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How People Make Sense of Trump and Why It Matters for Racial Justice

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Abstract

Scholars, journalists, pundits and others have criticized the racist, anti-queer, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, and xenophobic rhetoric that pervades the Trump campaign and presidency. At the same time, commentators have expended a vast number of words analyzing Trump's character: why does he do the things he does? We ask, how do the latter (analyses of Trump's character) help explain the former (Trump's racist statements)? Through a close rhetorical analysis of 50 diverse examples of Trump criticism, we reveal four prevailing characterizations or "archetypes" of Trump: Trump the Acclaim-Seeker, Trump the Sick Man, Trump the Authoritarian, and Trump the Idiot. Each archetype explains Trump's racism in a different way, with significant consequences for social critique. For example, the Trump the Idiot archetype dismisses his racist statements as a series of terrible gaffes, whereas Trump the Authoritarian explains them as an actualization of white supremacy. We trace the benefits and tradeoffs of each archetype for resisting white supremacy.

Keywords: Donald Trump, white supremacy, identity, rhetoric, archetypes

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Introduction

Read enough critiques of Donald Trump—the president and the candidate—and you’re likely to be struck by three things: 1) there are a great many of them, 2) they expend significant effort analyzing Trump’s *character* as a way of explaining why he does what he does, and 3) they are repetitive—certain characterizations surface over and over and become familiar as explanations (e.g., the idea that Trump does what he does because he is an incompetent idiot). Our central argument is that these repetitive characterizations of Trump—which we call *rhetorical archetypes*—offer multiple and competing resources for *making sense* of his words and actions. Of concern here are the different ways each archetype explains Trump’s embrace of white supremacy¹ and how each calls us to respond.

This essay unfolds as follows. First, we review some of the scholarly literature on race, focusing on four challenging ideas that prevent people from fully facing racism and white supremacy in the United States. This provides vital context for our critique of the archetypes. Then, we explain [begin page 108] the methodology we use to collect and code a corpus of 50 critiques of Donald Trump. This leads to a detailed description of the four main archetypes we found: **Trump the Authoritarian**, **Trump the Acclaim-Seeker**, **Trump the Idiot** and a set of pathologies unified by **Trump the Sick Man** (predatory behavior, narcissism, arrested development, and mental incapacitation). After describing each archetype, we show how each makes sense of Trump’s white supremacy. We find promise in Trump the Authoritarian’s ability to capture the *effects* of his white supremacy—domination and oppression—but we also argue that a marginal and emerging archetype, **Trump the Embodiment of Whiteness**, offers a better portrait of the historical continuity and institutional roots of his white supremacy.

But first, a caveat. At no point do we ourselves make claims about Trump’s internal state; the archetypes we describe emerge from media discourse. We do not claim that any one archetype is “truer” than any other; each probably contains a kernel of truth. Moreover, it’s unlikely we will ever *definitively* know why Trump does what he does—there is no “correct Theory of Trump.”² Nevertheless, there is value in better understanding the social consequences of different avenues of critique.

Conceptual Barriers to Facing Racism and White Supremacy

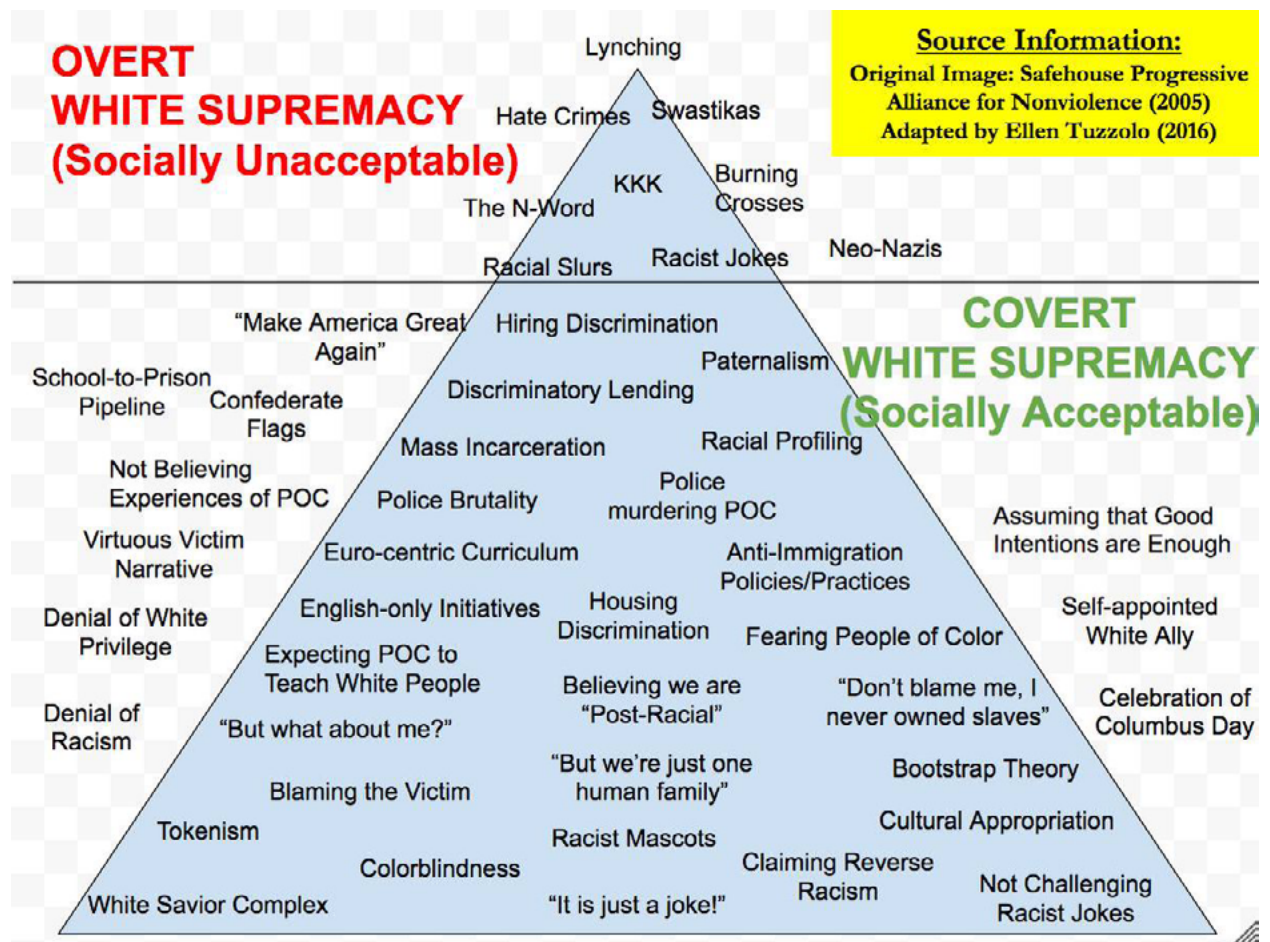
People diverge in their ability to face racism and white supremacy. Some seek to explain it; others seek to explain it away. Our review of scholarly literature on racism and white supremacy focuses on four challenging ideas that may prevent people from confronting racism in the United States in an honest and substantive way. These challenging ideas help explain the allure of archetypes that dismiss Trump’s white supremacy and our shared responsibility for it. That said, we acknowledge that the study of racism goes deeper than our rough sketch. Racial systems of oppression interact with others (i.e., they are intersectional).³ Who counts as white has shifted over time.⁴ And there is room for plenty of disagreement about how best to resist white supremacy, including approaches such as respectability politics (e.g. a politics of “be the change you wish to see”—something Gandhi never said), identity politics,⁵ hidden resistance,⁶ militancy,⁷ and separation.⁸

We rely primarily on scholarly literature in this section, but we also include a chart adapted by Ellen Tuzzolo from the Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence and widely reproduced online.⁹ The chart is helpful because it is updated to include current examples of white supremacy that haven’t yet made their way into scholarship (e.g., “Make America Great Again”), and because it brings white supremacy out of the abstract and ties it to concrete practices. [begin page 109]

Challenging Idea #1: Racism Is Both Individual and Systemic

The top half of Tuzzolo’s chart shows “overt” malice toward people of color. The examples listed (e.g., using the n-word) tend to describe deep, conscious commitments to white supremacy (one doesn’t just wake up one day and join the KKK). In contrast, the bottom half of the chart shows “covert” malice, where many of the examples are systemic: Euro-centric school curriculum,¹⁰ mass incarceration,¹¹ anti-immigration policies, school-to-prison pipelines, etc. These are covert forms of racism in part because it is hard to pin down the individuals responsible.

