

Behind the Bikini: Who's Accountable?

Over the past couple of years, the television show Love Island has become an international sensation. The most recent season of Love Island USA had over one billion minutes viewed across nine available episodes. Millions of people tune in to watch real people argue, cry, and share intimate moments on camera. And as if this was not mentally draining enough, after the show ends, contestants face thousands of hate comments on social media. This has led many people to wonder if the show has some responsibility to protect the mental health of its contestants.

The premise of Love Island is that young single contestants called “islanders” live under the same roof in a villa on a private island in Fiji. The islanders must couple up and participate in challenges to test their relationships. The goal is to “find love” and the couple deemed to be the strongest wins a cash prize. The show relies on filming the islanders all day and night, editing their conversations and behavior to create an entertaining watch for viewers at home. The show also relies on social media engagement, with viewers at home often voting for their favorite couple. In recent years, social media engagement has been extensive, with some assessments suggesting that the series' growth on social media is outstripping its success on television.

Former contestants find immense success from the show through brand deals, increased social media followings, and mainstream business opportunities. Yet the show has inspired thousands of hate comments on social media and even in some cases death threats against contestants. Two of Love Island UK's former contestants, Sophie Gradon and Mike Thalassitis, and former host Caroline Flack, took their own lives. This has led many former contestants to speak out about the mental health challenges they face during and after the show.

The Love Island production team increased the number of psychologists involved in the show and now includes psychologists that islanders can visit on set. The social media team for Love Island has also been reminding fans to keep comments positive. It is too soon to tell if these measures will make a difference for the contestants' mental health.

Who is responsible for the mental health challenges contestants often face? What are the obligations of the show's producers? The people commenting on social media? The contestants themselves?

Discussion Questions

1. Is it ethical to continue to produce the Love Island show?
2. To what extent are the producers of the show responsible for the mental health of the show's contestants?
3. What is the ethical responsibility of the show's viewers and those commenting on social media?
4. If contestants are willingly signing up for a show that has benefits and negative consequences, is it fair to blame the producers when those negative consequences happen?

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