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Real Housewives Of New Jersey: As Fake As The "Buh-Bies"

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The Real Housewives of New Jersey premieres tonight, and critics say it's the most "real" of Bravo's *Real Housewives* series... if you believe everything on *The Sopranos* was real.

We've already seen the half-hour [preview](#), and the hour-long series premiere runs tonight at 11 p.m. (10 p.m. Central) after the *Real Housewives of New York* reunion special. (It will move to its regular 10 p.m.

time slot next week.)

This is Bravo's fourth *Real Housewives* series, and for the first time, most of the cast are related to one another somehow. The show features Dina and Caroline Manzo, sisters who are married to brothers Albert and Tommie Manzo. The family runs the Brownstone, a catering business/wedding factory in Paterson. (Though it's not mentioned on the show, several reviews note that the 350-pound body of the brothers' father, Albert (Tiny) Manzo, was found riddled with gunshot wounds in the trunk of his car in 1983.)

The rest of the cast includes Jacqueline Laurita, a former Las Vegas cosmetologist, who is married to Dina and Caroline's brother. Teresa Giudice is a friend of the Manzos, but not related. She has three young daughters and her husband owns a construction business. Jacqueline's friend Danielle is the outsider on the show. The divorcee is not a relative of

the Manzos or even Italian-American.

Some reviewers say the women's family ties make their fights seem more believable compared to the series set in Orange County, Atlanta, and New York. The show relies heavily on *Sopranos*-influenced stereotypes, even featuring signs from the New Jersey Turnpike in the opening credits, even though these women actually live 20 miles away. Oddly, some reviewers argue that the show is more "real" than previous seasons, precisely *because* the women live like characters on the aforementioned HBO series. But let's be clear: The idea that any of these programs reflect the lives of most "real housewives" just proves you've been watching too much TV. Below, the reviews:

The New York Times

The New Jersey housewives are more real and more riveting than their predecessors because, well, they are from New Jersey, and also because they so closely mirror the make-believe characters in *The Sopranos*. The best reality shows look like fiction.

This may be the most preposterous *Housewives* edition, but it's also the most believable. The suffocating family ties are an improvement over past incarnations, when producers often threw together women who were not really that close and whose frictions often seemed forced. These women actually do know one another well, talk every day and raise their children together (badly). The camera crew seems to be eavesdropping, rather than masterminding. Some of the women seem to have a sense of humor, or at least to enjoy the joke that is their lives on film.

The Boston Globe

It's also totally believable, from start to finish: For all of its absurdity, this series feels more "real" than other popular docudramas such as MTV's *The Hills*, its characters completely authentic. Some reality stars seem completely aware of the images they're building; every conversation feels calibrated to serve some future career in fashion, publishing, or reality TV. The varied *Housewives*, by contrast, have built their lives and amassed their fortunes already. Now that they're fully realized, they feel they deserve recognition.

Their lack of self-awareness is intoxicating; it makes the premiere the most engrossing hour of pure TV escapism I've seen in a very long time. I watched nearly every moment with jaw agape: Don't they hear themselves saying things like, "My whole house has nothing but marble, granite, and onyx"? Don't they know that hating rich people is a quintessential TV experience? Do they care? They don't care! It's fabulous!

Compared to its predecessors in Orange County, Calif., Atlanta, and New York, *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* is the apotheosis of conspicuous consumption. Set in a town where every house has a hangar-size foyer with a massive chandelier, it follows what might be the closest to a group of true housewives the series has seen. "I think I'm one of the last generations to have the old-school attitude," one character, Caroline, says. "I live for my children, I live for my husband, My career is secondary."

Slate

When I say that *The RH of NJ* is the most synthetic installment of the show yet produced, I refer not to the cast members' investment in plastic surgery; the specimens of Orange County bionic science edge them out on that count. Rather, the drama queening in these parts is much too blatantly contrived. In the premiere, you can see the whole season's worth of conflict lurking in the foreshadows. The catfights get hyped as if arranged by Don King. The five housewives-raring to depict themselves as the heads of the Five Families-are terribly aware of the requirements of reality stardom.

The Los Angeles Times

Maybe it's just that the women, two of them sisters married to brothers, their sister-in-law, their nice friend and New Jersey's own Cruella de Vil are actually recognizable as human beings, even with their wads of cash and strange relationship with eyeliner ...

The Real Housewives of New Jersey promises to do what the rest of the series in the franchise never really did: show upper-middle-class families living something that approximates their actual lives. Sure, there's rigging going on. In the pilot, the dreaded Danielle makes a scene over not being invited on some "girls night out" that these shows are so fond of staging. But these gals seem less interested in creating TV personas or proving themselves the "hottest Housewife" than in reacting the way they might actually react if what was happening were real.

The Washington Post

Real Housewives of New Jersey is a rhapsody in beige, a fascinating journey through a world of \$1.5 million houses, minimum price — although the full effect of the nation's economic collapse seems not yet to have been felt, in the premiere. The women keep themselves in shape, most of them, but their major exercise is acquiring stuff. And always the homes must get bigger, bigger, bigger ...

The word "housewife" fell out of favor with the first flush of feminism, but these women use it without complaint to describe themselves. Besides, the term implies being married to a house, and for some of the women, that seems clearly to be the case. Meanwhile, it seems from the very first chapter that — unless later episodes get into the recession — a sequel is in order, a chance to see whether these women escape economic calamity or succumb. "I don't want to struggle with money," Danielle says. Who does? If only the choice were ours to make.

The Philadelphia Inquirer

These creatures may be so desperate for attention they'll do almost anything, but they probably aren't *that* bad. So much of the show is more obviously fake than Dina's parking scene, right before she drives by the exclusive-looking High Mountain Golf Club, which actually is open weekdays to anybody with \$74 and a shirt with a collar (\$86 on weekends). Don't count on any figures you hear: Though there are lots of multimillion-dollar houses in Bergen County's Franklin Lakes, home base for our "real" housewives, prices start at about \$250,000, not the \$1.5 million Dina mentions.

And if Teresa Giudice really did pay cash for the \$120,360 in goods she is supposedly shown buying in a few minutes at the furniture store, the more than two-and-a-half pounds of hundred-dollar bills would have made an ugly bulge in her designer handbag. Not to mention how it would have drawn IRS attention to her husband's construction company.

Variety (<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117940218.html?categoryid=32&cs=1>)

One of the moms is trying to turn her moppet daughter into a pint-sized actress/model, injecting an element of child pageantry a la *Showbiz Moms and Dads*, as a beaming mom sings along in her seat while the kid struts onstage. Another housewife has a twentysomething son whose goal in life—wait for it — is to open a strip club ...

These are, in short, a pretty loathsome array of deliciously shallow stereotypes, almost feeling stitched together from pieces of other programs. And one suspects while the producers sifted through footage in assembling the premiere, the smiles in the editing bay were even bigger than those haircuts.

The New York Daily News

(http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv/2009/05/11/2009-05-11_the_real_housewives_of_new_jersey_are_fake_but_impressive.html)

To confirm the obvious up front, "The Real Housewives of New Jersey" owes way more to the likes of *Melrose Place* and *Dirty Sexy Money* than it does to any actual New Jersey housewives.

If there's such a thing as a typical New Jersey housewife, she's a soccer mom who barely has time to brush her teeth in the morning. She's not a woman whose BlackBerry probably tells her that her first appointment of the day is phone sex at 3:30.

But then, the *Real Housewives* series has never been about "real" anything. The cast for a show like this, by definition, consists of exhibitionists.

***Earlier: [The Real Housewives Of New Jersey: Bronzer, "Buh-bies," And... Blow Jobs?](#)
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