'caring' element to the sign language interpreting profession. Jacob summed up this debate most succinctly when he said sign language interpreting was "a linguistic profession with caring attributes". He recognised the power imbalance many deaf people encounter in life and explained:

You have to be a good human. Often the deaf person's the underdog. If I just went in there and was there to interpret the

message, just being a linguistic conduit from one way to the other, then I don't feel as though I'll be doing my job. There's lots of elements to it, gently educating people, about, you know, their deaf awareness. Just helping tweak how, you know, their understanding of how an interpreter works can be different to how an interpreter truly works or how a situation should work. It's unpicking those, I think that takes skills outside of that linguistic bubble. There are some interpreters who do too much caring, but there are those that don't care enough. It's always a balance with every single booking. There's an element of, you know, treating, obviously you've got to treat people with respect and fairness and not takeaway anyone's, not take over anything from people but you can see these little glitches and I'll, I'll, I think from the little caring elements that I put into it, it makes the linguistic side work better. It smooths over those little bumps.

In Jacob's comment he recognised that in many cases, because of societies perception of deaf people as disabled, and the lack of access to information in sign language, deaf people are often not afforded the same treatment as others in society. For that reason, he took on a role of advocating for the deaf person by raising awareness to the hearing people present in interpreting events. He recognised this is over and above the interpreting function and is mindful of the need to do this without disempowering the deaf person, the overall aim being to enhance the interpreting process. Rory gave an example of how he would like some flexibility in how he worked. He said:

I want to be seen as a linguistic professional and allowed the flexibility to show a caring side when needed. Is that too much to ask? When the Consultant hands me the Deaf person's notes, I will not take them - indicating that they should be given to the patient... sometimes I do this whilst holding the patient's hand and signing with my free hand that the cancer is inoperable.

Rory's behaviour here is in line with Llewelyn-Jones and Lee's (2014) argument about interpreters' 'presentation of self': 'Interpreters must behave in ways that are consonant with, rather than counter to, the expectations of the participants. By normalizing their own communicative behaviors, and by acting in ways that are similar to the other participants, interpreters can be more effective in facilitating successful interactions (Llewelyn-Jones and Lee, 2014, p. 59). Rory's scenario shows his personable side and

emphasises that the interpreter is not invisible, not simply a conduit of information (Neumann Solow, 1981). Rory's approach however is open to misinterpretation, and misidentification as the deaf person's 'mate'.

Archie viewed interpreting less as a caring profession and more as being given privilege to be a part of someone's life.

Caring profession is a phrase. Perhaps it's the wrong phrase. What I firmly believe that to do a job where you are given the privilege of looking on peoples' lives who've never met you, you know nothing about, but they take you in for that moment and share their most intimate things with you. You have to be a person who can show empathy and care. I'm not saying that's the whole reason we do it and we're these wonderful people, we're not. But you have to... language involves emotion, and if you can't tap into that, then I don't think you're doing the people that you're working with, a good service. It is linguistic but you've got to have, you've got to care for the people around you.

He raised the point that one needed to be able to show empathy and care which was especially important when being involved in some of the most intimate aspects of peoples' lives. Identifying emotional aspects of language adds an additional layer to the interpreting process. There are some interpreting jobs, one might argue, that don't need emotion, an example being interpreting to camera explaining how to access council services, but many do, such as the scenario Rory described, which is interpreting saddening news about a cancer prognosis.

Interpreters may have preferences for different types of interpreting assignment and those requiring an element of care are more likely to attract interpreters with caring personalities. Gender stereotypical views of women as carers (Litosseliti and Leadbeater, 2013), may lead to men being considered as less suitable for such assignments. While it is not possible to confirm male interpreters' distancing from assignments with possible caring components, it is evident that male interpreters have occupied higher status, more publicly visible work (such as TV, politics) (Napier et al., 2021, p. 60).

Charlie described how he liked his work and felt "heavily invested" in it because he

said, *“I enjoy the art of doing interpreting and I enjoy the people I work with so I’m very invested in it”*. When I put it to him that some people view sign language interpreting as a caring profession, he responded:

See, I don’t like that term because I think when I say emotionally invested, I think it’s because you care about what you do without having caring like a big ‘C’ because I find, I want to get away from this sort of medical, deaf-people-caring type attitude towards it. I see it more as a linguistic minority group and we are providing a service and I still care about what I want to do without patronising people without like trying to interfere. I sort of, I want to, it’s hard to try and be ultra-professional because you do care to a degree, but you don’t want to intervene with peoples’ lives. Because I’m there to do the interpreting and I still have relationships with some of the people in a nice way. But I try to remain professional as well in a courteous way because you can be professional and be over, you can be over professional.

When I offered that this could be perceived as cold by some people, Charlie said: *“Cold, exactly. Yes. I think that its unnecessary. That rubs me up because there’s no need for it”*. In contrast, Jude felt that viewing interpreting as a linguistic professional rather than a caring one does not result in a ‘cold’ or ‘uncaring’ interpreter. He described a situation where he might decide to end a working relationship with a client to explore new opportunities: *“I think as male interpreters, I’m not saying that we’re uncaring or we are cold or we’re up for just leaving people in the lurch at all, but I think because maybe front and centre this is not a care profession, it is a challenging linguistic et cetera, et cetera.”*

Jude expressed a view that spoke to female interpreters’ willingness to put their clients’ needs ahead of their own by continuing to work with a client and undertake the same types of jobs at the cost of not developing their own skills which, Jude argued, might benefit the wider deaf community. Jude’s words tap into the question of women being less career centric than men (Sweet et al., 2016) or more risk averse (Morgenroth, Ryan and Fine, 2022).

Toby also felt uncomfortable with the term ‘caring’, and said:

As a top level I would say it was about linguistics, but I think as a subsidiary, caring is maybe the wrong term. I think there is something about interacting with people. Yeah, something about human interaction and maybe it's because of the nature of the training, or because of the nature, or my nature, that where I see something is not going right, I will probably become an ally for the deaf person. So, in that way you could say it's caring for that deaf person but it's not caring. It's about evening things out or saying that something is going wrong and stepping in to stop it before it, because that, if you follow that down, that's going to destroy this communication and there is maybe some cultural thing or that the question is too wordy that they're asking somebody in a job interview and so in that way, you could say that it's caring. Yeah. But I don't consider it as caring as in being about personal welfare, it's more about this thing to do with enabling each side to understand or communicate with each other in the best way possible.

In this reflection, Toby is aligning himself to the deaf person to foster empowerment and become an ally, whilst still maintaining the role of interpreter in facilitating communication (Llewellyn-Jones and Lee, 2014) between the deaf person and the hearing person. The cultural and linguistic mediation he undertook was, from his point of view, for the benefit of the deaf person's welfare. Elijah said *"It's kind of a supporting, caring, thing although it's not, when we are doing it, it's just interpreting. But I think people are, who might consider it as a job, are that kind of person. The supportive, caring type of person."*

Noah tried to consider this from the perspective of his clients and reflected:

I think if you were to take 2 interpreters who were for all intents and purposes exactly the same, but one cares and one doesn't, the caring one would be better at it, and I'd rather have the caring one (laughter) but it seems so odd to imagine that somebody that actually psychopathically couldn't care a shit about what they're doing (laughter). That's just ridiculous. So, yeah. It's important to care.

In contrast, Joshua did not see himself in any form of caring role or seem to display any caring tendencies:

I wouldn't say that I'm doing it particularly because I'm a very caring person. I think I do like signing with regards to there's a bit more of a skill, like I actually feel like I've accomplished something. I've learnt something and I get to be able to deliver that. And it's something which I can see myself improving. So, it's almost like a development of a skill, much like a labourer or a plumber or a mechanic, you know, develops that skill. Yeah, I wouldn't say, I don't know if I'd say my motivation's because I feel like I'm doing a kind service (original emphasis). Because I find that sometimes when people say to me like "Oh, that's really kind of you", I'm almost a little bit like put out, like not offended but I kind of am offended because I'm like well I'm not doing it just to be kind, in some ways.

Joshua felt that platform (conference) or theatre work felt more valuable than providing interpreting support in the workplace. When I asked him to say a little more, he responded by saying interpreting is “*more sort of looked at as a caring role*”, he said:

Yeah well, I'm probably quoting because that's what somebody told me once when I once said "Oh, I wonder why there's not very many male interpreters?" and so I've sort of actually stolen that from what they told me is they said "I think most men look at it as a caring role. Actually, men generally prefer platform work" and I guess that is more what I would be more interested in. I don't really like the routine. I guess you're, obviously you're an interpreter yourself, you would know. I think I prefer sort of more say platform or theatre work or, I don't know, something that feels a bit more value than just sort of helping somebody be like an Access to Work support job where you're just on hand if you're needed.

In this comment, Joshua assumed I put more value on one domain over another. It raises questions as to whether his perception of the profession has been tainted by others in that he has been told that men generally prefer platform work over community work and therefore, those are the types of jobs he should be taking, so that confirms to the stereotypical male interpreter. This connects to the perception that platform work holds more status than community work and therefore, should be undertaken by men.

Some interpreters might disagree with Joshua's assumption that one would not like to work 'routine' interpreting jobs. Many of the interpreters I interviewed shared that they

interpreted for people in the workplace or within community settings and saw huge value in this type of work compared to something like a financial service industry AGM where it was quite likely that there would be no deaf participants.

6.3.4 Perception as caring

The origins of why the interpreting profession is potentially seen as a caring profession was highlighted by Ellis when he said:

I think that what it is ultimately linked back to is the fact that the possibility that deafness (original emphasis) was seen as a disability and therefore if you work with deaf people you're working with disabled (original emphasis) people and therefore you're a carer. I don't think it's seen from a linguistic point of view, language point of view, yet. That might change. Fingers crossed.

Ellis is describing labelling by association in that historically, society has seen deaf people as being disabled (Finkelstein, 1990) because of the medical profession's desire to fix the individual so that they can hear. Being perceived as disabled, it was thought they needed a carer or the support of an interpreter. This attitude towards deaf people conveniently omits the role of the interpreter in making deaf people's contributions accessible to hearing people. In the world of sign language users, it is hearing people, unable to sign, who are disabled. Thinking in terms of cultural diversity, the term 'Deaf Gain' has been coined to challenges the emphasis typically placed on hearing loss, instead focusing on ways in which being deaf can contribute to the cultural diversity of the human experience' (Bauman & Murray, 2009, 2014; Holcomb, 2013 cited by Szarkowski & Brice, 2018, p. 133).

Freddie offered his thoughts regarding the perception of the interpreter as a carer:

From the outside world, we are with this person, we arrive, or we are seen to be arriving with them in the sense that the doctor calls you and you are with them already or you arrive at an appointment with them. I think other people's schema of somebody arriving with someone or someone being with someone in an appointment is that they're their carer or they're there to help them.

In this scenario, the medical professional is seeing the interpreter much like a chaperone for the deaf person, which is something many medical practices allow, for people who may be vulnerable. 'This cultural construction is often reinforced by a society that does not understand the potential for deaf people to live rich lives and accomplish their maximum, hearing and speaking issues notwithstanding. Many are not aware that there are culturally Deaf lawyers, medical doctors, stockbrokers, entrepreneurs, school administrators, and an infinite plethora of other occupations' (Leigh, 2017, p. 208). In addition, because sign language interpreting is a predominantly female profession, it may be viewed as a low status profession, and can go unrecognised by other professionals.

Also related to medical settings, Ellis described how he was seen by clinical staff as performing a caring role:

In a sense you are kind of caring because that's what the doctor and nurses are doing so you become an extension of that. So, rarely are you seen as the linguistic person, you're seen as a caring person. I don't have an issue with that I think that's great and if it feels calm for everybody and the communication is flowing, fine.

In these instances, the sign language interpreter is seen as an extension of the hearing medical professional and therefore undertaking the same role as the medical or healthcare professional. Although Ellis was comfortable with this, there is potential for misunderstanding on the part of the healthcare professional who may not fully understand the professional role and remit of the interpreter.

Again, referring to public perception, Ollie described how his personal perspective of what interpreting is may well differ from that of the public. He wrote: "*I consider it to [be] a linguistic profession. However, the public perception seems to see us as a caring profession... We can find ourselves in a variety of situations where a genuine human response is as important as the accuracy of translation.*" When asked how he might describe the role of the interpreter to an individual who has no knowledge, he responded with: "*I usually let them know that I am there to provide access to all parties in the room and never say that I'm there to 'help' or 'support' the Deaf person.*"

Charlie had similar experiences to Ollie when it was assumed he was only interpreting

for the deaf person and needed to make the point that he was there for all involved in the interaction:

I'll go to some doctor's practices or things, or you'll hear side comments like sometimes people say "Well, you know I've booked you for this person", and I'll try and think "alright, I'm gonna need to try to make them understand that the only reason I'm here is because you both can't communicate with each other". But, you know, "I'm here to interpret for everybody." And they go "Oh yeah, but you're just here to interpret for Joe Bloggs". So, I'll try and say it again, you know and then I just leave it because they're not, certainly not picking up what I'm trying to say. And I don't want to come across like you know, having a go at them because then I become a bit of a, I feel like being a bully somehow. But I try and drop subtle hints in and hope that people pick up on them.

Here, Charlie is being implicit in his message to the hearing person rather than explicit. By contrast, Hugo was much more explicit in explaining his role:

If you go into a doctor's appointment or whatnot, a lot of the nurses, they can be very much like "Oh, that's such a good thing you do", it's this, that and the other and a lot of the times my response is kind of like "No, I don't do it because it's caring, I do it because it's a language". The helping is just like a side-effect of it, I guess. It's not really one of those motivation factors because I just don't see it like I'm helping the deaf person that much. I just see it as [a] communication need for both the doctor, the hearing person, kind of, you're there for them as well. Because the hearing person ain't going to know what the hell that deaf person's saying and vice versa. You know what I mean? So, you're, kind of, there for both. But you don't think you're going to be helping the hearing person, do you? Do you know what I mean? You're there to facilitate language and do the best you can. Its more communication.

Hugo raises an interesting point here in saying that working with a deaf person does not feel like 'helping' them but simply providing equal access to communication. However, he describes 'helping' as a 'side-effect'. He explained that interpreters rarely feel they are 'helping' the hearing person who has similar need for interpreting support to access information from the deaf person.

George had a similar experience to Hugo in a medical setting:

Often when you go to an assignment they say “Oh, yes. You’re here for Joe Bloggs”, Joe Bloggs being the Deaf person, and I do try and make the point, I did the other day actually, I do try to make the point of being there for both parties and I think that view from the hearing people that I’m there for the Deaf person is still very much the dominant, I think. And I think it’s for people like ourselves to change that viewpoint.

He recognised that it is his responsibility to change the viewpoint of the hearing person and, like Hugo, is more explicit in pointing out the needs of hearing people in the interpreting process. Harvey also brought this up in his interview when he said, *“It’s not understood in mainstream society, either what sign language is or interpreting is, but generally it’s seen as “Oh, a nice thing to do”, so that perpetuates the “Oh it’s a caring, helping thing”.* Where Harvey refers to mainstream society, George more specifically referred to the older population when he said: *“I think if I asked my Mum and Dad, they will probably see it as a caring profession but as I said, anybody who is more in the know, they would see it as a, more of a profession, as I’ve just described in terms of a language and cultural mediator.”*

6.3.5 Caring as advocacy

It was recognised by many participants that interpreters perform roles alongside the direct process of interpreting which could be understood as caring. The following extracts from the data include concepts of helping, professionalism, emotion, caring, enablement and allyship. While these interpreters resisted the notion of interpreting as caring, in each case they describe situations in which they are heavily invested in delivering the best possible service to their clients in ways that include accessing information, services or advocating for social justice.

According to Harvey:

There is definitely helping that goes on, I mean even with my Access to Work clients not everything I do is interpreting. When you’re

spending eight hours a day with somebody, one day a week or whatever it is, you do develop a relationship that is beyond kind of interpreter. It's not friend (original emphasis) either but it's kind of somewhere in between that and so, yeah, if it comes to it that somebody is asking for my help with something or something that isn't strictly interpreting, then generally I'm happy to operate in that space.

Here Harvey is recognising that relationships between clients and interpreters can be both frequent and long term, particularly in the case of the designated interpreter (see Dickinson, 2017; Hauser & Hauser 2008). From my own experience as an interpreter working with some clients over many years, I find myself relaxing strict boundaries of professionalism by occasionally helping to access information for them.

Ellis described not wanting to lose that human element of being an interpreter when he described a situation where he was interpreting for a person at the end of life:

I found myself drawn into a situation... it's got to the point where initially I thought "well, it's just another job", but now he's dying it's upsetting me because I've got to know him. So, it becomes part of, if you're not careful, now I'm too drawn in, but that's too late now, I'm just going to have to ride it. But you can get drawn into the situation. You are there as a human being whether you are signing or not... you're really there, and it can really affect you, but it works both ways, you are affecting them as well. I'm afraid there isn't anything you can do about that, as a person, as an interpreter you're going to have to decide for yourself; do I just deal with it, it's too much I'll go and do something else, or I work with a team of people, but you will never eradicate that. And I think in a way I wouldn't want to. I wouldn't really want to.

Ellis's account shows him valuing humanity above standards of professionalism that might expect him to interpret for a dying person without being emotionally affected. He describes himself as being "too drawn in" and finding the situation upsetting. His reaction is deeply human and his decision to stay with this client until the end speaks to his professionalism in recognising the importance of offering continuity to his client (Hetherington, 2014). Ellis was clearly emotionally invested in this relationship, recognising the situation as upsetting and one where he felt it acceptable to show

emotion.

Toby identified times when he felt he had become an ally to the deaf client:

Where I see something is not going right, I will probably become an ally for the deaf person. So, in that way you could say it's caring for that deaf person but it's not caring. It's about evening things out or saying that something is going wrong and stepping in to stop it before it, because that, if you follow that down, that's going to destroy this communication and there is maybe some cultural thing or that the question is too wordy that they're asking somebody in a job interview and so in that way, you could say that it's caring. Yeah. But I don't consider it as caring as in being about personal welfare, it's more about this thing to do with enabling each side to understand or communicate with each other in the best way possible.

In this extract Toby was describing a situation where the outcome of an interview could have had serious consequences for the deaf person, and he wanted to intervene when he could see things not going well. In his desire to prevent what he considered an injustice Toby became an advocate for his deaf client.

This takes us into the contested territory of advocacy. McCartney (2017, p. 84) has argued that the 'difference between sign language interpreting and other social justice professions is that interpreters should never speak out for the people; rather, interpreters should encourage d/Deaf people to speak out on their own behalf'. But being deaf intersects with many other characteristics so that while being deaf itself may not warrant advocacy beyond self-advocacy and collective advocacy by members of the deaf community, deaf individuals may need, and seek, advocacy support in facilitating access, navigating systems, mobilising resources, and addressing inequalities. Indeed, facilitating access lies at the heart of sign language interpreting.

The extracts in the earlier part of this section speak to unease and uncertainty about professional boundaries, about self-care, expressed in terms of distinguishing helping and caring; and delivering a professional service facilitating communication between deaf and hearing people. This unease is related to the idea of emotions and emotional labour, more commonly associated with women than men (Gray, 2010). Yet, in a study

of emotion management in interpreter-mediated medical encounters Hsieh and Nicodemus (2015) argue that quality and equality of care should be a guiding principle when considering decisions about emotions and emotion work. This means invoking professional judgment about the best way of dealing with emotions while striving to achieve the objectives of interpreting encounters, something that was evident in Ellis's account.

More broadly what these extracts have in common is a level or form of engagement with deaf clients that goes beyond the technical delivery of interpreting to facilitate communication. In each case the interpreter is invested in helping the client in some other way, engaging in behaviours that might be more commonly associated with the feminine, caring aspects of interpreting. And they are doing this from spaces in which they can comfortably describe their role within a predominantly female profession, without compromising their masculinity.

6.3.6 Caring as empowerment

When I put it to Alfie that some people refer to interpreting as a caring profession, his response was:

Really? Well, I don't (laughter). (Pause). Well, I mean, I care very, I care a lot about the people I work with but it's not like counselling or something. And it's not like I'm looking after peoples' health. I'm trying to create opportunities for people on a level playing field for them to get stuff done which other people take for granted and you know I suppose that works for deaf people and hearing people who are trying to work with deaf people, and you know, I'm facilitating things, but I wouldn't say that this is a caring profession. I'm not comfortable with that description at all. I don't think that describes what I'm doing at all.

Alfie is adamant that he is not working in a caring profession, but he still acknowledges that he cared about the people he was working with and cared about the outcome of interpreting situations. By facilitating communication on a level playing field, he is empowering the deaf person where they may not be afforded that empowerment if it were not for access to information via an interpreted interaction. Harrison also viewed

activities outside of interpreting as enabling. He said:

What we do allows stuff to happen or supports the stuff happening and we don't have an existence outside of that in a sense. As an interpreter, without clients you don't do anything. I absolutely think it's an enabling profession and it's both enabling because there are people with different language groups doing stuff and different cultural knowledge and different knowledge gaps and you're, kind of, helping that happen but they also have different goals and they're really different contextual goals and so how I think an interpreter works will vary according to those goals and so how I'd work in a GP surgery where, I don't know, the patient wishes to get better and the doctor wishes to help them get better, means I may behave in very, very different ways and do really simple things like "Do you remember outside you told me that you'd forgotten your medication? You haven't told the doctor that yet", you know.

In the example Harrison gave, he was prompting the deaf person to feel empowered to discuss every medical issue they wanted to, giving the doctor the best possible chance of diagnosing, and curing them of something that might be wrong. This was something he might chose to do over and above interpreting from one language to another. Once a client has empowerment they are included. Arlo focused on diversity, inclusion, and social justice when he said:

For me it's a caring profession. Although I may be uncomfortable with caring, for me it's about diversity. It's about inclusion. And it's about social justice. Those are the reasons why I do it. Now, I don't know whether that... it's not caring, but it is. It's caring about how society is. I don't think I care, in that sense, for the people that I work with but am I careful to try and promote those agendas? Yes. Those are my underlying values.

This related to the comment that Jacob raised earlier about the deaf person being an “underdog” and the desire to use “skills outside the linguistic bubble” to ensure the deaf person was empowered. However, he did recognise that taking over a situation and doing everything for the deaf person may not be in the best interest off the client.

I was a CSW for about 2 or 3 years and I did work as a student

support worker for 7 years. So deep down there is a very strong, “I will support you, I’m here as your ally”, and I do have to suppress that at times, because I’m an interpreter and actually to take over and be an advocate would be to do them a disservice. It might solve the issue quickly but actually, that little journey of their issue is going to give them more life lessons than me taking over. So that natural caring side has to be pushed down. It’s tough at times.

He recognised that there was an internal conflict regarding the fine line between empowering and taking over where there was a risk that the deaf person, like anyone in a new situation, did not learn from the experience to be able to potentially tackle it independently in the future. An additional risk is that any intervention by the interpreter, beyond interpreting, even where the intention is to resolve a misunderstanding or to advocate for their deaf client, shifts the focus of the hearing person from the deaf person to the interpreter, risking disenfranchisement (Humphrey and Alcorn, 2007).

