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Reality television programs are often dismissed as junk food TV—vapid, low-brow entertainment used to fill the gaps in television schedules. What critics overlook are the watershed changes in production, audience, and talent management which the genre has brought to the medium.

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In our research section, we reveal how reality television producers mine the emotions, bodies and identities of cast members for spectacle and profit. In our second article, we excavate the values and beliefs embedded in reality television with a close examination of American talent and makeover shows. We also discuss lifestyle television as a laboratory for the development of democratic citizenship skills.

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Theme: Reality TV and Media Literacy

In many ways, reality television began with ‘real crime’ TV. Shows such as *Crimewatch* (1984) and *Unsolved Mysteries* (1987) were faulted for their ghoulish voyeurism, and for blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. Today, many audiences like to be positioned as flies-on-the-wall, and they like to play the role of “savvy” viewers who can pick out the artifice from the reality (Andrejevic, “Visceral Literacy”). Real crime shows were also criticized for injecting entertainment into tragedy, a charge to which there may be more substance. It was the spectacle of reality that drew audiences to the small screen. In the mid-1980s, closed circuit television (CCTV) technologies had become widespread, and real crime shows fully exploited the medium. Perpetrators were “captured” on camera, and audiences became a party to justice, able to identify the criminal in their midst. Victims shown on CCTV tape were ordinary people whose lives had suddenly become extraordinary. Some images recorded victims’ last hours, offering up poignant *memento mori* to their lives before the intervention of fate (Jermyn, “This *Is* About Real People!”). Then, as now, few audiences had the benefit of media literacy education. They were only dimly aware how much the medium itself compelled their belief in its truth.

A similar mode of representation is at work in contemporary “gamedocs” such as *Big Brother* and *Survivor*. The ‘nightwatch’ camera footage, so reminiscent of CCTV, offers to catch young men and women in the midst of ‘showmances,’ or to capture evidence of bad behavior by scheming team mates. Yet this footage, and even the ‘live stream’ 24-hour coverage offered online (often by premium subscription) may be heavily edited. Audiences need media literacy skills to understand the interplay between the visual “testimony” of reality television and the contexts in which it is situated.

Reality television producers also draw on human resources—the bodies of “everyday” people—to present evidence of the authentic. Participants in these shows must have enough talent to perform *as if* they were not being observed by the camera eye. The result is that many audience members feel that reality television is an avenue for social learning. For example, a plurality of subjects in a large-scale audience study of *Big Brother* responded that they were motivated to watch the show because it gave them “insight into people’s behavior” (Jones, “Show Your Real Face,” 407).

In fact, reality television programming is generally built on methods of characterization that match fictional genres much more closely than documentary. Producers deploy a small army of personnel to mold participants into readily recognizable characters, including stereotypes such as jocks, geeks, ‘bitches,’ or girls-next-door. While screen writers are absent from these productions, “story developers” create narrative arcs for the show--stories which often dictate how participants will act over the course of an entire series. Editors typically have an extensive library of footage for each episode, and this resource is readily exploited to create scenes of heightened conflict between participants. Occasionally, some relationships may be largely, if not entirely fabricated (Essany, *Reality Check*, chapters 6 and 7; Murray and

Oullette, *Reality TV*, Introduction).

A media literacy approach to reality television also requires investigation into the political, social and economic contexts of its production. To viewers, reality television programs may appear to spring from a genuinely democratizing impulse: you, too, can be on TV! In fact, commercial considerations are the driving force behind reality television production. Reality television producers are able to hire non-union labor. Screen writers and actors have a guild; story developers and reality show participants do not. Product placement is common (Why wouldn't Simon Cowell be drinking Coke?), and, after a 40-year hiatus, sponsorship has come back to the commercial landscape of television production. In some agreements, sponsors may exercise editorial control for the content of entire episodes. And, where nearly 100% of production costs are "sunk" into pilot episodes for fictional programs--with entirely uncertain prospects for success--the licensing of reality television formats can yield a steady stream of revenue (Raphael, "The Political Economic Origins of Reali-TV"; Magder, "Television 2.0"). To date, Fremantle Media has licensed 199 Idol formats (including American Idol) in 46 countries across the globe (fremantlemedia.com)

In this issue of *Connections*, we take you "behind the scenes" of reality television in a number of ways. In our first research article, we reveal how reality television producers mine the emotions, bodies and identities of cast members for spectacle and profit. In our second article, we excavate the values and beliefs embedded in reality television with a close examination of American talent and makeover programs. In addition to pulling back the curtain on the exclusionary ideals of citizenship embraced in much of reality television programming, we discuss existing and emerging opportunities for re-shaping the genre into something much more inclusionary and democratic. And in our MediaLit Moment, your high school students will have the chance to master the emotional "language" of reality television by staging a scene which defies its conventions.

