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MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF CORPULENT EMBODIMENT **A Case Study of *The Drew Carey Show***

On 19 March 1997, *The Drew Carey Show* aired an episode titled “Two Drews and the Queen of Poland Go into a Bar” in which the character Mimi Bobeck inherits the title, Duchess of Krakow, upon the death of her aunt in Poland. This event catapults Mimi, a secretary at a department store, into the presence of Polish royalty and she has hopes of marrying the King, and becoming Queen, in the tradition of Western fairytales. The episode outraged Polish Americans who viewed it as demeaning to Polish heritage and, consequently, the Polish American Public Relations Committee initiated a boycott of the U.S. network ABC, the program and its sponsors for airing this “most offensive” episode. Specifically, the Polish American Community was “disturbed by the loud-mouthed, clown-like female character called “Mimi,” who was depicted as being Polish on this particular program” and the Polish American Congress demanded that the episode never be aired again and the program “stop identifying Mimi as Polish.” Chris Hawaka of ABC responded in a statement that said ABC would edit out “the disputed segments of the program” and “in the future there will be no further mention of Mimi Bobeck’s Polish heritage.”¹

The Polish American community’s reaction to this program is at the same time a reflection of their determination to ensure positive media images of Polish Americans and a disavowal of women who transgress established

1. Polish American Public Relations Committee and Dana Alvi, Chairperson, *Polish Nation Libel: Boycott of the Drew Carey Show* (<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Senate/8844/14j.htm>, 16 August 1997).

boundaries for appropriate female behavior and embodiment. Mimi is both loud and large, demanding visual and verbal attention and violating norms for Western femininity that require women to be quiet, not to take up space and “to regard their bodies as passive objects that others should admire.”² The Polish American community’s demand that Mimi’s connection to the Polish community be silenced also reflects U.S. society’s perception of corpulent and, to borrow Kathleen Rowe’s term, “unruly” women. Rowe suggests that there is liberatory potential in women such as Mimi because “the figure of the unruly woman—too fat, too funny, too noisy, too old, too rebellious—unsettles social hierarchies” and makes societies rethink their norms.³ This situation raises questions regarding whether the Polish American reaction to Mimi is a testament to her disruptive power or a sign of the limits of the emancipatory potential of the unruly woman.

The reaction to Mimi’s verbal and visual excesses is instructive, but perhaps it would be more illuminating to place Mimi’s transgressions in the context of other bodies on the program. Most notable is the other highly visible, corpulent body on the show, inhabited by the leading character, Drew Carey. Carey is a popular figure who resonates with the American people, winning the People’s Choice Award for Favorite Male TV Performer in 2000 and 2001 and receiving a nomination in the same category in 2002. He also won the People’s Choice Award for Favorite Male Performer in a New TV series in 1996 when the program first aired and the *TV Guide*’s Editor’s Choice Award in 1999 for his influence in shaping the quality of television programming. Perhaps Drew’s popularity is a result of his everyday appeal as he lies outside Hollywood’s traditional standards for male beauty, weighing a chubby 240 pounds and wearing large, black-rimmed glasses that make him resemble the cartoon character Dilbert. Jerry Mosher points out that “fat is a men’s issue, too, and its role in the changing constructs of men’s bodies and patriarchal privilege is worthy of further study.”⁴ He argues that “American men are increasingly succumbing to eating disorders and the use of cosmetic surgery to correct corporeal deviations, and they have never been immune to the persuasions of the multi-billion dollar diet and beauty industries” [Ibid.]. Similarly, Sarah Grogan & Helen Richards report that:

The issue of men’s body image is of particular interest at present because it has

2. Cecilia Hartley, “Letting Ourselves Go: Making Room for the Fat Body in Feminist Scholarship,” in *Bodies out of bounds*, edited by Jana E. Braziel and Kathleen LeBesco (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 60-73.

3. Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1995), 19.

