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Abstract

One of the most popular themes associated with reality television is the 'make-over show', and its usefulness for advertising is evident; it not only promotes the ideology of beauty and thinness, but also of consumption. Scholar Eileen Saunders sums up the link between ideologies of beauty and consumption quite concisely: "in order to motivate consumers to buy beauty products, there needs to be some assurance of transformation offered" (2008:114). More specifically, the bulk of make-over based reality programming has shifted to achieving weight-loss goals that reflect the beauty signifier of thinness. With the so-called 'obesity epidemic' affecting Americans across the country, programs such as *The Biggest Loser* claim to promote a 'healthy lifestyle' that will help participants obtain a beautiful body. Unfortunately, this healthy lifestyle is really only an extreme and temporary 'quick fix' to a serious problem. Research done on the implications of consumerism that this particular program can have on the audience concludes that, most notably, it promotes the consumption of certain products in order to achieve and maintain a 'healthy' (or socially acceptable) weight. What has not been researched, however, is the extent to which the same notions appear on Canadian television.

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One of the most popular themes associated with reality television is the ‘make-over show’, and its usefulness for advertising is evident; it not only promotes the ideology of beauty and thinness, but also of consumption. Scholar Eileen Saunders sums up the link between ideologies of beauty and consumption quite concisely: “in order to motivate consumers to buy beauty products, there needs to be some assurance of transformation offered” (2008:114). More specifically, the bulk of make-over based reality programming has shifted to achieving weight-loss goals that reflect the beauty signifier of thinness. With the so-called ‘obesity epidemic’ affecting Americans across the country, programs such as *The Biggest Loser* claim to promote a ‘healthy lifestyle’ that will help participants obtain a beautiful body. Unfortunately, this healthy lifestyle is really only an extreme and temporary ‘quick fix’ to a serious problem. Research done on the implications of consumerism that this particular program can have on the audience concludes that, most notably, it promotes the consumption of certain products in order to achieve and maintain a ‘healthy’ (or socially acceptable) weight. What has not been researched, however, is the extent to which the same notions appear on Canadian television.

Canada is experiencing its own increase in obesity rates, but the reality programs about weight-loss in Canada take a much different approach to those represented in American media. Specifically, programs such as *X-Weighted* and *The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp* focus on less extreme and more practical methods of weight-loss. These programs stress the importance of small changes over a long period of time in order to achieve a healthy body weight. When compared to their American counterparts, however, these programs similarly strive for its participants to achieve an ‘ideal’ body weight that mirrors society’s standards of beauty. What, then, sets apart Canadian reality programming about weight-loss from its American counterparts? How do these Canadian programs promote consumption in order to achieve weight-loss, and is it effective? What role does the ideology of beauty play when promoting consumption within these programs?

The following paper proposes answers to these questions through an in-depth analysis of a Canadian reality program about weight-loss: *The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp*. This program will illustrate the nature of Canadian reality television content in relation to consumption and beauty norms, as compared to the American case, which will be discussed in terms of the program *The Biggest Loser*. This research aims to prove the following thesis: Canadian-based reality programs promote an individualistic solution to weight-loss, with a focus on achieving incremental goals over a realistic period of time. Goals are based on the aesthetic desires of participants, and promote ideologies of beauty through the attainment of these goals for a specific event or function. Consumption is not promoted through specific brands or products, but rather through methods of weight-loss that are meant to be attainable by not only the participants of the program, but the viewing audience as well.

A literature review will lay a framework for research done on reality television's role in promoting ideology, discuss the nature of the obesity epidemic and its significance in the media, and provide insight into American reality programs dealing with weight-loss; this research will serve as a point of reference for comparison to Canadian reality programs. A case study will follow, looking at the program *The Last 10 Pounds Boot Camp*, allowing for an analysis of the effects of this program on Canadian audiences and their practices of consumption. Reasons for possible differences in American methods of promoting weight-loss through reality television will conclude the case study and offer insight into the Canadian case.

History and Context

Since its emergence in the early 1950s, television has undoubtedly become one of the most widely used media for promotional activity. It has transformed, however, from selling a product, to selling a lifestyle. As the novelty of television wore off, consumers became less enamoured with advertisements that presented them with information about a product's usefulness or functionality, and advertisers needed to be more creative in order to garner attention from the audience and increase their consumption. With new ways of approaching advertising, the ideology of consumption emerged. Advertisers could now present consumers with depictions of how a product could improve one's self, or even help individuals achieve their goals. Essentially, consumption of products was depicted as the source of happiness for consumers.