Research Highlights

The Emotional Economy of Reality Television

In our theme article, we outlined the business model of reality television. But we are left with only a partial understanding of the business of reality television if we limit our discussion to the financing and underwriting of reality shows, or their relatively low labor and production costs. The primary economic driver of reality shows is the display and consumption of images of the personal, emotional and intimate, and the images themselves are built on the labor—and bodies--of highly dispensable talent.

To begin with, reality television turns received notions of labor on their head. Almost any activity can be turned into labor on a reality show. As media theorist Heather Hendershot writes: “. . . on TV, your job is to cheat on your girlfriend, pretend to be a millionaire, eat slimy bugs, lose a ton of weight, or room with fellow washed-up celebrities. Though participants’ goals may be stated loftily as ‘finding true love’ or ‘resolving emotional issues,’ the vast majority of reality TV focuses in some way on work. Often the work is redefined as ‘competition,’ but the hoops one has to jump through to succeed on competitive reality shows are laborious. Work is work. Play is work. Banter is work. Sex is work. No one just happens to get into a hot tub because she has a sore back” (“Belabored Reality,” 245).

Quite often the work on reality shows is emotional, and arguably, emotional work was the fountainhead of the reality genre. On *Queen for a Day* (1945-56, Mutual; 1956-60, NBC; 1960-64, ABC) four women chosen from the studio audience told their hard-luck stories and explained how one desired item could relieve their troubles. At the end of the show, the audience voted by applause-o-meter for the most deserving contestant, who received her requested item, and thousands of dollars in sundry goods. Similar shows included *Strike It Rich* (CBS, 1947-1958), in which quiz contestants who failed to win the item or service they desperately needed might receive help from viewers who called into the show’s “Heart Line.” Through this form of interactivity, viewers offered contestants money, merchandise, housing, or even jobs (Watts, “Melancholy, Merit and Merchandise,” 303).

The transactional nature of such shows was complex. Contestants made themselves vulnerable as they told their stories. This was their emotional work. The state of suffering—specifically, blameless, innocent suffering-- was the currency which brought material rewards. Contestants both performed and embodied the misery which was tallied up as merit.

Today, in romance shows such as *The Bachelor*, female participants do the emotional work of winning a man’s affections. In makeover shows such as *What Not To Wear*, friends attest to the low self-esteem and high moral standing of participants, and in turn participants receive services designed to renovate their self-worth. In weight loss competitions such as *The Biggest Loser*, the labor not only includes self-discipline, but also the display of emotional ups and downs on the way to fitness.

Participants may also be called on to serve as objects of humiliation. In *American Idol* and *Project Runway*, aspiring singers and designers must endure the barbs of Simon Cowell and Tim Gunn. On *Judge Judy*, courtroom procedures and the trappings of judicial authority are essentially window dressing to Judith Sheindlin's stinging indictments of participants' poor personal choices (Ouellette, "Take Responsibility for Yourself").

At times the transaction between producers and cast members takes on the character of a Faustian bargain. In 2000, Dutch company Endemol, owner of the *Survivor* and *Big Brother* formats, directed producers to construct creative "challenges" for cast members which could easily have been drawn from Cold War secret service manuals of interrogation techniques. These techniques included sleep deprivation, the illusion of imminent harm, the disjuncture of normal time, concentration on apparent irrelevancies, the building up and dashing of hope, and the fostering of distrust and paranoia (Brenton and Cohen, *Shooting People*, 117). Producers captured cast members' reactions on camera and packaged them as light entertainment.

Reality show participants may even lose control of their public identities. As unskilled, non-union labor, and as short-term, D-list celebrities, reality show stars aren't likely to have much bargaining power with producers when shows are complete. Writing about CBS contracts with participants in *Survivor*, Deborah Halbert observes, "Essentially, CBS controls their ability to appear in public and in what type of venue, their ability to talk about the show and their life stories. CBS owns their public identities and the rights to disclose their private identities. CBS owns the telling of the experiences that made them who they are. Everything a *Survivor* cast member could communicate to the public might be construed as the property of CBS. Additionally, CBS owns these rights through the universe forever" (quoted in Collins, "Making the Most Out of 15 Minutes," 98).

