

## **“I *am* Raped”**

### **The Raped Subject as Monstrous Other**

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Lynsay Hodges

#### Abstract:

In this paper, I argue that the raped subject is a monstrous other, drawing on Shildrick’s (2002) writing on monstrosity and its vulnerability. If the monster is that which exposes the qualities that the self projects onto its other during its moment of self creation – that is, vulnerability and a lack of fixity and autonomy – then the raped subject is primed to be constructed as monstrous, as they perpetually remind the self that they, too, are vulnerable to inconceivable harm. They instil in the self a sense of ontological insecurity (as per Laing 2010): they threaten the dissolution of that which forms its identity. As such, they must be abjected, kept at a distance using a variety of defence mechanisms, chiefly isolation, projection, and what Laing (ibid.) calls ‘petrification’. However, the monster also invites a sense of intrigue towards it: the self therefore investigates it, scrutinising it under its gaze, all the better to know it and expose its secrets. For to know that which most disgusts and terrifies the self is to exercise power over it, bringing about a sense of pleasure from this examination. The raped subject, then, has the acts perpetrated against them ‘stick’ to them as a stigma, ensuring that the violence remains ever present: “I was not raped, no: I *am* raped”. They are constituted as a thing through petrification or, more extremely, as a not-thing in the case of abjection. As such, the raped subject serves as a case study of the many societal monsters that are required for the current conception of the self to exist.



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*You see it in their eyes, first of all. Whatever light glimmered in them before extinguishes and all you are left with is your own image reflected back at you, hopeful that this time, the response might be different. But it never is. Sometimes it feels like you are making progress. That you are finally beginning to leave it in the past, back where it belongs. But then occasion has it that you feel you should tell someone about it. It is precisely in these moments that you are confronted with a terrifying fact. I was not raped, no: I am raped. There is a key difference here. It ensures that the acts of violence remain ever present, a stigma on the raped subject's sense of self. They can never escape their past. (Hodges)*

The above excerpt of a phenomenological autoethnographic study that I conducted (more on this methodology below) explains the process by which the subject becomes not a survivor of sexual violence, but a *raped subject*: that is, the disclosure of acts of violence against the person leaves an indelible trace of that violence on them, a stickiness of signs and affects that mean they are forever associated with it within the eyes of another (see Ahmed 2014). When this occurs, the rape is ever-present: the individual was not raped, but *is* raped. With such associations adhered to them, their ‘discreditable stigma’ (see Goffman 1968) is fully revealed. They can now be known as none other than this person to whom

terrible acts have occurred, leaving invisible yet still perceptible scars upon them. They are marred by these and yet they cannot remove them.<sup>1</sup>

I have written elsewhere on how the raped subject is an abject being to themselves (Hodges forthcoming). Here, I also briefly mentioned the ways in which they are rendered monstrous in the eyes of others. As I write:

Abjection of the subject does not exist solely in their own eyes. As Margrit Shildrick demonstrates, that which is deemed abject or monstrous is that which exposes the vulnerability of an enclosed, individualised and autonomous self... The monster threatens precisely because of its vulnerability to harm, as it is this vulnerability that demonstrates to the monster's interlocutor that they, too, are vulnerable. The rape victim/survivor, then, becomes a monster within society. Whether seen through the eyes of pity or disgust... they are abjected by others just as much as by themselves. (Hodges forthcoming)

It is this brief aside in that essay that I wish to expound on more fully here. This paper therefore explores the ways in which the raped subject is constituted as a monstrous Other. As we shall see, though, the very fact of their monstrosity is predicated on the fact that they constantly threaten to escape their confinement into the role of Other (Shildrick 2002). As such, the boundaries between Self/Other, inside/outside, pure/impure, normal/abnormal *et cetera* break down, as the monster is revealed to be that which is abjected in order to construct ourselves as Selves, but whose presence continues to threaten (Shildrick 2002; Kristeva 1982). This construction, therefore, is inherently fragile. As such, the ontological security that is usually experienced by the Self becomes challenged, as the monstrous being threatens to engulf it, taking it in and challenging its notions of inviolability and autonomy (Laing 2010, 44; Shildrick 2002, 51). In these respects, then, the raped subject is just one of many monstrous subjects whose precarious Otherness are used to construct the notion of the Self, despite the fact that this reliance constantly

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<sup>1</sup> This is why I prefer to use the term 'raped subject' throughout, instead of victim or survivor: it is more honest in how the subject is treated by others and how their subjectivity is therefore constructed for them by these others.

threatens to destroy that which it creates. As such, the Self must reject, *abject* the raped subject, using isolation, projection, and what Laing (2010, 47) describes as 'petrification' in order to constitute them as a thing, an object of the Self's experience, as opposed to a subject in their own right.

