

The Guy Who Raped Me Saw Me Half-Naked (and I liked it)*

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Content warning: Sexual violence

*The proceeding text is from my diary. It was written on April 10th, the day after the **BØRNS** concert. While I was not part of the original group that devised this project, I am grateful for their openness in allowing me to enter their community and participate in their art.*

I didn't realize what an outsider I've been to my own body until last night. (*The term "alienation" doesn't even begin to cover it. Dear Body, I'm sorry.*) It was the night of the spring concert; at the last minute, I decided to participate in a demonstration against rape culture at Middlebury. I stripped down until much of my skin was exposed. Purple handprints were painted on my flesh. I held a sign saying "still not asking for it." There were four of us performing. One of the other signs read "sexual assault leaves a mark."

I went into the action not knowing if I wanted to take my clothes off or participate by handing out slips of paper to passersby. In any event, I hoped that I would see Daniel.** I've been doing a lot of bodywork in therapy these days, some meditation... It's amazing how much of PTSD is written onto flesh and bone. Yet as the **BØRNS** action approached, I sensed that I needed participate as a performer. The deepest part of me wanted to transform my body from a site of mourning to a tool for education. I needed to challenge the gaze, His gaze, which still haunted me.

I didn't perform this piece to spite Daniel.** On the contrary, I have a deep-seated belief in his capacity for growth and change should he want it. I engaged with this performance because I needed to reaffirm the preciousness and value of my own body—a body that, in one night, had transformed into my enemy. I participated in this action to redeem the corporeal from rape in ways that op-eds and theses and intellectual exercises had not.

Here's the scene: I was standing outside of the concert venue before it started. I did not feel strange about being semi-nude in public—I felt at ease. Three or four minutes into the performance, Daniel** walked down the corridor. He was walking with Tom,** who had looped back to support his friend. (*I paused: for once, it wasn't my burden to seek this kind of support.*)

I stood firm in my posture, remembering the grounding techniques that I'd learned in therapy. (*Despite the messages that Daniel** often sends to me on Middlebury's pathways, I realized that I have a right to consume space.*) I looked at Dan** and Tom** with an intent gaze. It was intent, not angry—the same gaze that I'd used to engage with dozens of others.

One of the runners involved with the performance approached Daniel** and Tom** and asked them if they wanted a piece of paper describing the art display. They quickly said “no” and moved on. More than anything, I remember Daniel** trying to speak to Tom**. He was so flustered that he couldn't create words, no matter how hard he tried. His eyes darted all around the room; Dan** was clearly struggling. (*I know the exact feeling... For me, this sort of flushed-faced, bodily chaos had become all-too-routine.*)

Here's what was so transformative about the fact that the guy who raped me saw me half-naked: Daniel** saw my flesh, but it was radically on my own terms. In seeing him display a sense of shame, I was released from my own. Our sexual misconduct proceeding had been rather cold and distant—I knew how Daniel's** lawyers felt, but not Daniel** himself. (*And, to be certain, people who rape are undeniably human.*) In that hallway, I found comfort in seeing Dan** disarmed, in knowing that I wasn't the only one impacted by the past few years. I found comfort in having my body visually represent what I am reminded of every day—that sexual assault leaves a mark. And the best part is that I had a wonderful, feminist community to care for me throughout the entire process.

Dear Body,

You have been through so much, and I have at times been so harsh to you. Last night, I learned that you are such a powerhouse—I learned that when you are centered, you can move mountains.

You aren't valuable because of the gazes of others—you are valuable in spite of them. I feel you, I notice you, and I love you completely.

* In the interest of complete transparency: I filed a sexual misconduct case against this individual, and he was found by the College to be not responsible on all counts. I am not ashamed of this fact, nor does it deter me from my present activism.

** A pseudonym