

Interviews with Victims of Sexual Violence Online: A Discourse Analytical Perspective

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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce se zabývá diskurzivní analýzou rozhovorů s oběťmi sexuálního násilí. Teoretická část práce vymezuje diskurz, identitu oběti a sexuální násilí, včetně jeho dopadu na duševní zdraví obětí. Analytická část práce zkoumá, jak oběti sexuálního násilí v dětství hovoří o svých traumatických zkušenostech, přičemž se primárně zaměřuje na jejich vnímání sebe sama, jejich násilníka a okolností spojených s násilím. Analytická část práce dále zkoumá diskurzivní strategie a jazykové prvky, které oběti v rozhovorech používají, když hovoří o své identitě a traumatických zkušenostech. Zatímco některé z nich se primárně zaměřují na popis zneužívání, jedna se mu zcela vyhýbá. Jejich vnímání násilníka a vztahu k němu se také liší u každé oběti. Jedna oběť identitu oběti přijímá, jedna váhá a jedna identitu oběti odmítá.

Klíčová slova: oběti sexuálního násilí, identita oběti, sexuální násilí diskurz, diskurzivní analýza

ABSTRACT

The bachelor's thesis focus lies in the discourse analysis of interviews with victims of sexual violence. The theoretical part of the thesis defines discourse, victim identity, and sexual violence including its effects on the mental health of the victim. The analysis explores how three rape victims talk about their traumatic experiences with the childhood abuse while mainly focusing on their perception of themselves, their abuser, and the sexual abuse itself. The analytical part of the thesis further examines discourse strategies and the linguistic features used by the victims to talk about their identities and traumatic experiences in the interviews. It was revealed that while two of the victims focus mainly on the description of the abuse, one of them avoids talking about it. The perception of the abuser and their relationship with them also differs for each of the victims. One speaker accepts the victim's identity, one considers, and one rejects it.

Keywords: victims of sexual violence, victim identity, sexual violence, discourse, discourse analysis

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INTRODUCTION

The perception of victims of sexual violence has changed over the course of the years. Positive impact on the perception of victims of sexual violence had the feminist movements in the 1970s and movements like #MeToo. Another important step forward was the rape law reforms that have occurred in the past 40 years around the world. Despite these positive changes, “rape cultures” – the social structures and thus discourses that still allow for victim blaming and justification of rapists– still exist to this day.

When talking about those affected by sexual violence, the English language allows for the variation in labelling such social actors. The terms “victim” and “survivor” can be used by the society and the social actors themselves. Discussions have been held about the appropriateness of the use of the terms Hayes (2023, 3). While the term “survivor” suggests strength, it is crucial to state that not every victim of sexual violence has survived it.

Discourses on sexual violence often focus on female victims. The thesis explores the experiences of three victims and two out of those three victims are male victims. Not only does it focus on their experience with sexual violence but also on how these traumatic experiences affected their mental health.

The thesis aims to critically examine how victims of sexual violence articulate their experiences in online interviews. To trace power relations between the abusers and victims, discourse strategies used by the victims to talk about their identities and trauma, a critical discourse-analytical approach was adopted (Van Dijk 1993, van Leeuwen 2003, Fairclough 2013). The main focus is on the victim's perception of themselves, their perception of the abuser as well as their perception of the abuse. These aspects of the interviews were examined by focusing on the linguistic features such as lexicalization, metaphor, and figurative language as well as euphemisms used by the victims in said interviews.

I THEORETICAL PART

1 DISCOURSE

The term discourse originates from the Latin word “discursus” which means to “run to and fro” (Goddard and Carey 2017, 2). However, throughout the course of the years the meaning changed. The term nowadays is widely used across various academic fields, such as social psychology, philosophy, critical theory, sociology, and other fields (Mills 2001, 1), with variations in its understanding. For instance, in the narrow linguistic sense, discourse is used to refer to parts of spoken language (Goddard and Carey 2017, 2). In its broadest sense discourse is understood as symbolic interaction including communication between people, through either written or spoken language or through other semiotic representation (Bloor and Bloor 2007, 6).

The term can also refer to social practices existing around the ways of expressing thoughts and ideas that originate from a specific area of human activity (Goddard and Carey 2017, 2) or specific institutional context (Bloor and Bloor 2007, 7).

Modern study of discourse deals with context, background as well as the knowledge that is shared between addressers and addressees (Bloor and Bloor 2007, 7). It is through discourse that members of the communities share an understanding of how things are done and how communication works. Discourse study, among other things, looks into the relationship between language and identity, exploring how the way people speak and write shapes, and is shaped by who they are (Goddard and Carey 2017, 4-5). It considers how context, background, and shared knowledge contribute to the creation and understanding of identities. By analyzing discourse, researchers can uncover how members of various communities communicate and how their language practices reflect their identities. For example, discourse can reveal how individuals align themselves with certain groups, express their beliefs and values, and negotiate their roles within communities. It is also through discourse that members of communities share their understanding of norms and practices.

These social and cultural practices are reflected in texts viewed as communicative units that people produce. Both written and spoken texts are shaped by discourses in which they function. Texts within discourses are not just passive carriers of information but active participants in the construction and negotiation of meaning. The purpose of certain texts is also influenced by discourse and at the same time, discourse shapes the possible purposes that texts can have. In similar manner, discourse is influenced by the world while it also influences the world; it is shaped by language while it also shapes language. Discourse is shaped by the people who use it while it shapes the language that people use. Discourse itself

is formed by the discourses that have preceded it, and it might further be altered by the discourses that will follow. The purpose of certain texts is also influenced by discourse and at the same time discourse shapes the possible purposes that texts can have (Paltridge 2012,7).

2 DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

It was in 1952 when the term discourse analysis was first introduced by Zellig Harris (Harris 1952). Harris described discourse analysis (DA) as a way of analyzing connected speech and writing. He came to the conclusion that there are typical ways in which language is used in certain situations. Harris was examining language beyond the level of sentence as well as the relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic behavior. His aim was to provide a way for describing how language features are distributed within texts as well as the way in which they are combined in certain kinds and styles of texts. (Paltridge 2012, 2).

Discourse analysis studies language in use – the meanings people create through language and the actions they carry out when using language in specific contexts (Gee and Handford 2012, 1). With the use of language action, goals and purposes can be achieved:

“When a minister says “I pronounce you man and wife” he or she is marrying two people, not just communicating something to them. When a person calls the union of two gay men a “marriage” the speaker is helping to create or re-create the institution of marriage in a certain way, as an institutionally sanctioned union between two committed people, and not necessarily a man and a woman” (Gee and Handford 2012, 1).

