“An obese turtle on his back” – fat-shaming Donald J. Trump and the spectacle of fat masculinity

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ABSTRACT
This article brings together fat studies and masculinity studies to critically read the various stagings of the fat body of former U.S. President Donald J. Trump in U.S. late-night talk shows such as Late Night with Seth Meyers, The Late Show with Stephen Colbert and Jimmy Kimmel Live! During his presidency, these and other late-night hosts stressed that Trump was unfit for office, a sentiment often supported by fat-shaming discourses and imagery of the spectacular transgressions of Trump’s fat, male body that deemed his body as unfit for office as well. In these comedic segments, Trump’s fat, male body was utilized as a visualization of his incompetence, failures, and moral shortfalls. As I argue, these fat-shaming discourses are not merely aimed at making visible Trump’s lack of qualifications for the presidency, they result from deeply ingrained stigmatizations of fatness in popular culture. Specifically, I look at the unstable position of fat masculinity in U.S. public imagination, the dangers it supposedly poses to hegemonic masculinity, and the ways in which its intersection with whiteness (in this case Trump’s whiteness) informs this position. Satire, as a specific kind of communication, functions as a catalyst for anti-fat attitudes that are presented as political commentary.

KEYWORDS
Fat-shaming; Donald J. Trump; fat masculinity; late-night talk shows; obese turtle; fat men; U.S. president; male body; satire; critical whiteness studies; masculinity studies

Introduction
On November 5, 2020 – after President Donald J. Trump wrongly announced he had won the presidential election, CNN host Anderson Cooper, seemingly frustrated by Trump’s false claim, called him “an obese turtle on his back, flailing in the hot sun, realizing his time is over” (qtd. in Castronuovo 2020). Reacting to the criticism he received on social media for his comparison and choice of words (cf. Kiefer 2020, @ragenchastain 2020), Cooper has since apologized for this anti-fat remark, stressing it does not reflect the person he wants to be. Cooper’s comment is not an isolated incident, though; during his presidency, critics utilized Trump’s supposedly unruly body as a stage to negotiate his undemocratic politics and his professional and private misconduct. In August 2019, Democratic presidential candidate Andrew Yang challenged Trump to “any physical or mental feat under the sun,” calling him...
a “slob” and, of course, “fat” (qtd. in Panetta 2019). In this context, “fat” is used as the ultimate slur to demean Trump and weaken his power. These comments were made during a visit to the Iowa State Fair where Yang was shown eating fast food, which he said he was reluctant to do, because, as he claimed, he needed to stay in “presidential form” (qtd. in Panetta). Since the breakout of the global pandemic caused by the coronavirus, Trump’s body has become even more concerning: In May 2020, when he tested positive for the virus and chose to be treated with Hydroxychloroquin, a drug not approved as effective, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi voiced concern: “[H]e’s our President and I would rather he not be taking something that has not been approved by the scientists, especially in his age group and in his, shall we say, weight group – morbidly obese” (qtd. in Cillizza 2020).

With this comment, she joined the public pathologization of Trump’s male, fat, white, aged body. The “presidential form,” following Yang’s and Pelosi’s logic, should not be fat or “obese,” a president needs to be fit for the presidency. These concerns are not solely informed by patriotism, though. They are based on assumptions made about health, fatness, fat masculinity, and white entitlement: Trump is a fat, white man who has had access to excessive capital and has profited from white supremacy. A fat white man’s body in a position of power can cause anxieties related to capitalism, consumption, masculinity, and whiteness. As I will show, during Trump’s presidency, these anxieties were regularly negotiated in media and particularly U.S. late-night talk shows by staging a grotesque corporeal comedy of Trump’s body that was meant to offer release for the audience and a moment of resistance to Trump’s immense power. Yet, as I argue, the constant fat-shaming and visualizing of Trump’s body is – ultimately – unrelated to politics and power, but very much related to questions about fat masculinity and the position of fat men in U.S. society.1 In the following, I offer a media and critical discourse analysis in order to read the staging of Trump’s fat body by late-night television programs. This staging is dependent on visual imagery that points toward the grotesque, the glut, and the excessive. It references established discourses about fatness that deem fat bodies as “too much”: abundant, uncontrolled, and repellent (cf. Braziel and LeBesco 2001). For this critical discussion of the handling of Trump’s fatness by U.S. media, I will not comment on the nature and effects of his politics, but separate the body from the politics. This separation is meant to counter the fat-shaming discourses that imply Trump’s politics are closely intertwined with his fatness.

