



The Biggest Loser Debate Continues

I would like to commend author Amanda Vogel, MA, on her article "Weighing in on *The Biggest Loser*" [September *IDEA Fitness Journal*]. The article was informative, and she did a good job of presenting both sides of the story. I, on the other hand, don't need to be so diplomatic. I think there should be a disclaimer at the beginning of the show that states: "This show is for entertainment purposes only. Both the participants and the personal trainers depicted are not real."

I disagree that the show has been wonderful for our industry and has "given personal training more exposure." Unprofessional, uneducated and negligent behavior might be entertaining, and the show might purport to promote health and fitness, but it is not the portrayal of personal trainers we need to gain legitimate respect in the healthcare profession.

It was also very interesting to see how AFAA evaded the certification validation issue. They are a business and know free advertising when they see it. I would love to question either of the [show's] trainers on anatomy, biomechanics, physiology or joint structure and function. It's a shame the program chose personal trainers with very little education or experience when there are so many deserving fitness professionals. Don't get me wrong. It is not the

trainers' fault. They are merely taking advantage of a great financial opportunity.

I've always contended that *The Biggest Loser* insulted and intimidated the exact demographic it intended to inspire. The Australian study included in one of the article's sidebars confirmed my suspicions. I've always felt empathetic or embarrassed for the contestants as they were forced to stand bare-chested or in a sports bra before a national audience and then be voted off the show!

Anything that appears on television is somewhat glorified or accepted. *The Biggest Loser* plays into this type of mentality. In my opinion, this show lowers the benchmark as to what is acceptable in our society. With the current healthcare system dragging us into economic ruin, the benchmark should be raised, not lowered. We should be spotlighting people who, despite life's trials and tribulations, have managed to keep a healthy body weight and fitness regimen, not people who have consistently made bad health decisions!

How far will the entertainment media go in order to caricaturize personal trainers just for the sake of TV ratings, and what does it say about the American public to be amused by such unrealistic situations? I like to watch *Spiderman* and

Batman, but I know they are not real. The public needs to know *The Biggest Loser* is not real; and although it is frustrating, sometimes it is up to us to enlighten them.

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Really? An entire article on *The Biggest Loser*?

No matter how you justify, slice or dice it, it's not realistic. It's not how the great trainers work, and it's *made for TV ratings!* Please...Inspiring? Maybe. Realistic or long lasting? Not in the slightest. Research where all the winners are and you'll find most, if not all, are right back where they were before being sequestered, starved and getting the stuffing pummeled out of them in the name of "fitness." I'm still waiting for a show called *The Smartest Loser*.

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I have been a certified personal trainer since 1991, trying to educate my clients on lifestyle change one step at a time. In the last year, I've had so many clients ask me about the exercises that Jillian Michaels gives her clients. Some have subscribed to get exercises off [Michaels'] website. Many of these exercises are unsafe for the general population. If [home viewers] are not in a regular workout routine and they see the double-digit weekly weight loss on the show, they want the magic of the moment—a quick fix. But, as we've witnessed, even Oprah—who has a personal chef and a personal trainer, and went to a "fitness farm" to lose weight—is still having a

We Want to Hear From You!

Send your letters and opinions to Ryan Halvorson, *IDEA Fitness Journal* Fitness Forum, 10455 Pacific Center Ct., San Diego, CA 92121-4339; fax them to him at (858) 535-8234; or e-mail them to rhalvorson@ideafit.com. You may also leave a voice mail letter in the editorial voice mail box at (858) 535-8979, ext. 239. (For general membership questions or information, however, please e-mail member services at member@ideafit.com.) We reserve the right to edit letters for length or clarity.