The idea that racism can be systemic is challenging because it implicates all white people as partici-



► Figure 1. A Map of Overt and Covert White Supremacy

pating in racist systems, an idea that often provokes defensiveness. This defensiveness has been called “white fragility,” or more derisively “white tears.”¹² White people may insist that racism is limited to extreme acts of malice, downplay the negative effects of racism by labeling racial inequality as justly deserved (e.g. a culture of poverty), insist that they don’t see color,¹³ counter-accuse anti-racist activists of being racist themselves or of sowing division,¹⁴ argue that they cannot fix it on their own (and therefore shouldn’t try),¹⁵ and change the conversation to focus on their own emotional response. [begin page 110]

Challenging Idea #2: Individual Prejudice Depends on—and Is an Extension of—Systemic Racism

In the chart, overt racism is supported by the pyramid structure below it. This is a visual way of ex-

plaining that the covert racist structures in which we participate undergird more overt forms of malice. What’s challenging about this insight is, again, that moderate white people—who may consider themselves not prejudiced—are no longer exempt from critiques of racism. Rather, to draw on Martin Luther King Jr.’s Letter from Birmingham Jail, moderate white people often buttress the status quo.¹⁶ Being liberal does not absolve one of responsibility for racism. This idea breaks down our divisions between who “is” and “isn’t” racist. We tend to reserve the label “racist” for people in the KKK or white nationalists in the 2017 Charlottesville protests, not for people who teach a Euro-centric curriculum. For white people, embracing this idea involves reconfiguring their sense of self in an especially face-threatening way: it connects white people’s ways of everyday living with violently prejudiced people.

Challenging Idea #3: Dominant American Culture Is (Still) a Culture of White Supremacy

Tuzzolo's chart uses the term white supremacy rather than racism. One usually sees white supremacist used to describe people who very explicitly endorse the idea that whiteness is politically, morally, biologically, and culturally superior. However, arguing that we live in a culture of white supremacy helps broaden and reorient the problem of racism in productive ways: it invites white people to interrogate their own implicit biases and expectations of being on top. This idea is also challenging because it questions a simple progress narrative. It reminds us of the historical linkages between slavery, segregation, and mass incarceration.¹⁷ For instance, Michelle Alexander identifies continuities between Jim Crow laws from early in the century and the drug laws and enforcement strategies of the 1990s.¹⁸

Challenging Idea #4: Fighting Racism Means Bringing Covert Racism Out of the Shadows

The visual arrangement of Tuzzolo's chart suggests that we could collectively "lower" the dividing line between overt and covert racism, thereby exposing covert systemic racism to social opprobrium. This would entail becoming aware of subtle systemic wrongs, critiquing them, and renouncing them—even when they are currently socially acceptable. Furthermore, before white people can help, white people need to stop hurting; therefore, some anti-racism efforts might be more appropriately termed "racism cessation." This may be particularly challenging to white people because it frames racism as an ongoing failure of white people to respond appropriately.¹⁹ Additionally, [begin page 111] exposing covert racism will require giving the voices of people of color greater prominence; white people will have to listen to and follow people of color who articulate oppression.²⁰

Given the difficulties of facing racism and white supremacy, it is no wonder that rhetorical tools for avoiding the issue are so tempting. This project sets out to unmask and critique one such tool: those

characterizations of Donald Trump that excuse, dismiss, or ignore his (and by extension our) white supremacy.

Methodology

To track how critics characterize Trump—who he is, what he does, and why—we draw on a concept and methodology developed by Doug Cloud: *rhetorical archetypes*.²¹ Rhetorical archetypes are the "stock characters" of public discourse, prototypical representations of individuals or identity categories that can support arguments. The term *rhetorical archetype*, and the method outlined below, help systematize an idea that is already a thread across multiple disciplines: that certain "figures" or "representations" circulate through texts, become widely recognizable as a result, and do rhetorical work by drawing on (and re-shaping) how we understand those identity categories and individuals. Examples of archetypes in other works (though they are rarely called archetypes) include Killingsworth and Palmer's **environmentalist spoiler**,²² Asen's **welfare queen**,²³ Gigante's **scientist at work**,²⁴ and Breen et al.'s **pitiful predator/silent victim**²⁵ to name but a few. Studying cultural attitudes by looking at archetypal representations has a long tradition, going back at least as far as Foucault's argument that four figures shaped Victorian attitudes toward sex: **the hysterical woman**, **the masturbating child**, **the Malthusian couple**, and **the perverse adult**.²⁶

By using the term archetype, we intentionally draw on its commonsense meaning: a prototype or model that is imitated to the point of ubiquity and an almost subconscious recognition. However, rhetorical archetypes are not the same as literary or Jungian archetypes. They are not "atavistic and universal..."²⁷ nor do they dwell in our collective unconscious waiting to be dredged up through psychoanalysis.²⁸ In calling our archetypes *rhetorical*, we hope to draw attention to the contingent, persuasive work they do in discourse. They do not, on their own, endure across time [begin page 112] and culture and we are not born with them. They emerge from texts—lots of texts by lots of people. And they only exist insofar as they circulate widely enough to become shared templates for sense-making.

Finding and naming archetypes is a matter of interpretation—we do not claim that archetypes are a natural kind or an a priori phenomenon waiting to be observed; they are tools that reveal patterns. We take this not as a weakness so much as a challenge to make the process as rigorous and transparent as possible (hence our presentation of steps below and inclusion of the full coding scheme in **Appendix 2**).

1. Initial coding

We collected eleven “seed” articles representing a range of views of Donald Trump. We coded these for any action or attribute ascribed to Trump by the writers. The outcome was a long, undifferentiated list of almost 500 actions/attributes, most repeated across multiple texts. These included actions such as passing the buck, pointing fingers, breaking precedents, failing to sell a bill, making phone calls, holding meetings, playing with a fire truck, wearing a cowboy hat, etc. Critics also ascribed a large number of attributes to Trump, calling him stupid, paranoid, amateurish, insane, underestimated, furious, a savvy real estate developer, weak, etc. The dividing line between what is an action and what is an attribute is blurry, and not particularly important—both are used merely because archetypes are about being and doing. The inductive character of this first step is inspired by the traditions of Conversation Analysis (CA); it ensures that the archetypes are grounded in what people actually said, rather than what we remember or imagine.²⁹

2. Grouping actions/attributes into clusters, grouping clusters into archetypes

Based on our initial coding, we grouped actions and attributes into clusters, and from the clusters constituted archetypes. For example, we grouped the ascribed actions obsessing over press coverage and behaving like a reality TV star into the cluster self-promotion. We then asked of each cluster, what motives³⁰ do they imply? Which clusters share implicit motives? The clusters self-promotion and pandering to base or masses both imply a desire to be liked, and became parts of Trump the Acclaim-Seeker.

This generalizing process yielded coherent archetypes (see next section), but naming them wasn’t easy. For example, before settling on Trump the Acclaim-Seeker, we considered: demagogue, celebrity, exaggerator, attention-whore, and others. We tried to name the archetypes in a way that was precise but also recognizable. **Table 1** summarizes how the components of a rhetorical archetype fit together. [begin page 113]

Table 1. Sample Components of a Rhetorical Archetype, from Largest to Smallest

Component	Example
Archetype	Trump the Authoritarian (power hungry, seeks to centralize power)
Cluster	Fetishizing violence or military force
Action/Attribute	Advocating use of torture or other war crimes
Instance	John Oliver: “You have to take out their families! That is the frontrunner for the Republican nomination advocating a war crime.” ³¹

An assumption implicit in our coding is that writers mention actions and attributes as part of larger interpretive frames that they might not mention explicitly—thus, we assume that it only takes one action/attribute to “invoke” or “activate” an archetype.

3. Co-coding the test articles to establish interrater reliability

We hand-coded our seed corpus together to test the provisional coding scheme developed in step two. During this process, we revised and elaborated the coding scheme until we felt that we could consistently apply it on our own. We do not specify a means for counting individual archetype occurrences because we found it impractical to determine where one ended and another began. Sometimes an author draws on a single archetype for multiple sentences in a row, and sometimes multiple archetypes appear within a single sentence. Some articles, like David Brooks’ “When the World is Led by a Child,” were al-

most entirely focused on a single archetype (though others crept in).³² Our quantitative findings reflect this decision: we report only the number of texts that invoke each cluster and archetype, not the number of times any one text does so.