In many ways, the work of reality television seems so simple. One performs oneself on camera. How hard can that be? And yet participants often trade much of themselves in the process. Media literacy education is needed to help audiences understand the nature of that exchange. A larger discussion is also warranted, one which examines the aims and motivations of reality show producers, and their power to shape the lives of participants on and off screen. Nor should the discussion stop there. As Mark Andrejevic observes in *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, "The Illinois housewife who agrees to move into a house where her every move is watched by millions of strangers to compete for a cash prize exhibits more than an incidental similarity (albeit on a different scale) to the computer user who allows Yahoo to monitor her web-browsing habits in exchange for access to a free e-mail account" (17-18).

Finally, the images of suffering so common to reality television programs raise important social questions, especially when producers use controlled environments to enhance the display of that suffering. In such scenarios, producers are not unlike wardens who subject prison inmates to 24-hour surveillance. Could the experience of viewing such shows make us

more likely to accept constant surveillance as a normal condition in 21st century society?

American Dreams, Citizenship and Reality TV

We have argued that enhancing democratic participation in our media culture is not a high priority for most reality television producers. After all, production is driven largely by financial incentives. But what are the values that reality television actually supports?

At the end of the fifth season of *American Idol*, Taylor Hicks, newly crowned as the American Idol of 2006, pumped his fists in the air and shouted “I’m living the American Dream!” For much of the 20th century, the American Dream was primarily associated with home ownership and upward mobility for those with skills and ambition. In Hicks’ case, the horizons of the Dream seemed to expand to include such things as charisma, happiness and visibility. But the intelligibility of that Dream has never really depended on definitions. As news of Hicks’ victory spread, foreign news outlets seemed to feel no need for explanation as they conveyed his remarks (Weber, 46). American-ness is an idea, and it seems to be both elastic and readily adaptable.

One of the American ideas behind *American Idol* is the belief that the conditions of one’s birth can be overcome by marshaling resources for one’s self-invention. Hicks’ sudden rise to celebrity—from ordinary to extraordinary--re-affirmed the pursuit of self-transformation as a worthy goal. In its emphasis on self-transformation, the talent show format is closely related to another reality genre: the makeover show.

In *Makeover TV: Self, Citizenship and Celebrity*, Brenda Weber explores the many expressions of American-ness in makeover television, and traces the outline of the ideal citizen which arises from the makeover format. Those who have been transformed to the “After” state of the makeover take their place in an imagined nation “of beautiful, self-assured, and self-confident people whose lifestyles, appearances, domiciles, relationships and cars signify happiness and material security that leads, ultimately, to widespread confident visibility” (38). Perhaps the greatest creativity in the genre lies in its adaptability. Faces are lifted, yes, but rides are also pimped, wardrobes updated, gardens revitalized, rooms pizzazzed, and houses resurrected. All of these makeovers speak to the transformation of identity.

Though “Makeover Nation” is an imagined community where all the “After” people live, requirements for citizenship are defined and specific criteria for inclusion are drawn. The criteria for inclusion? Upward mobility, confidence, heterosexuality, consumer-orientation, conventional attractiveness, and gender congruence (i.e., beauty for women, strength for men). Middle class white-ness is not explicitly stated as a criterion, but it remains a governing expectation. As Weber notes, participants who are marked as “too ethnic” or outside the middle class are given makeovers expressly to make them feel “normal” (12). Further, the team of experts assembled for these shows are charged with the task of policing

the borders of Makeover Nation. Thus, makeover gurus often appear as figures of authority tasked with gaining control of participants who express opposition to their judgment and taste.

