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MONSTROUS (M)OTHERS—FROM PARANOID TO REPARATIVE READINGS OF OTHERING THROUGH ASCRIPTIONS OF MONSTROSITY

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Abstract: *The Danish film* A Horrible Woman *(orig.* En frygtelig kvinde*, 2017) marked a pattern that can be identified throughout several decades of Danish filmmaking. Examples are found in contemporary films like* Antichrist *(2009), as well as in earlier Danish films like* The Abyss *(1910) and* Red Horses *(1950). In these and other examples, women characters exhibit monstrous behavior that can be construed as a form of othering. Furthermore, othering women and mothers by presenting them as terrible, abnormal, or monstrous in Danish (popular) culture goes well beyond the silver screen. In this article, 'mother–daughter scholars' Mira Chandhok Skadegård and Tess Sophie Skadegård Thorsen explore how monstrosity functions as a tool for othering in film and other media, offering both a (generational) and historical view, and a discussion of current constructions of monstrosity, on and off screen, in Denmark. The article argues that monstrosity, as a symbol of power and violence, becomes a particularly oppressive gendered gesture. The authors examine this in a correspondence with one another. In letter form, with shifting analytical positions between mother and daughter, a dialogue emerges between generations on questions of '(m)otherhood' in Danish film and other Danish contexts, transitions of female film characters from passive to aggressive, and the role of monstrosity in othering non-white immigrant '(m)others' in public discourse. Finally, the article argues for a different approach to 'monstrous othering'. Through a reparative reading, it discusses whether there is empowerment and agency connected to being ascribed monstrosity.*

Keywords: *monstering*; *othering*; *mothering*; *structural discrimination*; *film representation*; *reparative reading*; *mother–daughter scholars*.

Introduction—The First Monstrous Mothers

"What woeful maternal fancy produced such a monster?" (Huet 1993: 3).

In this article, we examine links between monstrosity, othering, and mothering in contemporary Danish contexts. As 'mother–daughter scholars' in different fields ([structural] discrimination studies; film [and media] studies), we look at how notions of mother, woman, and monster are connected in film, and the construction of immigrant mothers in Danish public debate. Based on a negotiation of the ways in which monstering and othering can be seen as reciprocal patterns in the filmic and social frameworks we draw on, we suggest that everyday others are monstered through their particular framings of difference. That is, by constructing, or casting, difference in ways that distinguish *self* from *other*, *normal* from *abnormal*—a process of marginalization or alienation is in play. Drawing on Karen Barad's (2015) and Judith [/Jack]

Halberstam's (1995; 2011) analyses of monstrosity, we argue that this construction of difference as unnatural or dangerous (albeit symbolic or normative danger), is a process of othering. Monstering, then, aids in othering, while othering legitimizes monstering. Patterns of othering, that position mothers as the culprit-other at blame for monsters, are present in new forms of conflation of monster and mother in contemporary Danish film, as well as constructions of immigrant mothers in Danish public discourse.

In line with foundational work on the connections between women and the monstrous (Creed 1986; Shildrick 2001), we argue that structures of othering and monstering are at play in the positioning of women and mothers as monstrous others. These structures, for example, are similar to the othering and monstrosity at play in constructions of immigrant mothers (and sons) in Danish public discourse. We find that such gestures can be found in films where women are framed as dominating, emasculating, and overpowering mothers-to-be; in news-stories framing others as potential gang-members and terrorists; or in artistic renderings of the freakish other. Monstrosity, when produced through otherness, is not an unusual occurrence in contemporary Danish pop-culture and media (Andreassen 2005; Nielsen [M. M.] 2018; Yilmaz 1999).

Like monstering, othering constructs difference in ways that distinguish (and elevate) *self* from *other*, resulting in forms of marginalization and alienation. Monstering, while comparable and perhaps even overlapping, takes othering further by implying something unnatural, dangerous or malignant (Ryan 1998; Cohen 1996).

The article is structured as a correspondence between mother and daughter scholars. We take our points of departure about monstrosity and othering in our respective fields of [structural] discrimination studies and film [and media] studies. We examine links between the framing of women as causes of monstrosity, women as monsters, and monstrosity as a signifier for otherness with regard to minorities that are othered based on non-gender markers. Our inspiration for this type of collaborative-through-correspondence research comes from Henry Mainsah and Lin Prøitz' (2015) work on collaborative auto-ethnography. The approach provides a way for us to integrate meta-theoretical perspectives from the body of the researcher as privileged site of knowledge (Mainsah/Prøitz 2015). The integration of our own relationship and correspondence mirrors the inclusion of researchers as production site (Alvesson 2003; Delamont 2009), and draws on our (affective and theoretical) situated knowledge (Haraway 1988), experience as gendered and racialized others in the academy, and as mother and daughter. In this way we include, or point to, our bodies and social positions as relevant to (and affected by) the issues in focus. Being actual mother and daughter, while quirky and ironic, is also a serious reflection on how discourses on issues of gender, monster, and mother are imbricated in everyday lived experience. Our unique positions as researchers that are subject to (and reflected in) the same patterns of oppression that we examine allows us a dual lens, widening the boundaries of our partial perspective (Haraway 1988).

Our approach is comprised of a critical discourse analytical lens, with an emphasis on structural discrimination and its sedimentation in language and everyday practice. Such analysis rests on post/de-colonial theory and critical analysis of powered dynamics and processes (Skadegård 2017). We pair these with critical analysis of intersectional representations on screen in conversation with particular Danish social phenomena. This oscillation between the textual and contextual is premised on Anamik Saha's (2017)

push toward comprehensive analyses of film within the context of impact, production, and industry. Moving beyond the textual thus becomes a framework for negotiating filmed representations of otherness as co-constitutive practices for (and reflections of) societal patterns of oppression. We agree with bell hooks when she states that television, film, and other media "are powerful vehicles for maintaining the kinds of systems of domination we live under, imperialism, racism, sexism, etc." (hooks 2008 [1996]: 174). This frames our premise that political and social lived reality, and the oppressions these embody, are intimately linked to representations of life in film and media.

Methodologically, we engage our examples from film, politics and the construction of immigrant mothers in contemporary Danish public discourse, at the intersections of content, reception, and recirculation or reproduction. As such, we engage the examples both at their discursive level, as well as through a consideration of particular forms of reception. This creates a dynamic body of empirical material that highlights what is gained by engaging the arts in conversation with the contexts they reproduce and represent, bringing forth the strengths of both a film- and media-specific analyses of tropes and representational dynamics, as well as a focus on discursive and power practices on micro and meso levels of society.

