



Crimes, Criminals and the Monstrous on Social Media: The Norwegian Online Patrols Narratively Navigating Borders of Humanity

Guro Flinterud

Abstract

This article investigates how the Norwegian police's Online Patrols contribute to the cultural production of monstrosity through their posts on social media. Drawing on theories of monstrosity as a shifting moral and cultural category, the study examines how police communication—though framed as preventive and informative—implicitly constructs boundaries between humanity and its monstrous others. The article employs the concept of “implicit narrative,” derived from Bakhtin's theory of speech genres, to analyze how police posts implicitly activate broader cultural scripts. Through a close reading of posts about sexual predators, hate crime and women's rights, the article explores different ways that the police's social media presence draws from and play into ongoing cultural negotiations ultimately connected to morality and humanity. By situating police storytelling within the algorithmically governed and affectively charged landscape of social media, the article argues that digital policing practices are deeply entangled with cultural processes of othering. In this context, the law is not only a regulatory framework but also a narrative device through which monstrosity is constructed, contested, and circulated.

Keywords: Social media, police, implicit narrative, hate crime, sexual violence



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Introduction

Over the past decades, social media platforms have become central to everyday life and communication in Western culture and arguably represent a social sphere towards which the police cannot be indifferent (e.g. Ralph 2021; Schneider 2016). Simultaneously, social media platforms represent a space where communicational dynamics are different from the traditional areas of policing, relying more on performance and narrative (e.g. Bullock 2018; Wood 2020). This format challenges the conventional authority of the police through demanding them to adopt the vernacular of the platform for their messages to reach the public (Flinterud forthcoming). As a consequence, police information more directly enters a much broader interpretive sphere than it did prior to their participation on these types of platforms (Flinterud and Lundgaard 2024). While the police has always taken part in meaning making through their authority as law enforcers, both physically and discursively through exerting power on behalf of the state and through disseminating their versions of information about events, the format and algorithmic distribution of social media content immerse this information more explicitly into larger cultural debates of right and wrong. In this sense, the police, through telling stories about crimes and criminals on social media platforms, take part in the cultural processes through which the borders between humanity and monstrosity is negotiated.

This article rests on the premise that monsters are cultural entities defined through dynamic processes deciding what is deemed monstrous at any one time. Monstrous is in this context understood as human acts that transgress common definitions of humanity or normality, defying existing categories of the cultural and the natural, or perhaps rather revealing the instability of such categories (Tyler 2008, 114). In the context of crimes and criminals, the monstrous can be understood as a moral category that is continuously defined and interpreted through narratives of acts performed by humans where the borders between nature and culture are blurred (Asma 2009, 7). Legal systems are also primarily constructed to match cultural and moral sensitivities, and as such important factors in the process through which the border between humanity and monstrosity is defined in any context. The police as enforcers of law and order in close contact with the population are crucial actors in how these narratives spread in everyday life. In contemporary connective cultures, social media has emerged as an important arena for these types of negotiations where police information is performed, often narratively as stories about criminal acts.

The analysis in this article will focus on social media content created and posted by the Norwegian Online Patrols. The Online Patrols are sections in each of the Norwegian Police Service's 12 police districts dedicated to presence on digital and connective spaces, such as social media platforms and interactive games. They

belong to the preventive part of the police, which means that their presence is dedicated to using the tools of different digital spaces to prevent crime rather than to uncover or investigate crimes (Flinterud forthcoming).

I will read the Online Patrols' informational posts on social media as complex cultural expressions, asking: in what ways do the implicit cultural narratives within their posts about crimes and criminals navigate the borders of humanity in contemporary Norway? And by extension, how can these posts and their narratives be read as part of larger cultural narratives of monstrosity in contemporary Western culture?

In the following, I will first present relevant previous research and the theoretical perspective that the analysis rests on, which is the constructed connection between monstrosity and serious crime. Then I present my methods, the empirical material and the concept that make out my main analytical tool, implicit narrative. The analysis is a close reading of three examples of the intersections of monstrosity and crime is constructed through implicit narrative. I end with a short concluding discussion.