6.3.7 Women as carers

Some of the research participants offered thoughts regarding women in the profession being more disposed to caring roles. Joshua’s opinion was:

I find that women will be more sort of caring, or they’ll feel like they need to do things for the deaf person as I think I’m much more, well this is how I feel anyway, I don’t know if it’s because I’m a man, but I just think they’re deaf, they’re not disabled. And so, you know, they can do things themselves and I do think they should do things themselves so I’m not afraid to say “well you can do that” or I don’t feel like I’ll say “I’ll call your parents” or “I’ll call that person for you” is I think, you know, it would be like “well, you can send them a text” or “you can FaceTime them” or... yes I’ll support them but I don’t feel like, I feel like there’s some female interpreters that are more motherly and I don’t agree with that actually.

In this comment, Joshua described empowering the deaf client and he made the distinction that he felt his behaviour was somewhat different to some women he may work with who he perceived may do things for the deaf client rather than enable them to do it themselves and thereby adopt a “motherly” role. When Jacob reflected on the gender split within the profession he said: “There is mainly women, but it works, I don’t

know why that is, yeah, I don't know why that is but I think there's that whole carer model, that you know, kind of, I think some people go into it because they want to 'help the deaf people'. Here, Jacob is alluding to the fact that he thinks female interpreters may align themselves more to the helper model of interpreting (Lee, 1997) because of their pre-disposition as caring women.

Riley thought that females would be more attracted to the profession because of the perceived caring nature of the role and said:

You know, the 'caring' in inverted commas professions tend to attract the females more than males, for whatever reason, and the more, kind of, the high octane, high powered, expected to do overtime and expected to, sort of, live the job, tends to attract, or at least get more males in it. And again, you can speculate why that is, you know, it could be for a number of reasons, you know, due to women having babies and, you know, not being able to pursue the career full-time, in the same way males do. And, you know, there's obviously a load of reasons why that could be the case.

Many feminists would argue that the view shared by Riley is outdated and untrue. The perceived caring nature of the role of sign language interpreter may attract a woman whose personality is such that they are a natural carer but there is no evidence to suggest that women are not able to “*pursue the career full time*” should they wish to. However, the reality within the profession is that women almost twice as likely as men to work part-time (Napier et al., 2021 p. 45).

The caring nature of sign language interpreting was also identified in the research by McDermid (2009) who interviewed interpreters and deaf studies educators in America and Canada. The view of some research participants was that ‘the lack of male students was due to the perception of sign language interpreting as a helping profession and so attracted more females’ (McDermid, 2009, p. 116) which supports the stereotypical view of BSL interpreting. Some significant ways in which the sign language interpreting profession is depicted, developed, and reinforced as a ‘female profession’ revolve on discourses about women as carers, nurturers, and communicators is, as is evidenced, perpetuated by the views of some of the men in this study.

6.3.8 All-encompassing responsibilities

Ellis recognised that there was little awareness and understanding of the role of an interpreter, the process of interpreting and the all-encompassing responsibilities in an interpreted event:

We interpret, but for a lot of people that might be the first and last time they ever meet a deaf person, so why would you expect them to know anything at all about the whole cultural background? So, in that sense, yeah, it brings the caring, the culture, the linguistics all together as a package and maybe the fact that I'm getting up of a morning with a smile on my face and going out and loving what I'm doing is because I'm able to do all of that.

This reflection from Ellis brings together several of the views of participants in the study. It is very difficult to distinguish if the sign language interpreting profession is linguistic or caring because the consensus, particularly with the interpreters taking part in this research, is that one must bring a mix of elements to the role to meet the needs of the deaf and hearing communities involved in interactions.

6.3.9 Section summary

The gendering of BSL interpreting can be examined through a historical lens from the establishment of the role of the interpreter as the helper of the deaf community, the notion that women are better helpers or carers than men, the way in which hearing people have perceived deaf people as disabled, and in need of care that is more commonly provided by women.

In my interview with Archie, I was struck by an analogy of a car in that you cannot have a car without an engine. The car needs an engine to get it from A to B and the body of the car represents the linguistics of sign language interpreting, while the engine represents the rapport. In the same way that a lack of power limits the car getting from A to B, a lack of rapport can limit the effective communication needed in interpreting situations. A key finding from this discussion of the nature of BSL as a linguistic or caring profession is the recognition that we do not need a binary description of BSL interpreting as a 'linguistic' or a 'caring' profession as it can and arguably should have

both these elements as well as other attributes to meet the needs of the deaf and hearing clients receiving the interpreting services. It is also clear that the perception of the profession can vary in space and place or through the identities of those involved.

It could be argued that it was the case in the past that BSL interpreting was seen as a 'caring' profession, but for the reasons identified above, it would appear that is changing. This matters for two reasons. Firstly, if men exposed to or learning BSL see the interpreting profession as a caring one that is dominated by women and gay men, there is a possibility they may be reluctant to enter the profession. Secondly, the change in description of the profession should encourage the perception of the deaf community as a cultural and linguistic minority. Portraying interpreting as a linguistic profession, with an element of caring and empathy for the people you are working with, would hopefully attract more men to the profession. Increased numbers of men would go some way to tackle the recognised shortage of BSL interpreters in general, as well meet the interpreting needs of deaf men who prefer to work with a male interpreter particularly in both the workplace and medical settings.

Just as Kimmel (2006, p. 254) has argued 'we need a new definition of masculinity in this new century: a definition that is more about the character of men's hearts and depths of their souls than about the size of their biceps, wallets, or penises', I argue that we need a new definition of the BSL interpreter as someone who delivers a high-quality interpretation while still considering the heart and soul of the job. It is this individual - man or woman - who will undoubtedly excel at being a sign language interpreter.

6.4 Remuneration

6.4.1 Section introduction

This section examines the men's experiences of remuneration in BSL interpreting and pays particular attention to questions of gender and gender pay gaps (Olson, 2013; Punshon et al. 2019). There are a number of factors that are likely to influence these experiences: i) the freelance basis of much work in the sector, resulting in assignments being linked to availability; ii) men's confidence in seeking higher rates of pay/setting higher fees (Barron, 2003; Williams, 2023); iii) pro-bono work and iv) fees guidance

published by NUBSLI.

As a largely freelance profession, remuneration in sign language interpretation cannot be directly compared with other predominantly female professions. However, it is worth remembering that patterns of remuneration in those professions indicate the greater 'value' placed on men in terms of remuneration, either through occupying positions of seniority or by being paid more for similar responsibilities (Williams, 1995).

Within her review of Sign Language Interpreting in Europe, de Wit (2017) observes that 'Each country has a different way of funding interpreting services and within a country there are also different possibilities or responsible parties for the payment of the interpreting services.' (de Wit, 2017, p. 79). This is no different within the UK where responsible parties can include the government, employers, educational institutions, arts venues, limited or public companies and deaf individuals.

6.4.2 The National Union of British Sign Language Interpreters (NUBSLI)

NUBSLI is a rapidly growing branch of Unite and was established on 25th June 2014 with 10 interpreters. It is estimated that approximately 40% of BSL interpreters are now members of the union. NUBSLI is clear that it 'defends workers' rights to ensure they are remunerated appropriately, have fair terms & conditions and work in a safe environment' (National Union of British Sign Language Interpreters, 2021). The union produced the first 'Fees Guidance' for trainee and qualified interpreters in 2017 and this was followed up in 2020 after consultation with members. Many interpreters now refer to this slightly outdated (because of increasing inflation) guidance, when quoting fees for interpreting assignments. In addition, the published fees guidance gives people booking interpreting services, an indication of the fees they can expect to pay.

Importantly, it is recognised that while this guidance does not distinguish between gender, but it does between regions (see: <https://www.nubsli.com/guidance/interpreter-fees>). Also, it is important to note the fees recommended are simply guidance and not mandatory. Interpreters have the autonomy to charge whatever they feel is appropriate based on the assignment, their skills and experience and this may sometimes differ from the guidance. This is particularly the case with specialist domains such as performance interpreting.

However, it is recognised that although interpreters are likely to charge more than the fees guidance stated to reflect their individual skills, experience and responsibility, some of the ‘large, non-specialist agencies who cover specialist areas such as health and child protection, work do not pay rates that reflect the specialist skills involved in this type of work, indeed often paying much lower rates than freelance interpreters charge’ (Townsend-Handscorn, 2018, p. 30).

It was recognised by Ethan that “*hourly rates and fees are fairly standard across the board, with NUBSLI’s work having an influence on that*” and Harvey said that “*the NUBSLI fee guidance helps to prevent a disparity*”. However, because there are no standard industry fees charged by interpreters since most interpreters are self-employed (Napier et al., 2021, p. 44), there will still be a disparity.

6.4.3 Being paid the same as women

When asking interpreters if they felt they earned more, less or the same as their female colleagues, there was an interesting mix of answers with most saying they earn the same as their female colleagues. Arlo said:

I don't perceive there to be a difference, I've never been in the situation where I got paid more, I mean I'm pretty careful about that anyway, and I don't like to get paid more than anybody else that I'm working with. So, I think the answer to that question is no, I don't.

Zachary wrote that because of the nature of most of his work: “*I don't think gender affects the amount per booking we get. For the most part my work is ATW⁴² so it's dictated by the client's budget.*”

Jude, recognising he was not particularly business minded, explained:

I've never even thought of a gender pay gap within interpreting so that's my initial reaction to that. I certainly don't get paid or charge more than female counterparts. I've usually been really crap at

⁴² ‘Access to Work is a publicly funded employment support programme that aims to help more disabled people start or stay in work. It can provide practical and financial support if you have a disability or long term physical or mental health condition’ (see: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-to-work-factsheet/access-to-work-factsheet-for-customers#:~:text=Access%20to%20Work%20is%20a,physical%20or%20mental%20health%20condition.)).

charging anyway.

And Edward expressed his view by saying:

I would take a guess that they [men] don't [charge more], simply because we're all freelance, we're all setting our own fees and we're all working to a guidance. It's not like we're working for big corporate, you know, organisations and big companies.

The guidance Edward is referring to in his comment is the NUBSLI fees guidance (section 6.4.11). While Carter recognised that men in predominantly female professions can earn more than their female counterparts, he did not feel this happened in BSL interpreting. This was a view also supported by Harrison who explained that he had been preparing to deliver some training and was asking some of his clients if they felt there was disparity in the charges of male and female interpreters.

Nobody came back and said "Yes". So, and that's absolutely not empirical but certainly in London for some people who book a lot of interpreters, they don't believe that men charge more, you know, it's variable but it's not variable by gender.

These participants all felt that there was no difference in pay for men and women within the profession. As Reggie put it: *"It's the agencies or ATW that set a budget not gender."* It may be the case that, as a governmental organisation, ATW determines a deaf client's budget. However, from a personal perspective as a practitioner in London, there is the possibility of negotiation of fees when accepting an assignment via an agency, which contradicts Reggie's experience in his region.

6.4.4 Being paid more than women

An alternative view came from men who declared that they were paid more than their female counterparts. Elijah, despite being married to an interpreter who is a woman, who he believed charged the same as him, was aware that: *"One of my clients pays me slightly more than one of the female regulars, but I assume that's because they live in London and I live outside, so there's more travel time and more travel expense"*.

Elijah is distinguishing between the payment for the work he is doing, and the out-of-pocket expenses incurred.

Jude commented that he could think of a few men who would charge more than women for interpreting assignments and said: *“If I think of some of the names inside my head that I know that I know charge quite a lot, they do actually tend to be men, I suppose. Like the two off the top of my head that I know who tend to charge more than anybody else around. They are men.”*

Harvey had worked in an interpreting agency some years earlier, and he had caught sight of some quotes submitted by 1 woman and 3 men for an assignment and he was shocked at how much the male interpreter was charging.

Harvey: I was genuinely gobsmacked as to the fees that were being quoted. I mean this was maybe 8 to 10 years ago now and the fees were being quoted probably in line with what NUBSLI is saying for London now. So, it was a lot of cash. So, the male fees for a one-day job were astronomical compared to the one woman who came forward.

Paul: And that job that was being quoted for, what kind of job was that?

Harvey: That was a day of office support. Access to Work.

6.4.5 Being paid less than women

A contrasting view, from two participants was that male interpreters received less than their female colleagues. Harvey stated that he probably charged less than the women who worked in the same areas he did. He said: *“I’d like to say I don’t think it’s a gender thing, but I know it is. I think for the [geographical] area that I work in, that I probably earn less than female interpreters who follow NUBSLI guidelines or whatever they’re called”*. Harrison felt similarly.

Actually I think I under... mmm... undercharge, that’s the wrong expression, I [pause] do a lot of Access to Work bookings now,

bizarrely I've kind of flipped my career round so I now do a lot of Access to Work stuff and I'm really conscious of what people charge and what peoples' budgets are and I'm more likely, and genuinely in the last few months I've had a conversation with deaf people who said "You really should be charging me more" or I found out that the woman is charging more than me. I suspect that I'm quite exceptional in that and I don't mean in a "Ooo, I'm a nice person" exceptional, just I think it's quite unusual. My suspicion would be that men charge more."

Even though Harrison was aware that he could charge more for his interpreting services, he chooses not to. This way of disturbing what was perceived as an overall pattern was also referred to by Jude who also spoke of men and women charging the same for interpreting assignments and some men charging more. But he recognised that women can also charge more saying: *"I could also reel off 20 females who charge more than I do."* One might initially think that this could be due to women having more experience than him. However, Jude undertakes a great deal of assignments which are perceived as high profile and therefore, one might expect these assignments to command a higher fee. These few examples appear to reflect the choices of the individual interpreters rather than a profession-wide norm.

6.4.6 Aim for equal pay

A common response was to aim for parity in fees. Regardless of whether an interpreter believed they receive the same, more, or less than their female counterparts, many participants highlighted the ethical aspects of aiming aim for equal pay. From the Facebook group Rory wrote: *"In the few instances that I am negotiating prices and able to converse with colleagues about that (male or female) I would aim for an equal rate"*. Arlo explained he would feel uncomfortable if he was getting paid more than any other interpreter and when discussing charges, he said *"I'm pretty careful about that anyway, and I don't like to get paid more than anybody else that I'm working with."*

Carter considered the location he lived in when he described an *"unwritten rule where actually we pretty much charge the same amount of money"*. This practice ensured parity and equality within the region he works in. George considered the morality of a differentiation in fees when he said: *"My feeling is there isn't a discrepancy there in fees and neither should there be"*.

It is not only the interpreters who strive for equal pay. Some clients have also raised the issue, and this does not always sit comfortably with some interpreters. For example, when Harvey explained that he probably charged less than other interpreters, he went on to say that, if a situation arose where he was charging less for a job and the client encouraged him to charge more, he would not want to do that. He explained:

If I come up with a fee, it won't be the same for every job, but it will be what I, a figure that I have arrived at for whatever reason. And if somebody says "Yeah, but I want you to charge more", something about that doesn't sit right with me personally. I know it's not fraud because they've got an agreement and you can charge what you charge, and they pay the invoices. It's not like going to them afterwards and going "All the extra money you gave me, there's half for you and half for me". There's just something about it that if I let other people start setting my fee then it doesn't sit right with me. The word... it's not integrity, it's something less loaded than that but no, I charge what I charge and if other people don't like it, stuff them!"

Riley also expressed how he did not like feeling pressured into charging more than he felt was appropriate. He said:

I kept my fees at a certain rate when everybody, well lots of other people, had increased their rates and I didn't and I did get, I think I have had some flack because of that, but was purely down to personal reasons on my part. I just felt I shouldn't feel comfortable charging three hour minimum really. It just seems like I was taking the piss. I've charged the same rates for like five or six years; I'm upping it now. Even in Access to Work, I've actually had the deaf professional say, "You need a pay rise", and that's come from them.

Historically, interpreters have found that fees have remained similar for many years because they were unsure as to what they should increase their fees to, or they felt that they should not increase their fees. Carter felt that "given that, you know, 80 as you said 80% of all the registrants of NRCPD are female, I'm sure they would have their beady eyes on that very closely, if any kind of pay discrepancy did rear its ugly head."

While I did not ask Carter to expand on his response referring to female interpreters' 'beady eyes' during the interview, when writing this on the page I was struck by its potential negative connotations, seemingly expressing hostility towards female interpreters. This encouraged me to return to this interview transcript to see if there were further clues about his attitude towards his female counterparts. What I found, however, was a very experienced interpreter, whose partner is deaf. He has become a trainer of interpreters, expresses no preference for working with men or women – rather preferring to work alongside interpreters who 'put deaf people first'. He recognised female interpreters as being more collegial while he felt male interpreters were more arrogant and was committed to the idea of equal pay for men and women. This has been a learning point for me in terms of interviewing practice, something I reflect on in the conclusion to the thesis.

6.4.7 Men's and women's availability for work

Three of the interpreters I interviewed recognised they may earn more than female interpreters over the course of a year simply because of their greater availability for work compared to female interpreters who have greater domestic responsibilities (Napier et al., 2021, p. 36). Sebastian alluded to this when he wrote, *"Only difference is annual income and that's depending on hours worked, which vary from terp to terp [interpreter] depending on their commitments and how much they choose to work."*

Ollie also discussed his availability to accept interpreting assignments when he wrote:

As I am currently free of childcare, then I can work 24/7/365 and therefore earn as much as I choose. However, as mentioned elsewhere, I was a full-time then part-time house husband, and therefore my wages were, at that time, impacted by childcare responsibilities.

Ollie recognised that, at the time he was a part-time house husband, his earnings were impacted due to not always being available to accept interpreting bookings, as would be the case for a woman who had similar responsibilities. Keith (2021, p. 240) claims that 'bros are often uncomfortable with the idea of their wives making more money than they make', but Ollie did not describe being uncomfortable that his earning potential

was affected by being a house husband, simply that this is what happened within his family dynamic. Interestingly Ollie was conscious of the fact that even when working part time, it was likely he would be earning more than women in other predominantly female professions where lower status attracts lower incomes (Bardasi and Gornick, 2008).

Edward's family unit consisted of two working interpreters and one child, and he explained: *"I earn more simply because she does more childcare, but we charge the same fees. Whenever we work together, we charge the same fees."*

In some respects, the flexibility of working as an interpreter and how that is incorporated into family or home life can be a positive for interpreters. Isaac wrote that *"Many females may choose to accept contracts with fewer hours for various reasons, related particularly to childcare"* chiming with the study by Napier et al. (2021) who found that females were almost twice as likely as males to work part-time.

Freddie sought to balance his commitment to interpreting assignments to maximise his availability for his family and this led him to opt for theatre work:

Theatre interpreting allows you to prep a lot at home and that's actually a very small amount of time that they're [interpreters] doing. That goes back to that old-fashioned sort of 'woman stays at home and looks after children' archaic view. It might be actually that fits in with some people's lives if they have children. For me I kinda wanna go the other way. One of the reasons that I want to do theatre is that I can stay at home a bit more.

In my interview with Toby, he shared an experience related to a male co-interpreter:

Toby: I worked with somebody that had four medical bookings in one day and so... no it was three medical bookings and then I was with them for a short, what should've been a short meeting, group meeting. And this person, male, has a habit of needing to leave every booking early in order to get to the next booking. I think that's more of a situation that they're driven by money rather than being gender or sex based. Because I've seen that with some female interpreters as well.

Here, Toby identified the motivation to earn as much money as possible, a motive he had seen in both male and female interpreters. More worryingly, he suggested that the drive to earn as much money as possible had a negative impact on the quality the service delivered to clients and/or a sense of accountability to co-interpreters.

6.4.8 Salaried vs freelance work

Referring to conversations he had had with mentees, Edward touched on the topic of salaried work for an organisation, commenting on the question of differential payment for male and female interpreters in salaried and freelance contexts:

Because they work for a company maybe that might be the case, but I very much doubt it. I just don't think our profession's that kind of profession where we would, we as men, would get paid more. And certainly not in the world of freelance. Everyone would be pretty much setting their fees towards, you know, you don't want to charge too much beyond what other people are charging, you don't want to undercut either [...] But who knows?

This is arguably a rather idealistic view of the remuneration within the profession, since a number of participants shared their awareness of male interpreters charging more than their female colleagues (ssection 6.4.3). There were, however, other participants who shared Edward's view. Louie wrote *"I've always been an in-house interpreter and all the interpreters who start are on the same salary regardless of their gender - which is complete fair and equal."*

6.4.9 Confidence to ask for more – a matter of gender?

Although Jude said that he had *"never even thought of a gender pay gap within interpreting"*, he later reflected on this by saying *"I do think that men might be, might be more assertive about pay, potentially"*. Teddy was to the point when he said, *"I think I sometimes I get more, because I have the bottle to ask for more."* In this comment, Teddy was alluding to the fact that in his opinion women do not have the confidence to ask for more money. This was something Theo also experienced. He said:

I currently work with a small group of interpreters with one particular client. I would go and negotiate my rate for my work and then he would just apply it to the other two, who are both female interpreters. And then one year I said to one of my colleagues "You know, I feel bad because I go and negotiate a rate and then you just get told that's your rate, you're not given a chance to negotiate it". And they didn't particularly want to, I have to say. But we came to a discussion and said "Well, perhaps it's better if, we share that responsibility" and I think that was an interesting experience for me because it made me realise that actually they weren't keen on going in and negotiating rates. And I found that interesting because I think male, I mean males in general, there's been a lot of research around that, are much more happy to go and negotiate their pay rates than women are, and I wondered whether that's the case for interpreters as well? Anyway, last year one of the other two did it and we got a decent raise again and it all worked fine.

Teddy is referring here to encouraging one of his female colleagues to take the lead on negotiating a fee increase which was accepted by the client. While this offers an example of a female interpreter seeking a higher fee it does beg the question of how hard a female interpreter might negotiate in comparison to a male interpreter in order to achieve the desired increase in fees.

While Theo showed his awareness of research evidence that men are more likely to negotiate higher rates of pay, and Teddy had experienced this before encouraging a female colleague to lead a negotiation, Toby referred to his general perception: *"probably it would be easier for male interpreters to be paid more because of UK society's perception of males that they listen to the male voice more when you're arguing about fees."*

The question of gender differences in approaches to pay was something Charlie reflected on:

Are men more like, "This is what I'm charging, and I'm not worried about what you think, I'm worth it" and are women going "I can't charge that. I'd be worried it would be too much"? Or are women like going the same thing "That's what I'm charging. I'm worth it. It's because I'm worth it." (Laughter).

Here Charlie was referring to the legendary L'Oréal tagline used since 1971 (Loreal Paris, 2021), encouraging women to believe in their sense of worth (Tournois, 2013). Charlie's answer to his own question was that female interpreters do not believe in their worth, a view shared by Teddy who wrote, "*Some female colleagues can downgrade their worth & ask for less*".

Even where an interpreter has the confidence to ask for more money, there is a chance the request will be turned down. Toby explained:

But sometimes regardless of whether you're male or female, sometimes you are perceived as being an irritation anyway, a kind of necessary evil in a process that is very expensive and so sometimes, yeah, it doesn't matter whether you're male or female, that they want to pay you the minimum anyway, because they don't want to pay you anything to be honest.

