Supervisor's Evaluation of Mitchell Hoffman's Master's Thesis *The Voices of Victimhood and Survivorship*

Submitting the concepts of voice, survivorship and victimhood, which are all central not only to gender studies and feminism, but also to psychology, victimology, rhetorical studies and numerous other disciplines to critical analysis with the aim to expose the power of their discursive use in selected sexualized violence survivors' narratives, is the focus of Mitchell Hoffman's well-executed and well-argued master's thesis. In effect, the thesis is/are (a) superb story(ies) of (self)empowerment, since the author makes it explicit in his note on positionality that the issue at hand is also his lived experience. Further, the thesis is also an intriguing and highly competent academic text conveying nuanced analyses, displaying superb sensitivity as demonstrated in meticulous, eloquent and dense communication of the author's interpretation of the examined materials, and it is also a suspenseful and academically very satisfying – although challenging – reading. While the topic pertains to extremely traumatic experiences, Mitchell Hoffman delivers minute and multifaceted, in-depth interpretations of how sexualized violence survivors construct, re-create, re-shape, and re-establish their identities through narration, interview, writing, testifying, and speaking up; simply, by wielding voice as a form of their agency. Simultaneously, Mitchell Hoffman comments explicitly and extensively on his epistemic positionality thereby providing a self-reflective account of his argument and development both as a critical thinker and researcher.

Since discourse and language are also among the key tools and concepts employed in the thesis, I highly appreciate Mitchell Hoffman's very careful verbal choices; his carving out of the issue and exposing of the dilemmas he finds inherent in the analyzed narratives is well-phrased and it is clear the student is constantly self-checking himself for epistemic privileges, bias or "blind spots". Mitchell Hoffman combines Fairclough's critical discourse analysis with Bucholtz's feminist discourse analysis while being critically aware of the difficulties in the methods' developments and overlaps; to that end he also draws on many other authors for examples of methodological and theoretical anchoring of his research.

The narratives selected for analyses come from diverse media and institutional backgrounds (a book of memoirs, a TV interview, and victim impact statements in a sentencing hearing). Although this could be deemed methodologically questionable – as in: can one arrive at some general findings with such diverse data? –, the student makes a case for their use in showing the palette of discursive strategies that the distinct environments warrant and in effect help shape the narratives that get recorded, written, and heard.

One of the sources is the famous U.S. writer and poet Maya Angelou's *autobiography I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.* Cognizant of her class and racial background, Mitchell makes use of intersectionality to further develop argument about how a multiply marginalized author of color can use the genre of memoir to empower herself (and others) after childhood sexual abuse.

Secondly, the thesis conveys an analysis of Marlene Gabrielsen's interview given to the journalist Noelle Crombie in the TV documentary *The Ghosts of Highway 20*. Gabrielsen is a survivor of a series of rapes and femicides that occurred between 1978 and 1992 in Oregon and Hoffman explores what visual and rhetorical choices both persons make to account for a survivorship narrative. Thirdly, the student tackles a recent case of sexual abuse of a high number of U.S. women gymnasts by the national gymnastics team doctor. Specifically, Hoffman looks into rhetorical figures and discourses of survivorship as well as solidarity and (self)empowerment in victims' impact statements during the doctor's sentencing hearing. The student also makes a point of purposefully omitting the abuser's name and, contrarily, explicitly points out the names in individual gymnasts' (including Olympian medalists') testimonies.

While Mitchell Hoffman repeatedly and extensively consulted the choice of sources for analysis with me as well as the whole concept of his thesis project to which he gave lots of thought, I was introduced to the text of the thesis before submission only once. Mitchell, however, then incorporated all my suggestions in the text and acted on my recommendations. Since the text was already developed and structured in a way that prevented a more thorough changes as the student was pressed by the approaching submission deadline, there are some modifications that were impossible to integrate. Concretely, the smooth flow of the text and accentuation of the student's argument would have been enhanced, had the major theoretical concepts been discussed within the body of the thesis and not only listed in a glossary before the text proper. This choice was clearly pressed by the deadline. On the other hand, Mitchell Hoffman has not only demonstrated research independence and integrity in dealing with the subject at hand, but also excellence and maturity in establishing and developing his nuanced and attentive arguments in his thesis. In general, the thesis is a highly competent, analytical and critical study of selected sources, depth of which is unquestionably meritorious, with argumentative structure that is clear. Also, the choice of the topic researched is highly relevant. I recommend a portion of the thesis be published as a case study in an academic journal upon suggested modifications.

It is with genuine confidence and academic delight that **I recommend Mitchell Hoffman's thesis for defense and suggest it be awarded the grade *excellent***.

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