

Mapping Multimodal Literacy Practices through Mediated Discourse Analysis: Identity Revision in *What Not To Wear*

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“I don’t dress that bad!” –Misti, targeted for a fashion makeover on the television show, *What Not to Wear*

In the last two decades, definitions of literacy have stretched to accommodate fast-paced technological innovations and mushrooming media products. The notion of literacy as a fixed set of skills for reading and writing print has expanded to accommodate the multimodal literacies necessary to recognize, evaluate, and produce messages with a daunting variety of consumer goods and increasingly intuitive tools. Reading a multimodal text involves coordinating not just written and spoken language but also actions, images, and materials: turning the pages of a book, aiming a cursor and clicking a mouse, toggling a remote’s buttons to channel surf, or even navigating the maze of branded merchandise in a shopping mall.

Methods for data collection and analysis must also expand in order to research the visual and embodied literacies suggested by New Literacy Studies (New London Group, 1996; Gee, 1996) and critical sociocultural perspectives (Moje & Lewis, 2007). Mediated discourse analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) is an analytic approach relatively new to literacy research that provides a way of examining multimodal practices with the objects and artifacts valued by a community. Mediated discourse analysis (MDA) is similar to critical discourse analysis, sharing an interest in critical and close linguistic examinations of texts and situated ways of being and doing (Gee, 1999). While critical discourse analysis focuses on primarily verbal interactions to reveal how language constitutes power relations among identities, meanings, and global discourses, MDA focuses on mediated actions—physical actions with material objects—to understand how nonverbal actions in everyday, taken-for-granted practices contribute to identity-building and to reveal power relations among social practices that operate according to local and global histories: how physical mediated actions interact to constitute social practices, how social practices interact in local contexts, and how nexus of locally-valued practices build identities and meanings situated in power relations circulate through global discourses.

Physical actions with objects can indicate how literacy users are—or are not—taking up expectations for literacy tool use and performing literate identities (readers, writers, designers, players, etc.). MDA situates children’s actions with learning materials and social interactions with each other within histories of material tool use and histories of social practices—histories that are co-constructed through daily participation in the life of the classroom. Recursive processes of data collection and analysis in MDA provide a systematic way to meaningfully filter large data sets that are a natural outcome of researching the wonderful messiness of classroom interaction, and to look closely at the way that even the smallest things—glancing at another’s paper, holding a pencil just-so—constitute literacy performances that powerfully influence children’s opportunities to learn and participate in classrooms. For example, teachers may closely observe students during literacy

activities to identify learners for remedial teaching, teaching that often involves practicing particular mediated actions until they become automatic (e.g., touching words on a page, printing on a line). One goal of this assessment/teaching relationship is to revise practices to produce more credible student performances of literate identities.

In this conceptual paper, I examine the exaggerated revision critique in one “makeover” television program to illustrate how MDA’s filtering process pinpoints practices of identity revision that are so essential to makeovers, whether in reality television episodes or in schooling. To suggest MDA’s potential for revealing the identity-building accomplished through physical activity with objects, I analyze multimodal practices in one television episode of *What Not to Wear*, concluding with connections to familiar embodied literacy practices in classrooms. The dramatized and edited excerpts provide vivid examples of gatekeeping that make this fashion makeover program an apt choice for illustrating how the MDA process uncovers identity-building activity. However, it should be noted that the show presents an overly-tidy fictional text with submissive subjects and happy endings that might otherwise be challenged through opportunities for viewing lived practices, unedited video footage, member checking, etc.

WHAT NOT TO WEAR: AN EMBODIED TEXT

What Not to Wear (WNTW) is a reality television series that airs on The Learning Channel cable network. Each episode follows a predictable before-and-after sequence as “fashion experts” critique and correct the “style” (i.e., wardrobe, haircut, and cosmetics) of a surprised subject, usually a woman, who has been identified as unfashionable by her relatives and friends. Each subject is transformed from “worst dressed” to “best dressed” in the course of one episode as the woman’s wardrobe is transformed through a formulaic sequence: initial confrontation, explicit instruction in proper dressing, independent and guided shopping practice, hair and makeup demonstrations, and final product/performance evaluation by experts. The following descriptions accompany one set of “before” and “after” photographs on the show’s web site:

Before: The caption below a picture of a middle-aged woman wearing a tan suede jacket and blue flowered knit pants reads: “Laurie is a 39-year-old...who works at a landscaping company. She wears baggy clothes that make her look old and disheveled. Laurie also has a mullet she hasn’t cut in 15 years” (The Learning Channel, 2008).

After: In this photo, the same woman with freshly bobbed hair, wears gray wool slacks, a black silk shirt, pale blue cardigan, and a black scarf tied in a bow at her neck. The caption reads, “Clinton and Stacy show Laurie that you can be comfortable and still fashionable. For a casual, daytime look, they suggest tailored slacks and jeans that will show off the figure she’s been hiding for so long” (The Learning Channel, 2008).