4. Constituting the final corpus

For our final corpus, we sought variety and diversity. We gathered 50 critiques using several sources: our own news consumption, Google News searches (associating the terms “Trump” and “character”), popularity-based searches of YouTube (i.e. videos with >20 million views), “best of” compilations from outlets like *Buzzfeed* and *Politico*, crowdsourcing via social media, and, lastly, for ideological diversity, right-wing critiques from outlets like *The National Review*. We included multiple modalities and genres: collections of political cartoons, satirical news articles, sketch comedy, political analysis and others. The corpus begins on June 16, 2015 (when Trump announced his candidacy) and ends August 8, 2017 (when our analysis began). Although the study is primarily qualitative, limited quantitative results are provided to offer the reader a picture of the frequency of archetypes and clusters within our corpus.

5. Final Coding

Lastly, we divided the sources between us and identified the archetypes in each one by coding for clusters. We noted critiques that included mentions of race, since our analysis targets white supremacy. [begin page 114]

Results: Four Archetypes and Their Discursive Signatures

In this section, we describe the four main archetypes that emerged from our coding. We flesh out the clusters of actions/attributes that constitute each archetype with examples from the corpus. Readers should keep in mind that nearly all articles invoke multiple archetypes. We give roughly proportional explanatory space to each cluster, based on frequency of usage. More straightforward or infrequently used clusters are addressed only briefly. A social critique of the archetypes follows in the analysis section.

Trump the Acclaim-Seeker

Trump the Acclaim-Seeker, the most common archetype, wants approval (crowd adoration, positive press coverage, etc.). This archetype overlaps with Trump the Authoritarian because approval-seeking behaviors may have, as their ultimate end, power. However, critics position the actions/attributes that comprise the Acclaim-Seeker archetype as indicative of a quest for approval for its own sake—Trump just wants to be liked. The division between Trump the Acclaim-Seeker and Trump the Authoritarian is often subtle and always context specific. Trump the Acclaim-Seeker also overlaps with the narcissistic/exploitative cluster in Trump the Sick Man. The difference is that critics do not interpret the behaviors coded as Trump the Acclaim-Seeker as signs of mental illness. The archetype has four clusters (Table 2): self-promoting, pandering to base or masses, creating scandals to deflect criticism, and direct use of acclaim-seeker labels by critics.

Table 2. Frequency Counts for Trump the Acclaim-Seeker

Cluster	# texts (of 50)
Uses at least one Acclaim-Seeking cluster	38
Self-promoting	29
Pandering to Base or Masses	27
Creating Scandals to Deflect Criticism	3
Direct Use of Acclaim-Seeker Labels by Critics	3

Self-promoting

Self-promotion was the most popular of any cluster in the entire corpus. Trump self-promotes by bragging about relationships with powerful people: [Another reporter] asks about Trump’s relationship with French President Emmanuel Macron. Trump’s reply: “He’s a great guy. Smart. Strong. Loves holding my hand.” And then: “People don’t realize he loves holding my hand.” And yet again: “I think he is going to be a terrific president of France. But he does love holding my hand.” Implication: Macron is great.

But he's desperate to hold my hand. So I'm top dog.³³

Critics also ascribe self-promotion by recounting Trump's fulsome praise of his properties, as in Blair's account of a Trump hotel renovation project, in which Trump "pack[s] in the maximum [begin page 115] number of floors to make the building seem taller" and "claim[s] that the ballroom was the biggest in the city (it wasn't)."³⁴

Conspicuous consumption works similarly. Critics write of Trump gauche pointing out the beauty (and cost!) of small details:

His behavior was cringe-worthy. He showed off the gilded interior of his plane—calling me over to inspect a Renoir on its wall, beckoning me to lean in closely to see... what? The luminosity of the brush strokes? The masterly use of color? No. The signature. "Worth \$10 million," he told me.³⁵

Again, Trump self-promotes by bragging, in this case about the extravagant luxury of his possessions.

Critics argue that Trump obsesses over media coverage about himself to the point of distraction. Describing a campaign-style rally, Solotaroff notes that Trump only "devote[s] some 90 seconds to his typewritten notes, diverted instead by the mentions of him on Fox..."³⁶

Accusations of reality-TV-star behavior also coded as self-promotion: "Steve Schmidt, the Republican strategist, puts it somewhat more crudely: 'Trump's starring in a reality show of his own making, and treats every appearance like an episode, chasing ratings in the form of fresh votes.'³⁷ Note the way Schmidt compares "ratings" and "votes," reducing political support to crowd approval.

Hyperbolic claims and fabricating compliments about himself round out the self-promotion cluster. Impersonators over-used words like "great" and "huge" to spoof this behavior. One tweet in our corpus imagines this exchange³⁸:



Bob Vulfov
@bobvulfov

Follow

TRUMP: i invented immigration
DEBATE MODERATOR: what
T: i invented soap
DM: mr trump—
T: i invented calculus
DM: sir—
T: i invented sushi

9:30 PM - Aug 6, 2015

▶ Tweet by @bobvulfov

In a similar vein, critics skeptically recount compliments that Trump claims to have received:

In a short period of time I understood everything there was to know about health care," he told *Time*. "A lot of the people have said that, some people said it was the single best speech ever made in that chamber," he told *The Associated Press*, referring to his joint session speech.³⁹

[begin page 116] That Trump would fabricate such effusive praise suggests that it is what he desires above all else. It doesn't matter that no progress was made on his healthcare bill; what matters to him is that congressional representatives were impressed.

Pandering to Base or Masses

Critics also invoke the Trump the Acclaim-Seeker archetype when they interpret Trump's actions as pandering. By "pander," we mean that he presents the wrong kind of ideas to the wrong kind of people. Some, like Flake, argue that his overly simplistic rhetoric appeals to overly simplistic people.⁴⁰



▶ Cartoon from *The New Yorker*

A political cartoon collected by Stokes shows a news viewer, eyes directed upward in contemplation, being told by a newscaster, "In a further clarification of his position on immigration, Mr. Trump said today, 'C'mon—everybody knows there's never going to be a wall. But it's still going to be beautiful, and Mexico is still going to pay for it.'" The cartoon frames the idea as on-its-face absurd (the wrong kind of idea) and the viewer as a fool, because even when told directly that it's a lie, he appears to take it seriously (the wrong kind of person).⁴¹ Trump also panders by embracing ideas he knows to be false. John Oliver, for instance, calls him "a bullshit artist."⁴²

One cartoon depicts Trump's internal monologue

before a speech: “I should probably tell some lies, say some crazy stuff and end on my catchphrase.”⁴³ Other critiques show him pandering by opposing an oppressive “political correctness.” For example, Leibovich writes that Trump’s “war on political correctness is especially pleasing to many of the white voters of the G.O.P. who feel usurped...”⁴⁴ According to Solotaroff, Trump appeals to “meat and potato types” filled with “curdled resentment”—again, the wrong type of people.⁴⁵ Trump’s inconsistency can also be framed as pandering, as in “...Trump’s statements don’t necessarily come from anywhere, lead anywhere or have a permanent reality beyond his *wish to be liked at any given instant*” (emphasis added).⁴⁶

Creating Scandals to Deflect Criticism

In rare cases, Trump the Acclaim-Seeker explains even Trump’s scandals as an intentional strategy (unlike, say, Trump the Idiot below). For instance, Young argues that controversial tweets are “a way to deflect attention off of Russia while blowing a dog whistle and throwing a bone to his base.”⁴⁷ What makes this acclaim-seeking behavior is the final phrase, *throwing a bone to his base*, which explains controversial tweets as a crowd pleaser. [begin page 117]

Direct Use

Finally, critics label Trump with critical terms associated with approval-seeking, like “demagogue”⁴⁸ and “self-serving huckster.”⁴⁹

Trump the Sick Man

The second most popular explanation for Trump’s behavior is sickness, although each Sick Man cluster diagnoses a significantly different pathology (Table 3).

