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RESISTING EXPECTATIONS

Discourse analysis of Finnish travel literature about solo female travelers

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Abstract:

Over the past decade, interest in solo travel has grown considerably. Still, the existing literature is limited, and the experiences of Finnish solo travelers in particular have received little attention. This study examines how solo female travel is represented in travel books written by Finnish women. In this study, a solo traveler is defined as a person who leaves home alone and travels primarily by herself.

The study is based on the social constructionism paradigm and is qualitative in nature. The theoretical framework builds on discourse theory and prior research on solo female travel, women's travel writing, and travel guidebooks written for women. The empirical data consists of five travel books that have been published in the 2010s. All books are personal narratives written by Finnish women about their solo travels abroad for leisure. Discourse analysis was used to examine how solo female travel is represented in the data.

Four solo female travel discourses were identified: resistance, safety, gender, and transformation. Resistance was found on two levels: the solo trip itself was a major act of resistance, and women also resisted others' expectations during the trip. In accordance with previous studies, consideration of safety was always in the background. Women assessed frequently their safety situation and adjusted their behaviour accordingly, which affected their use of space. However, what was perceived as dangerous was different for each traveler.

Solo female travelers also encountered gender-related issues like being asked to dress more appropriately and having to lie that they are married. They reported being prone to the male gaze and having uncomfortable encounters with men, though these incidents were described mainly in a humorous tone. The findings suggest that solo traveling experience is slightly different depending on the woman's age, but further research would be needed.

Solo female travelers tended to consider themselves as travelers or "explorers" instead of tourists. Especially the younger women borrowed heavily from the Romantic tradition of travel writing, concentrating on the subjective and searching for an answer to an identity crisis. For them, solo travel was a transformational experience that changed them as a person. It is reflected that the narrative structure of these travel books resembles traditional adventure novels.

Keywords: solo travel, women, gender, travel literature, travel writing, discourse analysis

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1. INTRODUCTION

"It is impossible for you to do it," was the terrible verdict. "In the first place you are a woman and would need a protector, and even if it were possible for you to travel alone you would need to carry so much baggage that it would detain you in making rapid changes. Besides you speak nothing but English, so there is no use talking about it; no one but a man can do this."

– *Nellie Bly: Around the World in 72 days, published in 1890*

Women's solo travel is a topic that interests me both personally and academically. Traveling alone is more complex than one might think first, and there are concerns especially for women. When I was planning my first week-long solo trip in 2018, I was terrified. Can I travel alone? Where can I travel as a woman? How should I prepare to ensure my safety? Do I have the courage? *What will others say?* I spent hours on the internet searching for other women's experiences and solo travel tips, realizing that I am not alone with my feelings. The trip turned out just fine, but it left me with an interest on the subject. After starting my master's degree, I was surprised to find out that solo female travel was a subject of academic research and several studies have been conducted interviewing women who have travelled alone. As an avid reader, I became interested in how solo female travel is perceived in travel books.

Over the past 10 years, interest in solo travel has grown considerably, as Figure 1 shows. Google search volume on "solo female travel" has been growing steadily since 2014, the number 100 indicating the highest number of search and the number 50 half of the peak. The search interest took a dip during the Covid-19 pandemic but is clearly resuming fast (Figure 1). Soolomatkailijat, a Finnish Facebook group for solitary travelers, has currently 3300 members sharing tips and experiences of traveling alone (Soolomatkailijat). In the recent years, travel medias have published articles about the best and most dangerous countries to travel alone, though they are sometimes conflicting each other. Brazil, for example, has been regarded both as a good destination for its beaches and parties (Momondo, 2020), and a dangerous one because of the crime statistics and political situation (Koski, 2018). Several news articles of women's ambitious solo journeys have been published, like Sissi Korhonen biking alone through South America (Pennanen, 2019) or Anna-Katri Rähkä traveling alone in 70 countries (Kuukkanen, 2018). Rähkä also writes a popular travel blog Adalmina's Adventures and has published several posts about the topic, encouraging women to travel alone even it feels frightening (Rähkä, 2017). Finnish author Henriikka Rönkkönen has even coined the term *määmatka*, "me-trip", and written a novel of the same title in 2020 (Atena,

n.d.). The term refers to a single woman's solo holiday and is also a wordplay for *häätmatka*, honeymoon.

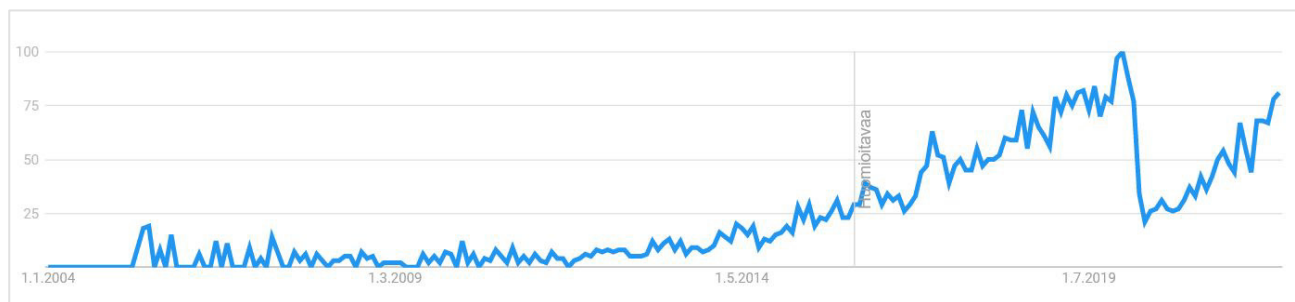


Figure 1. Google search volume on “solo female travel” from January 2004 to May 2022. Source: Google Trends.

One of the first travel guidebooks aimed specifically at women, *Hints to Lady Travelers*, came out in 1889 (Gilmartin, 1997). Published regularly throughout the twentieth century, these guidebooks have been implying that solo travel is a challenge for women (Gilmartin, 1997, p. 3). Indeed, advice such as not staying late out, behaving appropriately, and selecting a safe accommodation have been around since the 1880s (Gilmartin, 1997, p. 5). Current advice on the internet may be less conservative but emphasizes safety issues, nonetheless. In her interview, travel blogger Anna-Katri Rähkä assures that the same risks exist whether you travel alone or in a company but points out that women should pay extra attention their safety (Kuukkanen, 2018). She says that solo female travelers should wear covering clothing and not go alone to unsafe areas at night (Kuukkanen, 2018). Rantapallo, one of the largest travel websites in Finland, tells women not to attract too much attention by the way they dress, to stay alert all the time, to carry safety devices such as a whistle, and to wear a wedding ring or lie about having a boyfriend (Khanji, 2017). Likewise, *Kotiliesi* magazine advises solo traveling women to wear a ring or even carry photos of their family members' children in their wallet (Keponen, 2018). I will explore this theme of advice given to women travelers in Chapter 4.

1.1 Travel writing – what it is and is not

People have been writing about their travel experiences and visits to “other” places for as long as they have been traveling (Robinson, 2004, p. 303). Travel stories are written for reflection and self-discovery (Cockburn-Wootten et al., 2006, p. 8). Writing legitimizes the travel episodes socially, gives an opportunity for reflection and cultural commentary, and increases knowledge, which can raise the writer's personal status and can even make them popular (Robinson, 2004, p. 303). In turn, travel stories are pleasurable to read and allow readers to escape easily to places they might

otherwise never visit and engage with foreign experiences (Robinson, 2004, p. 303). According to Robinson (2004), it is easier to say what travel writing is not than what it precisely is. Travel books are not guidebooks containing “factual” information, newspaper “travelogues”, or journalistic travel reports (Robinson, 2004, p. 305). In prior research, travel books have been described as “pseudoethnographic” and “factual fiction” to illustrate how they contain somewhat objective reporting but are filtered by personal experience (Robinson, 2004, p. 305). The core elements of travel writing include the presence of the author’s voice and interior exploration that is contrasted with the external experiences (Robinson, 2004, p. 309). Besides the author’s personal writing style, travel experiences are written through their emotions and ideologies, which means that traveling is not value-neutral (Robinson, 2004, p. 309).

In tourism research, travel writings have remained an under-explored source of information (Robinson, 2004, p. 303). Using them for research purposes leads to ontological and epistemological questions such as the “tacit subjectivity” of the texts and varying truths (Robinson, 2004, p. 304). For example, Bassnett (2002, as cited in Mulligan, 2016, p. 332) notes that many earlier texts by women travelers, like the work of Isabella Bird, are self-conscious fictions and they should not be read as simply autobiographical. Like any other literature, travel writing is a linguistic construction that uses tropes, images, metaphors, rhetorical strategies, and persuasive structures, filtered with discourses that the author might not even acknowledge (Mulligan, 2016, p. 336). Travel books are not “a direct transparent window on objective reality” nor should they be read assuming that (Mulligan, 2016, p. 336).

1.2 Definitions of solo travel

Yang (2020, p. 2) notes that existing literature uses inconsistent definitions of solo travel, and some studies do not define it at all. Chung, Baik, and Lee (2017) have perhaps the narrowest definition, as they define solo travel as a single-person household traveling alone. According to Bianchi (2016, p. 197), solo travelers can be either married or unmarried people who choose to travel on their own for leisure. Both Laesser, Beritelli and Bieger (2009, p. 218) and Wilson (2004, p. 9) cite Foo’s (1999) definition that the term refers to one’s arrival status, that is, a solo traveler arrives in a country alone. However, this does not mean that solo travelers are on their own the whole time (Wilson, 2004, p. 9). Laesser et al. (2009) have created a conceptual framework of solo travelers. The four groups they identified were single-solo (people who live alone and travel alone), single-group (people who live alone and travel in a group), collective-solo (people who live in a collective

household and travel alone), and collective-group (people who live in a collective household and travel as a part of a group) (Laesser et al., 2009, p. 219). Therefore, those who take off by themselves to join group trips would be also counted as solo travelers. Because of these inconsistencies, it can be difficult to compare the solo travel research findings meaningfully (Yang, 2020, p.2).

Travelers themselves have also different opinions of what is counted as solo travel. Yang (2020, p. 6) studied contemporary meanings of solo travel and found that male participants were more likely to describe it as traveling completely alone, whereas female participants thought that joining a group tour without friends and family would be solo travel as well. Participants who did not have experience of solo travel associated it mostly with a “grand tour” in Europe or backpacking (Yang, 2020, p. 6). Generally, solo travelers should not be confused with independent travelers who book their own travel arrangements, or backpackers who do not necessarily travel alone (Laesser et al., 2009; Wilson, 2004; Yang, 2020). However, it is likely that solo travelers are also independent travelers who prefer freedom and flexibility rather than a package holiday (Wilson, 2004, p. 9). In this thesis, I will follow Wilson’s (2004, p. 9) definition of solo traveling. Hence, a solo traveler is a person who travels mostly on her own; she is solely responsible for her travel plans, leaves home alone, and travels primarily by herself although it is possible to meet new people along the way.

1.3 Solo female travel in tourism research

According to Bianchi (2016, p. 197), research on solo holiday travelers is still limited, and most of it is gender-related or focuses on a specific market segment. There are a handful of gender-balanced studies on solo travel. In their study of Swiss travel market, Laesser et al. (2009, pp. 222, 226) created the four-group framework for solo travelers and found that the main travel motivations for the single-solo group are “rest and relaxation” and “visiting friends and family”, whereas the three other solo traveler groups’ motivations could be described as “curious hedonism” (a desire to experience something new but in a convenient way) and “social matters”. Most solo travelers turned out to be older females or younger males, which partially contradicts other studies that have focused on younger females (Laesser et al., 2009, p. 225).

Mehmetoglu, Dann and Larsen (2001) interviewed 7 solitary travelers (5 men and 2 women) in Norway and identified different socio-psychological justifications for solo traveling. They created two categories of non-institutionalized solitary travelers: “solitary travelers by default” who did not

have travel companions, and “solitary travelers by choice” who had other justifications for traveling alone, such as ease, experience, and flexibility (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001). Bianchi (2016) explored solo travelers’ motivations and drivers of satisfaction and dissatisfaction by conducting semi-structured interviews with 24 Australian participants (11 men and 13 women). She found that an important reason for traveling alone was a lack of travel partners, but participants also travelled solo because they enjoyed it and it was easier (Bianchi, 2016, p. 201). The main dissatisfaction drivers were related to destination factors (such as safety, transport, accommodation, and bad weather), whereas incidents that made solo travelers highly satisfied were connected to personal factors (such as feelings of freedom and independence) (Bianchi, 2016, p. 205). Yang’s (2020, p. 7) findings support the earlier studies, suggesting that a lack of travel companion is a common reason for solo traveling but not the only one. Other reasons could be major life transitions like death of a spouse, prior negative experiences when traveling with others, and for many, an intentional choice to travel alone for freedom and flexibility (Yang, 2020, p 7).

As mentioned before, most research on solo travel has a gender-related or feminist perspective. It should also be noted that most studies have focused on Western women and therefore have a western-centric viewpoint (Seow and Brown, 2018, p. 1191). In her doctoral thesis, Wilson (2004) studied the impact of constraints on women’s solo travel experiences by conducting 40 in-depth interviews with Australian women. The results of that study were presented also in the article by Wilson and Little (2005), describing four interlinking categories of travel constraints: sociocultural, personal, practical, and spatial. Another paper by Wilson and Little (2008) draws on qualitative data from two studies with a total of 82 participants. They identified four categories of women’s travel fear: others’ perceptions and opinions, perception of vulnerability, sense of restricted access and temporal immobility, and conspicuousness and perceived “male gaze” (Wilson & Little, 2008, p. 174). Jordan and Gibson (2005) explored reasons, experiences, and meanings of solo female travel. They collected data from 60 in-depth interviews with women from the US and the UK and found three key themes: surveillance, resistance, and empowerment (Jordan & Gibson, 2005, p. 200). Jordan and Aitchison (2008) analyzed solo female tourists’ experiences of gendered power and “the gaze”. They interviewed 39 solo female tourists and found that all but one felt that they were subject to surveillance by local people (usually men) when they were traveling (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008, p. 337). I will elaborate on the results of these studies in Chapter 3.

Solo travel in general has been studied in Sweden (Abbasian, 2018) and Norway (Mehmetoglu et al., 2001). Also, Heimtun (2010) has explored the solo dining experiences of single Norwegian

women. However, apart from a few bachelor's theses hardly any research can be found by Finnish authors. Perhaps the most notable example is a master's thesis by Johanna Tarkiainen, which has also been published as a book. Tarkiainen (2001) studied how solo traveling women experience spaces and places, what kinds of emotions are related to traveling, and what kinds of meanings are attached to travel spaces. She used narrative analysis to examine discussion threads on Lonely Planet's forum and travel narratives in one book (Tarkiainen, 2001, p. 3-4). Tarkiainen found that women have fears and worries regarding their safety, but there are also experiences of participating, self-confidence, and courage, as well as a fulfilled want to experience the world (2001, p. 84).

1.4 Purpose of this study

This study is based on the social constructionism paradigm. The theoretical framework of this thesis builds on discourse theory and prior research on solo female travel, women's travel writing, and travel guidebooks written for women. In discourse research, language is seen as social activity that has limitations and consequences, and by using language one can construct knowledge, change policies, and use power (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 14). This study is based on the premise that the ways we talk and write about a phenomenon shape our thoughts and views of it. Even though travel writing and contemporary travel discourses might seem unconnected, they feed each other and can both shape geographies, cultures, societies, and spaces (Robinson, 2004, p. 312). Therefore, it is relevant to analyze how solo female travel is discussed and what kind of reality is produced in travel books.

