

BUT HER LYRICS...EPISODE 10

SHOW NOTES:

This episode of But Her Lyrics... tackles track 8 on Wonderful Hell, "Her?" Host Shawna interviews media critic and author Jennifer Pozner, who explains why negative portrayals of female politicians in the media are so dangerous. She also gives us a lesson in media literacy and permission to blame everything on Trump. Shawna then gets nerdy with the band on riffs, beats, and women in politics.

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<https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/hey-hey-ho-ho-where-did-radical-cheerleaders-go>

Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting: <https://fair.org/>

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EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

[intro music]

Shawna Potter: Welcome to But Her Lyrics..., the show where we delve into the meaning and politics behind each song from the new War On Women album, Wonderful Hell. I'm Shawna

Potter, singer and lyricist for War On Women and your host. In this episode, we are tackling the eighth track, a song we've jammed down your throat all season, Her? I hope you're not too tired of the song to stick around till the end to hear it in its entirety. Oh, well, okay, so right now I'm just thinking about what do we play as the outro music for this episode? Let's let Brooks surprise us. How about that? So why don't you take a guess now, and then see if you're right at the end of the episode when I'm like "blah, blah, blah buy our stuff." Whoever wins gets a high five wearing gloves and fully sanitized.

Okay, let's dig in. Her? is one of our songs that I consider to be an art project that happens to be a song. All I'm doing is naming things that female politicians are criticized for in the media that have nothing to do with their politics. I think the lyrics could almost go on top of any music in my mind. But Brooks had this really great off kilter riff, which we talk about in our interview towards the end that works so well for these short little lines, "but her this, but her that." Not "butt hurt" for the record [laughs] but maybe that's one of Sue's fake lyrics. And of course it all started with "but her emails," one of those chants annoying as hell from Trump and his followers who don't actually give a shit about emails or anything substantial really. And the only good thing we got out of it was all the but her emails memes, especially any crossovers with *The Handmaid's Tale*. But this idea that it wasn't about Hillary Clinton, that she was a placeholder for our country's disdain for women in general, well, that idea kept gnawing at me. So you know, so one day I just started writing down all the critiques I've heard about women in politics, some of them contradictory, even. Then I rearranged them, of course, to flow a little better, which also dictated how long and how often the verse riff would be played. I then end the song naming many, not all, but many prominent female politicians over this country's history. Truth be told, Sue wasn't quite sure how the song would end up. I think she was concerned we would celebrate shitty politicians just because they are women. So you'll have to keep listening to hear us get into all that when I interview the band. So stay tuned for that after my incredible interview with media critic and author of *Reality Bites Back*, Jennifer Pozner, who has written about the impossible standards that women are held to in media for two decades.

I can tell you now, there will be a bonus episode with Jennifer because well, she's a fountain of information, okay, a leading expert on the portrayal of women in media, and she's so generous with her knowledge that she just had too much to share to fit into one episode. So if you want to hear more from her, including the story of how we met, join me on Patreon and get all the bonus content. Speaking of, the official sponsor of But Her Lyrics... is First Defense Krav Maga out of Virginia, so big thanks to Nick and the whole team. Go check them out and support them. You

can be a sponsor too by joining me on Patreon. Support this podcast, get a shout out and tons of perks and access to exclusive and behind the scenes stuff by becoming a patron today like the following patrons who are the best patrons in the entire world. Huge shout out to Recruit Stephen and Julina and Meatheads Melissa, Lauren, Zacharie and Gaelen. And patrons, don't forget, you can ask questions about the podcast, the band, our music, previous guests, whatever, and get them answered on the episodes, so ask away once you sign up at patreon.com/shawnapotter

[music] **Interview time.**

Shawna Potter: Jennifer Pozner, thank you so much for joining me. Can you please introduce yourself to everyone? What's your deal?

Jennifer Pozner: What's my deal? Right now my deal is post-pandemic brain fog, but usually [laughter] my deal is that I'm a media critic, and I'm a media literacy educator. And I've been doing this work since the '90s, specifically at the intersections of gender and race in media.

Shawna Potter: So, you're the perfect person to interview for this episode. I did a good job in choosing you.

Jennifer Pozner: You're spot on.

Shawna Potter: [Laughs] I did want to ask, did you get a chance to listen to the song?

Jennifer Pozner: I did, I did. Yeah.

Shawna Potter: Oh, cool. You don't have to like it. [Laughs] But I was wondering as a media critic, did it hit you in any particular way? Did I get it right? [laughs]

Jennifer Pozner: Yeah, I think you did. It felt very '90s Riot grrrl to me which makes me happy.

Shawna Potter: I'll take that. Yeah.

Jennifer Pozner: Because that's where I come from, '90s and feminist activism. I wasn't a Riot grrrl, but I was around that community and I have a lot of love in my heart still for the radical cheerleaders who do like-- I don't know if you remember at all the radical cheerleaders, but I was doing a lot of street theater, direct action in the late '90s, early 2000s against war, street

theater around economic and justice issues and wealth equality and campaign finance, all that. And so there's a community in New York of people who would do a variety of different kinds of activism, anti-gentrification work, and I'd always run into the radical cheerleaders. I wish I could remember some of their cheers, but ripped up tights and dirty plastic bags as pom poms. [Laughs] Riot, don't diet, get up, get out and try it, things like that. [Laughs] And your song felt a little bit in that tradition to me. But it also felt and I think you will understand what I mean when I say this, I hope your listeners do because this is not an insult. This is Jen is exhausted after 25 years or more of doing this. It felt like, "Oh god, we have to keep doing this." [laughs]

Shawna Potter: Sure, oh yeah, sure.