Fat masculinity

To understand Trump’s victory, not despite, but with his body requires to consider the intersections of class, whiteness, and gender that enabled his presidency. For one, the male body, no matter if and how it is racialized, is
thought to be the source of “true masculinity” (Connell 2020, 45): “Masculine
gender is (among other things) a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular
shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities
in sex” (52–3). Connell mentions both a materiality and performativity that
creates masculinity but remains vague about the specificities. In Susan Bordo’s
The Male Body (1999), the fantasy of “true masculinity” (Connell 2020, 45) is
specified as “the cult of hardness” (55). “[T]he hard body is a ‘take no shit’
body” (57), it is supposed to be able to “play hardball” and “take a firm stand”
(55), metaphors that relate masculinity to power. In contrast, “[t]o be exposed
as ‘soft’ at the core is one of the worst things a man can suffer in this culture”
(55). Softness is connoted as feminine, maternal and weak – what a male body
should not be.

These misogynous, somatic restrictions are supposed to demonstrate male
power. Yet power is not only located in the male body but particularly in the
male, white body, especially in the Global North. White supremacy, Charles
W. Mills explains, “has a central somatic dimension,” one that is not simply
undone by fatness: “A white ‘somatic norm’ assumes hegemonic standing,
serving as an important contributory measure of individual worth” (2003, 46)
to which people of color are denied access. This “white ‘somatic’ norm,”
according to Richard Dyer, has been historically and medially tied to visions of
masculinity, to “tightness” and “self-control” (6), to imaginations of the white
body as hard, taut, and upright (cf. Dyer 1997, 21). Sabrina Strings argues that
because thinness was traced back to white American fantasies about the
“Nordics/Aryans” as “tall and lean” (2019, 276), it became “a form of
American exceptionalism” (276), namely a national project to demarcate
people of color and new immigrants from full citizenship. A white man’s
soft body, a non-muscular or fat body, exposes him as unfitting for whiteness,
masculinity, and citizenship. It is therefore either ignored or marginalized as
the undesirable Other. There is an astonishing lack of discussing male fatness
in media discourse when compared to the varieties of discourse about female
fatness, the “fat is a woman’s issue’ trope is so powerful that many contem-
porary examinations of fatness and dieting continue to overlook men” (Bell
and McNaughton 2007, 120).

This lack should not be read as “masculine indifference towards weight” (115),
though. In one of the few publications dedicated solely to the study of fat men,
Fat Boys: A Slim Book (2004), Sander L. Gilman reveals that in the nineteenth
century, the plumpness of white men was deemed acceptable as it was associated
with “prosperity” and “good health” (Stearns qtd. in Gilman 2004, 11). Yet
simultaneously, “morbid obesity[,] a plumpness gone out of control” (11) mir-
rored anxieties related to loss of control and was therefore unacceptable (cf.
Forth 2019). As Michael Kimmel has shown, at the turn of the nineteenth
century, “[g]etting in shape was a manly preoccupation […] as urban men
fretted about the loss of manly vigor” (Kimmel 2013, 48). “Believing that
American men had grown soft and indolent” (48), Kimmel holds that self-control, demonstrated through working out, pumping, and bulking up was a crucial step to re-affirm a steady, strong, and valuable masculinity. Anxieties about white masculinity, or rather its loss, have always been negotiated through the body and the control thereof; like women, men also make use of “many of the technologies that aimed to regulate the body through dieting, exercise, and measurement” (Bell and McNaughton 2007, 113).