So far, mostly in-depth or semi-structured interviews have been used to study experiences of solo travelers, and content or discourse analysis have been used to examine travel guidebooks and travel writing. The existing literature on solo female travel covers participants from Asia, Australia, the US, the UK, and some other European countries, but the solo travel experiences of Finnish women have not been studied. Women's travel writing has been analyzed from antiquity to the 20th century (see e.g., Meens & Sintobin, 2019; Mulligan, 2016), but contemporary travel books have received less attention.

To fill this gap, my aim is to examine how solo female travel is represented in travel books written by Finnish women, and with what consequences. I will answer the following research question:

RQ: How do Finnish female writers represent solo travel in contemporary travel books?

More specific sub-questions are:

- Which discourses are used to represent solo female travel?
- What kind of reality of solo female travel is produced through these discourses?

1.5 Data and methodology

This study is qualitative in nature, and I use discourse analysis to examine the ways solo female travel is represented in the data. Discourse research focuses on language use as social activity and how it affects the world and constructs knowledge (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019). Social constructionism and discourse analysis were the most suitable approach since I focus on written narratives that contain rich description of the authors' feelings and experiences. Following the definition by Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019, p. 35), a discourse is understood as a historically formed way of giving meaning to something while shaping the subject and constructing knowledge about it.

The empirical data of this study consists of five travel books that are published in the 2010s. They are personal narratives written by Finnish women about their solo travels abroad for leisure. The selected books are: *Vihreiden vuorten varjossa: polkupyöräretkellä Skotlannissa* by Päivi Laitinen (2010), *Ihanasti hukassa ja miten sieltä pääsee pois* by Merja Mähkä (2012), *Asioita jotka saavat sydämen lyömään nopeammin* by Mia Kankimäki (2013), *Vanha nainen Espanjassa* by Sirkku Passinen (2017), and *Asfalttivolgaa etelään: Peukalokyydillä Moskovasta Afganistaniin* by Emma Vepsä (2018). The data collection started in December 2021 and was completed in May 2022. From the five books, I collected a total of 100 pages of relevant excerpts about solo female travel. First, I themed the data in Microsoft Word and then coded it in more detail in Atlas.ti. As a result of the analysis, I identified four discourses that are used to discuss solo female travel in these books. The data was in Finnish, so the excerpts used in this thesis have been translated by me.

1.6 The structure of this study

This study consists of eight chapters in total. The theoretical framework is divided in three chapters that follow the introduction. The second chapter presents theoretical aspects of discourse research and provides definitions for *discourse*, *genre*, *text type* and *narrative*. Discourses are also discussed from the perspective of power relations and gender. The third chapter covers previous research on solo female travel and presents theoretical concepts such as the *geography of women's fear*, *surveillance*, *the gaze*, and *leisure constraints*. Studies on the motivations and positive aspects of solo travel are also briefly discussed. The fourth chapter focuses on previous research on travel writing and its discourses. Both travel guidebooks written for women and women's own travel writing in books and blogs are discussed.

In the fifth chapter, the data is introduced in more detail, the methods for data collection and analysis are explained and ethical concerns are reflected. The sixth chapter describes the findings of this study: four discourses that are used represent solo female travel in contemporary Finnish travel literature. The seventh chapter considers the consequences of these discourses and what kind of reality they produce of solo female travel. Lastly, the eighth chapter concludes the findings and provides practical implications as well as the limitations of the study and ideas for further research.

2. DISCOURSES AND LANGUAGE

2.1 What is a discourse?

Discourse research is multidisciplinary by nature and draws from both linguistics and social sciences (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 26). It is based on the paradigm of social constructionism (Suoninen, n.d.). Constructionism sees the social world as constructed by history, society, and language (Botterill & Platenkamp, 2012, p. 25). In discourse studies, it is argued that we use language to build things in the world and construct different areas of reality (Gee, 2011, pp. 16-17). Language is seen as a social activity, so discourse research is interested on *how* the language is used and in which context (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 14). It is recognized that there are norms, conditions, and consequences for using language: language affects the world and vice versa (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 20). Every choice has an impact on what kind of perception is formed about a certain topic (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 99). In tourism research, forms of discourse analysis have been used to critically examine representations of tourism experiences, practices, and motivations (Hannam & Knox, 2005, p. 23). Written documents often represent how people make sense of and reflect on their own worlds (Hannam, 2003, as cited in Hannam & Knox, 2005, p. 23). Since this study focuses on written narratives to see how solo female travel is represented and with what consequences, social constructionism and discourse perspective were the most suitable approaches.

There are several different approaches on discourse research. Suoninen (n.d.) presents two main orientations: analytic and critical. Analytic discourse perspective examines everyday language use and its consequences in detail, whereas critical discourse perspective focuses on social and political inequality caused by language use (Suoninen, n.d.). According to Gee (2011), the two main approaches are descriptive and critical discourse perspectives. Descriptive discourse perspective describes how language works, whereas critical discourse perspective aims to address social or political issues and controversies (Gee, 2011, p. 9). However, Gee (2011, p. 9) argues that all discourse research should be “critical” since the language itself is political. According to Hannam and Knox (2005, p. 26) post-structuralist discourse perspective is interested in either critiquing the power of discourses or deconstructing meanings within socio-cultural texts. Besides what is in the text, deconstructive discourse perspective is interested in what has been left out and the “secret meanings” (Duncan & Duncan, 1992, as cited in Hannam & Knox, 2005, p. 28). In this thesis, I follow the approach of Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019). They draw from the tradition of critical

discourse research to define discourses (2019, p. 34) but provide general guidelines for discourse analysis.

According to Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019, pp. 29-30), the original meaning of discourse was “a unit of language use broader than one sentence”, like a speech or a piece of text. To differentiate discourse research from linguistic research that understood language as a fixed structure, the context of the language use was included to the definition later. Nowadays, discourse means language use in a specific situation as a part of social activity, and it is also used to refer to established language use in a particular situation or in a particular field (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 30).

According to Siltaoja and Sorsa (2020, p. 228), a discourse is a group of statements that is used to construct and communicate an understanding of something. In the English language, there is a difference between *discourse*, meaning the theoretic view of language, and *a discourse*, which refers to the historically formed way of giving meaning to something while shaping the subject and constructing knowledge about it (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 35). There seems to be differences between authors, as for example Gee (2011, p. 30) refers to these specific discourses as Discourses with a capital D. In this thesis, I use the term “a discourse” to refer to a certain kind of language used to build understanding and give meaning to something.

Discourse researcher may ask questions like “what is said”, “how it is said”, “in what situation” and “with what consequences” (Suoninen, n.d.). In a broader scope, a discourse perspective can examine the temporal change of discourses, different means of language use, and power issues related to discourses (Siltaoja & Sorsa, 2020, p. 228). Gee (2011, pp. 69-71) uses the term “figured worlds” to describe the taken-for-granted models and typical stories that affect our thinking. Typical stories are not “right” or “wrong” and they can change over time as the society changes. What counts as typical or normal also differs by social groups and culture. A discourse researcher can ask what typical stories the text assumes and invites the reader to assume, as well as analyze what participants, objects, environments, ways of interacting, forms of language, and values are in the figured worlds (Gee, 2011, p. 72).

2.2 Genres, text types, and narratives

Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019, pp. 110-111) define *genre* as a combination of linguistic and social activity that is quite established and recognized by its users. A joke, a piece of news, or a lecture are good examples of genres, and we know how to act according to them. Like discourses,

genres are important discursive resources that reveal what is central and what kinds of relationships are constructed in different situations. The difference is that while discourses construct the world, genres are tools to construct social activity: for example, a genre like letter to the editor can use different discourses like feminist or racist one (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 111). Genres have unwritten, contextual norms that dictate how to act in certain sociocultural situations, and internal norms to guide structure and language (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 114). They also have recognizable goals and a typical structure that consists of functional sequences (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, pp. 121, 128). For example, the aim of a recipe is to tell how to prepare food, and it typically includes three sequences: the name of the dish, a list of ingredients, and cooking instructions. Sometimes genres have multiple goals, or they can overlap or merge with each other, which creates multi-layered social activity (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 201). Different genres can be used linearly in a text or embedded in each other, like for example a list of must-see destinations in a travel guide (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 197).

Genres consist of different *text types*, the most important of which are *descriptive, narrative, instructive, argumentative, and expository* (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen, 2019, p. 137). According to Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019, pp. 144-147), *narratives* are a powerful form of discursive practices used to create an understanding of a phenomenon or event. They are culturally and historically shaped ways of reporting, informing, teaching, entertaining and presenting, but also unique ways of giving meaning and reliving personal experiences and feelings. A narrative has an audience to whom it is told or imagined to be told. Therefore, a narrative is a performative act: it is told for a reason and meant for someone. It is constructed with conscious choices what to tell and what to leave out, and influenced by norms, context and assumed audience. Like discourses and genres, narratives tend to have a recognizable structure, typically a chronological plot with a beginning, middle and end (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 149).

Knowing the conventional norms of the genre, the researcher can identify regularities and deviations in the text and make them visible (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 116). Narrative, instructive, and argumentative language are usually the most interesting text types to analyze (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 137). Narratives can be studied from the perspective of discourses: who is telling the story to which audience and from which point of view (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 151). Another important aspect is to analyze how the narrator evaluates the story or their own reactions, because evaluation shows why the narrative is important, what the

narrator wants to say and what kind of identity is constructed (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 154).

2.3 Discourses, power, and gender

In discourse research, it is important to be aware of the socio-cultural context (Hannam & Knox, 2005, p. 26). Simply identifying the discourse is not enough, but it is more important to analyze what kind of social reality it produces or maintains (Siltaoja & Sorsa, 2020, p. 231). There can be many discourses to describe a single matter, all of which have different assumptions and perceptions built in them (Siltaoja & Sorsa, 2020, p. 228). Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019, pp. 71-74) state that as discourses define what can and cannot be said, they are linked to both power and resistance. French philosopher Michel Foucault has had a major impact on discourse studies, and his theory presents an idea that discourse (or language), knowledge and power are inseparable. The power of discourses comes from their ability to present things as “true” from a certain point of view, which becomes visible when they are examined in a long term. There is a constant battle of discourses for which one gains more power and who can define “the truth” (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 72). Foucault demonstrated that discourses could even lead to creating specific institutions that further regulate behaviour (Hannam & Knox, 2015, p. 26).

The concept of power is also connected to gender. Pritchard (2004, p. 317) argues that tourism processes are gendered in their construction, presentation, and consumption. For example, tourism labor and experiences of tourists and hosts can be studied from the perspective of gender relations, which allows focusing on the different experiences of women and men (Kinnaird & Hall, 1996, p. 95). These experiences depend on how gender relations are constructed in society and how they change over time (Kinnaird & Hall, 1996, p. 100). Today, gendered identities are not seen as binary but plural, so it is important to note differences among, as well as between, females and males (Pritchard, 2004, p. 318). Also, factors such as race, ethnicity, dis/ability, class, and nationality intersect with gender and sexuality, and they need to be acknowledged to study power relations and broader discursive networks (Pritchard, 2004, p. 323).

Aitchison (2005b) notes that feminist research focuses on gender relations, but all gender research is not necessarily feminist. Feminist research has a political aim to emphasize and improve women’s conditions in society (Aitchison, 2005b). Feminist poststructural theory, in particular, is interested in language and draws from Michel Foucault’s theory on discourses and the work of

Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan (Aitchison, 2005a, p. 216). In addition to male writers, classic texts of Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Germaine Greer have had a major impact on feminist and gender studies (Aitchison, 2005a, p. 217). In tourism research, feminist researchers have studied women's experiences and conditions as tourism workers and consumers as well as gender inequality in tourism (Pritchard, 2014). For example, researchers have studied tourism gender representations in brochures and observed that women are associated with passivity and availability, whereas men are associated with power and action (Pritchard, 2004, p. 321). According to Pritchard (2004, p. 318), masculinist discourses have heavily influenced tourism and determined what is "natural", with the result that they have become an unquestioned norm. Still, feminist research has remained a minority interest in tourism studies (Pritchard, 2014).

3. THE SOLO FEMALE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

3.1 The geography of women's (travel) fear

Feminist researchers have found that men and women perceive, use, and access public places differently (Wilson & Little, 2008, p. 169). *The geography of women's fear* is a concept created by Valentine (1989) to examine how fear of male violence affects many women's use of space. Public space is defined as "the space we share with strangers, people who aren't our relatives, friends, or work associates" (Waltzer, 1986, as cited in Valentine, 1989, p. 386). Although fear is a construction of a human mind, it is more complex than mere subjective emotion and has wide implications (Wilson & Little, 2008, p. 169). According to Valentine (1989, p. 386), girls and women create mental images and maps of places where they fear assault or have had frightening experiences, thus developing the geography of fear. Consequently, women need to apply "coping strategies" and "defensive tactics", such as avoiding places that they perceive dangerous at certain times. These can include large open spaces, like parks, woodland, and countryside, as well as closed spaces with limited exits, like subways, alleyways, or empty railway carriages (Valentine, 1989, p. 386). Valentine (1989, p. 389) also argues that the nature of public space varies during the day: in the evening and at night it is dominated by men so that women fear going alone to all public space, not just specific isolated places.

Wilson and Little (2008) studied Valentine's concept empirically and applied it to solo female travel. They identified four key themes of fear: (1) others' perceptions and opinions, (2) perception of vulnerability, (3) a sense of restricted access and temporal immobility, and (4) a feeling of conspicuousness and being prone to the male gaze (Wilson & Little, 2008, p. 173). *Others' perceptions* include attitudes, concerns, and comments from friends and family. Women's solo traveling was perceived as risky, fearful, dangerous, and somehow socially inappropriate (Wilson & Little, 2008, p. 173). Interestingly, male and female acquaintances expressed their views in a different way: women commented on the traveling woman's bravery and how they would not be able to travel solo themselves, whereas men were more concerned on solo traveler's safety and the harm that could be caused by other males (Wilson & Little, 2008, p. 174). *Perception of vulnerability* refers to the idea that traveling is more difficult for women since they are more vulnerable to attacks and sexual harassment. Several participants had encountered sexual harassment, and many of them blamed themselves for being in those situations alone (Wilson & Little, 2008, p. 176). *Sense of restricted access* means that women perceived their access to certain

destinations to be limited. Entire countries were thought to be “unsafe” or “off-limits”, and dark and isolated places were considered dangerous for solo female travelers (Wilson & Little, 2008, pp. 177-178). Generally, women felt that they had an intangible “safety sphere” around major tourist centers, to which they were restricted (Wilson & Little, 2008, p. 178). *Conspicuousness* refers to a feeling that solo traveling women were subject to the local “male gaze”, which made them feel self-conscious and uncomfortable (Wilson & Little, 2008, p. 179). This was often considered as a part of traveling, but sometimes these feelings limited women’s movements in certain spaces or the level of interaction they could have with local people (Wilson & Little, 2008, p. 179).