Discourse analysis focuses on language used to create meaning and accomplish intended purposes. While in most cases it concerns with the language above the level of sentence, there are situations when even a single sentence or utterance can be described as action or communication (Gee and Handford 2012, 1). Discourse analysis views the relationship between language, as well as the context in which the language is used and is involved with both description and analysis of interactions that are either written or spoken. Discourse analysis also deals with the way that people organize what they say as well as cultural and linguistic differences in these ways.

The present definition of DA is based on its use in the field of social psychology. That is due to the fact that the discipline of psychology has a specialism in health and DA has been used by psychologists to examine issues connected to health, illness as well as health interventions. Additionally, information regarding DA within social psychology is accessed easily. Talk and texts are action oriented and specific functions are performed by texts and wider means are available for people to employ in the forming of their individual accounts. With the focus on talk and text, interviews and analysis of documentary sources are the preferred data generation methods for discourse analysts (Ballinger & Payne 2000, 566).

2.1 Approaches to discourse analysis

There are different views and definitions of the term discourse analysis provided by different researchers across disciplines.

In linguistics, Fairclough differentiates between what he calls “textually oriented discourse analysis” with approaches to discourse analysis that hold more of a social theoretical orientation (Fairclough 2003). However, Cameron and Kulick question this distinction and argue that the instances of language in use that are studied under a textually oriented view of discourse remain socially situated and have to be interpreted in terms of their social meanings and functions (Cameron and Kulick 2003). Some scholars apply the term DA to the study of only spoken interaction. At the same time since the 1990s some analysts started using DA more critically to study the issue of power, inequality, and ideology (Baker and Ellece 2011). These scholars acknowledge that any language is used relative to social, political, and cultural formations and thus shapes individuals' interactions with society (Jaworski and Coupland 2006). In the recent years, more and more scholars adopt a view of DA as a series of interdisciplinary approaches that are used for the exploration of many social domains in various types of studies (Phillips and Jorgenson 2002). Discourse analysts study how people behave in interactions with each other as well as how people use communication in societies and social groups. However, it is also concerned with the way people communicate with other groups and cultures (Paltridge 2012, 6-12).

2.1.1 DA use in psychology and sociology

Since DA focuses, among other things, on the representations of identities in various discourses, gender identity became an important topic of research. In the past twenty years, the ideas about gender have changed and so does language used to talk about gender. Earlier, gender used to be understood as static and monolithic, while now it is regarded as fluid and multiple. Contemporary research on gender focuses on the multitude of femininities and masculinities in the broad range of communities: e.g. bisexual, lesbian, and transgender discourses (Gee and Handford 2012, 100).

One approach advocated for the study of gender is through the approach known as discursive psychology. Discursive psychology originated from Potter and Wetherell's

Discourse and Social Psychology published in 1987 (Potter and Wetherell 1987). It is an approach that deals with how psychological matters are portrayed in discourse: mainly in conversations, therapy sessions as well as witness statements. Discursive psychology is understood as a systematic as well as comprehensive alternative perspective to what is known as traditional psychological approaches such as social cognition, psychoanalysis, or behaviorism. Discursive psychology makes extensive use of the methodology and approach of conversation analysis as it typically involves analysis of sets of audio or video recordings collected in a particular setting (Gee and Handford, 104-108).

2.1.2 DA in linguistic studies

As has already mentioned, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is one of the approaches to DA which focuses on how discourse is connected to power and ideology. Its aim is to challenge the role of powerful networks because these networks both maintain and reinforce a hierarchical organization within society. Critical discourse analysis brings together social analysis and language studies. It can also be understood as a critique that is normative and evaluative: it does not just describe realities but also evaluates them. CDA assesses how they are in agreement with values that are fundamental for societies. (Gee and Handford 2012, 9) The main focus of CDA lies in the “partially linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures” (Fairclough and Wodak 1997). Stemming from the assumption that discourse shapes and is shaped by society and culture, texts have potential to shape representations, identities and relations. Critical discourse analysis also focuses on how dominant ideologies, such as sexism, racism and classism, are constructed by discourse and influence the perception and representation of identities, such as the ones related to gender (Statham 2022, 15-20).

3 SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence is a violation of survivors and violation of society. It affects the mental and physical well-being of the victim and disrupts social relationship. Statistics on sexual violence reveal that more cases occur than are dealt with by the courts (Brown and Walklate 2012, 1-4). “Sexual violence includes a continuum of behaviors such as attempted or completed rape, sexual coercion, unwanted contact, and non-contact unwanted experiences like harassment” (Dills, Fowler and Payne, 2016). This definition of sexual violence will be used throughout this thesis.

3.1 Rape as a type of sexual violence

Sexual violence has always been part of human history. However, the views on rape evolved throughout history. For instance, neither in ancient history nor in Early Christianity was rape perceived as a crime against the personal integrity of a woman. Yet, rape was perceived as an attack on the honor of the victim's family. The responsibility of getting justice for the victim was laid in the hands of her family. In some societies it was possible to get compensation for sexual violence. The amount paid depended on the social status of the victim as well as the social status of the rapist. For instance, kings and bishops could not be accused of rape. If a priest was accused of rape, he could swear an oath before the altar, that the accusations were not true, and he would be cleared of all the accusations. However, if a nun was raped there would be a greater punishment for her rapist. On the British Isles men were not only punished for having sexual intercourse with a nun but also for other acts of sexual violence, for example touching the nun's breasts. In Early Feudal society rape was a way men ensured a better position in society for themselves. Capturing heiress and having sexual intercourse with her whether with or without her consent ensured that that the woman had to marry her captor, and he then gained all of her wealth. The change in the perception of rape came only in the 20th century, when sexual intercourse stopped being perceived as a duty that a woman had to perform while she was married (Kovář et al. 2008, 11-14).

The word “rape” comes from a Latin word “rapere” which means to steal, to seize or to capture (Kovář et al. 2008). Sexual violence is a crime that occurs across race, gender, religion, age and within all socioeconomic groups (Hayes 2023, 4). Rape is the action/behavior, and rape culture is the infrastructure that allows rape to happen with relative impunity (Hayes 2023, 8). In societies, where rape is perceived as a crime, it is typically

connected with power and violence. However, there are a lot of cases of victim blaming due to the sexual aspect of the crime (Hayes 2023, 8).

3.2 Rape and the legal system

“The people in power are the ones who get to write the laws and in patriarchy, it is men, particularly cis-het white men due to colonization” (Hayes 2023, 93). The decision of survivors to report the crime and the experience if going through the legal system is shaped by rape culture. Law enforcements adhering to rape myths, victim blaming, sexual objectification of women and non-gender bodies, policing of women's sexuality including trans women and other LGB bodies, support of male entitlement all part of the rape culture undercutting the legal system. Factors like these are the reason for trivialization of rape as well as denial of widespread rape cases. Therefore, it is common for survivors not to receive justice. (Hayes 2023, 93).