The work reflects data-collection and analysis that was carried out in the contexts in which we are situated: Denmark and the US. As such, while the emphasis is on Danish material, the lack of Danish research on particular gendered dynamics of othering on screen demand the application of a theoretical lens that goes beyond Nordic research. The framings and implications of monstrous (m)othering on screen in Denmark are necessarily specific to Danish histories, national narratives, and localized renderings of race, class, gender, and more. As such we bring the primarily US American and British theories of monstrous othering to bear upon a Danish context.

Aside from this introduction and the conclusion, only the final section of the article is authored in collaboration rather than correspondence. In that section, we argue that a 'reparative reading', in Sedgwick's (1997) terms, might facilitate a more reflexive and nuanced negotiation of monstrosity in Danish films and contexts.

A Horrible Woman

Dear Mom,

In my research on racialized, classed, gendered, sexualized, and abled representations in Danish film, I recently came across a disturbing piece. When it hit Danish movie-theatres in 2017, *A Horrible Woman* (orig. *En frygtelig kvinde*), directed by Christian Tafdrup, received quite a bit of publicity in Denmark. While the film is clearly (intended to be) satiric and humorous, the thematization of controlling and aggressive women hit a politically sore spot following the recent *#metoo* and gender-representation debates in the Danish creative industries (Nielsen [S. B.] 2017; Nikolajsen 2017; Torres 2017; Ulrich 2017).[1] It seemed, due to increasing awareness within the public domain,

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[1] The *#metoo* campaign spread from the US to Denmark, leading to a series of revealing stories in national newspapers of sexual misconduct and abuses of power in the Danish film-industry—ultimately resulting in the restructuring of staff in one of the most famous production companies, *Zentropa*, and the production of a theatrical reading of *#metoo*-inspired stories at Copenhagen's *Teater Grob*.

misogyny in Danish film had crossed a line this time. On the international movie database *IMDb* (2017), *A Horrible Woman* is described as follows:

> When Rasmus meets Marie, he is certain that she is the love of his life. However, it doesn't take long before it turns out she is a possessive and manipulative being, that cunningly dissects Rasmus to pieces (*IMDb* 2017).

Unsurprisingly, many of the Danish reviews focus on (the director) Christian Tafdrup's anger or bitterness toward women. He has stated that the film is loosely based on true events, and has inferred on multiple occasions, that the main female character is a coarse caricature modelled on what he believes to be a general tendency among many Danish women (Nielsen [S. B.] 2017). A few critics mention, that the archetypical, one-dimensional, cunning, dominating and manipulative girlfriend/wife character is hardly an original one (Nielsen [M. M.] 2018; Nikolajsen 2017; Ulrich 2017; Bjørnlund 2017). In my forthcoming research on gender representations in early Danish film and representation-practices in the contemporary Danish film industry, I similarly find that reductionist and one-dimensional characters frequent Danish silver screens (Thorsen 2019). Nonetheless, I would argue that the particular kind of woman we find in *A Horrible Woman* is different from the many annoying women that have graced Danish cinema through the past 122 years of Danish film history.[2]

1910, the Danish film by director Urban Gad, *Afgrunden* (*The Abyss*; also known under the title *Woman Always Pays*), featured Asta Nielsen in her breakthrough role as the piano teacher Magda Vang. Magda behaves badly and elopes with a circus artist, leaving behind her well-intentioned and loyal partner. She dances provocatively in the circus and ends up stabbing her lover in jealousy, resulting in her imprisonment. In the bestselling Danish film *The Red Horses* (*De røde heste*) from 1950, the evil stepmom Zita plots with her lover to steal stepdaughter Bente's inherited farm. In the famous *Olsen-banden* films (1968–2001[3]), Yvonne is a mostly harmless but highly annoying, high-pitched complainer, who obstructs and hinders the male characters in carrying out their plans.[4] The Danish film history is full of horrible women. But unlike these previous portrayals of women who do something bad, are bad, are controlling, belittling or overpowering, the female lead in *A Horrible Woman*, I contend, differs from in her exaggeratedly monstrous and cunning behavior. In addition, I argue that this might be a development of gendered monstrosity that could be recognized in other contemporary female roles in Danish films, such as Charlotte Gainsbourg's roles in *Antichrist* (2009) and *Nymphomaniac* (2013)—both directed by Lars von Trier—, the role of Tina in the short *Kenned* (dir. Trine Nadia, 2012), and the cannibalistic, monstrous women in *The Neon Demon* (dir. Nicolas Winding Refn, 2016).

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[2] My overview of productions of women in Danish film history is not comprehensive, and is mainly based on selected canonical works complimented with archival research with an emphasis on early Danish film (1897–1912), carried out 2015–2017, courtesy of *The Danish Film Institute*'s digital library.

[3] If one includes the 'Advent calendar' series *Olsen-bandens første kup* (1999) and the *Olsen-banden Junior* prequel (2001) and excludes the musical from 2008, as well as the animation films from 2010 and 2013. The last (thirteenth) 'classic' *Olsen-banden* film is from 1981; the 'very last' (fourteenth; not part of the initial canon) is from 1998.

[4] She is a central character with a stable function, and present in all 1968–2001 films.

Before I can get into how some of these women characters have been designed, framed, and instructed to perform monstrosity, let me provide a definition of the term. Rosi Braidotti, in her work on teratology, mothers, and others, suggested that the monster was defined earlier, "[…] in terms of *excess*, *lack* or *displacement* of his/her organs. There can be too many parts or too few; the right ones can be in the wrong places or duplicated at random on the surface of the body" (Braidotti 1999 [1996]: 290; emphasis in original).[5]

If we follow this simple definition of monsters, the horrible woman in *A Horrible Woman* hardly qualifies. Aside from her breaking the fourth wall and sending the audience a devilish look (with briefly added flaming-red pupils in the trailer), she is not malformed. However, while Rosi Braidotti acknowledged the direct and literal definition described above, she also suggested an alternative definition—a *redefinition*—of monstrosity:

> As a way of concluding I would like to propose a redefinition: the monster is a process without a stable object. It makes knowledge happen by circulating, sometimes as the most irrational non-object. It is slippery enough to make the Encyclopaedists nervous; yet, in a perfectly nomadic cycle of repetitions, the monstrous other keeps emerging on the discursive scene. As such, it persists in haunting not only our imagination but also our scientific knowledge-claims. Difference will just not go away (Braidotti 1999 [1996]: 299).

By highlighting the monster as a 'slippery' 'non-object', Braidotti's redefinition moves us from the literal and material realm of embodied monstrosity, to a figurative, flexible, and fluid realm where monsters are produced *on the discursive scene*. If the monstrous becomes something one does*,* "[a] process without a stable object" (Braidotti 1999 [1996]: 243), rather than something *one looks like*, the binary lines between monster and norm become even more blurry. But where does that leave mothers?