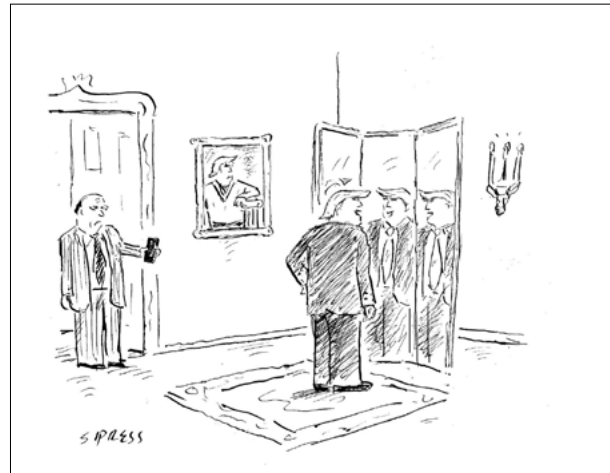
Table 3. Frequency Counts for Trump the Sick Man

Cluster	# texts (of 50)
Uses at least one Sick Man cluster	34
Narcissistic/Exploitative	16
Child	15
Predator	13
Mentally Incapacitated	7

Like Trump the Idiot, Trump the Sick Man has a deficiency that’s so strong his motives are irrelevant.

Narcissistic/Exploitative

The most common permutation of Trump the Sick Man characterizes him as narcissistic, usually in a vernacular rather than a clinical sense. The narcissism in these critiques is closer to the narcissism of Narcissus: literal obsession with his reflection or other self-image.



► Cartoon from *The New Yorker*

For example, one comic in the New Yorker collection has him “meeting with his advisers” which are shown to be three reflections of Trump in a trifold mirror.⁵⁰ Some directly call him a “narcissist.”⁵¹ Others ascribe traits linked to narcissism, such as selfishness and exploitativeness—the latter usually as a willingness to profit at the expense of others (e.g. “... none of it ever seemed to matter to Trump...didn’t matter that hundreds of people lost hundreds of jobs...”).⁵²

Some critics clearly label his narcissism unhealthy. They describe a man suffering from narcissism so strong it borders on psychosis, compromising his connection with reality. Schwartz explains that, “when he feels aggrieved, he reacts impulsively and defensively, *constructing a self-*[begin page 118]*justifying story* that doesn’t depend on facts and always directs the blame to others” (emphasis added).⁵³

Child

The second most common way critics invoke Trump the Sick Man is by diagnosing him with arrested development, though this is a vernacular term no longer used in clinical settings. Critics call him a “baby,” an “infantilist” or a “little boy” with “juvenile” behav-

ior and a propensity for “blowups” and “tantrums.”⁵⁴ Trump the Child is also preoccupied with childlike things, as when Merica depicts him “playing with a firetruck and trying on a cowboy hat as the bill was collapsing,”⁵⁵ or when he demands simple, unhealthy foods: “At the dessert course, he gets two scoops of vanilla ice cream with his chocolate cream pie, instead of the single scoop for everyone else.”⁵⁶ The explanatory power of this archetype is especially direct in D’Antonio’s critique:

Like many a 6-year-old, the stewing President chose to act on his feelings. Within days he had signed a letter dismissing the director. But instead of doing the adult thing and firing Comey face-to-face, Trump sent his former personal bodyguard Keith Schiller to deliver it to Comey’s office—while Comey was away in Los Angeles.⁵⁷

D’Antonio’s account draws on cultural schemata for how children behave (impulsive, fearful of “getting into trouble” with adults, etc.) to explain the way Trump fired Comey.

Predator

Another version of Trump the Sick Man figures him as a predator, usually sexual and usually toward women. Again, this is sickness in a vernacular rather than a clinical sense—psychologists no longer consider being a sexual predator to be an illness per se.



► Tweet by @1bonytoad

He has a “creepy obsession with his daughter” and he is shown on a spoof *Time* cover in an orange jumpsuit with the headline “groper in chief.”⁵⁸ In an *SNL* debate skit, Trump skulks around behind Clinton while she is speaking, with the theme from *Jaws* adding menace to the scene and Clinton nervously glancing behind [begin page 119] her back.⁵⁹ The predator version of Trump the Sick Man is an obvious choice to explain his behavior toward women (violating their personal space, sexualizing women—including his daughters, “grabbing them by the pussy,” etc.). However, Trump the Predator extends beyond his treatment of women specifically. Ariel Leve explains that Trump is “gaslighting” America.⁶⁰ Gaslighting—a reference to the film and play *Gaslight*—entails undermining a person’s confidence in their perception of reality as a form of abuse. Trump’s penchant for repeating falsehoods, in Leve’s estimation, is not a strategic appeal to his base (Trump the Acclaim-Seeker); it is predatory behavior deployed on a national stage.

Showing Signs of Mental Incapacitation

Finally, critics invoke Trump the Sick Man by suggesting he is mentally incapacitated. Fineman calls him “insane” and both he and Purple label Trump “paranoid.”⁶¹ Cassidy suggests that Trump simply lacks the cognitive capacity or “bandwidth” to do his job.⁶² Chronicling the early days of Trump’s campaign, Kroll can only make sense of some of Trump’s words and actions by speculating that he had “succumbed to heat stroke.”⁶³

McArdle, quoted at length by Douthat, contemplates how the mentally incapacitated archetype could provide bipartisan cover for removing Trump from office: “I don’t even think this would be controversial, even among his supporters. ‘Poor fellow,’ they’d murmur, ‘the strain of the office has destroyed his health. He has given more than his life for his country.’”⁶⁴ Thus, McArdle pitches Trump’s supposed mental incapacitation as a clinical and not rhetorical characterization. She suggests that mental-health critiques could be politically “neutral.”

Trump the Authoritarian

The third most popular archetype, Trump the Authoritarian, seeks power. This power is not the influence which all politicians seek but rather autocratic power—unquestioned, unilateral and, crucially, re-

moved from the democratic process. The archetype emerged from six clusters of actions and attributes framed by critics as out of the norm for an American president: delegitimizing criticism, emulating authoritarian leaders, fetishizing violence, direct use, bullying/playing people against each other, and dismantling democratic institutions (Table 4). [begin page 120]

Table 4. Frequency Counts for Trump the Authoritarian

Cluster	# texts (of 50)
Uses at least one Authoritarian cluster	31
Delegitimizing Criticism	11
Emulating, Approving of, or Working with (Other) Authoritarian Leaders	10
Fetishizing Violence or Military Force	7
Direct Use of Authoritarian Language by Critics	7
Bullying and Playing People against Each Other	6
Dismantling Democratic Institutions	3

Delegitimizing Criticism

All presidents complain about negative press coverage, but Trump the Authoritarian attacks the very idea of the press’ (or anyone else’s) right to criticize. Several critics highlight Trump’s habit of “demonizing resistance” by “brand[ing] the press the ‘enemy of the people,’” or even “encourage[ing] violence against reporters.”⁶⁵ Critics also accuse him of what has been called “whataboutism,” a favorite tactic of Russian propagandists,⁶⁶ through which Trump redirects criticisms by asking, in effect, “what about Hillary Clinton?” or “what about the Democrats?”

Emulating, Approving of, or Working with (Other) Authoritarian Leaders

Critics connect Trump to other authoritarian world leaders, such as Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong Un, and Hitler.