The history of rape laws shows hetero-patriarchal aspects of rape culture. United Kingdom laws relating to rape viewed women as property it also ignored men as potential victims. In the USA rape was defined as a theft of property of a man. Many of the global laws still share some connection to the UK. In the past 40 years there have been some progress regarding rape laws. In the USA laws were changed to be gender neutral which includes men and gender fluid people as potential victims (Hayes 2023, 93-94). Even, in developed countries up to 84% cases are not reported and official rape rates are likely to be underestimated (Chon and Clifford 2020, 244-261).

The feminist movements in several of the Western countries in the 1970s wanted to alter the traditional rape laws. As a result, there has been inclusion of a wider range of sexual assaults in the legal definition of rape. In comparison to Western and developed countries there have been no rape law reforms in many of the developing countries. In countries where rape law reforms have not occurred victims are more likely to be reluctant when reporting rape crimes. In these countries rape survivors also received negative social reactions. Important aspect of the rape law reforms was that marital rape became recognized as criminally punishable. However, in some countries sexual violence committed against spouse is still legal or not charged. That includes the Czech Republic, Japan and others. In the UK 45% of all rapes were committed by victim's partners. In many national laws male victims are not recognized in definition of rape. In 79 countries sexual violence against men is viewed as “sodomy”. Due to rape law reforms in some Western countries protections for

victims were established to encourage them and others to report rape crimes (Chon and Clifford 2020, 244-261).

3.3 Rapists and victims

Rapists can be divided into two categories; those that the victims know and those that they do not. Some statistics divide rapists that the victims know into further categories for example; a spouse, a neighbor, a partner and others. Stermac et al. (1998) distinguishes rapists that the victims know into those; known to them for less than 24 hours, more than 24 hours and intimate partners, including spouses. The category of rapists known to the victim is a broad one, including for example acquaintances and long-term friendships.

Motives and experiences of victims and rapists are understood as components of specific relationship, which has its dynamic and goes through specific stages. These stages differ based on several factors. Some of the factors are; if the victim knew the rapist, whether the victims depend on their rapist, the nature of the violence, whether there were any injuries, if the victim reported it and if there was an investigation (Kovář et al. 2008, 106-7).

3.4 Rapist status in Western Culture

In western scholarly debates, rape is viewed as a male trait that is typical in all time periods and cultures. Thornhill and Palmer (2000) argue there is positive evolutionary value to male dominance and violence. They view them as factors that contribute to reproductive success. Susan Brownmiller (1975) challenged the idea of rape as natural given by stating that rape is an act of power and domination. In Scully's (1990) study of sexual violence rape is perceived as learned behavior within a patriarchal culture. The result of her study concluded that rapists in comparison to other felons are the ones to more likely believe in double standard when it comes to social roles. Rapists are also more likely to identify with the traditional male role.

Western societies believe social continuity and stability depend on strong male authoritarian sex-based presence. Thornhill and Palmer (2000) argued that paternal absence is believed to produce rape-proneness. However, Lisak and Roth (1990) study of western rapists, study on fraternity rape by Sanday (1990) as well as Lefkowitz (1997) account of rape in New Jersey in 1989 indicate that men who grew up with a father can develop rape-proneness as those who grew up fatherless. Sanday's study (1990) shows the difficulty of

mother-son relationships in the west and the need for separating from the mother which might be expressed through humiliating and abusing women (Franke 2002, 599-606).

3.5 Victim Identity

Victimhood is often used to describe the fact that someone has experienced direct or indirect harm that was caused either intentionally or unintentionally. Attributes associated with the state of victimhood that result from the harm experienced are physical and psychological suffering, vulnerability, weakness, distress, discouragement as well as helplessness (Meredith 2009, 260). These attributes suggest that victims have medical, psychological, material and financial needs as a result from the harm they experienced but are often unable to meet them on their own. One of the aspects of the state of victimhood is that the victims often feel irresponsible for what has happened to them therefore being innocent while the offender is considered responsible and guilty (Meredith 2009, 260). Historically, discourses around sexual victimization mostly highlighted experiences of white girls and women. Studies show that men and women of color are less likely to get attention and sympathy and are often blamed by juries and media. While both men and women can be victims of child sexual abuse, not all victims are treated the same by society (O'Reilly and Lester 2016, 167-168). Gender stereotypes and sexual scripts are powerful because they not only justify and normalize acts of sexual violence, but they also affect how the harmed person makes sense of their experiences and identities (Boyle and Rogers 2020, 324-325).

When the word “victim” is used as a noun it refers to an identity or status. It is used by people affected by a crime or an accident to describe themselves or others. The term can also involve interests such as gaining social recognition, seeking justice, influence public opinion or to emphasize the guilt of the offenders. The harmed person can either accept the victim status or reject it as the status of a victim can have different implications, depending on who is using it, claiming it, rejecting it or attributing it to others (Meredith 2009, 260). Therefore, it is essential that the term is used carefully because its negative connotations could have a negative impact on the person it concerns. Recognizing identity projected by a person is an act of respect for that person's dignity (Meredith 2009, 260).

When it comes to someone who has experienced sexual violence in their life, the terms “victim” and “survivor” are often used. Discussions have been led about which of those two terms is more appropriate because the term “survivor” denotes strength, and the term “victim” projects weakness. This was the reason why the criminologists working within the feminist

movement preferred to use “survivor” instead. Another factor that is being considered is that not everyone who experienced sexual violence survived it. Therefore, this would exclude people who did not survive from the conversation Hayes (2023, 3) suggests that using “victim” instead of “survivor” acknowledges the harm and traumatic experience that often follow after a person experiences any form of sexual violence.

Studies show that for some victims acknowledging themselves as victims of sexual violence can in certain ways have positive effect on their recovery process, while other studies suggest negative effects of acknowledgment on mental health. Boyle and Rogers (2020) argue that mental health outcomes not only arise from labeling an assault “rape” but also from identification as a “victim” and or “survivor” (Boyle and Rogers 2020, 324). The interactions with other identities like race, gender also matter. When harmed people identify themselves as survivors it can help reduce distress due to the empowering nature and positive social value of the word. Movements like #MeeToo cast light on individuals who have not yet thought of identifying themselves as victims or survivors.

