

Every Rapist is a Cop Without a Badge

Sex, Desire, and Violence, Part II

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Judith's Dagger

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Content Warning: Discussion of Sexual Violence, Sexual Coercion, Child Sexual Assault, Rape Apologia, Pedophilia (Non-Graphic)

This is a follow-up to a previous article. Part I can be read online at <https://immerautonom.noblogs.org/en-US/sex-desire-and-power/>

A feature of the rape apologist ideology to which feminist analysis of rape-as-power responds is the reversal of the power relations between the victim and the rapist.

In the previous article, *Sex, Desire, and Violence: What Do We Mean by "Rape is About Power"?*, we discussed how this reversal is constructed by framing the victim as wielding the “power of their sexual desirability.” Sexual desire, far from being entirely divorced from power, is invested with *supreme importance* in the patriarchal economies of power — especially the sexual desires of adult cis men. Sexual desire may even be invested with a form of epistemic authority, by which knowledge-claims (about, for example, the woman-ness of trans women,) can be made according to a metric of fuckability afforded to them by a (cis) desiring-subject. “She is (not) a real woman because I (do not) want to fuck her.” In other words, sexual desire is even sometimes afforded the power to define the reality of and assign gendered meaning to the body itself and its physiological features. Allonormativity, *compulsory sexuality*, is among the sociocultural normative forces that invest sexual desire itself with certain forms of *power*: especially the power to assign one’s own sexual, erotic, and gendered meanings to the bodies of others.

Although the supposed power to incite and entice is attributed to the object of desire, it is in reality the social and sexual scripts of patriarchy that are implicated in the production and social construction of the (patterns of incitement to) desire, which come to (or are said to) *instigate* or *justify* the exercise of sexual power. This includes patterns of incitement to desire that fetishize those bodies that are inscribed with the social signifiers of vulnerability and powerlessness, signifiers of the *availability to be subjugated*, i.e., the child’s body. The reduction of the Other to a body, and then the body to a violable object of desire is a two-fold process of objectification. Intrinsic to objectification is the epistemic erasure of the desire-objects subjectivity, which renders the exercise of sexual coercion upon their body morally excusable.

Closely related, then, is the deligitimization of the victim’s claim to epistemic personhood, the denial of their capacity to know and to speak and to act as a reliable witness to their own lives and bodies. If a victim — or a woman, or a child, or a trans person — cannot act as a reliable witness to the “truth” of their own body, yet the desiring-subject, by virtue of their desire, possesses a form of epistemic authority, then the victim can become an object three times: an object of desire, an object of violence, and an object of knowledge. In this context, one way in which a rape victim is often

construed as “the one with the real power,” is through the discourse of “false accusations.” A (counterfactual) narrative is produced in which the victim is imagined as having the unique ability to unleash the whole power of the state upon the abuser, to “ruin his life” over a mere “lapse,” or “miscommunication.” The power to either “punish” or forgive. The rapist is imagined as being perpetually at the victim’s mercy, and the victim is often framed as “punitive, carceral, vengeful, vindictive,” etc. if they don’t forgive and extend the mercy to which the rapist is implicitly entitled.

This experience of being trapped between discourses of “false accusations” that position them as unreliable narrators and “punitive vengefulness/mandatory forgiveness” that position them as the one exercising coercive power over their rapist will be familiar to any victim who has been abused in the context of Evangelical Christianity. For example, consider the Indiana pastor who raped a sixteen-year-old girl¹. When confronted by his victim, he confessed, and his congregation rose to embrace *him* with love and support, in a big group hug, eschewing the vengeful, harsh punitiveness Evangelical ideology asserts that “the (secular) world” practices toward rapists. The church further expressed its support for him in a statement affirming its commitment to “demonstrating the same support, encouragement, counsel and forgiveness that has come to define the collective heart and ministry of this body.” This is quite typical of Evangelical culture’s handling of abuse. (Of course, it will also be familiar to many survivors in “radical” and “anarchist” scenes who have been subjected to “restorative justice” processes² that “radically” produce the same result as Evangelical churches.)