Consequently, Wilson and Little (2008) expand Valentine’s original concept to *the geography of women’s travel fear*. Solo female travelers experienced fear of male violence and therefore perceived and used space differently than men would, trying to keep themselves “out of harm’s way” (Wilson & Little, 2008, p. 182). In a former study, they noted that the lack of self-confidence and fear of sexual harassment limited solo traveling women’s willingness to move outside the major tourist centers (Wilson & Little, 2005, p. 168). These findings are supported by a recent study by Brown, de Coteau, and Lavrushkina (2020), who examined the female tourist experience of walking on holiday. While walking had a lot of benefits, women were anxious for their security even in relatively safe destinations, especially at night (Brown et al., 2020, p. 365). They felt vulnerable and considered themselves a potential target for attack, which made them stay vigilant and apply various safeguarding strategies (Brown et al., 2020, pp. 362-365). In fact, it is argued that women are so used to make constant decisions in public spaces to keep safe that they take it for granted (Brown et al., 2020, p. 365). Mura and Khoo-Lattimore (2012, p. 711) criticize studies focusing on solely women’s experience of fear for seeing women as a homogeneous group that is different from men. However, they found that while young male tourists were also concerned of being physically attacked, most of the females claimed that the fear of being raped is their major concern (Mura & Khoo-Lattimore, 2012, p. 715). In fact, 11 out of the 13 young women they interviewed matched “the stereotypical gendered perception of fear” (Mura & Khoo-Lattimore, 2012, p. 715).

3.2 Surveillance and “the gaze”

In his theory of power, Foucault (1977, as cited in Jordan and Aitchison, 2008, p. 332) argues that the human body is subjected to social and cultural control. In the 19th century, physical punishment was replaced by constant supervision, so that people exercise power over each other through social surveillance (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008, p. 332). Therefore, we respond to the collective gaze by

exercising self-surveillance and behaving in socially accepted ways that others expect from us (Jordan & Gibson, 2005, p. 198). Foucault argues that this practice sexualizes bodies as men and women are socialized to conform to masculinized and feminized ideas (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008, p. 332). Several researchers have pointed out that many tourism marketing materials and specific holiday spaces (for example the beach) are socially and culturally constructed as sexualized (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008, p. 334). “The sexualization of space” affects the way in which tourism spaces and places are constructed and gendered, so that tourists who do not conform to norms are marginalized (Jordan & Gibson, 2005, p. 198).

Jordan and Aitchison (2008, p. 329) argue that despite women’s “liberation”, the surveillance of women has increased in the late 20th century as they have become more mobile. Extending Urry’s original concept “the tourist gaze” and Maoz’s subsequent concept “the mutual gaze”, their paper focuses on the gaze of local men upon solo traveling women (“the local gaze”) and how it is experienced as sexualized (2008, pp. 330-331). In their study of 39 solo female travelers, only one participant reported being able to wander and observe without a feeling that she was gazed upon (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008, p. 337). All others felt that their presence as lone women in tourism spaces made them subject to local people’s surveillance (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008, 338). As a result, they exercised self-surveillance and adopted practices such as only going out alone at certain times of day (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008, p. 343). Heimtun (2010) found that many midlife single women feel uncomfortable and lonely when eating out in the holiday. Even if these women were used to do things by themselves, eating out was considered somehow socially unacceptable and made them feel out of place (Heimtun, 2010, p. 182).

Jordan and Gibson (2005, p. 200) found that many solo traveling women had a common experience of being subjects of surveillance and other’s (sexualized) gaze because they were on their own. Therefore, they argue that Urry’s popular concept of a tourist as “a *flâneur* who can stroll around the world relatively free from the gaze” would be largely a male experience (2005, p. 198). However, even though solo female travelers were subject of surveillance, they also resisted it using various tactics, such as going to dine alone in a restaurant regardless of others’ gaze (Jordan & Gibson, 2005, pp. 202-204). In the study conducted by Heimtun (2010, p. 184), women acknowledged that the positive aspects of eating out with others were exaggerated, and some adopted resistant practices such as bringing a book to the table. According to Foucault (1980; 1984a; 1984b, as cited in Jordan & Gibson, 2005, p. 198) power is fluid and negotiable, which allows people to use different forms of resistance to reclaim power. The solo trip itself can be seen

as a major act of resistance, and in addition to others' gaze, women resisted the norms and values of their families and home cultures (Jordan & Gibson, 2005, pp. 202-203). These acts of resistance made women feel empowered, and they also empowered others through their travels (Jordan & Gibson, 2005, pp. 205-206).

3.3 Leisure constraints

In leisure studies, constraints have been defined as factors that “inhibit people’s ability to participate in leisure activities, to spend more time doing so, to take advantage of leisure services, or to achieve a desired level of satisfaction” (Jackson, 1988, as cited in Wilson & Little, 2005, p. 155). There have been many attempts to classify types of constraints, perhaps the most popular of which is Crawford and Godbey’s model of three constraint categories: *structural*, *intrapersonal*, and *interpersonal* (Wilson & Little, 2005, p. 158). Later this was expanded to suggest that the three are in a hierarchy so that intrapersonal constraints are encountered first, and when these are “negotiated” successfully, second come interpersonal and third structural constraints (Wilson & Little, 2005, p. 158). It has been acknowledged that even though an individual has been able to “negotiate” the constraints and participate in leisure activities, the experience itself can still be constrained and the constraints can impact on enjoyment of activity (Wilson & Little, 2005, p. 158).

In Bianchi’s study (2016, pp. 201-202), both male and female solo travelers described constraints like extra costs, extra effort required to look after one’s belongings, risks associated with being alone, and feeling lonely because there was no one to share the experience with. Yang (2020) studied solo travelers and non-solo travelers and got similar results. For both groups, extra accommodation costs were the most significant barrier for traveling alone (Yang, 2020, p. 8). Regarding safety concerns, solo male travelers were mostly concerned about theft and petty crime, whereas female participants had concerns about sexual harassment or assault (Yang, 2020, p. 8). Social constraint was also mentioned, and especially non-solo travelers were concerned about having no one to share the experience with (Yang, 2020, p. 8). East Asian women face different kinds of constraints due to the patriarchal ideologies and the Confucian ideology (Seow & Brown, 2018, p. 1190). Challenging the western-centric viewpoint of previous studies, Seow and Brown (2018, p. 1199) note that a status as Asian woman is a constraint itself, as standing out from the crowd in a western environment intensifies the feeling of vulnerability. However, they found that loneliness was not a constraint that overly impacted women in their study, even if it caused some discomfort (Seow & Brown, 2018, p. 1197).

In a study of 40 solo traveling women, Wilson and Little (2005, p 161) identified four interlinked categories of constraint: sociocultural, personal, practical, and spatial. According to Wilson and Little (2005, p. 161), *sociocultural constraints* relate to social expectations for women and others' perceptions towards their travel. *Personal constraints* are associated with internal limitations, for example self-doubt, fear, and loneliness. *Practical constraints* include challenges such as a lack of time, money, or local knowledge. *Spatial constraints* can limit women's destination choices or restrict their movements in tourist destinations. These constraints do not necessarily prevent women from traveling but can limit their ease of access to the travel experience (Wilson & Little, 2005, p 162). Constraints are experienced differently in pretravel stage and during the trip: for example, practical constraints before departure included lack of time and money whereas during traveling it could be lack of language skills (Wilson & Little, 2005, p 161). Wilson and Little (2005, p. 169) argue that the different categories of constraints are interrelated and interacting, having cumulative impact on women's lives. They also note that it is important to investigate the "hidden meanings" behind the constraints: for example, lack of money and time can be the result of having to take care of a family (2005, p. 168).

Brugulat and Coromina (2021) applied Wilson's four categories of constraint in their study of 37 solo female backpackers and examined both precedent and "in situ" constraints. They found that women were aware of the potential risks but created diverse risk reduction strategies that combined information search and adjustment of consumption behaviour (Brugulat & Coromina, 2021, p. 652). Sociocultural constraints that female backpackers faced included lack of support from their relatives and unwanted attention (Brugulat & Coromina, 2021, p. 647). Personal constraints were related to fears concerning food, water, accommodation, being robbed, or having to seek medical attention, but prior research was used to reduce risks (Brugulat & Coromina, 2021, p. 648). Practical constraints were associated with not knowing the local language or culture, but word-of-mouth among backpackers was mentioned as a useful risk reduction strategy (Brugulat & Coromina, 2021, p. 650). Knowledge of security issues in the destination was a spatial constraint, however, the respondents did not agree on what is a dangerous place (Brugulat & Coromina, 2021, p. 649).

3.4 Motivations and benefits of solo travel

Why do women travel alone, then? In Bianchi's study (2016, p. 201), most participants (both men and women) travelled alone because they did not have anyone to travel with, though they also enjoyed solo traveling. Feelings of freedom, independence, peace, and relaxation were connected to

solo traveling, as well as doing and learning something new and meeting interesting people (Bianchi, 2016, p. 205). Especially female participants were proud of themselves for traveling alone (Bianchi, 2016, p. 202). In their study of 10 East Asian women, Seow and Brown (2018, pp. 1193-1194) identified freedom and flexibility as the main reasons for solo travel, with the notion that resistance towards Asian cultural norms was important. Solo travel was also linked to escape from daily routines or moments of identity crisis. Interestingly, meeting new friends was not a primary motivation as in earlier studies, but rather an extra benefit (Seow & Brown, 2018, p. 1197). Lack of travel companion was mentioned as a motivation, but it was relevant only to the first solo trip (Seow & Brown, 2018, p. 1195). Abbasian (2018) did an online survey of 27 Swedish participants and found that while some travelled solo because they did not find companion, the most important reason for solo traveling was freedom. When traveling alone, one can plan their schedule independently and there is no need to adjust to other people's interests or economy (Abbasian, 2018 pp. 41-42). Freedom was both the most important motivator for solo traveling and the biggest benefit that increased overall satisfaction (Abbasian, 2018, p. 45). Seow and Brown (2018, p. 1200) observed that a sense of independence and accomplishment was seen more as post-travel benefit rather than motivation for solo travel.

Chiang and Jogaratnam (2005, p. 63) did an online questionnaire of 194 solo female travelers and identified five motivation dimensions for traveling alone: Experience, Social, Self-esteem, Relax, and Escape. The most important aspect was "Experience", meaning exploring different cultures and learning new things (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2005, p. 66). "Self-esteem", or having luxury traveling conditions, was rated as the least important motivation factor, which suggests that solo female travelers are also economic travelers (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2005, p. 66). In their study of 60 women from the US and the UK, Jordan and Gibson (2005, pp. 204-208) found that themes like self-reflection, education, and self-development were connected to solo travel, and participants expressed feelings such as spontaneity, pride, and strength. Yang, Yang and Khoo-Lattimore (2019) interviewed 35 Asian women and found that solo travel allowed them time for self-reflection as well. However, unlike in the Western backpacking discourse, the self was not found by traveling to the exotic and romanticized Third World, but by challenging the social expectations for Asian women (Yang et al., 2019, p. 1052). Wilson and Harris (2006, p. 161) studied women who travel independently for both business and pleasure and identified three key themes: 1) a search for self and identity, 2) self-empowerment, and 3) connectedness with others, also described as "global citizenship". For these women, independent travel was as much an outer journey as it was an inner one, and many experienced a personal and professional life change after having to negotiate the

travel constraints (Wilson & Harris, 2006, pp. 165-167). The effect lasted long after the solo trip, as many women realized their increased strength and confidence only after returning home (Wilson & Harris, 2006, p. 166).

4. TRAVEL WRITING FOR WOMEN AND BY WOMEN

4.1 Discourses in women's travel guides

What kind of messages do travel guidebooks give to female travelers? Popular guidebooks like *The Rough Guide* and *Lonely Planet* play an important role in how travelers experience a destination (Siegenthaler, 2002, as cited in Cockburn-Wootten, Friend & McIntosh, 2006, p. 9). Gilmartin (1997) examined the safety and security advice given in 17 women's travel guides written between 1889 and 1991. In contrast to general travel guides, these books focus on problems that female travelers face because of their gender (Gilmartin, 1997, p. 4). She found that in a hundred years, the travel advice discourse had evolved from feminine to feminist (Gilmartin, 1997, p. 10). In the turn of the 20th century, travel guides aimed to maintain traditional gender roles by advising women to avoid foreign men but at the same time pointing out that they could depend on men's chivalry for help. Sexual harassment was seen as the woman's fault: "*That women traveling alone have at times painful experiences cannot be denied, but I boldly assert that in nine cases out of ten it is due whole and solely to their own fault*" (Bisland, 1894, as cited in Gilmartin, 1997, pp. 5-6).

In the middle of the century, women were taught how to handle men who made unwanted approaches but, on the other hand, how to have romantic relationships with men (Gilmartin, 1997, p. 6). Gilmartin (1997, pp. 7-8) found conflicting discourses as the authors' voices changed from a "mother describing naughty boys" to a "woman openly seeking adventure and romance through travel". There was also a parallel discourse reminding the readers of their vulnerability and advising not to go out after dark. Men were represented as opportunistic rather than protective, but women were still held responsible for getting harassed (Gilmartin, 1997, p. 8). The most recent guides offered two kinds of travel advice: how to avoid sexual harassment and how to handle it (Gilmartin, 1997, pp. 8-10). Now, women were advised to reject unwanted attention loudly and physically instead of ignoring it. Most of the advice regarding romantic relationships focused on issues such as birth control or sexually transmitted diseases, and women were expected to take control of their own health and safety. Gilmartin (1997, p. 10) concludes that even if the advice has changed significantly during the century, women still need to negotiate a position between protecting themselves from sexual harassment and not being denied the freedom to travel. Caesar (1999, p. 529) suggests that "*travel handbooks for women are engaged in simultaneously promoting and denying sexual difference: the sex of a woman matters when she travels, but finally not so much, and certainly not so much that she may as well stay home*".

Wilson, Holdsworth and Witsel (2009, p. 4) found that guidebooks aimed at the independent woman traveler usually consist of either generic tips and advice, travel stories from other women, or a combination of these two. Using critical discourse analysis, they examined two travel guidebooks, published in 1989 and 2001, in more detail. They identified three key themes: (1) empowered, confident woman, (2) safety, security, and sensibility, and (3) a shared experience of female travel (Wilson et al., 2009, p. 7). The theme of *empowered and confident woman* celebrates the decision to travel alone, highlights the benefits of independent travel, and resists stereotypes like limiting women to their age or marital status (Wilson et al., 2009, pp. 7-8). However, there is second, more underlying theme concerning *safety, security, and sensibility* that stresses the need for preparation to relieve fears and using “common sense” and “intuition” while traveling solo (Wilson et al., 2009 p. 8). Wilson et al. (2009, p. 10) argue that by implying that it is women’s responsibility to stay safe and rely on their intuition to avoid sexual harassment, these books may sustain the “geography of fear” by Valentine (1989). The third discourse they found is about a common experience of solo female travel that is different from the male experience, with the idea that all women share a similar understanding of the constraints and benefits (Wilson et al., 2009, p. 9). However, Gilmartin (1997, p. 4) observed that the guidebooks authors were quite a homogeneous group, all white and well-educated, and most of them were apparently unmarried as well. She notes that women of different classes and racial identity would probably have different travel experiences (Gilmartin, 1997, p. 4).

Even if travel guidebooks assume that all women share a common experience of traveling, travel advice seems to differ whether it is aimed at younger or older women. Barrett and Douglas (2020) analyzed the content of 75 online articles written for solo female travelers, 29 of which were directed at older women. They found three themes: 1) regulating risk, 2) letting go, and 3) discovering self (Barrett & Douglas, 2020, p. 429). Risk regulation included strategies like taking safety measures and blending in, but also “doing dependency”, that is, checking in with trusted ones or lying about one’s relationship status (Barrett & Douglas, 2020, p. 429). Risks of solo travel were highlighted in the articles for younger women, whereas older women’s articles focused more on rewards (Barrett & Douglas, 2020, p. 435). Older women were encouraged to take risks, challenge age-related expectations, and pursue pleasures, with an exception that seeking sex was mentioned more in younger women’s articles (Barrett & Douglas, 2020, pp. 432-435). Barrett and Douglas (2020, p. 437) suggest that cultural narratives about women’s vulnerability and risk vary according to a woman’s age and are influenced by constructions of sexuality.