This section has explored participants' thoughts and experiences of seeking higher fees for undertaking interpreting assignments. Keith (2021, p. 246) asserts that 'Wealth is a marker of masculine success because it exudes one's ability to possess power over others. Being in control, possessing the freedom to do anything you want to do, having the ability to wield influence over others, and appearing to be more important than others are all cultural indicators in a capitalist society that a man has success'. Although the amount of wealth Keith (2021) is describing may not be gained through working as a BSL interpreter, the power, control, freedom, influence and appearing important, may be achieved.

6.4.10 More charged for experience or responsibility

Charlie felt the length of time he had been an interpreter justified charging more for his services.

I think I've always charged a little bit more than what other people have, from what I gather, and I think it might be more only because I'm prepared to try and put a bit more down because I think to myself "Well, I've been qualified 20 years".

As a salaried interpreter working within further education, Isaac wrote: "*there may be*

slight differences within a pay scale band, but this is linked to other factors such as length of service and progression through that band. I wouldn't say that there were any pay differences between males and females on the same point within a pay band."

Theo referred to a mixed gender supervision group he participates in and said *"There doesn't seem to be big differentials between the people, you know? I think also people have tended to work in specialist areas, maybe they've been around longer and sort of work in legal all the time and charge accordingly."*

Similarly, Rory wrote that he expected to be appropriately remunerated for taking on positions of responsibility. *"If I accept more responsibility (coordinator of a conference team for example) then I expect to be paid for the time/responsibilities that come with it."*

As a younger interpreter who qualified more recently, Harley recognised that people with more experience would undoubtedly charge more than him. He said: *"The only people that I've talked to about pay really have been the women and from what they've said they probably charge a lot more than I would. But they've also been doing it for like 30 years."* In his comment, he referred to women (reflecting the higher likelihood of working with women) he had discussed pay with, but length of service could equally refer to men.

Riley considered the perception of clients if an interpreter is relatively new to the profession charged higher rates:

I think the more experienced you are, the more people will understand if you're charging more because you've obviously got 10, 15, 20 years' experience and, you know, you're bringing something to the table that the newbies aren't. And in fact, I think if you were a newly qualified interpreter and you are charging the same as somebody who's been in the job 10 to 15 years, that might actually look quite bad for you in the long term.

Charlie also raised the issue of being a new interpreter with little experience in the profession:

I would think that a newly qualified or trainee interpreter would charge less than a qualified but sometimes it would be very, very similar. I think that the newly qualified or the trainee should think about why they think they could command that to that, but if you don't have any conversations, people don't know where to pitch things at.

In her research on interpreting services in Europe, de Wit (2017) notes lack of a coherent career structure for interpreters in England, Wales & Northern Ireland, including any increase in remuneration according to experiences. Career structure may yet to be tackled but the increase in remuneration has begun with the introduction of the NUBSLI fees guidance which was first published in the same year that de Wit published her research (section 6.4.11).

There is no clear indication in this consideration of how remuneration is related to experience and responsibility that suggests gender-based differences. The general view was that greater experience and responsibility should command greater remuneration, but thought was also given to the fact that without transparency and willingness to share information about fees between interpreters, it is still possible that fees and salaries may reflect other factors, one possibility being men's greater confidence in negotiating. The following section explores the lack of transparency between interpreters.

6.4.11 Money not discussed

Jenson recognised that as a group of mostly freelance interpreters, we do not discuss fees in a particularly open fashion. *"We are closed bunch of people, aren't we? Trying to find someone that's willing to discuss pay in a fully open way, I've found quite a rarity. I've not blatantly asked everyone what their pay structure is."*

Harvey also explained that he would also not ask someone what they are charging:

Generally, I don't know what peoples' fees are. I assume that people tend to just follow whatever guidance they believe. It's guidance because it's not something that traditionally was even spoken about within the profession. It's like you never ask people

what they charge.

George also said he would not ask colleagues what they were charging:

We are a predominantly freelance profession; I wouldn't be aware of any fee differences. Nobody would tell me. How would I find out? The agency wouldn't tell me and certainly the individual interpreter wouldn't tell me. And I'm not going to ask as well.

Because of his age and inexperience, Harley appreciated that he would not necessarily be confident to talk about fees. *"I've not talked about pay very much to anyone. I'm always a bit shy about that."* The NUBSLI fees guidance documents can help here, guiding new interpreters as to the fees they should be expecting to charge clients and agencies.

However, in his comment below, Charlie stated there was no formal document which specified fees and felt that each freelance interpreter would have their own terms and conditions based on market trends.

I would think that probably they're [fees] more on par but there seems to be a limit to what people can charge or a limit to what people would pay. It's not written down, I just think it sort of understood in a way, so I suppose it comes back down to what a female or male interpreter thinks they're worth. So, I have my terms and conditions and a female would have hers.

Where he said that *"It's not written down"* when he talked about fees, he had not considered that recommended fees are written down and published within the NUBSLI fees guidance, which is available for anyone to view on the NUBSLI website. However, there are no set fees in the UK, only guidance, and more recently, interpreters seem to be more willing to discuss general fees as Harvey noted. *"Nobody wanted to talk about money but these days definitely, it is more sort of out there."*

6.4.12 Pro-bono work

While BSL interpreting has developed to become a recognised profession with associated remuneration, participants in this study also referred to interpreting they

undertook 'pro-bono', i.e. without charging a fee. In a survey of BSL interpreting in Scotland, Mapson et al. (2019) found that it was not uncommon for interpreters to offer their services without charge at funerals, or when undertaking small tasks for deaf friends such as making phone calls or assisting with informal appointments.

Joshua acknowledged that on occasion, he would work without charging the client *"because you do develop relationships with clients and, you know, if you make a friend and so on, then they'll ask you to do something, you'll feel harsh to turn around and say "No" if it's something small."*

Similar to Joshua, Charlie felt that offering to work for a client without charging depended on the situation and the relationship with that person. He said: *"I do think all of us do a little bit of pro bono now and again and I think it depends on what the situation is and if you know the person well, you've known them for a long time, and they're in a particularly sticky situation and you can do it, you're prepared to do it and you go and do it. I think it's just understood."*

It was recognised that there is a difference between interpreting on a pro-bono basis for someone you have a long-standing relationship with compared to an organisation asking you to offer your services for no charge without a valid explanation. In a situation where everyone is volunteering at an event, one might argue there is a valid reason to contribute to that event by offering the skills one has as an interpreter. However, as is sometimes the case, where other people at an event are receiving payment and the interpreter is the only person offering their time for free, that would not be equitable.

Offering pro-bono work links back to the caring nature of the profession as discussed in chapter 5, and such work is valued for several reasons. It provides deaf people with access to information which might not be provided otherwise, it contributes to advancement for deaf people and to achieving social justice. Trainee interpreters offering pro bono work are able to access opportunities for professional skills development especially when working with fully qualified interpreters, something that may not be available in paid work. In addition, a sense of satisfaction can be derived from helping others, individually and collectively because of the positive impact it can have on the deaf community. Offering to interpret on a pro bono basis can offer

opportunities for interpreters to build ‘strong allegiance with deaf communities’ (O’Brien et al., 2023, p. 32).

6.4.13 Section summary

This section has explored, for the first time, the views of male sign language interpreters in the UK related to remuneration within the profession. There were mixed views with views that men received the same, more, or less than their female counterparts, but the general feeling was that men in interpreting aim for equal pay. The BSL interpreting profession differs from many predominantly female professions in that most of the people involved are freelance and therefore not following pay gradings and scales, as is common in professions such as nursing (Punshon et al., 2019) and teaching. An exception to this is the closely related profession of translation (Fraser and Gold, 2001). This autonomy over fees has implications for earnings potential in that interpreters are free to charge whatever they feel is appropriate. In the situation of contractual agreements within ‘Access to Work’ or health contracts managed by interpreting agencies, there is less flexibility and autonomy for interpreters to determine fees. However, there is still some scope for fee variation even within those agreements.

There were discussions around the likelihood that men had more confidence than their female counterparts to ask for more money for their services. Barron’s (2003) study of gender differences in negotiators’ beliefs about requests for a higher salary, from two decades ago, identified clear gender differences in comfort with negotiation, negotiation approach, and sense of entitlement to higher pay among men who were seen to have a bargaining advantage over women (Kray et al., 2001). Despite narrowing of the gender pay gap these differences persist (Williams, 2023), reflecting the wider societal acceptance that women’s work is viewed as being of less value (Skeggs, 2014), a perspective instilled from childhood through socialisation processes (Simpson, 2011; Babic and Hansez, 2021) that continues to be reproduced through the practices of educational, employment and wider social institutions.

Only further study will allow deeper understanding of female interpreters’ negotiating behaviours but there were interesting examples of ‘collective bargaining’ in this study, where male interpreters described negotiating higher rates for all members of a team

and in one case subsequently encouraging a female interpreter to lead negotiations, leading to a successful outcome.

For interpreters at the start of their careers, NUBSLI has gone some way to create parity with fees guidance, a useful tool to support interpreters in setting their fees. But, as noted, there is no requirement to stick to these fee levels.

The availability to undertake interpreting assignments is undoubtedly a factor which affects potential earnings within BSL interpreting. As was identified by Napier et al. (2021, p. 45) female interpreters are 'significantly more likely than males to work part-time'. On first impressions one might attribute the prevalence of female interpreters to work part-time because of caring responsibilities, however, this was found not to be the case in the 2021 Census which stated 'analysis showed that there is no significant difference in the prevalence of caring responsibilities between male and female respondents' (Napier et al., p. 36) and therefore, further exploration would need to be undertaken to explore why female interpreters are more likely to work part-time

6.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has addressed the experiences of male sign language interpreters in the predominantly female profession of sign language interpreting in the UK focusing on preferences for co-working, perceptions of the profession as a linguistic or caring profession and questions of remuneration.

Because of the ratio of male to female interpreters, it is likely that men will find themselves co-interpreting with female interpreters and do not often get the opportunity to exercise a preference. However, this study has shown that there was generally no strong preference to work with male colleagues. Instead, there was a clear sense of a preference for forming interpreting teams with the skills and knowledge most suited to the assignment and client, rather than formation of teams based on gender.

From the data collected in this study there appeared to be a more collegiate approach within the BSL interpreting profession which appears to be different to other predominantly female professions. There was an idealistic sense of the formation of teams that possess the skills and knowledge most suited to the assignment and client,

rather than formation of a team based on gender.

The data demonstrated a more collegial approach within the BSL interpreting profession which appears to be different to other predominantly female professions. A recent example from primary education in England (Cousins, 2020), starting from prevailing pressures to avoid bias, showed expressed preferences for opposite gendered teams, and choosing 'the best person for the job'. The message here then is that caution should be exercised in making claims for genuine collegiality in sign language interpreting. Rather, further research is needed to understand how men and women fare in a profession characterised by very different structures.

The idea of men resisting the caring elements of their roles in the interests of maintaining a masculine image, was not found to be prolific in this study. There was clear evidence of engagement with caring elements of the role, although there was clear reluctance to use the language of 'caring'. These aspects of the work were reframed as enabling/empowering deaf clients through facilitating equal access to information via the interpreter. There are parallels here with Elliott's (2016) framework of caring masculinities involving 'a refiguring of masculine identities away from values of domination and aggression and toward values of interdependence and care. These nurturing, caring identities constitute a form of men's engagement in gender equality and have the potential to positively change both men and gender' (Elliott, 2016, p. 256).

What is encouraging is the general feeling from research participants that, unlike the common situation in other predominantly female professions, there is not vast discrepancy in remuneration between men and women in interpreting as there is in many predominantly female professions (Appiah, Appiah and Lamptey, 2021; Harding, 2009; Hollup, 2012; Simpson, 2004; Twomey and Meadus, 2008; Zamanzadeh et al., 2013; Zysberg and Berry, 2005; Wilson, 2005). However, the perception of the men in this study is that more work is needed in encouraging women to see their own value and have confidence to be appropriately remunerated for their work.

From the information shared by the interpreters, it appears that the image of the sign language interpreting profession is viewed from a number of perspectives. From the interpreters' perspective, it is considered a specialised profession that requires specialist skills in BSL and English, as well as in-depth knowledge of the deaf

community and culture. It is a profession which requires continued professional development, reflective ethical practice, and a level of emotional intelligence to be able to work with a variety of people in a variety of situations. However, hearing people are thought to have different perceptions. On one hand there are some hearing people who use interpreters regularly and understand the skills, knowledge and professionalism required. On the other hand, those who are not familiar with interpreters and the interpreting process are unlikely to appreciate that BSL is a language in its own right and that qualifications are needed to practice as an interpreter and that it is a charged-for, professional service.

The following chapter (*Chapter 7 - Experiencing British Sign Language interpreting as a man*) will explore how the BSL interpreters in this study experience the BSL interpreting profession as a man in relation to status, gender norms and sexuality.

Chapter 7 - Experiencing British Sign Language interpreting as a man: status, gender and sexual orientation

7.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter focuses on three further major themes emerging from the data: i) the status of male BSL interpreters ii) gender roles and norms and iii) sexual orientation and perceptions of sexual orientation of men in BSL interpreting. Discussion of each of these themes draws on insights from psychology and sociology that each contribute to understandings of personal orientations and structural constraints (Warr and Inceoglu, 2018). The value of drawing on both disciplines is summed up neatly by Crompton and Harris (1998, p. 121): workers ‘can choose but are also constrained, a fact which lies at the root of sociological explanations of human behaviour’.

7.2 Male status

This section explores questions of male status and how this plays out in sign language interpreting. It also addresses how male sign language interpreters respond to challenges related to their ascribed status and how they attempt to redress the balance.

7.2.1 Societal status

Broaching the subject of men’s status as interpreters compared to women’s, Harrison responded by expressing some general thoughts about society and said *“I think men have perceived status that’s higher than women. I think white men have a perceived status that’s higher than white women”*. Linking status with gender and race, Harrison’s words reflect wider power relations in society that associate men with greater assertiveness and dominance than women who typically exhibit communal, cooperative, and caring traits (Skeggs, 2014). They also make reference to white privilege (Bhopal, 2018).

Arlo also drew attention to wider questions of male status: *“I don’t think that they [male interpreters], I don’t, no, that’s not been my experience. I think this is more, I think this is less about male interpreters and more about how we are as men. How we function*

in society. I don't think it's exclusive to the interpreting profession."

"How we are as men" is understood by Keith (2021, p. 8) as 'an old-fashioned way of viewing gender is through a binary lens of masculine–feminine and then assume that masculinity is typified by physical strength, autonomy, leadership abilities, independence, and emotional stoicism, while femininity is epitomised by physical weakness, nurturance, kindness, dependence, and emotionality.

Status as a male interpreter was not on Noah's radar at all, and he felt completely thrown when I introduced the question. And his response also refers to broader structural influences. He said:

I don't know. That's, that's, that's, I, I would hope not. I don't think in either direction. I don't think people... I don't know, it's a, it's a, it's a globally broadly patriarchal context, isn't it? So, people will make, probably globally, probably patriarchal assumptions about things. And I don't know what they'd be because I would like to think that I am not of that mindset. I have no (original emphasis) idea. I don't know. Ask me the question again. Because I'm so sort of wrong-footed by it, I can't remember exactly what it was (laughter).

On repeating the question, he responded "*I don't know. You see what you look for don't you and I don't suppose I look for it. I don't find myself wondering if it's there, so I don't see it when maybe it is. But I don't think it is.*" Noah's insistence that he does not subscribe to patriarchal attitudes and does not recognise the possibility of privileged status among male interpreters offers an illustration of how privilege operates in society (McIntosh, 2007). Even where privilege is recognised by those who benefit, this does not necessarily translate into action to challenge such inequality, more commonly being explained as the result of legitimate achievement (Schwiter, Nentwich and Keller, 2021).

By contrast, Archie did recognise his status and described how he found it easy to present himself in a particular way because of his status as a man. He explained:

I do find I can, I think, I find I can present myself in a way that because of our society, it's easy to do as a male. So, for example, if we're walking into a court room generally the other interpreters

will say to me “Can you be the one who addresses the judge on our behalf?” Is that because I’m a bloke or is that because I have the skills to be able to address people correctly in the right circumstance? I don’t know. But I do think there is something, sometimes about being a bloke that you can command attention where our society in England, doesn’t give that same level, yet, to a female in the same position and that’s wrong but I think that’s a fact of life sometimes. So sometimes, for example, when there is something, when the interpreter isn’t being respected or their point of view isn’t being understood, I might have to stand up and make the case and it will suddenly change the dynamic and it will be accepted because I use this deep voice with big words and whatever. And I’ve often been told by some of my colleagues “We’d rather you do that because it gets things done quicker”. Now I don’t know if that’s the male thing or just, the being able to hold those conversations.

Here Archie is consciously using his male privilege, and being encouraged to do so by others, who recognise the advantage this can bring in achieving desired outcomes. While this illustrates an arguably benevolent use of male power and status, it does little to confront the socially embedded status of men, rather reinforcing the status quo.

7.2.2 Ascription of status by hearing and deaf people

Sign language interpreters engage both with members of the hearing and deaf communities and from the experiences that the participants shared, there appear to be differences between these two groups in terms of the status afforded to interpreters who are men. In the selected examples below, it is evident that lack of understanding of interpreters and the interpreting process and as well as societal expectations of men at work, hearing people appear to ascribe greater status to male than female interpreters. An exception might be found in care settings where stereotypes of women as care givers may influence the hearing person’s perspective. By contrast, deaf people are more focused on meeting their needs, whether that be by a male or female interpreter.

Toby felt that the hearing people he interacts with afford him greater status. He said it was:

Because their [hearing people] exposure to interpreting is often very limited and because they will see women predominantly, I guess that there is an assumption that comes from, who knows where, that's maybe the subject for a different conversation, but when there's a male, because they're rarer, does that mean that people are perceiving you as being a manager who's normally in the office and coming out doing work in the field? Or is it because of part of societal, I don't know what the proper word is, but societal training that if you're a male then you are automatically the one in charge.

Toby's account reflects patterns of men riding the glass escalator to positions of seniority or management in many predominantly female professions (Bradley 1993; Lupton 2000; Sasa, 2019; Williams 1995a). Toby went on to offer a specific example working with a female colleague:

I've had it where I've been at a community event that was being addressed by the police about something or other and I was working with a female co-worker, way more experienced than me, although I'd been around a bit by this time and my co-worker was there first. She said, "They won't give me any prep, they won't let me see the PowerPoint slides, they won't tell me anything" and so I kind of thought "Right, God, we're in for a really horrible time, is this where they're almost talking to the community although it's a bit of lip-service?", that kind of thing. So, I go in there and I do my usual thing of going in handshake towards the person that's the presenter and all I do is just repeat exactly what my fellow interpreter had done, but because I was a male talking to a male, suddenly it was all okay. And then, so, the guy was falling over himself to show me the slides.

Here we see a clear example of sexism, showing disregard for the female interpreter. Toby went on to offer further evidence of overt sexism.

Sometimes people will make an automatic assumption that because I'm the male, therefore I am the boss, the lead, whatever and I was working with a different interpreter, experienced, professional, huge respect, lovely person and when we got there to get our names, although we were booked separately it was down that she was my employee, rather than recognising that she was working through her own limited company that, yeah, because I was the male, therefore I had to be the boss. It was a bit weird. So, you get talked to in other

situation as being that persons' manager and I don't do well with that kind of thing where somebody looks at me as being the person with power, the status, I don't deal well with that. I get very uncomfortable.

This situation offers an example of sexist expectations and practices and gender policing (Leskinen and Cortina, 2013) that form part of the social and cultural norms in many workplaces, creating in turn hostile work environments and job satisfaction (Kristoffersson et al., 2018).

Theo reflected on the representation of the profession by men and women on association boards:

[It is] partly to do with male interpreters being encultured into believing that they can do whatever and get on and do things and female interpreters having been encultured into believing that they can't or that they shouldn't and partly to do with the people that, outside people, expecting men to come forward. I don't know. So, I think my perspective is... it's cultural from both sides.

Theo's reference to being 'encultured' speaks to what has become recognised globally as the impact of patriarchy on women's lives (Adisa et al., 2020) starting with early socialisation within the family and reproduced through educational institutions and beyond (Coltrane and Adams, 2008; Kimmel, 2000; Lips, 2004; Morawska, 2020).

One question on the Facebook page asked for views on the notion that men hold more prominent positions within the interpreting profession. Ollie wrote:

Is there an assumption by some female colleagues that men are more confident and in some way should be out front? Is this a perception that is perpetuated by male terps [interpreters] in agreeing to do so? My thoughts here are that unless men make a conscious effort to not be prominent, we will be so by default. Whether this is conscious (sic) or unconscious by design.

Ollie's words, like Toby and Theo's, show clear awareness of men's privileged status in the world of interpreting and the implications for women whose progress is hindered

by what Huang et al., (2019, p. 4) refer to as the 'broken rung', the lack of opportunity to get on the first rung of the ladder to senior leadership positions.

Referring to deaf people's understanding of interpreter status, Noah reproduced his view that gender did not matter:

[Deaf people] care a lot about how familiar you are to them [...]. Ordinarily a deaf person would like someone that they've had before in this context, and they can know everything and just get on with it rather than have to introduce what it's all about. So, familiarity and their appraisal of the skill level and professionalism and all the other things of the interpreter showing up. I don't think, because those other things are live variables for the deaf person because they're used to using interpreters, the gender thing is so far down the list that it doesn't even come to their awareness.

Given clear evidence of the importance of interpreter tone of voice, lexical choices, register and appearance in conveying deaf peoples' attitudes, opinions, contributions (Young, Napier and Oram, 2019), Noah's response betrays not only a lack of awareness but also a lack of regard for the importance of accurate representation when interpreting between deaf and hearing people. He did however begin to reflect when considering the views of hearing people engaging the services of an interpreter:

I wonder whether it's different for hearing people who don't have an automatic checklist of reasons they do or don't think this interpreter is any good and it might be that gender is more... can be seen as more superficially an obvious feature.

George's views on the question of status offered rather different insights. He had experienced jobs where female co-interpreters were paid more attention by the hearing clients:

If there's any bias from the hearing person to the female interpreter or the male interpreter, I would say it's towards the female interpreter particularly in a caring assignment. So, if I was co-working with a female in a caring profession, co-working within a caring profession, I have occasionally got the feeling that the focus has been more on the female interpreter and I don't know whether

that's because there's the impression that females are more caring than the males, I don't know. I couldn't pinpoint exactly what that feeling is, it's just a feeling I have occasionally that the focus from the hearing people is perhaps more focused on the female interpreter in those settings. Whether that's a reverse in other settings such as police, court, etc. and the focus is more on the male interpreter, I don't know, but certainly as a male interpreter I've noticed that in the caring assignments that I've done.

While it is unsurprising that female interpreters may be paid more attention in contexts of caring given social attitudes and stereotypical understandings of women as being more willing to engage in caring (Skeggs, 2014), it is interesting that George identified police and court work as domains more likely to attract male interpreters because of their high status (Napier et al., 2021). This leads us into the differentiation of interpreting jobs undertaken by men.