Jennifer Pozner: Not that your song has to keep doing this, but that this is still going on. I've been writing about sexist double standards in news coverage of female politicians since the mid-90s. One of the first really big pieces I did on the subject was when I was directing the women's desk at Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, I think in the year-- I think this piece was in the year 2000 because it was during the Bush Gore election cycle. The piece that was titled Cosmetic Coverage, I think, I gave that headline to it about how news outlets consistently covered women in terms of their hair, their shrill voices, their whiny, naggy sounding tone, their weight, their ankles, their "cankles", their eye shadow, how selfish would they be if they won because they couldn't take care of their kids, what would happen to their grandkids if they won, etc, over and over. There was a whole section on Katherine Harris, who was the Florida rep or the Florida official, I don't remember if she was a rep or an official at this point, who was in charge of the county with the hanging chads, I believe. Basically, this woman had a role in determining whether Florida was going to be called for Bush or Gore. And there was a lot of sort of wacky hijinks involved, by wacky hijinks I mean fraud and corruption.

Shawna Potter: Sure. [Laughter]

Jennifer Pozner: And she was a terrible, corrupt, operative. However, she also had very extreme eye makeup, and that was almost all that the news media and late night comedians could talk about. There was one outlet, I don't remember which one at this point, but if you go I think my Cosmetic Coverage piece is still in the archives at Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, you can find all of the references because I cite all of my sources in that piece. But you can find the exact quote, but it was something like, "If we can't even trust her to apply her mascara correctly, how can we trust her to fairly adjudicate the election?" You can't trust her to fairly adjudicate the

election because she's an operative paid by right wing foundations or whatever it was at the time, I don't remember the level of corruption. But my point in the piece about her, there were so many reasons that journalists should be skeptical of this particular public official. There were so many factual problems, there were so many political problems with this particular public official, and yet it was just, "Let's make fun of her for being ugly and not knowing how to use eye makeup." What? The reason I've written about this in so many different ways for so many different years. But the reason I remember that piece is it's the first time I delved into the LexisNexis News database and tried to see how quickly I could find the dress sizes of a wide variety of female politicians.

Shawna Potter: No, Jennifer, no.

Jennifer Pozner: And within maybe 10, 15 minutes, I found the dress sizes of Hillary Clinton and Geraldine Ferraro and just a shit...I mean, I don't know. You want me to curse on this? Just a shit ton of all of our female candidates and leaders described not only in these incredibly reductive ways, but literally by their weights and their sizes. And it went as far back as Tom Brokaw when he was introducing Geraldine Ferraro as the first female vice presidential candidate, he introduced her at the Democratic National Convention. I believe it was, you can feel free to fact check via that article. I'd only be fact checking myself from 20 years ago. [laughter] So, this might not be exactly verbatim, but I believe it was the Democratic National Convention. And Tom Brokaw said, "Geraldine Ferraro, the first female vice presidential nominee, size six." Yeah, and it never changes. On the campaign trail at that time when Hillary Clinton was running for Senate, there were articles about how she had whittled her dress size down to a fighting weight of I believe it was size eight by eating little more than lettuce leaves at lunch, something like that. That was a direct quote from political columnists. [Laughs] And then there were, of course, style section, endless style section articles about the clothing and the hair and the weight and the fashion sense and etc, of all the different female candidates for senate and for congress for local races across the country. Condoleezza Rice was... Was it Robin Givhan? I believe it was Robin Givhan in the Washington Post, but it might have been somebody else. I'm pretty sure it was Robin Givhan, did an entire piece about her fashion and called her a dominatrix because she likes black coats and tall boots. This was the most powerful woman in America and arguably possibly the world at the time, and they were they were reducing her to gender and race stereotypes based on her clothing and calling her a dominatrix, sexualizing this black woman who was in power because you can't have a woman in power or black woman in power unless she's sexualized, I guess.

Shawna Potter: Unless you knock her down a peg, right?

Jennifer Pozner: Right, or 10. [Laughs] And we can't underestimate the-- People today might not realize just how egregious that was. It sounds egregious even on its face, right? But 20 years ago, we didn't have news outlets ever doing that to male candidates. Trump changed the game in terms of political columnists, A section reporters, late night comedians, etc, making fun of male politicians. Because Trump is this over the top narcissist figure who his face is orange and his eyes are white because he uses bad makeup and bad spray tans. His hair is some sort of herculean feat of cotton candy and physics and hairspray, you know? His ties are weirdly long. There are things to legitimately discuss about his appearance even if it's not like in the style section. I still maintain that it's not legitimate to focus on a politician even if they themselves make themselves into clowns. I still think a politician should be, as a journalist this is my stance, bold I know, but let's as journalists cover politicians based on their policy decisions and the impact they'll have on the public not on whether or not they look like clowns. But in the style sections and for late night comedy posts, of course, Trump did sort of make himself fair game. He was very far out of the norm for general aesthetic norms. He put himself outside general aesthetic norms. But because of that, there has been five, six years' worth of male politicians, particularly Trump but occasionally others, talked about in terms of their hair or their clothes or pretty boy, etc. Before that, that really wasn't happening. The only time that happened was a short spate of news coverage criticizing Al Gore for having an expensive haircut. And that was basically it.

Shawna Potter: Right, that was like the worst of it. We've got - Chris Christie has had a lot of coverage, and then recently, Ted Cruz.

Jennifer Pozner: Yeah, there's always been fat shaming of politicians, male and female. That's a little different because... it's not good. I'm not excusing it in any way. But the intense focus on female politician's appearances, as well as other gender-based markers, are they mothers? If they're not mothers, why aren't they mothers? If they are mothers, why are they running for office? Who's going to take care of their kids? Chris Matthews in the 2008 presidential campaign talking about... 2008 or 2012? I believe it was 2008, talking about how Hillary Clinton reminded him of everybody's first nagging wife, something like that. Words like hectoring, words like nagging, words like shrill. There are so many, and I've maintained this as well, there's so many legitimate reasons, policy-based reasons to critique Hillary Clinton. Her "cankles" do not have any impact on foreign policy, they don't have any impact on stop and frisk. Her dress size