The horrible woman in Tafdrup's film is framed as parenting the male lead into submission. While motherhood is not a direct theme in the characterization of her until the very end, mothering is. Parenting, or treating you partner as a child, thus became part of the discourse surrounding the film. For instance, in an opinion piece in the Danish national newspaper *Berlingske* [previously: *Berlingske Tidende*], where the writer argues that her male friends are also "treated as children with full-grown beards [by their female partners]" (Nielsen [M. M.] 2018). To further this parental link to subjugation, the male friends of the lead character are heavily limited in continuing their social lives outside of the family once women and children become an increasing part of their everyday-life. Their partners and children are portrayed as the literal killjoys to parties and nights out throughout the film.

As such, by invoking a powered dynamic in which male enjoyment is presumed to be dependent on social lives with other men outside of the family realm, and where female joy is framed as contingent on control of male partners, both the film and the opinion

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[5] We use 'teratology' as a word for the study of monsters. In biological studies, teratology is used to refer to studies of abnormality or malformation—however, in literary and film research, and in our particular case, it refers to the study of (the construction of) literary and figurative monsters in media, film and societal discourse.

piece reproduce hegemonic articulations of gender, thereby re-centering male pleasure and the male gaze.

Mothering, then, emerges as a monstrous control of the overpowered male subject. This linking of mothering and monstrous, controlling and emasculating behavior is not particular to *A Horrible Woman* or to Tafdrup's male perspective, however. In the 2012 Danish short *Kenned*, director Trine Nadia brought to life a similarly domineering woman, Tina, who, in her efforts to become pregnant, forces her partner to soak his testicles in ice-water before making him endure less-than-enjoyable sexual acts. In this case, female desire for motherhood is framed as detrimental to male pleasure, which, once again becomes the central parameter for whether or not a relationship is portrayed positively.

In Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* (2009), Charlotte Gainsbourg's role develops into a monstrous character after losing her only child. Throughout the film, Gainsbourg's increasingly monstrous and violent behavior is assumed to spring from the lack and loss of her child, and, subsequently her purpose as a mother. However, as we come to learn toward the end, Gainsbourg's failures as a mother may very well be the root of her own demise and unravelling, as we wind up questioning her implication in the death of her child. In one particular scene, Gainsbourg deliberately puts the wrong shoes on the child's feet, causing pain and malformation. The scene produces her simultaneously as a monstrous mother, and a deliberate producer of malformation. "What woeful maternal fancy produced such a monster […]" indeed (Huet 1993: 3; see introductory quote).

The scene resonates with Huet's work, which identifies a pattern, in early literary traditions, of construing monstrosity as a result of a mothers imagination. In other words, Huet describes a tradition where monsters and mothers were separate, but linked, through a conception of the mother as a root-cause in producing monsters (Huet 1993).

In these films, however, motherhood, mothering, and monster conflate into one being or doing, which brings us closer to Braidotti's processual definition (Braidotti 1999 [1996]). The abovementioned women *act monstrously*, perhaps even *become monstrous* through their behavior, and they are certainly framed discursively in ways where they are *more monstrous* than their male counterparts. The women become monstrous when mothering (or failing to mother). But if monster is something one does, and is not fixed, why is it just women who are produced as monstrous in these films, and why is their monstrosity linked to gendered performance and motherhood?

With love, Tess.

Women as Monsters and (M)others

Dear Tess,

These are difficult questions, particularly for a mother to answer. What, more specifically, do we mean when we say 'monster'? Moreover, what is actually suggested, or drawn on, when a film constructs an emasculation of a male character through the parenting (mothering) behavior of his female partner? I wonder which assumptions about gender, masculinity, and femininity are at play here? From my perspective, there appears to be some complicity with differing oppressions, and notions of femininity and masculinity that foster monstering.

My first thought is that because the notion of mother and woman tend to be conflated in our shared imagination, any woman who is not—or will not be—a mother is often perceived as outside the norm. She is somehow lacking. She doesn't live up to her appropriate role as woman, or may be framed as emotionally or physically inadequate or incomplete (Lisle 1996). Is this a form of monstering? Alletta Brenner, in her work on monstrosity and womanhood, suggests that it is. As she writes, "monsters are objects that cross the boundaries of what we perceive to be normal, and thus natural" (Brenner 2009: 163).

With this in mind, what about women who do become mothers? Are they free from monstering, or behaving as monsters? By becoming mothers, they seemingly perform 'woman' correctly. Yet I would say that women, subject to dominant notions of mothering, traverse a fine line. As you suggest, mothering is (and has been) politicized and scrutinized in ways that place blame on mothers for everything from health, for example in regard to breastfeeding (Murphy 1999), schizophrenia, as the trope of the 'schizophrenogenic mother' (Harrington 2012; Hartwell 1996) to anorexia which may be blamed on bad mothering (Vander Ven/Vander Ven 2003), and the list goes on and on (Singh 2004). Much of this can be linked to Freudian perspectives on gender and their continued influence, though it hardly starts with Freud. The point here is that career choices, lifestyle choices, sexual orientation, and much more position women precariously, and often as bad women and bad mothers (Ladd-Taylor/Umansky 1998)— and perhaps also as monsters?

When the woman in the film *A Horrible Woman* demands oral pleasure for herself without reciprocating, and behaves in otherwise unpleasant ways, it suggests to me that her character is produced by (and exemplifies) current fears and anxieties around changing gender roles in our shared imagination.[6] While the film could be read as a satire on received gender roles, the film's director has stated that he modelled the story on his own failed relationships with 'terrible women' (Nielsen [S. B.] 2017). As Laura J. Shepherd (2010) points out, society (and perhaps also the director) estimates women through certain expectations around femininity and performance of gender. The character's behavior does not live up to appropriate feminine gender performance. Instead, it reflects a role reversal, or hegemonic masculinity, through which the female character reads as emasculating (an interesting notion in itself) and terrible, though we hardly would shake a leg had the behavior been conducted by a male character. In our terminology then, she is *constructed as monstrous*.

This is underscored by her comical breaking of the third wall. She turns and connects with the audience while her eyes literally flash red, drawing on shared constructions of devilry and the unnatural. While this infers humor or awareness of the extremity of caricature, it also presupposes a shared framework in which demanding, selfish, or non-nurturing behavior (in women) is absurd and discomfiting enough to be found humorous. She represents a bad or inappropriate woman. She does not nurture. She does not please. It appears that the joke relies on what Judith Butler (1999 [1990]) has deemed a "grid of cultural intelligibility" (194), or shared framework through which

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[6] Lack of reciprocation in sexual relations is usually something experienced by women. See for instance the seminal works by Peggy Orenstein on teenage and young women and sex in the US—including *SchoolGirls* (1994), *Waiting for Daisy* (2007), *Cinderella Ate My Daughter* (2011), *Girls & Sex* (2016), and *Don't Call Me Princess* (2018). [External references, therefore not listed in the bibliography.]

gender is congealed and naturalized. The joke seems to suggest some shared anxiety, or what I describe as 'shared underlying knowledge' (Skadegård 2017), about current negotiations around changing gender roles and expectations.