In *Reality Bites Back: the Troubling Truth about Guilty Pleasure TV*, media activist Jennifer Pozner illustrates the operation of these exclusionary principles with a wealth of detail. In her sixth chapter, Pozner focuses critical attention on Tyra Banks' adherence to mainstream norms of attractiveness in her roles as judge and executive producer for *America's Next Top Model*. The framing for what beauty is, and how beauty is expressed, becomes evident in the course of the show—but the framing is never challenged and in fact, sometimes affects the very identity of the participants. For example, in Cycle 3, Kelle, an African-American gallery owner, came onto the show exhibiting a strong sense of confidence. Judges repeatedly told her that her face, and particularly her mouth, were not photogenic. After several episodes of such criticism, Kelle became deeply insecure: "It's like I have a protruding mouth. . .I almost feel like I have a monkey mouth. I guess it can look really. . .primitive" (205). Banks said nothing to challenge the racial stereotypes which Kelle had internalized, and nothing to affirm her natural beauty. Instead she mentioned photographic strategies to elide Kelle's undesirable features.

For many viewers, the citizenship offered up in makeover television is not worth having. With its insistence on class, racial, gender and sexual norms, and its praises for an individualistic, consumer-driven ethic of self-care, Makeover Nation seems like a particularly unattractive place to live. How can they respond? Some ideas may be found in the emerging body of research which applies formal concepts of democratic citizenship to lifestyle television programs.

The citizenship practices available to reality television audiences don't seem to pose a threat to the power of reality television producers as standard bearers of culture, but they are valuable to a democratic society. For example, John Stuart Mill, one of the founders of the discipline of political science, argued that citizens must try on the ideas of others to really know their own, and to find the best truth possible. Reality TV can open a window for viewers onto a community which is both larger than and different from their own circle of family, friends and neighborhood. In "Democracy and Discourse: How Reality TV Fosters Citizenship," Deni Elliott highlights an exchange from a blog for the reality show *Sister Wives*, a reality show about a polygamous Mormon family:

Heatheradair: My problem with the entire glamorization of their lifestyle is the message it sends their kids. These kids are being taught that it's OK not to expect your dad to be around more than a night or so a week. . .and this is different than kids of divorced parents who might only see their parents on the weekend.

Hakura: You make some very good points. . .I don't think it's right for the state to pursue a prosecution for 'polygamy' when Kody is only *legally* married to one of the women. Polygamy, like gay marriage, is an example of the law applying 'traditional religious moral standards' to

people's lifestyle choices. . .I'm torn as to how this affects children.

Pakka: So what – he's not forcing me to be his wife so I don't care . . .I am. . .fascinated by it.

Carol: I love this show. I wanted to hate him but I thought he came off better on the show.

Lisa: Leave this family alone! They are wonderful parents and seem to love each other very much.

Mandy: Who are WE to judge their lifestyle? . . .I'm sure people thought the first women to ask for voting rights or the first black people to insist on being able to sit in the front of the bus with the whites were "disgusting" as well but thankfully our world continues to grow and evolve and accept (149).

Elliott observes: "What is polygamy like?' might be the theme of this exchange. Is it like same-sex marriage or other civil rights issues from the past? Is the relationship of a child to a polygamous parent like that of the relationship between a child and divorced parent, or not? What viewers think polygamous marriage is like helps inform their opinions. In exchange, trying on others' analogies opens new pathways for how to think about the unfamiliar lifestyle" (150).

In addition, new reality shows are being planned and produced which value sustainable living over consumer-oriented lifestyles. Such shows serve as models for "green" citizenship. For example, "Naked Chef" Jamie Oliver's *Jamie's Fowl Dinners* (2008) was aimed at educating the public about the health and ethical issues behind globalized and industrialized food production. In each episode of *Guerilla Gardeners* (2009), a team of young Australian horticulturalists descended upon traffic roundabouts, train station platforms, and disused patches of land around billboards with the goal of revitalizing suburban Sydney and encouraging a communitarian ethic. Such shows point to the adaptability of lifestyle reality programs for different purposes, and, as they become a recognizable sub-genre, they may take an increased audience share over time.

The outlook for reality television programming which supports an ethic of democratic participation is encouraging, but the success of such ventures is far from guaranteed. *Guerilla Gardeners* was cancelled after eleven episodes. Media literacy education can help audiences understand that they play an important role in making a participatory ethic attractive to both investors and producers. Understanding will need to be accompanied by commitment, however. Fully realizing the democratic potential of reality television will require energetic, even visionary advocacy -- and indeed, ratings.



A symposium on the Historical Roots of Media Literacy Education, introducing the Elizabeth Thoman Media Literacy Archive, was held September 20, 2013 at the University of Rhode Island's Providence, Rhode Island campus.