doesn't have any impact on funding for the Violence Against Women Act. Positives and negatives treat women candidates and women politicians as if they actually are vying for or holding power. And the other side of this is that while the focus on female politicians has always been so enmeshed in these trivializing gendered, often demeaning, often insulting, but even when they're supposedly complimentary, this particular candidate is pretty, she's lady like, she's diminutive, etc, they're always marginalizing. And while those kinds of double standards are in play constantly with female politicians, even to this day, the focus on AOC's lipstick and her hair and her suits and how much she spends on her clothing and she must not actually be a socialist because she got a nice haircut or wears a nice outfit, etc. Or you know, first she's too much of a socialist, then she's not socialist enough. [Laughs] But all of that focus serves to remind people, remind potential voters that women are ladies first and political actors a distant second. Studies have shown that this kind of coverage diminishes female participation in the political process, it dissuades many women from running for office in the first place. And when they do run for office, this kind of coverage often makes it more difficult for them to compete and win their offices. And when they're in office, it makes it more difficult for them to be effective. Because as this kind of coverage happens, the other kind of coverage, the coverage that focuses on their experience or their policy agendas or their votes or their legislation or their efforts to pass legislation is almost invisible. There's so little of it compared to male politicians. So when women are invisible, when political women are invisible, they're visible for the wrong reasons, for their hair and their clothes and their cankles. So they're being called cunts, and all of this by radio hosts and TV hosts and newspapers and magazines, etc, social media. So all of that put together, it really serves to diminish the ability of half the population to participate and compete in the political process.

Shawna Potter: Do you find that the way that female or non-cis male politicians are treated is different from how non-male people in general are treated in pop culture or is the problem is that we kind of treat them the same as general pop culture figures when really we should be concentrating on their politics? Is there a different layer there added or is it the same and that's what's wrong?

Jennifer Pozner: I mean, yes and no. It can sort of boil down to is misogyny and heteropatriarchy and transphobia the factor of those things in the way that all women and non-binary people are treated in news and in pop culture? Is that also the way that non-binary and trans and women politicians are treated? And is that the problem? You know, there's some of that, but I think that it's not the same. It's worse because average people-- If you're going to

do a "man on the street" interview, right? I don't mean like-- In the news industry, you call it a man on the street interviews...

Shawna Potter: Which of course you do. Of course that's what it's called, no one's changed it yet. Yeah.

Jennifer Pozner: Right, exactly. It's never person on the street. It's never cis person on the street or non-binary, it's just the universal way in which the rights of man is supposed to be for everybody. But anyway, if you're doing a man on the street story and you're asking random women and men and non-binary people and trans people their opinions about a new movie that's out or the latest trends or a fire that's raging in their community or whatever it is, and you might have your reporter say or do something sexist or transphobic or homophobic or whatever or racist, that's obviously gross and unprofessional. But that individual person doesn't have the power to change the lives of everybody in their region or their state or their country depending on the role that they're either campaigning for or in office for, right? It's yes, there is misogyny. Yes, there is transphobia. Yes, there is homophobia. Yes, there is racism in news and pop culture treatments of everyday people. But when those things are applied to the political sphere, it serves to elevate one particular demographic, cis white male politicians, as being the only ones who are inherently supposed to be in those roles, inherently qualified. That's the thing about this kind of coverage. Women and non-binary people are treated as if they are not inherently qualified for office because these other things are supposed to be more newsworthy.

Shawna Potter: So what makes me so mad and what I'm trying to get across in this song is that there's no right way to be for women. Doesn't matter what you say, what you do, how you dress, whatever, it will never be right, it'll never be enough. There's always something to critique. Is that changing at all with the election of Kamala Harris as VP? Do you see any shift? Or has Trump fucked it up because now everyone is focused on appearance more? [laughs]

Jennifer Pozner: I mean, look, it's both. [laughter] I think the answer to almost every question is Trump fucked it up. [laughs] So sure, let's go with that. And feel free to retroactively ask any question and the answer could be Trump fucked it up.

Shawna Potter: All future podcast episodes are going to have, "Let's check in with Jennifer real quick. What about Trump?" "Trump fucked it up." [laughs] Wow, who knew about this issue? That's great. That's perfect. That's a theme of this podcast generally, yeah. [Laughter] But do we

see things getting better or are we just in a state where we've gone too far and it's not changing anytime soon?

Jennifer Pozner: The real answer is yes and no. There's been a lot of progress and there's also a lot of stasis, right? So, one of the ways in which media coverage has changed in a gargantuan way since when I started and even-- So when I started basically in the early 90s as a teenager, in the mid-90s in my early 20s, writing about this stuff to now in my mid-40s writing about this stuff, but even changed in the last say six to eight years is the fact that before only a few years ago, there were very, very few precious few women who had major columns in national newspapers, who were A section news reporters on a regular basis, who had political talk shows on cable news, who were turned to as the arbiters of opinion and of reporting and of analysis. That shift has meant that you now have a lot more discussion when sexism, racism, homophobia, come up in political coverage, that plus the fact that we now have social media to get past the gatekeepers. Now there's often, I hesitate to say always, but very often when this sort of thing happens, it's commented upon. Before there was a period of time of about 10-15 years where if I was not writing about it, it almost never got covered. And I'm not saying that as an ego thing, I was exhausted.

Shawna Potter: [Laughs] You had your work cut out for you I'm sure.