4 SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health disorder which affects individuals who were exposed to a life-threatening or other extremely stressful event (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health UK 2005, 5). Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless (Herman 2015, 33). Traumatic events often overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that gives individuals a sense of control, connection as well as meaning. Traumatic experiences overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life. They involve threats to life, bodily integrity or encounter with death and violence. Victims experiencing these events feel helplessness and terror. When resistance or escape is not possible for the victim, their human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed as well as disorganized. These events lead to profound and lasting changes in emotion, cognition and memory. The victim might either be experiencing intense emotions but without clear memory of the traumatic event or they might remember the event to every detail but without emotion. The victim might often feel alertness and irritability without knowing why they feel this way. After the victim experiences traumatic event their human system of self-preservation goes onto alert, in case the danger returns (Herman 2015, 33-35).

Both men and women can be victims of child sexual abuse. However, not all victims are treated the same by society (O'Reilly and Lester 2016, 167-168). When people experience sexual abuse in their childhood, it can have impact on their well-being and mental health in their adult years. Leserman in 2005 pointed out that there is now long-established evidence suggesting that people who were sexually abused as children have increased risk of developing mental health issues, attempting suicide and abusing drugs or alcohol. When a child repeatedly experiences trauma, it forms and deforms their personality. They must find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are unworthy, safety in situation that is unsafe, control in situation that is terrifyingly unpredictable, power in a situation of helplessness (Herman 2015, 96-110). While the child is not able to protect or take care of themselves, they have to compensate for the failure of an adult to protect them and take care for them with the only means that are at the time at their disposal, a not yet matured system of psychological defenses. This environment forces the child to develop extraordinary capacities, both creative and destructive. Many victims of child abuse believe that growing up will bring them escape and freedom; however, the victim's personality developed in an environment of control and the victim might not adapt well to adult life. They often experience problems with trust, independence and initiative. Herman (2015) described that

when the child grows, they are still prisoners of their childhood and while trying to build a new life for themselves, they often reencounter their trauma (Herman 2015, 96-110).

II ANALYTICAL PART

5 METHODOLOGY

To analyze the discourses of victims of sexual violence, rape in particular, a critical approach was adopted (Van Dijk 1993, van Leeuwen 2003, Fairclough 2013) to describe power relations and to explore how the victims use discourse strategies and how social actors are represented in the interviews.

A total of three interviews with rape victims were selected for the analysis from the YouTube channel Soft White Underbelly run by Mark Laita. These were the interviews with two men and one woman identified as Seth Gehle (from 4.9. 2024), Lisa (from 25.5. 2023), and Grant (from 17.5. 2023). The three interviews represent three different cases of childhood molestation and rape; Seth was raped by multiple men in his childhood; Lisa was raped by her mother's pedophile lover; and Grant was raped by his mother.

The main focus of the analysis was on how the victims talked about the abuse. I focus on how the interviewees talk about their traumatic experiences by analyzing the linguistic features such as lexicalization, metaphor and figurative language as well as euphemisms used by the speakers when talking about the abuse, abuser and the events that the victims went through. Further focus is on how the victims use discourse strategies and how social actors are represented in the interviews.

6 REPRESENTATION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND IDENTITIES IN RAPE VICTIM INTERVIEWS

I analyze three interviews with victims of childhood sexual abuse. All of the three victims were sexually abused by a rapist/rapists prior known to them. Seth was abused by his friend Mondo; Lisa was abused by her mother's boyfriends and Grant was abused by his mother. All three victims were abused more than one time by different abusers. When it comes to talking about their identity, Lisa is the only survivor out of the three who accepts a victim status. Grant described that he does not see himself as a victim anymore because he worked through his trauma. Seth avoided talking about his identity completely in this regard. Additionally, the victims approached talking about the abuse in different ways. Seth was very descriptive when talking about the abuse going into details. Lisa avoided talking about the abuse and Grant focused more on how the abuse affected his mental health. Below I will look into the victim's image of themselves, their image of the abuser and their perception of events in more detail.

6.1 Seth

Seth's interview begins with him describing how he grew up in a small city in Ohio. Growing up he had two sisters and his mom had all three kids before the age of twenty.

6.1.1 Seth's image of himself

Describing himself around the age of his trauma, Seth focuses primarily on his own fragility. For example, he uses the word “*little*” (22 times) in such combinations as “*little boy*” or “*little kid*”, and “*small*”, as opposed to “*older/bigger kids*” or “*dude*” referring to his abuser. For example:

I had a tendency to hang out with older kids or bigger kids so that they could [...]
(11:21)

these other these older kids because they would always protect me I was very small a very small kid [...] (11:46)

Seth uses adjectives “*small*” (with intensifier “*very*”) to oppose himself to “*bigger kids*” which implies that he saw himself as fragile and in need for protection. His need for protection is most likely connected to his first experience with sexual abuse. He mentions:

[...] little boy who was 10 years old 11 years old and at the time I had real long hair I had real long brown hair down to my shoulders and truthfully I did look like a little girl (26:09-15)

Seth continues to use the adjective “*little*” to describe himself, focusing on feminine features at the age of 10-11. Seth implies that his abuser liked him for his looks. As another reason for him being abused, Seth seems to consider the lack of fatherly love and affection;

when you're a little boy like your Father's Love and Affection is something that is just so special and I never had that (27:18)

Apart from focusing again on his age and physique (adjective “*little*”), Seth mentions how he lacked love and affection from his father. He uses this as a reason why he started to cling on to his second abuser as he explained later in the interview.

When talking about the instances of abuse, Seth uses illeisms (talking about himself in 3rd person);

uh his nail was gone and um so that's like the kind of gentleman that he was right to sh get rid of his nails so that he could uh use them on this little boy use his fingers on this little boy (46:58)

Research has shown that third-person self-talk facilitates regulation of emotions especially when reflecting on negative memories. Seth here describes his abuser sarcastically as a gentleman enough to cut his nails before the act of molestation. Yet, the memory seems so powerful, that Seth keeps referring to himself as “*this little boy*”, distancing himself as a form of self-control.

Seth keeps referring to his age (adjective “*little*”). He refers to himself as a “*little kid*” in contrast to calling Mondo “*dude*” and “*man*” pointing out the age differences between him and his abuser.

this guy on the [...] phone I'm like I'm like dude like what the [...] is wrong with you man like I'm [...] a little [...] kid bro like leave me alone (53:32)

Seth was scared that society would label him as “*gay*” if he reported that he was being abused by a man which is an identity that he rejects. There is also implication made by Seth that society would think he was having sexual intercourse with his abuser voluntarily.

people are going to think I'm gay they're going to think I'm having sex with this man they're going to think all these like weird [...] things about me (1:02:58)

There were parts of the interview where Seth questioned his role in the abuse.