According to Jeffrey and Stephens (2021, pp. 1-2), travel guidebooks offer a unique insight into how women's emotions are instructed. Falconer (2017, p. 60) notes that women's guidebooks contain discourses of emotional management and positive attitudes as they tell women how to feel when traveling. Advice to "keep a sense of humor" when getting harassed by men implies that some emotions are encouraged over others. Falconer (2017, p. 61) argues that such advice is part of a broader discursive structuring of women's travel experience. In addition to being responsible for their own safety, women are also responsible for their emotional well-being: if they are angry or afraid, they have failed to meet the expectations for successful and happy female travelers (Falconer, 2017, p. 63). Similarly, Jeffrey and Stephens (2021, p. 12) argue that women are advised to demonstrate that they enjoy the freedom of travel but to suppress any socially undesirable emotional response. They used feminist critical discourse analysis to examine Lonely Planet's free online travel advice for women and especially solo travelers. Their main argument is that the travel advice aims to subvert women's anger when they face gender-based violence such as sexual harassment (Jeffrey & Stephens, 2021). This is done by using four different discursive strategies: 1) downplaying the harassment as it is "not worthy getting angry about", 2) advising to just ignore it, 3) implying that men's comfort matters the most by asking to protect men from "losing their face", and 4) advising not to tolerate it (Jeffrey & Stephens, 2021, pp. 9-11). The last strategy may appear progressive, but Jeffrey and Stephens (2021, p. 11) argue that it makes the woman traveler responsible, and it was also a less dominant strategy in the advice. What kind of advice should be given, then? Jeffrey and Stephens (2021, p. 12) give a practical example that does not tell women how to feel: "*Catcalling is common, and it may make you feel very frightened and/or very angry. For your own sake it is probably best to act as if you have not noticed, even though you might be fuming inside.*"

4.2 Travel books and the discourse of Romanticism

Mulligan (2016) examined the travel writings of four British women from the 18th to the 20th centuries and argues that the authors have adopted the discourse of Romanticism. In fact, according to Mulligan (2016, p. 324), the whole tourist experience has been affected by Romanticism, the effects ranging from emphasizing nature and picturesque locations to pure exoticism. Robinson (2004, p. 307) talks about "the idea of romantic" that is central to both travel and travel writing, as travelers seek to experience "the distant, the exotic, the picturesque, the untouched, and the unknown". Generic tropes such as a journal-like style, first person narrative, "verbatim" dialogue, and focusing on the difficulties are based on the writing style of Romanticism (Mulligan, 2016, p.

336). Travel writers tend to use superlatives such as “wonder” and “dramatic” and describe landscapes with value-laden adjectives like “wild” and “hidden” (Robinson, 2004, p. 307). Especially travel narratives from “remote” destinations seem to be written in a romantic style (Robinson, 2004, p. 307).

Romantic tropes such as freedom, authenticity, exemption from rules and norms, and strong feeling and sensibility can be found in women’s travel writing even in the 20th century (Mulligan, 2016, p. 325). Writers tend to concentrate on the personal and subjective, and a foreign country often provides a mere “romantic backdrop” for a privileged writer’s long vacation (Mulligan, 2016, pp. 332-333). The Romantic aim to “get away from it all” and to discover “authenticity” is reflected in a style that focuses on the individual who is searching for an answer to an identity crisis (Mulligan, 2016, p. 324). Analyzing the confessional style of Sarah Wheeler, Mulligan notes: “*at times, it seems the late twentieth-century woman travel writer will tell us anything apart from some simple description of what she finds in the culture she is visiting*” (2016, p. 334). Academics have addressed the problem of representing another culture in Orientalist way, but travel books continue to “celebrate the romantic dream of innocent wonder in exotic paradise” (Mulligan, 2016, p. 336).

Travel writers often distinguish themselves from tourists and maintain their status as “lone explorers” and advocates of the “real adventure experience” (Robinson, 2004, p. 310). Mulligan (2016, p. 336) argues that this is one of the problems of travel writing because the writers speak as “an élite minority, the anti-tourist”. Culturally, travel writers are considered to be critics and experts, assuming that “mass tourists” cannot fulfill these roles (Robinson, 2004, p. 310). However, Robinson (2004, p. 308) notes that both travelers and tourists search and have romantic experiences. Paradoxically, the more travel writers present rich descriptions of “undiscovered” places, the more likely they are to become “discovered” tourist destinations (Dann, 1999, as cited in Robinson, 2004, p. 310).

Cockburn-Wootten et al. (2006) used critical discourse analysis to examine written stories of independent women travelers in the travel guide *The Rough Guide to Women Travel: First Hand Accounts from More than 60 Countries*. They found four themes defining independent travel: 1) caring for others and being cared for, 2) danger and security, 3) connecting and networking, and 4) redefined identities (Cockburn-Wootten et al., 2006, pp. 10-13). The theme of caring created conflict for the writers because for them, independence meant relying only on themselves (Cockburn-Wootten et al., 2006, p. 10). Indeed, all the writings contained an implicit discourse that

the writers wanted to be independent and have an “authentic” travel experience (Cockburn-Wootten et al., 2006, p. 10). The second theme emerged as a feeling of being vulnerable and a fear of being threatened, but the third theme shows that connecting with local people was an important part of the experience (Cockburn-Wootten et al., 2006, pp. 11-13). The writers perceived foreign men as dangerous but assumed a strong emotional connection with women, seeing them as friends. However, by doing so, they ended up patronizing local women (Cockburn-Wootten et al., 2006, p. 14). The fourth theme included the idea of “changing” as an individual or “re-evaluating one’s perceptions” because of the travel experience (Cockburn-Wootten et al., 2006, p. 13).

4.3 Solo travel in women’s travel blogs

Besides travel books, also women’s travel blogs have been studied. Thomas and Mura (2019) examined blog posts about India by female solo travelers in 21 English-language blogs. Only one of the posts contained a personal experience of sexual assault, but all the blogs discussed the possibility of encountering physical violence and harassment (Thomas & Mura, 2019, pp. 36-37). To stay safe, bloggers provided tips such as avoiding alcohol and drugs, dressing properly, learning self-defense, and pretending to be married (Thomas & Mura, 2019, p. 37). However, challenging experiences were seen as important for inner growth and better self-esteem (Thomas & Mura, 2018, p. 38). Since bloggers appeared to have “normalized” unsafety and violence against women in India, Thomas and Mura question whether solo female travel is a phenomenon that challenges gendered power structures (2019, p. 38).

Ngwira, Tse, and Vongvisitsin (2020) used content analysis to study 10 Western female travel bloggers who travelled alone to Africa. They focused on negotiation strategies and both pretravel and during-travel constraints. These blogs, too, seemed to echo the themes of empowerment and safety. Being a woman was seen as an obstacle to travel to Africa, and the opinions from family, friends and the media had a strong influence on solo female travelers (Ngwira et al., 2020, pp. 41-44). On the other hand, these women had a desire to challenge themselves and they expected new, special experiences (Ngwira et al., 2020, p. 43). Ngwira et al. (2020, p. 43) observed that gender-induced travel constraints were usually negotiated by gender-induced strategies, that is, women could avoid approaching local men, seek help from other women or stay in all-female dormitories.

Chaudhuri (2020) examined the concept of *flânerie* in a popular Indian solo travel blog, The Shooting Star. *Flânerie* includes elements like strolling, gazing, and reflecting it through writing or

photographing (Chaudhuri, 2020, p. 296), and was also discussed by Jordan and Gibson (2005) regarding solo female travelers and “the gaze”. Chaudhuri (2020, pp. 299-300) found that in her blog, Shivya Nath promoted responsible tourism and offbeat destinations, but also discussed gender-related issues. She gave conventional safety tips such as dressing modestly and not changing locations during night but utilized the discourse of self-empowerment. In other words, she presented any obstacles as small barriers that could be dealt with using common sense and positive attitude, and scary experiences as learning opportunities (Chaudhuri, 2020, p. 299). Chaudhuri (2020, p. 301) notes that technology plays a major role in solo female travel, protecting women from danger and enabling them to be independent.

5. DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS

5.1 Data collection

The empirical data of this thesis consists of five non-fiction books that are: (1) written by Finnish women, (2) published originally in Finnish, (3) personal travel narratives and (4) about solo traveling abroad for leisure. This excludes male authors, business travelers, women living abroad, translated books, and travel guidebooks. According to the library search, there were 20-25 books that fit these criteria. To narrow the selection down, I chose newer books that have been published in the 2010s. In addition to business travelers, I excluded voluntary workers and pilgrims so that only leisure traveling remained. There was one comic book that fit the criteria, but I chose to focus on long-form written narratives to keep the data comparable. Some authors had published multiple works, but I picked the first book from each to capture the “first impressions” of solo traveling, if possible.

I aimed for a good variety of destinations and modes of transport. One of the five authors travels in one country, three have multiple destinations, and one travels around the world visiting 35 countries in total. The length of the trips varies from five weeks to one and a half years. Different modes of transport include airplane, train, bus, car, ferry, sailboat, bicycle, motorbike, and hitchhiking. Following Wilson’s (2004, p. 9) definition of solo traveling, the chosen authors leave home alone and are solely responsible for their travel plans, even if they meet new people or have friends visiting along the way. According to the solo traveler framework by Laesser et al. (2009), all the authors in this study belong either to the “single-solo” or “collective-solo” group.

The data collection started in December 2021 and was completed in May 2022. I bought two of the books as e-book editions and borrowed the other three from a public library. The first step was to read the books through casually to get a general understanding of the narratives. While reading, I wrote down the numbers of the pages that contained any relevant thoughts, feelings, and incidents regarding traveling alone or traveling as a woman. On the second round, I copied these passages from each book into a separate Microsoft Word document. After this, the sample of data consisted of 100 pages in total, the length of an individual document varying from 8 to 28 pages. Two of the books contained photos, but in this study, I focus only on the text.

List of selected travel books

1. Laitinen, P. (2010). *Vihreiden vuorten varjossa: polkupyöräretkellä Skotlannissa*. Tampere: Mediapinta.
2. Mähkä, M. (2012). *Ihanasti hukassa ja miten sieltä pääsee pois*. Helsinki: Tammi.
3. Kankimäki, M. (2013). *Asioita jotka saavat sydämen lyömään nopeammin*. Helsinki: Otava.
4. Passinen, S. (2017). *Vanha nainen Espanjassa*. Helsinki: SAGA Egmont.
5. Vepsä, E. (2018). *Asfalttivolgaa etelään: Peukalokyydillä Moskovasta Afganistaniin*. Jyväskylä: Atena.

Table 1. List of selected travel books.

Author	Päivi Laitinen	Merja Mähkä	Mia Kankimäki	Sirkku Passinen	Emma Vepsä
Book title	Vihreiden vuorten varjossa: Polkupyöräretkellä Skotlannissa	Ihanasti hukassa ja miten sieltä pääsee pois	Asioita jotka saavat sydämen lyömään nopeammin	Vanha nainen Espanjassa	Asfalttivolgaa etelään: Peukalokyydillä Moskovasta Afganistaniin
Book title in English	<i>In the shadow of the green mountains: A bike ride in Scotland</i>	<i>Lost in a lovely way and how to get out of there</i>	<i>Things that make one's heart beat faster</i>	<i>Old woman in Spain</i>	<i>Via asphalt Volga to the south: Hitchhiking from Moscow to Afghanistan</i>
Published by	Mediapinta	Tammi	Otava	BoD, SAGA Egmont	Atena
Year of publication	2010	2012	2013	2017	2018
Year of travel		2009–2011	2010–2011	2010	2015
Destination	Scotland	35 countries, including: India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Malawi, South Africa, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico	Japan, England, Thailand, France	Spain, Italy	Russia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadzikistan, Uzbekistan, Afganistan
Duration of the trip	5–6 weeks	1,5 years	2 x 3 months	9 weeks	ca. 2 months
Author born in	1965*	1977	1971		1987
Age during the trip	40–45?	32–33	38–39	61+ (minimum age for part-time pension**)	28?
Relationship status		In relationship / single, no children	Single, no children	Single, adult children	Unmarried, no children
Photographs	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Map	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes

*) Source: Valkonen, 2021

***) Source: Eläketurvakeskus

5.2 Introduction of the data

As can be seen in Table 1, the data includes journeys of different lengths in varying destinations, and the age range of the authors varies from under 30 to over 60. In this chapter, I describe the travel books in publication order from oldest to newest. The information of the authors' age and marital status are based on their own writing or public internet sources, and they are discussed because I consider them relevant to the gender aspect of this study.

Vihreiden vuorten varjossa: Polkupyöräretkellä Skotlannissa (“In the shadow of the green mountains: A bike ride in Scotland”) is the shortest book in this study and describes Päivi Laitinen’s solo bike trip that lasts 5-6 weeks. It is a compact travel diary written in first-person narrative. The book contains fewer personal thoughts and less reflection than other books in this study, but it features some historical stories of certain topics. The author is apparently a middle-aged woman, but does not share her age, marital status, or other personal details. Based on the year of birth and publication date, I estimated that she could be around 40–45 years old during the trip. She is a seasoned solo traveler and has published books of her journeys already in 2002, 2005 and 2007 before this one. Therefore, *Vihreiden vuorten varjossa* is her first book published in the chosen time range of this study (2010 onwards), but not her first work overall. Due to the large number of publications, Päivi Laitinen has perhaps contributed the most to the Finnish solo female travel literature. The publisher of this book, Mediapinta, offers both self-publish services and traditional publishing, but only a very small number of manuscripts sent to them get traditionally published (Mediapinta Oy, n.d.). Therefore, *Vihreiden vuorten varjossa* is more likely self-published.

Ihanasti hukassa ja miten sieltä pääsee pois (“Lost in a lovely way and how to get out of there”) is Merja Mähkä’s travel book of a journey around the world that lasted 1.5 years. The book is written in first-person narrative and structured around different continents, featuring a lot of photos and maps. This is the only book in this study that includes travel tips separated from the narrative, and a detailed calculation of the trip costs. At the beginning of the book, the author is 32 years old and has no children. She is in a long-distance relationship at first but breaks up with her boyfriend during her trip. In total, the author visits 35 countries in Asia, Oceania, Africa, and South America. The book is published by Tammi.

Asioita jotka saavat sydämen lyömään nopeammin (“Things that make one’s heart beat faster”) could be described a genre-hybrid book: it combines Mia Kankimäki’s travel diary with her research on a Japanese court lady Sei Shōnagon who lived a thousand years ago. The alleged history of Sei is intertwined with the travel journal, and the author plays with various narrative styles like lists and stream of consciousness style of writing. In between the first-person narrative, she switches to second-person narrative and writes “to” Sei. Even though the author is doing research, I decided to count the book in the leisure travel category since she took a leave from her day job. Moreover, Mia Kankimäki is one of the most popular Finnish travel authors with two best-selling books, so her work shapes the general view of solo female travel. At the beginning of her journey, the author is a 38-year old single and does not have children. She travels two times to Kyoto for a three-month period and visits also other cities in Japan. On her second trip, a tsunami hits Japan and damages the Fukushima nuclear power plant, which causes her to change plans and escape to Thailand for a few weeks. In between the two trips, she also visits London briefly to do more research. Otava has published the book in several formats, of which I have used the e-book edition.