Jennifer Pozner: I wanted company, but they're like... In the 90s, it was impossible to get pieces like this placed, so I had to write them for feminist newspapers that don't exist anymore because we've lost all our feminist newspapers. [Laughs] But it was like Sojourner and The Women's Forum were the only place I could place these stories because I would pitch them to elsewhere and the editors, the male editors, would say it was irrelevant. Or they would say, "We did a piece on this five years ago, etc." We've already done it five years ago, we've done it. I even got, "We published a woman or we published a feminist last year, last month, whatever." They would never tell George Will we published another white guy so we don't need to publish you. And they certainly wouldn't say we published a story on the economy three weeks ago, we don't need to publish another story on the economy. We published a story on healthcare five years ago, we don't need to, you know, but that was the landscape I was facing when I was trying to write about this. When I say I was the only one, I don't mean I was the only one anywhere, there were people writing about it and studying it in academia. And before I was at the women's desk at Fair, Laura Flanders ran the women's desk at Fair, and she wrote about this stuff in the late '80s and early '90s and throughout the '90s. So yeah, there were some people but in

independent media. But in terms of corporate media, this kind of discussion did not happen. Another thing, for example, I can say it now because enough time has gone by, but think about how many women moderated presidential and vice presidential debates in the 2020 election cycle. This is new, this is very new. I believe it was either the 2008 or 2012 cycle, I can't remember now because blame pandemic. But I was brought in as a speaker/consultant to talk about women in media, in particular women in news as well as pop culture at Turner Broadcasting in Atlanta. And I was speaking in front of a couple hundred programmers and executives and staffers of one of the biggest news companies and entertainment companies in the world. And they had seen Miss Representation. Yeah, so it was 2012 because they had seen Miss Representation, that's how they found me, the documentary Miss Representation. And they wanted me to help them understand sexism in media. And so one of the things that I-- And they wanted me to teach them all about sexism in the media and how to solve it and how to solve it in a way that didn't involve any money in 30 minutes. No, first they said in 20 minutes. In 20 minutes, and I was like I advocated I was able to get 10 more minutes from them.

Shawna Potter: Oh my god.

Jennifer Pozner: It was amazing. [Laughs]

Shawna Potter: I hope they paid you so fucking well. It is harder to do a 30-minute training than a two-hour one. Do you know what I'm saying?

Jennifer Pozner: It is so much harder. So, I do this speech and this Q&A in 30 minutes, where I'm supposed to try and help them understand sexism in news and entertainment media and how to fix it with no money. And one of the things that I talked about was how at that time there had not been women moderating any presidential debates in approximately 20 years. And right around that time, there were two teenage girls who had a small petition going around that started to get to pick up steam around we need a woman presidential debate moderator. And the Commission on Presidential Debates basically did the equivalent of patting these girls on the head and was like, "It's so nice that you care about politics, we'll take it under consideration. But also fuck you, we're not going to do anything." And the thing is the Commission on Presidential Debates is in charge of setting up the debates etc. But these media companies choose who they send to them. So they have a role. And one of the things that I said, and it was clear at that time that nothing was going to change. The petition was getting coverage, but the CPD was like, "Eeh." So one of the solutions, the it costs you nothing and actually gets you play

and attention and could make you some money and you can be good for your PR, put Christiane Amanpour up as one of the moderators for a debate about foreign policy. I listed a whole lot of their female political correspondents and foreign correspondents and said have one of them be a debate moderator. Pressure the CPD to use one of them instead of your constant parade of the same white guys who always moderate these debates. And then a few months later, it wasn't Christiane Amanpour who I had hoped it would be because she would have been a more substantive moderator, but they did put forth Candy Crowley and she did become a presidential debate moderator. And I was never able to take public credit for it. [laughter] But I'm pretty sure that that was one of the main reasons because the CPD was so misogynistic and condescending to those teen girls and nothing seemed like it was going to change. And then I have this meeting with them at Turner and then CNN's Candy Crowley becomes a moderator. But think about the fact that up until that point women did not have a say in shaping the conversation that American voters get to listen into about who various candidates are, what their positions are, on what issues, right? If you don't have a debate moderator who cares about issues of racial justice, they're not going to ask any questions about racial justice. Or if they do, they're not going to be nuanced, they're not going to know the right follow up questions to ask those politicians when they spew pablum in response, they're not going to be able to fact check in the moment because they happen to have that knowledge base. If somebody lies in their answer, they won't notice that it's a lie. Same thing with gender justice questions, right? So if you don't have any women moderators for decades of presidential debates, you did have when Ifill had moderated vice presidential debates so people kind of confuse the issue. Let's all just have a moment of silence when Ifill [laughter] but yeah, so I mean, you asked about... This is all because you asked me if things have changed. And things have changed in a lot of structural ways. We have more women in positions of power in news making jobs, editorial jobs, more women who have their own talk shows on cable, and in particular you finally have black women who have talk shows. You had Melissa Harris-Perry's show was an absolute game changer. And though she's no longer on MSNBC, you now have Joy Reid, and you have a lot of other women of color, black women as well as some other women of color who have their own political talk shows. And you have women like Zerlina Maxwell, very proud feminist, racial justice activist or racial justice advocate I want to say, not activist necessarily, having their own stakes in media and helping to shape the narrative. So that has gone a long way in at least bringing some of these issues to the forefront. But the big structural problems, there are still very few women, people of color, high up in the highest roles, the clout positions, CFOs, CEOs, even newsroom managers, editors-in-chief and certainly owners of media conglomerates. So with white cis

wealthy men still being the ones who ultimately make all the decisions top down, there's still a long way to go. But yeah, there's some change, there's been some progress.

Shawna Potter: Okay, so then as average citizens, what should we be on the lookout for? How do we make sure we don't fall for the sexist bullshit? Or what should we be advocating for to make sure that there's more change?