Subsequently, the ideology of beauty emerged in order to present a goal for which consumers, especially women, could strive for. The ideology of beauty promotes a certain aesthetic for women, with emphasis on thinness as a signifier of attractiveness. As Karen Blotnicky notes in a debate about advertising, "the North American beauty prototype has generally been youth focused, emphasizing physical attractiveness, and above all, thinness" (2008:105).

Similarly, the ideologies of beauty and consumption can be linked. To achieve 'beauty', one must adhere to the ideology of consumption, buying products that are aimed at achieving the stereotypical beauty norms set by society. Television advertisements, then, have become a way to show the narrative of achieving 'true' beauty by consumption. Still, some consumers remain unimpressed by the transparency of advertisements relating to 'real' life situations, especially because of the fact that the characters portrayed in many television advertisements represent dominant beauty norms, without actually using the product being promoted (although they desire consumers to believe otherwise).

Subsequently, commercials have now unofficially been incorporated into television programming. The practice of product placement emerged in movies, with products blatantly being referred to and used in the context of a story-line. Television quickly followed suit. Similar to commercials, however, the effectiveness of product placement in television programming is questionable. Because the product is typically incorporated subtly into a narrative, it can potentially go unnoticed. As one scholar notes, "audience research and research on media effects indicates that expectations with respect to the advertising effectiveness of product placement are unlikely to be met" (Steininger and Woelke, 2008:455). Again, a new innovation had to emerge in order for viewers to remain consumers, and subsequently, a new form of promotion arose with the advent of reality television.

The following literature review begins by outlining the content of reality television and its usefulness for promoting ideologies, especially those of consumption that link to beauty.

Literature Review
Reality Television and Ideology

Television has been an active participant in promoting certain ideological notions through its content and its narratives; plot-lines in a typical thirty-minute sitcom tend to resolve themselves within the allotted time-frame, and in doing so, also promote some sort of cultural norm or value. Reality television, similarly, aims to portray a certain narrative in which background information is given about the participant to create a context for their appearance on the program, allowing the audience to relate to the participant and their 'story'. Within these stories, the reality television program format similarly promotes certain values, norms, and ideologies. Interestingly, as author Leigh H. Edwards notes:

the "cultural work" reality programming does is to explore changing ideologies of human behaviour as new "realities" it wants to market on television, while the genre simultaneously reasserts or partially returns to more traditional models. This process of questioning and then returning to norms allows production companies and networks to fetishize social changes but revert to a safety position that stops short of imagining real social alternatives [...] (2008:227).

While reality television may seem as if it questions or even subjugates dominant cultural ideologies, it actually works to further promote these ideologies through the end-result of the program. This questioning and subjugation are only an illusion and are ultimately rejected in the end.

In particular, the make-over reality program focuses on presenting stereotypical representations of women that are aimed at attaining ideological norms of beauty which can only be achieved through consumption. Women are more typically seen on reality make-over programs such as *Extreme Make-over* and *What Not To Wear* because they are the ones cited as having to conform to particular ideologies of beauty. As June Deery notes in an article from *Feminist Media Studies*, "that most makeover subjects are female is a predictable result given the media's already crucial role in promoting images of ideal female beauty, an idealization clearly prompted by commercial forces" (2004:212). Here, she notes the convergence between ideologies of beauty and consumption. In his discussion on consumption in reality television, Wheeler Dixon states similar notions:

While the details of each show are distinctly different, the central organizing concept remains the same; you, too, can have a new identity, a new persona, in a matter of days, weeks, or months, just as long as you have the necessary capital to finance such a drastic reconstruction of the self (2008:52).

Dixon emphasizes the need for disposable income in order to reinforce the notion that consumption is related to spending, and this is depicted as the only way in which to achieve a 'new self'. This 'new self' brings up arguments which claim that the 'old' or the 'ordinary' self is not good enough, and must continually be revamped in order to adhere to standards of beauty.

The consensus among scholars seems to be that reality television, especially the make-over program format, promotes ideological notions of beauty, predominantly to women, in order to increase consumption by audiences. In all instances, reducing the self to physical appearance is key when promoting these ideologies, and more recently, America's increasing waistline has taken center stage as an outlet for their promotion.

