

Monsterization and Race

Labeling the Other as a monster has been used to marginalize and dehumanize minority groups and those lacking power. A monster does not have to have fur and fangs, but oftentimes it is the person or group in power who becomes monstrous through their prejudiced actions against those whom they have labeled as monsters. In a way that monsters are portrayed in the media, whether it is through films, books, shows, or especially in society, the monster is often defined by its physical appearance and is discriminated against, but it is the bully who is revealed to be the actual monster. This is an example of monsterization. When a vulnerable person is a target of racism, it can lead to further problems that can affect their identity in a negative way. Society perceives monsters as the “other” group. Those that differ in some arbitrarily significant manner and lack the social or political power to defend themselves are the victims of monsterization. There is often a racist misconception that marginalized groups are violent or unkind which can be seen in the media, but on the other hand, the dominant group that is spreading hate is the actual monster. Racist people are often confused with monsterization when talking about them since they believe the minority is the monster when in fact, the racist person is the true monster.

The extensive history of racism and the contemporary sociopolitical landscape of America has contributed to a massive increase in violence targeting the non-White, racial Other. This is an example of whereby, an individual or group transforms into a monster whether it is literally or figuratively (as described in Cohen’s *Monster Theory (Seven Theses)*). The power of identifying an individual or group as a monster is that the monster evokes and becomes a powerful symbol and the way in which the monster is depicted further reifies this image and the accompanying fear. As Cohen notes in his *Monster Theory (Seven Theses)*, “the monster’s body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy (ataractic or incendiary)” (Cohen 4). Two key elements of defining a monster, according to David Gilmore, are “mystery and menace,” that is, monsters are typically large in size, powerful (e.g., physically and/or magically), and are inherently “evil, that is, unmotivated wickedness toward humans” (6). What many

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don't understand is that monsters in the real world don't have to be big or scary. They can be anyone we know, and it is their mindset that makes them invisibly evil.

Monsters can be described as people who pick on someone that is different or does certain actions that can harm an individual physically or emotionally. The "monster" contributes a lot of fear and anxiety toward another marginalized group of people (also described in Cohen's *Monster Theory (Seven Theses)*). We often do not understand why we keep rejecting people who are different or stigmatized as being the "other" group. People are labeled as monsters just because they are different. As a society, most people they consider as "others" are perceived as outcasts, for example, people of color. However, racist people are true monsters that terrify or target others. Institutional racism is defined as "the perpetuation of discrimination on the basis of "race" by political, economic, or legal institutions and systems (*Institutional Racism, Britannica*)." Individual racism, on the other hand, refers to "an individual's racist assumptions, beliefs or behaviors and is "a form of racial discrimination that stems from conscious and unconscious, personal prejudice." An example of institutional racism would be the Jim Crow laws where the white and people of color had to be segregated. They could not share the same public restrooms, schools, stores, restaurants, or gas stations. Between those two variations of racism, both involve the act of prejudice in contributing to monsterization.

The way racism relates to monsterization is that there are certain races being stigmatized throughout society. There is a huge stigma behind people being perceived as the *other* group, and when people can't find a sense of belonging among a diverse population, they often struggle with self-esteem and identity. Inequalities toward people of color, systemic or interpersonal, "are not consequences of their biological inheritance but products of historical and contemporary social, economic, educational and political circumstances." (*AAA Statement on Race* 713). For example, there is a common stereotype that African Americans are criminals. That specific stereotype occurs in film and television which is how white audiences criticize based on what they are looking at. With that, white audiences take that specific African American stereotype and apply it to contemporary society. The reason why marginalized

individuals would feel out of place is because they are often concerned about not fitting in with white people. Oftentimes, when that happens, it can be visualized as putting people in boxes or applying labels on them. There are also stereotypes which are another connection to racism because they can cause a lot of social harm to a person's background or culture. Stereotypes are inherently a part of monsterization because it is used as fuel for hatred and othering. The reason why stereotypes can be portrayed in the media is not only because television is considered a part of White people's culture, but also since the writers and producers in charge of creating the television series are also predominantly white. Based on the history of when television dominated contemporary society, many white audiences are often influenced by what they see as well as reject people that are different from them.

Monsterization can also involve media representation of monsters. George Romero's zombie classic, *Night of the Living Dead*, calls into question who the monster actually is while addressing race and race relations in the United States during the 1960s. Barbara Bruce, in *Guess Who's Going to Be Dinner*, argues that "it is not true that [Ben's] color is arbitrary without meaning: Romero uses it to signify his difference from the other characters, to set him apart from their norms" (Bruce 62). For example, the movie, *42* talks about the story of Jackie Robinson being the first Black baseball player to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers. The monsters portrayed in the film are white people because they do not expect a Black player to be part of an all-white baseball league, especially during the time period of Jim Crow laws and segregation. Robinson's teammates and Dodgers fans alike used racial slurs and were cruel to him. They even tried to make a petition to not play with Robinson. The racist teammates and fans were the true monsters. Despite Jackie Robinson dealing with monsterization, from the impact he made, he was able to break the color barrier in Major League Baseball, and the fans who monsterized him eventually changed their minds. Another example of how monsters can be portrayed in the media is the idea of combining different races or ethnicities in interracial relationships. The idea of two different ethnicities being with each other was uncommon until now, so there are many hateful people who despise it. As much as interracial interactions have become more common today than in the past, there is still racism that

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happens in the media or in public.

Monsterization and race have a connection with each other because they both involve mistreatment by people that do not accept differences. As a society, we are afraid of the unexpected or what we normally do not see in another person. However, that should not be an excuse to act rude to one another. There is a difference between the bully seeing the monster and the bully being the monster. Specifically, white people who monsterize marginalized groups, whether through systemic or interpersonal racism, are the true monsters. The point is that no one deserves to be treated unfairly and people should be more open-minded to new backgrounds. Instead of judging others, they should try to get to know them first, so that they could potentially be an ally to the monsterized.

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