Vanha nainen Espanjassa (“Old woman in Spain”) is a book by Sirkku Passinen who travels alone to Torrevieja, Spain for nine weeks. She has friends and relatives coming over, and with them she also visits Barcelona and Bergamo, Italy. The book is written in first-person narrative and a diary-like style, and the author describes her feelings, thoughts, and actions in a very detailed way. Despite addressing herself as “old” in the book title, the author does not specify her age. However, it is revealed that she has adult children, and she was able to travel due to part-time pension arrangements. Her marital status is not explicitly mentioned, but she lives alone and tells others that she is “*sola*”. Originally the book was self-published, but later SAGA Egmont has published it as an e-book edition, which is the version that I have used.

Asfalttivolgaa etelään: Peukalokyydillä Moskovasta Afganistaniin (“Via asphalt Volga to the south: Hitchhiking from Moscow to Afghanistan”) is the most recent book in this study. It describes Emma Vepsä’s journey hitchhiking alone from Russia to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tadjikistan, Uzbekistan and finally to Afghanistan, from where she flies home. The book is written in first-person narrative and features a lot of author’s own reflection on the motivations of her trip, traveling alone as a woman, and others’ reactions to it. It is also illustrated with the author’s own travel photos. She is born in 1987, which makes her around 28 years old at the time of the trip in 2015 and the youngest solo traveler in this study. She does not mention whether she is in a

relationship, but she is not married and does not have children at the time of the trip. The book is published by Atena.

The books in this study fall mostly into the genre of travel writing but feature other genres as well. A good example of this is Mähkä (2012) who has embedded guidebook-style info pages in the personal narrative. Kankimäki (2013) combines her own travel story with Sei Shōnagon's biography, several lists of "nice things" and "depressing things", and even tanka poems. Laitinen (2010) tells, among other historical details, the story of Alexander Selkirk, who was an inspiration for the character of Robinson Crusoe. Vepsä (2018) drops occasional cultural, political, and historical facts as well. Passinen (2017) mainly describes her own travel experience, but the back-cover blurb expresses a wish that the book could be used as a guide: "*And maybe someone will benefit from reading this book – this is the kind of book I was looking for when I was planning my own trip.*"

5.3 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is not a single method, so the researcher must decide methods according to the research questions (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 240). After collecting the data, my sample was 100 pages of text in total. Generally, the analysis begins by organizing the data and familiarizing oneself with it (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 263). I started theming the excerpts in Microsoft Word. The initial themes emerged from previous solo travel research and included different types of fear, leisure constraints, surveillance, and positive emotions. I soon realized that I needed to expand these, as they did not cover all the issues that came up in the data. Indeed, it is important that the themes arise as a result of the analysis, so that the researcher does not have fixed themes in mind in advance in which to place the material (Juhila, n.d., a). I combined and refined the themes and created new ones as I worked through the five documents. I also used a website called Miro to create a mind map of the theoretical framework and to organize my thoughts.

Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019, p. 259) describe qualitative analysis as a cyclical process that takes time and can branch out in many directions. It is common that a researcher must analyze and process the data many times in different ways (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 264). It turned out that the data was too much to handle in Microsoft Word, so uploaded the themed documents to Atlas.ti, which is a dedicated software for qualitative data analysis. I examined the data as a whole and looked for similarities and differences. In Atlas.ti, I was able to code the text in more detail.

Coding means classifying text fragments based on common characteristics, and like theming, it is used to get a grasp of the data before moving to the analysis (Juhila, n.d., b). Code groups can be based on the theory or the data depending on the research setting (Juhila, n.d., b). I ended up having 74 codes in six groups: feelings (e.g., joy), constraints (e.g., language barrier), personal matters (e.g., expectations), practical issues (e.g., travel arrangements), gender-related issues (e.g., male gaze), and writing-related issues (e.g., creating a narrative arc). The theoretic framework guided me in creating codes and helped me to identify relevant issues, but I remained open to the data. I coded each document separately in turn, and whenever I identified new codes, I re-read previously worked documents from that specific viewpoint to see if those could be found there as well. This kind of process follows loosely the method used by Wilson et al. (2009, p. 7) in their study of travel guidebook discourses: they read the books first generically and then in more detail; then they highlighted specific sentences and paragraphs that seemed consistent or repeated, and finally compared and refined these “themes” until no new ones seemed to emerge.

Discourse analysis is grounded on observations that are systematically organized into identifiable and justified categories based on theoretical concepts (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 287). Once the coding was complete, I reorganized my findings, connecting them to the theoretical framework. The next step in analysis is to conceptualize the findings and name them as different discourses, which brings them to general level and links them to previous research (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 292). First, I identified three discourses: resistance, safety, and transformation. At my supervisor's suggestion, I split the safety-related issues in two and created a fourth discourse that describes the gender-related findings better. In discourse research, there is enough data when it can be used to answer the research question (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 279). This was indeed the case, and the data contained several interesting themes that could have been explored even further. I limited the analysis to themes related to traveling alone as a woman, leaving out other aspects that were about traveling in general.

5.4 Ethical concerns and reliability

In this thesis, I have planned the research, recorded the data, and reported the results in a careful way, following the general ethic principles and taking care of responsibilities towards the research community and participants. According to Puusa and Juuti (2020, p. 175), the reliability of qualitative research involves three concepts: credibility, trustworthiness, and ethics. Credibility is characterized by how well the scientific community, the research subjects, and the public accept the

results of the research and trust that the material has been collected appropriately. Reliability means the researcher's ability to justify her choices, use the right methods and convince the reader of her professional skills. Concerning ethics, the study should follow ethical principles that could be used as the basis of any well-conducted research, and the research process must not cause harm for the participants (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, p. 175). Since this thesis focuses on Finnish female writers, the data consists of published books that are accessible for everyone. Therefore, I have chosen not to anonymize the research data. Varpio (2008, p. 6-7) argues that analyzing an author's work without their permission cannot be restricted, since the work is public and meant to be reviewed. However, to ensure good ethical practice, I approached all the authors via email or social media. The authors were given basic information of this study and the possibility to deny the use of their book. All five of them replied and gave their consent to use the work for research purposes.

Qualitative research is based on the idea that the nature of reality and the information we can gain from it are subjective (Puusa & Juuti, 2020, p. 76). Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019, p. 42) remind that the researcher's relationship with the topic and the contexts of the research situation should be considered. This study is based on a premise that no "absolute truth" of solo female travel exists. I have not participated in the construction of the travel narratives, but the selection, analysis, and interpretation of the data are all subjective. As Juhila (n.d., b) points out, the categories do not exist in the data waiting to be uncovered, but they are formed as the result of active analysis. It can be said that a discourse researcher "makes" the research material as it is a result of consideration and conscious choices (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen, 2019, p. 279). The overall process is influenced by my background and prior knowledge of the topic. As a researcher, I have several things in common with many authors in this study: I am a white Finnish woman in my thirties, unmarried, working as a writer, and interested in traveling alone. In addition to my own prior travel experience, Finnish blog posts and media discussions have shaped my view of solo female travel. In turn, the results of this thesis will contribute to the discussion and shape the perception of the topic.

It is worth to note that all the data is in Finnish, so I have translated the excerpts that I use in this thesis by myself with the help of Google Translate. According to Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019, p. 42), translating the data is not just a technical detail but a language-ideological process, in which the researcher decides what to show and what to hide.

6. SOLO FEMALE TRAVEL DISCOURSES

In this chapter, I introduce the four discourses I have identified regarding solo female travel in the data: *resistance*, *safety*, *gender*, and *transformation*. For many of these women, solo travel is a way to resist others' expectations both before and during the trip. Even though fear is not an overarching theme in the books, safety issues are constantly considered. The gender aspect becomes particularly visible when authors discuss being prone to the male gaze and the need to dress appropriately. Finally, it is evident that for at least the younger authors, solo travel is a way to change as a person or change the world, which leads to transformation.

6.1 Discourse of resistance

Previous studies on solo female travel have discussed resistance in the context of surveillance (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; Jordan and Gibson, 2005). A practical example of a small act of resistance could be bringing a book to the table when dining alone in a restaurant (Heimtun, 2010). In the data, I found resistance on two levels.

Solo female travel as an act of resistance

First, solo female travel as a whole is represented as resisting others' expectations. This is consistent with Jordan and Gibson's (2005) findings that women traveling alone resist the norms and values of their home cultures, making the solo trip itself as a major act of resistance. Seow and Brown (2018) also observed that resistance towards cultural norms was an important motivation for solo traveling East Asian women. Indeed, for Mähkä, the journey around the world is an escape from boring day job after many years of "compromising", that is, traveling abroad only for few months per year.

To be honest, I was disappointed in myself and my life, which seemed to be dragging along its own predetermined course. I was burned out and broken. Instead of me living my life, my life lived me. I stayed awake at night knowing that the next day would be the same as yesterday and I was afraid that it would always be like that. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 7)

Before the journey, Mähkä does a lot of self-reflection and writes how she fears leaving because it would cause a long career break. She would have to "start all over again" and explain the gap in her CV to possible future employers. This is a good example of a sociocultural constraint that women must negotiate in order to travel solo (Wilson & Little, 2005). Her friends encourage her to leave

despite her fears, and she realizes that she is “ready”. Seow and Brown (2018) found that traveling alone was associated with an escape from everyday routines. Likewise, Mähkä portrays her solo trip around the world as an escape from ordinary, and an alternative to “what is right”, that is, a life that includes a home, a good job, and a boyfriend.

Why wouldn't we say no to constant fatigue, stress, rush, and schedules? Why would we settle for what was right? Why wouldn't we do what we wanted? (Mähkä, 2012, p. 222)

Similarly, Kankimäki begins her book by declaring that she is so bored she is dying, having worked at the same job for ten years. For her as well, solo travel means resisting expectations by leaving the rat race. In earlier studies, freedom and independence have been depicted both as motives for solo travel (Bianchi, 2016) and general Romantic tropes in travel writing (Mulligan, 2016). Kankimäki expresses her happiness after a successful escape:

This is where I will be for the next three months of my life. Not in the constant cycle of meetings, not in stress and anxiety, not in the pressure of constant growth, efficiency requirements and organizational reforms, not in lack of motivation, not annoyed by the wage, not enslaved by the alarm clock ringing at 6:15, not in frustration that nothing is happening in life, not waiting for the next episode of the TV series, not being crushed under the weight of being different – but here, free, independent, alone, with all the possibilities in front of me, free every morning to choose what I want to do or not do. (Kankimäki, 2013, p. 56).

All the authors discuss their age at some point, but the three younger women also write about their singleness and childlessness. No one mentions the lack of travel companion as the main reason for solo travel but being single clearly influences on their decision to travel. Especially for Kankimäki, who is 38 years old at the time, solo travel is a way to resist the norm of being married and having children. Yet, these two ways are not equal, and traveling is represented as an option B to have a meaningful life. She compares herself to others and reflects how writing a travel book feels like an egoistic project; for who would be interested to hear about a solo trip to Africa when others discuss their children? Before leaving, Kankimäki attends a party and notices that she is almost the only single there. She describes her feelings in an exaggerated, self-ironic way:

A childless freak who lives alone and has to go out into the world to find even some content to her pathetic life. (...) It seems that traveling and a change of scenery, be it to Africa or Japan, is the last chance for middle-aged old maids to justify their existence to themselves. If there is no husband, and for that matter no family, there is no other way but to leave. You must do something with your life. (Kankimäki, 2013, p. 21)

It is interesting to see how important it is for the three younger authors to justify their solo trips. It is as if that there needs to be a reason for traveling longer distances and writing a book about it. Perhaps the clearest example of this is Vepsä, who has a mission to oppose the perceptions created by the media. She aims to prove that the world is good by hitchhiking through countries that are perceived dangerous and relying on the kindness of the people.

I was brought to the side of the asphalt Volga by the idea that, despite all the images of violence thrown at us by the media, there is more good than bad on Earth. I think I had come up with a great way to show the doubters that there are many good-natured and friendly people all over the world, regardless of nationality or religion. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 11)

It could be said that with her book, Vepsä wants to offer an alternative discourse for traveling alone as a woman. Besides the media discourses, she discusses others' opinions on solo female travel. Wilson and Little (2008) argue that other's perceptions contribute to women's fear of traveling alone, which is connected to how they use space. Vepsä recalls getting positive feedback from a few people who have travelled in same regions, but generally, the comments have not been encouraging.

It wasn't the first time I encountered these opinions. It was difficult to avoid them if you happened to be a woman who traveled a lot and usually alone. Previously, I had been accused of being irresponsible and I had heard such comments as "it's a miracle nothing happened" and "well, don't complain when you're raped". In part, it was these comments that had driven me onto the road – I'd hitchhike just to annoy them. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 77)

The mode of transport and the entire journey are portrayed as an act of resistance to prove her point. Vepsä continues to argue how scaring women from traveling is an abuse of power just like sexual violence. According to her, if others were really concerned about women facing violence, they should warn women about staying at home and being in a relationship as well. Indeed, recent studies show that women's safety in public places has increased and that they face sexual violence mostly from men they know (Wilson and Little, 2008, p. 170). Vepsä ponders whether the real cause of fear is actually women's freedom. Even though not using the exact words, she recognizes Valentine's (1989) concept of "the geography of women's fear" and wants to resist it:

I personally wanted to believe that when I, as a woman, took over a space where women are not often seen – I hitchhiked and traveled alone – I would make it safer for all women. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 77)

Laitinen and Passinen, describing themselves as “middle-aged” and “old”, travel for a relatively shorter period in Europe. Neither describes any societal expectations nor seems to have (or need) a special reason for her trip. However, Laitinen aims to challenge herself and resist the fear of being too old to travel by bike.

I feel like I've seen this before. Clear mid-life crisis. But what is left if cycling is no longer interesting? A rocking chair and a stack of newspapers. But I'm not ready to give up just yet. (Laitinen, 2010, p. 11)

According to Wilson and Little (2005), personal constraints such as self-doubt are one category of solo female travelers' leisure constraints. Laitinen appears to negotiate these constraints successfully and is able to carry on her trip.

Resistance during the trip

Second, I identified small acts of resistance that happen during the trip. Passinen mentions several times when eating alone either in a restaurant or out in public feels awkward. The notion that eating alone is somehow socially unacceptable is similar to what Heimtun (2010) describes in her study. Sometimes the surveillance feels so strong that Passinen conforms:

When the adults were watching their children, they were watching other people in the park at the same time. Again, I felt some strange social pressure: eating in the park is not appropriate. So, I didn't get to taste pollo [the chicken] until I was home three hours later. (Passinen, 2017, p. 34)

Later, however, she decides to resist, associating herself with another “lonely woman”:

There is always a lonely woman sitting on one of those benches, a statue called Bella Lola. I guess a living lonely woman can sit there as well. (...) The plastic bag, in which the warm, delicious-smelling chicken was waiting, was on the bench next to me. I picked chicken pieces out of the bag with my left hand. Secretly. Yum yum. I did feel like a drunkard, but that only added extra spice to my delicacy. (Passinen, 2017, pp. 130–131)

She also finds one good restaurant where she “dares to go alone”. There is a kindly smiling waitress who understands directly what she wants, but other than that, it remains unclear why it is easier to go to this specific restaurant. She uses frequently the Finnish verb “kehdata”, to dare, which is a bit difficult to translate as it is connected more to the feeling of awkwardness than fear. Interestingly,

when Passinen goes to a restaurant with her friend, in turn, she participates in the surveillance of others:

A lone man in tweed pants seemed to know everyone and chatted with the waiters. Some took portions of ice cream. A woman drank beer alone, then a warm sandwich with artichoke hearts was brought to her. The atmosphere was cozy, and even the lonely woman didn't seem to be abandoned by her family. (Passinen, 2017, p. 201)

Laitinen seems to feel comfortable eating alone and sharing a table with other guests in local pubs. She describes one occasion when she feels awkward, when she is the only guest in the restaurant. She does not have the energy to resist at that point:

I suddenly feel like an intruder in the empty dining room. Even the waiter seems to be peeping through the doorway and wondering why I'm still here. I'm so tired that I willingly give up: I'd rather spend the evening sitting next to the heater in the hostel with a good book than test the acoustics of the deserted restaurant here. (Laitinen, 2010, p. 148)

Another time, she feels awkward when the owner's parents are visiting the hostel. However, there is another lone woman sitting at the room and reading a book, which helps her to stay. It seems important to see examples of other solo traveling women using space to resist the (self-)surveillance.