The Obesity Epidemic

Over the past two decades, the increasing average weight of American citizens has been brought to the public's attention as 'the obesity epidemic'; this categorizes obesity as a disease which is spreading rapidly, uncontrollably, throughout the American population. Although it is undeniable that America's average weight is increasing, its classification as an epidemic is questionable. As Natalie Boero notes in an article from the journal of *Qualitative Sociology*, the media is partly to blame for the sensationalization of the obesity problem as an 'epidemic':

the media is integral to the construction of the epidemic itself and, in doing so, it relies heavily on discourses of weight, morality, risk, and science that long pre-date obesity's designation as a medical entity or American epidemic (2007:42).

The media clearly recognizes the very real dangers of being overweight, but ultimately overemphasizes their prevalence in order to create a sensational problem that can be exploited. Similarly, because of America's preoccupation with body image, the obesity epidemic has gained significant coverage in the media. A study done on the effects of media on the obesity epidemic shows that there is "evidence that news media have 'thrown fat in the fire', enflaming the issue of obesity, while simultaneously highlighting individual blame for weight" (Saguy and Almeling, 2008:77). Not only has the media gained an integral role in defining what the obesity epidemic is, it also works to place responsibility for the epidemic on anyone but itself. Those responsible, then, for not only causing the epidemic but also having to remedy it, are the individuals.

Although the obesity epidemic is seen as a national problem, blame is typically transferred to the individual. Again, Boero notes how

individual willpower remains the default explanation for obesity [...] Regardless of strategies for containment or prevention, the 'obesity epidemic' is an epidemic of individual bodies, people and populations through which blame is placed on individuals yet continued reliance on professionals is ensured (2007: 50).

Boero links the negative stereotype of obesity and being overweight as a markedly individual choice, or more specifically, a failure, in relation to the ideological notions of beauty in society. This individualistic notion about personal choice and personal failure as contributing to a national problem is a recurring theme in many critical discussions of the so-called 'obesity-epidemic'.

It seems as if the media has created yet another 'moral panic' when it comes to the increasing obesity rate in America. Aside from reports on 'healthier food choices' or 'easy-to-do exercises', the media has done little in terms of offering a national solution to a national problem; instead, it offers reality television.

Reality TV and Weight-Loss in America

Because of the media's obsession with weight, and because of the weight problem in America, it seems natural that the capitalist media system in America would somehow find a way to benefit; this, of course, has been done through reality television. Make-over reality programs reached a new level with *The Biggest Loser*. The program's basic premise is this: two teams, each with a handful of extremely overweight and obese contestants, compete to see who can lose the most weight (with supervised training and a restrictive diet) for the chance to win \$100,000 and be crowned 'The Biggest

Loser'. What may seem like an inventive way to help those with serious weight issues become 'healthy', however, has been heavily criticized by many scholars.

Primarily, the program is framed in a way that perpetuates negative stereotypes of individual will-power and failure when it comes to issues of obesity. A study done by Sender and Sullivan on the effects of *The Biggest Loser* on audiences found that "most audience members left intact assumptions that the obese body represents the failure of will in a culture in which self-direction and choice are paramount, and a failure of self-esteem where confidence is fundamental to that self-direction and choice" (Sender and Sullivan, 2008:582). These results are troublesome because they clearly show that not only is the media successfully perpetuating negative stereotypes of obesity, but that the audience is not actively engaging the content to be able to oppose these messages. This *individual* will-power and failure is linked to personal responsibility, which is similarly achieved in *The Biggest Loser* through its personal narratives. The program's contestants are forced to tell 'their' story, providing personal reasons for their weight problems.

Deciding whether or not the weight-loss techniques depicted on the program are attainable is another source of contention. An article in *Time* magazine verbalizes the program's realism quite distinctly:

while the message of the show is inspiring, it is also unrealistic. *The Biggest Loser* achieves rapid transformations—contestants often drop more than 20 lbs. in a week—through rapid calorie restriction, endless exercise and no small amount of dehydration that occurs behind the scenes (Rawe, 2007:62).

The depiction of weight-loss methods is not only misleading, but dangerous. This depiction brings with it questions of whether or not these contestants are actually working towards their goal of weight-loss, or the incentive of monetary compensation. Even further, the program's contestants are provided with all the devices needed for achieving extreme weight-loss: trainers, meal plans, and their own personal gym. In reality, the contestants themselves, as well as the viewers of the program, typically do not have the financial resources to access any of these devices.

