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

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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
- o How is "health" addressed on the Biggest Loser?
- $\circ$  What is their criteria for "health"?
- o What is in/out of the frame?

## **Methods Questions**



- What is shown on the Biggest Loser?
- o What activities? What locations?
- What is said on the Biggest Loser?
- o 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



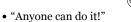
- "The Ranch": a communal living situation for contestants
  - o Away from families
- $\circ$  No job or family responsibilities
- o Access to top notch exercise facilities, trainers, free food/chefs

# Context of the Show



- "The Ranch": a communal living situation for contestants
  - o Away from families
  - $\circ$  No job or family responsibilities
- $\circ\,$  Access to top notch exercise facilities, trainers, free food/chefs
- Activities:
- $\circ\,$  Mainly shown working out
- o Physical (and mental) challenges
- o Eliminations and game strategy
- $\circ\,$  Sometimes shown eating

## Results - Early Themes



o Weight loss amounts

## Results – Early Themes



- "Anyone can do it!"
- o Weight loss amounts
- Sin/Redemption Narratives
- $\circ$  "Feels wonderful, like I need to spend more time in the gym to get more results like that." Brady (Season 6)

## Results - Early Themes



- "Anyone can do it!"
  - o Weight loss amounts
- Sin/Redemption Narratives
- $\circ$  "Feels wonderful, like I need to spend more time in the gym to get more results like that." Brady (Season 6)
- What is in/out of the frame?
- $\circ\,$  Food, class, race, employment
- $\circ\,$  Little to no follow up on previous contestants

#### Discussion

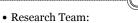


- What cultural ideologies about fat, fitness, health and the body are put forward on The Biggest Loser?
- Fat Bodies as...
- Health is...
- Neo-liberal Health

### Limitations & Future Research

- Small amount of episodes easily available
- Future research: continued coding of the most recent season
  - oFocus on race/class/gender themes
  - OStatistical analysis of weight loss results
- $\circ$  Content analysis of trainer/contestant quotes

## Acknowledgements



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