4. Jerry Mosher, “Setting Free the Bears: Refiguring Fat Men on Television,” in Braziel & LeBesco, 166-196.

recently been suggested that British and American cultural attitudes towards the male body have been in a state of change since the mid 1980s [...] and that men are becoming more and more concerned with body image.⁵

By probing “the ideological images and figures, as well as discourses, which transcode dominant and competing political positions” regarding the body on *The Drew Carey Show*, we may discern what sort of cultural values the program produces and reproduces regarding appropriate embodiment for men and women.⁶ To this end, using Susanne Langer’s *Comic Rhythm* and semiotics, the following analysis will examine Drew and Mimi’s bodily schemas as well as their respective romantic narratives in six seasons of *The Drew Carey Show*, from its pilot program in 1995 to its sixth season in 2001.

In contrast to ubiquitous Hollywood images of the hard-bodied action hero, the corpulent body is often pushed to the margins in U.S. media representations, as it is in everyday life and in critical endeavors. According to Kathleen LeBesco and Jana Evans Braziel, while critics have explicitly addressed “the commodification of the anorexic body [...] they have paid little critical attention to the power and politics underlying the social and capitalistic constructions of corpulence and the fat body.” [Braziel & LeBesco, introduction]. Broadcast television is an ideal location to analyze the social production of corpulent embodiment because a society’s “national popular culture is where the various agents of hegemony [...] give shape to the common sense of the people, including their taken-for-granted notions of masculinity and femininity.”⁷ Because the “purpose of television as a commercial system is to deliver an audience for the messages of advertisers,” programming reflects what network producers and sponsors deem economically desirable to air and, consequently, what images people are exposed to regularly and repetitively.⁸

A brief glimpse at U.S. television suggests that food is plentiful in the U.S. and Americans have larger portions and more culinary options than any other nation at present. Perhaps it is not surprising then that 62% of U.S. citizens are overweight and 26% are obese, making the U.S. the world’s fattest population. While it is a privilege to have such lavish amounts of food, Americans have an uncomfortable relationship with food and the manifestation of

5. Sarah Grogan and Helen Richards, “Body Image: Focus Groups with Boys and Men,” *Men and Masculinities* 4,3 (January 2002): 219-232.

6. Doug Kellner, *Media culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics between the Modern and Postmodern* (New York & London: Routledge, 1995).

7. Robert Hanke, “Theorizing Masculinity with/in the Media,” *Communication Theory* 8, 2 (1998): 183-202.

8. Bonnie Dow, *Prime-time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women’s Movement Since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

its abundance, fatness. This is apparent in representations of corpulent bodies on television and in U.S. society. LeBesco contends that “fat people are widely represented in popular culture and interpersonal interactions as revolting—they are agents of abhorrence and disgust.”⁹ Similarly, Le’a Kent has found that “the fat body is never portrayed as effective, as powerful or as sexual.”¹⁰ Those who bear the burden of being large in U.S. society receive noticeable cultural censure as “fat-phobia is one of the few acceptable forms of prejudice left in a society that at times goes to extremes to prove itself politically correct.”¹¹ Becoming overweight in U.S. society may be easy, but inhabiting an overweight body is laden with social pressure and scorn.

To determine how Drew and Mimi’s representations might reflect, counter or add to current research on corpulent embodiment and masculinity, it is necessary to consider how comedy functions on the program to frame their bodies. Richard Duprey asserts that “for all the jollity of the comic form [...] comedy is one of the most truly serious things in this world.”¹² Similarly, in *Comic Rhythm* Susanne Langer contends that “the purest heroic comedy is likely to have no humorous passages at all” and “humor is not the essence of comedy, but only one of its most useful and natural elements.”¹³ The difference between comedy and drama/tragedy (terms Langer uses interchangeably) has less to do with humor and more to do with the “basic feeling” each gives; while comedy focuses on self-preservation, self-restoration, perpetual rebirth and fortune, tragedy focuses on mortality, finality and fate. Instead of seeing comedy and tragedy as discrete categories, Langer argues that “the two forms are perfectly capable of various combinations, incorporating elements of one in the other” [Ibid.].