As you write, and as several reviewers note, women in film who perform in ways that are interpreted as dominating, demanding, or controlling are well-known tropes (Nikolajsen 2017; Ulrich 2017), and are what we refer to here as othered and subsequently monstered. They are horrible women, or women who perform 'woman' badly. In some interpretations, they are seen as the necessarily negative result of gender equality and subsequent fall of the (heteronormative) family (dir. Trine Nadia, 2012; dir. Lars von Trier, 2009). The male figure connected to such women is portrayed as comic and tragic, hen-pecked and submissive (Ulrich 2017).

Let us dwell on this disconcerting construction of the hen-pecked male, and its resonance with the audience, as described in several reviews of the film (Nielsen [M. M.] 2018; Torres 2017; Ulrich 2017). Words like 'monster', 'alien', and 'diabolical' are used to describe the female character (Torres 2017; Ulrich 2017). She is said to emasculate (Torres 2017) and 'bitch-slap' (Ulrich 2017) her lover. Further, several reviewers directly assert that the behavior, while exaggerated, is something many in the audience would recognize from their own daily interactions (Torres 2017; Ulrich 2017). Why is this notion even amusing? In my view, there is something very troubling going on here. If the female character, as Tafdrup says (Nielsen [S. B.] 2017), is representative of a broader tendency among women, then what exactly is that tendency? Do we, in all earnestness, still attribute passivity or weakness to men that actually listen to their (female) partners? What is it about characteristics we attribute to the feminine, that cause such a stir when connected to constructions of masculinity? Is an assertive woman such a contrast to her gender as to provide enough shock value for comedy? Is she, by performing woman without being subservient, a red-eyed monster? And, if so, could we consider whether this monster could also be seen as constructive and productive? Can we see her as breaking with (or disrupting) oppressive gender roles and categories, and enacting woman as assertive and in control? We may not like her, but we may perhaps find, in her liberating badness, an outlet for the frustration that passivity might engender? As Judith [/Jack] Halberstam suggests in *Skin Shows,*

> [t]he monster always represents the disruption of categories, the destruction of boundaries, and the presence of impurities […] and so we need monsters and we need to recognize and celebrate our own monstrosities (Halberstam 1995: 27).

This negative emphasis on the female character in *A Horrible Woman* can perhaps function to enlighten us, rather than vex us. The rendition of gendered interaction provides an opportunity to examine and critique the monstrousness of traditional expectations in regard to gender. Certainly, it makes some of the paradoxes within our notions (and practices) around gender equality explicit. For example, on the one hand, narratives or discourses of gender equality are strongly sedimented within Scandinavian contexts. We firmly believe that gender equality exists. On the other hand, women remain under-paid and underrepresented within power structures (Borchorst 2011 [2008]). Furthermore, while pornography, topless public bathing, sex before marriage,

and other relaxations of traditionally constrictive sexual norms set part of the stage, the framework remains within a masculinist, patriarchal sexual narrative. That is, female bodies remain the battleground over which sexual and libertarian freedoms are negotiated and construed. In Scandinavia, as *#metoo* and (anti-)everyday-sexism campaigns have emphasized and made explicit, sexual revolution operates within a framework in which women are still shamed in rape cases, slut-shamed in social contexts, violated, constructed, and seen as objects for consumption to a much higher degree than men. Similarly, the August 2018 legal banning of burqas and niqābs in Denmark suggests that women's bodies are still considered spaces through or over which a (mostly-male) parliament can exercise control. This leads me to ask whether Scandinavian sexual liberation, despite its progressive perspectives, also functions as a pathway for more masculine access, less masculine responsibility, and continued oppression of women?

It could appear that the move toward more liberal sexual interaction, without a critique of masculinist, patriarchal norms, as well as an absent critique of male-centered sexual pleasure, provides a context in which sexual liberation occurs within a heterosexist and masculist/patriarchal sexual framework. A woman usually remains an object of consumption, a pathway to pleasure, a collection of holes, and an implement to attain male pleasure and appease the male gaze (Mulvey 2009 [1989]). It would seem that a discursive conflation may occur here between Scandinavian sexual freedom and gender equality. Put another way, one might ask whether more relaxed Scandinavian sexual norms (sex without marriage, sexual liberation, etc.) are (mis)interpreted to imply gender equality? The apparent paradox between notions of gender equality and structural and institutional inequality (Borchorst 2011 [2008]) certainly points to a challenge.

As you have pointed out, *A Horrible Woman* appears to have been received by critics as an illustration of masculinity in crisis in Danish contexts. Several reviews have stated that the dilemma between the partners in the film reflect more general challenges between men and women (Hoffmann 2018; Nielsen [M. M.] 2018; Nielsen [S. B.] 2017; Torres 2017). In one online assessment, the film is described as "a kind of modern monster film, where the alien is Woman" (Torres 2017). In my mind, the heteronormative and misogynist representation of women, sex, and power in the film seems out of sync with broader Nordic narratives of progressive gender policies and perspectives. I wonder if this may point to a paradox, or a tension in regard to how gender is constructed and enacted in Danish contexts? Certainly, the heterosexist leanings and underlying assumptions within the film suggest a disparity between expectations (or a fantasy) of gender equality, and more general social expectations of gendered behavior that seem to mirror a less progressive stance.

In the film, the female character is portrayed as being sexually voracious and aggressive. This, to me, suggests some tension, or challenge, in regard to the construction of female sexuality within the film. On the one hand, progressive sexual mores support the notion that women enjoy sex and want pleasure. Yet the film's framing of female desire as aggressive, negative, even emasculating, suggests anxiety or discomfort with female sexuality that resonates more with shared expectations of women performing as passive objects of sexual desire. They risk being monstrous when they step out of a passive, receiving position.

If the film mirrors a wider and shared perspective on expectations of gendered behavior, as many of the reviews suggest, it hardly reflects a progressive stance on gender. Rather, it expresses very traditional gender expectations, and shames women who do not perform accordingly. Disparagement of female sexual desire in the film seems to suggest that sexual interaction remains construed within a traditional framework. When a female does not perform as a passive object, *she is monstered*. How, then, are we to understand the gender progressiveness, or sexual and gender equality so widely assumed to exist in Scandinavian contexts? This disparity seems, in my mind, to suggest that the notion of gender equality within the Scandinavian framework requires further scrutiny. As Borchorst (2011 [2008]), Kapur (2012), Mohanty/Russo/Torres (1991), and others have shown, assumptions about causality between 'Western' notions of sexual liberation and gender equality risk essentialization in terms of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity or culture.