7.2.3 Men's association with higher status jobs

Edward reflected on the fact that that even though the sign language interpreting profession is predominantly female, men in the profession were often seen in the higher status assignments. He wondered:

if it's disproportionate in that you have more females in the profession but those that are getting the more prestigious jobs might be male. That's probably, you know, the case in other female dominated professions. Sexist society that we live in and the glass ceiling and all of that, So, you can have a professional predominantly female but the ones that kind of get up there might be... might be male. I don't know. I don't know if that's true.

Napier et al. (2021) cast light on such high-status jobs including in-vision television work, conferences, mental health, court work and politics and found that men were significantly more willing to engage in high status work than their female counterparts. One possible explanation offered by Napier et al. (2021, p. 57) is that men are significantly more willing to engage in high status work compared to women in the BSL interpreting profession. This was associated with greater confidence supported by wider societal expectations of men as more assertive and powerful than women.

When I asked Edward if he thought that male interpreters who were aware of men's privilege made efforts to include female interpreters, he responded:

I'd like to think so, but I think there is probably a reason for that is a number of variables. We work in the field of disability politics, many of us are gay men, and I think we are probably a little bit more savvy than other men in other professions, if you know what I mean. So maybe... yeah maybe we are, maybe some of us are a little bit, yeah, more cognisant of the fact that there's a propensity for that to happen, whereas there might be other professions where your average men might, you know, at best clueless and at worse downright, you know, perpetuating all of that.

Here Edward positions himself explicitly as a gay male interpreter and focuses on the potential for gay male colleagues to be more astute when it comes to encouraging the inclusion of more women in higher status jobs. Linking his views also to involvement in disability politics suggests Edward's familiarity with theory as well as the practice of privileging of more powerful social groups and marginalisation of minoritised groups in society based on gender, sexual orientation and disability.

A final understanding of men achieving higher status jobs in interpreting came from Oliver who felt this was not connected to gender related social status but rather to length of experience. In his own case he explained his own involvement in higher status roles was because: *"I've been qualified for so long. And experienced in most genres"*. Oliver's position might arguably be described as a clear example of lack of awareness of his own privilege (Pease, 2012).

7.2.4 Addressing gender-based privilege and oppression

When participants did experience an imbalance of ascribed status, they described their efforts to redress the balance. Ollie felt the imbalance was *"uncomfortable and unjust"* for both him and colleagues who were women. Ellis shared an example and referred a colleague who was a woman for a vacant in-house job, following his appointment over her for a previous job he felt he had been awarded simply he was a man:

I think my first ever interpreting job being a man was an advantage. It was for a regional post at the RNID, and the resident deaf person

was a man and clearly, we were of a similar age, we really hit it off at the interview. However, the other candidate is someone that I know, and she is a CODA, and her signing was, is glorious. Way better than mine was. And I thought "I got that because I'm a bloke". You know, there is some lovely irony there because some years later, I was working at a place and somebody said "[Ellis] do you know any interpreters, we need more people" and I said "yes I do", and I gave that persons number to the person, my friend, and she got the job and she ended up running the interpreting service at [Midlands] College.

Toby took a rather different approach. He felt assertive female interpreters were able to "fight their corner", although there was a need to support them with that fight because of the treatment they receive, mostly from hearing clients. Harrison described a need to address prejudice and discrimination more generally explaining:

I'm very conscious when I'm working with people, for all sorts of reasons whether it's because they're younger than me or because they're earlier career or because they're women, that I will try and do things to mitigate what would be assumed status. So, I won't always just go first, I won't always be the one who approaches the client and so sometimes it is appropriate for all sorts of reasons but I will always, - always- I will usually (original emphasis) try and at least have it open that the other person does and if I think that there are reasons that they aren't confident about it then I'd encourage them to be so, rather than just that thing of "you're the bloke, you do it" and it never comes out like that but, you know.

Freddie too was sensitive to perceptions of imbalance, particularly when co-interpreting. "I think as a male, I'm very aware that I have to be very sensitive about the way I work to ensure that I'm not coming across or upsetting anything that could be potentially perceived as being unequal or in-equal - in, un." Co-interpreting was also referred to by Jacob who described how achieving an equal balance needs to be a team effort. He reflected upon a time when he was working at a conference with a female colleague who he described as very similar to himself in terms of experience. Yet several questions were only directed at him and not his colleague. He explained:

We kind of chatted about it, my colleague and I and we made sure

that any decisions we would make together. We didn't really flag it up with them, but we just tried to, with our reaction to it and how we kind of mediated with them, we tried to readdress the balance to make it quite clear that we're just equals.

He felt that by being open about what was happening, it would highlight and address the behaviour and prevent it from worsening.

Make it quite overt as to what's happening. I just think that works better. I've learnt over the 10 years that you need to, kind of, call things out and yeah say what you see, because if not, then these little things kind of bubble underneath and then it starts to affect your productivity.

Archie also felt that it was important to address discriminatory behaviour head on:

Quite often you know we'll walk into a scenario, and I'll find people are addressing me and I will straightaway turn away from the person addressing me and make it clear that I'm one of three or I will ask, if I'm asked a question say "Oh, I don't know. So and so, what do you think?" to make it very clear that we are not a status you know, there is no state here, we are a team of three.

On occasion, if all else failed, formal complaints were needed, a solution preferred to by Zachary when a hearing person was "*exceedingly chauvinistic and pretty much ignored*" his co-interpreter.

This recognition of male privilege and attempts to address the disadvantages this brings to female colleagues can be conceptualised as male allyship, a complicated and contested form of activism (Linder and Johnson, 2015). Edwards (2006) developed a model of allyship that distinguished between motivations of i) self-interest (ally as protector of particular individuals); ii) altruism (heroes or rescuers - based on a sense of guilt arising from privilege derived from particular identity); and iii) social justice (ally with understanding of the role they may play in perpetuating oppression and align themselves as allies to the issue rather than individuals). All three forms are evident in the excerpts above, with Toby's, and arguably Harrison's contributions showing potential for allyship as a matter of social justice.

7.2.5 Section summary

This section has explored status ascribed to male interpreters within BSL interpreting practices as well as the wider society. Empirical examples show that some interpreters experienced higher status than women within the profession because of their gender. This was not, however, an exclusive view with experience, possibly correlating with age, also being linked with status. Explanations included an understanding of wider structural attitudes to gender, while some participants felt differences could be explained by female interpreters' unwillingness to undertake high status assignments, an explanation that aligns with broader studies that show practices that rationalise men's comparative success in the workplace (Heilman, 2012) including in predominantly female professions (Simpson, 2004).

The higher status of men did not however carry over directly to deaf clients' views, with some participants describing how deaf people expressed a preference for the familiarity of the interpreter, interpreter's knowledge of them and their working life or medical history, and the interpreter's skills and professionalism (see: Hauser, Finch, and Hauser, 2008; Napier, Skinner, Young and Oram, 2020; Young, Napier and Oram, 2019). There was also mention of female interpreters' higher levels of recognition in care settings, perhaps unsurprising given wider societal attitudes aligning work involving care as being the domain of women.

7.3 Gender roles and norms

7.3.1 Introduction

This section explores participants' experience of their roles, and the social norms influencing their work in BSL interpreting. Emerging from the interviews were three interlinked themes: i) self-confidence, a sense of certainty and trust in one's own abilities; ii) ego, a sense of self-esteem or self-importance, and iii) arrogance, an inflated ego associated with lack of empathy and need for validation.

7.3.2 Confidence and self confidence

Confidence and self-confidence have been described as dynamic and highly individualised based on factors such as one's perspective, role, self-esteem, sense of

efficacy, sense of self, and experiences related to the context or setting (Perry, 2011).

In contrast to participants' sense that their female counterparts were, or may be, lacking in confidence, they suggested that male BSL interpreters were more likely to have the confidence to actively seek high status assignments with strong public visibility such as television and politics. Harvey viewed this behaviour as a "male trait".

Harvey: I think there is an element of being prepared to put yourself out there. As well, that I think you would need to be a certain, it takes a certain type of character, and that's not a, that's no shade, that's just like saying that some people are more able to do that type of thing, whereas I think most people would tend to shy away from anything that's like, that everybody can see, like the TV news like any sort of website type interpreting so that it's almost like a permanent record or something that people could look at and pull apart, because we do, because we're awful. So maybe it's more a male trait to do, to do that kind of work or to actively seek out that kind of work. I don't know.

Paul: So, do you think male interpreters have sort of a thicker skin and are not necessarily worried about putting themselves out there?

Harvey: Yeah, I think there is an element of confidence that maybe comes with having a thicker skin that, that you wouldn't necessarily go through the same thought process as to looking for reasons why you shouldn't do something but there's more reasons why you should do something so maybe I'm confusing confidence and arrogance...

This sense of confidence is arguably boosted by wider societal attitudes that it is appropriate for men, including men in predominantly female occupations, to put themselves forward in this way. This pattern can be seen in nursing, as well as wider professions, where men tend to apply for promotions earlier than women, even if they don't meet all of the required criteria (Hader, 2010). And in academia, women have been found to avoid becoming 'involved in the competitive, self-promotional behaviour traditionally associated with dominant masculinities' (Leonard, 2001, p. 4). Looking at

men's behaviour, Hader's argument is supported by ASLI Census state that 'there is a strong profile of male interpreters taking on (or being willing to take on) higher status, more publicly visible work (such as TV and politics)' (Napier et al., 2021, p. 60).

Harrison explained that he had always been confident, confident enough to declare openly in a workshop he was delivering, that on occasion, he did not understand passages of spoken or signed language. He was also confident enough to share with me that a young, newly qualified female interpreter had said to him: "*Yes, but you can do that. But if I did the same thing as a new career, younger woman, I wouldn't last five minutes, they'd think I was rubbish. You can do that because you're a bloke and you're 54 and you have some reputation*". This young woman's experience is reinforced by Valentin's (2019) research with female interpreters in Finland who experienced strong gender bias, threatening their confidence.

Harrison did not feel his confidence was linked with his reputation, he simply saw it as a personality trait, although he did recognise the privilege afforded him by virtue of his gender:

I've always just said "this is the job that I'm doing and if it, if I need to tell you it's not working, I'll tell you", and I think my experience of being a male interpreter, in that sense, is intrinsic to my experience of being an interpreter and impossible to unpick, you know? What aspects of my confidence and my privilege and my status and the acceptance of what type do, you know, at different times in my career, are down to the fact that I'm a bloke and so can get away with stuff?

Harley held a similar view in relation to the link between confidence and gender: "*I think through society they're [men] more likely to be told "you can do whatever you want" kind of thing. I don't think I fit into that so much (laughter), but I think it could be that they're [men] just more likely to just feel like they can do, they can do anything.*"

The data did reveal some exceptions. For example, Toby had a different perspective and felt he was not a 'typical man', confident to take on any assignment available. Indeed, he expressed anxiety at the thought of attending, let alone interpreting at, an international conference: "*I've never been to one of those events ... it would overwhelm*

me. I think I'd freak out just attending it".

In the past, Jude had been responsible for organising teams of interpreters for conferences. He described how male interpreters were more confident and willing to undertake platform work in comparison to female interpreters.

I know I will end up with men on my team because there are women who I would go to first that will say "no" and as a result I end up with guys that would be further down on the list, not necessarily because of skill set, they may just not be based near [southern city], but I know that they will say "yes". For two reasons actually. One because it is the fact that it is something platform that makes it interesting for some of these guys to do so they'll go out of their way to re-arrange what they would have had to come and do this very interesting work. People that are local, women that are local who I would automatically go to work with me on any number of things, the more high-profile it comes, and the more exposure driven the job is, the more likely they are to just say "no". Even if they are available. So complete converse. A man further away, not actually really available will make an effort to rearrange and to travel, and then you'll have a female who's local and available but will go out of their way to say "no" because it's exposing or "no thanks, not for me".

Alongside being more willing to undertake public facing interpreting assignments, these more challenging or specialist areas of work can command a higher fee. And although most participants in this study did not become interpreters principally for financial gain, the money, securing an income is an important reality and especially for freelance interpreters who experience some precarity while at the same time having some control over their earning potential by undertaking specific assignments of their choosing. Although not mentioned by participants in this study, it may be that men are more comfortable with the attention that comes with public facing assignments and can lead to distraction from the purpose of interpreters which is to enable deaf people's access to spoken language and hearing people access to signed language. This distraction has been effectively captured in a blog post by Withey (2023): 'My interpreter is not your rock star. They are there providing valuable access to the deaf signing community.' Conversely, women may be less motivated to take on public facing assignments because of the preparation required and as is identified by Napier et al.

(2021) many women within the profession work part-time and have caring responsibilities. But there is also evidence of women facing criticism when working in exposed arenas, not for the quality of their work but for factors such as their appearance or facial expressions (Williams, 2018).

7.3.3 Confidence and appearance

Increasing a sense of confidence can also be achieved through dress (Johnson et al., 2014). Riley reflected on how he felt more confident when going to work wearing a suit.

I think if I am wearing a suit then I do feel more confident in, kind of, stopping a doctor or interrupting and sort of saying, "Hang on a second, can you just clarify this?" or "What does that mean?", you know. I think it gives me more confidence to actually, you know, and sometimes it's quite big formal meetings within social services or say I've done a few, kind of, barrister, kind of, pre- and post-court. I've not actually done the court interpreting itself but I've done the, sort of, because there's been like a deaf social worker that's there to give evidence and they're talking to the barrister before they step into court and again, you know, I think it gives me the confidence to actually, you know, bring the whole, sort of, natural meeting grinding to a halt while you go "Hang on a second, I just need a little bit more time to just interpret that concept, just hold on" and then go "Okay, I've done that now, off you go."

For Riley, this sense of choosing clothes that give him confidence and which he feels portray him as more of a professional, is important. This phenomenon was evident in the 1980s when the notion of power dressing was 'rapidly gaining popularity with those women in professional career structures who were trying to break through the so-called 'glass ceiling' and providing them with a technique for self-presentation within this world of work' (Entwistle, 2020, p. 286). And Rumens and Kerfoot's research with gay men in medical settings found they felt better placed to gain promotion because of the clothes and accessories they wore to work, feeling more 'self-assured' and 'confident'. (Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009, p. 780). While society may not see Riley being a male interpreter as having to break through the glass ceiling to gain power and control in the kind of situation he describes, he clearly feels that dressing in a suit enhances his confidence sufficiently to be able to assert himself and exercise some power in

assignments involving powerful professional.

Ellis also talked about the pride he had in his professional appearance. He said:

I pride myself on... it's old school really but you know, clean shoes, smart clothes, normally I shave. I make sure that I don't really smell of garlic badly from the night before... If I'm out interpreting the next day, I never drink the day before. It's all about the moment for me... and I pride myself on doing it well. That's just a personal thing. I can't extrapolate that to the rest of my life unfortunately for my wife. I'm just useless. But I think if you're going to do something like interpreting and do it well, I think ahead, I think "OK, what's going to happen?" So, I was out this morning interpreting from 7 to 8 o'clock this morning in a factory that I've never been to and when I arrived actually I was over-dressed. I looked a bit too smart. But I thought better that way than the other way. It's just, that's just a personal thing.

For Riley, this sense of choosing clothes that give him confidence and which he feels portray him as more of a professional, is important. This phenomenon was evident in the 1980s when the notion of power dressing was 'rapidly gaining popularity with those women in professional career structures who were trying to break through the so-called 'glass ceiling' and providing them with a technique for self-presentation within this world of work' (Entwistle, 2020, p. 286). And Rumens and Kerfoot's research with gay men in medical settings found they felt better placed to gain promotion because of the clothes and accessories they wore to work, feeling more 'self-assured' and 'confident'. (Rumens and Kerfoot, 2009, p. 780). While society may not see Riley, a male interpreter, as having to break through a glass ceiling to gain power and control in the kind of situation he describes, he clearly feels that dressing in a suit enhances his confidence sufficiently to be able to assert himself and exercise some power in assignments involving powerful professionals.

'The Bro Code' advocates for owning at least one suit but, unsurprisingly, not in the context of employment. It says: 'This [suit] can be worn to weddings, funerals, graduations, and special dates. Plus, you'll look smart. If you don't own even a single suit in your wardrobe, then you're completely missing out!' (Serai, 2023) (see Number 28, Appendix 16). This shows that appearance can be important for some men but

those subscribing to 'The Man Code' may think differently. It says: 'No man shall spend more than 2 minutes in front of a mirror. If more time is required, a three minute waiting period must be allowed before returning to the mirror' (Urban Dictionary, 2023) (see number 47, Appendix 15) and 'A man's shoes may not intentionally match any other article of clothing on his body' (Urban Dictionary, 2023) (see number 54, Appendix 15), showing, a disregard for the value of any form of professional appearance, unlike Riley.

7.3.4 Ego

Ego, the sense of self-esteem or importance was thought to be relevant an important by Jude who had a considerable amount to say about the ego of male interpreters. He is an interpreter who has a reputation for working with high profile deaf people who attend and present at international events about the deaf and interpreting communities. He described differences he had observed between male and female interpreters when working with one high profile deaf person:

I think there are certain male IS [International Sign] interpreters that have made it a bit about me as the interpreter, "I work with [deaf person], I, look at me". [Deaf person] is a bit [signs DUMP THEM]. So maybe females being a little bit more humble, a little bit more discreet, a little bit more "I'm here in a very supportive way as an interpreter, it's all about you".

The 'Look-at-me' phenomenon discussed in spoken language interpreting (Zweig, 2014) has also been explored within signed language interpreting by Best (2017, p. 6). Discussing the promotion of signed language interpreters on Facebook with interpreters, she found that the promotion of accessible events by interpreters was deemed acceptable. So too was deaf posting pictures or videos of working interpreters on Facebook. But it was considered less acceptable for interpreters to draw attention to themselves by posting similar images or videos on social media. This is a reminder of the importance of considering perceptions of interpreters' behaviours by others, particularly deaf clients. In the context of spoken language conference interpreting, one of Ryan's (2015, p. 81) research participants stated 'Males are much more dominated by their egos. I have to switch off my ego in the booth when I work – I must not think my own thoughts, I would otherwise lose track of what is said. Few men are willing to do that'.

Jude did express the view that some male interpreters are unfairly described as egotistical particularly when judgement was being made by someone who had not met the interpreter in person.

I've heard so many interpreters who don't know certain men, usually females, who don't know certain men, there's a lot more of the [signs: STEREOTYPING] "oh yeah because he's [signs: PROUD] or he's [signs: EGOTISTICAL, THAT'S HIM]. There is a lot more of that and you kind of think "Well, I actually know him and he's anything but". So, you think "Okay, so is that because he is a man?". So, therefore the assumption [signs STEREOTYPING] must be.

In this comment, he suggests that men are easily labelled and stereotyped as proud or egotistical without any direct evidence of these behaviours. He felt that men interpreted invitations work as welcome votes of confidence boosting self- esteem.

I think the relationship with our [male interpreters] ego is more that if we are being asked to do something, we must therefore be good enough to do it and even if "I don't feel that I am, well, somebody else does so I'm clearly pretty good". So, and even if inside you kind of think "Well, I'm not, I don't know. But they've asked me so that's great."

He did not think women reacted in the same way, sometimes lacking in self-confidence, and was conscious that men's egos could prevent the best person for the job being engaged for a particular interpreting assignment.

We don't always help ourselves as men because I do think there are times when, actually, we're probably not the best interpreter in the room and we are on the stage doing the platform [work] and the thing that prevents the better [original emphasis] female from doing that job is "I think there are better interpreters in the room than me". Whereas men will go "But I was asked, so they obviously think I'm good enough, so I'll do it". So, I think that relationship with ego is interesting.

These thoughts about men's egos link back to questions of confidence discussed in

the previous section. Confidence and ego are loosely related, and we must exercise caution in suggesting that ego lies behind the behaviours of male sign language interpreters. Simply because they have greater confidence to undertake public facing assignments (Napier et al., 2021) does not necessarily mean they are egotistical but does suggest that they are less risk-averse than women interpreters (Michaels, 2022).

7.3.5 Arrogance

In giving his views about confidence (section 7.3.2) Harvey's said he was unsure whether he was confusing confidence with arrogance. He subsequently dug deeper into feelings about arrogant behaviour he had encountered from fellow male interpreters.

Not all male interpreters, but some male interpreters that I have encountered across my career, the word that's come into mind is 'arrogant'. It's almost like "Okay, we're in the same space but I'm doing my bit and you're doing your bit. I'll let you know when it's my turn". But other than that, you might as well be sat either side of the room or have a screen between you or whatever. There isn't that sort of collaborative support. I wonder if that's just male personality traits traditionally that you don't offer that type of support, but it's the job. So yeah, I have been taken aback.

Such behaviours could, of course, be linked to the model of interpreting used for teaching at the time a particular interpreter was training (Wilcox and Shaffer, 2005). Yet Harvey's experience is not unique. Harrison also referred to that was sometimes associated with men interpreters:

As a percentage, if people are talking to me about colleagues, they are much more likely to describe a male interpreter, as a percentage, I think it's not a huge number, as being arrogant or not paying attention to their colleagues needs, than they would be of a female colleague. And I think some of that is simply that thing of being in a place of privilege and not reflecting on the fact that everyone's experiences are the same as your own.

Both Harvey and Harrison referred to interpreters not working collaboratively with their colleagues to best meet the needs of the clients they are working with. And Carter

understood perception of arrogant behaviour by some interpreters as being linked to a need, in some way, to prove themselves in the field.

I think they have to demonstrate almost over and above the skills, knowledge and experience of the female counterparts sometimes there is a sense of the level of arrogance that men, that people pick up on from male interpreters and if I think of some of those male interpreters that I know, anecdotally that might be borne out just because it's a caring profession, you know, when you're doing sign language your emotions are heavily visible and you have to deal with somebody else's on top of yours. So, there are some kind of, coping and defence mechanisms I think, from a psychological perspective, that men use in order to deal with some of that kind of, yeah, just kind of that emotional psychological stuff that's going on. So, you know, I think if you were to ask people around personality traits, I think you would become, for men, you know good communication skills, normally quite exhibitionist but also with some sense of arrogance. I'm not... because they are arrogant, I just think it's because they need a lot of front to be the man, I guess.

Carter's words neatly encapsulate the elements of arrogance: inflated ego associated with lack of empathy and need for validation, more commonly described as insecurity that can be associated with displays of arrogance masquerading as confidence and self-assurance.

It is important to add too that perceptions of arrogance among interpreters was not limited to male interpreters. Harrison recognised that both men and women can display arrogance in the workplace, but, it seems, this behaviour is experienced more commonly with male than female colleagues. *"Arrogance is not limited to men, you know, there are a number of women that I also wouldn't want to work with but again, it's proportionality, you know, I can name more men that I wouldn't want to work with, as a proportion of the male interpreters who are working, than I would women."*

7.3.6 Section summary

This section reflects themes of confidence and self confidence in interpreting, traits that appear to have strong connections with gender. Associated themes of ego and arrogance were raised by small numbers of participants yet their insights into their

own, and their interpreting colleagues' behaviours help to bring the experiences of being a male BSL interpreter to life. These findings link back to the question of status with men's greater confidence giving them access to higher status assignments often involving public facing events where their recognition reinforced their sense of competence, findings that chime with use of those from the 2021 Census of sign language interpreters (Napier et al., 2021). Moreover, they chime with wider sociological insights into men's relative advantage and privilege in the workforce, and with evidence of men's behaviour in justifying their privilege as the result of their own endeavours.