The discourse of the universality of the male, white body (in contrast to the particularity of the female body or the “nonwhite” body) created the myth of the “the reasonable man” (Gilman 24) or the “man on the street” (25). To be average, statistically “normal,” means “to blend, to have no visible difference and conflict” (Warner 1999, 60) – contradictory to the visibility and conflict of fatness. Fatness thus particularizes men. It disrupts fantasies of the “manly vigor,” as fat men, white and BIPoC, seem to not be able to profit fully from the advantages patriarchy grants them, supposedly suffering from “the impotence of patriarchal power and [a] masculinity under siege,” as Jerry Mosher argues (2001, 171). In his analysis of fat men on television, he reads male fatness as a “symbol for downward mobility” (168), a classist narrative device to tell stories of “henpecked husbands, beleaguered dads, couch potatoes, slackers” (170). In Hollywood films featuring fat male characters, Barbara Plotz detects the infantilized fat man, “a child disrupting the world of the adult, ignorant of the rules he keeps breaking and thereby causing chaos and comedy” (2020, 33)\(^2\) and the “white everyman” (44), whose mediocrity and underdog-status makes viewers root for him (Palmer-Mehta 2009).\(^3\) Staged as a victim of feminism and modernity, the fat man is imagined as ordinary. There are many “unmarked, non-stereotyped representations of male fat characters” (Plotz 2020, 25) in film, that is, fat male characters who merely exist in their fatness, uncommented. Yet three conditions enable this ordinariness: whiteness, heterosexuality, and a cisgender identity.

What has become obvious in this brief overview of the theorization and history of male fatness is that power is central in understanding how male fatness “works”: Male fatness is either powerful, because it is expressive of gigantism and strength, or it is powerless, because its assumed softness references the feminine, the maternal. In theory, the white male body cannot be fat if it wants access to the promises of white supremacy (power, citizenship, and wealth). Yet discourses of crisis, the “white everyman” and class privilege complicate this theory; affluent fat men like Donald Trump can occupy positions of power because they are complicit in whiteness.
**The “everyman” president**

In contrast to the body of the “man on the street” that “escapes surveillance and regulation” (Robinson 2000, 1), the U.S. president’s body is highly visible, surveilled, and regulated. After all, the president is an icon, a figure of public interest, “a symbol of the nation – its temper, its spirit, its moral values” (O’Connor and Rollins 2005, 4). Amy Erdman Farrell suggests that the privileges and the power that come with the presidency can be obscured by fatness, “[f]or those seeking the highest positions in our nation, […] it is especially important to be thin, to demonstrate physically that they are fit for those levels of responsibility and privilege” (131). I would argue it is even more important since television made the president familiar and brought an array of images of the president into U.S. households, offering an unprecedented visibility to the presidency. In reference to the fat shaming of female candidates for the Supreme Court, Farrell makes clear: “To bring attention to the candidates’ fatness is to mark them as inferior and unfit” (2011, 131).

Meredith Conroy (2015) suggests that it is not “maleness” that determines the presidency, but rather masculinity, “a preference for strong, assertive, aggressive, tough candidates over compassionate, warm, cautious, and compromising or consensus-building candidates” (2). Health or body shape is not listed among the qualities sought of a president, yet “[q]uestions of health and personal vigor have proved central to several presidencies, and human frailties and failures of character have not been unknown” (O’Connor and Rollins 2005, 4). They were already central in the 1880s when President Grover Cleveland, whose “attempts to lose weight” were covered by newspapers (Farrell 2011, 131). President Bill Clinton’s “doughy physique” (Bordo 1999, 55) supposedly exposed his unfitness for office, in contrast to “the mean, lean, skydiving George Bush or the horseback-riding Ronald Reagan” (55). His affair with Monica Lewinsky, who was herself fat shamed by the press, was staged as a logical result of his out-of-control-body, his “voracious appetite” (55). Former New Jersey governor and Republican candidate for the presidency Chris Christie is probably the most well-known male politician whose body size has been publicly scrutinized, also by President Trump (Killough 2016). Mary Bresnahan et al., in a content analysis of the fat stigma attached to Christie (2017), have pointed out that people question Christie’s ability to be a president, because he is seen as a “bully,” as “lazy,” “selfish” and “out of control” (6), impressions clearly influenced by anti-fat discourses.

