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**It's time for MTV to move past the 'Jersey Shore' duplicates and strive for something more meaningful**

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The majority of [MTV](http://variety.com/t/mtv/)’s recent batch of docuseries could be compared to a questionable vat of jungle juice — with a mixture of cheap booze, sugary mixer and only disposable Solo cups to dole out the concoction, this brand of reality TV may provide a few amusing, blurry moments, but the hangover that follows is often rife with headaches and a nasty aftertaste that you find yourself desperately trying to brush away.

I’ve always avoided jungle juice at parties, but when it comes to MTV, I often find myself with a red plastic cup, sampling the brew. I am the intersection of two circles on the viewership Venn diagram — one labeled “TV journalist,” the other “targeted demographic” –  so when MTV rolled out several pilots for unscripted series over the last few months, I chugged some water, grabbed some aspirin, and began watching, hoping for the best.

“[Big Tips Texas](http://variety.com/t/big-tips-texas/)” debuted on Oct. 9, and centers on a group of young women working at a bar known as “Redneck Heaven” while pursuing their broader professional goals. (Our TV critic Brian Lowry [compared the program to 2000′s feature film “Coyote Ugly,”](http://variety.com/2013/tv/reviews/tv-review-big-tips-texas-1200686016/) a personal fave.) While the sizzle reel was intriguing, episodes one and two of the docuseries were painful to watch. Whatever empowering moments the series could have displayed of these girls capitalizing on their feminine sexuality for a bigger picture dream is mostly lost thanks to a slew of blackout-drunk arguments, fist fights and hookups.

What’s more, the program appears blatantly over-produced, as the women recite what seem to be scripted lines during green screen interviews. Several members of the reality biz have also shaken their heads at the crass title of the show, dubbing it cringe-worthy.

Then, there is “[Scrubbing In](http://variety.com/t/scrubbing-in/),” another promising concept that premiered Oct. 24. The show follows young nurses as they navigate their lives helping patients in hospitals during the day, and dealing with social drama and relationships at night. Given the continued interest in sudsy medical dramas in the scripted space, a reality version of “Scrubs” or “Grey’s Anatomy” seemed like a great find. However, the show struggles tonally, as scenes of the nurses working with sick patients are largely overshadowed by pointless, aggressive arguments between cast members.

The American Nurses Association felt the need to issue a statement regarding the show, saying in a letter to MTV brass that the org wants to “express disappointment in the depiction of nurses in the new reality show, ‘Scrubbing In’…Negative images reinforce sexist and inaccurate nurse stereotypes…Even more importantly, such negative portrayals erode the highly valued trust of patients and consumers who need the expertise of nurses in their respective health care situations.”

I touched upon the rampant nature of drunken arguments, violence and hookups on MTV programs in [an August article](http://variety.com/2013/tv/news/violence-on-mtv-why-did-producers-stop-intervening-on-the-real-world-franchise-opinion-1200574891/) about the devolution of venerable series “The Real World.” As stated in the story, drinking, casual sex and fights were included in many reality shows in the 2000s, but programs like “Jersey Shore” demonstrated an audience appetite for that brand of reality fare, and consequently upped the “noise factor” of shows greenlit in “Shore’s” wake.

“The louder, the better” seemed to be the protocol in MTV’s development offices after “Shore,” as “Buckwild” debuted on the net’s lineup earlier this year and intelligent, probing programs like “True Life” faded into obscurity. 2013′s “The Real World: Portland” rolled out after “Buckwild,” and was one of the most brutal, boozey iterations of the franchise yet.

Loud shows like “Jersey Shore,” “Buckwild” and “Real World” have shaped MTV’s unofficial brand in the public eye, along with programs like “16 and Pregnant” and “Teen Mom,” both of which now serve primarily as tabloid fodder. “Shore,” “Buckwild,” “16 and Pregnant” along with “Scrubbing In” have all received harsh comments from organizations decrying the shows’ content, as well, thereby propelling them even more into the media spotlight.