Through a sequence of lessons in each episode, the targeted person learns to first self-identify as a poor dresser and then to revise this identity by acquiring and coordinating articles of clothing in combinations that are interpreted as fashionable. The television makeover program operates as a multimodal text on (at least) two planes. First, the program represents one subject’s (portrayal of) lived practices and clothing choices which are read on her body as personal expression of global fashion trends. Second, each videotaped episode in the reality program is itself an embodied

multimodal text, situated in the nexus of two giant consumer systems: the fashion industry and the entertainment industry. Such multimodal texts require new ways of reading that track the subtle actions that construct ways with things as acceptable or unacceptable such as what we should and should not wear.

MEDIATED DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

To analyze how meanings and identities are attached to the ways we use things, Ron Scollon (2001b) drew upon powerful constructs: mediation from cultural historical activity theory (Leont'ev, 1977; Vygotsky, 1935/1978) and habitus from sociological practice theory (Bourdieu, 1977). Although Bourdieu's work provides other useful concepts for analyzing this fashion program, such as taste, symbolic violence, and cultural capital (see Palmer, 2004), I focus on the relationship between habitus, practices, and Vygotsky's mediation for the purposes of this paper. It is not my intention here to thoroughly critique or deconstruct the *What Not To Wear* cable television series (for this, see McRobbie, 2004; Roberts, 2007); rather, examples from the show illustrate the efficacy of MDA as a tool for analyzing multimodal identity texts.

Conceptualizing Mediated Discourse

Mediation. People use mediated actions (Wertsch, 1991), physical actions with objects that interact with the surrounding material and social environment, to make sense of the world and to participate in cultural groups. According to activity theory, people use mediational means such as language and literacy to mediate objects, transforming paper and print into meaningful texts and in the process, transforming themselves into readers and writers by enacting language and literacy practices. In this way, mediation not only transforms objects into meaningful cultural artifacts but also transforms tool users. In the case of WNTW, fashion is a mediational means that people use to transform pieces of fabric into clothing that expresses a particular identity. However, the ways artifacts are interpreted and taken up as part of valued identity performances vary according to the available roles in a particular community and its rules for belonging. For example, fashion rules that shape who should wear certain items and where, when, and how they should be worn vary across communities, according to discourses and rules that determine how clothing gets read as identity texts.

Habitus. At its core, MDA is a critical examination of mediated actions that reveals how they interact to produce valued ways of belonging. Mediated actions constitute social practices (e.g., multimodal literacy practices such as reading, writing, viewing, enacting, designing) that become tacitly recognized as the accepted ways of doing things in the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) of a particular community. Mediated actions and social practices accrue value over time within the collective history of a group as embodied forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). When two or more valued practices combine, they may support and intensify each other and such combinations form a nexus, a node of practices in the web of unspoken but expected practices and dispositions that make up the group's habitus. The tacit recognition of particular combinations as markers of insider knowledge and membership is the hallmark of nexus of practice, which is similar to James

Paul Gee's (1996) concept of Discourse as an identity kit:

Another way to look at Discourses is that they are always ways of displaying (through words, actions, values, and beliefs) membership in a particular social group or social network, people who associate with each other around a common set of interests, goals, and activities. (p. 128)

Nexus of practice refers to a network of backgrounded, valued practices that mark membership by eliciting automatic mediated actions from other members, thus achieving co-recognition of membership as well as cooperation and participation. This mutual recognition situates members within a *field*, a hierarchical network of relational social positions in which members' habitus and cultural capital shapes their access to more or less empowered positions (Bourdieu, 1986). A makeover program focuses explicitly on teaching an individual the embodied cultural capital necessary to get recognized as someone who can occupy a position in a particular field. The makeover genre uses exaggerated critique and explicit lessons to make usually tacit social boundaries of the field highly visible. In *WNTW*, the key scenes and repetitive practices center on correcting the novice's (mis)use of key backgrounded practices (wearing particular combinations of clothing articles, selecting event-appropriate outfits) with cultural objects (e.g., clothes, shoes, makeup). These practices are foregrounded in the show and explicitly taught in ways that revise novices' identities according to unspoken rules and cultural models.

FILTERING TO FIND NEXUS OF PRACTICE

Four filters in MDA sift through sites, scenes, practices, and transformative events to understand how a mesh of shared practices and motives binds communities of practice together. The most significant and engrained combinations of practices circulate community expectations, recruit members, and enforce identity-building activity (Gee, 1999) such as correcting the ways that errant members choose and use cultural artifacts. Although this paper primarily examines social reproduction in nexus, nexus can also be sites of social change and agency, particularly those that combine semiotic practices such as literacy, play, and drama that hold rich potential for producing texts, transforming meanings, improvising practices, and revising identities.