Therefore, throughout this paper I shall take the reader on a journey of first understanding the concept of monstrosity and abjection. I then detail the ways in which this is psychologically dealt with by the Self when encountering a monstrous Other. Once this abstract discussion has taken place, I explain how this applies societally due to a variety of power structures. I then bring in the raped subject and explain how and why they are monstrous. Finally, I deal with the manner in which the raped subject is treated because of their monstrosity. However, it should be noted that this can be more widely applied to a variety of monstrous Others, as there is commonality in these methods, and so will be of use to scholars in areas outside of sexual violence research. In total, however, this paper aims to be an intervention into this aforementioned field, to further detail the frankly atrocious ways in which raped subjects are Othered and therefore treated with disregard and contempt.

However, before we begin to go further into how this all operates, it is prudent to first outline the methodological underpinnings of this paper.

### **Methodology: Phenomenological Autoethnography**

As briefly mentioned above, the methodological underpinnings of this paper is something that I call 'phenomenological autoethnography'. But what *is* this perhaps peculiar sounding method?

Key to this is first an understanding of what both phenomenology and autoethnography seek to do. What binds these two traditions together is the emphasis on lived experience. As Henry S. Rubin writes, "phenomenology attempted to account for essences and experience as the derivatives of embodied subjectivity rather than as external discursive forces" (1998, 267). As such, instead

of looking outwards into structures of meaning, traditional phenomenology attempted understanding from the perspective of being-in-the-world. This embodied approach necessarily implies lived experience, even if an attempt at bracketing (as in the Husserlian approach) is made. However, as Rubin goes on to note, this separation from wider structures of power is only possible if these do not constantly impinge on the subject – a rare occurrence indeed. As such, a more critical or perhaps post-phenomenological approach is aware of these and their effects on the body's being-in-the-world and its experiences of human phenomena such as cognition, perception, embodiment and affect/emotion (for an exemplary account of the latter, see Ahmed 2014). Structural relations are therefore considered in the same breath as an individual's experience, as these are wedded together.

As such, “a phenomenological method can return legitimacy to the knowledges generated by the experiencing “I””, and it “works to return agency to us as subjects and to return authority to our narratives” (Rubin 1998, 267; 271). Lived experience of the world, which includes lived experience of power and oppression, is given primacy in this kind of phenomenological research. This has serious crossovers with autoethnography, which “[u]ses deep and careful self-reflection – typically referred to as “reflexivity” – to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political” (Adams et al. 2015, 2). Indeed, in feminist research such as my own, reflexivity such as this is not a luxury but should, in fact, be mandatory: as Liz Kelly notes, “[u]nlike non-feminists, we do not choose reflexivity as one research practice amongst many; it is integral to a feminist approach to research” (1988, 5). This is a recognition that subjectivity always bears upon our research and must be accounted for. Both methods of phenomenology and autoethnography, then, can seek to situate the feminist researcher within their society and analyse their experiences in such a way as to create rigorous, academic data that far exceeds the notion of ‘mere’ journal keeping that can sometimes tar both methods.

The method for this particular paper is simple. It is drawn from a wider project in which I wrote a plethora of vignettes on my lived experience as a raped subject. Whilst that particular project was largely more focused on affective experiences, and much of it forms my other work (Hodges forthcoming), I maintained an awareness of wider culture. After all, without a wider culture that is structured by various forms of oppression, I would not have been raped in the first place. It was from two vignettes in particular that the kernel of this project at hand was borne: from the found awareness, already stated above, that the rape remains constant ("*I am raped*") and from the understandings of abjection of the raped subject.

I have attended previously to the feelings of self-abjection that raped subjects experience (Hodges forthcoming). Needless to say, the experience of sexual violence deeply changes the subject's relationship with themselves. Indeed, there is a plethora of research into the ways the raped subject experiences themselves and their relationship to what happened to them: stand-out examples also written from the first-person perspective of lived experience are the works of both Karyn L. Freedman (2014) and Susan J. Brison (2002). Liz Kelly (1988) also surveys 60 women in their experiences of a 'continuum' of sexual violence, including acts such as flashing, domestic violence, rape or 'forced sex', and incest. Some of my own conclusions on the self-abjection of the raped subject have also been demonstrated in other research, such as that of Bülent Diken and Carsten Laustsen, who also come to the conclusion that "the rape victim often perceives herself as an abject, as a 'dirty', morally inferior person. The penetration inflicts on her body and her self a mark, a stigma, which cannot be effaced" (2005, 113). As such, I do not wish to attend to the individual's psychology here as it has been covered in more detail elsewhere by both myself and others.