While performing the role of 'woman' badly is monstrous, I would add that performing it well may also be damnable. As a mother, and as *your mother* in particular, I have had to tread carefully in the precarious space of gender, mothering, and being, certainly at times, horrible (not just due to the sudden monstrousness that occurs in parents during their children's teenage years…). Whether we like it or not, being a mother has far-reaching social, emotional, and personal implications.

How I performed 'mother' and 'woman' had an impact on how you and your siblings construct gender, and what you came to expect of a mother. Had I performed badly, I could have been construed as a monster of one kind. As I mentioned earlier, mothering has been scrutinized and linked to all manner of ills and harm to children. Yet, I can't help but think that there is also a certain monstrousness, or violence, to performing to societal expectations of 'good mother'. Acting in complicity with certain gender norms may present a skewed version of what is fair to expect of a woman. By this I mean that women are often presumed (and expect themselves) to be disproportionately nurturing, caregivers, primary homemakers, have professional careers, or at least participate actively in breadwinning. Further, add to this pressures and norms in regard to appearance, sexuality, social interaction, and so on. Performing gender, parent, and mother in this way communicates very high (and very particular) expectations to children. It may instill unrealistic notions of success criteria. Certainly, in Denmark, we are currently seeing high levels of stress and performance anxiety in young women (Sørensen et al. 2011). Could one argue that it is monstrous to perpetuate such norms without at least critiquing them? A double bind is at play: If we don't perform good mother, the child will suffer, yet when we do, that child may still suffer.

While each family is a unique construct, and parenting roles are distributed in varying ways, there can be no question that certain stigmas and disciplining frameworks are at play, explicitly as well as implicitly. Parents define the framework, rules and even the physical space in which growing up happens. Parenting means power and authority, and provides the examples and norms that children internalize and either emulate or, perhaps, resist.

Love, Mom.

Love and Benevolent Monstering

Dear Mom,

When I first wrote you about Marie-Hélène Huet's (1993) work on mothers being blamed for producing monsters, I considered Huet's argument and the precarious position of the mother as a particularity to the context (literature from centuries ago). However, your suggestions in your letter about the policing or judgement of differing forms of mothering behaviors and woman behaviors puts Huet's findings in a troubling new light. While the linking of mental illness and monstrosity is hardly a new one, and a highly problematic one at that, the contemporary research on the implications of mothering suggests to me that Huet's theory on the blaming of mothers for their monstrous offspring is hardly a finished chapter in history.

Are we suggesting that the judgement and policing of mothering practices serves to other and monster child, or mother, or both? It would seem, based on the double-bind you described of either failing your children by reinstituting violent norms, or potentially harming them in your efforts to break them, that monstering is not something you *do*, but something you *are made into*, in your performance of normative or non-normative mothering roles. This makes me think of Halberstam's (2011) work on the queer art of failure. If the normative system is one of oppressive control of behavior, is failing to uphold it really a failure? Or is it queer resistance?—A resistance of definitions, perhaps?

I went to the cinema with *your* mother some odd weeks ago. We saw the new feature film *Mary Shelley* (dir. Haifaa al-Mansour, 2017), the coming-of-age love story based on the life of the young author surrounding her publication of *Frankenstein* (1818). Most of the film centers on her love relationship with the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, her relationships to her father and sister, and, perhaps most importantly, the painful loss of her baby, who dies after she has to carry it through the rain, worsening an already onset pneumonia. She goes on to give birth to her debut novel *Frankenstein.* The references, in the film, to the book as a project she sees as a baby (a replacement or even a therapeutic treatment of her loss), further the argument we recognize from the *IMDb* description of the film, that "personal tragedy […] [transformed] Mary and fuel[led] the writing of her Gothic masterwork" (*IMDb* 2018).

Toward the end of the movie, Mary's exchanges with her stepsister Claire and the estranged love of her life, Percy, shed light on the metaphorical layers of monstrosity at play. In both scenes the interactions flesh out parallels between Mary's life and the experiences of [Victor] Frankenstein's monster. In a confrontation with Percy, Mary asks: "don't you recognize Victor Frankenstein?" (dir. Haifaa al-Mansour, 2017). This suggested positioning of Percy as responsible for creating a monster corresponds not only with the climactic dissolution of their love, but with dialogue between Mary and Claire. As Claire states, the book is a "perfect encapsulation of what it feels to be abandoned [*sic*]" (ibid.). In the film's framing of Mary, the abandonment she has endured (whether from the love or her life of from her baby's passing) produced her as the figurative symbol of monstrousness. As her sister states, "we both know this is no ghost-story" (ibid.), it becomes clear that the monsters at play are not exclusively fictitious.

In the case of Mary Shelley, it seems that her failure to rescue her child, while it could be interpreted as inadequate mothering, is not the most central monstering dynamic at play. Instead, the intentional framing of Frankenstein's monster as a symbol of Mary's internalized monstrousness becomes a link to viewing the monster as both separate from, and situated within—in other words: the monster is both *other* and *self*.

In addition to bridging the gap, at least in part, between Braidotti's (1999 [1996]), Halberstam's (1995), and Huet's (1993) definitions of monstrosity, the film *Mary Shelley* (2018) also implies that monstering of others—in this case the director's and audience's monstering of Mary; and Mary's 'production' of Frankenstein—can all be done through benevolent acts, good intentions, and more importantly, *love*. This suggests to me that a positioning of the monster, whether as other, or within, can be imbued with otherwise positively associated affects. Take, for a start, a look at bell hooks' work *All About Love* (2000), in which she suggests an entire rethinking of love as a radical practice. She argues that "[…] it is useful to see love as a practice. When we act, we need not feel inadequate or powerless; we can trust that there are concrete steps to take on love's path" (hooks 2000: 165). This shift towards analyzing love not as fixed or even interactional, but as processual, serves to complicate 'love' as a simple or exclusively positive affect.

Similarly, consider the work of Lene Myong and Mons Bissenbakker (2016 [2014]), Peter Hervik (2004), or yourself (Skadegård 2017), who have all argued that in a Danish context, benevolence, love, kindness, or hospitality for the other as guest (Derrida/Dufourmantelle 2000 [1997]; Hervik 2004), may seem positive, well-meaning, or full of good intentions, but can be laced with ambiguity, harmful, or even violent practices.