Creating monstrous crimes: previous research and theoretical perspectives

While all violations of the law might be considered morally wrong, not all will be deemed monstrous. Indeed, violating moral laws is often considered a part of human nature, and a reason for why we need formal laws whether in the form of religion or judicial law. Tyler refers to Foucault who traced a historical change in the connections between monstrosity and crime from the medieval to the modern period, where the idea of monstrosity was changed from relating to the criminal act to describing the nature of the criminal offender (Tyler 2008, 122–23). In other words, monstrosity is evoked not simply by a morally despicable act, but by the human transgressing the cultural boundaries of human nature.

In contemporary Western culture, the idea of monstrosity is most often reserved for serial killers (Asma 2009) or sexual offenders, often named sexual *predators* in the media indicating an animal nature (DiBennardo 2018). DiBennardo also found that media coverage of sexual offenders often focus on murder and kidnapping, even though these crimes rarely overlap statistically (DiBennardo 2018, 15). While serial killers are not that common in society, sexual violence unfortunately is. The increased severity of reactions towards sexual violence in contemporary Western society can be traced to the feminist movement of the mid-1970s, and recently actualized by the #metoo movement from 2017 and onward which further boosted the cultural narrative of sexual offenders as predatory monsters (Mack and McCann 2021; Kruse and Skilbrei 2024). With the increased availability of Internet forums

from the 1990s and in particular after the arrival of social media, online grooming and sexual abuse has become an area of priority for the police (Malesky Jr. 2007; Sunde and Sunde 2021).

The idea of the monstrous sexual offender is so ingrained within contemporary western culture that it is not only evidenced in police initiatives and media representations. In a study of the self-narratives of convicted sexual offenders, Kruse and Skilbrei shows how they actively take on and negotiate the idea of the monstrous when making sense of their offenses (Kruse and Skilbrei 2024). Despite differences in the interviewees' accounts, they all positioned their self-narratives against the idea of the monster—not necessarily denying the monstrousness of sexual crimes but narratively positioning themselves in opposition to the trope of the Monster. In this sense, they do not necessarily challenge the moral understanding of sexual crimes as acts of monstrosity, but through detailed narrative they position themselves and their own individual acts on the human side of the divide. While the narratives of convicted offenders are not part of the empirical material for this article, this aspect provides an important backdrop for understanding just how deep this narrative othering of sexual violence runs in contemporary Western societies.

This article analyzes posts from social media. These posts are not only part of a narrative landscape where humanity is negotiated through stories about specific crimes, but also emerge from online sites where stories are told and spread in specific ways. As such, the posts represent both a narratively constructed moral landscape and the real-life crimes they talk about, they are both story and information. The legend cycle Slender Man, a monster emerging from the Internet and intersecting with real life crime can help us understand the dynamics of these types of communication (Chess and Newsom 2014; McNeill and Blank 2018; Peck 2023). The Slender Man monster emerged from a discussion forum for horror enthusiasts in 2009, and rose to public attention in 2014 when connected to the attempted murder by two twelve-year-old girls of a girl of the same age in Waukesha, USA (Peck 2023, 7). While there is both a monster (Slender Man) and a monstrous act (attempted murder) in this story, what is most relevant to our discussion is the way that the mediated reports of the crime worked to construe monstrosity. Manning has used the twin concepts *hypermediacy* and *immediacy* to describe the mixed experiences of the Slender Man on online spaces as both existing within the medium (hypermediacy) and being part of everyday life (immediacy) (Manning 2018). This conceptual pair point to the intersections of online and offline modes creating a liminal space where the monster is simultaneously part of the media landscape of narrative and part of the real world through ostension. In the context of police social media posts, these concepts highlight how the stories conveyed by the police on social media not only exist within the narrative of the post, but

simultaneously exist as real-life possibilities, in understandings shaped through the experiences of the receivers. Peck has pointed out how rumor panics like the one following the attempted murders in Waukesha only seemingly is about the monster, but rather should be understood through the amplification of easy signifiers in digital and algorithmically governed spaces to cover up more complex issues of mental health and ideological violence (Peck 2023, 165–66). In this article I expand on this understanding, suggesting that the negotiation of the borders of humanity inherent in connecting heinous crimes to monstrosity is also present in stories on social media that purportedly does attempt to tackle the complex issues of social and criminal injustice.