► Comic from *The New Yorker*

Some literally blend Trump with these figures, as in “Tropicana Jong-il’s four-year term,”⁶⁷ or a comic of Trump with a Hitler-style mustache.⁶⁸



► Tweet by @deedeesay

Trump is shown, in a series of spoof covers of Time, in a wedding dress—Putin’s “blushing bride”—and as a puppet, with the clarifying headline “Putin pulls the strings.”⁶⁹ Critics argue that Trump enables and emulates (other) authoritarians, e.g., “no wonder Putin... smirks. In Donald Trump, Russia will never have had it so good”⁷⁰ or “Trump was either consciously or by coincidence following the lead of the world’s master predator, Vladimir Putin.”⁷¹

Fetishizing Violence or Military Force

Trump the Authoritarian thrills at violence. This cluster relates closely to the previous cluster in its “strongman” characterization of Trump. Solotaroff recalls Trump’s reaction to ISIS’ extreme violence: “we gotta waterboard ‘em, don’t you agree?”⁷² Solotaroff interprets Trump’s comment [begin page 121] as authoritarian, writing, “I tell him I’m not in favor of chopping people’s heads off...” (“Off-with-their heads!” is a recognizably authoritarian directive, as is the suggestion that the United States “take out their [terrorist’s] families,” a proposal John Oliver equates to “advocating a war crime.”⁷³)

Direct Use of Authoritarian Language

In seven texts, critics directly label Trump an authoritarian: a “tyrant,” an “autocrat,” a “dictator,” and a “king.”⁷⁴

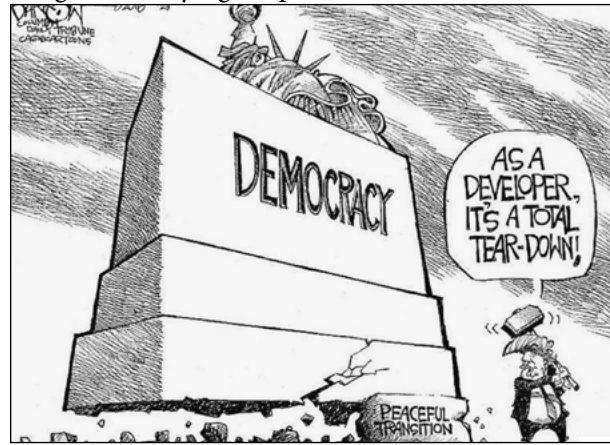
Bullying and Playing People Against Each Other

Trump the Authoritarian bullies, demands total obedience and intentionally creates internal rivalries. Such machinations call to mind a Frank Underwood type carefully bringing his inferiors into line and then, when convenient, throwing them to the wolves. Cassidy writes that Trump “openly encourages internal rivalries.”⁷⁵ He is willing “to let underlings take falls, and undermine ‘satellites’ who become political liabilities.”⁷⁶ He prefers feckless and dependent advisers, whom he selects via an “uncanny ability to sense weakness.”⁷⁷ Some use wordplay to ascribe bully-type behavior, as in the spoof headline “Trump Gives Intelligence Agencies Their Daily Briefing”—here one sees the importance of precedence-breaking in characterizations of Trump.⁷⁸

Dismantling Democratic Institutions

Trump the Authoritarian also dismantles democratic institutions or safeguards. For instance, Dougherty describes Trump’s “view of his authority and of

his policymaking to be more royalist than republican” arguing that Trump is less concerned with law and order than he is with “protecting the sovereign’s image and obeying his personal wishes.”⁷⁹



► Cartoon from *Cagle Cartoons*

In one political cartoon Trump sledgehammers the stone foundation (labeled “peaceful transition”) beneath “democracy,” also rendered as a stone structure (topped with a figure that resembles the Statue of Liberty).⁸⁰ [begin page 122]

Trump the Idiot

Finally, Trump the Idiot doesn’t fake incompetence for strategic purposes; he is incompetent. We used a broad cluster of displaying stupidity/ignorance, as well as direct use of idiot labels to define this archetype (Table 5).

Table 5. Frequency Counts for Trump the Idiot

Cluster	# texts (of 50)
Uses at least one Idiot cluster	28
Being Stupid/Ignorant	25
Direct Use of “Idiot” Labels by Critics	5

Displaying Stupidity or Ignorance

Trump the Idiot displays ignorance of, among other things, political conventions. Douthat calls Trump’s “campaign” against Attorney General Sessions “an extraordinary act of political *malpractice* from a White House that lacks a cushion for such *follies*” (emphasis added).⁸¹ Similarly, Trump fails to accomplish basic tasks, such as safeguarding classified information: “From all we know so far, Trump

didn't [reveal classified information] because he is a Russian agent, or for any malevolent intent. He did it because he is sloppy."⁸² Note that this last critique rejects any underlying strategy in favor of a Trump-is-an-idiot explanation. Trump's ignorance is, not, say, a way to please his base.

Critics also imply that Trump is an idiot by portraying him as unprepared and buffoonish in public appearances abroad: "...On top of coming across as a boorish guest, he displayed his ignorance on trade—one of his signature issues..."⁸³

Critics see Trump as self-sabotaging, acting counter to his own goals or contradicting himself. Both of these actions/attributes involve Trump *unintentionally* undermining himself. For instance, Brooks chalks up Trump's apparent tendency to self-sabotage to his "inability to focus" and ignorance:

He is ill informed about his own policies and tramples his own talking points. It makes it hard to control his mouth. On an impulse, he will promise a tax reform when his staff has done little of the actual work.⁸⁴

Even critics who don't ultimately buy into the Trump the Idiot archetype nevertheless understand it:

They [beltway insiders] tell each other that he is too stupid, paranoid, amateurish and even insane to survive the many car crashes he has had with himself as he fends off probes into whether his campaign was tied to Russia's interference in the 2016 election.⁸⁵

Note that the first half of this quote also invokes Trump the Sick Man in its use of *paranoid* and *insane*. [begin page 123]

A more petty way of invoking Trump the Idiot was to characterize him as having poor literacy. For instance, one of *Saturday Night Live's* debate skits features Trump repeatedly mispronouncing China as "JY-na."⁸⁶

Direct Use

Lastly, some critics invoke Trump the Idiot directly, labeling Trump an idiot or similar. They compared him to oafish figures from pop culture, such as Homer Simpson.⁸⁷ They called him an "incompetent person," "the American buffoon," "a Joker," and a "stupid man."⁸⁸

Analysis: White Supremacy and Archetypes for Understanding Trump

The four archetypes captured by our analysis above are tools for sense-making. Each lies in wait, circulating in public discourse, ready to be taken up by commentators, citizens, activists, and others to make sense of what Trump does and says. Each archetype emphasizes a different aspect of Trump; in this section, we observe how each archetype also explains white supremacy differently. We examine this first in those few direct uses of archetypes to explain racism within our corpus. Then we evaluate each archetype's potential to explain white supremacy using the 2017 Charlottesville white nationalist march as a case study. This was the first major incident related to race after our corpus collection period ended. On August 12, 2017, white nationalists gathered in Charlottesville to protest the removal of a Confederate statue. In their clash with counterprotesters, a car intentionally drove into a crowd, killing one counterprotester.⁸⁹ Trump's response caused significant controversy: "You have some very bad people in that group, but you also had people that were very fine people on both sides."⁹⁰ Perry's essay in this volume offers a different, though complementary, examination of the violence in Charlottesville.

White Supremacy and Trump the Acclaim-Seeker

Trump the Acclaim-Seeker positions Trump's white supremacy as an appeal to his base, a strategy for winning approval. The archetype makes sense of Trump's transphobic, anti-immigrant, anti-women, and anti-Muslim comments in much the same way—sometimes in the same sentence. For instance, drawing on Trump the Acclaim-Seeker, Leibovich comments with wonder on how Trump was succeeding by calling illegal immigrants rapists, questioning veterans, putting down women, and denouncing gay people: "And yet his lead in the polls kept growing. He was impolite company personified, and many Republican voters were absolutely loving him for that."⁹¹ From [begin page 124] the perspective of Trump the Acclaim-Seeker, then, Trump's racism is a reflection of his audience's racism.

Bouie explains Trump's white supremacy—and

invokes Trump the Acclaim-Seeker—by linking it to a strategy used by Southern politicians in the early 1900s:

Politically, what President Trump was doing in Ohio has a clear antecedent in the racial demagoguery common in the Jim Crow South. Rather than campaign on what they would do for voters, Southern politicians fanned flames of race hatred. This “nigger baiting”—labeled as such by observers at the time—was how they built emotional connections with their audiences and tarred their (often equally racist) opponents as unacceptable proponents of racial equality.⁹²

In other words, Trump’s racism is intentional and designed to “win over” audiences. In this critic’s view, Trump sees his audience as white people first and foremost, and his racist rhetorical strategy is an easy way for him to gain their approval.

In our corpus, self-promotion was a key marker of Trump the Acclaim-Seeker. Self-promotion is not an obvious motive for white supremacy, but in at least one case, critics suggested that some of Trump’s racist statements were a side-effect of his tendency to brag.



- ▶ Screenshot from *The Netherlands welcomes Trump in his own words*

A spoof from the Netherlands—meant satirically to introduce Trump to the wonders of that country—aped his racist ambition to build a border wall between the US and Mexico. The video one-ups this promise, speciously claiming the Netherlands already built “an entire ocean between [them] and Mexico.”⁹³

Interpreting Trump’s Charlottesville comments via Trump the Acclaim-Seeker, one can see the archetype’s explanatory power on full display. The archetype could explain Trump’s inflammatory comments as the deliberate creation of a spectacle—a

self-conscious audience appeal. He is, the archetype would suggest, nodding toward his base, who might adore Trump for drawing a (false) equivalence between white supremacists and counterprotesters (“...there is blame on both sides”).

