

## **A Review of the Diploma Thesis of Mitchell Hoffman “The Voices of Victimhood and Survivorship”**

The use of the label “victim” with respect to people who were (sexually) violated has been criticized from different theoretical positions for quite some time. While many authors suggest that the term “survivor” better captures experiences, self-identification or identity of the violated, it is also not without its problems. Mitchell decided to look at the dichotomy victimhood-survivorship through the firsthand testaments of selected victims and survivors of sexual violence and to analyze how these cases reflect the unequal dynamics of power over their own stories. The testaments were communicated through various media (a documentary, a memoir, a court statement) adding complexity to the analysis. The choice of methodology, critical discourse analysis, is also commendable.

Considering the formal issues, it surprised me that the name of student’s advisor Mgr. Tereza Kynclova, Ph.D. is missing in the Acknowledgements? More importantly, references in the text do not include a year of publication? Some references also include a superscript (Fairclough, p. 15), others do not (Baroni, p. 14). It seems that it is not because some references concern direct quotations and others paraphrases (see de Ling and Marmo, p. 16). Sometimes references are not in brackets (de Lint and Marmo, p. 15). Longer quotations are indented, but the letters are not smaller than the main text. This is not very user-friendly. Mitchell should explain what citation norm he used.

I have detected some typos and grammatical errors, but not more than usual. The more serious problem concerns the author’s writing style (see below).

The text starts with a well-conceived introduction/background laying out complexities of the problem under study and the author’s stylistic choices. However, it is perhaps too detailed as it takes almost 10% of the whole text and the author sometimes discusses issues that would belong to different chapters such as methodology (e.g. a discussion of sample selection on pp. 8-9). The same comment can be made with respect to the next chapter, *Limitations and Positionality*, in which Mitchell discusses his choice of methodology (p. 13).

The following chapter, *Methodology, Source Materials, and Theory*, is often written in a language which verges on being illegible. The author mixes together many concepts, terms, theories etc. in a manner that makes it very difficult to follow the line of argument. It does not

help that Mitchell does not break up the text into more paragraphs which would carry one thought, one concept, one theory. In the thesis, each paragraph tends to refer to several thoughts, concepts, theories etc. (e.g. a paragraph on pp. 18-19, 20-21., 21-22). Trying to understand such a text is an exhausting task with an uncertain result. It definitely does not help understand what points the author is trying to make. Needless to say, it is up to the author to make the text understandable.

To make things more difficult, methodology and theory are discussed in one chapter. It is hard to discern where the discussion of methodology ends and where the discussion of theory begins, especially when the method, critical discourse analysis, is discussed repeatedly at different parts of the chapter. Again, this does not help the reader to make sense of the text.

In the end, while the theoretical background can be (with difficulty) pieced together by the reader, the presentation of methodology is not sufficiently elaborated. The reader is left with a very vague idea what the critical discourse analysis is about, what its tools and procedures are.

In contrast, the analysis of individual texts is well structured. The author demonstrates very good analytical skills and excellent command of relevant theoretical literature. This combined with excellent writing skills makes for an interesting read. The analysis is nuanced and peppered with appealing insights. While I find some of the interpretations a bit problematic, these are just details. To give an example, I would be much more skeptical that “The medium of the documentary functions as discursive space conducive to survivorship. The interview and narrative format of Gabrielsen’s appearances on camera allow her to speak unscripted and without interjection, denial, or contestation (p. 35).” How do we know that her testimony was unscripted? How do we know that there were not interjections from the interviewer, no contestations? Could they be possibly edited out? I would be careful with generalizations about the medium of documentary. It can be used in different ways. In some cases, it may be conducive to victimhood.

It would be also interesting if the author commented on the apparent tension between the general statement about the role of judiciary in shaping the victimhood/survivorship discourse in the theoretical chapter and its concrete role in 2018 USA Gymnastics Sex Abuse Scandal. In the theoretical chapter, it is stated that “Other settings, especially reports to law

enforcement and prosecution in judicial systems, limit the conception of the subject as a survivor as the dispensation of justice comes from the official rulings of a legal institution by means of due process (Baroni 103)” (p. 14). I would argue that the analysis of 2018 USA Gymnastics Sex Abuse Scandal shows the opposite.

Overall, the thesis meets the requirements set by our program. I recommend it for defense with the grade B (2).

Petr Pavlik

Reviewer

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