In the following sections, each filter in the MDA process is illustrated with examples from *WNTW* (see Table 1 for an overview of each filter, *WNTW* examples, and potential connections to literacy assessment). The funnel design locates events in which key combinations transform meanings and identities. Mediated actions in these events are microanalyzed for their immediate transformational effects but also for links to global systems and discourses. Throughout the research process, MDA recursively connects these small moments to larger webs of practices and identities circulated by global systems and industries.

Locating Participants and Mediatlional Means

The first filter observes and compares locations to find prime sites that engage the social issue under study: in this illustration, identity building through popular media in the field of fashion. This step uses observation of sites, interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic documentation (fieldnotes, maps, photographs, videotapes) to identify key groups of participants and their

Table 1. Overview of Filters in Mediated Discourse Analysis

Filter	Unit of Analysis	Looking for	WNTW Examples	Literacy Assessment Connections
<i>Locating Participants and Mediation Means</i>	Location	Participants and Their Concerns	Women & Fashionable Dress	Teachers & Literacy Assessment Demands
		Social Issues	Feminine Beauty Ideal	“Teaching to the Test” “Achievement Gap”
		Mediation Means	Fashion & Drama: Makeover Genre	Literacy: Skills Checklist Practice Drill
		Discourses	Postfeminism	Accountability, Developmentalism
<i>Observing Scenes and Practices</i>	Scene	Patterns of Valued Practices with Mediation Means	Recurring Practices in Critique Scenes in Scene Sequences in Formulaic Episodes	Recurring Assessment Practices in Regular Literacy Lessons in Classroom Schedule
<i>Locating Nexus of Practice</i>	Linked Social Practices	Nexus (Links that Mutually Strengthen Practices & Intensify Effects)	Looking in Mirror, Twirling, Touching Clothes	Collaborative Copying, Inventive Spelling, Teacher Observation (Skills Checklist)
<i>Locating Transformative Events</i>	Collective Event	Transformation (e.g. of Cultural Capital, through Symbolic Violence)	From Defense of Favorite Outfit to Acceptance of Evidence of Poor Dressing	From Confidence in Writing to Uncertainty about Conventions; Exclusion by Peers
<i>Microanalysis of Mediated Actions</i>	Mediated Actions	Construction of Situated Meanings, Identities, Social Spaces	Construction of Error: Shared Gaze and Pointing to Clothing	Construction of Error: Shared Gaze and Pointing to Isolated Letters

collective histories of interacting with mediational means most significant to the issues that matter to them. MDA uses purposive sampling to identify prime sites and key informants for examining the social issues and discourses surrounding mediational means. In surveying likely sites, MDA uses ethnographic methods of data collection, observing and interviewing people in these places to identify the concerns that participants find most pressing. Reality television shows such as *WNTW* mimic this open-ended participant-driven sampling process by soliciting self- and peer-nomination in which prospective contestants or their friends identify particular fashion problems and needs. (Two relatives nominated—and surprised—the featured participant in the focal episode for this paper.) Through the nomination process, potential participants or their nominators voice concerns which center on perceived inability to successfully perform valued practices that count as dressing well.

At this point and at each subsequent filter, patterns are identified and checked against media studies, popular culture multimedia, and news reports to verify discourses and societal trends relevant to the local site. A quick perusal of programming on the Home and Garden Television network and The Learning Channel reveals schedules packed with “lifestyle television,” a self- and home-improvement genre including shows such as *What Not to Wear*, *10 Years Younger*, *Trading Spaces*, *Save My Bath*, *Rate this Space*, and *Date My House*. Readings in media studies show that women are the target audience for lifestyle television and makeover programs that circulate a discourse of postfeminism which constructs women as empowered, sexualized subjects who consume fashion and transform their bodies in order to please themselves, not men (Gill, 2007). The makeover show presents itself as the solution to participants’ perceived need for expert advice that will allow errant subjects to self-monitor and properly use fashion. However, one of the ironies of *WNTW* is that many of the subject’s nominating friends and family also fail to meet the hosts’ standards for fashionable dressing. This irony is actually a function of habitus which shapes aspirations as well as lived practices:

Through the operations of taste, the habitus of each group guides what it finds attractive. Taste governs what we regard as lifestyles and the positions within our reach, as well as those we do not wish to be associated with. Lifestyle programming in all its forms operates on exactly this assumption—that all goods (clothes, kitchens, and backyards) function as signs of identity—they tell others who we are (or rather who we want to be). (Palmer, 2004, p. 178)

In this way, goods function as identity texts (Carrington, 2003), objects that can be read for the messages they bear that produce and reproduce social positions. Readings of clothing allow members to visually recognize and be recognized as someone who knows the boundaries of acceptable dress. *WNTW* makes these boundaries explicit through negative examples that point out an individual’s personal fashion blunders.