It is notable that Trump the Acclaim-Seeker tables the question of whether Trump “really” means to be racist and focuses on his presumed motive of approval seeking. John Oliver comments regarding Trump’s reluctance to denounce David Duke and white supremacy: “With an answer like that, you are either racist, or you’re pretending to be, and at some point there is no difference there.”⁹⁴ Thus, Trump the Acclaim-Seeker calls us to consider our own as well as others’ ability to be persuaded by white supremacist appeals. One form of opposition to Trump grounded in Trump the Acclaim-Seeker is to starve Trump of acclaim.



- ▶ Screenshot from *Donald Trump: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (HBO)*

For instance, John Oliver suggests we undermine the brand-name appeal of “Trump” by using an older family surname, Drumpf (a campaign he calls “Make Donald Drumpf Again”). This name, Oliver notes, sounds “much less magical: it’s the sound produced when a morbidly obese pigeon flies into the window of a foreclosed Old Navy—drumpf!”⁹⁵

Starving Trump of acclaim might have been most effective during his campaign; deriding Trump has limited effect now that he is in office. Another form of opposition that emerges from Trump the Acclaim-Seeker is to “win over” his base ourselves in some [begin page 125] other way. That is, if Trump’s racism is ultimately designed to win him acclaim, then people opposing Trump should preempt racist audience appeals by building a coalition with conservative voters around, say, high-paying jobs or health care. This is an idealistic strategy.

White Supremacy and Trump the Sick Man

Trump the Sick Man positions Trump's racism as a personal defect; he is simply mean, whether that be as an extension of his meanness to women, or in the selfish way that a child is mean, or in the stunted way that a narcissist cannot fulfill obligations to others. Particularly with the predator subtype, Trump's racism is understood as transferring from his meanness to women. King, for instance, critiques Trump as someone "who picked on women, demeaned minorities and was thoroughly lacking in human decency."⁹⁶ The parallelism in King's statement suggests that when Trump is a predator, he is a predator to all those who are vulnerable.



► Cartoon from the *Star Tribune*

As another example, consider a political cartoon from the *Star Tribune*. Trump is portrayed in a locker room labeled "Trump's America," recalling defenses of his so-called "locker room talk." In the image, Trump—large, imposing, and in control—snaps a towel at Uncle Sam, who cringes in pain. The locker room is littered with such towels, each carrying labels like "misogyny," "hate," "bigotry," and "racism."⁹⁷ Trump here delights in inflicting harm on people; the locker room provides free space for attacks on women and people of color.

With this archetype, Trump's Charlottesville comments could be interpreted as simply the sick words of a sick man. If Trump is sick, then his racism remains abhorrent, but becomes an aberration rather than a shared social, cultural condition. Racism is Trump's disease, not a shared problem. Pathologizing him means that we do not have to face up to a

political system and voting public that did not deem racism, misogyny, homophobia, and Islamophobia disqualifying for a political candidate. The archetype individualizes his actions—Trump, rather than a culture of white supremacy, is the source of danger.⁹⁸

That said, in our corpus critics rarely used Trump the Sick Man to directly explain or address racism. The narcissistic/exploitative subtype, for instance, would seem to be ripe for explaining his housing actions that led to a federal investigation as racist. Instead, the narcissistic/exploitative subtype tends to be used to explain these business slights as being against "working people" in general: "So for seven decades, he fed his appetites and exercised his license to lie, cheat, steal, and stiff working people of their wages, made messes, left them behind, grabbed more baubles, and left them in ruin."⁹⁹ Given the possibility that the mentally incapacitated subtype of Trump the Sick Man is available to both parties (see above), invoking this archetype might be an intentional way to reach across the aisle to criticize Trump without mentioning the more controversial issue of his/our country's racism. [begin page 126]

White Supremacy and Trump the Authoritarian

Trump the Authoritarian explains Trump's white supremacy as a power-seeking behavior.

In one meme, George Washington looks at the viewer with stern disappointment, his expression captioned: "The moment you realize Russia, ISIS, and the KKK got the president they wanted but the majority of voters didn't."¹⁰⁰



► Image from "Anti-Trump Memes" on *Pinterest*
Here the KKK is combined with authoritarian regimes, suggesting that what the KKK does is the same as what Russia and ISIS do: employ authoritar-

ian tactics (terror, intimidation, etc.) to consolidate power. This association—white supremacy as an act of authoritarianism—can explain Trump’s actions toward other minority groups: “By tweeting that he has decided to ban transgender people from the military, Trump shows that he is the autocrat that he was elected to be: he can control people by issuing an order.”¹⁰¹

Trump the Authoritarian could explain his Charlottesville comments as an attempt to assert his power over people of color by finally giving an overt “go ahead” to hate groups. This critique has the admirable quality of directly connecting Trump’s rhetoric with its human consequences: resurgent, public enactment of white supremacy. The Authoritarian critique may also expand public attention and resistance to include Trump’s (much more consequential) administrative decisions: Gorsuch’s refusal to defend racial equality on the Supreme Court, Jeff Sessions’ rescinding of federal consent decrees with city police forces, strategic and increasing ICE raids on immigrants, etc. All of these may be understood as symptomatic of authoritarian creep.

On the other hand, this archetype is limited by our high public expectations of authoritarians. With infamous dictators as prototypes, Trump’s bumbling efforts (e.g. his failure to stop the Russian investigation) can cast doubt upon his authoritarianism. Dougherty argues, “He may believe he’s a king, and act like it. But look again: He’s actually a Joker.”¹⁰² That is, Trump cannot be a king (authoritarian) because he isn’t effective. (Here, Trump the Idiot “cancels out” Trump the Authoritarian.) In the right-wing outlet *The National Interest*, Matt Purple snarkily asks, “Has anyone else noticed that Donald Trump has yet to turn America into an authoritarian hellscape?”¹⁰³ Obviously, Purple’s perspective is limited to his own experience (others may indeed feel they are in an authoritarian hellscape). In any case, there is a danger that claims that Trump is an authoritarian might be seen as an exaggeration if one’s schema for authoritarianism is, say, Adolf Hitler.

White Supremacy and Trump the Idiot

Trump the Idiot offers an easy explanation for Trump’s white supremacy; it is unintentionally, bum-

blingly inappropriate. Talking about race is delicate, and Trump the Idiot is a bull in a china shop.



▶ Screenshot from “Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton Debate Cold Open” on *SNL*

After the first Presidential debate, *SNL* relied on this archetype to skewer Trump. When Trump gives a disjointed response in a debate, Hillary yields her time to him. That is, she sees Trump as doing her work for her; he is self-defeating. Trump begins a statement with “The thing about the blacks...” and the reactions of the other characters make clear that we the audience should react to this as bafflingly incompetent. Hillary’s mouth drops open as he delivers a stereotype-filled speech containing “facts” he says he read that morning. Eventually, Hillary has to close her mouth with her hand; and as Trump continues, she makes a fishing gesture of reeling in Trump. [begin page 127] Trump’s self-sabotage has been so effective that she asks, “Can America vote right now?”¹⁰⁴ Trump the Idiot, then, isn’t faulted for holding racist beliefs so much as for letting them come out at inappropriate times.

Trump the Idiot’s racism is haphazard and liable to bubble over unpredictably; critics use this frame to interpret his attacks on other minorities, too. Young suggests that Trump’s ban on transgender people serving in the military is simply unconsidered (unlike Gessen, who interpreted Trump’s attacks on transgender people as centralizing power, see above):

We also know that Trump likely gives zero fucks about what transgender people do, and probably thought until maybe 53 minutes ago that “transgender” was just the name of Optimus Prime’s wife.¹⁰⁵

The specific “53 minutes” implies that Trump has a recent (and necessarily shallow) introduction to a complex political topic that he should know about,

and that his general knowledge is lacking if his intuitions about what “transgender” means are so wildly off-base.

In contrast to Trump the Acclaim-Seeker, Trump the Idiot interprets Trump’s Charlottesville remarks as mistakes, as gaffes. When he was a nominee for President, this critique might have cast doubt on Trump’s ability to do the job well. In the Charlottesville case, Trump the Idiot suggests Trump simply does not understand the decorum and formality expected of him. Trump goofed. He just can’t hold his tongue—a key political skill.