Instead, the focus of this essay is the further enunciation of how the raped subject is marked as and formed into a monstrous Other, as was also revealed by

my autoethnographic writings. As mentioned, key to this was the recognition, borne from introspection on a number of my own experiences and contrasting that to wider culture, that the rape remains forever ‘stuck’ (see Ahmed 2014) to the raped subject as a stigma and therefore something to be treated with disdain. Additionally revealed was the fact that the rape of the subject is a constant reminder to others, too, that they are vulnerable to potentially irreparable harm. This vulnerability is central to the conception of monstrosity used in this essay. It is to this that we can now turn.

### **Monstrosity: A Definition**

Before I can more fully explore the points revealed in the introduction above, we must first come to an understanding of what monstrosity actually *is*. To do this, I will be drawing primarily from the work of Margrit Shildrick (2002) in her book *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self*. As the title to this book reveals, key to the understanding of monstrosity is a corollary understanding of vulnerability. As Shildrick writes, vulnerability “is characterised... as a negative attribute, a failure of self-protection, that opens the self to the potential of harm” (2002, 2). As such, “[t]hose who too readily admit or who succumb to vulnerability are either weak or unfortunate, beset by moral and/or material failure” (71-72). Vulnerability is therefore seen as a characteristic of the Other, who is marginalised on the basis of their ‘failure’ to be free from harm or impurity of some kind. The Self, on the other hand, conceives of itself as pure, inviolable and in constant control, distinct from that which surrounds it and enclosed by the boundaries of the body (but, crucially, is *not* the body itself) (50-51).

This conception of the Self can be threatened, however, by the presence of those Others who expose the disavowed fallacies on which it is predicated: that is, those Others that prove that the Self is not fully autonomous, that its boundaries can be breached, that it is vulnerable to harm and to dirt and to corruption of all kinds,



that embodiment is crucial to its constitution and expression. They must therefore be expelled in order to attempt to establish the Self in the ways it perceives itself as written above. However, "[a]t the very moment of definition, the subject is marked by its excluded other, the absent presence which primary identification must deny, and on which it relies" (Shildrick 2002, 5). The Other therefore cannot be fully expunged, for they are required in order for the Self to create itself in opposition to them. It is this that causes them to be monstrous, for their very existence is a threat to the Self that cannot be fully negated even as they are abjected. As Julia Kristeva writes, "from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master" (1982, 2).

The monster is therefore that which the Self attempts to create as its Other whilst constructing itself via binary oppositions. What the monster contains is all that which is repudiated by the Self during that moment of creation: vulnerability, a lack of fixity in boundaries and identity, an absence of total control, its association with the body (as opposed to being a separateness contained within it). The Self has a disquieting recognition of this fact: the monster "threatens to expose the vulnerability at the heart of the ideal model of body/self" (Shildrick 2002, 54). It therefore must be abjected, kept at a distance, lest its touch becomes contagious and dissolves the differences that the Self so cherishes. Yet a part of it is also fascinating: "it is nonetheless a privileged object of the gaze" (73), that "arouses always the contradictory responses of denial *and* recognition, disgust *and* empathy, exclusion *and* identification" (17). These feelings of disgust are central to the experience of the monstrous as abject, but following on from Rina Arya (2017), I also find the need to point out the centrality of feelings of fear. Because the abjected, monstrous Other so threatens the Self, they are not only to be reviled but also cause feelings of terror. However, because they are such a borderline case – one that triggers both feelings of recognition and rejection – they remain compelling in the face of this.

### **The Threat of Ontological Security**

The monster is therefore that which causes a deeply disturbing existential crisis within the Self. What is of use to describe this process is the concept of ‘ontological insecurity’, as proposed by R.D. Laing (2010) in *The Divided Self*. What I am not interested in is how this is pathologised by Laing in his role as a psychiatrist. Indeed, Laing establishes a binary between secure/insecure that is less useful and accurate than an understanding of the phenomenon as a *spectrum* of experience. What I argue is that, while the Self is usually ontologically secure, when it encounters the monster, it is so deeply threatened that it is triggered into having an episode of ontological *insecurity* until the menace is neutralised.

