boiler

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Abstract:

Il fenomeno del **body shaming** *rappresenta una delle forme di* ***violenza verbale*** *contemporanea più insidiose , in quanto capace di trasformare termini neutri o storici in armi di* ***stigmatizzazione sociale****. Questo processo di* ***risignificazione negativa*** *colpisce duramente la* ***percezione del corpo****, specialmente quello* ***femminile****, dove il linguaggio metaforico viene usato per rinforzare* ***stereotipi estetici restrittivi.***

Un esempio lampante è l'uso del termine ***boiler.*** *Originariamente derivato dal verbo inglese "****to boil****" per indicare un comune* ***scaldabagno,*** *questa parola ha subito una degradazione del significato. Nel gergo del* ***pregiudizio estetico****, '****boiler****' è diventato un insulto specifico per* ***descrivere corpi femminili*** *percepiti come eccessivamente* ***voluminosi*** *o* ***sgraziati****. La metafora riduce l'essere umano a un* ***elettrodomestico ingombrante****, privando la* ***persona*** *della sua* ***dignità*** *e* ***oggettivandola*** *attraverso un paragone puramente meccanico.*

Parallelamente, la figura mitologica del ***Golem*** *subisce una* ***distorsione simile****. Se nel* ***folklore ebraico*** *il Golem è un* ***gigante d'argilla*** *creato per* ***proteggere*** *la* ***comunità****, nel* ***linguaggio dell'offesa*** *viene evocato per* ***descrivere fisicità considerate massicce****,* ***sproporzionate*** *o* ***prive di armonia****. In questo caso, il richiamo al* ***mito*** *serve a* ***deumanizzare****: il* ***corpo*** *non è più carne e ossa, ma un* ***ammasso inerte*** *di materia informe, pesante e mostruoso rispetto ai* ***canoni*** *di* ***bellezza dominanti.***

Questi ***slittamenti di significato*** *dimostrano la* ***potenza manipolatoria*** *del* ***linguaggio.*** *Termini nati in* ***ambiti tecnici*** *o* ***spirituali*** *vengono* ***strappati*** *al loro* ***contesto originale*** *per alimentare il* ***giudizio sociale****, trasformando la* ***descrizione fisica*** *in una forma di* ***marginalizzazione*** *che punisce chiunque non aderisca a* ***standard*** *di* ***magrezza*** *e* ***proporzione*** *predefiniti.*

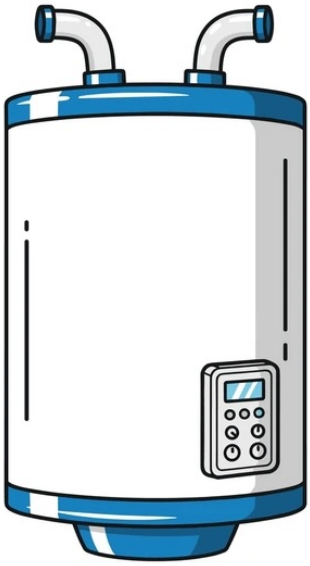
The phenomenon of **body shaming** is a modern form of **verbal violence** that turns **neutral** or **historical words** into tools for **social stigma**. This process changes the **meaning of language** to target the **human body**, especially the **female body**, and reinforces **narrow beauty standards**.

A clear example is the word ***boiler***. Originally, this term comes from the verb "**to boil**" and refers to a common **water heater**. However, in the **language of body shaming**, it has taken on a **negative meaning**. It is now used as a **specific insult** to describe **women's bodies** perceived as **excessively large** or **bulky**. This metaphor **reduces a person** to a **heavy household appliance**, stripping away their **dignity** and treating them like a **machine**.

Similarly, the **mythological figure** of the **Golem** has undergone a similar change. In **Jewish folklore,** the Golem is a **giant** made of clay created to **protect** the **community**. Today, this term is often used as an **insult** to describe **bodies** seen as **massive**, **out of proportion**, or **lacking grace**. This comparison is a form of **dehumanization**: the **body** is no longer seen as flesh and blood, but as a **heavy, monstrous mass** of **shapeless matter**.

These **shifts in meaning** show **how language** can be **manipulated**. Terms from **technical** or **spiritual contexts** are taken out of their original use to fuel **social judgment** and **marginalize** anyone who does not fit into **traditional standards of thinness** and **proportion**.