As a result, some programs, such as *The Biggest Loser*, work to promote their own products and services to the audience through notions of consumption. As Ouellette and Hay note,

television viewers [are] invited to stage their own lifestyle intervention by slimming down and 'getting healthy' [...] Tie-in merchandise – including workbooks and the Biggest Loser exercise DVD – [are] available for purchase, and participants [are] urged to join the Biggest Loser email club and sign up for informative podcasts (2008:478).

The show willingly exploits its own contestants' weight-loss efforts to help brand itself as a successful weight-loss tool, simultaneously promoting the consumption of its own products to unsuspecting audiences.

As with many things American, *The Biggest Loser* has the mentality of 'go big or go home'; it depicts extreme weight, extreme weight-loss, and extreme consumption in order to achieve this goal. As the only attention-worthy solution to obesity that the media has implemented, *The Biggest Loser* has more entertainment-value than practical use when helping audiences, who are part of the 'obesity epidemic' in America, loose weight. *The Biggest Loser* is a sensationalistic look at the obesity problem and 'solution' in America that succeeds by promoting consumption more than ideological norms of beauty.

These findings provide the basis for the following research on the Canadian perspective of promoting weight loss within the media. Previous literature gives an informative look at the American case and provides a point for comparison in terms of the function of reality television, the severity of the obesity epidemic, and the convergence of these two aspects as a tool for promotion.

The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp: A Case Study

After looking at previous literature surrounding the nature of reality television concerning weight-loss, it became apparent that there is virtually no literature on the Canadian case. There are many Canadian-based reality programs about weight-loss, including *The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp*, *X-Weighted*, and *Bulging Brides*, yet no literature exists on the nature of these distinctly Canadian programs. After having viewed these programs, it became apparent that their format, as well as their content, were quite different from that of their American counterparts. Focusing specifically on *The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp*, the remainder of this essay will aim to prove the following thesis, as previously stated:

Canadian-based reality programs promote an individualistic solution to weight-loss, with a focus on achieving incremental goals over a realistic period of time. Goals are based on the aesthetic desires of participants, and promote ideologies of beauty through the attainment of these goals for a specific event or function. Consumption is not promoted through specific brands or products, but rather through methods of weight-loss that are meant to be attainable by not only the participants of the program, but the viewing audience as well.

Methodology

This research requires a textual analysis of the program *The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp*. After viewing a dozen episodes of the program, one specific episode, “Battle of the Bulge”, was chosen as being representative of the majority of the content that was viewed. A textual analysis requires looking at media content beyond the surface and reading for deeper, latent meanings within the text. In this case, the text was the program itself. A textual analysis is the most logical approach when considering an analysis of television content because it is a uni-directional communication system that relays the same message to all audiences. How the audience chooses to read the message, however, is where the difference in meaning emerges. In this specific case, the research was conducted by viewing the episode “Battle of the Bulge” numerous times, looking for symbolic content. More specifically, the research was looking to uncover messages embedded with ideological notions of beauty, reference to products or any type of promotion that encouraged viewer consumption, and the attitudes of participants before and after their weight-loss in order to gauge successful completion of weight-loss goals. Even more specifically, the research looked at the weight of contestants and the goals set out for them by the program’s nutritionist and trainer in order to analyze the attainability of these goals for the average viewer watching at home. Similarly, the language used by the trainer and nutritionist were helpful in uncovering hidden ideological meanings promoted in the program. Language also helped to analyze the ways in which ‘overweight’ bodies are being represented on the program, as well as give insight into the ways in which overweight bodies in general are being represented in Canada. A textual analysis, through the deciphering of latent meanings in the program’s content, helped uncover most, if not all, of the information required to thoroughly interrogate the stated thesis.

The Program

The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp is a thirty-minute television program based in Vancouver, British Columbia, broadcasting across Canada on the *Slice* network, approximately four times per week. The hosts of the show include trainer Tommy Europe, who is responsible for implementing fitness routines, and nutritionist Nadeen Bowman, who is recruited to help participants overhaul their diets in favour of more nutritional choices.

Each episode follows the same format, and usually manages the same results.