Even if a monster is treated with love, benevolence, and kindness, does that treatment serve to sustain the monster in its inferiority? Does it serve to position non-monsters as 'better than'? If our love of and for monsters reconstitutes power through definition, is it really 'love'? If we return to bell hooks (2000), she would likely argue, that it is, at best, a *misunderstanding* of 'love'. If we return to Myong and Bissenbakker's (2016 [2014]) work, othering practices have been shown to stay intact even in cases where they are done through systems intended to be inclusive and loving.

If, as you have suggested, monstering can be a practice of controlling, defining, or judging a woman or a mother, even through kindness and benevolence, then this form of monstrous othering, perhaps, goes beyond gender? This also seems, in some part, to correspond to Rosi Braidotti's (1999 [1996]) argument:

> The persistence of the racial and racist overtones in teratological discourses intersects with the continuous emphasis on controlling and disciplining the woman's body. Thus, teratology shows the imbrication of genderized and racialized narratives and the role they play in constructing scientific discourses about the female body. Their interconnection is such that any analysis of female embodied experience simply needs to take into account the simultaneous—if often contradictory—effects of racialized and genderized discourses and practices (Braidotti 1999 [1996]: 298).

If anything, Braidotti seems here to suggest that an intersectional approach to teratology (the study of monsters and the abnormal) is inevitable. Additionally, it would seem to me that she is driving through the point that monsters (particularly those we know from literature and arts) are imbricated in, and thoroughly linked with, reality, including the structures of reality we know from gendered and racialized thinking about bodies.

Fictional monstrous bodies as symbol and metaphor for human bodies, or even, perhaps, human systems, structures, psychologies, and fears, are hardly particular to Braidotti's work. In the Danish anthology *Monstrologi—Frygtens manifestationer* (Christensen/Christiansen 2012), this link is made particularly clear. Further, in his contribution 'Things Come Alive—Rise of the Zombies', Steen Ledet Christiansen (2012) shows that:

> […] not only is the zombie an image of fear of terrorism in an age of war on terror, but also the even more insidious fear that we will be swallowed up by the networks we ourselves created, just as we swallowed up others on our path to empire (Christiansen 2012: 161).

Adding to this, Kim Toft Hansen's (2012) piece 'Batailles Godnathistorie—Jean Rollin, True Blood og den erotiske vampyr' about erotic vampires, stresses the metaphorical link to real life otherings and sexualities. This is apparent, for instance, when he brings in the work of George A. Dunn and Rebecca Housel's (2010) anthology *True Blood and Philosophy*. This, he argues, illustrates the ethical link between "adjustment, assimilation, and integration […] between individuals, who are different" (Hansen 2012: 279). The argument is brought home by Gunhild Agger's (2012) contribution on real-life monsters, understood as criminals and murderers, through the lens of the crime-documentary genre.

But are the monsters and monsterings on screen really as closely linked to the everyday as we suggest? Surely, the 'individuals, who are different' in Hansen's vampire analyses are more different from each other than people of varying sexualities, skin-colors, national or ethnic backgrounds? By using vampires and zombies as metaphor for the real, is the gap between us and the monster or the other made bigger or smaller? In other words, what happens when the monster is no longer fiction?

If the monsters we see in Christiansen's (2012) zombies, Hansen's (2012) vampires, and Agger's (2012) real-life criminals and murderers are produced as clearly *other*, through the mediated format they are presented to us in, and if there is a clear and binary divide between them, then perhaps that is specific to mediated monsters. While cinematic language might make mediated monsters easier to catch, the monstering of the real becomes increasingly difficult when it happens through mediation. As such, in instances where the monster is *not* a vampire or zombie, but 'just' a monstrous woman, inspired by real life, our monster might in practice become a scapegoat for heterosexism, misogyny, and racism, as we see in the case of our 'monstered (m)others' from *Kenned* (2012), *A Horrible Woman* (2017), and *Antichrist* (2009). Perhaps, the closer we get to non-fictional monstrosity, the closer *monsters get to us*.

Or, as Rosi Braidotti (2011 [1994]; see also 1999 [1996]) argues:

> They [the monsters] therefore represent the in-between, the mixed, the ambivalent as implied in the ancient Greek root of the word for 'monsters': *teras*, which means both horrible and wonderful, object of aberration and adoration, placed between the sacred and the profane. The peculiarity of the organic monster is that she is both Same and Other (Braidotti 2011 [1994]: 216).

But what do we make of this ambivalence through our intersectional lens? Does this translate into the questions of racism and structural discrimination that you work with? Does it apply to other categories than gender?

Much love, Tess.

Othering Visible Minorities

Dear Tess,

Your questions bring so much to mind. In regard to monstering the real, I cannot help but think about how certain racialized bodies are constructed within Danish media and political discourse. Exaggerated and negative media coverage, explicit denigration of Muslims, repeated and often racist depictions of non-white Danish youth, are just some of what we have become accustomed to (Nielsen [A. S.] 2019 [2018]; Andreassen 2005; Yilmaz 1999). Not too long ago, for instance, a Danish court ruled to evict an entire family from their (rented) home in an apartment complex, because a child in the family was convicted of a crime (*Sjællandske* 2018). This practice, which has since been applied to other families with immigrant background (*Ritzaus Bureau* 2018), suggests that the family is deemed unable to perform correct parenting. Parenting is seen to result in the child's criminal behavior or aberration. One could say, that the family is constructed as having *produced a monster*.

This requires some context. As you know, having grown up in Denmark, this type of situation is racialized, classed, and gendered in very particular ways. The families in question are families of color. Further, as renters and residents in the areas that they live, they represent a social and economic position that, while unspoken, is marked by class (presumed working class; presumed welfare recipients). Yilmaz convincingly explains how individuals such as those in question here can be seen as examples of how social and economic challenges have become *ethnified* (Yilmaz 1999). That is to say, social problems and resulting criminal offences, are conflated with skin color and ethnic background. For example, racialized men are often assumed to be more violent and criminally inclined than the rest of the population. Rather than seeing crime, violence, unemployment, and other concerns as situated within complex social, historical, and economic structures, there is a tendency to see these as connected directly to ethnic minority status and the construction of these groups as essentially deficient in particular ways (Hervik 2004; Yilmaz 1999). This is also mirrored in current political initiatives directed at families with immigrant backgrounds. Among other things, these include punishing families as delinquent for sending their children on holiday, or longer stays, in their countries of origin, or for caring for their toddlers at home rather than sending them to institutional day-care. With a point of departure in normalized, negative

constructions of immigrant families, these parents are constructed as problem families, unwilling to integrate or assimilate.