Method(ology)

Collecting

The analysis in this article is based on material collected between 2022 and 2025 as part of the Research Council funded project *A Matter of Facts: Flows of Knowledge through Digitalized Police Practices*, where the main aim was to explore some of the ways that the police creates knowledges and takes part in meaning making through the use of a diverse array of digital tools, social media being one. Here, I explore the presence of the online patrols on Facebook and Instagram. There are 12 police districts in Norway, each with their own online patrol-section, and each of these sections administrate their own accounts on Instagram and Facebook. A lot of the content is shared between the accounts, but all sections appear to make their own content with different frequencies, and some content is locally specific. Facebook posts were explored using META's now discontinued CrowdTangle tool, where I was able to collect and structure posts qualitatively, as well as extract text and metadata for computational analysis. In addition to this, I performed ethnographic fieldwork on the home pages of different online patrol accounts on Facebook and Instagram, partly going through the home pages in a structured way date by date, and partly through snowballing, looking up specific topics and posts of relevance, for example in relation to special occasions or current events (e.g. Hine 2017). The Online Patrols have open commentary sections on both Instagram and Facebook, which have also been read and collected as part of this fieldwork. These are however seldom used, and in the analysis only the third example makes use of comments from the commentary sections.

Categorizing

There are several possible ways to categorize the collected material. I found that in relation to online Patrols' stated goal of working preventively through being present

where the people are, there were two modes that could be identified as dominant in the material: connecting and informing (See also Flinterud forthcoming). *Connecting* is expressed through posts containing elements I interpret as intended to make the police more approachable, such as silly dancing videos or humorous skits, as well as posts showing the police observing holidays and events such as the national day, Pride or International Women's Day. *Informing* is expressed through posts containing elements interpreted as following a more standard police mandate of disseminating truthful information about the law for the public not to (inadvertently) break it, and about common crimes and dangers, so that the public are able to protect themselves. While some posts could be sorted clearly under one of the two modes, several posts combine them.

In addition to this inductive categorizing, I performed topic modelling on the extracted texts from Facebook. Topic modelling is a computational method for detecting topics in a text where an algorithm suggests clusters of keywords that might be meaningful in context (Baltz and Norén 2021). As such, it is a method whose results rely on the researcher's previous knowledge of the text and can be used to support qualitative analysis. Most importantly, topic modelling algorithms solely create results based on sorting through existing text, and is not prone to hallucinations, like the recent chat based LLMs such as ChatGPT. The topics thus discerned from the text material were mainly on a different level than the overarching categories created after my inductive coding, but one result was relevant for this article, namely that of all topics, only one of them was a defined crime: sexual violence. I will discuss a possible interpretation of this result in the analysis below.

Analyzing

The online patrols do not explicitly label criminals monsters on their social media pages—I have at least not found any mention of this in my material. However, as their mandate is to keep the people safe from dangers in terms of warning them against crimes and criminals, their communication will always be a form of othering, using the law to create moral boundaries between the reader (us, potential victim) and the dangerous criminal (them, potential monster). Sometimes this is done through posts that address how to protect oneself from crimes and criminals, other times it is done as a warning to help the reader not to cross the moral line, such as urging people to keep within the speed limit whether in their cars or on an electric scooter. The latter types of posts indicates the idea that these positions are not fixed: anyone can at any time cross that moral border if they do not follow the law.

I use the concept *implicit narrative* to analytically capture the ways that the cultural layers of this othering that appear when reading the posts in contexts

(Flinterud 2020, 76). The idea is similar to the concept of kernel stories coined by Kalčík, which she describes as “a brief reference to the subject, the central action or an important piece of dialogue from a longer story” (Kalčík 1975, 7). The difference between the concepts is that the kernel story is a tool used consciously by the narrator, while the idea of implicit narrative is meant to capture also the stories that are not necessarily consciously alluded to by the narrator. While the concept of kernel stories is relevant to understanding communication in close knit communities, the idea of implicit narrative is relevant to more open-ended media environments such as social media sites where a single utterance might evoke a wide range of co-existing stories.