Women and children *in general* (and feminists in particular) are thus imagined as wielding unaccountable power over cis men *in general* — all a woman (or a child) must do to permanently destroy an innocent man is accuse him of rape, and immediately a whole machinery of legal and social power will descend upon him. (Again, although a rapist can be of any gender, and a person of any gender can be raped, in the patriarchal ways of thinking that produce these narratives, it is cis men who are virtually always imagined as the prototypical “victims” of the out-of-control “moral panics” and “witch hunt mentality” that supposedly invest subaltern genders and children with this overwhelming epistemic authority.)

This is often claimed to be *especially* true of “sexual relationships” that (ostensibly) fall under the scrutiny of the law: a child or adolescent who “consents” to a “relationship” with a man becomes enframed as having privileged access to tremendous power over their “lover,” because, if they should have a vindictive streak or want to “punish” their “lover,” they can simply “blame the

¹Steinbuch, Y. (2022, May 24). *Indiana pastor John Lowe II admits affair - but woman says she was his 16-year-old victim*. New York Post. <http://tinyurl.com/yzr2bb6z>

²*Betrayal: A Critical Analysis of Rape Culture in Anarchist Subcultures*, available at <https://immerautonom.noblogs.org/files/2022/10/Betrayal-a-critical-analysis-of-rape-culture-in-anarchist-subcultures.pdf>

adult” or “reveal the relationship” in order to expose the helpless man to the persecution of the law. These discourses mirror similar storytelling techniques found in white supremacist, transphobic, and homophobic narratives. For example, the way a wealthy and powerful white male university professor might imagine himself as a martyr risking arrest and persecution for refusing to use a student’s pronouns, or for disseminating “suppressed” “race realist” “science” and so on: the idea is that the marginalized, otherized, and oppressed (i.e., the young, Black, trans, and queer students who are both officially under his authority and structurally marginalized relative to his de facto dominance as a cis white male at the top of the food chain) possess the power to “ruin his life,” over imagined slights or false accusations. So also might an abuse apologist imagine himself as a “revolutionary” risking arrest and persecution³ for seeking sex with children.

It should go without saying that this is all the exact inverse of reality. The reality of the legal system’s treatment of rape victims and marginalized people is so well-documented and beyond all doubt that it is pointless to recapitulate the many, many analyses that have been made of it here. But since of late many leftists, progressives, and anarchists alike seem to have slid quite far to the right on the question of the supposed overwhelming power of a rape accusation, it bears stating explicitly: *rape victims, especially children, are silenced and disbelieved at every single turn, from their own families to the fucking supreme court*, and they have been for hundreds and hundreds of years, for as long as court records and judicial norms have been documented.⁴

In all of these frames, the actual distribution of power is discursively reversed – the victim of rape wields both sexual and punitive power over the helpless rapist, who is weak in the face of the victim’s overwhelming desirability and powerless against the censure of the law; the “rapability” of subaltern genders and children (i.e. their sexual desirability and their vulnerability to sexual assault) allows them to wield a pervasive, ever-present social and legal power to “ruin a man’s life” by, essentially, ruining his reputation. (There is an internal contradiction, however: in those contexts where a rapist is understood as taking power back from someone who has abused their putative power over him, the transfer of power from the victim to the rapist is implicitly admitted to.)

Rape, said feminists in response, is not caused by the the rapist’s *weakness and powerlessness* before overwhelming sexual desire, as previous masculinist and patriarchal discourses had insisted, but the opposite: rape is an expression of not only a *will* to control and dominate but also a *capacity* to do so. And I don’t mean capacity in terms of physical strength, although that may be

³See, for example, Ralph Underwager’s interview to the pedophile activist journal *Paidika: the Journal of Pedophilia*, available here: <http://www.nostatusquo.com/ACLU/NudistHallofShame/Underwager3.html>

⁴See Suzanne Zeedyk and Fiona Raitt, (2000) *The Implicit Relation of Psychology and Law: Women and Syndrome Evidence*.