I froze which basically gives them consent because if I did not fight it off (28:44)

However, by reporting his abuser Seth's perception changed and he began to understand that he was a victim.

about a month after reported him maybe a month or two I hear that he accepted a plea deal (1:17:19-25)

Towards the end of the interview, it is clear that Seth now views himself as a survivor. He feels empowered after reporting his abuser and for no longer blaming himself for the abuse. When talking about himself Seth often used face-keeping strategies. For example, positive self-representation “*I thought he loved me*” by saying this he explained that at first, he did not understand that he was being abuse, “*I froze*” is used to explain why he didn't stand up to his abuser. However, when talking about Mondo he frequently used negative other-representation. For example, Seth's sarcastic description of Mondo “*that is the kind of gentleman he was*”.

6.1.2 The image of abuser in Seth's perception

Seth talked about the identity of his second abuser the longest (approximately 30 minutes). He mostly focused on his abuser's appearance. For example, he used the adjective “*big*” (22 times) in combinations with “*big hands*” or “*big teddy bear*”.

Seth recalls the appearance of his first abuser (adjectives “*grown*”, “*different*”) which contrasts with him pointing out how old he was at the time of the event to point out the age difference between them.

He mentions:

I remember he looked like a grown man I I was 5 years old and so he just looked so much different than me (5:10)

Seth used specification (“*teenage son*”) to further describe his first abuser. However, he avoided using nomination which indicates his detachment from the abuser and the traumatic event. Seth doesn't avoid using a proper term (“*molested*”) for the event and uses passivation (“*had molested me*”) to describe it.

you know their teenage son had had had molested me um multiple times (6:13)

When talking about his second abuser Seth avoided using nomination. Another adjective Seth used to describe his abuser was “*massive*” which he used (5 times) mostly in combinations “*massive hands*”, “*he's massive*”.

For example:

this man walks in the front door and this guy's 65 380 lbs he's massive and he looks uh very pale but you can tell he's Hispanic (18:35-44)

Seth further focuses on the abuser's appearance (adjective “*thick*”). By stating he looked like “he could throw a hard punch” it paints the abuser as rough and masculine in Seth's perception.

he looks like he could throw a Hard Punch he looks very just like thick (18:57-19:03)

Seth continued to talk about his abuser's appearance using simile (“*like a big pillow*”, “*like a big teddy bear*”). In contrast to previous section, here he paints the abuser as innocent looking.

he was so big he he was like a big pillow like a big teddy bear (27:06)

Seth described how everybody perceived his abuser in a positive way in comparison to how Seth knew who he really was behind the closed doors. In this section Seth only referred to his abuser using third person pronoun (“he”), avoiding using nomination completely.

Seth described people's perception of his abuser as:

everybody loved him he was in the community and he was a good friend he was funny all of the things and then behind closed doors he's doing these horrendous things to me (44:54-45:01)

Seth used nomination when referring to his abuser (“*Mondo*”). Despite being abused Seth chose to refer to him as “*my friend*”. Seth felt like he needed to clarify who Mondo was to him a “*friend*”, because he was aware it was not normal for a grown man to be spending time alone with a child.

I want Togo hang out with my friend Mondo and my grandma's like well who's Mondo [...] he's not like that he's not weird he's not you know he's not crazy and I tell her (56:53-57:07)

When talking about his abuser Seth used nomination (“*Mondo*”) 24 times, third-person pronoun (“*he*”) more than 60 times, “*guy*” 10 times, “*dude*” 2 times.

Seth referred to his abuser using nomination when introducing him to other people (his grandmother). When describing events that did not involve abuse (“*Mondo showed up to my grandparents’ house*”), (“*I was going to Mondo's house every weekend*”). However, when Seth describes the abuse, he avoids nomination and refers to his abuser in third person pronoun (“*he starts to rape me*”).

6.1.3 Seth's perception of the events

Seth began to describe his first experience with being sexually abused. Seth chose to use the phrasal verb “took me up” which indicates force. When describing the events of abuse Seth in most cases avoided nomination and referred to his abuser/abusers using third person pronoun. For example:

he took me up to the top bunk and he would uh expose himself to me (4:51)

Seth kept referring to his abuser in third person pronoun. He described the events as “*I would touch him*” but corrected himself “*he'd make me touch him*” which for Seth was an important distinction. By choosing to say “*he'd make me touch him*” Seth is indicating his lack of power in that situation and that it was not consensual.

He would touch me and I would TCH he'd make me touch him and he was well into his teen years and so that happened a few times (5:22-29)

When talking about the traumatic events in some cases Seth avoided using proper terms for the sexual abuse and used euphemisms instead (“*that kind of stuff*”). When talking about his emotional states during the abuse Seth often used metaphors to describe it (“*reptilian mindset*”). Seth described:

when you're a child going through that kind of stuff your brain kind of goes into like this like almost reptilian mindset (6:19-33)

Seth struggled with self-blame which was connected to him not standing up to his abuser. While describing the events he often used adjectives connected to feelings (“*terrified*”).

[...] you don't know what to do you're terrified [...] you don't do anything you just sit there (30:32-44)

Seth was aware that his abuser was manipulating him. As previously mentioned, Seth avoided using nomination in moments where he talked about the abuse and referred to his abuser using a third person pronoun (“he”). Seth continued to use euphemisms to describe the abuse (“*love him*”, “*get in bed with him*”).

[...] it was to get my attention [...] I would get in bed with him he he would basically you know he wanted me to love him and get in bed with him (37:39-51)

Research shows that victims of sexual abuse closely monitor and analyze behavior of their abusers. That is to deal with the unpredictable nature of violence. The “banging on the wall” became a warning sign for Seth. He continued to describe his feelings during the abuse using metaphors (“*being called to hell*”, “*the dinner bell ringing*”). Seth's looking for warning signs:

[...] I would hear that that banging on the wall I it was almost like being called to hell or like the dinner bell ringing (38:08-14)

Further metaphors used by Seth to describe his emotional state during the abuse:

I knew my time was coming [...] my stomach would just drop and I'm just thinking like you got to like go pay your dues you got to go like pay the taxes[...] (38:20-32)

In the following section Seth metaphorically (“*feed the beast*”) explained his reasons for not standing up to his abuser. It is common for victims of abuse to form strategies that help them go through the traumatic events. In Seth's perception:

[...] at some point it became easier for me to just feed the beast than to then to hold them off and try to try to fend him off (38:45-51)

In moments where he felt powerless and lacking control Seth used passivation to express it (“*I was frozen*”)

[...] it just made my skin crawl [...] I would just freeze I just was frozen I just didn't want to move (41:33-45)

Seth again described how he was looking for warning signs and monitoring his abuser's behavior.

He was pounding on the wall [...] I know it's coming like I know it's going to happen [...] this time though he was sitting up which was he was never sitting up he was always laying down [...] (59:38-46)

During the interview active verbs were often used to describe the acts of abuse (“*grab*”, “*pull*”). In this case Seth used them to indicate how powerless he was during the events.