Heroic comedy portrays the protagonist as an uncomplicated, ordinary man who is prompted by special circumstances to reveal his true talents, which have always existed within him but needed a special occasion to bring them forward. Langer explains that:

As a personage he [the hero] is impressive; as a personality he is very simple. He has the standard emotions—righteous indignation, paternal love, patriotic fervor, pride, anxiety...But this ideal male he was from the start, and the [...] episode merely gives him opportunity to show his indomitable skill and dar-

9. Kathleen LeBesco, “Queering Fat Bodies/Politics,” in Braziel & LeBesco, 74-90.

10. Leah Kent, “Fighting Abjection: Representing Fat Women,” in Braziel & LeBesco, 130-152.

11. Cecilia Hartley, “Letting Ourselves Go: Making Room for the Fat Body in Feminist Scholarship,” in Braziel & LeBesco, 60-73.

12. Richard Duprey, “Whatever Happened to Comedy?” in *Comedy: Meaning and Form*, edited by Robert Willoughby Corrigan (San Francisco, CA: Chandler, 1965), 243-250.

13. Susanne K. Langer, “The Great Dramatic Forms: The Comic Rhythm,” in Corrigan, 119-140.

ing. [Ibid.]

The hero's natural skills enable him to triumph over adversaries and it is this natural superiority which belays his dominance in society. Despite the fact that the hero possesses extraordinary characteristics that manifest when under duress, he is just a common man with whom the people of a society may identify. That the hero is fundamentally just an ordinary man vulnerable to shortcomings makes him all the more likeable. Richard Duprey argues that "in the failings of the common man we see more than a faint glimmer of our own imperfection."¹⁴

Langer also sees the figure in heroic comedy as static. "Because the comic rhythm is that of vital continuity, the protagonists do not change in the course of the play, as they normally do in tragedy" [Langer 119-140]. The hero does face challenges, but his natural skills provide him with what he needs to overcome these problems and thus there is no impetus for change:

The comic hero plays against obstacles presented either by nature [...] or by society; that is, his fight is with obstacles and enemies, which his strength, wisdom, virtue or other assets let him overcome. It is a fight with the uncongenial world, which he shapes to his own fortunes.[Ibid.]

Typically the hero is represented as male and the heroine is considered "next in importance" because "when a girl accompanies a male hero in his triumph, she is generally a stage prop, a *muta persona*."¹⁵ Consequently, the hero has become a key symbol of masculinity in U.S. society that embodies the ideology of the in-group and provides an example of desirable behavior and, in their absence or diminishment, undesirable traits.

Because comedy, unlike tragedy, is light-hearted, the hero's enemies are never overwhelmingly evil and the battles never too serious. Comedy tends to trivialize "the human battle" and, as a result, "its dangers are not real disasters, but embarrassment and loss of face." The "personal antagonist" in comedy "is really that great challenger, he is rarely a complete villain; he is interesting, entertaining, his defeat is a hilarious success but not his destruction." Consequently, the villain may be put off, but never put away because "there is no permanent defeat and permanent human triumph except in tragedy." Through the actions of the hero and the villain and their collective and individual exploits, comedy works to stir up feelings. "It is the nature of comedy to be erotic, risqué, and sensuous if not sensual, impious, and even wicked. This assures it a spontaneous emotional interest" [Langer 119-140]. When comedy sparks interest and feelings, it gives some indication of con-

14. Richard Duprey, "Whatever Happened to Comedy?" in Corrigan, 243-250.

15. Northrop Frye, "The Mythos of Spring: Comedy," in Corrigan, 141-162.

temporary human concerns as well as a society's collective state. Langer explains that "where the formulation of feeling is really achieved, it probably reflects the whole development of mankind and man's world, for feeling is the intaglio image of reality" [Ibid.].