The network that was once known for offering microcosmic examples of larger cultural issues — including AIDS, gay marriage, political and economic differences — now pumps out docuseries soaked in eighty proof in what at times reads as a reactionary development decision to those yakked-about fights on “Real World,” and boozed-up “smush room” moments on “Shore.”

And yet, just when I am about to lose hope in unscripted programming at the Viacom cabler, I watch the pilot for “[Generation Cryo](http://variety.com/t/generation-cryo/)” and find a diamond in the fratty rough.

“Generation Cryo,” which is set to premiere on Nov. 25, follows 17-year-old Breanna, who was fathered by a sperm donor. Throughout the course of the six-part docuseries, Breanna meets her 15-some-odd half-siblings in her quest to find her biological father, encountering a host of different perspectives on sperm donor dads along the way.

In “Cryo,” the stakes are real, and deeply emotional. In one scene (small spoiler alert), a father breaks down in tears as he expresses concern over his son meeting his sperm donor dad, and how that could potentially erode his position as the patriarchal figure in the boy’s life. A half-sibling of Breanna quietly mentions that he’s been called a “bastard” on social media, since he’s a sperm donor kid.

Free of explicit alcohol use, hookups and fights, “Cryo” is both intriguing and incredibly relevant, as another generation of sperm-donation children come of age, now with an online sibling registry at their fingertips. With “Cryo,” MTV is returning to its ability to tap into a cultural zeitgeist as it did with “Catfish,” while exploring the amorphous image of the nuclear American family.

In short, it’s MTV getting back to what MTV does best — offer young viewers a show that provokes thought about current issues, while still offering entertainment.

Another strong entry to MTV’s lineup is “Wait ‘Til Next Year,” a docu-dramedy that follows one high school’s football and cheerleading teams as they try to win just one football game in the midst of a record-breaking losing streak. The show debuted on MTV on air last week, but the net has also offered all episodes for streaming upfront on the downloadable MTV app.

While the show does cover some partying and doomed relationships, it is ultimately about the resilience of these teams, and demonstrates a great deal of heart. Among many featured cast members, we meet Cody, a member of the football team whose mother is addicted to drugs; Dakota, another football player, who hopes to lose a significant amount of weight; Ed, an athlete struggling with a criminal past; Danielle and Yanni, two girls who have found themselves in a relationship with one another and attempt to sort out their sexuality with their families. “Wait ‘Til Next Year’s” balance between its soapy high school drama and its heartfelt moments of resilience makes the show a standout.

“Wait ‘Til Next Year,” and especially “Generation Cryo,” are proof that MTV is still able to convey relevant issues to a young generation in an authentic, thoughtful way. The task of programming like this, however, has become harder in recent years: developing and producing docuseries that are both cutting edge and genuine is difficult given how saturated the unscripted landscape is (with so many cable nets entering the fray as buyers), and how a show exploring, say, a young gay relationship or teen pregnancy isn’t as eye opening and provocative as it was in the ’90s.

It has become challenging to find new characters, new subcultures, and forward-thinking concepts as producers scour American towns looking for the next reality hit. And, often, it seems easier to cast abrasive twenty-somethings, place them in a house with alcohol, and yell “action!”, hoping that, with enough conflict, the project will rate well.

But MTV is better than that. Compelling reality TV — what MTV built itself on after music videos exited the majority of its lineup — is still out there. Yes, it is difficult to find a cast of genuine characters with of-the-moment storylines who aren’t desperately seeking fame. Yes, it is difficult to produce such a show, with longer production periods inflating budgets. And yes, these series may not land on “The Soup” or morning news programs with clips of their outrageous antics, thereby boosting viewership as audience members rubberneck the hot messes.

There is no moral imperative for MTV to shirk away from its loud, crass reality programming. But should the net want to regain its esteem as a provider of probing nonfiction content, the key will be to order more shows in the vein of “Cryo,” and allow the boozey violence to find closure on its lineup. The time has come for MTV to pull up a chair to the quiet, sober kid at the party and, while others drunkenly shout and stumble around in the background, listen to what they have to say — in spite of the noise, it’s the soft spoken ones who now speak the loudest.