Trump the Idiot’s problem isn’t that he holds a white supremacist outlook—like Trump the Acclaim-Seeker, the archetype is ambiguous about whether he really does—the problem is that he *said it out loud*. This division between what it’s okay for people to believe privately and what they should limit themselves to saying in professional environments has some commonsense appeal. At the same time, this division is problematic. If his white supremacy is just a matter of him saying the wrong thing at work, then he needs a “talking to” from HR. By narrowing critique of Trump’s racism to a question of his workplace competence, we turn away from the underlying problem: America’s culture of white supremacy. Trump the Idiot encourages an anemic form of resistance: hoping for advisors who will protect Trump from himself (e.g., a strong chief of staff like John Kelly who might “whip him into shape”), complaining about his comments to mitigate our shame, or just waiting it out until the next election. This is a passive—and, in effect, permissive—response to Trump’s expression of white supremacy.

Conclusion

After our analysis, we felt some dismay about how each archetype handles racism. Trump the Acclaim-Seeker, Trump the Sick Man, and Trump the Idiot do not translate well into critiques of his white supremacy. And while Trump the Authoritarian holds some promise in its focus on the consequences of (and shared responsibility for) white supremacy, relying on it puts one at risk of overstating Trump’s capacity to become a dictator.¹⁰⁶ [begin page 128]

We conclude, then, by briefly considering a few archetypes that authors in our corpus tried to invoke

that haven’t (yet) gained widespread use. First, seven critics invoked Trump the Slimy Businessman, a figure who is motivated to make a quick buck by cutting corners and discriminating against people he doesn’t like. For instance, a satirized Trump makes the campaign promise, “I’m gonna run these streets like I run my casinos: more police and less Latinos.”¹⁰⁷ Here, white supremacy hides in the logic of capitalism. Second, Michael Arceneaux mines hip-hop youth culture to argue for Trump the Lazy—Arceneaux calls Trump a “thot,” a term for a grasping hanger-on. Trump the Lazy is a “slothful old man who scammed his way into the White House.”¹⁰⁸ Early in Trump’s campaign, Kroll makes a case for Trump the Vacuous, who is just frustratingly empty: “To be fair, some [journalists] did attempt to convey the bizarre emptiness of Trump’s rhetoric and the pointlessness of his visit.”¹⁰⁹ This archetype seems to us to be a precursor to the more comprehensive Trump the Idiot archetype (from no ideas to bad ideas).

But the most intriguing archetype-that-could-be in our corpus comes from Damon Young, who eloquently argues for Trump the Epitome of Whiteness. In fact, shortly after our corpus ended, Trump the Epitome of Whiteness came to national attention with Ta-Nahesi Coates’ widely read book excerpt “The First White President,” in which Coates argues that, by defining his agenda in opposition to Obama’s and in appealing to white voters at all income levels across the country, Trump is the first president to be defined by his whiteness.¹¹⁰ In Young’s usage, the capital W indicates that Whiteness is an action of oppression, not a description of someone’s skin color. Writing to a mostly black audience, Young argues:

Donald Trump exists as a concretized distillation of all the things the creation of Whiteness was meant to be. He’s a messy agglomeration of a thousand million trillion American Dreams; curated and congealed into a singular and sentient and terrifying reverie. He’s the Whiteness we’ve known since there was Whiteness to be known. Which is why, for those schooled in detecting pervasive Whiteness, nothing he’s done or will do is a surprise.¹¹¹

Like Trump the Authoritarian, then, Trump the

Epitome of Whiteness is “terrifying.” But perhaps more precisely than Trump the Authoritarian, Trump the Epitome of Whiteness does not rest on a totalitarian trajectory. Trump’s rhetoric is a product of American politics rather than an aberration. For people who know how Reconstruction collapsed after the Civil War, how the federal government resisted and tried to contain civil rights activism in the 1960s, and how Republican states have recently walked back voting rights, Donald Trump is not surprising. Trump the Epitome of Whiteness steels people emotionally for a long, messy, uncertain battle that won’t end with Trump, and it reminds white people that working in opposition to white supremacy is personal and must address white people’s own sense of self in the world. However, Trump the Epitome of Whiteness cannot explain everything

Trump does. It’s difficult to know how much of, say, Trump’s foreign policy—provoking North Korea, palling around with Putin—is particularly White. [begin page 129]

Explaining Donald Trump is messy business. But we need to make sense of his words and actions, as individuals and as a *polis*. This need is particularly acute for white supremacy because it is pernicious and has far-reaching consequences. By cataloging and critiquing circulating resources available for making sense of Trump (i.e., archetypes) we hope to provide readers, critics, and activists with a greater awareness of the options available and their consequences. We call on people to continue developing explanations of Trump that make clear the historical, systemic weight of white supremacy in America.

Notes

- 1 By “white supremacy,” we mean a more structural version of what many people call “racism”; we use the terms nearly interchangeably here. We use “white supremacy” to signal humility and include ourselves in the critique; it reminds us all that we are faced with and often contribute to a culture laden with racism. Furthermore, we take the view that people can call an action racist (or call it participating in racism/white supremacy) based on the action’s effects, without knowing what’s in a person’s heart. Thus, we presume that Trump has acted in ways that support white supremacy many times, whatever his personal attitudes.
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Appendix 1. Full Corpus, by Type

Articles

<i>Outlet</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title and link</i>
Business Insider	Ariel Leve	Trump is Gaslighting America: Here's How to Survive
CNN	Chris Cillizza	Why pro wrestling is the perfect metaphor for Donald Trump's presidency
CNN	Dan Merica	Trump Passes the Buck--and How It Could Hurt Him Going Forward
CNN	Jill Filipovic	What goes on in the mind of trolls
CNN	Michael D'Antonio	The Little Boy President
CNN	Michael D'Antonio	Is President Trump Having Any Fun?
CNN	Ryan Struyk	Four Tribes of Trump's GOP Opposition
Huffington Post	Howard Fineman	Yes, Trump Thinks He Can Defeat Russia Probe
Lit Hub	Rebecca Solnit	The Loneliness of Donald Trump: On the Corrosive Privilege of the Most Mocked Man in the World
National Journal	Andy Kroll	An Endeavor to Take Trump Seriously
National Review	Ben Shapiro	Trump: The Series — the Comedy We Want Invites Tragedies We Don't
National Review	Michael Dougherty	His Grace, Donald Trump
New Republic	Brian Beutler	Donald Trump is Loyal Only to Himself
New Yorker	John Cassidy	Six Reasons Why the Trump Reset Won't Work
NY Review of Books	Masha Gessen	Why Autocrats Fear LGBT Rights
NYT	David Brooks	When the World is Led by a Child
NYT	Ross Douthat	A Trump Tower of Absolute Folly
NYT Magazine	Mark Leibovich	Donald Trump is not going anywhere
Politico	Frank Cerabino	Trump's War with Palm Beach
Politico	Gwenda Blair	How Norman Vincent Peale Taught Donald Trump to Worship Himself
Politico	Gwenda Blair	The Man Who Made Trump Who He Is
Politico	Jeff Flake	My Party Is in Denial About Donald Trump
Rolling Stone	Paul Solotaroff	Trump Seriously
Slate	Jamelle Bouie	Make America Afraid Again
The Atlantic	David A. Graham	But What About Hillary Clinton?
The Atlantic	Peter Beinart	Anything They Can Do Trump Can Do Better
The National Interest	Lawrence Korb	Trump's Transgender Ban May Actually Undermine American Security
The National Interest	Matt Purple	Why Trump's Twitter Tantrums Will Work Against Him
The Root	Michael Arceneaux	Ya'll's President is a Lazy Thot
Time	Jeffrey Kluger	Go Ahead, Psychiatrists: Diagnose Donald Trump
Time	Michael Scherer & Zeke Miller	Donald Trump After Hours