In many ways, the hero and his personal antagonist reflect the relationship between Drew Carey and Mimi Bobeck. As the star character, Drew is obviously the essence of the program. Drew has held a variety of positions at the clothing retailer Winfred-Louder, including that of store manager, but he has held the position of Assistant Director of Personnel for the longest period of time, over a decade. Drew takes his job seriously and this is reflected in the clothes that he wears to work. He always is dressed smartly in a gray, blue or brown two piece suit with ties that are in colors appropriate for a business setting. Marcel Danesi argues that contemporary business wear, including the suit, is a modern version of the Puritan dress code:

The toned-down colors (blues, browns, grays) that the business world demands are the contemporary reflexes of the Calvinist's fear and dislike of color and ornament. The wearing of neckties, jackets and short hair are all Puritan signifiers of solemnity and self-denial.¹⁶

Although in the late 1960s and early 1970s the corporate dress code in the U.S. came "under the influence of [...] colorful suits, turtle-neck sweaters, longer hair, sideburns, Nehru jackets," and it looked like an "emerging dress code that threatened to enliven the world of corporate capitalism" might take hold, this never came to pass [Ibid.]. Drew operates within established norms for traditional business fashion and although he may be large, his solemn business attire works against stereotypical notions of large people lacking self-discipline. His abiding by the standard enables him to fit in quite comfortably with his slim counterparts, without drawing much attention to his body. Further, while his large black glasses overwhelm his face and look somewhat comical, they are never used in the context of a joke or portrayed as a drawback on the program.

In addition to dressing in a way that minimizes his physique, Drew is represented as an ethical and compassionate person. For instance, as Assistant Director of Personnel, Drew is advised by management that he must find someone to fire in the next five minutes or else he will be fired.¹⁷ He has visions of firing his nemesis Mimi, but when he feels the baby kicking in her stomach, his compassion does not allow him to fire her, despite the grief she has caused

16. Marcel Danesi, *Of Cigarettes, High Heels and Other Interesting Things* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

17. Paul Lieberstein. "Drew Pops Something on Kate," *The Drew Carey Show*, director Gerry Cohen (New York: ABC, 4 October 2000),

him. Additionally, because everyone is being kind to him, he does not have the heart to fire anyone and he ends up losing his own job as a consequence. On a separate program, he refuses to join his father's lodge, although it would allow him to make numerous business connections and potential jobs, because he learns that many of the members are bigots.¹⁸ Drew is represented as an everyday hero who turns down opportunities that will directly benefit him because they will harm others.

In contrast, as the phonetic pronunciation of her name suggests, Mimi is mostly concerned with herself. If people do not do what she wishes she overwhelms them with pranks or problems until they acquiesce to her demands. During the pilot program, Drew decides not to hire Mimi for a position at the Cosmetics Counter because she possesses a hostile attitude and he finds her makeup uncomely.¹⁹ She complains to his boss, claiming that Drew discriminated against her because of her looks and she threatens to file a complaint with the Labor Relations Board unless she is hired. Drew's boss hires her as his personal secretary so that she will not file a complaint and she ends up sitting right next to Drew, vowing to make his life miserable.²⁰ This situation portends a series of malicious pranks that still have not relented.

In addition to her entertaining pranks, Mimi's excessive makeup, ostentatious clothing, loud voice and large size make her character an entertaining spectacle that refuses to be marginalized. Despite the fact that she sports multi-colored, clown-like clothes that accentuate her overweight body and bright peacock blue eye shadow that runs from her eyelashes to her eyebrows, Mr. Wick, the store manager, says that she is the best secretary that he has ever had. Even though Mimi is a competent worker, Mr. Wick banishes her briefly to the store basement, which is used for storage, to do filing until she changes "her bad behavior and appearance."²¹ In her absence Mr. Wick explains "It's nice not to be visually assaulted when I walk out of my office." On a separate program, Mr. Souldard, a member of Winfred-Louder's Board of Directors, orders Mimi to change her appearance and to remove the trolls that she has lining her desk. When she objects, he places walls around her desk so that she cannot be seen by visitors.²² Similarly, in a guest appearance, Rush Limbaugh

18. Lona Williams and Jeff Lowell, "The Electron Doesn't Fall Far From the Tree," *The Drew Carey Show*, director Sam Simon (New York: ABC, 13 December 1995).