Implicit narrative is a Bakhtinian concept, derived from the ideas presented in Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of *speech genres* (Bakhtin 1986). Speech genres is a term that describes the broad range of contextual rules and conventions that govern communication, from the unspoken conventions that make a conversation between friends different from one between strangers, to the clear-cut rules of scientific publication, and everything around and in between. Central to this theory is that each utterance contains traces both of preceding utterances and of anticipated future utterances, which the utterer might or might not be aware of. As such, each utterance is polyphonic: it contains traces of the cultural context in which it is uttered, no matter how simple or complex. Using the word *implicit* rather than *implied* establish an analytical term to read an utterance as a polyphonic cultural expression, not bound by what might have been explicitly implied by the utterer. In the context of this article, this entails not limiting the police’s social media posts to the intentions of the police, but expanding the analytical focus to encompass the range of possible stories it could tell. This also means that when referring to the police as senders of the posts, I am not referring to the intentions or motivations of individual police officers or leaders within the organization, but to how the content might be interpreted in light of the official stance of the Norwegian Police Service as expressed in official documents.

Implicit monsters and explicit fear

Despite looming large in the literature of monstrous criminals, the sexual predator is not widely visible in the social media channels of the Norwegian Online Patrol. Nevertheless, results from topic modelling of the textual content of posts identified sexual violence as the only subtopic representing a defined crime—others referred to more general themes such as traffic, parents and youth, and opening hours of police stations. The content on Facebook and Instagram is largely visual, based either on images or videos where a lot of the text is integrated in the visual content and not written into the text fields. The fact that sexual violence does not appear

predominant when the sites are studied through a qualitative ethnographic approach but among the identified topics when analyzing the texts in isolation indicates that posts on this topic might more often contain longer written texts than other types of posts.

One example of this is a warning post actualizing the motif of contaminated drink, more specifically that of the risk of someone spiking your drink in a nightclub or bar. The post contained a generic image of a filled glass on a blurry blue background, and the text field contained a relatively long text:

Watch your drink [smile emoticon]. Always keep an eye on your drink when you're at a party, or out on the town. If you need to use the bathroom or go on errands, have someone you trust watch your bottle/glass. Don't accept drinks from strangers. Not everyone has honest intentions! Take care of each other [Heart emoticon].

This text does not explicitly mention sexual violence, but knowledge of common urban legends or rumors about contaminated drinks indicate that the outcome of having your drink spiked is not so much the danger of intoxication, but of subsequent sexual abuse. As Donovan has pointed out, drink spiking is a broad cultural phenomenon that range from malicious to practical jokes such as spiking the punch in a youth party to make people tipsy without their knowing or putting laxatives in someone's chocolate milk (Donovan 2016, 2). However, there is a long tradition in western storytelling of stories where drinks are connected to the exploitation of young girls and women, exemplified by Donovan through contemporary legends, but also prevalent in for example the ballad traditions of Scandinavia (Conrad 2021; Donovan 2016). An early example from Norwegian folklore is the ballad of Liti Kiersti, where in some variants, the elven king after seducing and luring the girl Kiersti into the mountain uses a special wine to make her forget her previous life outside.

In the case of the Facebook post, the image, the explicit mention of being at a party or out on the town and the fact that this is posted by the police all contribute to situate this text in the narrative landscape of predatory drugging. It is a text written to inform about possible dangers, keeping the first part of the act, spiking drinks, explicit, and the second part of the act, possible sexual assault, implicit. In this, the offender is also kept implicit, alluded to with the Norwegian word *uvedkommende*, which I have translated to strangers here, but which also carries the meaning of someone who has no right being there—someone who, as pointed out in the following sentence, might not have honest intentions. The text is directed at possible victims and other people with honest intentions, urging them to protect themselves and each other against this unnamed, prevailing danger,

implicitly understood as the sexual predator.