Etymology:



The word ***boiler*** comes from the english verb "to boil" with the added suffix *-er* indicating the device. Over time this word has become an **insult towards women** that **do not conform** to the **canons** of **modern beauty** set by cultural and social standards as well as by big model agencies.

https://www.shutterstock.com/it/search/boiler-line-art?image_type=vector

The word ***golem*** has very ancient roots. The word was first used by Hebrews in their bible with the meaning of "**incomplete matter**". During the **Middle Ages** the meaning of the word ***golem*** evolved and became an **anthropomorphic figure** that is **huge**, **heavy** and made of **earth**, **mud**, or **stone**. Today, with the boom of the video-games "Golem", it has become to indicate a **massive figure** that has **high resistance**, **good health**, and it is **slow** and hard to **take down.**



https://www.shutterstock.com/search/golem-cartoon

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Cultural specificity:

In **Italy,** the word ***boiler*** is a way to **insult women** that aren't skinny.

We came across this word while scrolling on **social media** through a challenge called “**Boiler Cup**”, a **contest** in which **guys** get points by **kissing** a **curvy** or **overweight girl** - **the bigger the girl**, the **more points** the boys get. There are many **videos** on **social media** about this challenge. The social media that got more engaged with it is **Tik-Tok**.



Boiler Summer Cup:
the terrible bodyshaming Tik Tok challenge.
Bullism. discrimination, fatphobia, and misogyny:
that's why the Boiler Summer Cup, which has become viral,
must be condemned
(screenshot from Tik Tok)



"For me, every girl over 60/70 [kg] is a golem"
(screenshot from TikTok)

In the social media, besides the word ***boiler*** another **common insult** is the word ***golem***, similarly used to **affront chubby** and **fat women**.

At the end, ***body shaming*** is the **center point** of everything in a society where **only the bodies** that **follow** the **normative beauty standards** get appreciated.

Both the words ***boiler*** and ***golem*** are thus used in a negative way by **teenagers** and, in general, **young people** as a way to **insult** a **girl** during an **argument** or a **peer discussion.**

Problematization:

As seen, the word ***boiler*** itself is not an insult but it has acquired a totally **different meaning** nowadays. All of this happened because of a **social media challenge** called «***The Boiler Summer Cup***» that had a great success since its appearance on **TikTok** in **May 2022,** but that quickly became an **international trend.**

«***The Boiler Summer Cup***» is a **contest** that was created on social media by **young men** in the **US** who wanted to **bodyshame girls** without **them noticing** and then **posting a video** on social media to **update** the **audience** of how **many points** they **had scored** - **points** which are **assigned** according to how **big** was the **girl.**



(screenshot from TikTok)

Examples of comments from TikTok videos are: «She is 8 points»; «I would win really quick»; «Boiler cup final boss»; «Who kisses will win the cup». Indeed, a **main rule** of the contest is that the **kiss** has to be **recorded** and **posted** on **social media** to be **valid**.

The **phenomenon** spread **quickly**, and people (in particular **young men**) began using the comment section of the videos **posting remarks** that had nothing to do with the challenge but that were only to **value the points** of a girl or **make fun** of her through the challenge.

Many **girls** and **women** have been finding these **comments** under their **videos**, that propagate an extremely **discriminating wave** of **hate** against **female bodies** that **do not conform** to **normative beauty standards**.

Communication strategies:

The videos that have been published since 2022 have raised **fierce complaints**, **inquiries**, and **investigations, denouncing** the **contest** and **countering** it with **articles** and **videos** that **reinforce** messages of **body positivity.**

An article in the Italian newspaper ***Il Corriere*** (https://www.corriere.it/sette/attualita/23_gennaio_13/conquistare-over-size-l-infame-challenge-tik-tok-che-raggira-adolescenti-cb643a20-8f6f-11ed-ae40-41a711fcbe95.shtml) reports an **interview** to the 23 year-old **body-positive** and **fat-acceptance activist Dalila Bagnuli** who managed **to stop** the **contest** and has become a **point of reference** for **many girls**. However, she continues bitterly, the **contest** has **reborn** under **different names**.

The article ends with the **testimony** of sixteen-year-old Alessia that **evidences** the **malice** of the **contest.** She says that when she saw a **video** scoffing at a girl, she thought, 'oh, poor her' and she would **have hugged** the girl. Only after a while, she **realized** that the girl **portrayed** in the **video** was **her**.

Indeed, another **malignant aspect** of the contest is that girls are the **unaware protagonists** of the **contest**, and **realize** that only when they **see themselves** in the **videos**.



https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2022/05/27/news/boiler_summer_cup_una_sfida_allintelligenza-351454896/

Also another Italian newspaper ***La Repubblica*** fiercely stigmatized the contest, as well as several **TV inquires** and **programs**, as for example **documentaries** on **body shaming** (e.g., ***Le Iene*** or ***Fanpage***) that have analyzed the "Boiler Summer Cup" phenomenon, **interviewing** the **victims**.