19. Drew Carey and Bruce Helford, "Pilot," *The Drew Carey Show*, director Michael Lessac (New York: ABC, 13 September 1995).

20. Clay Graham, "Miss Right," *The Drew Carey Show*, director Sam Simon (New York: ABC, 20 September 1995).

21. Christy Snell, "The Bully You Know," *The Drew Carey Show*, director Gerry Cohen (New York: ABC, 16 October 1996).

22. Jana Hunter and Mitch Hunter, "Mimi Moves In," *The Drew Carey Show*, director John Fuller (New York: ABC, 2 February 2000).

tells Mimi that she has “the perfect face for radio.”²³ Despite the frequent belittling she endures, Mimi takes great pride in her makeup and when she is forced by an allergic reaction to go without it for two weeks, she hides her face with dark glasses, a hat, a scarf and a hand held fan because she feels naked.²⁴ Later, she finds a color projector to cast a rainbow of colors onto her face.

Danesi contends that in recent times, “the sense ratio has shifted towards the visual,” and because television is a visual medium and we are visual creatures, Mimi’s grooming habits and bodily presence garner much attention [Danesi pages?]. Grooming codes “provide people with the appropriate techniques for ‘presenting the acceptable self’ in society” [Danesi pages?]. Applying makeup is an important part of this ritual:

Making up the face by putting on cosmetics, removing (or growing) facial hair, and wearing decorative trinkets such as earrings and nose rings is [...] designed to communicate who we are to others and what we want them to think we are. Makeup can announce social class or status [...] it can mark the coming of age; it can function to enhance attractiveness in sexual acting; and the list could go on. [Danesi pages?]

If Mimi’s makeup is supposed to function as a vehicle to present her most acceptable self and to enhance her attractiveness, then what are we to make of her appearance? Mimi’s face appears to be made up to decrease her physical attractiveness and to increase her buffoonery. This combined with her sincere attempt to look attractive make her appear all the more foolish. Mimi’s clothing and makeup construct an image of a woman who is not adept at recognizing cultural cues regarding the way to present an attractive/acceptable self, and the frequent remarks she receives suggest the kind of punishment women in general should expect to endure as a consequence. Mimi may be one of the most intelligent characters on the program, but her overwhelming visual presence and her frequent castigation reduce her efficacy because she appears incapable of digesting certain social norms.

While Mimi does not acknowledge that she fails to adhere to Western norms for femininity, Drew knows that he does not conform to U.S. norms for beauty and occasionally complains about being a “chubby” guy. Despite his lamentations, he is frequently the center of female attention and he is more often than not involved in a romantic relationship. For example, when Winfred-Louder recruits Drew to promote products from home using a web-camera, the company hires a beautiful woman to pose as his girlfriend and in a matter

23. Terry Mulroy and Bob Nickman, “The Salon,” *The Drew Carey Show*, director Gerry Cohen (New York: ABC, 4 February 1998).

24. Scott Gordon and Christy Snell, “Drew’s Brother,” *The Drew Carey Show*, director Gerry Cohen (New York: ABC, 19 November 1997).

of days he asks her out and she accepts.²⁵ At the same time, Drew's long time friend Kate, who is similarly attractive, reveals that she is jealous of their budding relationship because she is also in love with him. It seems Drew's luck with the ladies might run out when he meets Sharon, a tough talking handy-woman who fixes problems around his house.²⁶ But sure enough, following some persistence on his part and a break up with her boyfriend, Sharon and Drew become involved. However, Sharon is only interested in a physical relationship with Drew. Drew casts a similar spell on a young, attractive woman who has come to see Drew's band play at the Ramada Inn.²⁷ He calls her his groupie and he quickly gets involved in a physical relationship with her as well. She tells him that she likes the fact that he will never let success go to his head. He replies, "Ya, I'll never let it near me." Although Drew makes self-deprecating remarks like this one, it is clear that he is largely successful with women.

