

Biggest Loser: A critical media analysis of obesity, weight loss & health in reality television

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Research Team:

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Presenter Disclosures

Natalie Ingraham

The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

No relationships to disclose

Background

- “Obesity epidemic” panic in America and across the globe
- The changing nature of fatness
- Neo-liberal ideas of health(ism)
- Reality TV as a place to examine cultural signifiers of fatness, health, and fitness

Research Questions

- Primary research question:
What cultural ideologies about fat, fitness, health and the body are put forward on The Biggest Loser?
- Sub-Questions
 - How is “health” addressed on the Biggest Loser?
 - What is their criteria for “health”?
 - What is in/out of the frame?

Methods Questions

- What is shown on the Biggest Loser?
 - What activities? What locations?
- What is said on the Biggest Loser?
 - About exercise? Fitness? Food?

Methods

- Content & Textual Analysis
- Team performed individual coding (mainly emergent coding)
- 12 episodes coded across 7 seasons
- Code books: First, Middle and Finale episodes

Context of the Show

- “The Ranch”: a communal living situation for contestants
 - Away from families
 - No job or family responsibilities
 - Access to top notch exercise facilities, trainers, free food/chefs

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- Activities:
 - Mainly shown working out
 - Physical (and mental) challenges
 - Eliminations and game strategy
 - Sometimes shown eating

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- What is in/out of the frame?
 - Food, class, race, employment
 - Little to no follow up on previous contestants

Discussion

- What cultural ideologies about fat, fitness, health and the body are put forward on The Biggest Loser?
- Fat Bodies as...
- Health is...
- Neo-liberal Health

Limitations & Future Research

- **Small amount of episodes easily available**
- **Future research: continued coding of the most recent season**
 - Focus on race/class/gender themes
 - Statistical analysis of weight loss results
 - Content analysis of trainer/contestant quotes

Acknowledgements

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