It should also be noted that none of the posts warning of sexual abuse addresses the offender. The basic communicative strategy is to warn the possible victims and protectors, the good people, against an evil that is constructed as outside of the receiver group. This strategy emphasizes the status of the offender as other to society, in the sense that the police is a force that is meant to protect the state and its citizens against such threats. Inherent in this focus and use of language lies the possibility of contributing to the dehumanization of criminal offenders and the creation of monsters.

As previous research confirms, there is a close association between sexual violence and the monstrous in contemporary Western cultures. As such, the Norwegian police's implicit narrative about sexual predators in social media posts serve to emphasize and address a commonly recognized trope. However, this narrative style is evident also in posts informing and warning about other types of crimes where the associations to the monstrous is more culturally complex. In the following, I will analyze posts where the police address two different topics, one regarding hate crime and one regarding women's rights, to explore the ways in which the implicit narratives of these posts take part in larger cultural negotiations over the borders between humanity and monstrosity.

Negotiating humanity in hate crime

Since 2007, hate crime has been listed as one of the criminal offences to be given highest priority by the Norwegian Director of Public Prosecutors (Solhjell 2023, 3). In 2014, a hate crime unit was established in the capital Oslo, and in 2021 expanded to a national resource tasked with enforcing hate crime investigation in Oslo and online. In the wake of these developments, several videos with different kinds of information about hate crime were published on the social media pages of the online patrols on Facebook and Instagram. In this part, I will analyze three videos published in 2022 where the information is presented by civilians, and not police officers. In these videos, each person is presented as illustrating what hate crime is through telling a true, first-person narrative, either framed as a victim or as an observer of the crime.

Solhjell and Klatran have explored how police officers' own understandings of policing hate crimes could be seen as a form of boundary work, which involves negotiating both the borders between legal and criminal acts, and between types of criminal acts (Solhjell and Klatran 2024). In legal terms, what characterizes a hate crime is that it does not only affect the victim, but sends a message of fear to an entire society through being motivated by hatred of a property or the identity of the victim, such as religion, sexual orientation or disability (Solhjell 2023, 2). In practice, however, the labelling of a crime as a hate crime is not so straightforward.

Considerations of when an utterance transgresses from being a person executing their right to freedom of speech to an example of criminal hate speech, or whether a crime is motivated by hatred or prejudice is highly dependent on cultural norms and local knowledge. In this sense, the very existence of the category hate crime could be understood as an element of the negotiations of humanity inherent to criminal acts, not only regarding how society judges the offenders but also how they disclose cultural attitudes about the perceived humanity of the victims. The police's hate crime information campaign on social media used already defined hate crimes as their vantage point, but nevertheless, the inherent instability of the category of hate crime enables several possible implicit narratives within the same post.

Iman Meskini – religion

Norwegian actress Iman Meskini tells the story of a woman who were harassed for her religious dress in a grocery store. The accompanying text states that this is not Meskini's private story, but she uses first person narration, and being a Muslim herself is shown wearing her traditional *hijab* covering her hair in the video. She says:

I had bought dinner and was on my way home. As usual, I wore my chador, a fully covering garment that shows I'm a Muslim. Suddenly, I was attacked by an unknown woman. She hits, kicks and tries to rip of my headdress, while almost spitting out: "Get that fucking thing off, you burqa bastard." Luckily, a store employee came running over, and the woman ran away. I'm shocked. This happened because I look the way I do, and because of what I believe in. This is hate crime.

Then the image blurs, and a text appears on the screen saying: "This is a true story performed by an actress. We encourage you to report to the police if you have been victim of a hate crime"

Jan Thomas- LGBTQ+

Norwegian stylist Jan Thomas tells a story about something that happened to one of his friends when he lived in Los Angeles:

I lived in the USA for many years and had several friends there. One of my very best friends was going to accompany his friend out after they had watched a movie, to say goodbye. His friend got in the car, and my friend leaned over to give him a hug. Out of the blue he was hit on the back of the head with an iron pipe. Collapsed, was driven to Cedars-Sinai

where he was in a medical coma for a whole month. Fortunately, the perpetrators have received prison sentences, simply because it was easy to prove that this was hate crime.