Trump did not have to reject fatness in order to become president. For one, he profited from being a “celebrity,” from his prior work in U.S. popular media and especially from the reality television format *The (Celebrity) Apprentice* (NBC, 2004–2015) that helped advance his image as CEO and real estate mogul (Street 2019). Long before he became president, Trump was staged as a “fat cat”: a “wealthy, powerful, and often greedy man” (Farrell 18) without
scruples. This image can be traced back to discourses that were circulated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in U.S. media. Fatness, particularly that of white men, was associated with “overconsumption and excessive desire,” with the white fat men’s failure to “regulate the abundance of the modern world” (44). Related to these anti-fat imaginations was the fear of uncontrolled and unchecked (political or capitalist) power. In Trump’s case, his greed and power were made harmless by people’s amusement toward his eccentricity and excess (The hair! The golden tower!), and by his supposed tongue-in-cheek humor. His media persona as a “fat funny guy” (Kornhaber 2016), supported by comedic appearances as himself in Home Alone 2: Lost in New York (1992), Zoolander (2001), or Sex and the City (1999) made audiences believe he was a self-reflective celebrity who had almost an ironic stance toward his image, who was “in for the joke.” This image turned quickly during his 2016 presidential campaign when he demonstrated disdain for other candidates, critics, and marginalized groups in general (Nacos et al. 2020).

In his analysis of Trump’s populism, Stefan Brandt points out the importance of appealing to “the ordinary American, the hard-working citizen who has been ignored for too long whose rights will finally be cherished and reinstated” (Brandt 2020, 309), staging himself as the hero who came to save them (cf. 308). Brandt convincingly analyzes Trump’s rhetoric of ordinariness, nativism, anti-establishment, yet does not factor in the somatic component that visually adds to Trump’s convincing appearance, his whiteness, and his fatness. Christopher Forth has convincingly shown the complex relationship between fatness and Trumpism, drawing the parallel between consumption, capitalism,Americanness, and fatness (cf. “The Fat Imaginary” 2020): Trump successfully utilized his whiteness and his fatness-as-ordinariness to appeal to his voters, who are often imagined as a homogeneous mass of white, fat, underclass or working-class Americans.

**The fat president**

Trump’s discriminatory behavior (cf. Forth, “The Fat Imaginary”) and his populist rhetoric did not discredit him as a presidential candidate; much to the horror of his opponents, he became president. As a kind of resistance, ridiculing Trump by means of his fat body became a popular act in late-night talk shows and political satire programs, such as Late Night with Seth Meyers, The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, or Jimmy Kimmel Live. The most common tropes utilized to mock the body of “Fat Donnie,” as political satirist Bill Maher once called him, relate to his diet (fast food), the sport he practices (golf), and his body (fat). For example, when The White House did not immediately provide U.S. embassies with official photos of the president, late-night host Seth Meyers voiced sympathy. Talking about it in his show, he
showed close-up images of Trump’s behind while playing golf,\(^5\) followed by an image of him sitting with his stomach bulging above his belt. In the background, one can hear the audience laughing. Meyers does not directly comment on Trump’s body size; he and the audience share a knowledge of fatness. The expected and accepted reaction to seeing a fat body do sports or simply seeing a fat person sitting is perceived as funny, because it transgresses what is deemed acceptable and esthetically pleasing. Meyer’s faked sympathy suggests this body, including its sagging skin and perspiration, is not to be published in photos (“Trump Has Impeachment Meltdown on Fox and Friends: A Closer Look” 2019).