Subversion:

Social Media

Recently, many **female influencers** have been getting attention for **praising** and **advising body positivity**.

The main ones are:

- **Spencer Barbosa** (https://www.instagram.com/spencer.barbosa/), famous for **promoting** and building **self-confidence**
- **Bethany Cook** (https://www.instagram.com/bethanycook_/), known for how she tries to **normalize** the connection between **curvier bodies** and **fashion**
- **Clara Dao** (https://www.instagram.com/clara_dao/) whose goal, especially in her old videos, was to make every **girl** and **woman** feel **comfortable** in their **own skin**
- **Katherine rae** (https://www.instagram.com/thekatherinerae/) who makes videos about where to find **cute** and **stylish plus size** clothes.

  Furthermore, some **body positivity activists** (as content creator and activist Caterina Guerra https://www.instagram.com/caterina.guerra99/) use the term ***boiler*** in their **educational contents** to explain how **fatness** is a **physical characteristic** and **not** a **moral failing**, trying to **'normalize' the term** to the point of making it **harmless** by promoting the **acceptance** of **all bodies** and challenging **imposed beauty standards**.

The Arts

Fernando Botero, a Colombian artist, revolutionized art with his signature '**boterism**'— an **aesthetic** celebrating exaggerated **volume** in **human forms**.

Botero painted and sculpted **voluminous women** as symbols of **vitality**, **sensuality**, and **power**. Botero's canons derived from his **passion** for his **homeland** and was inspired by the history of **Italian Renaissance art**. Botero's paintings combine **solid, full** and **monumental forms**.
When some critics asked him why he painted overweight women he simply answered: “I do not paint **overweight women**. I only **explore** the **volume**”.
From his point of view, the **soft**, **full forms** are **more intense** than the **lean ones**, and the **roundness** represents **sensuality** and the **exaltation** of **life.**



Fernando Botero, *The Garden Club*
(1997)



Fernando Botero, *La Fornarina* (2008)

*"**La Fornarina**"* reinterpret **Renaissance beauties** with **swelling curves**.

The contemporary English artist **Jenny Saville** refers to the history of art and the oil painting technique to depict **monumental**, **heavy, nude female figures** which directly **challenge** the **traditional**, **idealized**, and **patriarchal representations** and the **notion** of **beauty** of the **female body**.



Jenny Saville, *Propped*
(1992)
https://www.designartbeauty.com/jenny-saville-monumentalmente-donna/

Films/TV series

Cyberbullying is addressed in documentaries and TV series, as for example the **Italian TV series *Skam Italia*** and ***Prisma*** that explores **young people's relationship** with **body image** and the violence of **online comments**.

An example of a TV series is also «***Insatiable***» in which a **young**, **fat**, and **unkempted** girl develops an ED (eating disorder) and as soon as she **becomes skinnier** people **start talking** to her and she understands that what matters in this world is the just the **outer appearance**.



Insatiable TV series
(Netflix, 2018-2020)

Music

In music, especially in **Italian Trap** and **Drill**, the **language** is often **crude**. However, the strongest response **against bodyshaming** comes from the world of **Pop**/**Indie**.

For example, in her **songs** and **interviews,** the **Italian artist BigMama** takes the **insults** she receives about her **weight** and **transforms them** into an **anthem** of **power** and **talent**, rejecting the **label** of **victim**.

Here are some of **her words** on **her body** from **interviews** and **monologues**: ""My body led me to chemotherapy at 20. My body has given me so much and taken so much away"; "I love being too much; "If you don't like my body, don't be like me your whole life"; "I grew up alone: a book to say thank you to my body."



BigMama, *Cento occhi*
(2024), Rizzoli

"Cento occhi" [One Hundred Eyes] is a song written by **BigMama** inspired from the **experience** of being **bullied** for her **physical appearance**, and **transforming** the **gaze** of **others** into **self-awareness** that leads to **redemption**.
With the same title and themes, in 2024 she published a **book** where she speaks about her **life experiences** mixing **elements** of **poetry** and **self-reflections**.

"***La rabbia non ti basta***" [Anger is not enough for you] was written by **BigMama** for Sanremo 2024. The song speaks about the **need** to **overcome pain** and **internal anger** to **convert them** into **strength** and link it to the **need** of **self-acceptance** and **self-protection,** especially when one has been a **victim** of **bullying**.



Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UymqXckCJj8

Advertising

Also some **companies** have embraced the **body positivity message** and promote it in their advertising.

Dove has been one of the first companies to **support body confidence** and **positive self-image** by launching the '***Real Beauty Campaign***' in 2004.



https://www.dove.com/ca/en/stories/campaigns.html

The video "***Beauty Bias***" was created by the company ***Dove.*** It portrays real **testimonials** of **diverse women** in **everyday scenarios**: **job interviews**, where candidates are prejudged on appearance before speaking, **promotions denied** for not matching corporate 'image' ideals, and **self-doubt** rooted in **societal body standards**.
The **video** explores the concept of **weight bias**. It shows how **society** creates **strict beauty standards** that often favor thin people. When we follow these **standards** too closely, we **develop** a **bias**, an **unfair prejudice** against **people** who **don't fit** that **specific image**.
The main message is that **beauty standards** based on **weight** are **harmful.** They hurt **people's self-esteem** and make **them feel judged** for their **appearance** rather than for their **personality**. ***Dove*** wants to promote **body positivity**, which means **accepting** and **celebrating** all **body types**. By **recognizing our biases**, we can learn to treat everyone with **respect** and see **beauty** in **diversity.**


Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZ05C1o9utg


Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sD-R2OzcleQ

In the first part of the video "***AI & beauty standards***" we can see a woman asking **AI** to generate photos of the **most beautiful woman** in the word, the **perfect body** for a woman and the **perfect skin** for a woman.
At least once in her life, every woman dreams to **become different**, to become like the **supermodel** that we see on tv or in the social media. This happens because women follow **unrealistic standards** of **beauty** instead of trying to **feel beautiful** the way they are.
In the second part of the video the **woman asks AI** to generate **different images** of **beauty,** but this time the point of view is different: the images are more realistic and they portay **different types** of **beauty,** where every woman has some **imperfection** but it is this imperfection to make her so **special**.
Dove created this advertising to **protect** the **young generation** from the **unrealistic inspiration generated by AI**, which reproduces **normative** and **biased** standard of beauty.

Last but not least. Tracing back the **history** of the **Body Positivity Movement**, an article on **BBC Bitesize** concludes quoting the **Fat Manifesto** and saying that if **body positivity** does not include the **fat people** and **Black people** who made Body Positivity possible - as well as other **marginalized bodies** - it's **not Body Positivity** at all (https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/z2w7dp3).

Discussion:

Here are some questions to reflect on the words ***boiler*** and ***golem***.

- Why do you think that weight, out of all the female traits, was chosen as a way to discriminate girls and women?
- What kind of impact do you think it has, especially on younger girls?
- Why do you think the 'Boiler Cup' challenge became so popular?
- How did you feel while reading this entry?
- Do you feel like that the use of such words are normalised in our society?

References/Further Readings:

In Italian:

- Bagnuli, D. (2023). *ANTI manuale della bellezza* [ANTI-handbook of beauty]. Sonda.
- BigMama (2024). *Cento Occhi* [One Hundred Eyes]. Rizzoli.
- Ciabatti, T. (2013). Conquistare una over size: l'infame 'challenge' di Tik tok che raggira le adolescenti [Wooing an oversize girl: Tik Tok's hideous challenge that circumvents the teenagers]. *Il Corriere*, 23 January, 2013.
- Liso, O. (2022) Boiler summer cup: una sfida all'intelligenza [Boiler Summer Cup: a challenge to intelligence], *Repubblica*, 27 May, 2022.

In English there are many books of what has now become a genre, 'the Fat Studies'. These volumes offer feminist perspectives, insights, inspiration, and concrete tools for enhancing body positivity and fighting against discriminations regarding beauty body standards. Here are the ones that we suggest:

- Cooper, C. (2021). *Fat Activism: A Radical Social Movement*. 2nd ed. Intellect Ldt.
- Taylor, S. R. (2018). *The Body is not an Apology: the Power of Radical Self-Love*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Tonic, G. (2025). *Greedy Guts. Notes from an Insatiable Woman*. Coronet..
- Wann, M. (1998). *Fat! So?: Because You Don't Have to Apologize for Your Size*. Clarkson Potter/Ten Speed.

How to cite this entry: Class 2A - Liceo Volta, Turin, Italy (G1). (2026). Boiler. *In Other Words. A Contextualized Dictionary to Problematize Otherness.* Published: 15 May 2026. [https://www.iowdictionary.org/word/boiler, accessed: 11 November 2026]