7.4 Sexuality

7.4.1 Section introduction

This final section explores a long-held belief among interpreters and the deaf community that most interpreters are gay and how that has manifested itself within the profession. It also explored gay and straight male interpreters' experiences of the profession including how they are perceived; and ends by exploring men's experiences of co-interpreting with gay men and with women.

7.4 2 Most male interpreters are gay (?)

Without any formal evidence, there has been a long-held belief among interpreters and the deaf community that most male interpreters are gay. There is difficulty in confirming this belief because sexuality can only be self-reported and therefore reliant on disclosure by individuals. However, in a survey of registered interpreters and translators in the UK, Napier et al., (2021, p. 35) found that, compared to the ONS data reporting 2.2% of the UK population identified as LGBTQIA+, their data revealed 'a figure seven times higher' at 14.49% of their sample that represented approximately 43% of registrants (Napier et al., 2021, p. 35). Despite acknowledged under reporting of LGBTQI+ identities in the ONS household survey, this disparity lends strong support to anecdotal reports of a higher proportion of LGBTQIA+ within the SLTI profession than in the general population'.

Harvey reflected on the perceived high number of gay male interpreters he met through work or on courses. He said:

The demographic of people working as interpreters, or even people on the courses that I was doing, it seemed very similar to nursing in that respect, that yeah it was predominantly female, the males were very few and far between and half of them seemed to be gay men, the men that were involved.

Joshua had a similar experience to Harvey and said: *“I find that even though there are so very few male interpreters, but even on top of that is you’ll find that there’s even fewer, let’s say, heterosexual male interpreters”*. Elijah also made a direct comparison between nursing and the interpreting profession in relation to the two professions being caring and therefore, both fields attracting gay men.

I’ve always thought, based on no evidence whatsoever, that it’s [interpreting] kind of like a caring profession. So nursing, the number of male nurses compared to female nurses and then the number of those male nurses who are gay and the number of those male nurses who are straight, you’re talking to minority within a minority. And I think interpreting is similar. It’s kind of a supporting, caring, thing although it’s not, when we are doing it, it’s just interpreting. But I think people are, who might consider it as a job, are that kind of person. The supportive, caring type of person.

Bobby also referred to minorities within minorities when he explained what he tells people about his job when he first meets them. He said: *“I often say “I’m a minority, in a minority, in a minority” because I’m a sign language interpreter, it’s a minority profession, I am a male, and I’m straight (laughter). There you go.”* He first noticed this when he worked as an in-house interpreter for a charity and met other interpreters who were men within the team who were all gay. He was also keen to point out *“not that it really mattered, it never really bothered me, it was just an interesting point”*. He reflected on this and questioned *“Does this profession attract more gay males because it is a female dominated profession as opposed to being a, your traditional kind of brute male dominant, dominated profession like, you know, work being, you know, working for a big finance company or law or whatever it is?”*

When learning sign language and training as interpreters, both Jake and Ollie had been told that most interpreters who were men were gay. Jake said, *“For a while, I*

believed that I was part of a small club of non-gay-men interpreters". Ollie questioned whether the alleged high numbers of gay male interpreters was: "a perception of the times or a statistical truth?" Reggie also referred his early days as an interpreter: "It was an instant assumption back then that male interpreters were gay, as it was a job that only women did as it was a 'caring role'.... can remember being told this."

Harrison reflected on changes in attitudes during the number of years he had been an interpreter, *"more often my gender would be discussed in the fact that I wasn't gay, more than the fact that I wasn't a woman. Certainly, in the early years, not now... well still now occasionally."*

Members of the deaf community commenting on his sexuality and gender was something Jude had experienced. He said: *"The amount of times that I've been told not only "Oh you're a man" is also "You're a straight man". From deaf people. From deaf people. Which is interesting. "Nice to have a straight male". What?"* While these comments seem incredulous to Jude, they do reflect similar experiences of other men within the profession.

Joshua felt that the notion that most men in the profession are gay could have an adverse effect on the numbers of men entering the profession. He said: *"I think if younger guys see the interpreting profession as a caring profession that's dominated by women and gay men, there's a possibility that they'll be reluctant to go into that profession".* He did not expand on why, but this suspected reluctance speaks to the continuing social stigma associated with men entering jobs that challenge masculine ideals, as in nursing (Clow, Ricciardelli and Bartfay, 2014; Harding, 2007; Smith et al., 2020) and teaching (Ariogul, 2009; Roulston and Mills, 2000).

7.4.3 Gay male interpreters

A number of participants self-identified as gay including Alfie who referred to being very effeminate. *"I'm used to being really out to everyone, or assuming I don't need to come out because they just assume as soon as they see me".* He also talked about how he approached that open-ness with new deaf clients.

I say "Well, you know, I'm gay (laughter), you need to know that"

because maybe, I don't know what's obvious to deaf people, you know, so I'm usually pretty upfront about that. I'm gay in a way that people will know as soon as they see me or hear me speak, they will recognise that I'm gay and I think that changes things a little bit but generally people have just shrugged their shoulders and say "Well, I don't care. That shouldn't make a difference" or "That doesn't matter". Sometimes the gay thing has been a disadvantage and sometimes it's been an advantage. I know that's part of the reason I keep being asked back to the Queer Film Festival, because I fit in and because, because I'm gay. I think there's some positive discrimination that happens. So, that helps in my mind make up for some of the other times where I've felt uncomfortable.

His sense of being uncomfortable is unsurprising given: 'heteronormativity is the rule for most bros, gay men are lumped in with women as possessing feminine traits, which undermines their masculinity and makes them targets of derision and abuse.' Keith (2021, p. 11).

As a straight interpreter, Harrison felt that being gay within the interpreting profession did not appear as challenging as it could be within other workplace environments. Referring to his own experience he said:

There was a sense in male interpreters being gay was not a thing, it was not a bad thing, it was not a negative thing, although people, gay men have told me who are interpreters, they would still get some homophobic remarks, it was actually within the interpreting community. I didn't see that and that might be because I'm not gay, so I don't see it but, but that felt like a different status to the kind of status in wider society.

It is impossible to categorically confirm that there is a general acceptance of gay men in the profession, but Harrison's comment does allude to the possibility that, from a straight male perspective, gay men who are interpreters may face less prejudice from within the deaf community and the interpreting profession than in other professions or in the community. In this sense he saw the interpreting profession as a safe space for gay male interpreters.

7.4.4 Straight male interpreters

In contrast to the assumption that most men in interpreting are gay, Rory recalled working with more straight male interpreters in the past. He reflected that *“Back in the 90s, I worked with male interpreters a lot more! Conferences, exhibition type events, etc. I remember drunken nights (more than I remember the working days) with 5 males in particular. We were all straight!”*.

In his work as a trainer of new interpreters joining the profession, Carter recognised how there are more straight men entering the profession. When he thought about the men in his current cohort of trainees he said: *“They’re all straight. Which is really bizarre. I would expect one of them to have been gay!”*.

What did emerge from that data was the topic of straight male interpreters not being stereotypically male. Jude, who identified as straight, reflected on this:

The vast majority of my friends tend to be female. I don't really cope very well in the whole alpha male [original emphasis] environments. It doesn't really do much for me. You know, we have these sayings, you know, very much in touch with my or “You're very much in touch with your feminine side” and all of that. Which I get a lot of. And I've certainly had deaf people whatever “gay, straight?”. How interesting if you're a guy that actually has a bit of empathy and is a little bit, actually cares about people, you must then be gay, because obviously straight alpha male men don't care about anybody apart from themselves, apparently.

Harley expressed his connection to women and specifically referred to talking about something which might be sensitive and how he would prefer that to be with a woman. He said:

I've got more female friends and I think I never really was quite like ‘one of the boys’ and like hanging out with. I've got a few male friends but if I wanted to talk about something I'd probably go to a female friend more first. And so, I feel like I kind of relate more to that.

Harrison described how he was not stereotypically male and had a level of *“emotional comfort”* with women. He said:

Most friends I've had have been women. On the courses that I've done, most of the students have been women. I don't do any (original emphasis) of the stereotypical, kind of, male things, I don't do sports, I don't do pubs, I don't like talking about sport, I don't do talking about women, you know, so all of that stuff that, and it's a stereotype because there's lots of men not like that but the reality is I think in my life, after school I've probably had two male friends, you know, and the rest have been women. And so, I'm more emotionally comfortable with women.

The way Harrison describes himself contrasts with the societal norms of male behaviour with respect to concealing emotion, behaviour that is encouraged from an early age (Randell et al., 2016). It also contrasts with the behaviours of male Psychiatric Nurses in Bagihole and Cross' (2006) research where, male nurses were more likely to talk about football when they got together.

7.4.5 Perspectives of others outside interpreting

Participants' experiences linked to sexual orientation included instances of straight male interpreters being assumed to be gay by their future wives. Harrison shared his story:

So, you probably know that I met my wife whilst interpreting and when I first met her, for the first nine months she thought I was gay and there were two reasons for that. One is because most of the male interpreters she had, if not all of the male interpreters she had were gay. Secondly, because I didn't behave in stereotypical gendered ways and so I was quite nice (laughter) and so she assumed, that reinforced the idea that I might be gay, until I started to fish to find out if she was in a relationship and then she realised I might not be. So, you know, just in a really practical level, because usually you wouldn't know from someone what they think of you but clearly someone who uses a lot of interpreters at that time just A) assumed I was gay and B) assumed because I was nice, I was gay.

Ellis had a similar experience where his now-wife assumed he was gay because of his style of using BSL. He shared something she said:

My wife, when she first met me, I was interpreting when she first met me, and she said, "I really fancied you, but I wasn't sure whether you were a straight man or not." And I think there's, and I'm aware of it, I'm like, I get really camp, I can get really camp when I'm signing. I couldn't give a monkeys, you know, I quite happily get on with it.

Although Ellis admits to being 'really camp' when he is signing, it is also worth noting that most BSL teachers are thought to be women. Although no statistics could be found on this within the UK, a website in the US⁴³ claims 81.4% of sign language teachers are women and 18.6% of sign language teachers are men and so Ellis may have picked up their gendered signing style (LeMaster and Monaghan, 2006) although if this were the case it might be expected that many male interpreters would have adopted a similarly gendered signing style. Harrison and Ellis's experience of being mistaken as gay by their subsequent wives were linked to their behaviour in the workplace which had led to misgendering. What seems pivotal here is that they were not conforming to the behaviours of 'stereotypical' heterosexual men.

Edward shared a story which related to a deaf gay client not wanting him to interpret for him because of the perceived familiarity between gay interpreters and deaf gay men in the deaf community.

I remember once being in a situation where I was told that they didn't want a gay man (laughter) to interpret, and they wanted me to convey that to the healthcare professional. They didn't want me to interpret the appointment because I was a gay man, and everybody knew each other in the deaf gay community and he felt very uncomfortable, and he didn't want me there and he wanted me to tell the healthcare professional that he didn't want me and why he didn't want me. And I said to him "Well, I feel uncomfortable about doing that". And he said, "Well I want you to tell them" And I said "Yes, but your motivations for not wanting me to interpret for you are all focused on confidentiality, right?" and he's like "Yes". I said "So, what about my right to my confidentiality and my identity as a gay man? Maybe I don't want to be outed by my client at work", which caused him to pause. And then I said "I can absolutely tell

⁴³ See: <https://www.zippia.com/sign-language-teacher-jobs/demographics>. Zippia is an online recruitment service that helps job seekers find and pursue jobs and it aggregates information that a job seeker needs to make career decisions.

them you that you don't want me to interpret and I can say that it's for personal reasons and I would be happy with that or maybe we can, you can just let me do this for you and I can reassure you that I have absolutely no vested interest in using this information in any kind of way.” And then he agreed that he would use me (laughter).

A similar situation in a healthcare setting had occurred with a deaf man relying on a straight interpreter. Hugo explained:

I was with a guy, you know, a gay guy and he got quite embarrassed at first because he was on about literally like the clinician asked him “Are you bottom or top?” pretty much, and it's quite a straightforward question isn't it really? And he was quite like “Oh, I don't want to tell this male interpreter”. If I was female maybe it would've been different but in that situation I was literally like “Oh, don't matter, don't bother about me” like I literally went “Honestly, don't care about me I'm not bothered like, I'll walk out of here and I'll probably forget like, I don't care” and to really, just be like, that I just add the extra stuff in and then he felt comfortable and literally was just like this, this, that and the other and then I went to interpret for him again and because of that initial one was over, he was just like completely different. He was so like he just literally was like he went into a bit too much detail sometimes, because I think it was that comfortable (laughter) and it was like “Alright, yeah!”

These two extracts speak to questions of building trust (O'Brien et.al., 2023) through and in confidentiality, to ethical behaviour in professional settings and the exercise of empathy, by interpreters and deaf clients having a care for each other's welfare. The trust that Hugo fostered in his experience of interpreting in a highly sensitive clinical setting echo findings highlighted by Adeyemi-Adelanwa et. al. (2015) who examined the attitudes of patients towards being cared for by male nurses in a Jamaican hospital. They found that:

89% of respondents agreed that male nurses created an atmosphere which was conducive to care and were friendly and sensitive to their patients. This strongly suggests that there are enough positive perceptions of male nurses by patients who receive treatment from them to overcome their initial negative perceptions

(Adeyemi-Adelanwa et. al., 2015, p. 142).

Hugo's client was initially uncomfortable, but the way Hugo treated him and put him at ease resulted in the client overcoming his initial negative perception of having a straight man interpret for him.

7.4.6 Co-interpreting with gay male interpreters and females

A final thematic section addresses common experiences among participants in this study of co-interpreting with gay male interpreters and with women. Toby explained: *"I've worked with more gay male interpreters rather than straight male interpreters"* and Jacob referred to the different kind of experience working with gay, and with women interpreters compared to straight interpreters.

Co-working with a gay colleague and co-working with a straight male colleague is quite a different experience. Co-working with a gay male colleague and women colleagues, female colleagues is very similar but co-working with a straight male is different. I think there's less banter, there's less, you know, professional banter, not unprofessional banter. that there is a nice relationship. You can bounce off each other, just a little bit more.

Similarly, Jacob expressed how much he enjoyed working with female co-interpreters. He said: *"As a gay man I love women, I love working with them, there's a really good rapport so kind of, so the idea of, I realised actually, that from working at the college, that all the interpreters bar one were women and got on well with them."*

The possibility of friendships between gay men and straight women at work has been explored by Rumens (2008, 2010a, 2010b, 2012) who identified diverse ways in which gay men 'find and work out intimacy in the context of workplace friendships with other gay men and with heterosexual men and women' (Rumens, 2008, p. 9). It is evident from contributions in this study that sign language co-interpreting offers a further context in which supportive friendships can be built between members of minoritised groups.

7.4.7 Section summary

This section has interrogated the long-held belief among interpreters and the deaf community that most male interpreters are gay, the experiences of gay interpreters in the sample, and illuminated experiences of co-interpreting by gay and straight interpreters. In summary there is indeed a higher representation of gay men as registered interpreters than in the general population, but this does not equate to all male interpreters being gay. Further findings, based on very small numbers of contributions to this section of the thesis, and therefore must be treated with caution, suggest that being gay does not constitute a barrier to work in the field of interpreting; the world of BSL interpreting is largely recognised as a safe occupational space for gay men; different styles of signing may lead to mistaken identity as gay; gay men are able to develop strong positive working relationships with co-interpreters, particularly women. Of particular interest was the negotiation between gay deaf clients and gay interpreters when working in contexts of highly sensitive information where respect for each others' sexuality and right to privacy led to the development of trust, support, and continuing interpreting arrangements.

7.5 Chapter summary

This chapter, like the previous one makes several contributions to knowledge relating to the experiences of men in the predominantly female profession of sign language interpreting. This chapter was arranged to reflect the second set of themes of male status within the profession, gender roles and norms, and sexual orientation in BSL interpreting.

Key points this chapter makes relate to the status men are afforded within the interpreting profession. It describes how, as in other predominantly female professions, men and women experience status differently with men experiencing privileged access to opportunities that have been explained both in terms of gender-based traits and societal influences. Further exploration of how women experience status, or arguably the lack of status, is needed to develop understandings in this area of BSL interpreting further and how this compares and contrasts with women in other predominantly female professions.

Examination of gender roles and norms within the profession has demonstrated higher levels of confidence among men in BSL with interesting insights into men's egos and

different understandings of displays of arrogance in male interpreters. This knowledge could usefully be complemented by further research to better understand women's own views and experiences relating to confidence. What was clear from the accounts of some men in this study was that they were aware of situations where they were selected for assignments when there were better qualified women but for a number of reasons, including women's reluctance to engage in public facing assignments with high stakes, men continued to take on these assignments. Understanding of women's attitudes and experiences would benefit from further research which might usefully extend existing research on interpreter resilience (Crezee and Major, 2021) taking a gender perspective.

Finally, the chapter has explored issues related to sexual orientation: the representation of gay men in the BSL interpreting world, experiences of gay interpreters in this occupational space, experiences of straight interpreters, and experiences of working across sexual orientation and gender. Encouragingly the BSL interpreting profession offers a welcoming space for gay men without pressure to conform to heteronormative stereotypes.

In the following chapter I summarise the findings of the study, outline its original contributions to knowledge, consider its limitations, make recommendations for policy/practice and for further research and offer some concluding remarks.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This thesis presents the first in-depth empirical study of men's motivations to become, and their experiences of working as, BSL interpreters in the UK. With men representing approximately 17% of registered interpreters (Napier et al., 2021, p. 31), sign language interpreting is recognised as a predominantly female profession. In contrast to a significant body of research on men in predominantly female professions, particularly nursing and teaching, there is a dearth of research on men in sign language interpreting, offering fertile ground for exploration.

In this chapter, I begin by recapping the aims of the study and the research questions that informed the empirical study of 38 male BSL interpreters, using semi-structured interviews and an online focus group. This is followed by a summary of the findings, discussion of their significance and contributions to knowledge. I reflect on the limitations of the study and envision future possibilities for furthering empirical knowledge and theoretical understanding by adopting alternative research methods. I make recommendations for practice and policy, and for future research, in the field of sign language interpretation. I conclude the chapter with some final reflections on the study and its implications.

There is a body of research on men in predominantly female professions with the majority of this focusing on the nursing and teaching professions (see chapter 2), yet there is a dearth of research on men in sign language interpreting and what is available tends to focus on the practical implications of gender on the interpreting process.

This study has presented an opportunity to examine men as a minority in sign language interpreting in the UK in order that interpreters, educators, professionals, and scholars can gain deeper insights into, and understand the implications of men as a minority in the profession.

As the consideration of the motivations for men in the UK to become BSL interpreters and their experience in the profession has been largely absent from the literature on men in sign language interpreting, the findings of this study allow us to contrast the experiences of men in other predominantly female professions to gain a greater

understanding of the reasons men pursue a career in a predominantly female profession and how they navigate that as a minority within the field.

8.2 Recapping aims and research questions

The aims of the study were: i) to establish the motivations of men entering the profession, including the ways in which they are first exposed to sign language and the influence of that exposure in progressing to become BSL interpreters; and ii) to develop understanding of how male interpreters experience working within this predominantly female profession.

An interdisciplinary review of the literature spanned evidence and theoretical argument about men in predominantly female professions, men in spoken language interpreting and men in sign language interpreting. The review reinforced the importance of individual and structural factors (Warr and Inceoglu, 2018) and the intersecting influences of personal orientation and structural constraint (Crompton and Harris, 1998) in influencing motivations and experiences. It also confirmed a clear gap in knowledge and understandings of men's motivations for, and experiences of, working in BSL interpretation. To address that gap, my research questions are:

1. What are the motivations for men to become British Sign Language interpreters?
2. What are the experiences of men in the predominantly female profession of British Sign Language interpreting?

8.3 Exploring exposure to BSL

Research Question 1: What are the motivations for men to become British Sign Language interpreters?

Including questions of first exposure to sign language, motivations to learn skills in BSL and continue into interpreter training, the findings can be summarised as follows:

Initial exposure to sign language is highly variable ranging from birth into families with deaf members to chance encounters with sign language interpreting. Three main categories of initial exposure were identified among the sample. These were through: i) **personal contacts** with deaf parents, family members and friends, or hearing family

members and friends who were in contact with one or more deaf people; ii) **activities and events** at church, through work and volunteering, via a hobby or course, or through a random meeting with one or more deaf people; iii) **direct observation** of the use of sign language, involving BSL interpreters at work or between deaf people communicating through sign language.

These categories were not mutually exclusive and further analysis of participants' accounts of initial exposure revealed a more complex picture from which it was possible to develop a typology of **introducers, influencers, and attractors**. This approach to understanding how men become exposed to BSL and to start on their journeys to sign language interpreting allows for a more nuanced understanding of the many, varied, and multiple factors influencing men's decisions to join this predominantly female profession. Complementing existing psychological research on personal orientations, values, and preferences for choices of work (themselves influenced by membership of socio-cultural groups) with sociological insights, allowed for deeper understandings of the ways in which gender intersects with other social categories to influence decisions in choice of career. In short, this approach helped in thinking about what attracts men to such occupations, how they negotiate their lack of fit with Acker's (1990) notion of the ideal worker, and how their involvement in a female dominated profession, popularly understood as having significant elements of 'caring', may moderate argument about societal valuations of work that is conceptualised in this way (Skeggs, 2014).

The second part of this research question concerns motivations to develop BSL interpreting as a choice of profession. Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations emerged from the interviews and online focus group. Extrinsic motivations ranged from social justice ideals to ways of earning a living.

Social justice ideals were sparked by awareness of the marginalisation and social exclusion of deaf people and the deaf community, and aspirations to achieve equitable access for, as well as empowerment and advancement of, deaf individuals by breaking down barriers (Llewellyn-Jones and Lee, 2014). These were perceived as facilitating comprehensive, person-centred, communication between deaf and hearing people in an effective and meaningful way with high quality language and interpreting skills. Interpreters who had witnessed barriers directly with friends and family considered

themselves as interpreting 'with' rather than 'for' the deaf community, and as such they felt part of the wider deaf community (Miner, 2021). Interpreting 'with' implies allyship, while interpreting 'for' implies advocacy, distinctions that merit further consideration.