The image blurs, and a text appears: “Hate crimes against people with different sexual orientations are rarely reported. The number of unreported crimes is large. Report to the police if you have been the victim of a hate crime”

Amir Hashani – disability

The last person is Amir Hashani who tells his own story about experiencing harassment for being disabled. Hashani is not presented with a title in the video, but in addition to being a victim of a hate crime, he is also part of public debate and an activist working for the rights of disabled, queer and minorities in Norway:

About three years ago, I was the victim of a hate crime in Oslo. I was waiting for the tram, going to [the airport] to take the plane to Stavanger. A guy across the street started shouting: “Disabled should die, disabled should die!” I thought, OK, what’s happening? After a few minutes, he crossed the street, coming towards me. Of course I was scared. He walked towards me and started spitting at me out of the blue. Then he threatened me and said: “Disabled should die, they don’t deserve to live”. I didn’t understand anything, I thought it must be candid camera or something like that. I’ve never experienced something like that before. Then the tram arrived, a lot of things happened, and he suddenly disappeared. I went and reported the case to the police, and after four-five days the same thing happened again. Same place, same guy. He screamed and shouted, “Disabled should die, disabled should die”. He walked towards me again and I just felt, why is this happening again, same place, same guy? What’s going on? So, I reported it again. This happened to me because I’m in a wheelchair, I’m disabled. This is hate crime.

The text at the end of the video reads: “Hate crimes against people with disabilities are rarely reported, and we believe the numbers of unreported crimes are large. We encourage you to report if you have been the victim of a hate crime.”

Each of these videos thematize what the police consider important motivations for hate crimes: religion, sexual orientation and disability (Solhjell 2023, 2). They present simple narratives of acts that can be defined as hate crimes, told from a victim-centered perspective. The story contributes to establishing concrete examples of what hate crime can look like while the first-person narrative establishes emotional closeness. Visually, the videos are in the style of a serious lecture. The

person talking takes up most of the space in the frame, and the background is neutral grey. The speakers' physical appearance embodies the core of the message: Iman Meskini wears a hijab, symbolizing her Muslim identity, Jan Thomas wears a t-shirt saying, "I [heart] U", alluding to the freedom to love, and behind Amir Hashani you glimpse a headrest, indicating that he is sitting in a wheelchair. Each person ends their story with a short explanation of why the incident happened, stating that this is a hate crime. The text ending the videos encourage victims to report such acts to the police.

The three posts use references to criminal law to materialize a crucial area of negotiations over humanity in contemporary western culture. Stating that "this is hate crime", referring to underreporting and encouraging victims to report situates the Norwegian police morally in this landscape. It is not just about condemning violence, but also about condemning the motives, which are connected to cultural valuation of difference. The discourse surrounding sexual violence express the belief that the act is by its nature a crime that transgress humanity and as such connected to the nature of the individual offender (e.g. Kruse and Skilbrei 2024). The idea of hate crime as a particularly serious form of violence stems from the idea of a culturally enhanced crime, where violence is condemned as such, but the additional motive of hate stemming from culturally imposed beliefs makes it suitable for a harder sentence (Solhjell 2023). The idea of rights and equality connected to the categories of religion, sexual orientation and disability is not universal and has become increasingly contested in Western societies from the 2010s (Bjånesøy et al. 2023). When the Norwegian Police Service through making such videos so clearly express their, and thus the Norwegian state's, official position on these issues, they simultaneously express a view that is currently not aligned with the official position in countries Norway over the past decades import cultural ideas from, such as the USA (Brummett and Campo-Engelstein 2021). As legal rights for LGBTQ+ for example become restricted in several states in the USA, it is no longer so certain that the act in Jan Thomas' story would be considered a hate crime within that jurisdiction.