Episodes begins on the streets of Vancouver, asking women where they would like to lose their last ten pounds. The audience is then introduced to the woman (in all cases, the participants were women) who will be challenged for the next four weeks in order to drop her excess weight. More specifically, the woman participant of the program is aiming to drop that final ten pounds in anticipation of an upcoming event, such as a reunion, a birthday, or a benefit. Her weight and measurements are taken, usually in the presence of family or friends, in order to create the starting point from which the woman is to measure her success once her four weeks are up. The woman's diet and exercise regimen are criticized and then revamped by Europe and Bowman, and she is even shown a glimpse of her potential future, via digital photo progression, if she continues with her unhealthy lifestyle, effectively shocking her into adopting healthier habits. A target outfit is chosen for the woman, an outfit she will have to fit into when her four weeks of hard-work have been completed. Tommy continues to challenge the participant throughout all four weeks of her participation, and gives her a final challenge in which she must carry a backpack filled with ten pounds of her guiltiest pleasures to remind her of what that extra ten pounds of weight feels like. After two weeks, a mid-point weigh-in is conducted and measurements are taken in order to gauge the success of the regimen thus-far, presumably accounting for any changes that would need to be made in order to reach the weight-loss goal. After four weeks, the final weigh-in is conducted and the woman models her target outfit which, surprisingly (or not), fits perfectly.

The following analysis will further describe, in detail, one particular episode, "Battle of the Bulge", and where exactly this program fits into concepts of ideology, beauty, and consumption.

Analysis

After watching Episode 1001: "Battle of the Bulge", it became evident that *The Last Ten Pounds Bootcamp* focuses on an individual reason and solution to weight-loss, and is littered with references to the ideological notions of beauty. Ideologies of consumption, on the other hand, were not overtly apparent.

Before the program begins, a disclaimer appears that reads: "This program deals with extreme weight loss and should only be attempted if you've tried everything else, are sick of lugging around excess flab and have consulted a physician". Primarily, the disclaimer refers to the program depicting 'extreme' weight-loss and is referenced as a last-ditch effort to lose weight. This notion is interesting because during each episode, participants lose an average of ten pounds over the course of four weeks, what hardly constitutes 'extreme' weight-loss. Because it is branding itself as extreme, however, could point to the fact that because the women being depicted on the show are barely overweight, it becomes more difficult for them to lose those few extra pounds; this means they must work harder to reach their goals. The disclaimer also references the 'excess flab' that people are tired of carrying around. Similarly, the opening credits use language such as 'muffin top', 'arm flab' and 'Buddha belly' to reference typical problem areas that women complain about when expressing a desire to lose weight. Both the disclaimer and the opening credits use pop culture language, such as the term 'flab', to make the program not only more relatable to women and their own weight issues,

but also to make reference to the areas in which women should be most concerned about looking 'good'. The emphasis on using pop culture language, and the fact that these slang terms are used to refer predominantly to a woman's imperfections, enhances the notion that women are constantly judged through the media in terms of their weight.

The program begins with a voice-over of Tommy asking: "What stands between looking hot, or not"? Women on the street respond by talking about themselves and where they would like to lose 'their' last ten pounds. Almost all women noted their thighs, hips, or buttocks. These initial interviews secure the 'reality' of the program while also reinforcing the fact that many women in Canadian society are unhappy with their body image. Interestingly, none of the women in the opening segment were noticeably overweight, and some even looked thin. Tommy's initial question, and the women's answers, directly link the fact that looking 'hot' is highly dependent on a woman's weight, clearly depicting the ideological norm of thinness in association with beauty.

The participant in episode "Battle of the Bulge" is Jodi, a thirty-one year old single woman who weighs-in at one hundred and fifty five pounds and is approximately five feet, seven inches tall. According to the body mass index, which measures height in proportion to weight to determine a person's level of body fat, Jodi is in the high-end of the normal weight category (Center for Disease and Control, 2009). Because of the fact that Jodi, and the producers, feel that she is at least ten pounds overweight further reinforces the notion that the ideological norms of beauty presented in the media can be unrealistic and unhealthy. Although it is by a small margin, Jodi is scientifically considered a healthy weight in proportion to her height. What this does show, however, is that the program is depicting a proactive approach to weight. Jodi is making changes before her BMI reaches the overweight category.