a factor (but, because rape is so often not accompanied by physical force, strength may not even enter the picture); I mean that the rapist *always implicitly knows*, even if they may consciously hold the anti-feminist beliefs described above, that the mechanisms of legal, social, and gendered power are all really at their disposal, not the victim's. The capacity to rape is a social capacity, a structural capacity, not a capacity inherent to a type of body or a type of person. The power to rape is distributed unevenly by patriarchal social organization: cis men are afforded the prerogative of sexual violence as a component of the techniques of rule to which they have access within what Sayak Valencia calls "necropatriarchy":

"I understand necropatriarchy as the privilege of exercising the techniques of necropolitical violence proffered by the patriarchy to the figure-body of the individual man (as microsovereign of the populations in his charge). So men have among their gender privileges the knowledge and cultural socialization in the use of the techniques of necropolitics, and legitimacy in the handling and use of violence as a key technique of rule. That is [...] the executors of violence, usually heterosexual cis men, act as armed soldiers of the 'sovereign.' Their crimes occur with impunity, and there is a persistent lack of justice for trans and cis women, as well as minority populations. Due to their race/ethnicity, sexuality, and class, they possess a monopoly over the techniques of death, ruling over gender, class, race, sexual dissent, and functional diversity."⁵

The mechanisms of legal, social, and gendered power are often (although not as consistently) slanted toward the rapist even when the rapist is not a cis white man. Access to the power of the law or the power of patriarchal storytelling is considerably less reliable as a fall-back for people of marginalized genders, and when it is available it often takes different forms than those at the disposal of cis men. However, the discourses of rape culture are powerful and hegemonic, and still consistently conspire to excuse and permit rape in a variety of ways. For example, in the case of a cis female teacher who rapes one of her underage male students, the victim is vastly disadvantaged when it comes to even articulating (or understanding) himself as a *victim at all*. He may be "officially" recognized as a victim in terms of pure legal doctrine (if the abuse is discovered in the first place) but the designation of victimhood can only extend beyond the bureaucracy of law in certain limited circumstances. When a Men's Rights Activist wants to accuse feminists of lying about the gendered distribution of power-to-rape, he may bring up the male student as a victim, but outside that context the victim is mercilessly entrapped in

⁵Sayak Valencia (2019). Necropolitics, Postmortem/Transmortem Politics, and Transfeminisms in the Sexual Economies of Death, translated by Olga Arnaiz Zhuravleva, in *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 6 (2). 180-193. Duke University Press.

gendered discourses that construe the cis female body as incapable of rape and “males,” as always sexually desiring, always sexually consenting, initiating, eager – the woman who is his rapist is put into discourse as a coveted reward he is “lucky” to have “got.” Here we can also see the great significance with which sexual desire, and especially the position of the (aspiring) masculine subject as *desiring subject*, is invested in the discourses of sexual power. We can also see how child victims may be even further removed from power than adult women, even when the victim is a boy. In fact, the gender of a child victim going up against an adult rapist does not seem to have much effect on their access to means of any escape from the physical and epistemic violence of the state and legal system’s collaboration with their rapist.⁶ Or when a cis woman rapes a trans woman, the gendered power the rapist wields over her victim is very materially real, but is obscured by discourses that frame the cis female body as incapable of becoming the weapon of a rapist and discourses that frame trans women as intruding upon or threatening to cis womanhood, and so on.

So here is where I am going with all this:

Every rape (including every act of sexual interaction with a child) reifies a relation of domination and subjugation between, at minimum, the rapist and the victim. But *every* rape *also* functions to produce and reproduce a *societal* relation of domination and subordination (prototypically, in the coercive gendering of subjects and the *sexing of bodies*), between those who wield implicit or explicit social legitimacy in exercising the techniques of (necropatriarchal, state, etc.) rule, and those upon whom those techniques of rule are exercised. Rape is a technology of oppression. Rape is an assertion of *entitlement*, in the sense of “being the title-holder to a piece of property,” of holding the *title* to someone else’s body. Rape is a *property relation*. As such, it has special significance in the adult-child hierarchy, which is characteristically defined as a property relation, in which children are configured as parental property and/or as objects of exchange between adults, as in child marriage, pederasty, and other practices through which an adult “owner” may license other adult’s sexual or physical access to the body of the child in their care.⁷

