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OUR TOWNS

## New Jersey, as Real as It Gets

By [PETER APPLEBOME](#)

“Everybody loves me — babies, dogs, hot girls, cougars. I just have unbelievable mass appeal,” says Mike Sorrentino, a.k.a. “the Situation” on [MTV](#)’s off-the-charts dopey new reality show, “Jersey Shore.”

True, not everyone loves the show, which was first shown a week ago and already is basking in the welcome glow of controversy and copious free publicity. Italian-American groups say it demeans Italians. Daniel Cappello, executive director of the Jersey Shore Convention and Visitors Bureau, says that it misrepresents life at the Jersey Shore, and that people should know the place isn’t all over-gelled, over-sexed self-described Guidos and Guidettes.

But, like “the Situation” (the nickname stems from his killer abs), the show seems to have enough mass appeal to further cement one of the defining truisms of modern culture: In a reality TV world, no place is deemed more real than New Jersey. Whether it’s “The Real Housewives of New Jersey” or “Jersey Shore,” the fictional mob reality of “The Sopranos” or the real-folks rock of [Bruce Springsteen](#), if you want real reality, not silly poseurs sneaking into the White House, there’s no better place to find it than New Jersey.

“New Jersey is reality central,” said Robert Galinsky, who teaches would-be reality performers at his New York Reality TV School. “If you went through all the casts of people on reality shows, you would find more people from New Jersey than any other area, except maybe L.A. People from New Jersey run the gamut. They’re eccentric, they’re from rich areas and poor areas. Maybe it’s because they’ve got that chip on their shoulder because of New York, but they always put out that little extra effort.”

“Jersey Shore” follows a cast of eight studious young quantum physics scholars — wait, wrong show. It features a cast of eight party-hearty twentysomethings (only two actually from New Jersey) during a contemplative summer at the beach.

Their interests include hair gel, abs, tans, breasts, sex, hair gel, lip gloss, hot tubs, breasts, lip gloss, abs, hot tubs, breasts and hair gel.

They express a lot of big thoughts:

“She came in with two garbage bags. I thought that was ghetto and weird. Like, you couldn’t find a suitcase?”

“I have a tanning bed in my house. That’s how serious I am about being a Guido and living up to that lifestyle.”

“No way I’m going to Jersey without my hair gel.”

“I want to marry a Guido. My ultimate dream is to move to Jersey, find a nice, juiced, hot, tanned guy and live my life.”

“I am like a praying mantis. After I have sex with a guy I want to rip their heads off.”

“How do you go in the hot tub in a thong and a bra? Wear a thong bikini, that’s a little bit more classier, if you’re going to wear anything at all.”

“I feel this job is beneath me. I’m a bartender. I do, like, you know, great things.”

Mr. Sorrentino, 27, who grew up in Manalapan and is assistant manager at a fitness club, said the cast members were all proud of their heritage, but didn’t claim to represent all Italians or all life at the Jersey Shore.

Mr. Cappello is quick to point out that in 2008, Monmouth and Ocean Counties had more than nine million visitors, who spent more than \$4.8 billion — presumably not all on booze and hair gel. There are the swells at places like Deal and Bay Head, families at Long Beach Island and Point Pleasant, and single young professionals at Belmar, in addition to the somewhat more raucous scene at Seaside Heights.

You can say it’s reality TV, not reality. And Americans don’t need to go to reality TV school to learn how to act on television. We’re all waiting for our close-up. As Mr. Galinsky said: “We’ve been home schooled for years. Every American has a master’s degree in being a television personality because we’ve been watching TV for so long.”

Still, when in the perhaps not-so-distant future scholars try to figure out just how a great culture fell so far, so fast, they won’t have to look too hard. They can just pop in a DVD or download this happy train wreck or others like it, sloppy slivers of American reality, and it will be right there in front of their eyes.