So, what is ontological insecurity? To understand this, we must first understand its ‘opposite’. As Laing writes:

A man [sic] may have a sense of his presence in the world as a real, alive, whole, and, in a temporal sense, a continuous person. As such, he can live out into the world and meet others: a world and others experienced as equally real, alive, whole, and continuous. Such a basically ontologically secure person will encounter all the hazards of life, social, ethical, spiritual, biological, from a centrally firm sense of his own and other people’s reality and identity. (2010, 39)

To be ontologically insecure, then, is to experience one’s sense of being as somehow unreal, fractured, discontinuous, even ‘dead’. Such an individual constantly feels “precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question” (2010, 42). As Laing states, “[i]t is, of course, inevitable that an individual whose experience of himself is of this order can no more live in a ‘secure’ world than he can be secure ‘in himself’”, so that “the ordinary circumstances of everyday life constitute a continual and deadly threat” (42).

While Laing writes, as stated above, as though there is a marked boundary between ontological security/insecurity such that it constitutes a binary, it is not difficult to posit instances in which individuals who are typically secure in their

selves suddenly experience a deep sense of insecurity. I argue that an encounter with the monstrous triggers such an experience, in that it confronts the conceptions that the Self holds of its own being in such a way as to deeply challenge its sense of identity and control. This results in what Laing calls the threat of 'engulfment', in which the individual's sense of identity and control is profoundly disputed by the threat of relatedness with an Other. When the monster approaches, *encroaches*, it is felt as a potential contaminant, that its own lack of fixed identity and its own vulnerability may become 'catching'.

The Self must therefore defend against such instances. Laing (2010, 44) argues that the typical response to the anxiety of engulfment is isolation. It therefore tries to isolate itself from monstrosity: if it does not come close, if it remains unseen, if it is abjected, it cannot expose the Self to ontological insecurity or, indeed, dissolution.

There is another tactic, however, that can also be used. Laing (2010, 46-47) states that another anxiety experienced by the ontologically insecure is 'petrification'. This inheres from the fact that the individual needs to be constantly reminded of their own personhood. However, to do so is also to risk seeing others as people, and therefore opening oneself up to the possibility of understanding oneself as not a subject but an *object* of another's experience. I do not necessarily believe this is a threat that the monstrous poses to the Self, in that the monstrous is barely recognised as another person. It is this fact — the monster being denied of personhood — that serves as another defence against the ontological insecurity that monstrosity threatens. By denying the subjectivity of the monstrous Other, the Self is preserved as the one that experiences, as opposed to being the one that is experienced. As such, the monster can be contained as something more easily discarded, more readily abjected. Indeed, this process of petrification to the point of abjection can so severely infringe on the other's personhood that they are not even constituted as an object: as Kristeva writes, the abject is "[a] 'something' that

I do not recognize as a thing” (1982, 2, with “only one quality of the object — that of being opposed to *I*” (1).

### Projection

A term that I appropriate from psychoanalysis<sup>2</sup>, projection is described in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* as “a process whereby the subject’s ego disowns unacceptable impulses by attributing them to someone else; the intolerable feelings are then perceived as coming from the other person who, from then on, appears to the subject as a persecutor” (Wright 1992, 352-353). As such, we can argue that a similar process happens here, although it is not desirous impulses that we speak of. Those qualities the monster owns are those that are repressed by the Self in order to construct itself as a Self. These are then projected onto the monster. By placing these conceptions onto the monstrous Other, they are both acknowledged but not integrated into the psyche in order to protect itself. This allows the Self to place the monster at a distance to it, by turning it into a threat to itself.

Projection in psychoanalysis refers to psychic attributes being placed on others that may not be truly based in the other’s reality (for example, selfishness may be projected onto them when this is not characteristic of them). They therefore constitute a phantasy of the other. However, projection in this instance, in the way I use the term here, does accurately describe the reality of the Other as the vulnerability inherent in the monster *is* true, in that all – both Self *and* Other – are vulnerable, embodied, have their agency limited by external factors, and their identity is not self-contained but instead based on relationality with other subjects

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted here that I do not accept many of the basic premises of psychoanalysis, for example the theories of psychosexual development and, in particular, the Oedipal complex. However, there are times when it can be engaged with in a limited capacity to elucidate on certain psychical processes that it has more accurately observed. This, I believe, is one of them, to some degree. I therefore use the term ‘appropriate’ here to more accurately describe my engagement with the tradition: taking what is of use, altering it to fit our purposes, and discarding the rest.

and the world. I therefore argue that my use of the term projection at least partially removes it from the realm of psychoanalysis and instead describes more of a phenomenological process through which characteristics of the subject’s being are accurately perceived but then repressed for the Self and, instead, are cognitively ascribed to the Other, because they are also accurately perceived as existing in them.

### **Society’s Monsters**

So far I have dealt with the phenomenological experiences of the monster. While this gives us some hints to whom society perceives as the monstrous Other, it is absolutely essential to explore this further for two reasons: firstly, because to not do so decontextualises the investigation at hand, rendering it an exercise in abstraction which fails to be of any political or sociological utility; and secondly, because to understand why the raped subject is a monstrous Other, we must have an understanding of this Other’s positioning within society. It is to this point that I now turn.