Observing Scenes and Practices

The second filter in MDA requires careful observation of the scenes where participants used mediational means. This step looks for patterns across scenes and tracks the practices that people use to manage materials and carry off identity performances. Activity within each scene is documented through a mix of data sources including fieldnotes, digital photographs, audiotapes, videotapes to identify the key locations and to capture where, when, and with whom participants carry out regular practices with mediational means to manage artifacts and identity texts. For example, examination of the 12 standard scenes in the formulaic structure of *WNTW* reveals 4 scenes in which a subject’s identity performance is critiqued through the mediational means of fashion to give meaning to her practices with articles of clothing which communicate particular identity texts (e.g., athlete, mother, teacher, friend). Several practices (critique, shared gazing, and twirling) recur in scenes 5, 7, 8, and 11 in Table 2.

Locating Nexus of Practice

The third filter uses closer analysis of linked practices to find nexus, instances where key practices combine to produce social effects such as identity revision. Even casual viewing reveals that practices with mirrors occur repeatedly in each episode, perhaps not surprisingly given *WNTW*’s

Table 2. Progression of Scenes in *What Not to Wear*

Scene No.	Scene Title	Scene Content
1	Intervention	The program opens with short clips of rationale from friend/family “nominators,” followed by an “intervention” scene in which the two co-hosts, Stacey London and Clinton Kelly, flanked by friends and family, surprise and confront the woman in the midst of her everyday activity.
2	Transaction	The hosts offer to trade a \$5000 prepaid credit card for the subject’s entire wardrobe. Her acceptance triggers a series of critique scenes in which the hosts point out her fashion faux pas.
3	Critique 1: Secret Surveillance	In the first critique, the hosts show footage that has been “secretly videotaped over the past two weeks” as London and Kelly point out fashion mistakes committed during trips to the grocery store or at her workplace.
4	Critique 2: Trash Can	In the next critique, the hosts and the woman meet to analyze the wardrobe, piece by piece, inevitably tossing every article of clothing into a large trash can, often despite her pleas to save at least one or two special pieces.
5	Critique 3: The 360° Mirror	In another critique, the woman dons just-discarded articles of clothing—which apparently have been fished out of the trash—and stands inside a multi-paneled set of full-length mirrors, “the 360.” After defending a favorite outfit and explaining when and where she would wear it, the hosts emerge suddenly from behind the mirrors to critique the clothing for its shape, fabric, motif, or fit.
6	The Rules	The hosts then show the woman several mannequins dressed according to “the rules,” fashion guidelines tailored to her individual fashion needs.
7	Day 1: Independent Shopping Trip, Failed	The woman then travels to New York for a two-day marathon shopping trip, with camera crew in tow. As she looks at herself in the dressing room mirrors, she critiques each article of clothing. The hosts do the same via video as they watch from a distant location, often laughing and ridiculing her shopping purchases. At the end of the day, the subject talks to the camera about the difficulty of following the rules as she wipes away tears of frustration.
8	Day 2: Intervention Redux & Guided Shopping Trip	On the second day of shopping, the hosts again surprise the woman, this time in a store, pointing out her shopping errors and rejecting the purchased clothing that strayed from the rules. The shopping then resumes, but now with guidance from the hosts.
9 & 10	Hairstyling & Makeup Demonstrations	In the haircut scene the woman is turned away from the mirror and finally twirled around to reveal her new hairstyle. In the makeup scene, the woman views herself as makeup is applied and explained step-by-step by the expert.
Transitions	Self-Reflections	The critique and shopping segments are interspersed with scenes where the woman reflects on her feelings and responds to the makeover activity.
11	Transformation: The Reveal (to Hosts and Audience)	Following the hairstyling and makeup sessions, the woman emerges, newly coifed and clothed in her recent purchases, to dazzle and amaze the hosts. The hosts and subject evaluate and admire three outfits, gazing at the woman’s reflection in the mirror. After each display, the woman poses and twirls for the camera.
12	Homecoming: Final Reveal (to Family & Friends)	Finally, the woman returns home and prepares for a final reveal, as her family and friends wait in anticipation and share their hopes for her changed appearance. She walks into a room to cheers, twirling so all can admire her new look.

agenda of transformation; the mirror enables discussion about the reflected image and allows the subject to participate in the critique of her personal style (identity text). Nexus are instances in which two or more social practices *link and integrate* (Scollon, 2001b, e.g., looking at one's clothing in a mirror, posing for the camera, twirling, smoothing out wrinkles, defending its appropriateness) where practices occur simultaneously by design and each practice has important consequences for the other.