During his presidency, these kinds of visuals were common in late-night programming, predominantly hosted by white, liberal, slim(med down), male presenters.\(^6\) Although the contributions by hosts like Trevor Noah, Samantha Bee, and Lilly Singh should not go unmentioned, late-night television has traditionally had a very limited gendered and racialized lineup. Filmed in either New York City or Los Angeles, its target audience is above 30 years, has a relatively high income and a college degree (Metcalf 2016). Initially aiming at rather light entertainment, since the 1990s late-night hosts have become more willing to show their partisan political views, using “their humorous commentary [to make] their own left-of-center opinions clear” (Baumgartner 2020) when addressing a like-minded audience (cf. 11). Trump’s first presidential medical checkup in January 2018, for example, offered the perfect segue to share political views by means of Trump’s body. Host Stephen Colbert questioned the results of Trump’s physical in 2018 that declared Trump was only one pound beneath being declared “obese”: “That’s awfully . . . convenient” (“Trump Is Conveniently One Pound Under Obese”). Responding to the claim that Trump, despite eating fast food and not exercising, was in good health because of his genes, Colbert responded, “great genes, but he can’t fit in them,” a homonym aimed at Trump needing oversize clothing. Host Jimmy Kimmel declared “may God have mercy on the guy who has to see him naked” (“Jimmy Kimmel Examines Donald Trump’s X-Ray” 2018), then showed a faked x-ray of Trump’s body: A fat silhouette wearing a MAGA baseball cap with a stomach containing “5000 fried chicken bones” and two McDonald’s Happy Meals, including the boxes they come in. A common stereotype about fat people’s nutrition is repeated here: They eat fast food. In a segment about Trump’s failure at being good at golf (but lying about it), Stephen Colbert suggests that golf might help viewers understand Trump. Colbert is shown looking at a golf ball, asking: “Golf, can you explain him?” Then, the image changes into a cheeseburger, and Colbert repeats the question: “What about you, cheeseburger? You’re his only friend!” (“Donald Trump Sucks at Golf” 2019b).
The narrative of Trump-the fast-food-lover sends ambivalent messages. It serves the purpose of undermining his respectability by fat-shaming and infantilizing him. Yet simultaneously, Trump very consciously performs his love for fast food to amplify his “white everyman” persona; classism and nationalism inform this performance that suggests he is not above a “good, American cheeseburger.” In 2019, when the White House hosted a dinner to celebrate Clemson University’s football team, it only served fast food, due to the longest government shutdown in U.S. history. To hide his incompetency, Trump praised the national symbolism of fast food: “If it’s American, I like it. It’s all American stuff” (Trump qtd. in Cantor 2019). Amidst a group predominantly consisting of Black and Brown college football players, the fast food has a bitter aftertaste, though. Fast food is made responsible for fatness around the world and – being affordable and easily available – is considered a symptom of U.S. poverty (Saguy 2013, Raisborough 2016). The supposedly patriotic act of offering “American stuff” might appeal to Trump’s white, middle-class voters, yet it calls up racist and classist discourses about fat people of color and food preference (cf. Block et al. 2004). In this scenario, Trump profits from his whiteness and class privilege. He stages his everyman persona, while his Black and Brown guests are photographed wearing their nice suits to match the occasion of going to the White House, but reaching for a cold burger in a cardboard box. Joking about this event, late-night host James Corden – the only host who is not slim, but who has publicly renounced and reduced his weight, as a new spokesperson for WW (formerly Weight Watchers) – first calls the involved fast food chains Trump’s “four most trusted advisors” and then admits that this will have been a disappointing visit for the students, ignoring the racist and classist implications of this “celebratory” dinner (“Donald Trump Fed ‘Hamberders’” 2019).