Jodi claims that her love of potato chips and cocktails, along with her lack of exercise (she admits she never exercises) are to blame for her weight problem. Her personal choices and lifestyle are what have gotten her to the point of being 'overweight'. In one segment, Jodi states that her biggest fear is failing, and asks herself, "What if it doesn't work? What if I'm just supposed to be 'this' forever?", 'this' referring to her 'overweight' self. The fact that Jodi's biggest fear is failure, and her expressed disgust with herself at this weight, hints at the underlying notion that weight equals beauty. When Tommy and Nadeen ambush Jodi at home to get her weight and measurements, her and a friend are watching a hockey game, eating potato chips, and drinking beer. Here, Jodi is undoubtedly embarrassed about having to share her weight and measurements with her friend. This reinforces the stigma associated with weight: emphasis is on how you look, not how you feel. Similarly, Jodi is meant to lose weight for an upcoming breast cancer research benefit. It is interesting to note here that the whole purpose for the weight-loss is for Jodi to 'show-off' her new, slimmer figure, presumably presenting herself more positively than if she were overweight. This depicts society's preoccupation with weight and the ways in which people use weight to judge others, subsequently coinciding with notions of self-control and personal responsibility for weight.

Later in the episode, Tommy shows Jodi a digitally enhanced photograph of herself. He states that if she continues with her current lifestyle and gains only three pounds per year, she will be noticeably overweight by the time she is forty. The use of this 'scare tactic' to get Jodi motivated is not only useful for her, but for the audience as well. Three pounds is seemingly irrelevant, but over time, it can create a significant difference in a person's weight. Here, the program is potentially showing the audience their own pitfalls when it comes to weight, scaring them into making possible lifestyle changes themselves. Again, this shows a proactive approach to weight maintenance.

During her final challenge, Jodi must walk twenty eight storeys to the top of the Harbour Centre Tower, in Vancouver, BC, carrying a ten pound backpack filled with sugar, lard, and juice. This backpack literally represents the extra weight that Jodi could potential carry around if she continues her old eating habits. When she reaches the top of the Tower, however, Jodi takes off the backpack

and symbolically says goodbye to her old, unhealthy ways. This symbolizes a new chapter in Jodi's life, as she sheds the extra weight and becomes a 'better' person because of it. Jodi expresses the same excitement during the final weigh-in, after learning that she has lost ten pounds and eight inches in total around her chest, waist, and hips. Although she is happy with her weight-loss, Jodi admits that she was nervous before the weigh-in. This highlights another important point: although Jodi looked noticeable thinner and felt healthier, she was preoccupied with the actual numbers on the scale. This is representative of society's obsession with not just physical appearance, but the numerical representation of weight. There is a huge stigma around weight, and many people in society refuse to acknowledge their own weight. Unfortunately, the program does nothing to help viewers stray from this stigma, especially because the whole premise of the program is based on losing that coveted ten pounds. In the end, Jodi feels that the four-week program is only the beginning of a new, healthy lifestyle that she will continue to follow.

Clearly, the program references ideological beauty norms throughout its entire duration. In terms of the notions of consumption, however, it does not blatantly advertise any products that could help achieve the 'extreme' weight-loss depicted. The meal plan offered by Nadeen, and the training sessions given by Tommy, are informative in terms of offering advice on healthy food choices and effective exercise plans, but do not promote any physical products. Similarly, there are currently no products or merchandise for sale on the program's website. After further research, however, it became apparent that both trainer Tommy Europe and nutritionist Nadeen Bowman have their own websites, which promote personal weight-loss plans that provide results 'as seen' on *The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp*. Both Tommy and Nadeen sell their own personal products by referencing the program, undoubtedly using the publicity and success of the program's participants as tools for promotion.

The weight-loss methods presented by both Tommy and Nadeen, however, seem practical and feasible when it comes to losing weight. The program's audience could easily make the suggested changes to their own diet, especially if the nutrition problems of the participant are reflective of the viewer's problems, which is more than likely in many cases. Tommy's training tips, too, can help give audiences a new perspective on exercise and provide them with information and alternatives for becoming more active.

In only one instance does the program promote consumption for achieving a weight-loss goal: the target outfit. The target outfit encourages Jodi, and viewers, to choose and purchase an outfit as a tool for motivating weight-loss. Not only a motivator, fitting into the target outfit can also be seen as the successful completion of one's goal, further promoting the notion that a healthy weight is about numbers, whether on the tag, or on the scale. Again, the notions of ideology and consumption work together in this instance.