Even though Drew is represented as being desirable enough to have several beautiful women seeking his company, sometimes simultaneously, his body is never portrayed as erotic or alluring. Although there are several intimate scenes with lovers in a variety of separate shows through the years, Drew's body is covered in either long-sleeved pajama tops or short-sleeved undershirts, while blankets cover the rest of his body. In a rare program, Drew does take off his shirt, to disastrous ends.²⁸ Drew perceives that his boss, Mr. Wick, is favoring an employee because of his muscular physique. Consequently, Drew decides that he should spruce up his body in order to gain his boss's favor. Instead of dieting or exercising, he takes diet pills that must be ingested with beer. In order to get a free bottle of pills, Drew agrees to pose without a shirt for a before and after picture for potential investors. However, in a deceitful turn of events, his picture is plastered on a billboard to advertise why people need the new product. Drew is horrified when his topless photograph is shown to the world and, to make matters worse, he becomes the object of ridicule and scorn by his friends and even strangers who have seen the billboard. He is so distraught by the humiliation that he and his friends climb up to the billboard in order to tear it down.

25. Holly Hester and Michael Becker, "Drew Cam," *The Drew Carey Show*, director Sam Simon (New York: ABC, 17 November 1999).

26. Apryl Huntzinger, "She's Gotta Have It," *The Drew Carey Show*, director Thomas J. Thompson (New York: ABC, 7 April 1999).

27. Clay Graham, "Ramada da Vida," *The Drew Carey Show*, director Gerry Cohen (New York: ABC, 30 September 1998).

28. Les Firestein, "Drew Vs. Billboard," *The Drew Carey Show*, director Gerry Cohen (New York: ABC, 27 September 1997).

Not surprisingly, Mimi's body also is always fully clothed. However, unlike Drew, she does not have much good fortune in terms of her personal life, finding few dates and a lot of rejection. True to Mimi's callous character, her nickname for Drew is "pig." However, in earlier programs, she cautiously expressed an interest in Drew who acted sickened by her advances. Later, she becomes interested in her attractive boss Mr. Wick, even hiding him in her home in the fashion of the movie *Misery* after he is traumatized by a tornado hitting the store.²⁹ In a later episode, Mimi also takes advantage of Mr. Wick's drunken and depressed state at Kate and Oswald's bridal shower, as he is in love with Kate and thinks that she is the figure who visits him in a darkened bedroom.³⁰ Unlike Drew, who seems always to have a date or who inevitably gets his girl if he pursues her long enough, Mimi rarely has companionship and often has to manipulate men into being with her.

In the fifth season, Mimi finally finds a mutually agreed upon relationship with Drew's brother, Steve, who has come to work at Winfred-Louder in the Cosmetics Department. However, Steve is not your stereotypical man—he is a transvestite who is open about his love of cross-dressing. At Oswald's bachelor party, Steve jumps out of the cake dressed as a woman and proclaims "I'm a cross-dresser and I want the world to know!"³¹ Mimi and Steve are represented as similar spectacles who are appropriately matched because, it is suggested, neither is desirable.

Occasionally, Mimi and Steve are shown in an affectionate stance. In a scene in which Steve has moved into Drew's house because Drew feels guilty about having to lay him off, Drew learns of their budding romance when he sees them having sex in his kitchen.³² The sight of his brother engaging in relations with Mimi, whom Drew views as having an unattractive appearance and attitude, sickens Drew. Ultimately, however, Steve proposes to Mimi and she accepts. Despite Drew's protests, they get married and eventually have a child.