[...] he he kind of grabs me and and he kind of pulls me towards him (59:51)

In the last section Seth described the moment he finally reported his abuser to authorities. Which felt empowering to him and he no longer avoided using nomination when referring to his abuser (“*Mondo*”).

I reported him maybe a month or two I hear that he accepted a plea deal they offered him a plea deal they offered Mondo a plea deal he was charged with 11 counts (1:17:25-30)

Seth mostly used active voice when talking about the abuse. Active verbs he used when talking about the abuse; *raped* (2 times), *molested* (4 times), *grabbed* (3 times) and others. He switched to passive voice in situations where he felt powerless and out of control (“*I was touched*”, “*I was frozen*”). Metaphors were used to describe Seth's emotional state during the abuse “*being called to hell*”, “*to feed the beast*”. Seth used adjectives connected to feelings to further describe his emotional states during the abuse; *puzzled*, *frozen*, *terrified*. Seth blamed his abuser for the sexual violence. However, he also blamed his mother for not taking care of him and protecting him.

Seth briefly mentions his mother and grandparents. However, they are mostly excluded when Seth talks about the abuse. At the end of the interview Seth talks about reporting Mondo, the role of the police and other officials is excluded as well. However, Mondo is included in all parts of the interview that refers to the sexual abuse and he is represented as agent, he plays an active role in the abuse. There are cases of appraisal when Seth talks about himself “*I was a kid*”. Activation is used when Seth feels empowered and in control of the situation “*I'm not letting him get away with this*”. Passivation is used when talking about the moments during the abuse where Seth felt powerless “*I froze*”.

6.2 Lisa

Lisa's interview begins with her describing how she grew up in California. She described that her parents looked innocent to other people but she uses the adjective “*dysfunctional*” to describe them. She talks about her mother attempting suicide. Her parents got divorced when she was five years old.

6.2.1 Lisa's image of herself

When talking about herself Lisa mainly focused on describing how she grew up without a father and how she lacked his affection while growing up. Lisa described that she tried to find the affection not provided to her by her father somewhere else which she believed was the reason she easily started to cling on to men in her life including her first abuser John.

I was there alone without a parent I was starving for affection (2:21)

Lisa further described that even though her mother was present in her life, she did not receive affection from her either.

she never gave me a hug or brushed my hair out of my eyes or anything like that (12:50-56)

She again described her lack of affection from her parents.

Rey giving me that nurturing was very special it gave me a sense of what real affection from my parent would look like (13:03-9)

Lisa is the only one out of the three interviewees that accepts a victim status.

I know my siblings are victims as well (10:15)

6.2.2 The image of abuser in Lisa's perception

Lisa began to describe her first experience with sexual violence. She did not use any euphemisms for the sexual abuse and referred to it in proper terms since the beginning of the interview. She also did not avoid using nomination (“*John*”) when referring to her first abuser.

and so the first clear memory I have of being sexually abused was from John (1:47)

In the section below she referred to her abuser using a third person pronoun. She attributed him positive attributes by describing him with adjective “*helpful*”. Lisa described her abuser as:

he was super helpful to my mom [...] (1:55)

Nomination (“*John*”) is used to refer to her abuser. Lisa further labels her abuser as a “*pedophile*” and she is the only interviewee out of the three to do so.

[...] John would come and see me in the evenings and you know pedophiles are always looking for opportunities (2:09-14)

Lisa explained that due to the lack of her father's affection she started to cling on to her abuser that gave her attention. She described her father with adjectives “cold” and “distant” with the intensifier “very” to emphasize.

[...] wouldn't give me affection I asked him for hugs and he was just very cold and distant and uh so John John was there to give me attention (2:27-33)

Lisa used nomination (“Larry”) when referring to her second abuser but avoided going into details regarding the abuse. Lisa's mother blamed her for the end of the relationship with her partner which again highlights the unstable environment that Lisa was brought up in.

Larry says Lisa come in here and proceeded to show me how to bathe him you know in all areas so [...] my mom blamed us kids you know good I'm glad Larry's gone (9:41-55)

Lisa was the only victim out of the three that disclosed the identity of all two of her abusers.

6.2.3 Lisa's perception of the events

Out of the three interviewees Lisa is the only one that avoided describing the details of the abuse and mostly talked about the events that proceeded the abuse.

Like Seth Lisa avoided using nomination when referring to her abuser while describing the abuse and referred to her abuser using third person pronoun. Victims of abuse monitor and analyze their abuser's behavior which is the reason Lisa noticed her abuser's eyes changing, describing them with the adjective “primal”.

[...] he went into a field and it was different in the field than at home and all I remember really is just the the look in his eyes changing to I don't know more primal (2:45-3:00)

Lisa continued to avoid using nomination and kept referring to her abuser in third person pronoun. It is common for abusers to use death threats and even targeting at the victim's family. Lisa described it as:

He says do you love your mom [...] if I say anything about what happened then you know she'll die [...] (3:15-26)

Lisa continued to talk about the abuse this time not avoiding to use proper terms “*molestation*”. She pointed out her dress describing them with the adjective “*little*” which in this case indicated how vulnerable and powerless she was against her abuser.

[...] I start coloring and he starts to proceed to molest me and he has his hands up my my little dress (3:54-59)

Unlike Seth Lisa does not go into detail about her emotional states during the abuse and mostly avoided talking about her feelings during the abuse. However, she metaphorically described the effect it had on her. Lisa's metaphoric description:

[...] the early sexualization and the um the violence the anger you know just rolled downhill and who's at the bottom (10:03-9)

6.3 Grant

Grant's interview begins with him describing how he was sexually abused by his mother.

6.3.1 Grant's image of himself

When talking about himself Grant explained how the sexual abuse from his mother affected his mental health. He mostly focused on his struggles with dissociation and self-blame while also discussing his victim identity. In Grant's perception:

I am learning through through recovering and getting myself whole but the effects [...] what's underneath it it always stays (0:28-39)

Grant began to described metaphorically (“*I was a demon from hell*”) his perception of himself that was affected by him enduring sexual abuse at a young age. It indicates that he felt shame and to certain extend believed he deserved the traumatic events that happened to him. He explained:

I remember thinking in high school and I that that I was a I was a demon from hell put on Earth to be tormented by people [...] and then when I die I was going back to hell (4:06-21)

Grant described how his perception of himself changed with time. He stopped blaming himself for the abuse and shifted the blame towards his abuser. Grant no longer identifies with the victim identity:

I want to clarify too you know where I'm at right now I don't look at myself as a victim I [...] I'm in a much better place but this is her [...] you know it's not my [...] you know (14:44-51)

He explained that he no longer identifies with the victim identity because he now feels good about who he is which is connected to his previous metaphoric description of himself.