Jennifer Pozner: Okay, this is a fantastic question. Love this question, love you for asking it. [laughter] So, media literacy and media activism are crucial. Misogyny, racism, transphobia in news coverage, does not change without public pressure. So, we have a ton of options now more so than ever before in that we have so many different ways to get past the gatekeepers to get our concerns across. Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, public shaming of companies when they do the wrong thing. But when I say public shaming, I don't mean, let me be very clear, I don't mean to contribute to extra toxicity in the social media sphere. I don't mean, "Hey, CNN, you fuckwads, why are you on your bullshit again?" I don't mean that. They're not going to take that seriously. [Laughs] That just self-marginalises us. The thing is I'm not even saying there's anything wrong with feeling that, I feel that sometimes even as a journalist, right? When I say putting public shame on companies or on advertisers for those media companies, I mean, in a way that they can hear us. So on Tuesday in your broadcast that was hosted by so and so, this guest said this incredibly inaccurate or incredibly homophobic or incredibly misogynistic or incredibly racist thing. Here's why it was inaccurate, here's what you need to do about it. And you can tag the host, you can tag the network, you can tag the PR team for that network. You can organize with friends before you even post it so that everybody-- Things often don't just go viral. There's a lot of online offline strategy that makes a thing take off, right? So, work together with as many people as you can to know that people are going to retweet, people are going to share, people are going to big up your action alert. Maybe it's an action alert where you-- So, you could have a tweet, you could also send out good old fashioned action alerts like I used to do when we only had email and didn't have social media. You can send, whether it's via email or social media, "Hey, we want letters to the editor." Newsrooms still read letters to the editor, they read them more than tweets. When people are motivated to send a physical letter to a newsroom, they consider that every letter that they receive is representative of a significantly large number of people who didn't take the time to write it out themselves and put it in an envelope and send it to them. So, you can find the addresses of the editors-in-chief or of the station manager or whoever it is. And when you send a letter to the editor or you ask people to do so, you can provide-- If you ask people to do letters to the editor, you can provide sample

language. Here's what was wrong with this particular news article, here's what was wrong with this particular broadcast. Here are the inaccuracies. Here's what we want as a follow up or here's what we want as a retraction. Here's the kind of story we need to see more of. If you're marginalizing sources of color, if you're marginalizing women sources, let's say there's an entire story about reproductive justice issues and there are no women and there are no people, women or--

Shawna Potter: Or people with uteruses.

Jennifer Pozner: Yeah, there are no women or transmen who could possibly give birth in that story, there are no sources whose bodies and lives are innately affected by that story, then not only should you be pointing out that that story had a glaring oversight, but you can also provide them with names and contact information. Always check before you give names and contact information with the people you're suggesting, make sure they're up for it. I've done this constantly, and this is a way that I've been able to get people placed in news outlets on a regular basis. Even when people asked me for interviews, if I think that they should be asking a person of color for the interview instead of me, I will tell them, "No, and here's who you should call instead and here's their contact information," but I always run it by those people first.

Shawna Potter: I love this philosophy of not only telling people, "Hey, you fucked up and here's why and here's why it matters." But then saying, "Okay, now here's what you do to fix it." Because in every training I do, sometimes I train the trainer kind of thing and sometimes I'm just doing the training, and my whole philosophy is if I don't make it as easy and as cheap as possible for you to change what you're already doing, you're not going to do it. And so it's in my best interest to make my trainings about safer spaces fun and easy and here's your to do list and here you go, so that it actually gets done.

Jennifer Pozner: Exactly, exactly. But okay, so I started with a thing you can do, but the first thing that you asked was what should we be looking out for? That's a media literacy question, and there are a million ways I can answer it. I will direct you to the fun with media literacy chapter in my book Reality Bites Back, which has a ton of very actionable ways to apply critical thinking skills to the media that we consume. The book is about misogyny and racism in reality TV among other forms of exploitation in reality TV. But the fun with media literacy chapter, although the tools and resources and games that I came up with and activities I came up with in that chapter are pegged to reality TV, they're also very, very relevant to news. So everything

from the ways that parents can have conversations with their kids about how news media or entertainment media make them feel, how particular kinds of representation make them feel, to bingo cards, bingo games that you can play while watching everything from a presidential debate, to a reality show, to a movie.

Shawna Potter: Oh, that's funny. That's fun.

Jennifer Pozner: To sample letters to the editor, but there's also a very useful media literacy deconstruction, a set of media literacy deconstruction questions that I was able to reprint from a group that doesn't exist anymore, but was brilliant, a critical media literacy group called The Media Literacy Project that was based in New Mexico. We just don't fund these programs as much as we need to. So after a couple of decades, they ended up folding a few years ago. Brilliant organization, I hope their archives are still online. If they are, you can get some great stuff there. If not, at least there's the deconstruction questions in the chapter, this media literacy chapter in *Reality Bites Back*. But some of those questions are really important to think about for any piece of media we engage with. But when it comes to coverage of women in politics, or cis women in politics, transpeople in politics, etc, people of color in politics, it can be particularly useful. So things like, who created this message? Who owns this message? Who profits from this message? How would this message change? Whose values are upheld in this message? And whose values are either diminished or completely invisible in this message? How would this message shift? How would it look different? How would it sound different? How would it narratively change if a different set of people were involved in its creation or were involved as sources, as subjects of the message? So when I say the message, I mean whether it's a newspaper article or a broadcast report or a late night comedy show or whatever it is, what is the gender and the race and the class and the sexuality and the gender orientation and the immigration status and the disability or physical ability status of the people involved as subjects, as sources, as shapers, as behind the scenes creators of this message? And would it would it change? What is the frame of the message? Would that frame shift if you had a wider variety of voices from historically marginalized groups helping to frame and shape that message? Another thing we should always think about, and I think this is a very useful thing for thinking about how political coverage plays out, in particular related to women and people of color in political coverage. What is the text of the message versus what is the subtext? So if a piece about AOC and her fancy suits or whatever existed in a bubble and we didn't have this larger, diminishing narrative about women politicians as being only relevant for their looks or their clothing or their marital or not marital status, for their motherhood or not parenthood status, etc, if it existed in a

bubble, then it would just be the text would be the subtext. Here's this person, she has interesting style, let's talk about her style, right? But the subtext, it doesn't exist in a bubble. So the text is we're doing a story on how much money AOC spent on her suit or how pretty AOC is. The subtext is we shouldn't take this woman seriously, she's too pretty, she should be a starlet not a politician. We shouldn't take this woman too seriously because how can she care about public policy if she spends so much money? How can she really care about economic public policy if she spends so much money on a suit? And then the subtext even more so around race, around gender, around class, all the initial dismissing of her because she had been a bartender, the text was is she flighty because she was a bartender? The subtext is working class people don't belong in politics. Working class people are not intellectual, working class people shouldn't get to decide what happens with legislation that affects working class people. [Laughs] So thinking about text versus subtext, that's a really important set of media literacy skills right there. And then also following the money.