Vanity Fair	Mark Bowden	DONALD TRUMP REALLY DOESN'T WANT ME TO TELL YOU THIS, BUT ...
Vanity Fair	Paul Elie	Can God Save Donald Trump
WSB	Damon Young	Donald Trump is Just a White Man Allowed and Encouraged to Be as White as He Wants to Be
Washington Post	Ben Terris	And then there was the time Donald Trump bought a football team ...
Washington Post	Colbert King	Americans put Trump in the Oval Office. What does that say about the country?
Washington Post	Lindsey Bever	Trump's Bogus Time cover - The fake news that launched an army of memes
Washington Post	Tony Schwartz	I wrote 'The Art of the Deal' with Trump. His self-sabotage is rooted in his past.
Wired	Various, compiled by Lauren Murrow	Our Favorite Trump-Era Headlines From The Onion

Tweets

<i>Outlet</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title and link</i>
Buzzfeed	Jarry Lee	27 Tweets About Donald Trump That'll Actually Make You Laugh

Memes

<i>Outlet</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title and link</i>
Pinterest	Various	Anti-Trump Memes

Political Cartoons

<i>Outlet</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title and link</i>
New Yorker	Various, compiled by Colin Stokes	Donald Trump Cartoons - Politics and Satire in the New Yorker
The Telegraph	Various, compiled by Mark Molloy	14 of the Best Cartoons about Donald Trump's First Month in Office
Thoughtco	Various, compiled by Daniel Kurtzman	Donald Trump Cartoons

Videos

<i>Outlet</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title and link</i>
YouTube video	Derick Watts & The Sunday Blues	Do You Wanna Build A Wall? - Donald Trump (Frozen Parody)
YouTube video	Epic Rap Battles	Donald Trump vs Hillary Clinton. Epic Rap Battles of History
YouTube video	John Oliver	Donald Trump: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver
YouTube video	SNL	Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton Debate Cold Open - SNL
YouTube video	SNL	Donald Trump vs. Hillary Clinton Town Hall Debate Cold Open - SNL
YouTube video	Zondag Met Lubach	The Netherlands Welcomes Trump in his own words

Appendix 2: Full Coding Scheme

Broad principles

- Passages should be coded at the level of cluster, rather than at the level of specific attribute/action or broad archetype. (Actions/attributes sometimes overlap, making it impractical to differentiate between them. Clusters provide more granularity than archetypes do.)
- The author of the text (or someone quoted in the text) must make the relevant attribution/interpretation.
 - Example: a theory must be *called* discredited by the text to be an instance of *repeating a widely discredited conspiracy theory*, not just be a theory that the coders think is discredited.
 - Example: a critic must suggest more or less directly that Trump's actions stem from foolishness to be an instance of *being stupid/ignorant*; it is not enough if the text just describes an action that the coder deems foolish.
- A text's speculations about Trump's character in general count.
 - Example: "he just wants to be loved" counts as *self-promoting*, whether or not the text uses that speculation to explain a particular action. (The rationale for this "capacious" approach to coding is that characterizations of Trump are a circulating, shared resource for interpreting his actions that achieve some level of generality.)

Trump the Acclaim-Seeker

Seeks approval and adoration as an end in-and-of itself

- Cluster 1: Self-Promoting
 - Bragging about relationships with powerful and influential people
 - Bragging about quality of resorts and other properties
 - Engaging in conspicuous consumption (e.g. redecorating white house with gold curtains)
 - Obsessing over media coverage, positive and negative, to the point of distraction
 - Behaving like a reality TV star (e.g. seeking "ratings" in a metaphorical sense)
 - Seeking power for sake of self-image (e.g. wanting an impressive title)
 - Making hyperbolic claims of his own greatness (e.g. cartoonish use of superlatives: greatest, best, huge, "everybody says so," etc.)
 - Fabricating compliments from others
- Cluster 2: Pandering to Base or Masses
 - Making promises with little basis in reality or feasibility
 - Repeating untruths, including discredited conspiracy theories, to garner positive crowd reaction
 - Rejecting "political correctness" or "trolling" because his base approves
 - Seeking acclaim through rally or revival style communication outside of normal campaign season
 - Appealing to the "wrong kind of people" (defined variously critic to critic but including white supremacist and other hate groups)
 - Criticizing legislation, initiatives or ideas which he had previously supported, especially to cater to desires of a particular audience (e.g. "telling people what they want to hear")
- Cluster 3: Creating Scandals to Deflect Criticism
 - Intentionally, strategically creating scandals or outrage (especially via Twitter) to minimize negative press coverage
- Cluster 4: Direct Use of Acclaim-Seeker Labels by Critics
 - Being labeled by critics with words associated with figures who seek approval in problematic ways, such as "demagogue," "populist," etc.

Trump the Sick Man

Has abiding personal flaws or pathologies

- Cluster 1: Child
 - Preferring simple, unhealthy or unsophisticated foods
 - Receiving special accommodations from staff or others (extra ice cream, distractions from cable news, short texts with lots of pictures or visuals, etc.)
 - Playing with toys such as trucks, firetrucks
 - Displaying poor impulse control
- Cluster 2: Predator
 - Behaving toward women in inappropriate or illegal ways
 - Expressing sexual attraction to family members (Ivanka) or children
 - Employing strategies used in abusive relationships (e.g. gaslighting)
- Cluster 3: Narcissistic/Exploitative
 - Rejecting obligations to others, especially supporters
 - Hoarding wealth (at the expense of others)
 - Obsessing over own name or self-image (e.g. in mirrors) to point of distraction and irrationality (beyond mere self-promotion)
 - Expressing disregard for feelings/welfare of others
 - Being diagnosed as narcissistic (including by psychologists, who may advocate abandoning “Gold-water rule” of not diagnosing politicians from afar)
- Cluster 4: Mentally Incapacitated
 - Suffering insanity or dementia
 - Being described as mentally incapacitated in some other way

Trump the Authoritarian

Is power-hungry, seeks to centralize power

- *Cluster 1: Emulating, Approving of, or Working with (Other) Authoritarian Leaders*
 - Praising authoritarian leaders and their policies
 - Proposing lifting sanctions against authoritarian leaders
 - Seeking campaign help from Putin
 - Being in cahoots with authoritarian leaders
 - Having attributes of authoritarian leaders (e.g. a Hitler mustache)
- Cluster 2: Delegitimizing Criticism
 - Attacking “fairness” or legitimacy of criticism from media or elsewhere over and above normal complaints about negative press coverage
 - Demonizing journalists or similar as “enemies of the people”
 - Delighting in on-air “failure” of those who speak critically of him
 - Engaging in “whataboutism”—deflecting criticism by criticizing something else and not responding to critique.
- Cluster 3: Fetishizing Violence or Military Force
 - Expressing delight in use of force, death of enemies
 - Advocating use of torture or other war crimes
 - Advocating military spending and expansion for influence (e.g. striking fear into hearts of enemies) rather than defense
- Cluster 4: Bullying and Playing People Against Each Other
 - Demanding loyalty and obedience from subordinates, especially those in positions which are normally understood as functioning independently of direct presidential authority
 - Creating internal rivalries intentionally as a means of control

- Sacrificing (or being willing to sacrifice) subordinates to protect self
- Choosing “weak” people because they can be manipulated
- Cluster 5: Dismantling Democratic Institutions
 - Weakening checks and balances
 - Upending longstanding traditions associated with American democracy
 - Recasting government accountability mechanisms as persecution
 - Appointing unqualified people (or no one at all) strategically, as a way to weaken disfavored institutions
 - Attempting to (or expressing wish that he could) create change by dictum, unilateral authority
- Cluster 6: Direct Use of Authoritarian Language by Critics
 - Being labeled by critics with words and phrases widely understood to have authoritarian connotations, such as “king,” “sovereign,” “dictator,” etc.

Trump the Idiot

Lacks necessary knowledge and skill for job

- Cluster 1: Being Stupid/Ignorant
 - Failing to guard classified information
 - Appearing unprepared in meetings with foreign leaders
 - Lacking basic knowledge
 - Showing extreme naiveté about political process (over and above what one would expect from a new politician)
 - Making problems worse through own actions (e.g. self-sabotaging)
 - Making contradictory statements that undermine goals (i.e. not to pander to an audience)
 - Displaying functional literacy errors
 - Leaving government in disarray by failing to appoint people to key posts or appointing unqualified people (not as deliberate strategy to undermine institutions)
 - Creating and worsening scandals due to incompetence (not as distraction strategy)
 - Being negatively compared with predecessors’ intellectual ability
- Cluster 2: Direct Use of “Idiot” Labels by Critics
 - Being labeled by critics with words associated with stupidity, foolishness or naiveté.