As Kristeva notes, the “abject and abjection are my safeguards. *The primers of my culture*” (1982, 2, emphasis added). It is important to break down this quote into its two parts. The first refers to those processes that have already been detailed, those through which the monster is abjected in order to protect the Self, because to not do so results in “a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me” (2). The second is revealing. By stating this, Kristeva points to *the centrality of abjection in the formulation of the social*. As she goes on to write, “[t]o be sure, if I am affected by what does not yet appear to me as a thing, *it is because laws, connections, and even structures of meaning govern and condition me*” (10, emphasis added). This therefore demonstrates that what we consider to be abject or monstrous is not a ‘natural’ occurrence but is instead deeply indebted to the socio-cultural.

This is a socio-cultural context that is structured by various power relations and systems of oppression. Indeed, the conceptions of the Self that are fundamental

are also socially constructed, as Shildrick notes, calling them “the ideal of the humanist subject of modernity” (2002, 5). As such, all that is considered the opposite of this is constructed as the monstrous Other that continually threatens the Self, which must be constantly guarded against. So who does Shildrick identify as operating in this role? Basically, all marginalised and oppressed peoples: “[t]hat which is different must be located outside the boundaries of the proper, in [B]lack people, in foreigners, in animals, in the congenitally disabled, and in women” (5). She charts a genealogy of how this is established throughout her book, drawing on a variety of disparate texts such as Aristotle’s writings, medieval teratologies and historical conceptions of motherhood and pregnancy, among many others. Through this, she demonstrates that the ideal subject, the ideal Self, is one that we would recognise as those most privileged in our current society, and that this is constructed through its opposition to those that continue to be maligned. I argue, however, that the list she gives is incomplete: to it, we can add other axes of marginalisation, such as queerness and madness. And, of course, crucial to this essay is, I contend, one more: those who have been sexually violated.

This explanation of the social elements of monstrosity thus reveals that it is not only in the individual encounter with the monstrous that signs are associated with it: in fact, it cannot be just this, because that does not account for the way these signs seem to ‘stick’ to some bodies more than others. I would like to dwell on this point – *stickiness* – more, as I have mentioned it in passing throughout this essay without so far fully enunciating on the process that underlies it. To this, I turn to the work of Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. As she argues, “stickiness depends on histories of contact that have already impressed upon the surface of the object” (2014, 90). It is difficult to tell the origin point of this contact, of what impressed on which first, “because stickiness involves... a chain of events” (91) that become difficult to discern, especially over time. It is not always necessary, however, to detect an origin to describe the stickiness of signs and affects to an

object. What is important is that “signs become sticky through repetition” (91): by the associations being repeated, again and again and again, they build and build until they appear to be ‘natural’ qualities. As such, “[t]he sign is a ‘sticky sign’ as an effect of a history of articulation, which allows the sign to accumulate [affective] value” (92). As such, we can say that monstrosity as a characteristic of the Other becomes stuck to them through the continued repetition of this association as well as others, such as the projection of vulnerability. This comes with affects attached, such as fear and disgust, but also intrigue and pity. The more and more this attribution circulates throughout the ‘affective economies’ that Ahmed (2014) also describes, the more a person – or group of people – becomes associated with it. It is this movement through affective economies that also allows the Self to learn of these monstrous associations before even coming into contact with the Other themselves. As such, they are taught that *this* ‘type’ of person is an embodiment of monstrosity, which then invites them to be treated as such (that is, through abjection and the defence mechanisms described above).

### **The Raped Subject as Monstrous Other**

Rape Crisis England and Wales (2020) reports that 20% of women and 4% of men have experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 16<sup>3</sup>. Additionally, approximately 97,000 rapes, attempted rapes, or assaults by penetration occur every year in England and Wales (2020) – that is, roughly eleven per hour, or one every five-and-a-half minutes. This is an astounding number, illustrative of the prevalence of the experience of being a raped subject.

Additionally, as Linda Martín Alcoff explains, “[f]undamentally, sexual violations occur in the whole human being, body and mind” (2018, 13). As Ann J. Cahill (2001, 3) writes, “it is is a sexually specific act that destroys... the intersubjective, embodied agency and therefore personhood” of the raped subject.

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<sup>3</sup> Information on sexual violence perpetrated against non-binary individuals is unavailable.