Strong familiarity with the experiences of deaf people goes some way to establishing and building trust with the deaf community, important for reducing stress, anxiety and additional labour which has been associated with unfamiliar interpreters (O'Brien et al., 2023, p. 37). It also speaks to questions of allyship, identified as part of a wider role for interpreters implying involvement not only with linguistic aspects of deaf people's lives, but also with deaf culture (Shaw, 2014) and active involvement in the struggle for recognition and civil rights (Halley, 2020; O'Brien et al., 2023). There are interesting parallels here with research on allyship in higher education institutions (Patton and Bondi, 2015) and among psychologists (Melton, 2018). Drawing on critical race theory to explore the potential for White people to become social justice allies, Patton and Bondi (2015) distinguish between 'nice White men' and genuine social justice allies, between engagement at an individual level involving rewards for being 'good people' with few risks and sacrifices, and engagement at the institutional level to disrupt systems of oppression and injustice. Equivalent considerations for sign language interpreting would focus on the importance of recognising the historical and continuing dominance of hearing people and spoken language, together with a desire to be supportive rather than controlling. Exploring the role of psychologists in mental health services in the USA, Melton (2018) refers to the professional expectations of 'the multicultural competent psychologist' as providing leadership as agents of prosocial change, advocacy, and social justice, yet participating in advocacy and allyship has been described as: 'a continuously evolving and messy process of becoming aware, educating self, exploring beliefs, feeling connected, experiencing affirmation, and navigating viewpoints' (Gray and Gayles, 2022, p. 151). This aspect of hearing men's motivations for becoming sign language interpreters has not been fully explored in this study and offers an interesting opportunity for further research.

Motivations linked to remuneration hinted at masculine notions of being a 'provider' for the family, reflecting Ryan (2011) and Hickey (2019)'s findings that remuneration within spoken language interpreting was less important to women than men. In this study, the pragmatic view that people need to earn a living was evident within the motivations to

become an interpreter although a focus on generating great wealth (Keith, 2021) was not. More important was the ability to earn a living from something the interpreters enjoyed. There was some evidence of the interpreters' awareness of the strong potential for interpreting assignments based on the paucity of male interpreters. But while this placed male interpreters in a privileged position, this was not always recognised or acknowledged.

Intrinsic motivations, linked to personality traits and the drive for self-actualisation, were evident in the form of skills development leading to professional development and career opportunities, as well as enjoyment in the varied nature of the work involving interaction with deaf people which was associated with a sense of pride.

Intrinsic motivations for developing language skills and becoming an interpreter are, necessarily, linked to the idea of connection, more specifically connection, or reconnection in the case of male BSL interpreters with earlier connections, with deaf people. Here we alight on a similar concern exposed when considering extrinsic motivations in the form of social justice ideals. While the men in this study realised they needed to focus on their skills development which they understood to benefit the deaf people they were working with (Bontempo and Napier, 2007), there was no obvious recognition of their privileged position as hearing people, nor of the wider implications this might have for deaf people and the deaf community. While it is easy to conceptualise interpreters as aiding communication, enabling deaf people to gain access to services and wider aspects of society, it is more challenging for (most) hearing people to conceptualise (some) interpreters as disempowering, slowing the advancement of deaf people at a structural level. This argument is articulated by De Meulder (2019) whose study of motivations to sign explored the benefits and disbenefits to the deaf community of outsiders learning to sign for intrinsic reasons. Linking motivations to prevailing language ideologies, and linking sign languages to specific ideologies, for example inclusive education (De Meulder and Murray, 2021.). De Meulder (2019) argues that deaf people and especially deaf children are subject to ideologies that discourage or devalue the use of sign languages that are seen as compensating for hearing loss or even as acting as a barrier to the development of spoken language, rather than seen as a strong marker of cultural identity and membership of the deaf community with its own language. She argues, it is something

of an irony that sign languages are becoming increasingly popularised and institutionalised, while sign language communities find themselves increasingly marginalised and medicalised.

Research Question 2: What are the experiences of men in the predominantly female profession of British Sign Language interpreting?

Turning now to the second question that focuses on the experiences of men once they have become interpreters, chapters 6 and 7 discuss findings related to: i) gender preferences in work settings, ii) perceptions of sign language as a technical/linguistic and/or caring profession (chapter 6), iii) remuneration and iv) the intersection of gender and sexual orientation (chapter 7).

8.4 Exploring experiences

8.4.1 Gender preferences in work settings

While many men in predominantly female profession prefer working in particular environments that reflect their masculinity and/or allow them to work with other men (Evans, 1997a; Evans and Frank, 2003; Wingfield, 2010) there is no direct comparison in the field of BSL interpreting. The closest analogy that can be drawn is any expression of gender preference when co-interpreting. This key finding revealed a different picture from the broader literature, with the interpreters in this study being more likely to reflect on the nature of each interpreting assignment and select the best co-interpreter for the job, regardless of gender, to offer the best service possible for the client or client group when undertaking conference interpreting. Interestingly, it was possible for interpreters to value a positive attitude to interpreting over a high standard of linguistic skills when identifying co-interpreters, confirming the importance attached to attitude by instructors of trainee interpreters (McDermid, 2009). A significant proportion of the men interviewed did however express a preference to work with co-interpreters with whom they already had a personal connection and in whom they could feel confident in terms of the support they would receive in the interpreting event to achieve the best outcome for the deaf people involved. There were, however, references to differences in support that can be provided by men and women co-interpreters. Harvey for example noted that women “*tend to be much more up for working collaboratively*”, as a team and on

equal terms, where ego was not a barrier to achieving this. This was felt to lead to a better interpreting experience for all involved linking back to one of the motivations for becoming a BSL interpreter, which was the desire to provide the best possible service to the deaf community. Willingness to substitute a high level of technical linguistic skills for a positive attitude in interpreting, when expressing preferences for co-interpreters, takes us to the question of how BSL was perceived, as a technical linguistic or caring profession.

8.4.2. BSL as a technical linguistic or a caring profession

While sign language interpreting is unquestionably concerned with linguistics it is also perceived by many to require an appropriate aptitude for a 'caring' profession. This led DeMeulder (2008, p. 114) to argue that studying for qualifications as an interpreter should be based on some life experience and not undertaken 'right out of school' But unlike many men in these professions who minimise or reject their association with the caring elements of the work which questions their masculinity (Lupton, 2000; Simpson, 2014) and their place in the profession, the sign language interpreters in this study appeared more willing to recognise and freely accept the caring element required as part of the role of a sign language interpreter. They did not feel the need to re-frame and distance the role from that of a feminine one to a masculine one as has been found in other predominantly female professions (Cottingham, 2015; Cross and Bagihole, 2002; Irvine and Vermilya, 2010; Simpson, 2004). This acceptance was couched in a language of achieving access to, and improving, services, and wanting to provide a level playing field. These elements of the role can readily be understood in terms of human rights and social justice (Mc Cartney, 2017), demonstrating the 'caring' role that interpreters play, and the service they offer, not simply in enabling deaf people access to a hearing world, but also in enabling hearing people access to deaf people's worlds. This is a marked difference in dynamics from that of men working in other predominantly female professions and, to some degree, within spoken language interpreting where an interpreter is potentially viewed as a conduit of information. The interpreters in this study saw themselves as working to assist the deaf community in a process of self-empowerment, providing access to information from which they are regularly excluded. In this sense BSL interpreting is unique among predominantly female professions.

8.4.3 Freelance working and remuneration

This study also pointed to a further distinction from other predominantly female professions in that most of the interpreters working in the field are freelance (Napier et al., 2021, p. 44) and this has direct implications for questions of remuneration. In theory freelance workers are free to charge whatever they feel is appropriate for a specific assignment. But they are, in practice, led by NUBSLI fees guidance, Access to Work budgets and national agreements with multi-language agencies. An interesting insight offered by this study is the sense that in the absence of strict charging terms within the profession, men were more likely to have the confidence to charge more than women, evoking argument about gender pay gaps. But there was a slight twist here in that this was not only seen to benefit male interpreters but also enabled female interpreters to benefit, through inclusion in fee negotiations for team or pool interpreting assignments. It is not clear whether this carries over to increase female interpreters' confidence to negotiate higher rates when working alone or when leading negotiations for co- or team interpreting, but it does offer a contrasting picture to that of men working in other female professions where there are persistent gender pay gaps (Punshon et al., 2019). The gender effect is also noticeable in discussion of remuneration in freelance work since it is recognised that male interpreters are more likely to be working full-time than women (Napier et al., 2021, p. 45), thought to be linked to commitments in the domestic sphere. As a result, men's overall earnings potential in the profession is greater than women's (Davies et al., 2000) mirroring elements of the gender pay gap across the labour market.

8.4.4 Sexual orientation

The final theme emerging from the data related to sexual orientation. Literature focusing on predominantly female professions includes the stereotypical notion that men in these professions are perceived as homosexuals (Ashkenazi et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2011; Williams and Dellinger, 2010). Yet, despite anecdotal evidence suggesting that BSL interpreting is predominantly a profession of women and gay men, this study did not substantiate that view. It is evident, however, that the BSL interpreting profession is not dominated by a heteronormative culture, a recent survey (Napier et al., 2021, p. 35) revealing 14.49% of people in the SLTI profession self-disclosing as

LGBTQIA+ which is seven times higher than the 2.2%⁴⁴ reported by the ONS for the general population.

This study conveys a fascinating mix of views and experiences relating to interpreters' views of others, and the ways they have been perceived by others. The notion that a majority of male BSL interpreters are gay was perpetuated by some participants while those who had been in the profession for longer periods of time expressing contrasting views, refuting the stereotypical view of male BSL interpreters as gay. This also sheds light on wider research on gender in claiming a reluctance for men to enter predominantly female professions (Ariogul, 2009; Clow, Ricciardelli and Bartfay, 2014; Harding, 2007; Roulston and Mills, 2000; Smith et al., 2020) based on the notion that masculine ideals are challenged in such professions. While this challenge to masculinity is related specifically to sexual orientation (Harding, 2007) Smith et al.'s (2020) study refers specifically to perceived differences between men and women stemming from predefined socio-cultural norms and the effects of cultural pressures to 'act like a man' which deter men from nursing as a profession (Smith et al., 2020, p. 2126). Here we see an alternative articulation of 'the man code' referred to by Boley (2015) and featured in the title of this thesis. Returning to questions of sexual orientation, the only reasonable conclusion that can be reached here is that beyond the evidence of greater willingness to self-disclose as LGBT+ among sign language translators and interpreters in the UK (Napier et al., 2021) than the population in general, issues of sexuality and sexual orientation within the sign language interpreting profession remain under explored.

8.5. Original contributions to knowledge: theoretical insights

As the first study of men in the predominantly female profession of sign language interpreting the thesis offers number of theoretical insights into the motivations and experiences of men in predominantly female professions into a new profession. Comparison and contrast with other predominantly female professions has allowed for new perspectives and understandings in the broader field of the sociology of work,

⁴⁴ Widely acknowledged as an underestimate relying on willingness to self-identify (Stonewall, 2022 [rainbow_britain_report.pdf \(stonewall.org.uk\)](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/rainbow-britain-report.pdf))

sign language interpreting studies and deaf studies.

8.5.1 Exposure and motivation

In a similar vein to Simpson's (2004) typology of men working in female professions as seekers, finders, and settlers, I have been able to develop a typology of early and key influences underpinning men's interest in and motivation to become sign language interpreters. **Introducers** who expose or introduce BSL to those participants who had not encountered BSL before, **attractors** who have no prior connection but are observed using sign language, and **influencers** who provide encouragement, support, feedback, and reinforcement on the language learning journey.

8.5.2 Gender norms

Gender norms refer to the cultural expectations influencing beliefs about how men and women should act, communicate, and relate to one another. Introduced through early socialisation and reinforced through education systems, organisations and institutions gender norms can have a strong impact on career choice and on behaviour in the workplace (Simpson, 2011). This study runs counter to the findings of many studies on men in female professions that demonstrate men's behaviour in identifying specific areas of work thought to be 'more manly' within the profession or rising more rapidly to management levels 'riding the glass escalator' (Williams, 1992, 2013). Participants in this study did not feel they had to 'act like a man' (Smith et al., 2020). This repositions the framing that men in predominantly female professions must follow the gender norms of the 'man code' (Boley, 2015). A majority of the men in this study positively embraced the caring elements of the role of BSL interpreter and did not distance themselves from aspects of the interpreting role considered as being more feminine. This suggests there are interesting questions to be asked about the changing nature of gender norms and stereotyping in female dominated professions.

8.5.3 Use of BSL as connection: conceptualising a new form of family practice

Communicating through the medium of BSL connects people through the use of shared language, connections that are particularly valuable given the small numbers of the UK population that are able to use the language either in a rudimentary way or

with fluency. The use of BSL may, or may not, be a strong connecting factor between family members of the same household. However, early exposure to BSL within the family, for example through a deaf parent, is more likely to lead to familiarity with, and use of, BSL. Use of BSL can also connect people outside the conventional family. And following Morgan's (2011a; 2011b) argument that family practices are fluid and open to new understandings, it is possible to conceptualise the 'deaf family' based on shared knowledge of sign language and deaf culture provides a space for a different form of family practice. It is, however, important to note that fluent use of BSL is a necessary though not sufficient requirement for membership. Knowledge and understanding of deaf culture, of experiences of marginalisation and exclusion and their implications are also necessary.

8.5.4 Gender and co-working

The expression of men's preferences to co-work with other men is commonly seen among men in predominantly female professions and has been understood as a way of preserving a sense of masculinity (Evans and Frank, 2003), facilitate bonding (McDowell, 2015; Pullen and Simpson, 2009) and for the sharing of experiences (Smith et al., 2020). Perhaps due to the nature of many BSL interpreters being freelance, male interpreters rarely get to work with other male interpreters outside of the major UK cities, offering a different scenario to men in nursing, teaching, and other predominantly female professions where men will potentially regularly work with other men and build workplace relationships within the department or within social spaces.

The BSL interpreters in this study offered very different views about their gender preferences in co-working. Their focus was not on preserving a sense of masculinity but rather directed towards achieving the best service and outcome for each client in the specific circumstances. This links back to the one of the key motivators for male BSL interpreters, their desire to provide the best possible service to deaf people. While this finding challenges the notion that men seek to preserve masculinity and bond by working together and sharing experiences, caution must be exercised in interpreting the meaning of this difference. Their status as self-employed, freelance workers who are commissioned largely for discrete assignments places them very differently from nurses, teachers, social workers, and practitioners in other female professions who

spend significant periods of the working day in the same space as other practitioners and whose responsibilities and tasks are usually assigned by managers to whom they are accountable. This raises interesting questions warranting further research about gender relations in co-working across different forms and patterns of work.

8.5.5 Men embracing caring aspects of caring but calling it something else.

Sign language interpreting is recognised as both a linguistic and caring profession, with stereotypical views of male interpreters focussing on technical linguistic aspects while female interpreters are seen as more likely to pay attention to the caring aspects of the role. Parallels are drawn with men in other predominantly female professions such as nursing that is similarly characterised as having clinical and caring aspects. However, there are examples in this study where participants give clear indications of engaging in caring aspects of interpreting, expending emotional labour, more commonly associated with women's undervalued work (Skeggs, 2014) and a source of women's exploitation (Müller, 2019). However, they did not perceive these roles as caring. For example, Ellis viewed continuing to interpret for someone in distressing circumstances at the end of life as professionalism while Toby described intervening to clarify misunderstandings in communication that would be detrimental for the deaf client as allyship. Here we see these two men finding a conceptual space in which they can comfortably refer to their caring roles within a predominantly female profession without compromising their masculinity and without 'breaking the man code'.

8.6 Reflecting on the limitations and strengths of the study

One clear limitation of the study lies its limited sample size that prevents the possibility of generalising from its findings. The qualitative approach to the study did however generate rich data revealing multiple insights into the motivations and experiences of men in BSL interpreting and identifying questions for further exploration. This was particularly true for the semi structured interviews, though less so for the online focus group that did not yield the discursive exchanges I had hoped for.

While the study of men as BSL interpreters has focused on questions of gender, given

rise to questions of sexual orientation, and touched peripherally on age, it has not offered any opportunity to explore other intersecting categories, notably ethnicity and class.

While I have been transparent about my own position as a BSL interpreter and ‘practisearcher’, my closeness to the topic under investigation and my personal acquaintance with some participants arising from my membership of what is a very small profession for men, may have led me to make inadvertent assumptions and limited my interviewing practice in failing to probe sufficiently, encouraging participants to clarify or expand on their responses. These reflections about methods of data collection, in particular the use of individual interviews, have led me to consider the potential use of alternative methods in exploring the motivations and experiences of sign language interpreters, and in exploring the questions that have arisen as a result of this research. A further limitation linked to my own position as a hearing interpreter is the exclusion of deaf interpreters from this study. This is the subject of a recommendation for further research set out below.

As a part time student, this study has run the course of six years, with the unwelcome arrival of the Covid pandemic mid study. Data collection had been completed before any period of lock down, and while this is fortunate in terms of minimising disruption to the study, I have not been able to capture any implications of the ‘Covid effect’ for interpreting practices.

8.7 Recommendations for interpreting policy and practice

While most of the recommendations arising from this study relate to further research, there is one clear recommendation for policy and practice in the field of sign language interpreting and this relates to questions of client/interpreter matching.

Community interpreting, particularly for deaf individuals in legal, health and social care settings, is usually provided via agencies on whom organisations call upon when needed. In such circumstances the chances of interpreter and deaf individual matching in terms of their characteristics is extremely low and, as witnessed in this study, can lead to culturally inappropriate allocation of interpreters. An article by Jones (2020) ‘Where are my People?’ aptly calls for culturally competent interpreters. From a policy

point of view a recommendation is for the regulatory bodies and associations of the deaf to take active steps to educate and inform interpreting agencies of the importance of achieving the closest match possible and recognising the potential problems for clients where matching is not possible.

8.8 Recommendations for future research

As the first comprehensive study examining men's entry to BSL interpreting and their experience in the profession the thesis has created a platform from which there is potential for further exploration in several related aspects of study. Some recommendations call for complementary studies with different samples, geographical locations, or methods, while others focus on exploring questions that have arisen in the analysis and discussion of findings from this empirical study.

1. A replica study of female sign language interpreters' motivations for, and experience of, work as sign language interpreters.
2. A replica study by a deaf academic on the entry and experiences of deaf BSL interpreters and translators who are men. This is especially important considering the greater ratio of deaf male to female interpreters.
3. A replication of the study in other countries would provide evidence of the similarities or differences based on a geographical and cultural context.
4. A study of the motivations, experiences and expectations of men undertaking training as BSL interpreters. This would be particularly useful in providing some additional theoretical insight into the motivations for entering a predominantly female profession and experiencing education and training as a minority member of a cohort.
5. With the growth of the Interpreters of Colour Network in the UK, a study of the motives and experiences of men in this minoritised group within a minority profession would further develop understandings of the intersection of gender and ethnicity in BSL interpreting.
6. Similarly, a study of LGBT+ interpreters, who constitute one of the largest

subgroups within the profession of BSL interpreting, would add to understandings of intersectional issues in BSL interpreting.

7. A study of female interpreters' perceptions of male interpreters would offer give a 360° view of men in the profession.
8. A study of deaf people's choices of, and experiences of working with, male interpreters. With a wide repertoire of more conventional and creative research methods (Kara, 2015) available to researchers there are many ways in which researchers, including participant researchers, can explore aspects of motivations/choices and experiences of sign language interpretation.
9. A finding from this research raised interesting questions about the nature of advocacy and allyship, and the place of interpreters in such roles. Attracting different views this would make an interesting area of study within sociology, deaf studies or interpreting studies.
10. Another question arising from this research concerned gender relations in co-working across different forms and patterns of work. As an under explored area in the sociology or work, further research would provide us with new insight into this.

8.9 Concluding thoughts

I described my entry to the world of BSL interpreting and subsequently researching the field of deaf studies and interpreting in the introduction to the thesis. I now feel I have added to my identities as a practitioner and an applied researcher.

This study has enabled a deeper understanding of men's motivations and experiences as BSL interpreters. It has enabled some myths to be dispelled and cast light on the differences between sign language interpreting, spoken language interpreting and other predominantly female professions.

Evidence from this study demonstrates that the BSL interpreting profession, despite some similarities, does not generally follow the same script as other predominantly

female professions. This is largely attributed to the history and development of the profession and its close connection to the deaf community. Additionally, the freelance nature of the profession sets it aside from the most common predominantly female professions of nursing and primary teaching in relation to career acceleration and gender pay gaps. However, BSL interpreting does support the broader literature on predominantly female professions as a generally inclusive profession for LGBT+ people.

When considering men in BSL interpreting, we need to think of the implications for, and impact on practice. As has been said many times within this thesis, BSL interpreting is a predominantly female profession and as such, we need to think about men as a minority within BSL interpreting, how that affects them, their female colleagues, the deaf community, and men who may be coming into the profession.

Men need to consider that they are in a predominantly female profession but not a female dominated profession. There is a difference. Women are greater in number but that is not always reflective of the status women hold within the profession, especially when men are more willing and more likely to undertake interpreting assignments which are perceived as high-status or high-profile. Research participants have shared evidence of oppressive actions toward female interpreters and such behaviour should be called out in the pursuit of gender equality within the profession. Male BSL interpreters also need to be aware of their gendered behaviours and the impact this might have on colleagues and the people we interpret for. It is critical for all parties within an interpreted interaction to be aware of, to understand, and be able to respond to the impact gender has within that interaction.

As can be seen from the number of recommendations for further research, this study has exposed several avenues for further research relating to gender and other intersections including race and sexuality in sign language interpreting.

Just as Kimmel (2006, p. 254) has argued 'we need a new definition of masculinity in this new century: a definition that is more about the character of men's hearts and depths of their souls than about the size of their biceps, wallets, or penises', I argue that we need a new definition of the BSL interpreter as someone who delivers a high-quality interpretation while still considering the heart and soul of the job. It is this

individual – regardless of gender - who will undoubtedly excel at being a sign language interpreter.

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Appendix 1. Key sources of literature on gender

Key sources on gender included the following peer-reviewed journals: Gender and Education, Gender and Language, Gender and Society, Gender, Culture and Organizational Change, Gender in Management, Gender, Place & Culture, Gender, Work and Organisation, Journal of Gender Studies, Journal of Men's Studies, Men and Masculinities, Psychology of Men and Masculinity, Sex Roles, The Journal of Men's Studies, Understanding Masculinities, while searches focusing on predominantly female professions identified sources across a range of professions and academic disciplines as follows:

Counselling: Journal of Counselling and Development, Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy

Librarianship: American Libraries, Journal of Academic Librarianship, Libraries & Culture, Library and Information Science Research

Nursing & Healthcare: Applied Nursing Research, Australian Occupational Therapy Journal, Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research, International Dental Journal, International Journal of Dental Hygiene, International Journal of Nursing Studies, Journal of Advanced Nursing, Journal of Clinical Nursing, Journal of Dental Hygiene, Journal of Genetic Counseling, Journal of Mental Health, Journal of Nursing Education, Journal of Professional Nursing, Nurse Education Today, Nursing & Health Journal Articles, Nursing Administration Quarterly, Nursing Forum, Nursing Inquiry, Nursing Outlook, Nursing Standard, Physical Therapy, Sage Open Nursing

Social Work: British Journal of Social Work, Journal of Social Work, Journal of Social Work Practice, Journal of Women and Social Work, Social Work

Teaching: Early Childhood Research Quarterly, British Journal of Sociology of Education, Educational Review, Gender and Education, Irish Educational Studies, Oxford Review of Education, Teaching and Teacher Education

Sign language, Interpreting and Translation: International Journal of Interpreter Education, International Perspectives on Sign Language Interpreter Education,

Interpreter and Translator Trainer, Interpreting, Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education, Journal of Interpretation, Researching Translation and Interpreting, The Linguist, The Sign Language Translator and Interpreter, Translation & Interpreting

Sociology and psychology: Annual Review of Sociology, Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, Social Problems, Social Psychology Quarterly, Social Science and Medicine, Sociology, Sociological Inquiry, Sociological Quarterly, Sociological Research Online, Social Problems, Sociology Compass, The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, The Sociological Quarterly, The Sociological Review

Human resources and organisations: British Journal of Management, Canadian Journal of Career Development, Career Development Quarterly, Culture and Organization, Human Relations, Human Resource Management Review, Industrial Relations, International Journal of Human Resources, International Journal of Management Reviews, Journal of Business Ethics, Journal of Management Studies, Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, Journal of Vocational Behaviour, Labour Economics, National Institute Economic Review, Organization Studies, Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes, Research in the Sociology of Work, The Journal of Business Communication, Women in Management Review, Work and Occupations, Work and Organization, Work, Employment and Society

Appendix 2. Topics discussed in predominantly female professions

Appendix 2. A selection of topics discussed in published works on predominantly female professions.