The victim-centered perspective and use of first-person narrative has the effect of emphasizing the humanity of minority groups and an inclusive and multicultural society. At the same time, this presents a simplified and one-sided image of the offenders that is at odds with the idea of the act as existing within, and even resulting from, a complex culture. While the act of violence is attributed to a monstrous nature (e.g. Kruse and Skilbrei 2024) the additional severity of defining the acts as hate crime refers to the cultural aspects motivating the act. In this sense, we can discern a contesting implicit narrative in these videos, telling the story of how certain groups culturally justify the violent act as reactions to people displaying traits that they define as monstrous. The events in the USA in 2025 and

2026 where violent clashes between immigration officers detaining immigrants and protesters, so far leading to the death of two protesters, is an example of the intensification of polarized narratives about equality in contemporary Western societies (i.e. Leingang 2026). While acts of violence are generally not condoned by the public across the political spectrum, the motives where minorities are targeted by the majority group are increasingly justified by far-right government such as the Trump/Vance government that influence contemporary Western societies through both traditional and social media. A study from the first Trump-presidency indicate that the rhetoric and restrictive legislation concerning immigration led to an increase in violence towards these groups (Hodwitz and Massingale 2023). In this way, even hate crime campaigns spreading a message of protecting minority groups implicitly make visible the fluidity of how the law contributes to constructions of the monstrous, either through its simplified portrayal of easily identified racist, homophobic or ableist motives as particularly immoral, or as an implicit reminder that legal bodies elsewhere rather construe the act or identity of the victim as particularly immoral. The *nature* of the act is thus condemned, but the *culture* that motivates it is justified by certain groups through construing aspects of the victim as not quite human.

Despite implicitly embodying the ongoing debates over humanity in contemporary Western culture, the three videos do situate the Norwegian Police Service as an organization whose official stance is in support of multiculturalism and human rights in presenting a simplified narrative of what hate crime is with an easily discernable line between right or wrong. This is partly due to the relative ease of adjusting a personal narrative about an incident to the precise legal definition of a crime without explicitly mentioning the wider cultural or societal context, and partly to the format of social media posts with its possibility of short form messages presented concisely and without regard to complexities. However, not all police- and crime related information is as suitable for this format. In the following, I will analyze a video which is similar both in form and content, but which goes further into a legal landscape where the contemporary complexities of multicultural societies become more visible.

Women's rights and the monstrous immigrant

In the preceding examples, we saw how the police used social media content to present simplified information about a complex legal concept, hate crime, through presenting three clear cut cases of violence motivated by religion, sexual orientation and disability. In this part, I will explore a video which is similar in form, but where the narrative content is opposite, presenting a clear-cut legal concept, domestic violence, through referring to stories about a complex and politically fraught issue,

immigration.

The example video is visually similar to the three hate crime videos, showing a person on a grey background talking directly to the camera. This time, the person talking is a woman dressed in a police uniform and with the title “Police inspector” showing on the screen along with her name. The first name is of Middle Eastern origin, while the surname is of Norwegian origin, and with her black hair, brown skin and slight accent her presence she arguably represents a modern, multicultural Norway where woman, police officer, ethnic minority and Norwegian are identities that can be embodied by one person. Her tone of voice is calm and her facial expression serious as she says:

Norway is the most equal country in the world, but not for everyone. Through criminal investigation, we experience that women live under terror-like regimes, carried out by their closest relatives. One conversation with the wrong man or asking for a divorce can trigger a conflict of honor that can end in murder on Norwegian soil. We’re talking about Norwegian women who must escape to undisclosed places in Norway or live in exile in a foreign country. All these women have done wrong is to live by fundamental human rights that you and I take for granted. We must acknowledge that cultures that practice violence in the name of honor exist in Norway. Norway is not a country of equality until all women can control their own lives. The police cannot do this alone; there must be more of us. Your courage can save lives.

Instead of being addressed to the victims, this video is addressed to the witnesses, asking them to help the police. The video was posted on the account for the Online patrol in the Capital area police district, Oslo, Asker and Bærum, on the International Women’s Day, 8. March 2024. It is framed as concerning domestic violence and women’s rights, stating that some women in Norway “live under terror-like regimes” and that “Norway is not a country of equality until all women can control their own lives”. While these expressions in isolation could be interpreted as culturally neutral, the reference to “cultures that practice violence in the name of honor” is picked up in the commentary section on Facebook as implicitly referencing “other” cultures than that defined as “Norwegian”. One person writes: “Norwegians haven’t started committing violence of honor. If so, who’s committing this violence, and who inspires them?”, with another person answering: “It’s misleading of the police to say that this is ‘Norwegian women’. They might be Norwegian citizens, but they’ve brought this culture of honor from their home country. Still tragic and bad, but not at all a Norwegian practice.” In these comments, we see how when the monstrous others only exist implicitly in