When valued practices link and integrate, they form nexus that make up core practices within a community of practice, that is, nexus act as markers that signal one's membership and ability to perform the expected ways of doing things within that group (Scollon, 2001a). Any community of practice holds expectations that members should engage in certain practices as well as expectations for the ways that these practices should or should not occur together (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Scollon, 2001a). In the current analysis, it is important to consider how nexus (nodes of linked and integrated practices) not only connect to mediational means with artifacts (fashion and mirrors) but also how they uphold and transform shared meanings of artifacts (identity texts communicated through clothing) and shared expectations for participation.

As the show's subject stands in front of the mirror, the hosts read her reflected image for its cultural value, specifically, its congruence with postfeminist beauty ideals circulating in popular media. As the title of the show suggests, these readings are intentionally negative, focusing on "outdated" clothing that women should not wear and should not *want* to wear.

Negative emotions of all kinds towards goods are generally repressed and hidden in most discourse about fashion, which is portrayed instead as an endless quest for the new....the rejection of the old is as much a part of fashion as the desire for the new. (Wilk, 2000, p. 182).

Of course, this is only one of multiple, simultaneous readings of the reflected image and associated clothing choices, including the subject's own reading related to her personal preferences, physical comfort, social goals, economic considerations, and local and global histories that influence taste and fashion. As each episode unfolds, the subject's actions with the full-length mirror change along with the clothing changes. In the first mirror scene, she emerges in the 360° mirror, fresh from the garbage can scene that disparaged and disposed of her entire wardrobe. As she defends her favorite (just trashed) outfits, she stands stiffly, hands to the side, feet planted on the floor. In contrast, in the final mirror scene after the "reveal," the refashioned woman twirls, a "girly girl" practice that expresses emphasized femininity discourse (Blaise, 2005), and dances for the mirror and the camera as she shows off her *WNTW*-endorsed clothing.

Locating Transformative Events

The fourth filter analyzes collective events to discover particular interactions where nexus transform meanings and players' identities in ways that affect their participation in the community of practice. In this filter, emergent coding (Merriam, 1998) of interactions involving key nexus identifies specific events where nexus of practice produce transformations, that is, changes in the meanings of texts, artifacts, practices, or identity performances that affect cultural capital or social status in the community.

MDA draws a fine distinction between nexus of practice and community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991): nexus of practice describes the relationships among practices and social uses of materials in a particular place while community of practice describes the social relationships among a group of people who take up social positions in a field. However, a community of practice is defined and maintained in part through its enforcement of nexus of practice as a condition of membership, that is, by expecting automatic performance of valued practices with as well as avoidance of offensive practices. This borderwork maintains boundaries by explicitly sanctioning those who violate expectations or who lack cultural capital. Thus, MDA maps transformative nexus, mediational means, and artifacts to patterns of social relationships among members to track changes in participation, including inclusive and exclusionary activity.

Practices with the mirror are instrumental in the transformation of favorite articles of clothing into markers of an unfashionable subject. In scene 5, the woman stands in front of “the 360,” a six-paneled mirror in order to first read herself and defend her clothing. Then her reflected image is read by the experts who emerge abruptly through a mirrored panel to interrupt her defense, using ridicule to critique each article of clothing. The hosts’ clowning entertains audiences and frames their critique as playful teasing.

This is popular entertainment which uses irony to suggest that it is not meant to be taken literally. However, this does not mean that there is no humiliation. Participants frequently dissolve into tears and there is ‘panic mingled with revolt’ as they are put through their paces, unlearning what is considered unacceptable and unattractive about themselves. (McRobbie, 2004, p. 105)

The foregrounded subjects are the objects of external identity revision but *WNTW* fans learn to self-monitor their own clothing choices, important in maintaining a cohesive global discourse.

In public in a mass society, in settings where we can't monitor what you are not doing, similar likes [i.e, goods that you prefer] are much more prone to function as signals of inclusion. In other words, you belong by virtue of your visible agreement with a standard list of likes, you wear what we wear and eat what we eat. Equally, the best way to place boundaries around a group in this setting is through a system of dislikes. If you consume what we hate, you don't belong. (Wilk, 2000, p. 186)

Practices with the mirror are readily apparent in the foregrounded storyline of the *WNTW* episode; however backgrounded off-stage practices with cameras are just as instrumental in constructing fashionable or unfashionable identities and for teaching distant viewers and consumers how to dress to fit in. The sequence and framing of camera shots intensify meanings and produces subjectivities through changes in scope and focus (e.g., close-ups of faces that magnify subjects, cut-in shots that objectify subjects by focusing on body parts).

Microanalysis of Mediated Actions

In order to identify the mediated actions that produce transformations of identity and participation, fine-grained linguistic analysis (e.g., Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Stuart-Faris, 2004) is used to examine transformative events for visual data such as movements, handling of materials, and gaze along with verbal interaction. The transcript in Table 3 represents a moment from one transformational event with the 360° mirror. (A clip of the scene, titled “Style at Sea” can

be viewed at <http://tlc.discovery.com/beyond/player.html>). The transcript represents camera shots with *WNTW* host Stacey London and the subject of the episode, Robin, a single mother and “data manager.” When the camera shot changed in the middle of a participant’s utterance, the interaction turn was split to represent camera shots.)