LeBesco contends that "In much of the West, fat is seen as disgusting/revolting and thus lurks on the cultural periphery" [LeBesco 74-90]. In contrast, the corpulent characters Drew and Mimi on *The Drew Carey Show* are designed to be center-stage. Although they are similarly corpulent, they are

29. Lona Williams, "Misery Loves Mimi," *The Drew Carey Show*, director Sam Simon (New York: ABC, 8 October 1997).

30. Maria Espada, Jody Paul and Apryl Huntzinger, "The Wedding Dress," *The Drew Carey Show*, director Brian K. Roberts (New York: ABC, 13 May 1998).

31. Clay Graham, "Bachelor Party," *The Drew Carey Show* director Brian Roberts (New York: ABC, 11 March 1998).

32. Bruce Rasmussen, "Steve and Mimi," *The Drew Carey Show*, director Gerry Cohen (New York: ABC, 24 March 1999).

portrayed in decidedly different lights, illuminating U.S. perceptions regarding gendered corpulent embodiment.

In the instance of Mimi, her large body, acerbic remarks and refusal to fit in with social expectations for dress and decorum clearly make her a spectacle, but her constant belittling on the program ensures that her disturbance of traditional boundaries is perceived as undesirable. Mimi's multi-colored, eccentric clothing and bright makeup make her appear like a circus clown. Unlike Drew, who downplays his size by wearing traditional, conservative clothing, Mimi's character purposely draws attention to the fact that she does not abide by U.S. society's norms for feminine appearance in dress or in body. Although Mimi is a symbol representing the unsettling of boundaries, because she is subjected to constant ridicule on the program the alternative femininity she represents is undermined and Western norms for femininity are reinforced; for who would choose to be the object of such castigation? Because the program is a comedy and human struggles are trivialized, the ideological reasons behind Mimi's ridicule are never questioned and the unruly woman's role in U.S. society is cast as an unpleasant option, if an option at all. Drew's positioning as a heroic figure, as a man who makes ethical decisions even when he is punished for his decency, makes it appear as though the censure that is disseminated on the program is just and the judgments rendered somehow equitable. The social order prescribed by the program, one that benefits the white male because the white female bears a greater burden when she inhabits a large body, is therefore naturalized and moralized subtly by Drew's presence.

The corpulent female body is represented as troubling, because not only is Mimi visually powerful, but she is also unapologetic about overstepping womanly boundaries. In contrast to Drew, who engages in self-discipline when it comes to ethical matters, Mimi never lets an opportunity pass in which she may seek her own goals at the expense of others. Since there is greater pressure on U.S. women to subvert their needs in order to meet the needs of others, the blatant and continuous transgression of this norm makes her appear all the more malevolent. Her positioning as a mean-spirited clown works to justify the constant disapproval she receives, annihilating her liberatory possibilities, and ensuring that social hierarchies remain intact.

Although Drew is large, he is none the worse for his size, at least regarding his access to intimate relationships. Drew's frequent involvement in sexual relationships and the fact that some of the relationships are purely physical pave new ground for the representation of the corpulent male in the U.S. media. Previously the corpulent male's sex life has been contained and his body has been used "as a televisual symbol of white heterosexual masculinity

losing its definition” and becoming “soft and impotent.”³³ In contrast, while Drew’s body may contribute to the perception that hegemonic masculinity is losing its definition physically, his sexual success works to reassert the potency of the hegemonic male, despite his changing form. Consequently, although Drew fails to achieve the cultural ideal in terms of embodiment, he still is able to reap the benefits of this position, suggesting a relaxing of body image requirements for the white male, while such requirements are reinforced for women in the image of Mimi.

At the same time, the fact that Drew’s shirt stays on in romantic scenes and his naked chest is exposed only to generate mirth reflects a continued hesitancy by the U.S. media culture to represent the naked corpulent body as a object of desire. This indicates that producers do not think Americans are ready for such an image, even though more than half of the U.S. population is overweight. Perhaps this is because, as we watch what we perceive to be a reflection of ourselves on primetime television, the last vision that we want to be confronted with is the naked truth of our own materiality.

33. Jerry Mosher, “Setting Free the Bears: Refiguring Fat Men on Television” in Brazil LeBesco, 166-196.