the message, the police have no control over the meanings the receivers read into their stories. In this case, the implicit narrative of cultural conflicts connected to immigration is read into of the explicit information about women's rights. The monstrous, but identity-less, persons alluded to in the video are given identities and origins in the public's readings. The content is thus given specific cultural connotations that does not only allude to the monstrousness of keeping women under violent regimes, but assigns this monstrousness to an entire culture, specified mainly as being not Norwegian, and with reference to being brought from "their home country".

This video clearly shows the pitfalls of handling complex cultural issues in the simplistic visual format commonly shown on social media platforms. But more importantly, it provides an example of how social media posts play a role in the increasingly polarized public discourses of contemporary Western culture, where the discursive line between humanity and monstrosity is more fraught than ever before (e.g. Rabab'ah et al. 2024). False news, conspiracy theories and the amplification of extreme content has received a lot of attention in research on social media, several scholars pointing towards the role of storytelling and implicit cultural references in these processes (e.g. Phillips 2018; Tangherlini 2018; Bodner et al. 2020). The posts made by the police might not be interpreted explicitly as examples of these types of processes, as they are framed as information based on reported crimes and the police's own experiences. However, the combination of content that carries complex cultural connotations and the context of being posted on social media platforms where the police has no control over who reads it and where it is distributed means that posts in which the legal concept is clear, but the cultural content is politically fraught carries a much greater possibility of amplifying implicit narratives that go beyond the surface topic of the text. In this context, the immigrant monster that is created when readers connect "terror-like regimes" to "cultures of honor" might be brought to life through the police's stories about the rights of women, when stories about these women are interpreted as sanctioning explicit racism towards men in immigrant populations. The comments of the readers, then, not only express the idea that these monsters exist outside of the post, but also that they can be identified through a set of cultural characteristics and cultural belonging.

Concluding discussion

The analysis moves through three levels of how the police's social media stories about specific types of violent crimes implicitly evoke narratives that challenge categories of humanity and monstrosity. In the first example, explicitly warning about someone putting drugs in your drink, the idea of monstrosity is evoked

through the allusion to sexual predators. The main part of analysis, however, revolves around examples where there is a cultural layer to the interpretation of the act, specifically concerning contemporary understandings of the status of minority groups. The second example uses posts that aim to explain a contextually difficult legal concept through simple stories. These posts explicitly mention the concept of hate as motivation for the criminal act, which destabilizes the focus on the perpetrator as the less-than-human in evoking existing cultural attitudes that the victims, i.e. people who deviate from the norm through identity or ability, might somehow be the monstrous ones. The third example addresses a relatively clear legal concept but presents it using culturally complex examples. This post returns the focus to the violent offender as potentially monstrous, but ventures into a narrative landscape where the offender is not defined solely by their actions, but through the perceived cultural origin of these actions as belonging to specific “other” ethnic groups.

The stories told in these videos, and even the format they are delivered in, do not diverge significantly from how police services traditionally disseminate information, telling stories about crimes building on their experience and authority in such matters. The potential for demonization and polarization has always been inherent in this type of information where there is a clearly drawn line between right and wrong, represented by the law. What makes these stories as social media posts more potentially flammable is the way that social media platforms provide new contexts for them, where the police cannot control the interpretations and the narrative as it unfolds. The examples in this article show how well-meant posts might have different outcomes, in particular in a polarized cultural and political landscape such as that we are currently experiencing in Western societies. The Online Patrols might have high competence, legal skill and the best intentions, but they still cannot quite tame the monsters that might be born out of algorithmically governed social media platforms.

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Author

Guro Flinterud is Associate Professor in Cultural Studies at the University of Bergen. She has worked as a Senior Researcher at the Norwegian Police University College, studying the cultural impacts of police use of social media platforms. Her research interests include the transmission of folklore in digital spaces and the intersections of concepts of the natural and cultural in folk narrative. orcid.org/0000-0003-0599-8618