The symposium brought together leaders from four decades of media literacy and scholars from a variety of disciplines as well as the next generation of future leaders in media literacy to discuss the field's historical frameworks and to explore how the past informs the present and future of the field. Michael RobbGrieco, Temple University, was the keynote speaker. The complete program can be accessed [here](#).

Additionally, the National Association of Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) sponsored a Google Hangout prior to the Symposium. Find the [video here](#). Interested in exploring the history of media literacy? Check out CML's [Voices of Media Literacy](#), a collection of 20 interviews with media literacy pioneers.

Elizabeth Thoman Media Literacy Archive

The University of Rhode Island now houses the Elizabeth Thoman Media Literacy Archive which holds significant historical artifacts and documents related to the development of media literacy as a movement and a field of specialization at the intersection of media studies and education. Elizabeth Thoman, CMH, was editor of Media & Values magazine 1977–1993 and the Founder of the Center for Media Literacy (CML), a leading national media literacy organization in the United States.



The archive includes the Media & Values production archive, comprehensive media literacy curricula library, and correspondence with leaders from the media literacy field over the years. The archive is available to scholars through the [URI Library's Special Collections](#).

CONSORTIUM for MEDIA LITERACY

Uniting for Development

About Us...

The [Consortium for Media Literacy](#) addresses the role of global media through the advocacy, research and design of media literacy education for youth, educators and parents. The Consortium focuses on K-12 grade youth and their parents and communities. The research efforts include nutrition and health education, body image/sexuality, safety and responsibility in media by consumers and creators of products. The Consortium is building a body of research, interventions and communication that demonstrate scientifically that media literacy is an effective intervention strategy in addressing critical issues for youth.

Resources for Media Literacy

Sources Cited

Andrejevic, Mark. *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004.

“Reality TV, Savvy Viwers, and Auto-Spies.” *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. Eds. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette. New York: New York University Press, 2009. 321-342.

Andrejevic’s essay explains how reality television viewers simultaneously accept, even welcome surveillance in their daily lives even as they see themselves as savvy, discriminating viewers of reality television.

Brenton, Sam, and Reuben Cohen. *Shooting People: Adventures in Reality TV*. London: Verso Press, 2003.

Book focuses on psychological aspects of participation in reality shows, and includes a thought-provoking discussion of the involvement of psychologists as paid consultants.

Collins, Susan. “Making the Most Out of 15 Minutes: Reality TV’s Dispensable Celebrity.” *Television & New Media* 9.2 (2008): 87-110.

At times this article is densely packed with the theoretical language of cultural and media studies, but it offers a detailed explanation of the significance of celebrity to our cultural industries, and of the role which reality show participants play within them.

Elliott, Deni. “Democracy and Discourse: How Reality TV Fosters Citizenship.” *The Ethics of Reality TV: A Philosophical Examination*. Eds. Wendy N Wyatt and Kristie Bunton. London: Continuum Publishing Group, 2012. 143-158.

Elliott’s essay demonstrates how reality television can inspire democratic participation.

Essany, Michael. *Reality Check: The Business and Art of Producing Reality TV*. Oxford, UK: Focal Press, 2008.

Hendershot, Heather. “Belabored Reality: Making It Work on *The Simple Life* and *Project Runway*.” Murray and Ouellette, eds. *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. 234-259. Entertaining, incisive analysis of the role of work in reality television programs.

Jermyn, Deborah. “‘This *Is* About Real People!’: Video Technologies, Actuality and Affect in the Television Crime Appeal.” *Understanding Reality Television*. Eds. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn. London: Routledge, 2004.

Essay convincingly situates the ‘real crime’ program as an important pre-cursor to the reality television genre.

Jones, Janet Megan. “Show Your Real Face: A Fan Study of the UK Big Brother Transmissions (2000, 2001, 2002). Investigating the Boundaries Between Notions of Consumers and Producers of Factual Television.” *New Media & Society* 5.3 (2003): 400-421.

Article uses 30,000 audience surveys to analyze interpretive strategies of UK *Big Brother* fans.

Lewis, Tania. "‘There Grows the Neighborhood’: Green Citizenship, Creativity and Life Politics on Eco-TV." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 15.3 (2012): 315-326. Article examines the link between lifestyle television and participation in larger discourses of citizenship.

Magder, Ted. "Television 2.0: The Business of American Television in Transition." *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. 141-164.

