



Master's Thesis Evaluation Form

Student's name: Samina Norgaard

Thesis title: Women's experience of gynecological examinations: embodiment and malpractice in care

Name of the supervisor: Ema Hrešanová PhD.

Name of the opponent: Jaroslava Hasmanová Marhánková PhD.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the thesis? Please give your reasons for the suggested grade in detail below.

1. *Does the author show understanding of one or more theories, and use theory to generate a hypothesis or to make the problem area more understandable.*

Comments: This thesis explores an underrepresented area of women's health, specifically the embodied experiences of pain and discomfort during routine gynaecological examinations. The research fills a gap in ethnographic and sociological studies by focusing not on women with pathological genital conditions but on those who are considered "healthy" by biomedical standards. It emphasises the structural violence inherent in the normalization of pain and discomfort during gynaecological procedures, shedding light on the broader issue of emotional neglect and poor equipment design in medical practice. The thesis thoughtfully frames the lack of emotional care and the normalization of suffering in gynaecological practice as a form of structural violence. This conceptual lens adds depth to the discussion. It elevates the study from a simple critique of individual doctors or institutions to a more systemic critique of gynaecological practice as a whole. While the thesis could benefit from a deeper engagement with theories of pain to further enrich the analysis, the overall theoretical foundation is solid. The author's familiarity with the key concepts and debates in the field contributes to a coherent and insightful study.

2. *Is the research question articulated clearly and properly? Is the research question sufficiently answered in the conclusion?*

Comments: The author formulates the research question as "*To understand why women experience pain and discomfort during gyno-vaginal examinations,*"(pp. 13), which is quite broad and does not accurately capture the specific focus of the study. The formulation of the research question may be more of a stylistic issue than a fundamental flaw. While the thesis maintains coherence in its focus, the broad framing of the question does not fully reflect the nuanced exploration of structural violence and practitioner insensitivity that the thesis ultimately develops. A more refined and specific research question could have better guided the reader through the analysis, offering clearer direction from the outset. Nonetheless, the overall coherence and focus of the thesis remain strong.



3. *Is the thesis based on relevant research and literature and does it accurately summarize and integrate the information?*

Comments: Yes. The thesis is based on relevant research and literature and effectively integrates theoretical discussions with empirical analysis. Given the limited space and the author's decision to focus specifically on structural violence and practitioner insensitivity during gynaecological examinations, it is understandable that certain aspects of the broader literature are not fully addressed. While the omission of some debates leaves room for further exploration, the thesis still provides a solid and coherent analysis, successfully integrating the selected theoretical perspectives with the empirical data.

4. *What is the quality of the data or the other sources? Are the sample method, data collection and data analysis appropriate?*

Comments: The thesis methodology includes nine in-depth interviews with women and five participant observation sessions in gynaecological surgeries. This combination of qualitative methods offers a strong research design. The author demonstrates considerable skill in reflecting on the research process and methods.

However, a significant concern arises regarding informed consent during the observation sessions. While the doctors provided consent for the observations, the women being examined did not. This raises an ethical issue that is not fully addressed in the thesis. Although this may not necessarily be considered a breach of research ethics, it touches on a critical aspect of the thesis's critique—structural violence in gynaecological practices. By relying solely on the doctors' consent and overlooking the women's agency in this process, the research risks replicating the very power imbalances it aims to critique, where the doctor's authority is prioritised over the patient's experience. This oversight highlights the need for a more thorough reflection on the ethics of consent in observational research, particularly in sensitive healthcare settings. Furthermore, the process of anonymization of the gatekeepers and observed places is somehow confusing. I was not sure if the names of doctors/hospitals are pseudonyms (if not, I would consider it highly problematic).

Additionally, the language barrier during the observation sessions presents another limitation. The researcher could not understand verbal interactions between doctors and patients, relying solely on body language to gather data. While body language can provide valuable insights, it is a limited lens through which to understand the full scope of the interactions.

Despite these limitations, the research design remains highly interesting and innovative. Moreover, the author demonstrates skilful presentation and interpretation of the data.

5. *Are the findings relevant to the research question? Are the conclusions of the thesis based on strong arguments?*

Comments: Overall, the thesis demonstrates a robust and well-supported argumentation throughout. Each empirical component of the study maintains a clear focus. The thesis does a good job of linking the findings to the broader issues of pain and discomfort during gynaecological examinations, providing a coherent narrative that ties together the theoretical



framework and empirical observations. For me personally, chapter 5, which reflects on the role of medical instruments, stands out as particularly insightful. This chapter explores how the design and use of gynaecological equipment contribute to the normalization of pain and discomfort, adding a critical dimension to the analysis.

6. *Are the author's thoughts distinguished unambiguously from the borrowed ideas?*

Comments: yes.

7. *Is the thesis containing original/innovative research (in terms of topic, approach, and/or findings)?*

Comments: Yes, the thesis demonstrates the researcher's ability to conduct compelling and original research. The study not only presents new findings but also critically reflects on the data and the broader implications of the topic.

8. *What is the quality of style and other formal requirements?*

Comments: The text is well-structured and logically organized. The writing is clear and coherent. There are no apparent issues or failures regarding formal requirements, such as citation practices or formatting.

9. *Are there any other strengths and weaknesses of the thesis, which are not included in the previous questions? Please list them if any.*

Comments:

10. *What topic do you suggest for the discussion in the thesis defence?*

Comments: For the thesis defence, two key topics would be particularly relevant for discussion: 1) Ethical Aspects of the Research: A critical discussion on the ethical dimensions of the research is essential, especially focusing on informed consent and language barriers and 2) the role of the socioeconomic status, language barriers, positions as a migrant or foreigner of the interviewed women on their experiences. How might these factors contribute to their privileges or vulnerabilities during gynaecological examinations?

Overall assessment of the thesis:

(Please, state clearly whether the thesis is or is not recommended for a defence and write the main reasons for the recommendation).

Overall, the thesis is an insightful piece of research. It addresses an important and underexplored topic in the sociology of medicine, offering original contributions. The research design is well-executed, and the findings are thoughtfully analyzed, providing



valuable insights into women's experiences during gynaecological examinations. While there are some methodological issues that require more detailed attention (such as the ethics of informed consent and the impact of language barriers) these do not detract significantly from the overall contribution of the study.

Proposed grade: A-B

(A- B: excellent, C-D: very good, E: good, F: fail)

Date: 5.9.2024

Signature: