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Here be monsters: monster porn and the crisis of masculinity

Rebecca Saunders

Introduction

The animated pornographic subgenre of monster porn (Susanna Paasonen 2018; Rebecca Rebecca Saunders 2019) ostensibly bears out the notion that monsters no longer exist. Exhaustive commodification, the ironies of postmodernity and the triumphant artificiality of digital culture are considered to herald an end to true monstrosity, what monster theorist Fred Botting calls “DisneyGothic” (Botting 2008, 2). The monster is a fundamentally unknowable and dangerously boundary-dwelling creature—“difference made flesh” (Jeremy Cohen 1996, 41)—but everything is known and controlled in an age of digital logic and simulation. Monster porn is a specifically sexual iteration of this contemporary neutering of horror, what games theorist Jaroslav Švelch describes as the way “the logic of information control [. . .] colonizes even the things we fear,” the digital medium “render[ing] monstrosity knowable and objective,” safely “fit[ted] into databases and algorithms” (Jaroslav Švelch 2013, 194–5). The animated pornographic subgenre of monster porn (Susanna Paasonen 2018; Rebecca Saunders 2019) ostensibly bears out the notion that monsters no longer exist. Exhaustive commodification, the ironies of postmodernity and the triumphant artificiality of digital culture are considered to herald an end to true monstrosity, what monster theorist Fred Botting calls “DisneyGothic” (2008, 2). The monster is a fundamentally unknowable and dangerously boundary-dwelling creature—“difference made flesh” (Jeremy Cohen 1996, 41)—but everything is known and controlled in an age of digital logic and simulation. Monster porn is a specifically sexual iteration of this contemporary neutering of horror, what games theorist Jaroslav Švelch describes as the way “the logic of information

control [. . .] colonizes even the things we fear,” the digital medium “render[ing] monstrosity knowable and objective,” safely “fit[t]ed” into databases and algorithms” (Jaroslav Švelch [2013](#), 194–5).

Monster porn markets itself as a thrillingly disturbing outlier of pornographic film media. Its grotesque antagonists ooze pus and ejaculate as they drag their distended genitalia through endless rape scenes and melancholy, apocalyptic landscapes. Its constellation of dedicated websites variously declare: “Think twice before entering this terrible 3D world” (Monster and Demon Sex,); “The most shocking porn you’ve ever seen!” (Monster Sex Sins,); and “Toe-Curling 3D Monster Porn at its Scariest!” (Bad Ass 3D Monsters,) that will make “your hands start to tremble” (Fucked by Monster,). Monster porn also clearly draws on other transgressive visual genres, such as hentai, (body) horror and live action (horror)porn (Steven Jones [2010](#)). Yet, despite its imagery and superlative exclamations of corporeal terror, these sites are more ridiculous and bizarre than genuinely disturbing. The monsters that stagger across the screen do not inspire fear, conjuring instead the well-worn stereotype of the lonely and pathetic, male computer user. User comments on the image board Rule34, for example, where user-generated monster porn also abounds, are representatively casual and jokey. Users invariably respond to images with technical suggestions on aesthetic improvements, the content a conduit for digital animation expertise and wry arousal. Of a school girl screaming as she is fucked to death by giant squid, one user jokes ‘Why this never happens to me? (Rule34 [2020](#), sic). In response to elven princesses gang-raped by hulking, drooling beasts, users remark: “why am I so attracted to [these mutant monsters]?” (Rule34 [2020bb](#)) and “Everything is better with a friend. Especially gangrape since you only get tore up ten times in a row instead of twenty” (Rule34 [2020c](#)). Much of this content circulates on platforms like Tumblr and Patreon, with users commissioning tailored creations from their favourite cartoons and video games and so also constitutes a sanitized economic deployment of the monster (Rebecca

Saunders 2019, 254). The self-conscious ludicrousness of monster porn and its thoroughly unsurprising circulation on mainstream tube sites typifies the insignificance of twenty-first century monsters and bears out Botting's assertion that "[t]here is nothing special about monstrosity in an age of cybernetics" (Botting 2008, 14).

Yet, medieval, Reformation and Gothic monsters served important revelatory functions. Medieval monsters were divine portents (Alix Bovey 2002, 10) and they served a politically useful role in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Historian Catherine J. Kudlick describes how "monstrous metaphors" and "notions of degeneracy, defectiveness [. . .] idiocy and deformity" were appended to expedient Others: "Jews, women, homosexuals [. . .] [and] 'lesser-developed' nations" (Catherine Kudlick and J 2003, 765– 766). In Gothic literature like *Frankenstein* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Hyde and Frankenstein's monster were reflexive creatures that clarified societies' hypocrisies. Jeremy Cohen asserts the revelatory significance of the monster: "[t]he monstrous body is pure culture [. . .] the monster exists only to be read: the monstium is etymologically 'that which reveals', 'that which warns,' a glyph that seeks a hierophant" (Jeremy Cohen 1996, 38). This ability of the monster to clarify a society's workings derives from its fundamental status as Other. Whether on the edges of medieval maps, as freakish attractions in eighteenth century fairs and coffee-houses (Katharine and Park and Lorraine Daston 1981, 34) or lurking in the urban or foreign shadows of Gothic literature, monsters are necessarily marginal entities. Their coevally prohibitive and illuminating functions depend on their excluded status. Where monsters speak of a society's hypocrisies, hierarchies and fears, they do so precisely from the outside, their elucidation dependent on their expulsion. This prohibitive and marginal status is significantly tied to the monster's sexualness, an aspect clearly foregrounded in monster porn. Its sexuality is historically conceptualised as dangerously excessive and uncivilised, Cohen describing the monster as "transgressive, too sexual,

perversely erotic, a lawbreaker [. . .] embod[ying] those sexual practices that must not be committed, or that may be committed only through the body of the monster” (Jeremy Cohen 1996, 47, 49). Monster porn is therefore contradictory, emphasising at once, the monster’s sexual otherness and the content’s cultural and economic normalcy. How can this paradox of sexual otherness and cultural normalcy be understood? Where the revelatory function of the monster has derived from its definitively outsider status, what can these now quotidian figures reveal? Of what do these pornographic monsters warn, if anything? The culturally illuminating role of the monster is paralleled in this pornography by the symbolism of its animated form. Animation is a reciprocal medium, drawing necessarily on other well-established narratives and iconographies to construct its meaning so that, like the monster, animation speaks to the culture from which it is formed. Animation theorists Terrance Lindvall and Matthew Melton describe animation’s need to “allud[e] to other texts and contexts beyond itself” in order to “establish a common ground for communication” (Terry Lindvall and Matthew Melton 1997, 204–5) with animated representations of forms, feelings and behaviours necessarily knowable and familiar. That animation therefore constitutes a “cartoonic complex of signs” and “[cultural] discourse” (Lindvall et al. 1997, 204–5, 209) endows computergenerated pornography with a particular signifying power. Drawing heavily on the cinematographic and affective traditions of heteronormative, live- action pornography, itself a hyperbolic expression of patriarchal sexual culture, monster porn therefore constitutes a condensed, symbolic representation of contemporary sexual mores. Just as Vivian Sobchack describes animation as producing a “directed and intensified scrutiny”, a “heightened and hyperbolic form of judgmental attention” (Vivian Sobchack 2006, 179), so these metaphorically potent animated creatures, in writing large the sexual significance of the monster, draws our attention to twenty-first century conceptualisations of and anxieties around heteronormative, male sexuality. This article considers how monster porn’s

representations of masculinity problematise the theoretical premise that postmodernity and digitality have attenuated meaningful monstrosity. This pornographic subgenre demonstrates that the revelatory role of the monster no longer depends on its fundamental status as Other; rather, it is precisely in the normativity of these pornographic monsters that their cultural significance lies.

Fluid animations

What Sergei Eisenstein describes as the “plasmaticness” (Sergei Eisenstein 1988, 64) of animation, its capacity to forge entirely new forms untethered from logic, contains an inherently transgressive drive that correlates with the monster. Film theorist Steven Shaviro similarly describes animation’s impulsion to “corrupt all standards, to exceed all limits, and to transgress every law” (Steven Shaviro 1993, 17), monstrosity inhering within the unlimited possibilities of the animated medium. Monster porn epitomises the existential and corporeal transgressions and liminalities of both animation and the monster as a figure of sexual excess and unnaturalness. Various leaking semen, drool and disease, the gargoyles and necromorphs that populate monster porn sites proffer impossible existences, lingering grotesquely between species or between life and death. The glossy, pop art stills of the digital artist Topping Tart are just one example of the way the fluidity of the animator’s line is used to represent a grotesque sexual excess. Topping Tart’s images depict freakish exaggerations and multiplications of the sexual body. Distended vaginas, penises and breasts overflow the logic of the normal human, breasts hanging in dense, pendulous clusters and human torsos birthing phallic tentacles. Body parts grow and meld into each other in throbbing mounds of confused flesh (Soofia Tariq 2021). This imagery is indicative of the libidinal quality with which the limitlessness of the animator’s line is endowed in monster porn., the monstrous distensions and multiplications of the sexual body communicating the monstrosity of sexual desire that overflows the logical and normative.

The liberated perspectival possibilities of animation are also employed to depict monstrous sexual subjectivities. Christopher Holliday describes the “virtual camera” in animated films as “no longer restricted by human positioning, or by its status as physical apparatus” so that the filmic “eye” is able to communicate non-human “diegetic consciousness” (Christopher Holliday 2016, 256–7). William Brown similarly refers to the capacity of animation’s cinematic eye to “escap[e] human perception and abando[n] its otherwise all-pervasive anthropocentrism” (William Brown 2012, 268). This perspectival construction of a non-human sexual subjectivity is occasionally employed in monster porn, particularly in hentai representations of young girls penetrated by squid and octopi. As tentacles take hold of the female animation’s limbs and spin her around, probing, seeking and inveigling themselves into her eyes, flesh, anus, mouth and vagina, the perspective provided is that of the tentacles themselves, the creature’s vision hurtling upon and through the turning female flesh with an erratic speed and nauseating multiplicity. The viewer is therefore made to see through the “eyes” of the monster, forced into an alliance with a non-human sexual subjectivity.

However, these existentially and, more rarely, perspectivally monstrous creatures belie the ultimately anthropocentric nature of this content. The fluid capacities of animation are most consistently reified into both human and highly conservative expressions of gender. Susanna Paasonen asserts precisely this:

[D]espite the unlimited possibilities that animation affords in imagining characters engaging in acts impossible for actual human bodies to accomplish [. . .] the fantastic scenes of monster toon porn are recurrently tied up with highly predictable ways of imagining both sexual scenarios and gendered power dynamics (Paasonen 2015, 14).

The very hyperbole of animation is used to create a concentrated representation of predictable, and specifically androcentric and heteronormative forms of

sexuality, particularly as they are typified by heteronormative pornographic film. Though the monsters are fantastical and alien, their sexuality is incontrovertibly masculine, with recognizably human penises protruding from scales, fur and hide. The male monsters' behaviour echoes conservative pornography's performances of heteronormative masculinity. They customarily operate in gangs and, overpower and brutalise their female counterparts through violent penetration, replicating behaviour found especially in extreme gonzo (Stephen Maddison 2009) and horrorporn. Their prey are also anthropocentrically female, with breasts, vaginas and only the occasional gesture towards the fantastical with, for example, elf ears or blue skin. They are also highly feminised, with an emphasis on nubile fragility or voluptuous sexual availability and are invariably frightened and powerless in relation to their male attackers. In the decontextualised stramash of gifs and clips, the structure and meaning of monster porn derives solely from the heterosexual male monsters' advancement upon and subsequent rape of the female animated characters. Film titles similarly demonstrate that the ostensible freakishness of monster porn is quickly resolved into highly normative, heteropatriarchal notions of sex, with representative titles like: "Double forced gangbang with two horrific trolls"; "Sexy chicks being assaulted by evil tentacle monsters" and; "Wicked creatures molesting slutty darlings" (3dmonster).

The majority of monster porn also replicates the perspectival traditions of mainstream pornographic film, further bolstering its heteronormative anthropocentrism. The sexual interactions of the animated figures are generally represented from angles which suggest either the fixed or point-of-view camera positions of live-action filming, with scenes depicted as if the monster were holding the camera in the gonzo style or moving between wide "shots" and "close ups" of the female animation's face to communicate her distress and pain. The male monsters and their female victims also adopt and shift between the sexual positions common to mainstream porn which have developed out of

the need to maximise the visibility of real genitals in conjunction with the limits of the human body's physiology. Where Katherine Sarafian describes the ability animation affords to "create fantasy worlds that cannot be seen elsewhere [. . .] [that] expand the imagination and stretch the cinematic aesthetic," (Katherine Sarafian 2003, 210) monster porn instead represents both gender and sexual interaction in the most conservatively human and heteronormative terms.

The very fluidity of the animator's "line", its capacity for infinite explorations of form, functions to solidify an anthropocentric androcentrism. The term and tag "belly bulge" describes a particular representation in monster porn that depicts the female animation's stomach swelling when she is penetrated by the male monster. The distension of the female's stomach is grimly suggestive of the monster's momentum and its movement inside her body, the impact wrought by the dangerous size differential expressed through this often fatal alteration of the female animation's body and her concomitant expressions of shock, pain and disgust. Often the bulge continues to expand with monstrous reproductive fluid, the swelling of the woman's stomach culminating in the rupture of her skin altogether. Many monster porn clips end with the female animation exploding with semen and collapsing dead in the monster's claws as its penis continues to mindlessly thrust through her body. The libidinal charge of the content is built on this gendered bodily flux, with anti-diegetic short films deriving their entire meaning and proffered thrill from this radical change in the female animation.

This fatal morphing of the female animation's body is an X-rated example of animation's generic propensity for morphs, the "intense physical distortion[s]" (Amanda Quist 2017, 11) of creatures and objects providing one of the pleasures of the genre. Quist's description of a morphed object's liminal status "at once not what it was, but also not yet what it will become" (Amanda Quist 2017, 12) expresses the uncanniness of a monstrous sexual encounter. The ruinous, abject impact of the male monster is expressed through the

becoming-fluid of the female animation's borders. The healthy boundedness of the female animation, its safe separation of inside from outside and of self from other, is irretrievably damaged or destroyed by the forced inundation of the monster's profoundly "radically excluded" (Kristeva Julia 1982, 4) sexual fluids. The change in the female animation's outline communicates the way she is forced into her own grotesque liminality through unwanted intimacy with the monster. The borders of the animation mark the Kristevan "border of [one's] condition as a living being" (Kristeva Julia 1982, 3) so that the becoming-fluid of the borders of the woman's animated being express her existential destruction. The morbidity inherent to animation, what Alan Cholodenko calls its "lifedeath," (Alan Cholodenko 2009) is therefore used in monster porn to communicate the morbidity of heteropatriarchal sexual violence. Lifedeath describes the way in which the plasmatic possibilities of becoming in animation simultaneously renders these pictorial figures vulnerable to death, capable at any moment, as film theorist Bill Schaffer puts it, of "exploding and unravelling into the void of surrounding space" (Schaffer 2008, 204). He continues that the fluidity of the line, the "transformative, mobile capacity of the animated line" which "define[s] [the animation's] borders [. . .] *at the same time*, leaves them permanently vulnerable to the possibility of being undone from within," so that: 'a cartoon character is [. . .] always in the process of being formed or dissolving [. . .] threatened at the level of his most intimate definition by the very same lines that initially define him and allow him to emerge. (2008, 204, 201). This susceptibility to death finds a particularly misogynistic expression in the endless extirpations of female animations in monster porn. What Schaffer calls the "specifically *animatic* conflict between the *freedom of lines* and the *integrity of bodies*," (2008, 204) is visited entirely on the female figure, the liquidity of the animated line (Sergei Eisenstein 1988, 64) finding a literal expression in the "belly bulge". Thus, while the grotesque hyperbole, ontological liminality and literal fluidity of monster porn typifies the untethered possibilities of animation, it ultimately

expresses an anthropocentric and patriarchal heteronormativity, the belly bulge demonstrating how even animative fluidity functions to solidify heteropatriarchal representations of male sexuality.

Normal monstrosities

The humanness and heteronormativity of monster porn bears out the notion with which this article began: that the digital, commodified and ironic mediated monsters of this century signal the end of true monstrosity. In their ordinariness, these beasts and zombies lose the otherness that is fundamental to the figure of the monster and with it, seemingly, the creature's revelatory capacity. Botting describes how the normalisation of monsters from the late twentieth century attenuates their capacity for cultural illumination:

Monsters of modernity, once the exceptions giving shape, difference and substance to the systems that excluded them, become normal. No longer monstrous [. . .] Difference evaporates into [. . .] in-difference [. . .] the monsters of and on technical screens [. . .] no longer render norms visible; they are the norm. (Botting 2008, 10, 9, 12)

However, monster porn demonstrates that it is precisely in the familiarity and sameness of these monsters that the significance of this pornography lies. Its depiction of the indistinguishability between man and monster does not signal the vitiation of monstrosity but rather clarifies the monstrosity *of* normative male sexuality itself. Where Botting's phrase the "monstrosity of norms" describes an absence of monstrosity, the "indifference" and "reduc[tion]" (2008, 10, 12) of horror in the digital age, the normativity of these porn monsters is their monstrosity and the basis of their revelatory function. The unfrighting normalcy of these pornographic monsters clarifies the horror of hegemonic male sexuality. The anthropocentric and heteronormative nature of these creatures functions to reveal the monstrosity of that most fundamental

and, historically embedded societal norm: maleness. Where men, in conjunction with wealth, whiteness and non-disability, are the historical keepers of religious, economic, political and judicial power, they have placed themselves in the normative centre of societal cartographies. Where various monsters—women, foreigners, criminals, the poor, the mentally ill and people with disabilities—are pushed to the margins, men define the normativity of the centre. Male power reciprocally constructs its synonymy with the healthy, right and civilised and defines various monsters in opposition to its fundamental normativity. As the fundamental basis of normative subjecthood and morality, maleness is therefore necessarily oppositional to monstrosity. A monstrous male sexuality is similarly impossible. From Britain's nineteenth century Contagious Diseases Act and Australia's twentieth century lock hospitals, to the contemporary lawfulness of spousal rape in countries such as Jordan, Oman, Singapore, Pakistan and India and the incredibly low rape conviction rates across Europe and North America (currently 1 in 70 in the UK (Alexandra Topping and Caelainn Barr 2020)), the infrastructurally-enforced impossibility that monstrosity be appended to male sexual behaviour is clear. The unassailable legitimacy of male sexual behaviour is frequently starkly revealed in judicial decision-making and media discourse. In 2021, Pakistan's prime minister Imran Khan blamed the country's rape epidemic on women wearing "very few clothes" (Soofia Tariq 2021). The year before, prominent police officer Umar Sheikh located responsibility for a woman's gang rape in front of her children while she waited for a mechanic by her broken-down car with the woman herself: she had chosen to take a less-populated route and had not checked her fuel tank (Lahore CCPO, 2020). In a 2019 BBC interview, Prince Andrew of the British Royal Family confidently pitted his confused recollections against multiple eye-witness accounts, photographic evidence and the testimony of Virginia Roberts, in an attempt to deny having sex with the seventeen-year-old girl trafficked by Andrew's good friend, convicted paedophile Jeffrey Epstein. Andrew's vague denials and muddled reasoning—

“I have no recollection of ever meeting this lady [. . .] I’m almost convinced that I was never in Tramps [bar] with her [. . .] I don’t know where the bar is in Tramps”; “I’m at a loss to explain this particular photograph”; “If you’re a man [. . .] you have to take some sort of positive action [to have sex with a woman]. And so therefore if you try to forget, it’s very difficult to try and forget positive action, and I do not remember anything. I’ve wracked my brain and . . . nothing”; and so on (Prince Andrew & the Epstein Scandal)—though embarrassing, demonstrated his belief that whatever he said would be accepted by the public as unproblematically true. As the epitomisation of male hegemony as a white, wealthy British aristocrat, Andrew’s status precludes the sexual monstrosity of making use of Epstein’s sexual slaves or of taking pleasure in having sex with a girl whose youth reportedly reminded him of his own daughter (Hannah Furness 2020). In the United States, the 2016 trial of wealthy, white Stanford University student Brock Turner saw the man serve just three months in prison for stripping and raping an unconscious woman, the rape infamously described by Turner’s father as “20 minutes of action” (Xu Victor 2016). The judge agreed with Turner’s father that the rapist posed no danger to others because “[h]e has a very gentle and quiet nature [. . .] and has never been violent to anyone including his actions on the night of January 17, 2015” (Elle Hunt 2016). The monstrosity of Turner’s sexuality— seeking out people who are incapacitated; desiring non-responsiveness; enjoying exploitation and so on —could not be attached to him because he was *necessarily* decent and civilised by virtue of his gender and social position. His court case was therefore not concerned with prohibiting monstrous sexual behaviour but with resolving Turner’s monstrosity back into normalcy. Likewise, in 2018, US judge Brett Kavanaugh was accused by multiple women of drugging women in order to sexually assault them; of taking his penis out of his trousers in a bar and pushing it into a fellow student’s face; and of holding a fellow student down, forcibly pulling her clothes off and putting his hand over her mouth to muffle her screams (Christine Hauser 2018).

Kavanaugh went on to be confirmed as a judge in the United States' Supreme Court. As with George Bush Senior, Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Clarence Thomas, Ronald Reagan et al., Kavanaugh's a priori legitimacy made the allegations impossible. Kavanaugh's hysterical screaming in court was an expression of shocked frustration over the possibility that a patriarchal judicial apparatus might malfunction: that it could fail to consistently reassert the necessary opposition between maleness and monstrosity. It is this necessity that the taint of deviancy and grotesqueness be shifted away from the male sexual body that produces instead a socio-judicial focus on women: their clothing when they were attacked; whether they had consumed alcohol when they were attacked; their sexual history; their reluctance to report the crime; and their attempts to continue living in the domestic, educational or work environments where they were attacked., These things are taken as a sign that an attack must not have taken place or that the woman is misinterpreting consensual sex out of confusion or dishonesty. Monstrosity *cannot* be attached to masculinity and so the responsibility for monstrosity must lie elsewhere. Such cases demonstrate the continuing construction of heteronormative male sexuality's antithesis to monstrosity. Yet the types of behaviour described above—brandishing one's genitals in public; excreting unwanted bodily fluids on people; violently forcing one's sexual desires on others; purposefully seeking out vulnerable people, and so on— are tenets of monstrosity. Such behaviour exhibits the out-of-control, irrational and bestial traits associated with the monster and exposes the false synonymy between maleness, and rationality and self-possession. The public outcry in response to these and other prominent cases demonstrates a contemporary cultural anxiety regarding the status and historically embedded legitimacy of male sexuality. Though the opposition between male sexuality and monstrosity continues to be judicially, politically and culturally reproduced, recent protests in countries like Brazil and Pakistan, online movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp and cultural responses like *Bombshell* (2016), *Big Little Lies* (2017), *The Morning Show*

(2019) and *Promising Young Woman* (2021) trouble the idea of maleness as the monolithic and incontrovertible norm. The repressed monstrosities of male sexuality are being dredged up to the surface.

It is within this context of crisis that the animated monsters of monster porn speak. In locating the bestial violence and corporeal revulsion of aliens, dragons and necromorphs within normative male sexuality, they powerfully assert the indistinguishability between man and monster. On animated sites like 3dporncentaurs.com and 3dmonstertoon.com films and images of monsters raping women are combined with highly photorealistic animations of human men behaving in exactly the same way. HornyMonsters.com, features real men dressed in monster costumes with flailing rubber tentacles and zombie body paint. Like their animated counterparts, they lumber towards performatively disgusted women, dominating and penetrating with bestial thoughtlessness. The animated monsters replicate the normative masculine sexuality depicted in heteronormative live-action pornographic film and legitimised in the patriarchal societies beyond. Where representative mainstream sites like RoccoSiffredi.com, FacialAbuse.com and JamesDeen.com blur the boundary between sex and horror and represent male sexuality as violent, and unempathetic, so monster porn's replication of these traits in explicitly monstrous bodies highlights the monstrosity of hegemonic male sexuality. The bestiality of monster porn's male figures—their violence, lack of speech, thoughtless cruelty, pack mentality and so on—and their lack of human(e) qualities are expressive, then, not of their non-human nature but of normative, human male sexuality. Where Holliday describes one of the pleasures of animation as figures' "negotiation", their "magneti[c] [. . .] shimmer" between "human socialization [and the] anthropocentric teleology of humanity" and [. . .] "true animal actions, behaviour and primal motivation", (Christopher Holliday 2016, 252, 250) the murderous violence of monster porn's creatures represent not their lapses into non-humanness but their approximation of hegemonic male humanness. This representational

blending of monstrous and human male sexuality clarifies the monstrosity of normative male sexuality. These animated monsters perform the revelatory function of the monster not, then, through the figure's traditional otherness, but precisely through their normativity. Here, the "monstrosity of norms" describes not the contemporary attenuation of monstrosity, but its existence at the heart of the most fundamental norm of hegemonic maleness itself. The monsters of monster porn are not the victimised creatures of Gothic modernity, "identif[ied] with outcasts and victims, those 'othered' and 'monstered' by repressive state apparatuses" (Botting 2008, 13).

They are the monsters of the repressive patriarchal apparatus itself. The epistemological troubling enacted by these pornographic monsters takes place not through their Gothic, dyadic status as "dialectical Other" (Cohen, 41) but through their unsurprising sameness. The significance of monster porn therefore lies not in its clarification of monstrous difference but in its clarification of the absence of difference between male sexuality and monstrosity. Where, as Sobchack states, otherness no longer marks "the difference that makes a difference" but "the difference that makes a sameness," (Vivian Sobchack 1987, 297) monster porn demonstrates that the sameness of difference, the normativity of monstrosity, does not signal an end of monstrous difference, but rather its presence at the heart of patrilineal societies' very formation of the norm. Normalcy, that is, the power to define legitimacy, produces monstrosity. The sameness of these monsters is the very basis of their horror because it clarifies that the real monsters have always been those who drew up the societal maps and could place themselves safely in its centre. Monster porn speaks of this growing cultural awareness of the sexual monstrosity of male hegemony. In their own ironic and hyperbolic way, these pornographic monsters collapse deeply historically embedded constructions of civilisation, morality and, lawfulness that are founded on the unassailable normativity of maleness.

The male abject

By depicting male sexual power in overtly monstrous terms, monster porn exposes the bestiality, grotesqueness and deviancy of hegemonic male sexuality. These animated monsters do perform, then, the traditional function of the monster as a dangerous disturber of societal boundaries (Jeremy Cohen 1996, 40), their revelation of the monstrosity at the heart of normativity demonstrating the fragility of the defining societal law: the paternal law. This revelation of the monstrosity of the norm destroys the basis on which women have historically been conceptualised as the monstrous sex, demanding too a refiguring of religious and cultural notions of abjection and otherness.

Abjection and concomitant monstrosity have historically been appended to women. Simone de Beauvoir famously asserts that where “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute— she is the Other” (Simone de Beauvoir 2010, 26). Kristeva links abjection to the feminine and maternal body in her analysis of pagan and religious constructions of disturbing and othered bodies and fluids (Kristeva Julia 1982, 13). Mary Douglas describes how notions of dirtiness and concomitant rituals of purification “weigh more heavily on the women than on the men” (Mary Douglas 2001, 3, 126) in the patrilineal societies that dominate human culture. Barbara Creed also explores literary, filmic and psychoanalytic constructions of women as the repository of abjection and otherness. What Creed terms the “monstrous-feminine” (Barbara Creed 1993) describes the multitudinous societal constructions of women, through religious, medical and politico-economic structures, as the expedient receptacle of monstrosity. The contemporary legitimacy of male rape and assault demonstrates how the abjection of male sexual behaviour continues to be transferred onto women.

However, in monster porn, the representation of normative male sexuality through puss-filled, radioactive mutants and hell creatures locates the abject incontrovertibly within the male sexual body. On monster porn sites, the male penis is consistently described as “evil”, “ugly” and “vile” (MonsterPornArchive). Semen is depicted as the most profoundly abject bodily

fluid, a slimy, disgusting fluid produced by aliens or the living dead, leaking from miserable, shrivelled phalluses or exploding in putrefying gobbets. Forced onto and into unwilling recipients, the physical ruination of the female animations show semen to be a fundamentally foreign and unwanted bodily fluid that disturbs the existential and physical borders of those who come into contact with it (Kristeva Julia 1982, 66). Live-action heteronormative pornographic film typifies the transferal of the abjection of male sexual desires onto the woman through semen. In the money shot, semen is constructed as a pollutant and a symbol of male sexuality as violent, subjugating and desirous of humiliation. Its expulsion onto the female performer's face is a literal transfer of these grotesque desires onto the woman, who becomes grotesque through her inundation with semen. This iconographic stalwart of pornographic film is a hyperbolic symbol of broader societal ways in which the horror of male sexual violence is shifted away from men and onto their victims. The institutionalised effacement of men's responsibility for their sexual behaviour compounds the abjection of the male sexual body and fluid. Creed draws on Kristeva to define "abject things [as] those that highlight the 'fragility of the law' through hypocrisy and lies" (Barbara Creed 1993, 215). Where the horrors of male sexual violence are necessarily defined as normative and legitimate, the bodily fluid which represents that violence constitutes too the abjection of hypocrisy. In its forced and unwanted placement; its disturbing of the boundary of the subject; and its hypocrisy, semen is fundamentally abject. The overt monstrosity of male bodies, fluids and sexual behaviour in monster porn clarifies semen as the most definitively abject and societally threatening of bodily fluids. Crucially, by representing male sexuality in the body of the monster, this pornography retains the abjection of male sexual violence in the male sexual body. It refuses to purify male sexuality by shifting the grotesqueness of its desire—for vulnerability, violence, humiliation and so on—onto its female victim. Along with the "blood, vomit, pus, shit etc. [which] are central to our culturally/socially constructed notions of the horrific" (Creed,

219), there must therefore also be semen. Unwanted contact with semen is profoundly existentially threatening and its hypocritical denial of its own violence threatens the basis of morality and civilisation. In demonstrating that society's most established norm embodies the most abject horrors of human sexual behaviour, monster porn therefore demands a refiguring of undergirding psychoanalytic, philosophical and medical conceptions of abjection: not the vagina, but the penis; not menstrual blood but semen; not the mother, but the father.

Male sexual power itself is similarly represented in monster porn in grotesque rather than triumphant terms. Though the male monsters consistently reign over the female animations, they are often represented as overtly pathetic. Freakishly infantile and mottled, golum-like creatures scuttle over Amazonian women, who are radically juxtaposed in their beauty, normalcy and humanity. Fat, old men slump shamefully over their female victims, or despondently rape young, attractive women in dingy basements. Male sexual violence is depicted explicitly as melancholy, disgusting and pathetic. Where the normative rightness of male sexual power works by shifting the taint of sexual abjection onto the victims of their uncontrolled sexual desires, these animated representations of masculinity refuse a purifying shift of abjection from male to female, locating and retaining the abjection of sexual omnipotence definitively in the male sexual subject. The power, virility and aggression that is a well-established legitimate stalwart of male sexuality is hyperbolically represented in this animated genre, through extreme violence and fatal size differentials: women's bodies can be exploded by sperm; they are penetrated by penises larger than the female animations' entire bodies, and so on. Michael O'Pray describes, animation as an "objectification of our own desire for omnipotence [. . .] [the spectator] confronted with [. . .] the very fantasy of that control in the animated figures [and] primitive all-powerfulness of the line" (O'Pray Michael 1997, 199–200). Yet, it is through the extreme dominance of these monsters that the morbidity and horror of (non-performative) sexual

power is expressed. The way in which these pornographic monsters reign over their disgusted female prey is shown to be the basis of their grotesqueness. It is the unrestrained power of the male figures that allows them to efface the subjectivity of another, and it is precisely this capacity which renders their sexuality disgusting. Monster porn demonstrates, then, that it is the ability to wield supreme power that produces monstrous sexualities. The excess and liminality of these monsters communicates the abjection and horror of sexual desires and behaviour that are allowed unrestricted expression, a free reign fundamental to the history and development of male sexuality. In “The Pornographic Imagination,” Susan Sontag describes sexual violence as inherent to human psychosexuality, describing the “demonic forces” of sexuality and “the erotic glamour of physical cruelty and an erotic lure in things that are vile and repulsive [. . .] pushing us at intervals close to taboo and dangerous desires” (Sontag 1987, 221–222). However, as the dominance of male perpetrators in rape and assault (Michele Black 2011), sexualised murders (María. Salguero 2016) and child abuse (Kathy McCloskey and Desreen Raphael 2005; Tracey Peter 2009) demonstrate, the libidinal lure of cruelty, violence and abjection is disproportionately enacted in male sexuality. It is the unfettered power afforded the male subject which *produces* the legitimacy of the sexual use of others and, the abjection of sexual violence. Where men’s sexual behaviour is necessarily normative, its monstrosity is structurally produced because cruelty and violence is an institutionally excused and legitimised aspect of male sexuality. By creating disgusting monsters that replicate the normative sexual behaviours of human men, monster porn starkly locates monstrosity within the power of hegemonic masculinity. Monster porn demonstrates not only, then, that normative male sexuality *is* monstrosity, but that its normativity *produces*—as it obscures—the conditions for that monstrosity.

The fundamental otherness of normative male sexuality can be seen in cultural responses to recent, prominent examples of that sexuality. The images

of Brock Turner “thrusting” into an unconscious woman or of Louis C.K. desperately casting around for colleagues to masturbate at suggest an awareness of a grotesque and pathetic violence embedded in hegemonic male sexuality. Key contemporary figures in the twenty-first century understanding of male sexuality, such as Harvey Weinstein and Jeffrey Epstein also hint at the monstrosity produced precisely by normativity. Weinstein typified male centrality and power, yet his body, sexuality and semen are described in grotesque and monstrous terms. He is frequently represented in the media as a man-pig hybrid (J.D. Crowe 2017), snout and ears protruding from his suit. He is out- of-control and bestial, his chauffeur describing how his “gastric band failed after he overdid it at the buffet” and his food had to be worked through his bowels manually by a doctor (Jessa Schroeder 2017). He is “Harvey Swine-stein” (Dale Eisinger 2018) and “Slime-Stein” (James Beal), a “monster” who, as one prosecutor described, “lured victims like a witch in Hansel and Gretel” (Beal) in “his hunting ground” (Stephanie Stephanie Kirchgaessner 2017) of Cannes film festival. One of his victims Asia Argento describes him explicitly as the lumbering protagonist of a Gothic “scary fairy tale”: “It is twisted. A big fat man wanting to eat you” (Ronan Farrow 2017). His sexuality is at once overpowering and repulsively pitiful. One woman describes trying to get away from him “without getting slobbered over” (Ashley Lee 2017); another of him desperately masturbating into a potted plant (Daniel Roth 2017); and another of him “fumbling at my gown. He was trying to kiss me and shove inside me. It was disgusting. He came over my leg like a dog [. . .] It was pathetic, revolting” (Martin Martin Robinson 2017). Epstein is similarly described as a “spider” (Barry Barry Levine 2020), the Netflix documentary *Filthy Rich* delightedly focusing on his mishappen penis as a trace of his revolting impotence in the world of healthy, adult, egalitarian relationships.

However, the conceptualisation of these looming figures of contemporary masculinity as monsters, though it speaks to the grotesqueness of their abusive sexualities, simultaneously functions to eject these men from healthy and

normal male sexuality. By defining these men as monsters, the infallible rightness of normative masculinity can be preserved.

The cultural response to Jimmy Savile, for example, worried over “the making of a monster” (Dan Davies 2014), defining him in freakish terms that defied explicable societal teleologies. Instead of seeing him as a celebrated iteration of common male sexual practises, he could be usefully expelled as a “sex monster” (Tom Sykes 2016), a fundamental outsider who posed an “assault our values. The man was a weirdo, paedo, sicko [. . .] broiling [. . .] [in] the fires of Hell” (Quentin Letts 2015). Media representations of Josef Fritzl similarly conjured the notion of an evil that transcended and existed outside of normal masculinity; Fritzl’s description of himself as being “born to rape” (Kate Kate Connolly 2008) contributed to a conceptualisation of the man as a subhuman creature that defied societal explanation. Like Weinstein, Epstein and Savile he was described in the media as the “Monster of Amstetten,” (Wess Haubrich 2020; Netflix 2010) “reign[ing] terror” in a “house of horror” (Jeremy Armstrong 2018).

Defining these men as monsters establishes them as bizarre societal outliers whose behaviour need not speak to normative male sexuality and the ways in which abjection and violence are produced through unchecked power and judicio-cultural legitimisation. Just as Botting describes how the exclusion of monsters in modernity “serves to legitimate, naturalise and solidify [. . .] boundaries” (Botting 2008, p. 9) between legitimate and deviant, civilised and monstrous, so by naming these prominent representations of male sexuality as monsters, normative masculinity and institutionalised male power can be purged of monstrosity. Yet, these monsters are not anomalies, as demonstrated by the horrors of male sexual abuse endemic in the Catholic church; the American Senate; the British aristocracy (David Sanderson 2015); education and medical institutions; familial structures; and culture-producing industries and workplaces like Hollywood, the BBC, Fox News, Bollywood and Tehelka and the Times of India. Male sexual monstrosity is not an aberration but is

instead deeply historically and institutionally enshrined. Abject figures like Savile and Weinstein cannot function, then, as “monster[s] of prohibition” (Jeremy Cohen 1996, 46). Cohen describes the utility of the monster as “delimit[ing] the social space through which cultural bodies may move [. . .] interdicting through its grotesque body some behaviors and actions, envaluing others [. . .] linked to forbidden practices, in order to normalize and to enforce” (Jeremy Cohen 1996, 46, 49). Instead, the structures of normalisation and enforcement work to excuse, legitimise and therefore to produce the very monstrosity that should be forbidden. The social space delimited through conceptualisations of what constitutes monstrosity precisely envalues and fosters the sexual monstrosity of hegemonic masculinity.

The pornographic monsters’ quotidian lumbering through the digital landscape significantly speaks to this normalcy of male sexual monstrosity. These thoroughly unshocking monsters do not represent the unlawfulness but the legitimacy of bestial sexual violence and abjection. These monsters are not cleansing and stabilising figures, then, escaping temporarily in Bakhtinian thrills before their exclusion reinforces society’s organising principles. As Botting states, “[a]s exceptions to the norm, monsters make visible, in their transgression, the limits separating proper from improper their exclusion also serves to legitimate, naturalise and solidify those boundaries” (Botting 2008, 8–9). By excluding or killing the monster, society can cleanse itself and reinforce the binaries and laws of its civilisation. However, male sexual monsters are not exceptions and so their transgressions cannot serve to strengthen societal laws; their transgressions *are* the law. The impossibility of purging societies of the monstrosity of their own most fundamental norm and the basis of their laws is demonstrated precisely by monster porn’s normalcy, which asserts not the end of monstrosity but rather the impossibility of repressing the horror of normativity itself. Unlike the purifying catharsis afforded by zombie films or video games, the creatures of monster porn are never represented as dying. Marina Levina and Diem-My Bui describe the

“happy ending” of the horror film genre as necessitating the “restoration of repression” of whatever “terror” has been allowed to temporarily emerge (Levina Marina and Diem-My. Bui 2013, 4). These pornographic monsters are never cleansed through their destruction, their unexorcised parade of grotesque masculinity speaking to the impossibility of exiling that which constitutes the norm itself. Monster porn, in its caricature of heteronormative sexual culture in general and pornography in particular, clarifies the reciprocity of normative male power and sexual monstrosity. The cultural reflexivity of animation joins with the revelatory cultural function of the monster to endow monster porn with a peculiarly emblematic power, a concentrated symbol of contemporary male sexuality. In these hyperbolic pictorial signs, the horror and revulsion of masculinity is writ large, performing the monster’s function as cultural cipher not through otherness but through a normalcy that renders monster porn a graphic metaphor of the abjection and otherness of normative male sexuality. It is in these monsters’ comfortable continuity with normative sexual culture in which their horror lies, the blending of man and monster and the erasure of the distinction between norm and other not signalling the collapse of otherness and the impossibility of real, contemporary monsters, but the abjection, otherness and monstrosity at the heart of patriarchal sexual norms. As the figure of the monster functions to reveal the anxieties and taboos of society, so these pornographic monsters reveal a contemporary crisis in reckoning with the pervasive monstrosity of hegemonic masculinity that can no longer be repressed.

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