In this scene, Robin stands in the 360° mirror, dressed in her favorite casual outfit: unbuttoned denim chambray long-sleeved shirt over a purple cotton knit T-shirt, blue denim jeans, and sneakers. She steps into the center of the six-paneled mirrored space, arms at her side. Camera focused at eye-level shows her head and her upper body.

In order to demonstrate the dramatized identity shift that is essential to the show, Robin must acknowledge that her clothing is inappropriate. In part this is accomplished verbally through criticism, sarcasm, and innuendo. For example, in camera shot 9, Stacey explicitly criticizes Robin’s favorite piece of clothing (a t-shirt that Robin uses as a humorous way to attract attention) and implicitly suggests promiscuity through the veiled reference to “antibiotics” that indexes sexually transmitted disease. The bulk of the verbal critique (shots 8-24) is directed at the t-shirt, which is paradoxically constructed as wanton *and* as obscuring a “great little body.”

But construction of error is also accomplished through gesture and nonverbal interaction with the mirror, articles of clothing, and cameras. First, the reflective function of the mirror and its naturalized omnipresence throughout the program reiterates that presentation of an attractive body is a goal of primary importance, consistent with postfeminist discourse (Gill, 2007). The shared gaze of both women on Robin’s reflected image objectifies her clothed body as a pedagogical object, subject to correction. Second, Stacey’s almost constant handling of Robin’s clothing (shots 8-10, 16-24) emphasize differential power relations between expert and novice. As expert, Stacey is permitted to touch Robin and her clothing while it is socially improper for Robin to touch Stacey’s clothing. Finally, the mirror image is intensified by camera shots that zoom in on only Robin’s torso—changing subject to object—so that the clothing Robin wears becomes a text for teaching that is touched or gestured to repeatedly in order to instruct viewers about its unfashionable features.

Robin’s and Stacey’s readings of the clothing in the mirror contrast sharply. Robin’s defense of her clothing includes actions with the t-shirt that focus on its social history (opening the front of her denim shirt to reveal the “Kiss Me” print in shot 2), its physical comfort (hands in pockets and turning in shot 4), and emphasize her emotional attachment (slapping her sides for emphasis in shot 6). In contrast, Stacey uses the mirror’s image to draw Robin’s attention to the t-shirt’s materiality (fabric, color, fit) in the here and now; personal histories with items of clothing are rendered irrelevant along with their associated discourses. However, MDA seeks to discover how participants’ objects of importance represent—and are embedded in—social and material histories, identities, and practices (Rowell & Pahl, 2007) that create objectified cultural capital. For example, in addition to discovering the activities and memories sedimented into the shirt Robin loves, MDA would examine its fabric (denim) and histories (including manufacturer, retailer) for past and current meanings (e.g., marker of working class or rural status). Conversations with Robin might also uncover conflicts between the show’s imperative to spend \$5,000 in 2 days with her possible economic concerns and budgetary constraints as a single parent. In a typical episode, a woman’s entire wardrobe is trashed to be replaced with far fewer items of more expensive, newer clothing,