Shawna Potter: That's always my number one thing. If I'm wondering what's going on with an issue, I think, "Well, who's profiting?" And that leads me right to the bad guy. [laughter]

Jennifer Pozner: Exactly. Yeah, I will also say that I am taking a brief break to do this podcast from writing my media literacy graphic novel, *Breaking (the) News* which is going to have--

Shawna Potter: Exciting.

Jennifer Pozner: Yeah, it's very exciting. I'm teaming up with an award winning artist, Gideon Kendall. And our book will really be aimed at arming people with the tools they need to apply critical thinking skills to all the media they engage with, whether it's news, whether it's video games, whether it's TikTok videos, and to sort of arm them against propaganda and disinformation, to help them deconstruct various negative and harmful tropes, to help them learn why they should maybe create their own media and how to do that. So yeah, it's gonna be really exciting. Right now at this very moment, I'm working on the chapter on representation issues.

Shawna Potter: When can we expect this graphic novel?

Jennifer Pozner: Oh, that's a tricky question. Pandemic threw a bit of a wrench into my writing schedule. And frankly, I will be honest about this, and to my ability to focus and to my ability to-- So, right now I got an extension, I may need another one, we'll see. I'm not sure. Ideally, this will

be out in 2022. The book is called Breaking (the) News. And it is forthcoming from First Second Books, which is an award winning graphic novel in print.

Shawna Potter: Amazing. We can look forward to that. And, of course, we should all go out and buy your book Reality Bites Back which has so much great information in it. And well, I guess until the next book is out and until people finish Reality Bites Back, how can people find you online to see what you're writing and what you're doing?

Jennifer Pozner: I'm technically still on Twitter, but I never ever, ever check it. About 12 years of rape threats almost every day was enough and I kind of took a step away.

Shawna Potter: It wears you down.

Jennifer Pozner: But I'm there. You know after a while, you know. But I'm still technically there at j e n n p o z n e r. If people want to ask me questions, they can tag me. I will only see it if you tag me because I don't read Twitter anymore. But if you tagged me with specific media questions, I'm happy to answer them as long as there's no creepers. [Laughter] And I'm on Facebook. Feel free to find me on Facebook Jennifer L. Pozner, p o z n e r. Also Jenn Pozner on Instagram, I don't really use it very much either, but yeah, j e n n p o z n e r. I'm all over the place.

Shawna Potter: Jennifer, thank you so much for joining me today.

Jennifer Pozner: You're welcome. Thank you for having me. This was fun. And it was a good excuse to not write for an hour. [Laughs]

Shawna Potter: Woo-hoo, everybody needs a break sometimes.

Jennifer Pozner: Yeah, on a Sunday. [laughter]

Shawna Potter: I love chatting with Jennifer, I love seeing her insightful posts on my Facebook feed. So I recommend following her there. That was great. Big, big, big, big thanks to Jennifer for joining me on this episode. All right, let's start these band interviews with Sue who explains her concerns over the content of the song. All right, the song Her?

Sue: Oh boy. This song is about Joaquin Phoenix falling in love with his phone [laughter]

Shawna Potter: No, this is the one that you and I knew that we wanted to talk to each other about because I remember you had some concerns.

Sue: Well, so again, at first I was like, "What's this song about?" Then when I got the demo with the lyrics, the first is like "but her emails" and I'm like, "Okay, I guess that's what this song is about." [laughter] I felt like I couldn't really understand any of the other lyrics, you know what I'm saying? And I guess that I, I don't know. You and I have had some differences of opinion in the past about how this band should use its platform about specific political things like candidates to vote for and stuff like that, you know? But we talked about it and I feel like we came to an agreement about it. And I was just worried that it was like, "All right, time to diss Hillary Clinton even though it doesn't matter anymore." [Laughs] Or let's stan Hillary Clinton even though..." That's weird, we wouldn't do that, you know? I guess that I was very pleasantly surprised when I found out the actual lyrics and I didn't-- Actually, I do remember you asking me if I knew any like-- I remember I was like, "Oh, Geraldine Ferraro, don't forget her."

Shawna Potter: Yeah, I wanted to make sure I didn't forget. You know Wikipedia looking up random stuff online, you never know if there's going to be like a glaring omission. And so yeah, I just wanted someone else to kind of double check the names that I had just in case.

Sue: [Laughs] Honestly, I am a person that is still triggered every time I see Sarah Palin's name. I don't know what... Someday I'll examine why she was the person that I could not even talk about without flying into a rage. I'll get there someday, you know what I mean? But I feel like she probably like, I don't know. I don't know that much about her. I watched that one HBO documentary Game Changer or whatever like 10 times because she was sad in it, and I wanted to see her be sad. And that's a very un-Sue-like thing to do.

Shawna Potter: Yeah, I'd say so.

Sue: I don't like it when people are sad. And it's an instinct in me that only the people that I really hate get. And I don't know... That's all. We mentioned her, I still got a little flare up of that feeling when I saw her name on that lyric sheet, you know? So, I don't know, it's weird. I don't think it's super important for me to delve into that part of my psyche right now, you know?
[laughter]

Shawna Potter: There's a lot of stuff going on. Her?

Brooks Harlan: So, Her? is a song that I like a lot. Her? you probably remember Her? was definitely around in the batch of songs that we were looking at for Capture the Flag. And I remember you just being like, "I think this is really cool, but what in the world would I do with this song vocally?"

Shawna Potter: I had no idea, I had no idea vocally what to do.