For Mähkä, Kankimäki, and Vepsä, the question of eating alone seems irrelevant as they do not mention any discomfort or awkwardness. On the contrary, Kankimäki describes how tasting all the local delicacies is almost ecstatic and how she spends 900 euros in a month for food. Resistance is still visible in small acts. Vepsä tells an anecdote of having drinks with a fellow traveler in Kyrgyzstan, where drinking beer turns out to be a resistant act towards the local gender norms:

I also ordered a beer to celebrate my arrival in Kyrgyzstan and was very surprised when the waiter put a drinking straw in the drink. Harry, who had been traveling in Central Asia before, laughed at my confused expression and explained that local women didn't usually drink beer, so the purpose of the straw was to make the drink more feminine. I took the straw out of the pint and sipped from the rim as manfully as I could. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 151)

Vepsä continues her resistance towards others' perceptions on the road. In addition to people at home, the locals also try to persuade her to change her travel plans, which she ignores.

Since I had heard warnings about the dangers of hitchhiking everywhere I had ever hitchhiked, I didn't bother with them. I had specially prepared for asking for payment by learning a local saying that describes being broke, with which I hoped to break the ice: "Kapusta pusta". Directly translated into Finnish, it meant that the cabbage was empty. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 96)

The opinions of friends and family affect the solo traveler during the trip, as well. When the nuclear power plant disaster occurs in Fukushima, Kankimäki is pressured to travel to Thailand to be safe. There she finds herself bombarded with suggestions from friends on what she should and should not do – which is quite the opposite of the freedom she described earlier. Others expect her to make the most of it and explore Thailand, but she resists.

"Why are you still in Phuket", asks Seb. (Because I don't have the energy to leave.) I know, this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a "middle-aged, Western woman in a rut". But what if I just want to wait for the opportunity to return to Kyoto? What if I don't feel like going backpacking in this downpour? (Kankimäki, 2013, p. 248)

Everyone seems to have an opinion of her, and even the hotel manager suggests that Kankimäki should write about a more interesting subject than Heian period Japan. All in all, Phuket is represented as a direct opposite to the aesthetics of Kyoto. Kankimäki wants to resist others' expectations and just be herself, which becomes somewhat a theme of the whole book. Just as travel guidebooks advise women to be happy and keep a sense of humor (Falconer, 2017), Kankimäki feels pressure to be different:

I suddenly realize why I enjoy Kyoto so much. There, no one suggests that I should be different – happier, more talkative, more party-spirited, more boisterous, or more drunk. No one complains that I'm gloomy, shy, or bleak, but I get to be who I am and still feel understood. "The worst thing about exile is being stuck in a place where no one shares your views," writes Murasaki in Liza Dalby's novel. That is exactly how I feel in Phuket. (Kankimäki, 2013, p. 246)

Passinen describes similar mentality of being herself when she does not have any friends visiting. She starts to enter the house via backyard to avoid greeting her neighbors, because she is not fond of small talk. Her friends send emails asking how she spends her time, perhaps expecting hearing about new, exciting experiences. However, for Passinen traveling alone becomes "business as usual" that does not differ much from being alone at home: she sleeps, eats, reads, watches television, buys groceries, walks around, sits outside and so on. This contradicts to some extent previous research, according to which meeting interesting new people and getting to know different cultures are the main motivations for traveling alone (Bianchi, 2016; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2005). I

would suggest that this is a matter that depends on the traveler's personality. Like Kankimäki, Passinen enjoys the freedom to do what she wants, but also to do nothing if she chooses so. She could just sit on her terrace for a week, and nobody cared – that is the essence of freedom.

No one has the energy to perform traveling all the time. When you are away from home for nine weeks, life becomes quite ordinary. (Passinen, 2017, p. 122)

Sometimes the expectations come from the solo traveler herself. Mähkä, Kankimäki, and Laitinen all describe moments when they feel guilty for not doing enough, even though nobody is demanding them to do anything. Laitinen demonstrates that resting while traveling can be a resistant act as well:

The Protestant ethic affected me so much that for a short moment I had even a bad conscience. Not a single kilometer in sight, just idling around – I hadn't planned anything like this. How deeply the useless sense of duty and the pain of accomplishing have been embedded in humans! For laziness is already a value in itself, and especially in these times of efficiency, it is downright a virtue! (Laitinen, 2010, pp. 31-32)

All in all, solo female travel appears to be a constant battle between resisting expectations and conforming to them. The expectations can be implied or said aloud by others, or they can be internalized norms. Either way, resisting them requires an effort and some courage as well.

6.2 Discourse of safety

Being so familiar with the media discussion on the dangers of solo traveling, I expected to find a discourse of fear in the travel books, but that was not the case. The writers often describe how they are afraid, nervous, or panicking, but it is not an overarching theme. There was also a lot of self-confidence, courage, and trust to be found. However, consideration of safety was always in the background. This is consistent with previous research, as some variation of safety, security, or risk-regulation pops up in almost every study of women's travel writing or travel guidebooks (e.g., Cockburn-Wootten et al., 2006; Gilmartin, 1997; Thomas & Mura, 2019; Wilson et al., 2009).

Assessing the safety situation

The authors assess frequently their safety situation and adjust their behaviour accordingly. This is in line with Valentine's (1989) concept of "the geography of women's fear" describing how women create mental maps of places where they can and cannot go. However, what is perceived as

dangerous is very different for each woman. This is consistent with the study by Brugulat and Coromina (2021), who found that knowledge of security issues was a spatial constraint for solo female backpackers, but they did not agree on what is a dangerous place. In Torreveija, Passinen takes for granted that she cannot go alone for a walk after 6 pm.

The daytime is short: at four in the afternoon, it is already getting dark, and at six it is completely dark. There was no point in sleeping until noon. A lonely woman cannot be outside when it is dark. Maybe I could enjoy dark evenings when it was warmer, and I could sit on my patio in candlelight. (Passinen, 2017, p. 28)

Meanwhile in Asia, Vepsä and Mähkä travel in areas where there have been actual terrorist attacks and conclude that it is safe enough.

A lot had happened in Afghanistan in the last ten years, and not all the events were positive. (...) I decided that I would reassess my security situation when I arrived in Mazar-i-Sharif. Before that, I would just focus on getting there. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 21)

Srinagar seemed safe to me, but admittedly, just a couple of days before I arrived, four people were killed in a bomb attack in a neighboring town. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 24)

Even though Vepsä appears to be fearless at times, it can be seen how she assesses her safety situation. She expresses her trust in people in general but still takes precautions.

Not having a sign also gives the hitchhiker the opportunity to refuse a suspicious ride without being rude, although I thought it likely that the suspicious looking motorists were also mostly on the move with friendly intentions. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 29)

Although traveling in a truck was not the fastest way to get ahead, I generally felt safer in a truck than in a car. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 117)

In addition, Vepsä considers the safety of others. At one point, she recognizes that as a foreigner, she might put locals at risk by staying at their home, so she turns down an invitation. After arriving in Mazar-i-Sharif, Vepsä visits the base of Finnish peacekeepers and gets a ride back:

For the first time since crossing the border, I was a little scared, as a military vehicle seemed a much more likely target for a possible armed attack than a woman walking alone on the street. For the same reason, it was also not wise to give me a ride directly to the hotel, because we really didn't want to create the impression that I was an important person for whom you would get a good ransom. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 279)

It is interesting to see how differently women perceive safety. While Passinen avoids the streets of Torre Vieja in the evening, Vepsä considers that walking alone in Afghanistan is relatively safe. This is probably related to both personality and previous travel experience, as Vepsä is an experienced solo traveler. Regardless, security is regularly discussed in all the books.

Fear and trust

All the authors describe several moments when they are afraid. Passinen starts the entire book by expressing her fear of solo traveling:

Why do I have to go alone, with almost no language skills, to the ends of the earth? I was scared and nervous, but the trip was paid, and I had taken time off from work and invited guests and talked about it to everyone. I couldn't cancel it anymore. I had to go. (Passinen, 2017, p. 4)

She also fears getting lost in a new city, withdrawing money from a cash machine, and traveling by a train alone. The fear of dark and isolated places comes up frequently in Passinen's book, and it prevents her from going to certain areas. Overall, Laitinen describes her feelings less, but she expresses her worry about the traffic:

The red lines on the map indicate that the area between Ayr and Ardrossan is only a network of motorways. It always terrifies me to approach such megalopolises by bike. First, you tend to get lost there, because you are not allowed to ride a bike on the highway, but there are no signs for alternative routes either. Secondly, you tend to be an underdog among other traffic there. And thirdly, if you survive the traffic, the exhaust fumes farted by the trucks will make you lose consciousness. However, there are no options now. (Laitinen, 2010, p. 44)

In India, Mähkä admits being scared when riding a bus through a dangerous region as the only foreigner – but only a little scared. In Southern America, she arrives several times at a destination in the middle of the night, which makes her anxious. She does get scammed once in Buenos Aires, which causes her to fear being robbed again.

I woke up from my wide and plush single seat to the harsh reality. I had hundreds of dollars' worth of cash with me and a night of La Paz was waiting outside. Small hours are the worst possible time to arrive alone in a South American capital. Bus stations are often located in unsafe neighborhoods on the outskirts of city centers. You never know if you can trust the taxi drivers. The probability of being robbed is almost as high in a car as it is on the street. Taxi robberies are even scarier in that the drivers take the cars into dark alleys and leave you there. Street robbers at least

abandon people they mug on the street, where you can find your way to the destination. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 181)

However, not all fear is negative: Mähkä describes vividly her fear and excitement when she participates in extreme tourist activities such as skydiving.

On the other hand, authors express also trust and confidence. Even though Vepsä recognizes that she is rather poorly prepared for hitchhiking in Russia in the winter, the advice she gets from others makes her more confident.

I had received valuable advice from more experienced hitchhikers, which had raised my confidence to a whole new level. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 28)

Encountering a woman driver gives her an opportunity to reflect the risks of hitchhiking for the drivers as well. It seems that women rarely stop to pick up hitchhikers, and over the years Vepsä had hitchhiked with a woman only twice. She expresses again her belief that strangers are most likely kind.

I have wondered if it's just a coincidence or if women are intimidated by strangers more than men. The driver and the hitchhiker take exactly the same risk anyway, because either of them could be an ax murderer. Personally, I prefer to stick to the point of view that either of them might be a really nice person and both have an equal chance to learn something new during the trip together. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 201)

Kankimäki meets her friend in Tokyo, and they go to eat out. For her, the feeling of being safe is connected to the destination:

In no other big city could two women wander in such dark and deserted tunnels without fear of criminal gangs, junkies, dealers, and pimps. But here: cheap, simple, densely atmospheric, deliciously smelling izakayas, where flight attendants and ikebanists from all over the world can fill their stomachs. (Kankimäki, 2013, pp. 156–157)

This indicates that Kankimäki has a mental map of dangerous destinations as in “the geography of women’s travel fear” by Wilson and Little (2008), even if she considers Japan a safe destination for women. Kankimäki is in Japan when the tsunami hits Fukushima and causes a nuclear power plant disaster. As she is six hundred kilometers away in Kyoto, she trusts that she is not in imminent danger:

Such situations always seem scarier when watching horror pictures on television than on the location, where life goes on normally and you know that you are fine. (Kankimäki, 2013, pp. 228-229)

Later however, the pressure from her friends and family makes her more scared, and she ends up traveling to Thailand for a few weeks.

Facing real danger

It appears that the actual dangers the authors face end up being different from their fears. They tend to describe the incidents and their own reactions in a detail. The influence of Romanticism can be seen here, as first-person narrative and focusing on the difficulties are generic tropes based on that writing style (Mulligan, 2016, p. 336). Perhaps the most serious incident for Passinen is a few hours of power outage in her apartment that makes her very anxious, but she is able to solve it by calling her Finnish contact person. She even loses her bag at least twice but finds all her belongings intact. Vepsä, in turn, almost freezes to death while hitchhiking in Siberia. Looking back, she describes her inability to understand the seriousness of the situation and reluctance to accept help.

My face was frozen, and the pain felt unbearable. The tears made the situation worse by freezing on the cheeks. I tried to protect myself from the wind by covering my face with a scarf, but my breath wet it and the scarf froze against my skin. The only people who stopped by me were policemen, to whom I assured that everything was fine, even though my eyes were blurry with tears. The policemen didn't believe my explanations and offered to stop a car for me while I warmed up in their car. I wasn't too excited about the idea, but my objections fell on deaf ears – and maybe that was for the best. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 130)

Mähkä faces many dangerous situations during her 1.5 year solo trip. In Lusaka, she gets so angry at cheating money exchangers that she attacks the men physically. Retrospectively, she thinks that she must have put her male travel companion to a real danger. In Buenos Aires, she gets scammed and loses her laptop, mobile phone, iPod, camera and 500 photos. She travels from Colombia to Panama by sailboat in a violent storm. In addition, she almost drowns two times. The first time happens when she is surfing, and she describes the experience in short, dramatic sentences:

I don't know what happened to me. I was halfway struggling towards the shore when I saw a huge wave coming my way. I froze. When the wave was a couple of meters away, I hid under the surfboard. The wave broke right on top of me. At least three meters of angry water mass hit my board like a tank. I sank deep into the water. I lost my grip on the board. I felt myself sinking deeper and deeper. I lost track of the direction to the surface. The dive went on and on. I had time to think that I would

never get up again. The moment was bright, my lungs were crushed, and the oxygen was gone. I popped to the surface at the last minute. I climbed onto my board instinctively and had the first panic attack of my life. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 113)

The second time, Mähkä is floating on a rubber tire in a river, when she gets separated from other tourists. After saving herself from the river, she finds herself in a field with a herd of cows. The scene is described again vividly, almost as a comic relief:

“This is an even stupider way to die,” I muttered to myself as I outran some horned Guatemalan cows through a man-tall bush. They never followed us in Äetsä. The river was in front of me again. A herd of angry cows behind me. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 238)

Interestingly, most authors describe frightening encounters with animals. In addition to the angry cows, Mähkä is almost attacked by an orangutang named Mina during a guided tour. Laitinen almost hits a sheep when cycling downhill, and both Passinen and Vepsä encounter angry dogs.

Getting and giving safety advice

The authors get a lot of advice from travel guidebooks, fellow travelers, and local people, but it depends on the situation whether they take it or not. It is common for the authors to write about safety in retrospective and reflect whether their decisions were sensible. Learning from one's mistakes and blaming oneself for being poorly prepared is a common theme in the books. Especially Vepsä criticizes herself for not making necessary arrangements beforehand.

The fact that getting a map hadn't occurred to me earlier was another example of how poorly I had prepared for my hitchhiking trip. With Alexandra's help, I managed to find a fairly decent map of Russia, which, however, was written in Cyrillic letters. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 39)

Even though the authors often resist others' opinions regarding the safety of solo travel, “insider knowledge” from guidebooks and fellow travelers is presented as valuable. Mähkä believes that reading a travel guidebook properly would have helped her to avoid being scammed in Buenos Aires.