Table 3. Transcript of Excerpt from 360° Mirror Scene

	Mediated Actions Visible Within Camera Shot	Talk
1	[Mid shot] Swaying slightly, shifting weight from one foot to the other,	Robin: OK, this is my casual outfit.
2	[Camera switches to cut-in shot of her chest, begins tilting down to her waist and hips] Robin opens denim shirt to reveal print on t-shirt but camera remains focused on her hips.	Robin: This is my most favorite shirt. It says: 'Kiss me before I change my mind.'
3	[Camera shifts to closeup of Robin's face] Robin tugs on denim shirt and straightens its collar by pulling with both hands on front plackets, with a simultaneous slight shrug and head shake, while shifting from side to side.	Robin: and I actually did get a few kisses for wearing this shirt.
4	[Mid shot of torso only] Robin puts hands in back hip pockets, shirt bunched up over her wrists, swiveling a quarter turn in the mirror and back again.	Robin: And this is my most favorite denim t-shirt (sic).
5	[Camera tilts up to her chest.]	Robin: I love it; it's comfortable;
6	[Camera switches to a mid shot of her head and body] Robin drops hands, spreads arms out slightly to side, palms up, and drops them to her side with an light but audible slap that communicates determination and punctuates "love this outfit!"	Robin: love this outfit!
7	[The camera shifts to a high-angle tilt mid shot that makes Robin appear smaller] as one panel of the mirror swings open and London, in a black cocktail dress and heels, steps inside the 360° space. [The words are uttered in one breath, within an audible sigh that ends with a loud throat-clearing noise; the effect is exasperation.]	Stacey: OK, Robin (uh-hmm)
8	[Camera shifts to eye level mid shot (head and torso) of both women.] Stacey walks behind Robin and places one hand on Robin's nearest arm and the other around Robin's back and farthest shoulder. Stacey removes her right hand from Robin's arm. Stacey touches her right hand to her forehead, shielding her eyes and glances down but keeps her left hand on Robin's shoulder; Robin lowers her head and does not look into mirror. Stacey moves right hand, palm up, in front of Robin's chest, emphasizing the printed phrase, ends with hand on Robin's arm and gives Robin a slight hugging squeeze.]	Stacey: I mean <i>first</i> of all I love (heh) that this is your signature T-shirt.
9	[Camera shifts to close-up of both women's faces, but gradually zooms in on Stacey for the one-liner.]	Stacey: After you got those kisses, did you need to take antibiotics?
10	[Camera shifts to full body shot with Stacey smiling and Robin laughing, eyes closed.]	
11-15	Stacey talks with Robin's relatives who are sitting outside the mirror area, referring to Robin in third person.	
16	[Closeup of Stacey's face.]	Stacey: You have this
17	[Mid shot of both women] Still standing behind Robin, Stacey leans in so her chin is almost touching Robin's shoulder. Stacey pulls Robin's denim shirt open by firmly grasping each placket, exposing the purple T-shirt. Stacey indicates Robin's waist, dropping plackets of shirt but gestures with her hands, with her forearms under Robin's arms. Stacy holds up open palms to the camera in a stop gesture. Stacey gestures with both hands in circular motions to Robin's breasts. Stacey turns her hands palms up.	Stacey: great little body and look with here and don't get me started on the girls. They need to be up;

18	[Close-up of the two women's faces] Robin's eyes closed tightly, laughing.	Stacey: they need to be in;
19	[Mid shot of Robin's two relatives who nominated her, who are watching from backstage] Robin's relatives are laughing.	
24	[Return to mirror with mid shot of Stacey and Robin] Stacey drops her hands to Robin's waist.	Stacey: they need to be high. Alright? And where is your waist?
25-30	After Stacey talks about Robin's recent weight loss, Robin has a chance to defend herself.	
31	[Mid shot of Stacey and Robin] Robin stands, hands at her side lifting and dropping the waistband of her jeans to demonstrate their loose fit. As Robin talks, Stacey stands, head tilted to one side, hand on hip, interrupting, "C'mon" while shaking a finger or her open palm to discredit Robin's claims. Stacey grimaces.	Robin: I just like my clothes. And now they feel loose. I like the feeling. Stacey: You like loose clothes. Fantastic.
32	[Camera shifts to close up showing Stacey's full face but half of Robin's face.]	Stacey: If you saw somebody else walking towards you in this outfit,
33	[Mid shot] Stacey punctuating sentence with a fist and then places her hand on hip.]	Stacey: would you think that they care at <i>all</i>
34	[Close-up of Stacey's face, now smiling; Robin's face is only partially visible.] Robin shakes head slightly. Robin nods head slightly.	Stacey: about their appearance? Robin: No. Robin: Probably not.

circulating postfeminist discourse that promotes the necessity of staying fashionably current and that supports ongoing consumer demand for new styles.

At the end of the scene (shot 32), Stacey uses the mirror to separate Robin from her image, positioning her reflection as "somebody else" and inviting Robin (and viewers) to evaluate this more distant identity text. In response, Robin agrees to construct herself as apathetic about her appearance, and Stacey becomes a successful teacher: lesson learned, and not just for Robin. Viewers also learn the fashion lesson that stresses discarding old clothing and updating wardrobes with newer, expensive items that conform to the trends of the current season. As the show grows in popularity, this lesson is repeated over and over for more and more viewers, who learn to shop and wear clothing according to the discourse of ongoing fashion consumption, thus creating more robust demand for the clothing industry.

However, participants and *WNTW* fans are not passive readers of media identity texts. This illustration has highlighted just one pattern, identity revision, in one nexus of fashion and drama practices. It presents a partial picture of the foregrounded dramatized text; other scenes reveal more complexity in Robin's resistance and improvisation during this makeover. Similarly, fans as backgrounded subjects can enjoy viewing an episode without engaging in identity revision or taking up the fashion practices *WNTW* endorses. Obviously, a dramatized performance is not an accurate representation of lived lives. While dramatic exaggerated examples from *WNTW* illustrate MDA's power as a deconstructive analytic tool, on-site analysis derived from ethnographic inquiry of live interaction would uncover a much more agentic picture of social actors' appropriations, ruptures, and improvisations as well as more tensions between practices, artifacts, and discourses.

Nexus of practice are made up of dynamic, malleable networks shaped by social actors; nexus exist in dialectical relation to fields and capital so that changes in nexus change power relations in fields.