Discussion

Many women complain about wanting to lose that extra ten pounds of weight, thinking that losing those pesky pounds will be the answer to all of their problems. The Canadian case of reality programming about weight-loss, as depicted in *The Last 10 Pounds Boot Camp*, certainly plays into these ideals. The program uses pop culture language and makes blatant references that link beauty with thinness; achieving a weight-loss goal is a step towards becoming more beautiful. Individuals must admit to their 'unhealthy' ways before embarking on their weight-loss journey, and are subsequently seen as responsible for their own actions. Tommy and Nadeen are there to help them along the way, but it is ultimately the participant who must push themselves to achieve their goal. Consumption is not a particularly important tool to help 'sell' the audience on the depicted weight-loss techniques, but they are constantly reminded of the ideological beauty norms of society, which should aid in the

realization that if the audience has weight problems, they, too, should take the responsibility to correct them. The weight-loss techniques depicted on the program are realistic and feasible, but the program ensures the audience that the participant and the viewer must be willing to engage an effort to achieve their goals.

Conclusion

The Canadian case of reality television about weight-loss exposes striking differences when compared to the American case. American programs, such as *The Biggest Loser*, focus primarily on promoting consumption, while simultaneously using the program itself as a source of consumption. The Canadian case, however, is decidedly focused on promoting an ideology of beauty that aims at perpetuating the association between thinness and beauty. This can be even further demonstrated with the motivating factor for each program: in *The Biggest Loser*, contestants are motivated to lose weight with a grand prize of one hundred thousand dollars, while in *The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp*, the motivation is the target outfit. While *The Biggest Loser* depicts what really can be constituted as extreme weight-loss (for example, losing upwards of ten pounds in only one week), the Canadian definition of 'extreme' weight-loss in *The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp* is nowhere near the intensity of *The Biggest Loser*. Arguably, weight-loss goals in both programs are difficult to attain, but the Canadian case shows a much more realistic approach to losing weight and eating healthy. *The Biggest Loser* displays more of a sensationalistic approach to weight-loss and the obesity problem in America. Contrastingly, the Canadian case lacks any mention of obesity or the obesity epidemic. *The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp* is premised on losing only small amounts of weight and preventing negative eating habits that could contribute to a future of overweight and obese Canadians; in this sense, the show depicts a proactive approach to maintaining a healthy body weight. Unfortunately, this is accomplished in the context of body image rather than health.

But is one program format really better than the other? Both are promoting unrealistic norms of beauty, some form of consumption, and a material object as the motivator to accomplish weight-loss goals. The Canadian case shows a digital reproduction of where an unhealthy lifestyle could lead, while the American case shows the real thing. When comparing all factors, it seems as if the Canadian case may better represent Canadian culture and values when it comes to obesity and weight-loss. The benefits of making small lifestyle changes that can impact an individual's future, as depicted in *The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp*, appears to positively 'outweigh' the sensationalistic representation of the obese body and the struggle for weight-loss that *The Biggest Loser* depicts.

So why such a stark contrast between the representations of overweight bodies in America and Canada? Presumably, because of its physical location, Canada shares similar problems of obesity as its southern neighbours. The problem, however, is not as prevalent in the Canadian context, and has not been cited as reaching such 'epidemic' proportions as that of America. The obesity rate in Canada was twenty three percent in 2004, according to the Canadian Community Health Survey, compared to the American obesity rate of thirty one percent that same year (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004). The significantly greater population of America, and the even higher obesity rate, could account for the major difference between the American and the Canadian case. As mentioned, the Canadian case is taking a more proactive approach to weight-loss before it reaches the insurmountable level of the United States, and this can be seen through *The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp*.

The American and the Canadian case, however, share similarities: both programs blame the individual for their undesirable weight, and both make them responsible for changing their lives. Most importantly, and probably most significantly, however, is the fact that both programs' primary focus is on one thing: numbers. The end result is about the numbers that appear on the scale, not about how the participant feels. Although these programs are not likely to have a significant impact on the

prevention of or solution to obesity, the way to judge a healthy body should not be completely focused on the numbers on a scale. Of course, the corporate media systems whose goal it is to make money would be difficult to convince. Either way, *The Biggest Loser* and *The Last 10 Pounds Bootcamp* show different representations of weight that undoubtedly characterize the ideal values of their respective countries; America blatantly promotes material consumption, while Canada subtly hints at consumption through the promotion of ideologies of beauty.

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