On a stopover in Cape Town, I bought a South America travel guide and tried to orient myself to what was to come. I was so tired that I only read the “How to get from the airport to the city” section of the travel guide and immersed myself in Stieg Larsson. It was an expensive mistake. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 150).

But I had never lost so much important stuff at once as in Buenos Aires, where I was cheated in the most humiliating way possible. I could have read about dirt-throwing thieves in my guidebook if I had bothered to even skim the warning section. (Mähkä, 2012, pp. 156–157)

Later in Bolivia, Mähkä appears to have learned from this experience and takes advice from a guidebook. As the book warns clearly not to go to Kari Kari alone, she asks a male traveler to accompany her. In turn, Mähkä gives solo travel advice for her readers so that they can either avoid her mistakes or learn from the best practices. The book features several info pages of different themes, embedding the genre of travel guidebook and instructive language in the narrative.

How to survive in the credit card jungle. 1. Take several cards with you. A solo traveler cannot rely on a friend if the credit card is lost. I had three credit cards with me. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 182)

On an info page titled “Should I travel alone in Africa”, Mähkä writes that even if she did travel alone there, she would not do it again. This is an interesting contradiction, as if telling the reader “do as I say, not as I do”. She justifies this by telling a story of her friend Charlotte from New Zealand. When Charlotte took a taxi in Tanzania, two men jumped into it and demanded Charlotte's credit cards with pin codes, threatening to rape her. Charlotte was groped, hit, and kept captive for three hours before the men found an ATM that worked and stole all her money. Mähkä uses this example to warn the readers, but kind of downplays it in the end and concludes Charlotte's narrative arc with a positive note.

You can get into bad situations while traveling, but bad luck can surprise you anywhere. Everyone must assess the risks themselves. (...) Although Charlotte, an experienced traveler, had already spent half a year in Africa, after the events in Dar es Salaam, she had to consider returning home. However, love for Africa won. She left for Uganda in a couple of buses and one pickup truck. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 147)

This short story combines both the discourses of “empowered, confident woman” and “safety, security, and sensibility” that are common in travel guidebooks written for independent women travelers (Wilson, 2009). It also supports Gilmartin's (1997) argument that women still must negotiate between protecting themselves from sexual harassment and being able to travel.

6.3 Discourse of gender

It is difficult to separate the theme of gender from the discourses of resistance and security, because many of the authors' experiences are related to being women of a certain age. However, the following examples represent gender-specific issues that male solo travelers are unlikely to face.

Men and the male gaze

Overall, there were fewer mentions of sexual harassment or being prone to the male gaze that I had expected based on media discussions and previous research. Vepsä, Mähkä, Kankimäki and Passinen all describe occasions when men approach them on the street or in a bar, but these encounters are usually depicted in a humorous way rather than being distressing. It is almost as if situations like this are taken for granted as a part of solo travel.

When Mähkä takes an Asian long-distance bus with narrow double beds, she fears that she would have to travel on a same bed with a large, drunk man. Luckily, the person who is next to her is a young woman who becomes her travel companion. Later however, she travels on a normal bus which turns out to be an unpleasant experience. A young man sits next to Mähkä on a bus and offers a candy. Then he wants to show a video from his phone, but it turns out that it is porn.

I glared at the young man angrily and turned towards the window. I took iPod out of my bag and decided to pretend to be asleep, all the while ready to hit if the porn harasser decided to touch next. I didn't get much sleep on the bus journey. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 96)

As a risk reduction strategy, Vepsä uses her instincts to estimate whether she should trust a driver or not. She turns down several offers from male drivers because "something" feels wrong.

There were four men in the car, and even though they said they were going to Almaty just like me, something was wrong with the situation. I trusted my instincts and didn't get in the car. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 116)

Passinen is afraid of getting robbed or killed, but not harassed. She supposes that age protects her from being sexually assaulted. This finding supports the idea that the experience of traveling alone, especially from a safety perspective, is different for younger and older women. Indeed, Barret and Douglas (2020) argue that cultural narratives of women's risk vary according to age.

A man with a dog approached, but there were no other passers-by. It was a little scary: if some beach bandit was waiting for his prey, what could I do? Or well, age does protect, for who wants anything but money from an old hag like this. If they demand for my money or my life, I will give the money. (Passinen, 2017, p. 145)

However, it is not just men gazing at female travelers, but the authors gaze local men as well.

There was the man of my life! I usually like dark ones, but he would have been fine as a blond: solid build, slightly curly hair, seems balanced and sensitive, walking alone. I just knew that he would be the man of my life. (...) I instinctively greeted "¡Hola!". He looked at me very beautifully with his blue eyes, shyly, but didn't say anything. Maybe he had just arrived and didn't know the local greeting. Lovely man! But we would never meet again. Just as ships at sea meet once or twice, and then both continue in their own directions. (Passinen, 2017, pp. 160-161)

Kankimäki writes jokingly that she should get a lover for herself in Japan, but it is not that simple: Japanese men do not want a "large, loud, and independent" Western woman, and all the Western men are supposedly there after "divine" Japanese women.

Interestingly, both Passinen and Mähkä mention the "best before date" of a woman. 32-year-old Mähkä uses it ironically when recalling how her gynecologist thought that she should look for a husband instead of traveling abroad. However, Passinen, who is over 60 years old, argues that women should indeed be aware of becoming invisible to men at some point:

For the first time in a long time, I have felt like a woman here. In Finland, I was already content with the fact that the "best before" date had passed a long time ago. At a certain age, a woman becomes invisible. That's good to note. (Passinen, 2017, p. 26)

In Spain, she gets attention from men who greet, smile, and approach her frequently, and she finds it rather cheery. In a way, traveling alone gives her an opportunity to redefine her identity as "an old woman" and resist the role she has at home. This contrasts with previous research (e.g., Jordan & Aitchison, 2008), where the male gaze is reported to make solo traveling women feel uneasy and vulnerable.

Pretending to be married

Three of the five authors, those under 40 years old, mention lying about their relationship status. This is often recommended in online articles about solo female traveling (see e.g., Khanji, 2017; Keponen, 2018), and Barrett and Douglas (2020) call it "doing dependency" in their study. As

mentioned before, Vepsä uses her instinct to decide whether she should accept a ride or not. One time, however, she finds herself in an awkward situation when she is in a car alone with a man who starts enquiring about her marital status.

My next ride was very short and the first that I wanted to get out of as soon as possible. Behind the wheel there was a young man, who immediately started asking if I was married. For the first time during my trip, I lied and said yes. I didn't like the way the man looked at me, but I didn't feel threatened either, so I decided to ride with him to Üch-Korgon, which was less than ten kilometers away. Once there, I thanked him for the ride and quickly slipped out of the car, when Romeo, thinking too much of himself, started to lean towards me with his eyes narrowing. (Vepsä, 2018, pp. 188–189)

Mähkä uses her imaginary husband as a funny anecdote in her book. She reports first telling that she is married to a nurse, but because Indians apparently cannot comprehend the concept of a male nurse, the husband gets promoted to a doctor and soon they have two imaginary children who are in a boarding school. Despite the humorous tone, Mähkä considers this essential in order to be left alone.

Wiser from the experience, I immediately made it a habit in India to talk about my happy married life, because a woman traveling alone should not admit to Indians that she is not married. It is simply not understood. A wrong answer is followed by either ten new intrusive questions or, in the worst case, a harassment attempt. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 18)

On the other hand, Passinen does not mind telling locals that she is single. When a man approaches her on the street and asks whether she is “sola”, Passinen affirms, and they have a chat. Because Passinen does not speak Spanish, the conversation on her part consists mostly of single words and her interpretation of what are his intentions. It seems that the man is asking her for a coffee and then starts to imitate kissing. Passinen declines the invitation and leaves the situation but depicts the encounter more as amusing than intimidating.

It is worth to note here that language barrier is a major practical constraint for Passinen (English and Spanish), Vepsä (Russian), Mähkä (Spanish), Kankimäki (Japanese), and they all blame themselves for not learning even the basics before traveling. Even Laitinen mentions that understanding the local English dialect is difficult for her, though she has learned a lot during her previous travels. Most likely, the language barrier has shaped the travel narratives as the authors might misinterpret conversations. Also, they present the dialogue from solely their own perspective, not to mention that unless they have been constantly writing down every conversation, they are

citing it from their memory much later. This kind of “verbatim” dialogue is one of the Romantic tropes and is often found in travel writing (Mulligan, 2016).

Dressing appropriately

Dressing appropriately to the local culture is a common advice given in travel blogs (Chaudhuri, 2020; Thomas & Mura, 2019). It is mentioned few times in the data, though authors describe their reluctance of doing so. Mähkä mentions that her host asks her to wear loose pants and a headscarf while visiting mosques, even if she has a below-the-knee skirt. Later, she would have wanted to go to swim but feels that it is not safe.

Too bad women can't swim in Cox's Bazaar. Those who need to cool off can at most go to the sea and splash water on their clothes. A one-piece swimsuit would be far too daring for the beach. I hear that even Western men who swim in shorts are stared at so much that a dip in the water is not worth the trouble. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 64)

For Vepsä, dressing appropriately is mostly a safety issue as well. She wears a headscarf and heavy makeup to stand out less, but considers wearing a burqa:

Many wore the garment today mainly for security reasons, as Afghanistan was not without reason considered the most dangerous country in the world for women. As a western guest, I didn't think I was in as vulnerable a position as most local women, but I still wouldn't have dared to walk down the street without covering my head, because I attracted enough attention even now. I would certainly have worn a burqa if I had intended to travel to the countryside. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 289)

Dressing appropriately as a safety issue does not come up when traveling in Western countries. For Laitinen, who travels in Scotland, clothes are purely a question of having the right equipment for a bike journey, and she blames herself for buying poor quality clothes.

6.4 Discourse of transformation

Most of the authors seem to consider themselves as travelers instead of mere tourists. Passinen calls Torrevieja a “tourist trap” which she has sworn to avoid and recounts looking for a restaurant that is “Spanish” and not “conquered by tourists”. Laitinen observes “normal tourists” who live a simple life by eating in restaurants, writing postcards, and gazing at the sea, and describes taking a few days off to live like them. Indeed, it is common for travel writers to see themselves as “lone explorers” and advocates of the “real adventure experience” (Robinson, 2004). In the end of her

book, Vepsä calls her trip a “philosophical exploration”, implying that she is an explorer as well. Mähkä has given her solo trip a name, “the Great Journey” with capital letters. The most obvious example of the juxtaposition of travelers and tourists comes up when Kankimäki travels unwillingly to Thailand for a few weeks. She describes it as a mind-numbing experience in contrast to Kyoto:

The flatness of this tourist trap infects people like a virus. Suddenly there is nothing more meaningful in the world than lying down, reading, eating, and swimming. I’m mainly interested in sunscreen factors, sand drifting into the room, and maintaining fluid balance. There is no other reality. There are no other levels. There are no wars, earthquakes, nuclear power plants. There is no book project about the writer who lived in Heian court. There is only a cold drink and a degree of tanning. (Kankimäki, 2013, p. 242)

Even small trips to the surroundings start to feel somehow pointless – maybe tomorrow, or the day after tomorrow... I get greedy for doing nothing. It’s hard to get hold of thoughts, sometimes they flash somewhere on the edges of consciousness, then disappear again, drowning in the incredible, all-consuming abyss of flatness. Sei, you’re definitely not here. There is no trace of your world here. You don’t live in these white, red, or tanned human bodies, skinny and fat, bare breasts, chubby or drooping, sweat mixed with sunscreen. (Kankimäki, 2013, p. 242)

Mulligan (2016, p. 324) points out a travel writing style that focuses on searching for an answer to an individual’s identity crisis. The influence of Romantic writing style was also evident in the data, as a discourse of transformation and change. I recognized these themes particularly in the three books whose authors are under 40 years old and who travel outside of Europe. Vepsä, Mähkä and Kankimäki do not just travel; they change as a person and might even want to change the world. For Mähkä, traveling is searching for self:

I left because I hoped that I would find out in the world what I wanted from life. It felt good to admit it out loud. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 222)

Vepsä has a mission to offer an alternative discourse for solo traveling and change the world for her part:

I also wanted to fight against the spread of the epidemic of hatred by telling true stories about friendship, hospitality, and openness. I wanted to make people interested in the world around them and its people. I think evil had too much power in the world, especially because good people focused too much on fearing each other. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 23)

These findings also resemble the discourse of redefined identities in the writings of independent travelers (Cockburn-Wooten et al., 2006).

During the trip: Enlightenment leads to change

During the trip, especially Kankimäki and Mähkä describe moments of enlightenment when they learn something new of themselves or the world. Strong feeling and search for authenticity are common Romantic tropes in travel writing as well (Mulligan, 2016, p. 325). The authors seem to recognize this as a trope, since Kankimäki uses a self-ironic tone and Mähkä states that she does not care what others think.

I continue from the flea market to the nearby Zen temple area, where I wander into the Daisen-in temple garden. I am enlightened, I fall in love, and I pretend to understand what these rock gardens are all about. (Kankimäki, 2013, p. 93)

The road to Monkey Bay was bumpy and the pickup truck bounced. I held on to the car's railing and felt electrified. What kind of power was going through my body, going to my fingertips and toes? Did the speed accentuate the colors? The African-dusty green of the hills now looked spring-bright, the road looked as if it led to the mythical Eldorado. Golden. I hoped the ride would last forever. A tingling, intense physical feeling of happiness took over me. I screamed with joy. I quickly hoped that my voice would be drowned out by the noise of the car engine or the potholes of the road, until I stopped caring. Others may think me crazy, as long as this road and this happiness never end! (Mähkä, 2012, p. 145)

Already in the beginning of the book, Mähkä presents her adventure to the reader as a life-changing experience. The trip is about her growing as a person, and overcoming fears strengthens her. Again, she recognizes it as a cliché but writes anyway:

Landscapes, languages, and cultures changed. And as cliché as it is, I changed too. I have tried to tell as truthfully as possible about what it is like to be alone on the road for a long time. (...) For me, this was a journey to myself, my fears, and my dreams. I wouldn't change even those bad moments. (Mähkä, 2012, pp. 10–11)

In addition, Mähkä has several moments when she realizes something important about life. Drawing from the Romantic tradition, these are usually connected to admiring the beauty of the nature. For example, she decides that she would never be so busy again that she forgets the current phase of the moon.

What about all the natural wonders I saw during the trip? There was the orangutan Mina that I had to run away from, endangered rhinos that came to me and my wine bottle, there were hundreds of starry-eyed alligators in the river at night. Galapagos. A nebula that looked like broken car window. Moon, moon, moon. If anything, they changed me. That there can be so much beauty in the world! That outside my small everyday life there can be something so untamed, so unreachable, so

incomprehensible. And that I got to experience all those miracles. Why can't I see them in everyday life? (Mähkä, 2012, p. 253)

Kankimäki acknowledges that the solo trip changes her, as well. It starts already at home when she has made the decision to leave. The works she does in the ikebana class serve as a metaphor: they become bolder and more colorful. Later she decides that she will never be afraid of anything ever again, and a few pages later finds that she has already changed for the better.

Where is my former cowardly self, who, when alone, never dared to seize an opportunity, but just hung around kind of on the sidelines? Oh no, I don't miss you at all, I was just thinking. (Kankimäki, 2013, p. 95)

Vepsä aims to change the world but ends up changing herself after facing her own privileges and prejudices.

I had set out to hitchhike from Moscow to Mazar-i-Sharif to break other people's prejudices, but during the journey I had also ended up taking a look in the mirror so many times that it was almost laughable. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 277)

What happens when "authenticity" is not found? Interestingly, Mähkä describes an occasion when she expects to be enlightened but feels nothing. This makes her question the whole trip.