CONNECTIONS TO LITERACY RESEARCH

This paper has analyzed a popular makeover show to illustrate the affordances of MDA as a process for identifying and closely examining the nonverbal and material meanings in multimodal texts. Identity-building practices with material artifacts and global discourses are highly relevant to the multimodal texts that students engage and produce in and out of classrooms. MDA has potential to tease out discourses and histories in artifacts and practices to reveal more agency and complexity than depicted here. However, the particular focus on identity revision in the television makeover genre does resonate with current concerns about literacy assessment. In the concluding section, I offer the following overview to suggest how MDA can be applied to literacy classrooms. This brief outline shows how MDA organizes a set of pilot studies that explore the discourses and tensions in literacy assessment in early childhood classrooms (Wohlwend, 2009a).

Overview of MDA in a Literacy Classroom

MDA investigates social issues of importance to participants and in schools. When I asked a focus group of kindergarten and first-grade teachers about issues regarding their school's literacy program, they identified accountability pressures and increased literacy assessment demands pitted against the need for developmentally appropriate, play-based curriculum as their key issues and concerns (Wohlwend, 2009b).

1. *Locating Participants and Mediational Means:* In the first filter, focus group discussions and visits to seven early childhood teachers' classrooms documented teachers' literacy assessment practices and decision-making as well as children's interaction with literacy and play through literacy tools, toys, and print in the material environment while news reports (Adler, 2008; Hemphill, 2006; Henig, 2008) provided evidence of tensions among accountability, developmental, and other educational discourses circulating in schools.
2. *Observing Scenes and Practices:* Within one focal classroom, I compared scenes (locations where children engaged in play and literacy) checking for connections to teacher's assessment practices. I used participant observation augmented by videotape recording, fieldnotes, and mapping to collect data about materials in each center location and children's interactions as they engaged in recurring curricular activities (e.g., writing workshop, play centers) as well as teacher literacy assessment materials (e.g., skills checklists, writing rubric). The writing table emerged as a focal scene for children's authoring of books, playful storytelling, and the teacher's interpretative assessment practices.
3. *Locating Nexus of Practice:* Within one scene (i.e., the writing table), I videotaped children's writing practices (collaborative copying, invented spellings), collecting writing samples and comparing these to the teacher's interpretation of the children's writing development (Wohlwend, 2008, 2009a). The nexus of collaborative authoring, inventive spelling, spontaneous enactment of stories, and teacher observation emerged as a key nexus for getting children recognized as good writers.

4. Locating Transformative Events: Within this writing/playing/assessment nexus, I compared collective events (with two or more children), looking for activity where children's engagement in nexus affected their participation with peers and classroom status. One event in this nexus reduced the status of an already marginalized child as five children who engaged in collaborative authoring and playful storytelling at the writing table actively excluded a child, exacerbated by the immediate removal of the child for daily pull-out sessions for testing and practice of phonetic skills (Wohlwend, 2009a).
5. Microanalysis of Mediated Actions: Close readings of action with objects in this transformative event revealed how teacher's assessment (skills checklist) of children's mediated actions (collaborative copying; isolated letter recognition practice) related to global discourses of literacy development and reproduced identities that enabled identity critique and revision, gatekeeping and normalization, inclusion and exclusion.

Directions for Mediated Discourse Analysis

If teachers have a better understanding of how tacitly valued literacy practices affect children's social positioning, they will be better able to design mediated encounters in which expected combinations of practices for classroom participation are implicitly modeled or explicitly expressed (Rowe, 2008). As illustrated in the *WNTW* example, some educational discourses legitimate powerful experts (including classroom teachers) who monitor and correct novice errors. MDA enables critical recognition of the ways that naturalized classroom practices, literacy curricula, and built environments in schools support construction of error and uphold identity-building activity that reinforces the disparity of expert/novice power relations. We might also critically look at schooling for similarities (e.g., uses, motives) to the shaming function so necessary to the construction of the excluded/reclaimed subject on *WNTW*:

...a sizable proportion of lifestyle television is devoted to the stigmatization of those who are laggardly or recalcitrant in their fulfillment of this duty [to consume] and, through a combination of public shaming and financial incentives, to inducing them to become fully participant, consuming subjects in the neoliberal economy. (Roberts, 2007, p. 228)

The aims of children working to protect play spaces or build friendship alliances in peer culture may be at odds with adult goals for academic achievement in school culture or more equitable power relations among social groups. MDA provides researchers and teachers with critical lenses for examining classroom practices with local materials situated in past histories and global discourses that perpetuate inequitable ways of doing school. This knowledge may help us recognize, engage, and break down exclusionary educational stratifications that have proved so difficult to disrupt. Practice-focused and action-oriented approaches such as MDA help us appreciate the nuances of identity-building in social and material interactions and better understand how to dissipate sites of exclusion in popular culture as well as school culture.

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