Profession	Author	Geographical location
Administration	Seeley, 2018	USA
Cabin crew	Simpson, 2004, 2014	UK
Care work	Baines, Charlesworth and Cunningham, 2015	Canada & UK
	Dill, Price-Glynn and Rakovski, 2016	USA
Childcare	Murray, 1996	USA
	Rolfe, 2006	UK
Dental hygiene	Adams, 2003	Canada
	Diaz et al, 2021	USA
	Johnson, 2009	Canada
	Luciak-Donsberger, 2003	Austria
	Luciak-Donsberger & Heaton, 2009	Austria & UK
Dietics	Joy, Gheller and Lordly, 2019	Canada & USA
Family therapy	McHale and Carr, 1998	Ireland
Genetic counselling	Chen, Veach, Schoonveld and Zierhut, 2017	USA
Hairdressing	Hall, Hockey and Robinson, 2007	UK
	Robinson, Hall and Hockey, 2011	UK
	Sobiraj et al., 2015	Germany
Librarianship	Carmichael, Jr., 1994;	USA
	Passet, 1993	USA
	Williams, 2013	USA
Physical therapy	Rozier, Hamilton and Hersh-Cochran, 1998	USA
	Rozier, Raymond, Goldstein and Hamilton, 1998	USA
Psychology	Callaghan et. al., 2018	USA

	Crothers et al., 2010	USA
Retail	Johansson, 2015	Sweden
Social work	Furness, 2012 Galley, 2020 Labra, Bergheul and Turcotte, 2017 McPhail, 2004 Pease, 2011 Williams, 2013	UK UK Canada USA Australia USA
Speech and language therapy	Litosseliti and Leadbeater, 2012	UK
Teaching, particularly early years and primary	Bertilsson, 2022 Cushman, 2005 Dudak, 2019 Erden, Ozgun and Ciftci, 2011 Ferrari, 2016 Haase, 2008 Jackson, 2004 Jones, 2015 Labra, Bergheul and Turcotte, 2017 O'Keeffe, 2016, 2017, 2018 O'Keeffe and Deegan, 2018 Oyler, Jennings and Lozada, 2001 Robinson, Skeen and Coleman, 1984 Rolfe, 2006 Sak, Sahin and Sahin, 2012 Skelton, 2003, 2012 Sumsion, 2005 Williams, 2013	Sweden New Zealand Poland Turkey USA Australia USA UK Canada Ireland Ireland USA USA UK Turkey UK Australia USA
Veterinary medicine	Irvine and Vermilya, 2010	USA

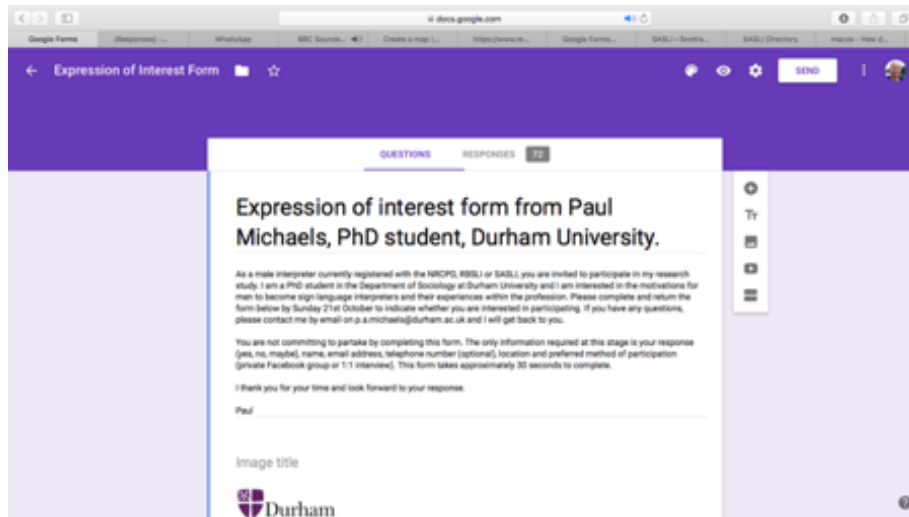
Appendix 3. Topics discussed in nursing

Topic	Authors	Geographical Location
Attrition	Stott, 2004, 2007	Australia
Barriers	Ashkenazi, Livshiz-Riven, Romem and Grinstein-Cohen, 2017	Israel
Career choice and pathways	Appiah, Appiah and Lamptey, 2021 Ashkenazi, Livshiz-Riven, Romem and Grinstein-Cohen, 2017 Chen, Veach, Schoonveld and Zierhut, 2017 Harding, 2009 Labra, Bergheul and Turcotte, 2017 Wilson, 2005 Zamanzadeh et al., 2013a; Zamanzadeh et al., 2013b Zysberg and Berry, 2005	Ghana Israel USA New Zealand Canada Australia Iran USA
Career satisfaction	Twomey and Meadus, 2008	Canada
Caring	MacDougall, 1997	UK
Concept of the male nurse	Sasa, 2019	USA
Domains	Holyoake, 2001, 2002	UK
Emotion management	Cottingham, 2014	USA
Experience	Appiah, Appiah and Lamptey, 2021 Evans, 1997a Heikes, 1991 Sayman, 2009 Stott, 2004 Harvey Wingfield and Myles, 2014	Ghana USA USA USA Australia USA
Gender discrimination	Kouta and Kaite, 2011 Sullivan, 2000	Cyprus USA

Gender performance	Kellett, M. Gregory and Evans, 2014 Mcdowell, 2015 Pullen and Simpson, 2009 Solbrække, Solvoll and Heggen, 2013	Canada UK UK Norway
Identity	Bush, 1976 Hollup, 2014 Holyoake, 2002 McLaughlin, Muldoon and Moutray, 2010 O'Connor, 2015 Wallen, Mor and Devine, 2014	USA Mauritius UK UK Ireland USA
Masculinity	Cottingham, 2014b Evans and Frank, 2003 Isaacs and Poole, 1996 Mcdowell 2015b Sedgewick and Kellett, 2005 Yoder Miranda, 2007	USA Canada Australia UK Canada USA
Perception	Adeyemi-Adelanwa, Barton-Gooden, Dawkins and Lindo, 2016 Ashkenazi, Livshiz-Riven, Romem and Grinstein-Cohen, 2017 Loughrey, 2008 Saritaş, Karadağ and Yildirim, 2009	Jamaica Israel Ireland Turkey
Privilege	Evans, 1997b Williams, 1995, 2013	USA USA
Recruitment	Clifton, Crooks and Higman, 2020 Meadus, 2000 Wilson, 2005	UK Canada Australia
Reflexivity	Simpson, 2011	UK
Salary	Clayton-Hathway et al., 2020 Dill, Price-Glynn and Rakovski, 2016 Karlsen, 2012	UK USA Norway
Sexuality	Eliason et al., 2011 Harding, 2007	USA New Zealand

	Röndahl, 2011	Sweden
Stereotyping	Clow, Ricciardelli and Bartfay, 2014 Harris, 2012 Jinks and Bradley, 2004 McKinlay, Cowan, McVittie and Ion, 2010	Canada USA UK UK
Wellbeing	Evans and Steptoe, 2002	UK

Appendix 4. Expression of interest frontpage screenshot



Appendix 5. Sample expression of interest individual form

11/29/22, 11:05 PM

Expression of Interest Form - Google Forms



Expression of Interest Form

Questions Responses 72 Settings

Paul

* Required



I am interested in participating. *

- Yes
- No
- Maybe - please contact me to provide me with more information

Name *

████████████████████

Email *

████████████████@gmail.com

Telephone

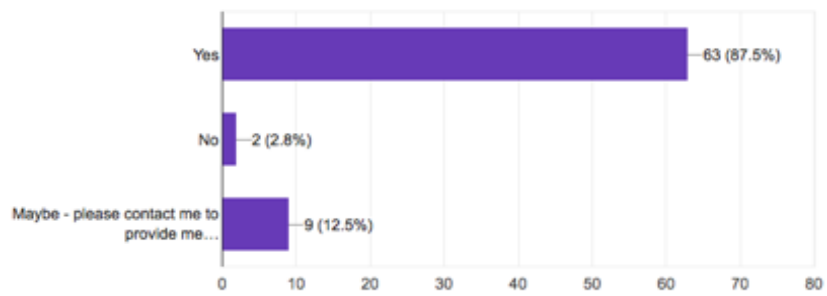
07 ██████████

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1PJIo0L_pjarX0c1VjSbBtQK5lxtyp-Ek6sfSMAY6FXc/edit?pli=1#response=ACYDBNg1kUUZFzp4gIQ_Qkt2j5iyxZ2P-uhUer... 1/2

Appendix 6. Number of respondents expressing their preference to be involved or not.

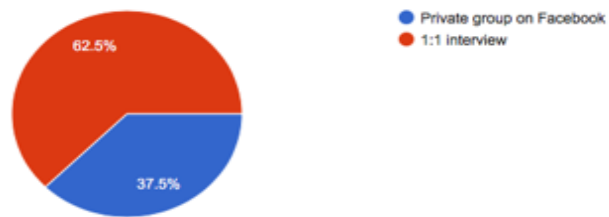
I am interested in participating.

72 responses



Appendix 7. Preference to partake in a 1:1 interview or the Facebook group.

Preferred method of participation
72 responses



Appendix 8. Pilot interview questions

Some of the questions were related to predominantly female professions in general (3-16, 23-25) and other specifically relating to sign language interpreting (1, 2, 17 – 20)

Initial questions asked based on what I had read about the experience of men in predominantly female professions were as follows:

1. Tell me the story of how you decided to become an interpreter.
2. How long have you been an interpreter?
3. Tell me about your views on the statement that Male SLIs are more adept at assuming a certain level of authority within the workplace.
4. If male SLIs do not display authority in the workplace, what are your views on the fact that they may be seen as incompetent, and their professional ability is questioned?
5. Tell me about your views on the statement that professional development may be affected because of not being able to express fears, failings or mistakes in the workplace.
6. Tell me about your views on the statement that people think interpreting is considered a woman's profession.
7. Tell me about your views on the statement that female interpreters are more effective working in groups than male interpreters.
8. Tell me about your views on the statement that male interpreters feel that the content of social conversation when working is predominately feminine. Do you think this happens?
9. Tell me about your views on the statement that male interpreters may feel uncomfortable by women's conversation of a sexual nature. Do you think this happens?
10. Have you ever felt you have been left out of social activities because you are a male interpreter?
11. Tell me about your views on the statement that male interpreters would rather work with other male interpreters rather than female interpreters. Do you?

12. Tell me about your views on the statement that male sign language interpreters may engage more in academic study relating to interpreting. Do you think the ability to do so is a motivation to enter the profession?

13. Do you think male interpreters plan a career in interpreting or do they find themselves involved by 'accident'?

14. Do you think male interpreters consider the fact that they will be the minority when entering the profession and therefore possibly experience issues of gender inequality and potentially feel isolated from male camaraderie?

15. Tell me about your views on the statement that male sign language interpreters retain many of the most powerful positions in the profession.

16. Do you think male SLIs feel they have an advantage in terms of advancement, tenure, and/or promotion in the field over women?

17. Do you consider interpreting to be a caring or a linguistic profession? Why?

18. Do you think a higher proportion of men do VRS interpreting? Why might this be?

19. Do you think many interpreters are partnered with another interpreter? Why do you think this might be?

20. Do you have a family member who is deaf?

23. Would you prefer to co- or team- work with an interpreter of the same sex. Why?

24. Do you feel you earn less than your female counterparts?

25. Do you feel you have less or more status than your female counterparts? What examples can you provide?

25. Do you feel there is a distinct threat to your masculine image being an interpreter?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 9. One-to-one interview participant information sheet

Life as a Sign Language
Interpreter: Mens' Perspectives
Participant Information Sheet - 1:1 Interview



My research into the motivations of men to become Sign Languages interpreters and their experiences within the profession. The data collected in the interview will form part of my doctoral research project. The aims of the research are:

1. To explore the motivations of men entering the Sign Language interpreting profession.
2. To explore the experiences of men within the Sign Language interpreting profession.
3. To explore what implications the findings have for our understanding of gender in the workplace.

In turn, it is hoped that this will help to:

1. Fill the gap in knowledge regarding the motivations for men to become Sign Language interpreters and their experiences within the profession.
2. Expand our understanding of gender in the workplace.

The purpose of the interview will be to learn about your motivations for entering Sign Language interpreting and your experiences within the profession. You will be asked some prompt questions but generally, I'm happy for you to tell me anything about your experiences working in Sign Language interpreting.

The findings of my research will be utilised in my doctoral thesis and possibly in other academic publications and presentations. Anything you say will be reported and your real name will not be mentioned in my research. With your consent, I will audio or visually record the interview and later transcribe and analyse the recording. These files will be stored securely on a password protected device.

You are not obliged to answer the questions being asked if you do not want to. You can also end the interview at any time you want to and you can withdraw from the research at any point without explanation. You can withdraw any specific comments made up to 28 days after the interview and that comment will be deleted from the transcription. There will be no repercussions.

If you have questions, please contact me.

Paul Michaels, PhD Student, Department of Sociology, Durham University
p.a.michaels@durham.ac.uk
07947534833

Appendix 10. Facebook group participant information sheet

Life as a Sign Language
Interpreter: Mens' Perspectives
Participant Information Sheet – Facebook
Group



My research explores the motivations of men to become Sign Languages interpreters and their experience within the profession. The data collected in the group will form part of my doctoral research project. The aims of the research are:

1. To explore the motivations of men entering the Sign Language interpreting profession.
2. To explore the experiences of men within the Sign Language interpreting profession.
3. To explore what implications the findings have for our understanding of gender in the workplace.

In turn, it is hoped that this will help to:

1. Fill the gap in knowledge regarding the motivations for men to become Sign Language interpreters and their experiences within the profession.
2. Expand our understanding of gender in the workplace.

The purpose of the group will be to learn about your motivations for entering Sign Language interpreting and your experiences within the profession. Questions or statements will be posted and you will be invited to make comment.

The findings of my research will be utilised in my doctoral thesis and possibly in other academic publications and presentations. Anything you say will be reported anonymously, and your real name will not be mentioned in my research. I will import the comments into NVIVO to assist with analysis and this software will be accessed on a password protected computer.

If you agree to take part you will not be obliged to answer the questions being asked or respond to comments made if you do not want to. You will also be able to leave the group at any time you want to and withdraw from the research at any point without explanation. You will be able to delete specific posts you have made at any time. There will be no repercussions.

The group will be set as 'secret' on Facebook and only invitees will be allowed to join. Only current members will be able to see who's in the group, see what members post in the group and see stories about the group on Facebook (e.g. News Feed and search). Current and former members will see the group name, see the groups description, see the group tags, see the group location and find the group in search.

You will be expected to treat all other members in the group with respect at all times. It is important that whatever is said within the group is not shared outside the group. It is possible that there may be views that you disagree with, or which may even make you feel uncomfortable. If this happens causes you distress, please make this known to me by sending me a direct message. If you would like to provide feedback on anything raised in the group setting but feel you are not able to bring it up publicly, please feel free to send me a private message. If you have questions, please contact me on the email address below.

Paul Michaels, PhD Student, Department of Sociology, Durham University
p.a.michaels@durham.ac.uk
07947534833

Appendix 11. Interview participant consent form

Life as a Sign Language Interpreter:
Mens' Perspectives

Consent Form – 1 : 1 Interview



Everyone who takes part in this research project is required to give their informed consent. This means that I have a responsibility to make sure that you fully understand what being a participant will involve for you before you agree to do so. Please therefore familiarise yourself with the attached information sheet and do not hesitate to ask me any questions in relation to its content, the research project or your involvement in it.

	YES	NO
I have read and understood the information sheet.		
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions in relation to the research project and my involvement in it.		
I voluntarily agree to be involved in the project. I understand that I do not need to answer all questions asked and I can refuse to answer any question or withdraw myself from the interview completely at any time without reason.		
I understand that even if I agree to take part now, I can withdraw any or all information I have shared up to 28 days after the interview.		
I give my permission for the comments I make in the interview to be used within the data analysis.		
I give my permission for the interview to be audio or video recorded and transcribed and I understand the recording and transcription will not be shared for anyone else to use as data. I understand the recording and transcription will be stored securely on a password protected computer only to be viewed by the researcher and his PhD supervisors.		
I understand that my name will not be used and that my identity will be kept anonymous in any publications related to this research project.		
I understand that what is discussed in the interview will be treated in kept confidence, but that if the interviewer feels that anyone is at risk of serious harm, he may need to disclose this to relevant agencies.		

Having read the information sheet and consent form, I confirm that I understand what is required of me for this research project and that I am happy to take part.

Signed:		Participant
Date:		
Signed:		Researcher
Date:		

Appendix 12. Facebook group participant consent form

Life as a Sign Language Interpreter:
Mens' Perspectives

Consent Form – Facebook Group



Everyone who takes part in this research project is required to give their informed consent. This means that I have a responsibility to make sure that you fully understand what being a participant will involve for you before you agree to do so. Please therefore familiarise yourself with the attached information sheet and do not hesitate to ask me any questions in relation to its content, the research project or your involvement in it.

	YES	NO
I have read and understood the information sheet.		
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions in relation to the research project and my involvement in it.		
I voluntarily agree to be involved in the project. I understand that I do not need to answer all questions and I can request that specific posts are deleted up to 28 days after posting. I am aware that I can withdraw myself from the group completely at any time without reason.		
I give my permission for the comments I make on the group to be used within the data analysis.		
I understand the data collected will not be shared for anyone else to use as data. I understand the transcription will be stored securely.		
I understand that my name will not be used and that my identity will be kept anonymous in any publications related to this research project.		
I understand that what is discussed in the forum will be kept confidential to group members, but if I feel that a comment suggests a risk of serious harm to any research participant or service user, I will discuss this with the researcher who may need to disclose this to relevant agencies.		
I confirm that any comments I make on the forum will not include the names of clients or any other individual interpreter not in the group, to protect their anonymity.		
I will not reveal the identities of participants or anything they express with anyone else outside of the forum. I understand that the research has asked the same of all members of the forum.		
I commit to being respectful towards other members of the forum members at all times.		

Having read the information sheet and consent form, I confirm that I understand what is required of me for this research project and that I am happy to take part.

Signed:		Participant
Date:		
Signed:		Researcher
Date:		

Appendix 13. NRCPD Assignment categories

- **Education**
 - Schools, e.g. classroom, staff meetings/training, parents' meetings
 - Adult education, i.e. 'Leisure' courses
 - Further Education
 - Higher Education and professional
 - SEN tribunals
- **Leisure**
 - Sport indoor
 - Social events, e.g. wedding reception
 - Sport outdoor, outdoor pursuits
- **Mental Health**
 - Clinical meetings
 - Therapy/treatment
 - Clinical interviews, e.g. mental state examinations, assessments
 - Tribunals
- **Health & Social Services**
 - Physical health, e.g. GPs, hospitals, physio, optician, dental, health visits, ante natal
 - Community consultation meeting
 - Housing
 - Child protection case conferences
 - Social Services casework
 - Social Services home visits and assessments
- **Theatre, Arts, Television**
 - Workshops or training, arts, TV
 - Theatre, opera performance, musicals, pantomime, comedy etc.
 - Talks, e.g. gallery, museum

- **Education**
 - Schools, e.g. classroom, staff meetings/training, parents' meetings
 - Adult education, i.e. 'Leisure' courses
 - Further Education
 - Higher Education and professional
 - SEN tribunals

- **Leisure**
 - Sport indoor
 - Social events, e.g. wedding reception
 - Sport outdoor, outdoor pursuits

- **Mental Health**
 - Clinical meetings
 - Therapy/treatment
 - Clinical interviews, e.g. mental state examinations, assessments
 - Tribunals

- **Health & Social Services**
 - Physical health, e.g. GPs, hospitals, physio, optician, dental, health visits, ante natal
 - Community consultation meeting
 - Housing
 - Child protection case conferences
 - Social Services casework
 - Social Services home visits and assessments

- **Theatre, Arts, Television**
 - Workshops or training, arts, TV
 - Theatre, opera performance, musicals, pantomime, comedy etc.
 - Talks, e.g. gallery, museum

Appendix 14. Possible Interview Questions

Tell me how you were first exposed to British Sign Language.

Are Male SLIs more adept at assuming a certain level of authority within the workplace?

If male SLIs do not display authority in the workplace, are they seen as incompetent and is their professional ability questioned?

Is professional development affected because of not being able to express fears, failings or mistakes in the workplace?

Do male SLIs consider interpreting a women's profession?

Are female SLIs more effective working in groups than men?

Do male SLIs feel that the content of social conversation is predominately feminine?

Are male SLIs ever made uncomfortable by women's conversation of a sexual nature?

Have male SLIs ever felt like they have been left out of social activities because they are men?

Would male SLIs rather work with men than women?

Do male sign language interpreters engage in academic study relating to interpreting and is the ability to do so, a motivation to enter the profession?

How long have you been an interpreter?

Do male SLIs plan a career in interpreting, or do they find themselves involved by 'accident'?

Do male sign language interpreters consider they will be the minority when entering the profession and therefore possibly experience issues of gender inequality and potentially feel isolated from male camaraderie?

Do male sign language interpreters retain many of the most powerful positions in the profession?

Do male SLIs feel they have an advantage in terms of advancement, tenure, and/or promotion in the field over women?

Do male sign language interpreters consider interpreting to be a caring or a linguistic profession?

Appendix 15. The Man Code

The Man Code

<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=man%20code>

This is a collection of rules that every man should live by. It originated in an article written by Maxim, but with some help from the valet boys (Vaida & Dodds) and now the guys at Mifflin, they have become law. The rules are to be followed at all times. They can be changed but that requires a majority vote.