On the river, we had a guitar which was played by the American yoga teacher Peter. We danced. We sang. Ganesha, Ganesha, Ganesha... This is freedom! This is happiness! To dance yourself into giddiness, drunk only on life. The sand whirled on our feet. The Ganges was black. Fireworks exploded in the sky. Ganesha! Liberty, fraternity and so on. Hell no. I didn't feel anything at all. Not freedom, not happiness, and not the elephant-headed god Ganesha or his friends. Why did I pretend? My Great Journey was just starting to resemble a big joke. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 39)

It is as if there is a certain "narrative arc" for a proper solo journey that she tries to perform. Most likely, this is connected to the Romantic tradition of travel writing and the expectations that come with it.

Returning home: a new life awaits

The idea of "a story arc of the travel writer" is supported by the authors' descriptions of their "old life" before the solo trip and "new life" after returning home. This is a prominent theme especially for Mähkä and Kankimäki. Mähkä begins her book by literally having packed away her old life:

My whole life was packed in a black 70-liter backpack. The carry-on luggage contained only a passport, a one-way plane ticket to Delhi and a guidebook to India. My backpack wasn't even full. All I took with me from my old life were a couple of pairs of shoes and a pile of clothes. Everything else remained. I finally flew away, like I had always dreamed of. It was September 2009 and the beginning of my Great Journey made even the tip of my nose happy. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 7)

Much later, Mähkä writes how she has found so much beauty on the road while there was so little of it in her "old world", and so many disappointments. When the end of the journey approaches, Mähkä describes it as a personal end of the world. She feels so much changed that it is impossible to come back.

When I left Finland a year and a half ago, my farewell party lasted three days. Then there was cause for celebration. Now it was a funeral, the mourning of which was already over. I had made my decision. I would come back to the Pacific. Finally. It was the only right solution. I had nothing in Finland. Everything I needed was on the go. I had survived volcanoes and a few drownings. I could handle anything. I would support myself somehow where I would have time to look at the stars. I would no longer have to ask for permission or think about whether what I wanted was social democratic. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 246)

When Mähkä reflects how the Great Journey has been her only dream, the discourse of resistance can be seen as well. She does not want "a bigger apartment or a sailboat, and at least not full work weeks and stress" implying that is what people normally want or should want (Mähkä, 2012, p. 225). Kankimäki has similar thoughts after six months of traveling. She decides to request more time off from work and starts thinking of selling her apartment.

I feel that if I were to return to my old job and my old home at the end of the year off, the whole year would be nullified. (...) I realize that I would always like to live like this: travel, write, do research. To be an explorer. (Kankimäki, 2013, p. 208)

Ninety pages later, she reflects how "returning to the old" feels even more impossible. The theme of resistance is present as her friend suggests that Kankimäki could indeed sell her apartment and live with that money traveling for a few years.

It sounds attractive, but at the same time really inappropriate and prodigal behaviour. That I would give up my job and my home, all my hard-earned marks of a decent citizen and adult, and just let go? On the other hand, to whom am I responsible for my life? Unfortunately, I couldn't find anyone but myself. (Kankimäki, 2013, p. 296)

Vepsä, Mähkä and Kankimäki have all resisted expectations by leaving and changed as a person during their adventure. The question in the end seems to be whether the transformation can be permanent.

After the trip: Happily ever after?

What happens when you return home after a transformative journey? In previous research, solo female travelers have reported post-travel benefits such as pride, increased strength, and a sense of independence (Bianchi, 2016; Seow & Brown, 2018; Wilson & Harris, 2006). Even if Mähkä has declared that she can never go back to her old life, it turns out to be not so bad when she gets there. She herself has changed and found what she has been looking for. The book literally has a happy ending, as the protagonist describes her inner peace:

Realizing a big dream did not leave a void. Vice versa. It gave a fulfilling peace. I looked at my travel photos. A happy woman looked back from them. That woman didn't disappear anywhere, even though I returned to Finland. (...) I knew I wasn't going anywhere for a while. I had been lost and got out of there. Life after the fulfilled dream was wonderful, peaceful. All the good that came of it was more than I could have ever dared to ask for. I have always hated the saying "everything happens for a reason". And the one that says every cloud has a silver lining. Even the one that says something about seeds. Nowadays, I think they have a point. Sometimes I'm so happy it's embarrassing. (Mähkä, 2012, p. 254)

Vepsä and Kankimäki describe the end of their solo journeys as a beginning for another. Vepsä continues hitchhiking both in Finland and abroad. She claims to have found what she was looking for and to have broadened her worldview, as well.

When the plane took off, the philosophical exploration of more than 7,000 kilometers was over. Along the way from freezing Moscow to the spring of Mazar-i-Sharif, there were enough surprises, but I had also found what I originally set out to find – and more. The helpfulness and kindness of strangers had surprised even the hitchhiker herself. One of the biggest personal lessons of the story was definitely the importance of taking a look in the mirror: being aware of one's own prejudices and privileges turned out to be much more difficult than pointing fingers at others. For someone who is used to independent travel and decision-making, it was also good to let things go for a change and learn to accept help. Although I didn't know it when I was sitting on the flight to Kabul, hitchhiking continued to play an important role in my life and eventually became a significant part of my identity. (Vepsä, 2018, p. 301)

On the final page, Kankimäki starts writing her book, living her new life. After doing research on Sei Shōnagon for a year, Kankimäki addresses her final words to Sei, implying that she has finally found her and thus completed the journey.

But now I'm just starting my work – my new life – blissfully ignorant of that madness, that all-consuming black hole, that haunting, physically tormenting and extremely lonely quagmire called writing a book. I climb up to the attic of the Norman house, sit down at the desk under the skylight, take out my diary and notes. I enjoy that it's quiet, that I can dip my brush in ink and start writing. When you get your hands on white Michinoku paper or any paper, it makes you want to live for a while again... Then I look and there you are, Sei, on a low couch under a slanted roof. Your long black hair waves around you and your kimono covers the floor like a stormy sea. You look at me and smile. Sei, I made a pot of green tea, I brought two cups, let's start. (Kankimäki, 2013, p. 324)

The structure of these travel books resembles traditional narrative patterns like the Hero's Journey: the hero(ine) gets called to an adventure, faces many challenges and temptations, and gets help from mentors along the way. The adventure changes her, and she returns home as a transformed character.

In comparison, Laitinen ends her book practically in the same scene than the beginning. On the first page, she is starting her journey and it is raining. On the last page, she is close to her destination, and it is raining. The end is almost anticlimactic:

Inverness is clearly getting closer. A rain cloud is also approaching, and two kilometers before Inverness it starts to drop drops on the ground. I don't care anymore. In fact, I would have been more surprised if it hadn't rained today. When I get to the edge of the city, it starts to sprinkle properly. I dig out the raincoat and cycle hunched the last meters to the hustle and bustle of the center and the hostel. I think that's it. (Laitinen, 2010, p. 159)

Passinen is somewhere between these two approaches. She concludes the book after returning home but has not “found herself” abroad even if she faces many of her fears and feels empowered at times. Instead, she was happy traveling, and she is happy to come back.

It's so wonderful to come home. It does not bother me at all. This is where I live. This is where I belong. I didn't miss anything, but I knew that home wouldn't disappear from here. Tomorrow I'll call the boys and ask them to taste Italian cheeses and wine. (Passinen, 2017, p. 304)

The circle closes, and the protagonist continues her life as usual.

7. DISCUSSION

What kind of reality of solo female travel is produced through these four discourses? Broadly speaking, the representation is similar to what we can see in the media discussion and previous research. Solo female travel is about empowerment through traveling on the one hand and safety on the other. Despite encouraging women to travel alone, the way solo female travel is discussed tends to indicate the existence of “the geography of women’s travel fear” (Valentine, 1989; Wilson & Little, 2008) and may participate in sustaining it. Furthermore, the discourses of safety and gender maintain the perception that solo female travel is still something different from the male experience, or just solo travel in general. This supports the idea that research should also be done from a gender perspective. However, it is worth to note that the findings related to gender in this study are rather binary and heterocentric. As in previous research, solo female travel is mainly discussed in the context of cisgender women and heterosexual relationships.

The discourse of resistance builds the perception that solo female travelers are mainly single women who either do not have children or whose children are already adults. This makes sense, as not having family members to care for allows women to travel more freely. Traveling alone as a young woman is represented as an alternative to being “a responsible adult” and starting a family. For those in a similar life situation, this can act as an inspiration and encouragement. However, such representation may make it more difficult for married women or mothers of young children to go on their own solo trips. Furthermore, the discourse of resistance reinforces the perception of what is considered as being responsible, that is, having a family, an apartment, and a job. Yet, a regular job is represented as “a rat race” that leads to either boreout or burnout. A long solo journey offers an escape and sometimes traveling is even “the only choice”. The total travel expenses are rarely discussed in detail, but it is evident that solo travel is an option for the relatively wealthy who can afford to travel and/or take time off from work. However, even though solo female travelers seem to be quite a homogeneous group, they are of different ages. It becomes clear that solo travel is not just for backpackers in their twenties; middle-aged and older women travel alone as well.

Regarding the discourse of transformation, solo female travel is represented differently depending on the length of the trip. The longer the trip, the more it seems to change the solo female traveler. Shorter solo trips can be more “business as usual” and staying in one destination might feel much like at home. Longer solo journeys, however, are portrayed as life-changing events that shape the solo female traveler as a person. Traveling to exotic destinations is presented as a way to find

meaning in life and to “find yourself”. This is consistent with Robinson’s (2004, p. 307) argument that especially travel narratives from remote destinations tend to be written in a romantic style.

It is worth to consider what kinds of travel experiences get to be written in the first place. Generally, the possibility of facing sexual violence while traveling solo is widely discussed, but few report experiencing it themselves. Even if Romantic-styled travel writing tends to focus on the difficulties, it is unlikely that a solo female traveler who was sexually assaulted during her trip would write about her experience. Still, some difficulties and setbacks are needed to write an interesting story. As Passinen puts it:

The trip would have been much more pleasant if I had been able to anticipate things. Or on the other hand: if the trip had been very pleasant and problem-free, there would not have been material for a book. (Passinen, 2017, p. 307)

Therefore, we get to read the encouraging stories in which travelers face hardships that can be overcome and learned from. In this study, women under the age of 40 went on long-distance journeys lasting months. In their writings, the discourses of resistance and transformation are the most evident. Interestingly, these books are also the ones published by traditional publishers. Because the sample is so small, no generalizations can be made. However, there seems to be a certain pattern in the traditionally published books: the solo trip is a journey of transformation, and the authors end up growing as characters. Although the authors write non-fiction, their stories resemble traditional adventure novels and narrative patterns like the Hero’s Journey. Is an inner journey as well as an outer one needed to write a travel book that sells? The Romantic tropes of travel writing seem almost an essential component of these books. As a reader, I found myself critical of the sentimental writing style, but at the same time thinking that the established narrative structure made the book a pleasant read as I knew what to expect.

This leads to the question, how accurately travel books represent Finnish solo female travel as a phenomenon. Books are always constructed and edited works in which the authors have decided which events to include. Like all genres, travel books have a goal, and the story is crafted to support that. Funnily enough, Kankimäki describes this very problem when she addresses the alleged history of Sei Shōnagon:

Sei, your book seems like an authentic description of the life of the Heian court, and many think it is even the most important surviving document from your time. But when it is compared to other sources that describe the same events, one notices that

your perspective is unique. You left things unsaid. You may not have lied outright, but at least you shaped reality to suit your purposes. You skillfully created a piece that looks like a historical documentary, but actually gives a completely distorted picture of the events. (Kankimäki, 2013, p. 310)

To me, this seems like an appropriate description for discourses in travel writing as well.

Nevertheless, even though travel books show only one side of the story, they shape our view of solo female travel and contribute to building reality.

8. CONCLUSION

In this study, I have examined five contemporary travel books to analyze how solo female travel is represented in narratives written by Finnish women. I identified four discourses that are used: *resistance*, *safety*, *gender*, and *transformation*. Resisting others' expectations was a major theme both before and during the trip. Women needed to negotiate several sociocultural and personal constraints to travel solo. Especially, for unmarried and childless women in their thirties, solo travel meant resisting the societal norms and others' perceptions of women traveling alone. Even though solo female travelers faced many obstacles and others doubted them, their trips turned out to be rewarding. The freedom of "being yourself" was the essence of solo female travel. For some women, "being themselves" might also mean being antisocial, shy, or grumpy at times. Even though fear has been a key concept in many previous studies, it was not an overarching theme in this study. While some solo female travelers strongly expressed their fear, others represented themselves as very confident and trusting. However, safety was always in the background, and all took safety measures and discussed security-related issues. Not knowing the local language turned out to be a major constraint for all women, which has probably shaped the travel narratives.

Solo female travelers encountered some gender-related issues such as being asked to dress more appropriately and having to lie that they are married. These are also common advice given in many travel blogs and online articles written for women. Almost everyone reported being prone to the male gaze and having uncomfortable encounters with men, but these incidents were described mainly in a humorous tone. Often, the gaze became mutual as solo female travelers gazed local men or participated in the surveillance of other tourists. Even though the data is limited, the findings suggest that solo traveling is slightly different experience for younger and older women. Older women might feel less vulnerable to sexual harassment and face fewer social expectations. Also, the discourse of transformation was evident for the younger women. For them, solo travel was a way to change as a person, and they borrowed heavily from the Romantic tradition of travel writing.

This study contributes to the theoretical discussion by shedding light on the solo travel experiences of Finnish women. Solo female travel and women's travel writing have been studied separately before, but this thesis offers some new insights to the field by combining both points of view. The results were largely in line with previous research, showing the contradiction between feeling empowered and free on the one hand, and negotiating constraints and regulating risk on the other. As a practical implication for travel writers, I would suggest that they pay attention to the narrative

structure and use discourses consciously. The ways solo female traveling is represented shapes the general view of it, be it in a travel blog or book. The findings suggest that even if the Romantic tradition of travel writing is criticized by researchers, it is still widely used. Travel books published by traditional publishers include an inner journey as well as an outer one, and “a story arc of the travel writer”.

From a wider perspective, tourism companies can use these findings to serve better the growing customer segment of solo female travelers. Accommodation and transport providers can highlight the safety aspects. Depending on what kind of solo travelers they want to target, they could emphasize either the privacy or the possibility to meet new people. Solo travelers are often independent travelers but visit sights and use tourism services, nonetheless. Experience providers could offer them exciting, unique experiences and tours that enable “transformational tourism”. This could also be used as a selling point at the destination level. Destination marketing organizations should consider that as solo travelers often see themselves as “travelers” or “explorers” instead of mere tourists, they might be looking for the “hidden gems” and places that are not too “touristy”.

There are several limitations in this study. Since the data sample consists only of five travel books, the findings cannot be generalized to all solo female travel. The books were chosen based on my best judgement, but a different sample of books could have produced different findings. Translation is a minor limitation as well. Because the book excerpts used in this study are translated by me, some meaning might have been lost or altered. Basing the analysis on published books also limits the findings only to what the authors have wished to express publicly under their own name. Further research on Finnish solo female travel could be conducted by interviewing either travel writers or solo travelers in general. As shown in previous studies, more research would be needed on the effect of women’s age on the solo travel experience and representation. If Finnish travel literature were to be studied further, it would be interesting to compare old and newer books to see if the representation of solo travel has changed over time. The experiences of solo traveling men could be also analyzed and compared to women’s narratives.

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