⁶Zeedyk and Raitt (2000)

⁷I am reminded of Theo Sandfort’s “*Boys on their Contact With Men*,” (1987), in which the boy-love advocate and sexologist Sandfort interviews a number of young boys who are in so-called “sexual relationships” with adult men, and he is careful to state that he obtained the interviews *with the permission of the adult “partners.”* In fact, it was the adult men who *asked* the boys to participate in Sandfort’s study. Some of those men also had the permission of the boys’ parents. In this case, the parents grant the adult “partners” sexual access to their children, and then the adult “partners” in turn grant Sandfort epistemic access to the boys, neatly setting up a scenario where the boys are not really free to speak openly because they know that their words will be reported to the men, whom they know are already aware that the interviews are taking place. From a pure “research ethics” point

All power relations between large classes or groups of people — e.g. the relationship between the state and the subject, or between the owning class and the working class, adults and children, cis men and women, etc. — must be constituted and sustained through the aggregation of many routine daily practices of the techniques of rule. All exercise of these techniques of rule are always functioning to reify the oppression of all who are subject to them. It is for this reason that *all cops are bastards*. Every cop is acting as an agent and enforcer of the state's monopoly on political violence, as long as they are acting as a cop, even if they save a kitten from a tree, and even if they supposedly “fear for their lives,” i.e., (claim to) feel powerless to sustain their own survival in the face of a “threat.”

Every rape reifies and enforces a hierarchy of violence that flows — through the mechanisms of (necro)patriarchy, capitalism, and the state, and through the blunt material exercise of power — downhill from those who have access to the exercise of power onto the bodies of the marginalized, otherized, and oppressed. Every rape constitutes a practice of oppression, the large-scale aggregation of which amounts *rape culture* or *patriarchy*. Patriarchy in turn constitutes the structure of power, from the priest to the police to the courtroom principle of “innocent until proven guilty,” that facilitates each individual rapist's free exercise of power upon the victim's body. This facilitation of the rapist's free exercise of power upon the victim is pervasive at every level of the state; the monopoly on legitimate violence is deployed not to “catch rapists” or to “protect children,” but to obstruct and truncate the victim's access to *any* form of power, including the power of the justice system to redress grievances. In this sense, all cops are the allies and facilitators of rapists, if not rapists themselves (*which they are, at startlingly high rates*).

And every rapist, regardless of either their own gender or the gender of their victim, is always acting as a *front line enforcer*, in the most absolute sense, of a structural hierarchy of bodies, genders, sexualities, desires, and power. Every rapist is acting in the capacity of an “armed soldier of the ‘sovereign’,” an executor of violence, who acts with virtual impunity and is always impossible to hold accountable, as patriarchal discourses of “desirability as power,” “false accusations,” “witch hunts” “moralistic panic,” “punitive vengeance/mandatory forgiveness,” and endless other discourses constantly and deftly extricate the rapist from any and all attempts to seek aid or justice on the part of those over whom the rapist exercises embodied sexual power. As such, *every rapist is acting in the capacity of a cop*.⁸

of view, the study is bafflingly poorly designed, and from the point of view of anarchist love for the oppressed, the study is agonizing to read. The boys are trapped between three sets of adults with power over them, all of whom are engaged in a practice of mutually reifying each other's relation to the boys as a property relation. Not surprisingly, Sandfort repeatedly frames the children as the ones who “hold the real power in the relationship,” including by means of the exact narratives of imagined legal power and “power of desirability” discussed in this essay and its predecessor.

⁸See *Thirty-One Theses: Toward an Anarcha-Transfeminist, Youth Liberationist, Anti-*

To fight a rapist, in any form, is an act of insurrection against the entire fucking state, capitalist oligarchy, and patriarchy.

This is what it means for “*rape*” to be “*about power.*”

Racist, Anti-Rapist Prison Abolitionism, available at <https://immerautonom.noblogs.org/en-US/thirty-one-theses-a-manifesto/>



Tongues like fusillades! Eyes Like fire!

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