This, combined with the research by Diken and Laustsen (2005) on the self-abjecting feelings of the raped subject, shows that we must take seriously the psychological impact of sexual violence on the individual who is forced to undergo it (as I have done elsewhere (Hodges forthcoming)). If the numbers are as large as Rape Crisis states – and there is absolutely no reason to disbelieve these – then there is simply an astonishing amount of individuals going through a considerable degree of trauma and pain relating to their lived experience of rape. As already stated in the methodological section above, this has been covered in detail elsewhere.

This, however, also shows the importance of theorising on the ways in which they are treated in society, as it is surely this that has an effect on how the raped subject feels about themselves and what has happened them – again, lived experience does not exist in a vacuum from its social context but is deeply tied to it. As Alcoff also points out,

*“Sexual violations transform us. Both victims and perpetrators are transformed, as well as their families, friends and social circles. Just the knowledge that such events are real possibilities in one's life, however remote, has an impact even on those who have no direct experience of them.”* (2018, 110) (emphasis added)

This therefore demonstrates that we must pay attention to the ways sexual violence transforms those proximate to it, but who have not experienced it. Enter stage left, then, those that are disclosed to: those that come face-to-face with the raped subject and must recognise the vulnerability inherent in their position. And recognised it is: it then *becomes* ‘them’: they are it and it is they. As I outline in the introduction to this essay, the act socially sticks to the raped subject in the process described above using Ahmed’s (2014) framework, haunting them in a way that cannot be easily exorcised. This constitutes them as perpetually raped, as a *raped subject*. These phantoms both exist because the raped subject is monstrous whilst also being that which constitutes them as such. They are, in a sense, caught in a tautology.



Indeed, this may elucidate further on why Alcoff can describe rape as a form of social death: the raped subject is inherently robbed of their subjectivity outside of that of being raped; they are therefore 'dead' socially, non-existent apart from this fact (2018, 65). This is demonstrated in the 'consequences' of sexual violence on the raped subject that Kelly outlines:

loss of safety, loss of independence or autonomy, loss of control, loss of confidence and self-esteem, loss of memories, loss of status (for migrant women who leave a violent husband this may include loss of residence 'rights'), loss of trust, loss of a positive attitude to sexuality, loss of housing and property, loss of jobs, children and educational opportunities, loss of support networks including relatives and friends, loss of health and, in the most extreme cases, loss of life itself. (1988, 189)

As such, the lives of raped subjects can be completely destroyed by the violence they have experienced in many different ways. This further demonstrates the ways in which they socially 'die': robbed of many parts of psychological self-conception as well as of material resources that would relate to the sense of self and its place in the world, raped subjects become nothing but that: *raped*.

### *Stigma and monstrosity*

But why *does* this rape stick to the subject, as I have stated? In many ways, it constitutes a form of stigma, which Erving Goffman describes as "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance" (1968, 9) due to breaching societal norms. In a social situation, "evidence can arise of his [sic] possessing an attribute that makes him different from others in the category of persons available for him to be, and of a less desirable kind... He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (12). Crucially, "[b]y definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma *is not quite human*" (15, emphasis added). We see here, then, that to be a stigmatised individual is to be monstrous, seen as that which is excluded from being considered a human subject, a Self. This corresponds to what has been described above: the

monstrous Other which the Self constructs itself in opposition to; the petrified creature to protect against ontological insecurity; that which is abjected, which cannot even be properly considered a ‘thing’. Stigmata can therefore be considered the sticky aspects of monstrosity, as well as the markers of social death.

As I have also written elsewhere, the stigma of rape inheres from the fact that “I am revealed in my failure to conform to a specific social rule: *do not get raped*” (Hodges forthcoming). This is the message of a rape culture that promotes victim culpability when discussing the causes of sexual violence, instead of focusing on the fact that people should not be raping others under any circumstances. As such, the raped subject is one who carries the stigmata on their body as the trace proof of their failure to conform to a social rule or norm. It is this, in part, which makes them monstrous.

#### *Abjection and vulnerability*

As was outlined earlier in this paper, a key element of what forms the monster is their vulnerability. To understand the raped subject’s threatening vulnerability, it must be remembered how the Self constructs itself. Again, the Self is *not* the body, but is instead contained by it. This body mediates the Self’s relationship with the world: it serves as the boundary between what is inside (me) and what is outside (not me). Crucial to the Self’s sense of identity, control and autonomy is maintaining this distinction, as that which cannot be crossed because the Self is inviolable.

