they continue to play an important role in DRC politics today.

*Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth about Guilty Pleasure TV*
by Jennifer L. Pozner
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392 pages

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In *Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth About Guilty Pleasure TV*, feminist media activist Jennifer Pozner analyzes television's most controversial genres: reality shows. As a feminist journalist, media commentator, and founder and executive director of Women in Media & News, Pozner’s approach to reality television diverges in definitive ways from traditional scholarly techniques. Pozner’s critical and insightful examination of the alarming effects of reality show trends makes *Reality Bites Back* an important resource for television researchers launching projects in the cross-section of reality, race, class, and gender, as well as a suitable read for all persons interested in understanding the meanings behind reality programs.

Pozner begins her book by dismissing simplistic notions that present reality television as “harmless fluff” or a guilty pleasure, and instead, stresses the importance of deconstructing the complex relationships between reality television show producers, networks, contestants, and viewers. She also dispels the myth that the proliferation of reality television is a response by networks to the public’s demand for this type of entertainment, pointing out the more likely reason there is an abundance of reality shows: they are cheap to make and can generate millions in advertising revenue. The central premise of *Reality Bites Back* is that reality television renews old-fashioned gender stereotypes previously considered by feminist media researchers to be fading due to the gains made by feminist struggles,

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1 Women in Media & News Website, http://www.wimnonline.org/
and perpetuates those stereotypes with exploitative show concepts designed to garner ratings through the behavior of carefully chosen contestants. Using this as a starting point, Pozner argues that the definitions of “reality,” and the images of women presented by these programs, are fundamentally damaging because of the power that mass media holds to deeply impact social and psychological understandings of how the audience view themselves and others. From there, Pozner interrogates representations of bodies, race, class, and sexuality to illustrate the profound social consequences of stereotyping on reality television.

In each chapter, Pozner explores a different trope of reality genre television, the implications of the tropes, and how they may effect individuals and society. She is thorough and precise in breaking down the underlying components of reality television, including an examination of the pervasive role of fairy tale romance themes in Chapter One and hyperconsumerism and mockery of the poor in Chapter Four. Additionally, in Chapter Seven, Pozner critiques the use of violence in glamorous and romantic contexts on reality television, providing specific examples in which women are instructed to be passive or to overlook offensive and dangerous behavior. In Chapter Nine, she discusses the integration of advertising, product placement, and the assumption of gendered consumerism on reality shows such as *America’s Top Model*.

Of particular interest for feminist media scholars is the second chapter, “Get Comfortable with My Flaw Finder.” This chapter looks at television shows in which a woman’s worth is equated to her body, normalizing bodily scrutiny and self-regulation. The third chapter also makes an important contribution to feminist media studies. In this chapter, “Bitches and Morons and Skanks, Oh My!” Pozner examines the very narrow roles in which women are placed in reality television.

Both in chapters 5 and 6, Pozner addresses the ways in which race is exploited to typecast people of color. She suggests that this generates detrimental social effects as both contradictory and essentializing messages about race and ethnicity become more widespread through the media. Erasing Ethnicity, Encoding Bigotry and Ghetto Bitches, China Dolls, and Cha Cha Divas investigate racism and post-racial displays in the controversial program *Flavor*
of Love and the intersection of post-racial attitudes with varying standards of ethnic beauty through a look at Tyra Banks and America’s Next Top Model. Through analyses in all of these chapters, Pozner’s book coincides with prior academic studies of reality television which conclude that reality programs are far from real in the truest sense, that their contestants are exploited on fundamental levels, and that most importantly, while viewers might understand these factors, it does not dissuade watching or prevent them from identifying with contestants in both negative and positive ways. Thus, the most important contribution of Pozner’s first nine chapters is not necessarily the presentation of an original theoretical framework; rather it is the application of existing frameworks to her breadth of comprehensive reality television knowledge.

Throughout the book, Pozner makes clear that her goal is not to banish reality shows, but is rather to encourage critical media literacy, analytic practice and activism. This is where she turns in the last two chapters of the book. Chapter Ten: Fun with Media Literacy! includes step-by-step instructions on how to make your own Backlash Bingo game, suggestions for watching reality television with your family, Deconstruction Questions written by the Media Literacy Project, cut out postcards, and even a set of reality TV subgenre-specific drinking games among other fun and unique methods of fostering conscious viewing habits. In chapter Eleven: What Are You Going to Do? includes suggestions for six concrete ways to take action, as well as fifteen short essays written by media justice advocates offering advice based upon their own experiences.

Overall, Jennifer Pozner’s Reality Bites Back is a fascinating read that never fails to engage the reader from Pozner’s description of reality television stereotyping, her witty, funny, and sometimes outrageous commentary, or her reportings on the status that reality television has reached in American culture. Pozner’s methodological and linguistic approach makes it an accessible text for academic and non-academic readers alike. For budding media scholars and anyone interested in learning about the inner-workings of the reality television industry from a sociological perspective, Pozner’s work is a must-read. She carves out
her own ground by including social justice-oriented elements, and rather than leaving the reader frustrated after nine chapters of bad news, Pozner inspires readers to action by providing suggestions and stories of success that prove media activism is attainable at many levels.