Ouellette, Laurie. "‘Take Responsibility for Yourself’: Judge Judy and the Neoliberal Citizen." *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. 223-242.

Pozner, Jennifer L. *Reality Bites Back: the Troubling Truth about Guilty Pleasure TV*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2010.

Pozner takes a no-holds-barred approach in criticizing the reality television industry’s damaging representations of women, arguing the industry has mounted a coordinated attack on the social progress of women in the U.S. over the last 40 years. Pozner’s style is witty, and at times tongue-in-cheek, but she uses ample documentation to support her claims. The book includes a chapter of responses by a dozen media activists to the question “What are you doing—and what can readers do—to positively transform the media?” The resources section features a good listing of organizations, books, films and other materials, and some interesting suggestions for media literacy activities involving reality television programs.

Raphael, Chad. "The Political Economic Origins of Reali-TV." *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. 123-140.

Watts, Amber. "Melancholy, Merit, and Merchandise: The Postwar Audience Participation Show." *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. 301-320.

Weber, Brenda R. *Makeover TV: Self, Citizenship and Celebrity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009.

Weber’s book may be chock full of theoretical constructs, but it’s still a sensitive, in-depth exploration of the genre. Weber also entertains the idea that a makeover can be an empowering experience, and draws on the work of noted feminist scholars for her discussion.

Recommended:

An American Family: Anniversary Edition (DVD). PBS, 2011.

The Osbournes, Season 1 (DVD) MTV Networks, Big Head Productions, 2002.

Kompare, Derek. "Extraordinary Ordinary: *The Osbournes* as ‘An American Family.’" *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. 100-122.

The PBS series *An American Family*, which first aired in 1973, wasn’t just an observational documentary of a middle class California family, and is often credited as the first American reality program. *The Osbournes*, a product of the reality television boom at the turn of the 21st century, drew viewers with an ‘inside look’ at the home life of an aging rock star famous for his antics on and off stage. A comparative study leads to significant questions about the differences between reality and documentary genres, but also reveals that the representation of families in television has remained remarkably stable over the last few decades.

MediaLit Moments

Jamming the Makeover

The format of the makeover show is a familiar one to us. If there's any novelty to it, it's the fact that emotional reactions to events in the storyline take on greater importance than the events themselves. Emotions are the basic components of the "creative language" of the genre. In this MediaLit Moment, your freshmen and sophomore students will have the chance to become fluent in 'makeover' by staging brief scenes and reacting to events in ways which defy conventional expectations.

Ask students to act out a scene from an imaginary makeover program which breaks the conventions of the genre.

AHA! When I act out this scene from a makeover show but don't follow the rules completely, it doesn't feel like a makeover at all!

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Key Question #2: Construction: Does my message reflect understanding in format, creativity and technology?

Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view

Grade Level: 9-10

Materials: Television, DVD Player, DVDs of sample makeover shows.

Activity: To prepare for this lesson, rent or buy a DVD of a makeover show, and note the time markers for specific sequences: 1) the story of the makeover recipient's problems 2) the expert team "selling" the makeover they will perform 3) the big "reveal"

Begin the activity by asking students about makeover programs they like (These can be makeovers of any kind, including weight loss, home makeovers, "supernanny" makeovers, etc.) Ask them to list the basic components of makeover shows. Play short clips from each sequence from the DVD. For each clip, ask, what emotions are being conveyed, and what emotions are the scenes supposed to evoke from the audience?

Tell students that they're going to sketch out (or write a script for) a short scene from an imaginary makeover show. The show should have a title, and the scene should feature clear

emotional reactions. The scene must include one emotional reaction that is unexpected. They have plenty of artistic license to make fun of the genre. Ask students to gather in groups of three or more to sketch and play their scene.

Optional: Stage a short example. Cast yourself (or a willing student) as someone who has just received a facelift or other body/style makeover. This person expresses their excitement about receiving the makeover. A small group of students mills around the person who has been made over. They should make small talk and ignore him or her entirely.

If time permits, ask one or more groups to stage their scene in front of the class. If not, end with a discussion of their experience with staging the scene. What are their thoughts and feelings about playing “against the rules”? What did they learn about the responses that makeover shows expect from participants? Experts? The audience? What are the values and beliefs “behind” those expectations?

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy’s MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, © 2002-2013, Center for Media Literacy, <http://www.medialit.com>