A few months after the results of his first medical exam were released, CNN reported that Trump wanted to lose ten pounds because he was “approaching obesity,” following a new diet with more fish and less ketchup on his steaks (“President Trump Goes on a Diet” 2018). In this report, White House insiders are quoted saying that the chefs try to include more vegetables in his meal plan, “although it is not clear how many of them he is eating.” CNN host Wolf Blitzer might not be openly mocking the situation, but this report clearly infantilizes Trump; it portrays him like a child who will not eat his vegetables. Whether the results were fabricated to put the nation at ease, and support the image of the president as infallible, is not of importance here; it is rather the cultural work of these narratives that are of interest. The exam results are presented as illogical, confirming the dominant medical discourse that correlates health with body weight. Trump’s fat, male body is imagined to be full of food, out of shape, and – most importantly – deceptive. This is, for instance, supported by news about Trump altering photos of himself “to appear thinner,” as Colbert states (“Trump Has Been Posting Altered Photos
Of Himself” (2019a). He describes the altered version of one specific photo showing Trump entering Air Force One as “Trump young and strong,” while referring to the image of fat Trump as “Trump old and weak.” The same is repeated with food items: slimmed-down Trump – “fake” Trump – stands for “salad,” while fat Trump is reminiscent of a “hamburger” (“Trump Has Been Posting Altered Photos Of Himself”). Trump has become infamous for his persistent lying to the public (Kessler, Rizzo and Kelly 2020), a habit that late-night hosts have used to ridicule him while exposing these lies. The suspicion toward his exam results however sits differently, it references the concrete anti-fat bias of medical providers and of the general public that assumes they know how healthy a fat body is. The 2018 health exam even inspired the so-called “girther” conspiracy, a pun referring to the “birther” conspiracy that was publicly supported by Trump in 2008 and that questioned President Barack Obama’s birth certificate. The “girthers” went to social media to compare Trump’s declared height with his driver’s license and to post images of other men who have the same height and weight (Meixler 2018). Film director James Gunn even offered to give $100,000 to charity if Trump agreed to a public weighing (Pierpoint 2018), a request that is commonly used by doctors and dieticians to degrade and expose fat people.

Trump’s size is used as a gateway to offer criticism of his presidency; his body is turned into a grotesque spectacle to laugh at. As Jimmy Kimmel jokes, “[h]e sneezes, gravy comes out of his [breaks off]” (“Trump’s X-Ray”). As political satire, the late-night segments “allow[. . .] for the expression of hostile attitudes and emotions towards figures, practices, and institutions of public significance,” as Robert Phiddian explains (2019, 4). Criticism of the public figure Trump is voiced through “hostile laughter” (5) and – in this case – comedic exaggerations and distortions. Trump is not the first president whose integrity is questioned. Satirists “present their work as the defence [sic] of an underlying moral order that is being traduced, but they do not obviously (or rather, they obviously do not) play by ethical deliberative rules” (9). Phiddian points out that approaching satire with “a standard of detachment, balance, sympathy, or complexity of analysis” (2019, 9) will not reveal the value of satire for “public culture,” namely questioning power and socio-cultural hierarchies. This begs to question whether my analysis misses the point of satire. After all, the targets’ physical appearance will be in the center of satire, “satirical intervention will always ‘other’ its targets” (10).

This othering is not arbitrary, though: it is based on a “common consensus about reality,” because political satire “follows accepted cultural codes” (Momen 2020, xiii). In the case of fat shaming Trump, the common consensus that is used to make political satire is not that Trump is a bad president – not everybody would agree to that – but that fatness is bad. As a framework of political satire, fatness enhances the shortcomings and failings of President
Trump. Fatness, integrity, and power are staged as mutually exclusive. He is a bad president because he has abused power (enabled by his maleness, whiteness, and class) and he is fat; the fatness adds to the visual spectacle.

Conclusion

Satire reveals inconsistencies in society and politics, or demonstrates superiority in the face of “those who are deceitful” (Momen xiv). Seth Meyer’s segment from 2019, for example, was performed during Trump’s impeachment trial; in-between examples that demonstrate the former president’s inability to deal with the situation, Meyers brings in moments in which the audience can finally laugh about something that does not seem as grave and dangerous to the U.S. democratic system as Trump’s abuse of power – his fatness. The supposedly unflattering image of him sitting is jokingly labeled “Melting Criminal” by Meyers, who merges the criminal accusations with the fat body. The laughter caused by satire is especially effective as a form of release in authoritarian or quasi-authoritarian regimes (Momen 2019), in which political opposition is ineffective. In the face of an unsuccessful impeachment trial, the fat body is (ab)used as one of the few methods of resistance to a president who does not seem to ever be held accountable for his abuse of power. His fatness offers a canvas on which his shortcomings can finally be made visible. He might get away with his crimes during office, but at least he remains fat.