I was a victim but I don't see how I'm a victim now I I feel good about who I am (26:46-51)

Grant's perception of himself changes through the interview. First, he perceived himself as a victim of the abuse, feeling shame and self-blame “*I thought I was demon from hell*” which are implications that he believed he deserved to suffer. However, as the interview progressed, he began to identify with survivor identity “*I don't see how I am a victim now*”, “*I feel good about who I am.*”

6.3.2 The image of abuser in Grant's perception

When talking about his abuser Grant mostly focused on describing her mental states. He repeatedly mentioned that he believed she suffered from a mental illness which he interpreted as the reason why she was sexually abusing him. Similar to Seth and Lisa, Grant also monitored and analyzed his abuser's inner states so that he could look for warning signs to predict when would the abuse occur.

He used the adjective “*sadistic*” 2 times in such combinations “*sadistic look*” or “*sadistic pleasure*” to describe his abuser. Another adjective Grant used was “*demented*” with the intensifier “*very*”. He described her as:

[...] and I remember she started to look in her face she started to to change [...] she got this very demented sadistic look in her eyes [...] (7:53-8:06)

Grant believed his abuser took pleasure in abusing him.

[...] and that was her sadistic pleasure in it (24:40-46)

When referring to his abuser Grant used the familiar term “*mom*” 23 times and included the possessive “*my*” 19 times out of those 23. He did not avoid using it even when describing the abuse as opposed to other interviewees who mostly referred to their abuser using third person pronoun when describing the specifics of the abuse.

my mom she started molesting me (1:07)

However, he also used the third person pronoun “*she*” 54 times in combinations such as “*she was*”, “*she started*”, “*she did*”. Grant chose to use the third pronoun mainly in cases where he discussed his mother's emotional states because that was a sensitive subject for him to talk about. For example:

[...] she would dissociate I don't know if she had multiple personalities but she definitely dissociates (13:16-23)

When describing his abuse, he referred to her as “*mom*” (23 times), in third-person pronoun “*she*” (54 times)

6.3.3 Grant's perception of the events

When describing the abuse Grant mainly focused on how it affected him mentally. Similar to other victims Grant was also look for the warning signs which is done by closely monitoring his abuser's behavior to deal with the unpredictable nature of the abuse. He explained:

[...] she got into my bed and my mom she started molesting me [...] I already knew the routine by then (1:07-13)

It is common for victims of abuse to form a coping strategy to help them deal with the traumatic events. The victims often dissociate to detach themselves from their abuser and the abuse. Grant metaphorically described it as:

[...] I would imagine these decks of cards like cement cards just blocking falling and just trying to separate that from uh from me (1:57-2:02)

It is also common for victims of abuse to struggle with body memories and re-experiencing the trauma in their minds. When recalling these traumatic events Grant avoided the use of familial term and referred to his abuser in third person pronoun. For example:

[...] she starts licking it [...] I'd have dreams about that [...] I wake up the side of my face would be wet so that's like the body memory where your body just stores this trauma (9:15-28)

Grant continued to describe his struggles with mental health due to the abuse. When describing his struggles with depression he used superlative (“*worst*”) to emphasize.

the PTSD and the dissociation part of it was I wanted to die so bad so the worst worst depression[...] (3:02-9)

Grant's metaphoric description of dissociation:

[...] it's like you're sitting on your couch in your back your brain watching life happen before your eyes but it's a movie[...] (3:29-34)

For the sexual abuse he used labels “incest” and “torment”.

the place I was at mentally from all the incest and all the torment I went through throughout (4:59)

Example of another label used for the abuse:

[...] I remember experiencing body memories of actually being raped by my mom in like the fifth-grade classroom (6:23-28)

Grant described that the abuse caused him to feel emotionally numb.

that's when the numbness started to kick in I started to get very numb feeling nothing (11:02)

Grant's perception of emotional numbness using simile:

people's happiness started to it just became too much to bear [...] it's just like when you when you're hungry right it's worse when you're hungry next to a restaurant and people are eating really good food you just want it more (11:41-54)

Similar to Seth, Grant also described that during the abuse he is body would react to the abuse by freeze response.

[...] I just I'd freeze bad like I'd I I wouldn't it was it was it was such a bad freeze response (16:16-16:22)

Out of the three interviewees Grant talked about his struggles with mental health the longest. When dealing with the traumatic events Grant struggled with dissociation, body memories and self-blame “*I was demon from hell*” implying that he believed he deserved what happened to him. However, as the interview continued, he stopped blaming himself and started to blame his abuser, describing her as an “*abusive person*”, further describing that she took “*sadistic pleasure*” while sexually abusing him. Grant used implications when describing his abuser's mental state, implying that she suffered with a mental illness “*she might be a psychopath*”. Grant used active voice when describing the sexual abuse “*she chased me*”, “*she licked me*”. However, sometimes he used passive voice to describe situations where he lacked control “*I was molested*”, “*I was touched*”.

In the interview Grant's father is backgrounded, he doesn't disclose almost any information about him. His mother is always included when describing the sexual abuse, she is represented as the agent "*She took sadistic pleasure in it*". When talking about his abuser he often uses nomination "*my mom*" and at times specification "*she got this very demented sadistic look*". When Grant talked about himself there are cases of appraisement "*I am strong*". Activation is being used when Grant talks about how his mother abused him "*She chased me*". Passivation is used when Grant talks about his perception of the abuse "*I was molested*".

6.4 Interpretation of results

Herman (2015) described that victims tend to develop an attachment to their abuser and that they will try to maintain that attachment even at the sacrifice of their own good. That can be seen in Seth's case. He was sexually abused by Mondo for several years and yet for several years, he kept coming back to his house almost every weekend. Despite the abuse, he felt that he was safe and protected whenever he was with Mondo. When describing Mondo in the interview he still attributed him positive characteristics like "*funny*" or "*smart*". However, neither Lisa nor Grant had formed a special attachment to their abusers. Lisa did not interact any further with her abusers nor was she dependent on them during the abuse. Grant was living with both of his parents. However, later in the interview he disclosed that he spoke to his mother only a couple of times in his adult life. In her book, she describes that threats are commonly involved in abuse. Seth feared for his life the last time he was at Mondo's house. However, Mondo in most cases threatened to kill himself, if Seth stopped hanging out with him. In Lisa's case, John threatened Lisa to hurt her mother if she spoke about the abuse. Grant did not receive verbal threats from his mother.