It seems reasonable to wonder if the construction of 'non-white family' (defined in Danish political discourse and statistics as immigrants of 'non-Western' descent) as problematic, figures into the court decision to sanction eviction.[7] Certainly, there are a disproportionate number of non-white families and individuals that experience being targeted, for example by police, or described as intractable in news and other media coverage (Andreassen 2005). I suggest that the decision to punish an entire family for a member's crimes is potentially connected to the way these families are racialized and classed, and, as I discuss below, to the notion of a monstrous female. I cannot say that such a gesture or positioning couldn't also happen for a racially majoritized (white) family similarly positioned (economically and socially). However, the legal sanction here seems clearly directed at a particular group, making the decision institutionally and structurally discriminatory (Skadegård 2017).

Let me add some perspective to illuminate how this connects to our topic of women and monsters. As I see it, a number of elements are in play. One issue is that racially minoritized immigrants and their descendants (and families) are constructed as culturally incompatible with Danish contexts, norms, and culture (Hervik 2004). That is, racialized persons in Denmark are seen, described, and understood to be essentially so different to 'Danes' (whether Danish citizens or not), that they are often considered irreconcilable with 'Danishness'. Neo-racist narratives which infer that non-white subjectivities are culturally different, and less civilized, than white European bodies underlie a number of shared presumptions and discourses about non-white immigrants (Hervik 2004). One of these is the role of the female/mother. On the one hand, racialized and immigrant women (including mothers) are constructed as incompetent, and oppressed (Andreassen 2005). They are seen as illiterate, lazy (unwilling to join the work force), submissive (to their male partners), or in other ways problematic. On the other hand, however, because racialized immigrant fathers and males are constructed as patriarchal, violent, oppressive, and absent (another form of monstering), the same women are paradoxically also constructed as central caretakers in immigrant families.

As such, these families are constructed, on the one hand, as oppressed by patriarchal structures and violent (monstrous) men. On the other hand, the women are constructed as primarily responsible. This also infers that they are at fault for fostering, for example, criminal, or otherwise monstrous offspring. Racially minoritized, immigrant women are seen to favor male children via leniency and lack of structure (neglect), leaving young males free to roam the streets as violent sexual predators (Andreassen 2005). In this way, immigrant women can be said to be monstrous in their production of aberrant (monstrous) male children due to their bad mothering. It is an interesting twist that in the case of these women, their assumed passivity and submission to male dominance is the problem. In the film, *A Horrible Woman*, it is precisely these qualities that are lacking in the majoritized (white) female character, and which result in her being monstrous and horrible. It seems racialization, class, and other factors intersect and create differing grids of oppression for minoritized and majoritized individuals.

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[7] It is common in Denmark to use the term 'ikke-vestlige lande' ['non-Western countries'] as a category. See, for example: *Danmarks Statistik* 2017.

So, to go back to the court case and the family evicted because of a child's behavior, one could say that certain discriminatory discourses underlie notions of the maternal, immigrant, and non-white household. The racialized immigrant female parent is made congruous with our notion of the 'monstrous mother', *a mother who produces monstrosity*. Further, the paradoxes within this way of perceiving the mother/family suggest, as discussed earlier, that a catch-22, or metaphorical vice grip, infuses how mothers are defined, constructed, and blamed. This links to Freudian inspired readings of the essentially monstrous female subject (when she does *not* do 'female' correctly), and to the ensuing notion that she is also 'monstrous' when she *does* 'female' correctly (Creed 1986; Williams 1984)—yet, when she is a raced female…

she can do *no* right.

Much love, Mom.

A Collective Reparative Reading—Revolutionary Mothering, Empowerment, and Agency

In the above correspondence, we share thoughts, ask questions, and try to speak to the issues from each our personal, generational, and theoretical perspectives. We do this to underscore how issues around gender, mother, other, and monster are not merely theoretical or abstract. They are very much a part of our everyday material existence. The forms of oppressive gestures and expectations to gender performance hit close to home in many ways. As a female parent, certain considerations arise. As a younger researcher on gender, other considerations come to the fore. Yet each of us is met with disparaging constructions and renderings of women in film, media, and everyday activity. Mothering, but also being a woman in a heteronormative context, is a contentious and dangerous field in which any step can potentially be interpreted as a misstep. We look at how a film, produced through and for the male gaze (Mulvey 2009 [1989]), draws on and reifies certain normative gender oppressive discourses. Our thoughts behind the structure are many. As Mainsah and Prøitz (2015) illustrate, there is much to gain from collaborative and atypically dialogical approaches to research on race and gender. It is also a deliberate methodological divergence from close textual analysis, which dominates studies of raced and gendered representations (Saha 2017), and from studies of social difference through lenses of the powered majority.

In line with Tuck and Yang's (2012) concerns about the uses of 'decolonization' as metaphor, we do not throw the terminology around lightly. Meanwhile, working collaboratively while incorporating our relationship with each other and allowing it to guide us, brought to mind the words of Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni:

> In decoloniality, research methods and research methodologies are never accepted as neutral but are unmasked as technologies of subjectivation if not surveillance tools that prevent the emergence of *another*-thinking, *another*-logic, and *another*-world view. Research methodologies are tools of gate-keeping (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015: 489; emphasis added).

We find that there is much to gain from viewing monsters not through the classical early 1900's lenses or definitions of binary difference, as in Braidotti's (1999 [1996]: 290) simple definition, but rather, as processes of othering and processes of conforming to or

resisting self-definitions of the monstrous, as described in her alternative redefinition (1999 [1996]: 299; see block quotation).

In making this assertion, we have perhaps carried out what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1997) would call a 'paranoid reading' (we did, after all, see monsters everywhere, quite literally). What Sedgwick proposed in her groundbreaking work on paranoid reading, is that the deconstructive or perhaps critical-for-the-sake-of-criticality, undertone of an analysis such as ours, can benefit immensely from a self-reflexive reconfiguration of the purpose and practice of critical theory. Sedgwick calls this direction 'reparative reading'.

In our analysis, the reparative reading of *A Horrible Woman* (2017) operates on two levels. Firstly, while our analyses in the correspondence can be seen as expressions of paranoid readings due to the consistent (re)definitions of monsters and monstrosity in the film, as well as within Danish society, any such takeaway would be premised on the assumption that monstering or monstrosity is inherently destructive or negative. To us, the processual focus of the analyses enables nuanced and dynamic understandings of monsters and (m)others, that can adapt the fluidity of these constructions as they are (re)configured through time. By this, we mean that the connection between mothering, monstering, and othering allows for ways to see how notions of the unnatural, the alien, and monstrous connect to contemporary categories such as woman, mother, and 'race'. That is, we look at how the concern with, or construction of, the unnatural or abnormal, functions to maintain certain tropes about difference. The monster has changed form in the sense that we no longer rely entirely on figures like vampires and zombies to invoke the unnatural, the abnormal, or the monstrous. Further, we point to monstering as potentially also connected to well-intentioned, even loving gestures. At first glance these arguments might read as paranoid; monsters are everywhere, and even when produced through love and benevolence, they are often examples of violent definition through power. Meanwhile, we argue that monsters may not be all bad. As we discuss below, the monster can also be understood as a productive force, or an interrogation of the normal. As such, our critical and paranoid reading was always laced with a reparative possibility.