There are, of course, instances in which this separation can be menaced or nullified. One example that befalls most people would be periods of illness (and it is the reminder of this that the disabled Other threatens the Self with). However, the example I would most like to dwell on here, due to the nature of this paper, is rape. Rape is a complete and total destruction of the Self’s sense of identity and autonomy. To be raped is to have the notion of the Self’s inviolability come

crashing down. It is to be harmed in one of the most horrifying ways imaginable. That which is maintained as outside violently forces its way to the inside. The centre of the Self is annihilated, as it is annihilated in any encounter with the abject as we saw Kristeva (1982, 2) describe above (see also Hodges forthcoming). We can see that it meets Arya's exposition of the abject as that which "encroaches on the boundaries of the self, [operating] as a threat, calling being into question" (2017, 56). Indeed, as I have argued elsewhere, rape is one of the most abject encounters one can possibly experience, to the point that the raped subject's sense of self is altered in the aftermath into something abject itself (Hodges forthcoming). And as the quote from Kelly above shows, there are a variety of losses that a raped subject experiences in the aftermath that is outside of their control, further demonstrating their vulnerability to harm and ill.

Rape is therefore a violent reminder of the body and the Self's vulnerability to harm. However, it does not just remind the raped subject of this. When disclosing the fact that one has been raped, the raped subject is not merely disclosing a stigma (as outlined above), but is also, as the quote from myself in the introduction states, reminding their "interlocutor that they, too, are vulnerable" (Hodges forthcoming). It is also in this sense that they are rendered monstrous: not only are they marked as an Other on the basis of their own vulnerability, their very being serves as a perpetual reckoning for the Self regarding their own violability. As such, their very presence threatens to break down the careful distinctions that the Self puts in place in order to construct and maintain itself.

#### *Object of the gaze and affective reception*

We have therefore seen how the raped subject is a monster in terms of their stigma and their vulnerability. What should now be analysed is the ways in which they are treated as a monster. As the opening to this paper details, the raped subject's image

is forever changed in the eyes of the Self, constantly marred by that which assailed them. They have not been raped, they *are* raped.

The usage of the word ‘image’ above is chosen here purposefully, for it highlights that the raped subject is conceptualised as something which is experienced as the object of the gaze. As I outlined above using quotations from Shildrick (2002), the raped subject as monster is a spectacle for the Self to consume. While they do not wish to touch it (as it is conceived of as contagious), the Self certainly wishes to look upon it, inspect it, examine it.

This investigation of the raped subject is not only conducted with the eyes, however:

They want to know everything. They want the gory details. When? Who? How many times? Was it violent? Did it hurt? Will you report it? Why not? Are you getting counselling? Have you been tested? Who else knows? Can I tell so-and-so? Why not? I need someone I can talk to about this too, you know.

As this additional element of the phenomenological autoethnography reveals, the Self so loves to put to questioning that which it deems is its monstrous Other, all the better to scrutinise it. It is here that there are parallels to the complex web of power and pleasure in the confessions and examinations that Foucault describes:

This [task] produced a twofold effect: an impetus was given to power through its very exercise; an emotion rewarded the overseeing control and carried it further; the intensity of the confession renewed the questioner's curiosity; the pleasure discovered fed back to the power that encircled it. (1981, 44-45)

Yes, the Self does indeed enjoy, with a morbid curiosity, searching for all the intricacies of the monster that lies before it. As Shildrick writes, “they [the monster] may elicit the contradictory responses both of horrified disengagement, and of fascination and recognition” (2002, 73). We must not ignore the affectivity here. Both horrified and intrigued, sickened and enraptured, the Self exercises its power over the abject raped subject, consuming them as one would a text. Perhaps, as an aside, this is why “depictions of rape are a pervasive part of this culture, embedded

in all of its complex media forms, entrenched in the landscape of visual imagery" (Projanksy 2001, 2): the Self is enthralled by that which it abjects in order to create itself as a Self.

Furthermore, in Kelly's study, many women reported issues in the affective way they were received when disclosing. This is where the affective economy that Ahmed (2014) describes when talking about stickiness comes into play: it instructs the interlocutor on the societally 'acceptable' ways to respond to the monstrous disclosure, based on what emotions stick to the signification of the revelation of raped subjectivity. However, while these may be *socially* accepted, they are often found to be unacceptable by the raped subject themselves, in that they are often extremely distressing for them to experience. As Kelly writes, "[m]any women felt that they were treated as victims and that attitudes towards them changes. Responses of horror, anger, pity, disbelief or blame upset many women" (1988, 204), and some people go so far as to have revenge fantasies on their behalf which they loudly express (204). Indeed, I have personally experienced people of all genders having revenge fantasies quite independent of my own thoughts and feelings on the matter, but expressed in such a way as to pull me into them in disquieting ways that centres *their* anger.

