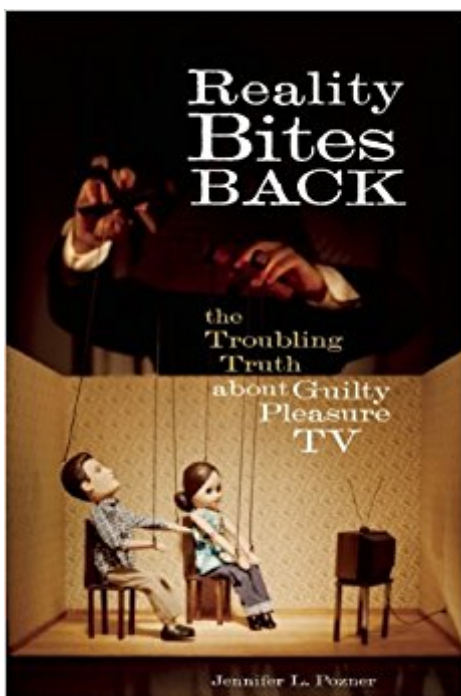


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Reality Bites Back: The Troubling Truth About Guilty Pleasure TV



Synopsis

Nearly every night on every major network, “unscripted“ (but carefully crafted) “reality“ TV shows routinely glorify retrograde stereotypes that most people would assume got left behind 35 years ago. In *Reality Bites Back*, media critic Jennifer L. Pozner aims a critical, analytical lens at a trend most people dismiss as harmless fluff. She deconstructs reality TV“s twisted fairytales to demonstrate that far from being simple “guilty pleasures,“ these programs are actually guilty of fomenting gender-war ideology and significantly affecting the intellectual and political development of this generation“s young viewers. She lays out the cultural biases promoted by reality TV about gender, race, class, sexuality, and consumerism, and explores how those biases shape and reflect our cultural perceptions of who we are, what we“re valued for, and what we should view as “our place“ in society. Smart and informative, *Reality Bites Back* arms readers with the tools they need to understand and challenge the stereotypes reality TV reinforces and, ultimately, to demand accountability from the corporations responsible for this contemporary cultural attack on three decades of feminist progress.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“A witty, original, and very smart analysis of the dark side of reality TV. Pozner expertly reveals the toxicity of what many consider to be simple lightweight entertainment and arms readers with creative ways to resist and fight back. A serious scholarly work based on years of research,

Reality Bites Back is also fast-paced and fascinating. You'll never look at these shows the same way again!

•Jean Kilbourne, ED.D., creator, Killing Us Softly:

Advertising's Image of Women film series, and author, Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel

“Jennifer Pozner's Reality Bites Back is an extraordinary gift to critical media literature. Instead of hurling down invectives against popular culture from an insulated ivory tower, Pozner is a smart, snarky fellow traveler who offers stinging criticism and stunning insights peppered with just enough colloquial profanity to keep readers laughing and shaking our heads. Pozner reminds us that TV is never accidental, but directed to reinforce particular social lessons. This should be required reading for every American girl and woman.”

•Melissa Harris-Lacewell, Princeton University, Department of Politics and Center for African American Studies, MSNBC commentator, and columnist, The Nation

“Hooray! Here comes Pozner, ready to lay some reality on reality TV. Find out why these shows sell even when we don't watch, and what they sell, thanks to producers who say “it's a lot of fun to watch girls crying.”

• Fun, fresh and furious, Reality Bites Back is feminist media criticism at its best.”

•Laura Flanders, host and founder, GRITtv, and author BUSHWOMEN

In an attempt to shut out the worries of the world with a little mindless entertainment, my wife and I have watched the last few cycles of America's Next Top Model. A few cycles back, there was a contestant named London, a pretty girl and a capable model who happened to gain a few pounds as the season progressed. At no time did we consider her fat, but we also had no reason to doubt the show's conclusion regarding this contestant, that she was unable for whatever reason to discipline her eating as well as her competitors. London was eliminated from the show mid-season. In Reality Bites Back, Jennifer L. Pozner fills in certain details about London - she had suffered from eating disorders throughout her life, which had become increasingly severe right before she was cast on ANTM. When her eating habits became somewhat normal during the show, her body reacted normally and she gained a few pounds. London had spoken frankly to fellow contestants about this issue, but the footage never made it to air. The show's producers knew about her issues, but allowed the judges to knowingly portray her as unprofessional due to overeating during the season. I focus on this example because it shows perfectly how Pozner is true to the subtitle of this book - this is The Troubling Truth About Guilty Pleasure TV. There is a wealth of new information about shows we've all either watched or experienced as cultural wallpaper, such as The Bachelor, Flavor of Love, and Wife Swap. And not just backstage details and descriptions of editing

tricks either; the book fires sharp arrows at the networks, sleazy producers, and sponsors of these shows and explains why they are uniquely damaging to our culture and our image of ourselves and others. Readers will appreciate Pozner's "Happy Warrior" writing style and her tips for fighting back, which include tips from a wide range of media experts. This book belongs on the bookshelf, not next to the dense cultural studies tomes, although it would stand out well there. Instead, I would classify it with *Food, Inc.*, *Fast Food Nation*, and *Maxed Out*, readable, engaging books about things we all knew were bad for us, (factory farming! Debt! Reality Television!) but didn't realize what cesspools they really were until we got the whole story. I can't wait for the movie...

I enjoyed *Reality Bites Back*, though at times it felt overwritten and Pozner's snark became tiresome. The amount of research she put into this is staggering, and she lays out the sexism, racism and classism rampant in reality TV in a way that surprised me-- and I didn't exactly have a high opinion of reality TV to begin with. A major focus of the book is product placement: it's not just that product placement exists within the shows, but that episodes and even entire series are built around products. Many shows are basically long, sneaky commercials. I had never watched *Real Housewives* or *Jersey Shore*, but didn't see any harm in *What Not to Wear*. Pozner points out the distorted views that such shows push. Pozner doesn't shame people who like reality TV, but rather asks that we all become more media-literate, savvy, critical viewers. That we become aware of things like product placement, manipulative editing, and stereotypical casting. The book came out a few years ago and the TV landscape has changed in that time. Scripted television shows are doing extremely well now-- better than ever, some might say. It no longer feels like television is rushing towards an inevitable future as a reality-show wasteland. However, many of the harmful practices outlined in this book are still going on. Definitely worth a read.

Overall, I think the author did a great job showing the dark side of what today is known as reality TV. Throughout the book, Pozner balances humor with her evaluations of the subject well enough to make some of the repetition easier to digest. With the prevalence of reality shows today, I believe that it is a topic definitely worth being analyzed. I've personally never been a fan of reality shows but never could quite give a definitive answer to why. That has changed after reading this book. Reality programming is designed to trigger emotional responses in its viewers in order to sell more products. There is nothing inherently wrong with trying to sell products. The problem is that these shows also promote harassment, prejudices, sexism, and stereotypes among other things. This book will help the reader become more conscious of the programming they choose to view.

Do you know what a "frankenbite" is? Me neither! Then I read this eye opening exposure about so-called reality tv. Producers can take anything you say and edit it to suit their needs! You "love" pizza? Guess what America is gonna hear, "You love ASS." Her writing takes down the soft core producers who have directed programming directly for your titillation. Fascinating and appalling, this book will be lent out to all of my Jersey Shore friends!

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