1. If you've known a guy for more than 24 hours, his sister is off limits forever! Unless you actually marry her.
2. When questioned by a friend's girlfriend, you need not and should not provide any information as to his whereabouts. You are even permitted to deny his very existence.
3. Unless he murdered someone in your immediate family, you must bail a friend out of jail within 24 hours.
4. A best man's toast may not include any of the following phrases, "down in Tijuana", "one time when we were all piss drunk", or "and this girl had the biggest rack you ever saw".
5. You may exaggerate any anecdote told to your friends by 50% without recrimination, beyond that anyone within earshot is allowed to yell out "bullshit!". (exception: when trying to pick up a girl, the allowable exaggeration is 400%)
6. Under no circumstances may two men share an umbrella.
7. The minimum amount of time you have to wait for another man is 5 minutes. The maximum is 6 minutes. For a girl, you are required to wait 10 minutes for every point of hotness she scores on the classic 1-10 scale.
8. Bitching about the brand of free beverages in your buddy's refrigerator is forbidden. But gripe at will if the temperature is not suitable.
9. A friend must be permitted to borrow anything you own - grill, car, firstborn child - within 12 hr notice. Women or anything considered "lucky" are not applicable in this case.
10. Falling on a grenade for a buddy (agreeing to distract the skanky friend of the hot babe he's trying to score) is your legal duty. But should you get carried away with your good deed and end up getting on the beast, your pal is forbidden to ever speak of it.
11. Do not torpedo single friends.
12. On a road trip, the strongest bladder determines pit stops, not the weakest.
13. Before dating a buddy's ex you are required to ask his permission. If he grants it, he is however allowed to say, "man, your gonna love the way she licks your balls"

14. Women who claim they "love to watch sports" must be treated as spies until they demonstrate knowledge of the game and the ability to pick a Buffalo wing clean.
15. If a mans zipper is down, that's his problem, you didn't see anything!
16. No man shall ever be required to buy a birthday present for another man. (in fact, even remembering your best friends birthday is optional)
17. You must offer heartfelt condolences over the death of a girlfriends cat, even if it was you who secretly set it on fire and threw it into a ceiling fan.
18. While your girlfriend must bond with your buddies girlfriends within 30 minutes of meeting them, you are not required to make nice with her gal pal's boyfriends- low level sports bonding is all the law requires.
19. Unless you have a lucrative endorsement contract, do not appear in public wearing more than one Nike swoosh.
20. When stumbling upon other guys watching a sporting event, you may always ask the score of the game in progress, but you may never ask who's playing.
21. If your girlfriend asks to set your friend up with her ugly, whiny, loser friend of hers, you must grant permission, but only if you have ample time to warn your friend to prepare his excuse about joining the priesthood.
22. Only in a situation of mortal danger or ass peril are you permitted to kick another member of the male species in the testicles.
23. Unless you're in prison, never fight naked. This includes men who aren't wearing shirts. If your buddy is outnumbered outmanned, or too drunk to defend himself, you must jump into the fight. Exception: if during the past 24 hours your friends actions have caused you to think "what this guy needs is a good ass wuppin", in which case you may refrain from getting involved and stand back and enjoy.
24. Friends don't let friends wear speedos. Ever. Case closed.
25. Fives must be called at all times when getting out of your seat. If not, your seat is up for grabs. However, "house rules" may come into effect, in which case it is left up to the owner of the seat.
26. Shotgun can be called on anything where a shotgun applies., as long as you are in eyesight of the object, or it is at a reasonable time.
27. When picking players for sports teams it is permissible to skip over your buddy in favor of better athletes- as long as you don't let him be the last sorry son of a bitch standing on the sideline.

28. If you ever compliment a guy's six pack, you better be talking about his choice of beverage.

29. Never join your girlfriend in ragging on a buddy of yours, unless she is withholding sex, pending your response.

30. Phrases that may never be uttered to another man while lifting weights:

"Yeah, baby, push it!"

"Come on, give me one more, harder!"

"Another set and we can hit the showers"

"Nice ass! Are you a Sagittarius?"

31. Never hesitate to reach for the last beverage or pizza, but not both. That's just mean.

32. Never talk to another man in the bathroom unless you are on equal footing: both urinating, both waiting in line for all other situations an "I recognize you" nod will do just fine.

33. Never allow a telephone conversation with a woman to go on longer than you are able to have sex with her. Keep a stopwatch nearby, hang up if necessary.

34. You can not rat out a friend who show's up to work or class with a massive hangover, however you may: hide the aspirin, smear his chair with limburger cheese, turn the brightness on his computer way up so he thinks its broken, or have him paged every seven minutes.

35. If you catch your girl messing around with your best friend, let your states crime of passion laws be your guide.

36. If your buddy is trying to hook up with a girl, you may sabotage him only in a manor that gives you no chances of getting any either.

37. Before allowing a drunken friend to cheat on his girl, you must attempt one intervention. If he can get up on his feet, look you in the eye, and deliver a "fuck off" then you are absolved from all responsibility. Later on it is ok that you have no idea what his girlfriend is talking about.

38. The morning after you and a babe, who was formerly "just a friend", go at it, the fact that you're feeling weird and guilty is no reason not to jump on her again before there is a discussion about what a big mistake it was.

39. If a buddy has lint, an eyelash, or any other foreign object on his hair or face, under no circumstances are you permitted to remove it. However an appropriate hand gesture may be made to make him aware of it.

40. An anniversary is recognized on a yearly basis, under no circumstances will anything be celebrated in an interval other than a year
41. When using a urinal in a public restroom, a buffer zone of at least one urinal will exist at all times. If the only empty urinal is directly next to an occupied one, then you are still required to wait. (Exception: at a sporting event where a line has formed to use the pisser)
42. When coming to a room which you know is occupied by your friend and possibly another girl, you must knock and wait for an adequate response. If no response occurs, and the door is locked, a 10 minute period is required before knocking again.
43. The only time dicking over a buddy for a girl is legal, is when the girl ranks a 8 or above on the 1-10 scale. (exception: a girl may rank from 5-7, as long as there is oral sex involved).
44. A mans gotta scratch what a mans gotta scratch. This applies to picking as well. Let the man be.
45. No man shall ever watch any of the following programs on TV:
Figure skating
Men's gymnastics
Any sport involving women (unless viewed for sexual purposes)
46. If you accidentally touch or brush against any part of another man below the waist, it is an understood accident, and NO apologies or any reference to the occurrence is necessary.
47. No man shall spend more than 2 minutes in front of a mirror. If more time is required, a three minute waiting period must be allowed before returning to the mirror.
48. Any dispute lasting any longer than 3 minutes will and must be settled by rock, paper, scissors. There is no argument too important for this determining method.
49. No man will ever willingly watch a movie in which the main theme is dancing, and if a man shall happen to view such a movie it is only acceptable if its with a girlfriend.
50. Only acceptable time when a man is allowed to cry:
when a heroic dog dies to save his master.
after being struck in the testicles with anything moving fast than 7 mph.
When your date is using her teeth.
The day Anna Kornikova chooses a husband.
51. If a bet is made, and the challenge is completed, then the bettor may recoup his money by immediately completing a more daring challenge. If he refuses the challenge or chooses not to propose one, then and only then, must the money be paid.
52. Masturbate often. (exception: if your roommate is due back within the hour)

53. If a hot girl shall happen to pass by while you are in an arms reach of your buddy, you must, and will, tap him on the shoulder to make him aware of the babe.
54. A man's shoes may not intentionally match any other article of clothing on his body.
55. No comment shall ever be made to a man about how much he is sweating. In fact, there is no need bring notice to any body part which he may be sweating from.
56. No man shall ever allow anyone to speak ill of The Simpsons or any Rocky movie.
(Exception: Rocky V)
57. You have not made any mistake if you find that there are extra pieces after reassembling or assembling an object. In fact, you have just found a way to make that object more efficient.
58. There are is never an occasion in which any shirt without buttons may be tucked in.
(Exception: when you are participating in a organized sporting event)
59. Unless you are under the age of 11 or wearing a bathing suit,, DON'T wear whitey tighty's. It still escapes all reasoning as to why they even make them in adult sizes.
60. Any object thrown with reasonable speed and accuracy, MUST be caught.
61. No man shall ever keep track of, or count, the amount of beers he has had in a night.
62. Under no circumstances may two non-related men share a bed or anything which can be perceived as a mattress.
63. In an empty room, car, ect., a man can not ask another man if he is mad because he isn't talking.
64. If you jiggle more than twice, your playing with it.
65. A man shall never help another man apply sun tan oil.
66. The guy who wants something the most is responsible for getting it.
67. If your friend says "Lick my nuts" as a way to put you down, don't try to be funny by saying "OK" and moving your head towards his crotch, two homosexual references in a row are just plain scary...
68. If you say ouch, you are a pussy!
69. It is the God given duty of every man to assist any other man that may be in need of assistance in obtaining every guys dream (threesome with two girls)

* with every set of laws, there are appropriate punishments. If any man shall happen to break any one of these codes, he will be found guilty, and will, for 24 hours from the time of the violation, be considered NOT A MAN. During this time he will not be referred to in any masculine way, and he shall bear the name Princess.

Appendix 16. The Bro Code

The Bro Code

<https://www.lovepanky.com/men/guy-talk/bro-code-rules>

Some call it “bromance” or “bro-hood,” but only men understand the bond they share with their other Y-chromosomed brethren. It’s not the kind of relationship they have with girls or even with their own biological brother, but that unspoken and totally platonic kind of love between “bros.” Is it really a surprise there are bro code rules only guys know?

Brohood is a kind of bond that explains how bros get away with trading insults as a form of a greeting. How they get along despite all the dangerous and embarrassing pranks they pull on each other, and how they still share a beer and laugh immediately after a fist fight.

Girls have a strict girl code that all female friends must follow if they want zero drama and for their friendships to last the test of time. Guys are no different, except some of the bro code rules tend to be a little difficult to understand for those outside the inner circle! [Read: [Male bonding vs female bonding: What are the main differences?](#)]

What is a bro?

A bro is many things, but a bro is not an ordinary guy friend. Bros do a lot of things for and with their bros: good, bad, funny, or stupid. It’s more than just a friendship, it’s a close bond that is likely to survive a huge amount that life can throw at it.

Bros can be childhood friends that grow up together or they can meet and instantly click. Unlike the female squad, however, bros don’t tend to be cast away from the group very easily.

Bros tend to put up with a little more in some ways, but that could be down to the large amount of bro code rules that participants have to live by!

[Read: [Queerplatonic relationship – What it is & 25 signs you're in one](#)]

What makes the guy code rules so sacred?

The guy code rules give you a proper idea on how to maintain guy friendships with your bros. There are certain lines you can cross, and lines you can't. In a sense, this is the guys' definition of setting firm boundaries.

Whether it's getting together with your friend's ex or something as silly as bets, it's important to observe all the rules. Your ability to maintain friendships for the rest of eternity relies on keeping sticking to these bro code rules.

If you break one, you can expect all your friends to either be mad at you, resent you, or even hate you. Yes, it's that crucial. [Read: [The male best friend – A guide for men and women](#)]

So, what are the bro code rules?

There is no contract that is handed to bros when they realize that they are indeed in the middle of a bro situation. It's something that's unsaid but extremely sacred to the deep friendship they share.

Let's call them bromandments, the bro code rules that all bros must follow.

[Read: [Why do men need male friends?](#)]

1. Bros before ... girls

This rule is the founding principle of being a bro and is said to have preceded even the concept of the bro code. This rule states that guys should put his

bros in priority over the pursuit of the opposite sex. [Read: [What if you and your friend are into the same woman?](#)]

2. A bro must have another bro's back no matter what

A bro must be there for his bro in times of need, be it financial difficulty, the pursuit of girls, fistfights, and drunken shenanigans. Nothing else must get in the way of this and he should ask no questions.

3. Immediate female family members of other bros are completely off limits

This means a bro shall never lay hands on another bro's sister or hot mother. However, he can comment on their level of attractiveness. Stepmoms and stepsisters are an exception but this is a gray area as some bros may not enjoy non-blood relatives being commented upon. Proceed with caution!

[Read: [13 Signs your friends are ruining your relationship](#)]

4. A bro's girlfriend and any ex is also off limits

Meaning no bro can sleep, flirt, or make lewd comments about their bro's current girlfriend or exes. To do this is a huge breakage of the bro code rules and could result in fights and casting out of the circle.

5. A bro shall not cock block another bro

Also the rule of "dibs." If a bro liked a girl first, you serve as his wingman and don't ruin his chances, whether you really like her or not. [Read: [What is a cock block and 11 reasons why they do it](#)]

6. Girls can be bros too

Bros must acknowledge girls with bro-like qualities. When a girl acts like a bro and follows the code, she is accorded equal protection and respect. Which means ...

7. Girl bros are off-limits too

A bro is not to make sexual and romantic advances to a girl bro unless to tease her. She is to be seen as one of the bros and not sexual or attractive in any way.

8. If you catch a bro's wife/girlfriend cheating, you inform him every time

Regardless of the consequences, you must inform him immediately. Your bro comes before everything else, and even though you know he will be angry, you must do your duty. [Read: [Women who cheat: 10 Surprising reasons they're unfaithful](#)]

9. When a bro finds another bro's girlfriend annoying, he must stay silent until they break up

Always respect your bro's choices. Even if it doesn't suit your preferences. However, when the relationship is over, feel free to tell him how you feel.

10. When a bro's wife/girlfriend asks you where he is, you have no idea

Because rule number two. Even if you know where he is, even if he's standing right next to you, you have no idea. You haven't seen him. You have no clue. [Read: [How to make guy friends – 16 hard reasons and ways to avoid hooking up](#)]

11. You must greet your bro appropriately

A hug cannot come before a handshake, it must be accompanied by a pat on the back. If you observe guy friendships in movies, there's a reason why there are always handshakes or a pat on the back.

12. You must inform a bro if he is dressed horribly

If your friend is wearing a neon green polo with pink shoes, one of the bro code rules is that you are obligated to tell him he looks horrible. Honesty is the best policy in cases of his attire.

Especially when his dating life depends on it, tell him when he's dressing horribly. Unless you're also wearing the same outfit, then rock it together.

[Read: [How to dress to impress a girl & get more than just a second glance](#)]

13. Avoid uncomfortable urinal confrontations

A man shall not take the urinal beside another man. You must leave at least one empty urinal in between each other. Even if you're both men, respect your personal space and boundaries with one another.

14. Unless your friend murdered someone, you bail them out of jail

You go to the bank, collect all your pennies, and hand them over to the police. He'll pay you back, don't worry. One of the things about guy code rules is that your friendship is ride-or-die. If something happens to them, you need to have their back at all costs.

15. If your drunk bro is about to cheat on his girlfriend, you must follow through with one intervention

Make him aware of the choice he is about to make. If he replies with "f*ck you," then the bro code rules exempt you from any responsibility from that time onward.

The burden is no longer on your shoulders or the consequences of him cheating on his girlfriend. You're also not obligated to listen to his rants about his choices on that matter. [Read: [To cheat or not to cheat? A guide to make up your mind](#)]

16. Never speak about it again rule

If you accidentally graze or touch another man below the waist, it's already agreed upon as an accident and there will be no mention of it ever.

There's no need to make it a big deal so it's best to not mention what happened again *unless you want to make things even more awkward*. [Read: [10 things to do to become manlier, but not aggressive](#)]

17. A bet is a bet

If a bet is made, no matter what, the loser must follow through with his obligations to carry out his side of the bet. Don't be a lame friend in this aspect, but follow through with the bet.

This includes embarrassing acts or monetary compensation. If he refuses to pay or carry out the duties, you must settle upon an agreement.

18. Wingman duties

If you have a girlfriend and go out to the club with your friends, you are automatically given the job as wingman. Do your best to support them in finding a girl. Whether that's introducing them to other girls, using the smoothest lines to introduce them, or something along those lines.

From there on out, you must support your friends until they achieve their ultimate goal, whatever that may be *as long as it's consensual*. [Read: [How to choose the perfect wingman while meeting women](#)]

19. Speedos are out

Unless you are an Olympic swimmer, you are prohibited from wearing Speedos. You probably don't live under a rock to know that this isn't the most

attractive thing, especially for the ladies. We're in the 2020s, and Speedos are definitely not a thing anymore.

20. Respect another man's boundaries

Every guy has his own personal line. Understand where their line is and don't pass that line. Boundaries are everything when following these guy code rules.

Everything in this list is all about boundaries, so respect them with everything you've got. [Read: [How to set personal boundaries & guide other people to respect it](#)]

21. Act as your bro's Internet buffer

If something tragic happens to your friend, one of the first things you must do is delete their browser history. Protect their privacy at all costs – that's what friendship means in the world of guy codes.

22. Bros don't brag about how many girls they've slept with

This might come as a shock to some of you, but the basis of guy friendships isn't about boasting about how many girls you've slept with. Sure, it's probably an impressive number, but no one cares and you look like an a-hole.

Don't be that a-hole. You don't need to shoot off your ego when talking to your guy friends. [Read: [Curious minds want answers – How many sexual partners is too many?](#)]

23. Pranking your fellow bros is seen as bonding

If you decide to engage in pranking, make sure these three things will not happen: Result in a trip to the ER, with you stealing their phone, or in you or him being in financial debt.

Pranks are always fun, but there's a fine line in knowing when to stop. One of the big bro code rules is to make sure it doesn't cost their health, finances, or anything significant. [Read: [17 bad friends you should weed out of your life](#)]

24. Bros don't let bros drive home wasted

Dish out the money for a cab, and hand him the receipt the next morning. Safety should be your priority when you're dealing with a drunk bro.

If he's intoxicated, don't let him drive no matter what, even if he insists on doing so. If something terrible happens to him while driving, that burden's on you.

25. Back up your friend

If your friend gets into a fight and you're unable to calm the situation, back your friend. Even if he's wrong and an idiot, he's your idiot.

Loyalty is an integral part of the bro code rules, so you need to always have their back. If you don't, maybe you shouldn't be hanging out with this person in the first place. [Read: [How to be a good friend – 49 traits and friend codes that define a real pal](#)]

26. Don't give another man advice on working out unless he asks you

He realizes he has small arms, he has a mirror. Giving out unsolicited advice makes you sound like an a-hole. You're entitled to have your own opinions

and comments, but ultimately, it's their body. If they're happy with the way they look or don't care about working out, let them.

27. Best man, best stripper

If given the title of best man at your friend's wedding, you're entitled with the duty of preparing the bachelor party.

Regardless of what he insists *assuming that his values and beliefs don't contradict*, it is your duty to provide him with the best stripper, or the wildest act of the night. [Read: [How to politely decline being the best man](#)]

28. You must own at least one suit

This can be worn to weddings, funerals, graduations, and special dates. Plus, you'll look smart. If you don't own even a single suit in your wardrobe, then you're completely missing out!

29. Bros never make their friends feel ashamed

No matter what sexual activity he participated in, even if he made out with someone unusual or he did something you'd never personally do, you shouldn't ever judge or criticize him for it. Don't make him feel ashamed for doing it, whether drunk or sober. [Read: [The grossest sex acts you probably didn't know existed](#)]

30. Bros pitch in for beer when cash is short

If a friend is lacking in cash in the middle of a round of drinks, you shouldn't hesitate to cover for him. Money is just money, but you can't have another iconic experience with the guys. Don't hesitate to pitch in when a friend is in need, as they should for you too.

Bro code rules regarding daily bro-to-bro activities

We've covered some of the big bro code rules, but what about the small daily life rules that remain unspoken but are still hugely important?

31. A bro must not gaze at a naked bro's body. [Read: [Here's how you can be masculine without being a jerk](#)]

32. Bros do not give each other birthday cards.

33. Bros do not accompany each other with clothes shopping.

34. Bros are honor-bound to help another bro who is moving house or making DIY repairs.

35. Bros must never ever share dessert.

36. If a bro volunteers to do a food or alcohol run, he is entitled to claim the leftover change.

37. A bro doesn't let a bro marry if he is younger than 30 years of age. [Read: [20 questions to ask each other before getting married](#)]

38. A bro never rents a chick flick to watch alone. This must be done in the presence of his other bros.

39. Bros never cry. Except when a family member or another bro dies or if they get "dirt" in their eyes. [Read: [When a woman is crying – The gentleman's dos and don'ts](#)]

40. A bro shall not apply sunscreen to another bro.

41. A bro must never reveal how many women another bro has slept with.
42. A bro is not required to remember another bro's birthday. *Nor does he fuss when his birthday was forgotten*.
43. A bro must provide a condom to another bro in need.
44. A bro must return the favor when another bro buys a round of drinks.
45. A bro always leaves the toilet seat up for another bro. [Read: [The man code – The 10 most important rules of a gentleman](#)]
46. When a bro tells another bro a secret, he is obliged to take that secret to the grave.
47. When a bro was not invited or was not able to attend another bro's wedding, they don't make a fuss about it.
48. A bro must always order enough pizza for all his bros.
49. A bro must not fuss when another bro doesn't reply to his texts, calls, or emails.
50. A bro doesn't sulk and give another bro the [silent treatment](#).
51. Bros don't shake one off in front of other bros.
52. A bro doesn't unfriend another bro on Facebook.

53. Bros don't wax their body hair.
54. A bro doesn't need to notice or compliment another bro's haircut.
55. A bro doesn't ask another bro to accompany him to the bathroom.
56. Bros don't pout for selfies. [Read: [30 alpha male characteristics that make him a real alpha](#)]
57. Bros don't need umbrellas. Unless to offer shelter to a chick in need.
58. Bros don't choose their own nicknames. Their other bros will be the ones to give it to him.
59. Bros take care of fellow bros who've had too much to drink. Only after they draw on his face with Sharpies and take photos of him covered up with a lot of empty beer bottles.
60. A bro of a bro is my bro—bros don't get "bad vibes" with their kind like women do.
61. When a bro has a kid, all his bros become honorary uncles.
62. A bro never keeps a photo of another bro in his wallet. [Read: [13 rules of etiquette for the modern gentleman](#)]
63. Bros don't make eye contact when eating a banana. [Read: [Where are the men? Feminizing men kills our society](#)]

64. A bro doesn't let his broken-hearted bro drink alone.
65. A bro never tickles other bros.
66. Bros don't giggle.
67. If bros share a house or an apartment, you are obligated to stay away when a bro brings a date home.
68. Bros don't touch each other's hair.
69. Bros don't smell each other on purpose.
70. A bro's nuts are off limits to pranks, assaults, or even fistfights. [Read: [The bond between wingmen and lead players](#)]
71. Bros don't share drinks or feed another bro with his own spoon.
72. Once a bro, always a bro. The bro title is one you carry to the very end.

Many rules, but a life-long connection

You might read this list of 72 bromandments and think that being a bro sounds pretty exhausting. Well, yes, but the rules speak for themselves. If you want to have a connection with a friend that lasts forever, the bro code protects it.

Bros don't give up on one another. They don't argue over petty things and let the issue cause a rift. Bros have no problem with dropping everything for another bro. In the end, bros are solid friends. In fact, they're more than friends, they're family.

[Read: [Relationship advice for men – 22 tips to make you a better partner](#)]

True card-carrying bros are expected to abide by these unspoken rules that define what it is to be a true bro. Regardless, breaking the bro code rules doesn't make you less of a bro if you're true to your guy friends. After all, bros don't let bros do stupid things alone.

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