Brooks Harlan: So, I think it was pretty much demoed exactly as it is as it made to the record. The length of sections may have been adjusted, but the order of the sections and the way they go I think was pretty much set for years. So I always liked it. I always wanted to write a song in 5/4 that reminded me of the first song of the Drive Like Jehu Yank Crime record because I love the way that song feels and it's in 5/4. So, I wanted to write something that was cool like that. And I think I came up with this riff like just messing around with an amp one day, just trying to come up with something discordant but also was quirky. And so like the riff is literally just sliding parallel. Let's see, what you what do you call it? It's like a diminished ninth. So it's like a ninth, but it's a half step flat. So, it's essentially a half step apart but in octaves. I'm not describing that very well. But so that's why it has that weird, discordant sound, and it's really fun to play. Then the B section is sort of like me trying to write a Voivod song.

Shawna Potter: Did you succeed?

Brooks Harlan: Well, I think it sounds like a Voivod part, but I think Dave approached it a little more like a fusion drummer would approach it and less like a prog drummer. And that's good because I think it makes the part sound better and more musical.

Shawna Potter: I think that's something that we talk about a lot or think about when we're writing songs, that if any one person's part sounds too much like something else that's out there, we tend to kind of not worry about it too much knowing that well once Dave on drums comes in, that's going to change it. Once my vocals come in, that'll change it. And I think that that is always kind of really fun. It's almost like a secret sometimes to the average music listener. It's a secret that we have a Voivod part that they might not even hear it because they hear his drums and my vocals.

Brooks Harlan: Yeah.

Shawna Potter: But now they know, it's not a secret because we just told them.

Brooks Harlan: Yeah. Well, yeah. I mean, I don't think anybody could ever claim to write 100% original music, so that's fine. Yeah, I like when you finally came up with the idea for the vocals over this song, I think you had the idea for writing lyrics like this, and we had two songs in mind about what you could try it over. And this one just because it's in five, it's like da da da, da da da, da, da, da, da, da da. And it just worked, and it sounded cool, and it was kind of a circus lupus phrasing and so it just worked for me, you know.

Shawna Potter: Yeah, and obviously the first line I had was but her emails, and then that's all I needed to know to know how the rest of song was going to go. I was like I could figure out all the other words anytime. [laughs]

Brooks Harlan: Also, I'm proud of the fact that it starts in 5/4 and never changes meter the entire song. So sometimes people will use the odd meter as an effect in one place and then settle down into 4/4 for the chorus or something, but this stays in 5/4 through the whole-- Oh, no, actually there's one measure that's in 4/4 for some reason. Let me see if I can find it in the music. [Laughs] Yeah, it switches at the end of the A part da na na na na, it goes da na na na na na na na na, so that's in 4/4 and then again it goes back into five do do do, do, do do do.

Shawna Potter: And then that never happens again, right?

Brooks Harlan: Never happens again. I don't know why I could have done that.

Shawna Potter: [Laughs] Well, then you don't get to claim it.

Brooks Harlan: Forget what I said. Forget what I said.

Shawna Potter: Okay, delete.

Brooks Harlan: I don't know why I did that, but it's just almost like a trick like, "Oh." You might think oh, it's starting to settle down and get back into normal, and then it kicks it back in with a five thing.

Shawna Potter: Anything else about Her? before I move on?

Brooks Harlan: I don't think so. I mean, it's kind of self-explanatory.

Shawna Potter: What about the song Her?

Jenarchy: It is like her emails, her this, her that? Yeah, I like it. Is that the one that has the breakdown at the end that's like gets a little spastic?

Shawna Potter: Yes.

Jenarchy: Yeah. I'm like did that-- I think that wasn't the name of it for a while, right? When it was in the studio we were calling it something else?

Shawna Potter: I don't know. Well, the songs always have like a fake weird title for a long time until the lyrics are like set in stone. And sometimes even then I'm still having to decide, "Well, what I want to call this song?"

Jenarchy: Something about wolf like a metal wolf or--

Shawna Potter: Yeah, there's a lot of songs where we were like wolf number two or whatever. [laughs]

Jenarchy: It was a play on laser wolf mixed with something that was about it being hard. So that's one of the songs that I look forward to meeting it in the live setting because it was like all about like, "Oh gosh, it's really hard. Can we play it? Oh, are we gonna nail this part?" It was a complicated music piece. And now I feel like we're going to remit it as what it's about, her emails and it's going to take on a whole different, yeah, a whole different identity of being like a rad feminist anthem song.

Shawna Potter: [Laughs] You spoke about Her? a little bit, but anything else about that?

Dave Cavalier: Her?'s the shit. [Laughs] Her? is just like the, I can't wait to play that song live. It's so weird and crazy. I feel like I really kind of pushed for there to be a, it's not a drum solo, but it's like there's a drum moment at the end of Her?

Shawna Potter: Oh, a drum moment?

Dave Cavalier: There's a drum moment. There's a moment where things shift and we're opening it up for drums to happen. And this is like the type of moment that I knew this band could have but had to be done in the right way. Because we are not a band where it's like time for the drum solo and we go like, bum bum bum tu tu tu tu tu tu. It's like that kind of shit's not going to happen in this and it shouldn't.

Shawna Potter: Okay. I was like, "Well, maybe I don't know."

Dave Cavalier: I mean, yeah, we'll see when we get back and we're all so deprived from never playing live, we're like, "Let's just have a drum solo."

Shawna Potter: We're going to think everything sounds really great, and no one will like it.

Dave Cavalier: Yeah, yeah, context. But there's a drum moment where Brooks again had this idea for how these chords were going to work at the end. And they were all happening quickly and very close to one another. And my suggestion was just to spread them out a little bit basically. Play this chord and then just let it ring for a couple bars and then go to your next one, as opposed to like cut, cut, cut, you know? And that just opens it up. And it's all in five also, which like keeps it interesting. So it's all in 5/4. And there's a drum moment, and I think it's great. I think it's beautiful. You're just like saying names of female politicians at the end. So it's not entirely just this like drum focused like Fucking Phil Collins, right? It's like we're still being musical, we're still playing the song. But it really just opened up in this cool way. And yeah, although the subject matter of the song is so right on. You're talking but her emails, but her everything, but her laugh, but her smile, but her credentials, but her, you know, will always find something wrong with the female candidate. Like let's talk about Kamala Harris and how like at the vice presidential debate people were like, "Oh, well, she was pulling her punches because she didn't want to come across as an angry black woman." It's like there is nothing that she could have done to be received in a positive light like, "Oh, so she wasn't being an angry black woman in your eyes. So she was pulling her punches, right? But if she wasn't pulling her punches and she was more aggressive, you would have called her an angry black woman. So what is she supposed to do in order to come off as a vice president to you?" You will always find something wrong with a woman's performance in politics. That being said, I was going to say but people really seem to love AOC, but like, you know--

Shawna Potter: She's hyper critiqued though.

Dave Cavalier: --people hate AOC. Exactly, yeah. The lefties and liberals are all really rallying behind her which is awesome to see. But yeah, like you said hyper critiqued like everything. Her clothing, the way she speaks, people she surrounds herself with, the fact that she is a huge Bernie supporter, it's like they will find anything to tear her down.

Shawna Potter: Yeah.

Dave Cavalier: And so here's my prediction.

Shawna Potter: Okay, lay it on me.

Dave Cavalier: I think. So let's say, Biden has just won, and let's say that everything goes smoothly, and he's the president come inauguration. He will have these four years, and then he'll run again to try to do the next four years. And so that's eight years later at this point, and then it's time for somebody new. And then here she is, now it's AOC time, right? And she will have been in politics for like 10 years, so people won't be able to say that she's inexperienced or whatever other bullshit they want to try to say about her. And you have AOC and you have Kamala at this point, and now maybe you have a Kamala-AOC ticket which in my mind is like undefeatable a decade from now.

Shawna Potter: Oh, okay.

Dave Cavalier: This is what I think would happen.

Shawna Potter: And you don't think Joe Biden will die before a second term or during a second term. [laughs]

Dave Cavalier: I'm not planning on him dying. But if he did, then you got Kamala and it's great.

Shawna Potter: Yeah. [Laughs] But luckily for both of us, we're not in in the game of [laughter] predicting what fucking asshole is going to be in power telling us what to do.

Dave Cavalier: Yeah. It is funny that they're so old, Trump and Biden. They're older than Obama.

Shawna Potter: Funny is a word for it. [laughs]

Dave Cavalier: Yeah. They're older than Obama, they're older than George Bush who was president for eight years. They're old, they're really fucking old.

Shawna Potter: Yeah, no, thanks.

Dave Cavalier: And white and men, obviously. But old, yeah.

Shawna Potter: Yeah, I mean, just thinking about my grandparents, I'm just like, "How do they have the energy to do this job? How could they possibly take on the stress of running this country?" It just seems like it's a bad idea. [laughter] I don't care how healthy you are, it's just like let someone else have a turn. But, here we are.

Dave Cavalier: Here we are.

[music]

Shawna Potter: All right. Look, if my grandparents ever hear this podcast, which they won't, let me just say I love you so much but you should not run for president in 2024. That's all I'm saying. Stay home, relax. You're retired, enjoy it. I love you. Keep listening to hear the song Her? in full finally for once all the way through. [Laughs] The album Wonderful Hell isn't really available on vinyl right now because the vinyl plants are so backed up, so grab it on Bandcamp or stream it in all the usual places.

[music]

Big thanks to Brooks Harlan for chopping up today's song to create the podcast normal theme song. What song did he put behind this part right here right now that you're hearing? Did you guess it right? Do you get a high five? I hope so. If you'd like to support this podcast and this band, stop what you're doing and share, subscribe, and review this podcast. It's free and it helps. You can buy WOW merch from B9store.com, shirtkiller.com and in the UK and Europe through [Cortex Records](http://CortexRecords.com) and LHPmerch.com. Why don't you buy my book *Making Spaces Safer* from AKPress.org or, of course, your local independent bookstore? It's available in Spanish for more Orciny Press and I'm always on the lookout for translations in other languages. So if you know of a local publisher that can help out in your country, please put us in contact. If you need a new overdrive or boost pedal designed and built by Brooks himself in our shop, head to bigcrunchamprepair.com. And join my patreon to help me keep this podcast going. You can join in at the Seeds level at only \$1 a month, or donate more for bonus stuff like extra episodes, behind the scenes info, and Rosie slideshows and that bonus interview I was talking about with Jennifer Pozner as promised. You can pay monthly or annually for a discount. So thanks in advance for doing that. And you know what? Big thanks to Amy, Majda, Mario, Anna, Anthony R., Anthony C., Dylan and Dominic for helping to calm me down with wine and food at the airport recently, when I was flying to Chicago to present at a conference and I was scared to see

so many exposed noses from my fellow travelers. I didn't like it, okay? I made it through I think without getting sick. But it is still scary out there, so vax up, mask up, and cheers.

HER?

But her emails
But her makeup
But her health
But her age
But her voice
But her hair
But her clothes
But her face

But her school
But her thoughts
But her ankles
But her laugh
But her children
But her husband
But her name
But her past

Her credentials
Her experience
And her lattes
Are they soy?
But her service
But her plans
But her dancing
But her joy

Her?

But her crows feet
But her laugh lines
But her nails
But her hose
We don't care
She's a woman
She just can't
Run the show

But her policies

Her naivety
But her drive
But her veins
But her cunt
But her breasts
But her mouth
But her brain

Her.
Enough. Its time

Elizabeth Warren
Amy Klobuchar
Kamala Harris
Kirsten Gillibrand
Tulsi Gabbard
Carly Fiorina
Hillary Clinton
Jill Stein
Michele Bachmann
Cynthia McKinney
Sarah Palin
Carol Moseley Braun
Winona LaDuke
Heather Anne Harder
Elvena Lloyd-Duffie
Lenora Fulani
Patricia S. Schroeder
Geraldine Ferraro
Sonia Johnson
Margaret Wright
Ellen McCormack
Patsy Mink
Linda Jenness
Shirley Chisholm
Fay T. Carpenter Swain
Margaret Smith
Belva Lockwood
Victoria Woodhull