Secondly, the reparative reading can be seen as a next step in our argument. If we have established that monstering and monsters occur continuously in relation to and enmeshed with (m)others, then what does monstrosity do for such (m)others? Perhaps it is too easy, paranoid even, to assume that this monstrosity exclusively others, or that othering is necessarily an entirely destructive rather than productive process. If anything, this next step of reparative reading would suggest that monstering and othering are complex and fluid processes with multiple potential (paranoid and reparative) outcomes.

Karen Barad explains this duality well in her *GLQ* article 'TransMaterialities—Trans*/Matter/Realities and Queer Political Imaginings':

> Monstrosity, like electrical jolts, cuts both ways. It can serve to demonize, dehumanize, and demoralize. It can also be a source of political agency. It can empower and radicalize. In an unforgettable, powerful, and empowering performative piece, 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein [A]bove the Village of

Chamounix',[8] Susan Stryker embraces the would-be epithet of monstrosity, harnessing its energy and power to transform despair and suffering into empowering rage, self-affirmation, theoretical inventiveness, political action, and the energizing vitality of materiality in its animating possibilities (Barad 2015: 392).

A critically paranoid reading of the positionings and monsterings of others, and otherings of mothers in film and everyday contexts, is perhaps necessary to comprehend the very real-life-consequences of the very real people who can be monstered, othered, mothered, or any combination of the three. It is perhaps even reparative, or at least productive, in itself. However, in the spirit of Sedgwick's (1997) reparative reading, and Barad's (2015) and Halberstam's (1995) room for nuanced coinciding multiplicities (what we might call 'quantum monsters'), we would like to take our argument one step further, by suggesting that monsters are enmeshed with hope and possibility through their very monstrousness. They are both the mirror we hold up to the normal, and a way to break with it. For us, this is a reminder that the fear and policing of mothering, the definition and outing of monsters, and perhaps even the subsequent othering of them comes from *somewhere* and leads to *something*. As we see it, these places and things have to do with power, agency, and hope. By identifying and marking them, we might strengthen our capability to mitigate or at least understand what monstering *does*.

   Perhaps our fear of monsters is a direct response to their ability to mirror something in ourselves that we either wish to have, or had forgotten was there. Or maybe we are just afraid of their power. But if anything, as a monstrous other, or othered monster, that could be a reminder of the fragility of norms and the potential that lies in standing out. And perhaps the paranoid reader, who laces her analysis with repair is then enabled to recognize that potential, and to recognize the norms that it breaks with. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick says,

> […] she has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did (Sedgwick 1997: 22).

If monsters, as Barad suggests, are "a source of political agency" (2015: 392; while referring to 'monstrosity'), they may be seen as automatically imbued with hope. It might arguably be the case for past and future monsters alike, that this hope is born from the potential fear of monsters. This fear is clearly rooted in their power, hence the cutting both ways (Barad 2015). What then, do we gain from using our definitions to limit that power, when it is at the very core of our existence as, and with, monsters? What kind of agency might one think a monster to have if one reads a monster reparatively? Surely not just the agency to aid us in self-definition through othering, but also agency in resisting that same othering. This suggests to us, that it is revolutionary to carry out mothering regardless of monstrous dilemmas. Just as it is revolutionary to

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[8] Stryker, Susan. 1994. "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix [*sic*; later republished as: 'Chamonix']—Performing Transgender Rage", *GLQ—A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1:3, 237–254. [External reference, therefore not listed in the bibliography.]

love, a love that can affect change, when we resist monstering as othering and read it as repair.

Conclusion

Not all others are monstered, and not all monsters are others. However, the two categories can, at times, become filtered and enmeshed. For mothers, the link becomes more blurry, as mothers oscillate between being framed as the root cause of monstrosity, and being monstered themselves. Regardless, framings of motherhood become contentious spaces for the negotiation of gender, difference, and norm, both in fiction and beyond.

In the film, *A Horrible Woman* (2017), the female character is monstrous and comical, emasculating, and awful. Yet, as we point out, when racialized women with immigrant backgrounds perform gender in passive, subservient, and softer ways, they are constructed as monstrous in their passivity. When the mother/co-author in this article describes performing 'good mother' in her own life, the indirect consequence is the monstrous expectations that are thereby communicated to her children. We have argued that the monstering process is both an external and internal one, as well as a potentially productive one. We have suggested that monstering occurs even within benevolent, kind, and loving (m)othering. This mirrors the processes of structural discrimination and systemic othering that we know from intersectional analyses of racism, sexism, classism, ableism, heteronormativity, and more.

Finally, we suggest that, if we view monsters and monstering as processual, we are also able to repair and rethink the revolutionary possibilities, agency, and resistances that they symbolize and enact. Rather than subscribing entirely to reparative reading as a solution, or paranoid reading as a problem, the oscillation between the two produces potential for a *quantum monster*, a duality of being and being produced as. That is, both destructive and constructive. This positioning of the monster allows for a reckoning with agency as being simultaneously self-defining and restrained. Also, it positions monsters as *both/and*. They are the products of monstrous mother's imaginations in fictions past, and transformative possibilities for the future. At the heart of this dualism, in our case, was the duality of our own mother–daughter relationship and its monstrous manifestations of willful potential.

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Biographical Notes

Tess Sophie Skadegård Thorsen, Mira's daughter and Dr. Rashmi Chandhok Skadegård's granddaughter, is a PhD candidate in the School of Social Sciences at Aalborg University. Tess' research on the production of representation in Danish film is a part of the VELUX-funded research project 'A Study of Experiences and Resistance to Racialization in Denmark' (SERR).

Mira Chandhok Skadegård, Tess' mother and Dr. Rashmi Chandhok Skadegård's daughter, is a Postdoctoral Fellow at Aalborg University in Copenhagen, Denmark. The focus of her current research is primarily on structural discrimination (gender, religion, social background, and the other discrimination grounds), and dynamics connected with power, inequality, inclusion/exclusion and complicity. Her theoretical framework builds on her background in philosophy, anthropology, and literary theory, and is strongly informed by postcolonial, feminist discourse theory, deconstruction, CRT and intersectional perspectives.