Fat activists and writers like Aubrey Gordon (aka Your Fat Friend), Ragen Chastain (@ragenchastain) and Chrissy Stockton (2018) have openly criticized the seemingly acceptable fat shaming of Trump on social media, particularly by people identifying as “left” or “liberal” media outlets. As Gordon writes,

[.]he political Left had long since used the deep-seated fear of fatness to attack opponents, galvanize a base, and symbolize capitalism, greed, poverty and ignorance […] When we like a fat person, we divorce them from their unsightly bodies. And when we dislike them, we take aim at those same bodies we otherwise ignore. (Your Fat Friend 2019)

Such “sentiments” have a long history in U.S. culture, as shown before; they find their origins in the period of industrialization and the anti-fat representations of fat, white men whose fat bodies were symbolic of the dangers of capitalist consumption and unchecked power. A dedication to equality includes everyone, and fat-shaming opponents or undesirable public figures, even if they themselves have shamed others for their bodies (like Trump did many times, cf. Glum 2017), leads back to Gilman’s duality of acceptable/unacceptable with which fat men are measured. In the context of the late-night show segments I presented, Trump’s fatness is unacceptable, because he is an unacceptable president for the liberal hosts and the assumed liberal audience. Fat acceptance, it seems, needs to be deserved, it is not a given.
Yet, as I have shown, anti-fat rhetoric needs to be viewed through an intersectional lens. In Trump’s case, it is a rhetoric intertwined with anxieties about masculinity, whiteness, and class. If “thinness . . . whiteness or maleness operate as unmarked categories” (Saguy 2013, 36), then Trump is too visible. As Gilman so fittingly puts it: “[T]he ‘ghastly’ fat boy has always been with us. He has always been a focus of fascination, concern horror; interest, and that obsessive interest exists not primarily because of any ‘real’ concern for men’s health but because it presents the outer limits of the performance of masculinity” (33). The obsessive interest in Trump’s body, too, is not caused by concerns about health or even esthetics, it is caused by the crises that it makes visible, of the class disparities in U.S. society, of toxic masculinity, and of white supremacy. Trump’s fat male body materializes these crises.

**Notes**

1. In this text, I use “male” and “masculinity” as concepts that inform identity formation and performance, regardless of gender and sex attributions. They also inform the ways in which fatness is conceptualized and deemed acceptable/unacceptable.

2. A stereotype that, when racialized, recalls “a persistent tradition in Western culture leading back to colonialism” (Plotz 35) and used to “justify” colonialism as a necessary paternalism and care for a racial Other that is not mature or developed enough (cf. Strings, Farrell).

3. For a critical reading of the dangers of sympathizing with the mediocrity of white men, see Ijeoma Oluo’s *Mediocre* (2000).

4. In “What is Donald Trump?” John Street offers an insightful review of the variety of approaches to what Donald Trump might be: a celebrity politician, a stand-up comedian or a rock star. His body and whiteness are not factored in, though, when making these assumptions.

5. Trump’s practice of golf has been discredited as expressive of class privilege, of his lazy character and his inclination toward cheating (Reilly 2019).

6. Jimmy Kimmel reduced his weight in 2010 (cf. “Celebrities’ Weight Loss” in US Weekly 2021) and has been known for fat jokes in his show, for instance in a segment in which he asks pedestrians whether they are fat and lets his in-studio audience guess what their answer will be (cf. “Pedestrian Question - Are You Fat?”).

7. This is reminiscent of the giant “Baby Trump” balloon used by anti-Trump demonstrators in the UK in 2018 (cf. Phiddan 61).

8. I would like to thank the reviewer of this article for pointing this out.

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