We can see how these affects tie in with the gaze and questioning. There is a curiosity involved in receiving the monstrous disclosure, as I have already outlined. But it also provokes other feelings, such as those of pure horror or of pity. These are put upon the raped subject, making it their responsibility to deal with the emotions of the person they are disclosing to, in a form of what Arlie Russell Hochschild (2012) calls 'emotion work', even if that person then reverts to the myths of rape culture to blame the raped subject for their own violation. This emotion work is in fact a form of unpaid labour that is just as tiresome and alienating as other forms of work, and puts the onus of the emotion management of the entire disclosure from both parties squarely onto the raped subject. Furthermore,

these emotions of the person being disclosed to are reflected in their questioning, as well as the dying light in the eyes outlined in the introduction to this piece, tying in with Kelly's note above about the changed perceptions and attitudes towards the raped subject (1988, 204). In all of this, we see the responsibility for how the disclosure is handled is passed onto the raped subject themselves, who is treated as a text to be read and interrogated whilst performing emotion work for the the person being disclosed to as they experience a number of 'stuck' emotions that are indicative of the fact that they find the raped subject to be monstrous: something horrifying yet compelling, something to be pitied whilst also reviled.

*Ontological insecurity and defence mechanisms*

To become the object of this affectively charged scrutiny reveals the 'petrification' process, as enunciated by Laing (2010), that was detailed above: the personhood of the raped subject is absolutely denied, constructing them as a thing or, in extreme cases of abjection, not even a thing. This is to protect the Self from the threat of engulfment by the raped subject's monstrosity. If the process of investigation is not carefully managed, the inherency of vulnerability signified by the raped subject threatens to overwhelm the Self, denying it of the foundational lies that it is based upon: of separateness, inviolability and control.

This also constitutes a form of isolation, yet another defence mechanism, as was also shown above: by marking the raped subject with their stigma, there is a schism between them and the rest of society. They are figuratively isolated from all of the Selves that comprise it, kept at a distance to prevent from their pollution.

Projection, which has also been written upon here, serves as the final measure of protecting against the monstrous raped subject. By projecting vulnerability and other conceived-as-negative qualities onto the raped subject, the Self can then abject them afterwards in a manner that prevents conscious identification with them, which would reveal the Self's own vulnerability. The

repressed elements of the Self can therefore be acknowledged, but only as qualities of that which it is not.

Through these ways, the demarcation between the Self and its monstrous Other can be managed. A complex combination of these three tactics operate when the Self comes into contact with the raped subject. To not do so would reveal that the Self is also vulnerable to being raped, to having its boundaries transgressed, to losing all sense of autonomy and choice.

#### *The threat of further violence*

Finally, there is one area that I shall only touch on briefly, as it is certainly something deserving of further research elsewhere, but is still important to note: the threat of further violence against the raped subject. In Kelly's study, she found that there was "[a] number of instances of men using knowledge of past abuse as a justification for their abusive behaviour" (1988, 201). Men who were disclosed to at some point, men who the raped subject therefore trusted with their monstrous secret, would occasionally go on to then abuse the raped subject and use their previous violation(s) as an excuse for this behaviour. This demonstrates the way in which the monstrous Other is vulnerable in more ways than just emotional and symbolic violence: they may, in fact, be physically and/or sexually attacked because of their status, with further violence done to them by this stigma being used as the justification for this attack. As already mentioned, more research in this area should be conducted: as Kelly (1988) found, much existing research in repeated victimisation came to unsatisfactory conclusions, often revolving around supposed victim culpability and 'learned helplessness', both of which blame the raped subject for their violation. As such, this is something that desperately needs to be handled with a more delicate and, certainly, a more feminist approach.

#### **Conclusion**

This paper has sought to elucidate on the raped subject as a monstrous Other. As I have argued throughout, monsters exist through the Self's construction of itself, in which its vulnerability and other perceived 'negative' characteristics are projected onto the Other. However, this is an unstable process, with the Other constantly threatening to overwhelm the Self, exposing the fallacies on which they are based. The Other is therefore monstrous, a threat to the Self, something to be abjected. Yet they are also that which commands the attention of the gaze, eliciting a sense of interest in them. The raped subject is one of these monsters. Rarely conceived of as a survivor because the rape is ever present, the violence clinging to them is perpetually a stigma. The Self must therefore protect against them using a variety of processes such as isolation, projection and petrification, all the while investigating them, because despite how much they disgust and terrify the Self, the exercise of this power over the monstrous raped subject generates a captivating sense of pleasure. Indeed, this sense of power over the raped subject may lead to them then being violated again by those they disclose to. As the opening to this essay says: "I was not raped, no: I *am* raped". This is what it means to be a monster.



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