The overwhelming sense of helplessness is a constant presence in the life of a child who is being abused, which was true for all three cases. Herman describes that a child who is being abused often adopts a position of complete surrender. Seth never stood up to Mondo and would never fight back during the abuse and neither would Lisa. Grant was the only one out of the three cases who did fight back trying to get his mother to stop. In the interview, he mentioned that he once even threatened to kill her if she did not stop touching him.

Since the victims are in an environment where there is constant danger present which from them requires a state of constant alertness, they develop the ability to look for warning signs of the abuse. They become well aware of their abuser's inner states. These include

changes in facial expressions, dissociation, anger and others. Seth was very aware when Mondo's mood would change, especially when he got angry or when he heard "*pounding on the wall*". The last night he spent at Mondo's house he described that he felt that the "*mood changed*" which again indicates how aware he was of his inner states. Lisa described how she could tell when John's expression changed as well. She described his look as "*primal*". The same with Grant, where he would describe changes in his mother's expressions describing her looks as "*demented*" or "*sadistic*" he would also recognize when she would "*dissociate*".

Abusers will also interfere into the victim's peer activities; Herman describes it as "jealous surveillance" of social contacts. This was true in Seth's case where Mondo would go to his family events and when Seth tried to hang out with his friend Jacob and his mutuals Mondo would call him threatening to kill himself if he did not show up at his house.

Another point Herman (2015) describes is that the children will believe they are "bad" and that they deserve the abuse in order to preserve meaning, hope, and power. This can be seen in Grant's case where he would compare himself to a "*demon from hell that was put to this earth to be tormented*" indicating that he believed he was evil and deserved to suffer. Seth described during the interview that when Mondo abused him, he metaphorically described it as having to "*pay your taxes*" or "*pay your dues*" not exactly indicating that he thought he deserved it, he thought it was something he had to do in order to preserve, deserve Mondo's protection and him providing him with food and safe place to stay.

Abused children cannot develop an inner sense of safety. Thus, they become dependent on external sources of comfort and solace. Another thing that they cannot develop is a sense of independence so they seek someone that they can depend on. This can be proved by Seth's dependence on Mondo. Multiple times during the interview Seth used the adjective "*big*" or "*massive*" to describe Mondo. He kept coming to his house despite knowing he would be abused. Mondo provided him food, a place to stay, and a feeling that Mondo would protect him from others. Protection and safety that his parents failed to provide. This can also be connected to the fact that Seth was molested before he even met Mondo, hence feeling like he needed to be protected. John was there for Lisa when her mother was working so Lisa she could see John as someone who would keep her safe in her absence. Grant tried to ask his father for help when his mother tried to abuse him once, but he refused to help so Grant his mother was his primary caregiver whom he depended on despite the abuse.

Another tendency of abused children is that they become quickly attached to strangers but also cling to their abusers. Seth started to cling to Mondo almost immediately when he first met him, after spending one weekend at his house, he began to spend all his weekends there. When he started hanging out with Jacob and his other friends, he stopped going to Mondo's house immediately for some time because he started clinging on to his other friends and because he found the feeling of safety and protection someplace else.

Herman also describes that abused children often dissociate and completely disconnect from others. Which again was what happened in Grant's case.

Herman describes that victims of sexual abuse are at risk of repeated victimization. Seth was abused twice in his life by different abusers. Lisa was abused three times also by different abusers. Grant was the only one that was abused only by one abuser, his mother. It is also common for the victims to relive the traumatic experiences in their memories. Seth mentioned multiple times during the interview that he can remember all the sensory feelings from when he was abused to this day. Grant mentioned two times that he relived the abuse at times in his mind, where he for example felt how his mother “*licked the side of his safe*”, the same sensory feelings. (Herman 2015, 95-115)

CONCLUSION

The thesis analyzed interviews with victims of sexual violence through a critical approach. Interviews selected for the analysis were from the YouTube channel “*Soft White Underbelly*” run by Mark Laita. The interviews selected for the analysis were with two men and a woman identified as Seth Gehle, Grant and Lisa respectively. These three interviews with victims of childhood molestation and rape were analyzed with the focus on how the victims chose to talk about the abuse through the lens of their perception of themselves, their abuser, and the events. The linguistic features used by the victims when talking about the traumatic events were interpreted through the prism of power dynamics, discourse strategies, and representation of social actors.

It was established that each of the victims approached talking about the abuse in a different way. When talking about himself, Seth used face-keeping strategies mostly in cases where he described why he did not stand up to his abuser. He often highlighted his fragility by referring to himself as “*small*” or “*little*”. Seth spent the longest time out of the three victims (approximately 30 minutes) talking about his abuser's identity. He mostly referred to his abuser in third-person pronouns especially when he was describing the abuse. He further used nomination a few times mostly in moments when he was talking to other people about his abuser and specification to further describe his abuser's appearance. His understanding of the role of the abuser resulted in the negative-other representation. Seth used metaphors to describe his emotional states during the abuse along with a variety of adjectives connected to feelings when describing the abuse and his feelings during it. Activation is used in moments where Seth feels empowered and passivation is used when Seth described moments in which he felt powerless.

Lisa is the only one out of the three interviewees who identifies herself as a victim. When talking about herself she often mentioned a lack of affection from her father which she understood was the reason why she started to cling on to her first abuser John. Lisa in most cases uses nomination to refer to her abuser. However, she is the only one out of the three who avoids describing the abuse in much detail.

The third victim Grant, unlike Lisa, rejected the victim identity stating that he worked through the trauma and no longer identifies as a victim. When Grant talked about his abuser-mother, he often implied through the description of her feelings that she might have suffered from a mental illness. In addition, when talking about the abuse he mainly focused on the effect it had on his mental health. While at the start of the interview, Grant mentioned the

struggle with self-blame, as the interview progressed, he targeted the blame on his abuser. Similarly to Seth, Grant used activation when describing how his mother abused him and passivation to describe situations where he lacked control.

This analysis showed the importance of talking about the experiences with sexual violence. The perception of victims of sexual violence has improved in recent years. However, many survivors still feel ashamed for what happened to them and are in many cases afraid to report their abusers because they are afraid of negative social reactions. It was also important to include interviews with men because there is still stigma surrounding male victims.

The main limitation of the thesis is that only three interviews were selected for the analysis which is a sample size too small when talking about such a complex issue as sexual violence. Another limitation is that the interviews were with two men and a woman so interviews with transsexual and non-binary people were not included. Lastly, sexuality, gender or ethnic identity were not considered in the analysis. Further research could include interviews with transsexual men and women as well as non-binary people while also considering how other identities individuals identify with shape their perception and experience with sexual violence.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DA Discourse analysis

CDA Critical discourse analysis

PTSD Post-traumatic stress disorder