BREAKING BAD: BREAKING TELEVISION'S LIMITED REPRESENTATIONS OF ADDICTION

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ABSTRACT

As a communication device, television helps cultivate a culture's social reality. Yet, television sometimes advances flawed concepts in a social reality, particularly concerning addiction. Television appears to have cultivated limiting stereotypical concepts regarding the attitudes, thoughts, and action patterns characteristic of addicts. These stereotypes may hinder a person's recovery. This analysis, therefore, examines narratives in AMC's *Breaking Bad* to learn how the television series conceptualizes addiction. Combing Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm with William Kirkwood's Rhetoric of Possibility, it delineates an alternative narrative representation of addiction. It reveals limitations in stereotypically conceived representations of addiction, and shows coherent narratives supporting a more comprehensive concept of the term. Through the Fisher-Kirkwood lens, *Breaking Bad* may be seen as cultivating an enlightened conceptualization of addiction. In so doing, the television show's cultural importance is established.

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TELEVISION, SOCIAL REALITY, & THE NEED FOR SOMETHING MORE

The effects of television on the cultivation of social reality, or the mutually held cognitive reality of particular groups or cultures, have long been discussed. It is generally accepted that those who view television tend to develop certain attitudes, values, and belief systems over time (Gerbner, 1978a; Hawkins & Pingree, 1981). This appears true concerning our thoughts about love, romance, and relationships; it appears true regarding our conceptions of violence in our neighborhoods and cities (Gerbner, 1978a), and it even appears true regarding our conceptions of money and materialism (Shrum, 2008). Gerbner (1980a) argued that it appears true concerning our conceptions of mental illness. It is, therefore, no giant leap to conclude that it also may be true concerning a variety of other audience perceptions, including—as this essay will discuss—our conceptions of addicts and addiction. In fact, both Gerbner (1978d) and Shrum (2007) suggested this in their respective essays.

Shrum (2008), who built off the work of cultivation theorists—including George Gerbner, as well as, Hawkins and Pingree (1981)—held that those cultivated attitudes, values, and belief systems are frequently distorted. Much of Gerbner's work supports this. Gerbner argued that though the world projected from the television appears conventional and familiar, the reality is that it bears minimal accuracy to the real world at all (1982, p. 15). He maintained this worldview specifically as it relates to violence and sexual mores.

Yet, how does television communicate this apparent misrepresented social reality? Gerbner (1978b) calls television "the most prolific and tireless storyteller in our home." He said that television has overtaken the place that grandparents, older siblings, popes, pastors, and even emperors have held for centuries. No longer do these important cultural leaders transmit socially accepted reality through their spoken narratives, at least not with the same impact. Instead, today, each house has a pulpit, a courtroom, a classroom, and a family campfire right there in the middle of its living room. From the stories pronounced via television's glowing light, audiences learn what it means to be in a relationship, to die, to be successful, and countless other bits and pieces of what is construed as knowledge. From such a perspective, it is relatively easy to conclude stories, or narratives, to be a primary mode of communicating; and thus the primary means of promoting a social reality accepted among audiences. Over time, these narratives become the social reality people accept. Thus, stories appear to be the primary mode of communicating what eventually becomes shared social reality. Supporting this, both Shrum (2009) and Berger (1997) argued, narratives are what make up the communicative subtlety of television. Berger stated, "Television is a narrative medium par excellence" (p. 2). A variety of narrative critics, including Fisher (1987), also added weight to this view of television's communicative mode.

What Are Narratives?

Narratives (stories) are considered by many to be a fundamental aspect of our human daily existence. Taylor (2001) wrote of the omnipresence of narrative:

> "we live in story the way fish live in water, breathing them in and out, buoyed up by them, taking from them our sustenance, but rarely conscious of this element in which we exist. We are born into stories. They nurture and guide us through life; they help us know how to die. Stories make it possible for us to be human" (p. 6).

According to Fisher (1987), the governing metaphor for visualizing humanity should be viewed as *homo narrans*, or as a storytelling creature. Viewing humanity this way, he claimed, allows all other conceptual metaphors for describing humanity—including *homo sapien, homo* *economous,* and *homo faber*—to be subsumed within the storytelling framework. Humans, Fisher argued, think, dream, perceive themselves as living within, and communicate in stories.

According to Foss (2009), a narrative typically must contain two events that either express an action, a state, or a condition; must be organized by time, contain some sort of causal-change related aspect, and concern at least one subject. They can be found almost anywhere: in conversations, speeches, movies, newspapers, newscasts, books, biographies, songs, radio, virtually any medium allowing a message to be interpreted. What is more, "Each is tangled up in countless others" (Taylor, 2001, p.6). Each appears to be a part of and influence each other.

Specifically, "narrative provides people a powerful way of teaching lessons and transmitting ideas" (Berger, 1997, pp. x). They have the power to capture both our intellect and our emotions. This combination of elements entraps the whole person, and thus makes a listener or viewer susceptible to identification with the scenario being portrayed. That identification, as McClure (2009) pointed out, fosters beliefs, attitudes, and actions more powerfully than any other form of communication. Since narratives can be considered as having the potential to change minds, they ultimately have the power to induce action. In this sense, they can be called a form in the function of rhetoric. Or, as Bryant (1953) claimed, they can be seen as a tool in "the function of adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas" (p. 413).

Unfortunately, not all narratives portray reality fully. Some portray the reality of certain elements with a general accuracy, but fail to represent such holistically. For example, while watching a television program, a viewer is exposed to a narrative involving two people in love. Many of the characteristics of what a love relationship entails are included in the representation; yet, as common sense tells us, the representation is limited in its actuality. Perhaps it focuses only on the physical element of a relationship, ignoring things like the emotional and psychological dimensions.

Limited representations have consequences, especially when viewed by an uncritical audience. Simply, since social reality grows largely from the perpetuated narratives an audience is exposed to, a limited representation can contribute to a stunted and impoverished understanding of life. This stunted understanding can lead to a life less well lived. In fact, as McKerrow (1989) explained, communication that conceals the full extent of something can lead to the mystification and limited development of those the people in power wish to remain controlled. Such aims block praxis, and thus hinder a person's "chance to consider new possibilities for action" (p. 97). This, of course, raises the need for examples of more holistically accurate representations of reality. It seems only right that viewers be provided with narratives that parallel reality a little more accurately. These, albeit still lacking in completeness, would thus offer viewers the potential to witness examples of life previously unimagined. Yet, the majority of television programs do not appear to care for creating such responsible television. All of this, however, raises questions regarding other types of limited concepts existing within various narrative representations of reality.

The Limited & Comprehensive Representations of Addiction

As demonstrated, research on the cultivation effects of television has focused on a variety of topics in their relation to the resultant social reality. As previously discussed, sex, violence, crime, relationships, and materialism in television have all been examined, and have all been shown to include examples of misrepresentation. The resultant social reality surrounding the concept of addiction has also been examined. Sulkunen (2007), for example, illuminated four ways addicts can be represented in film and television. Society-wise, he suggests, addicts are seen as weak-willed, lacking self-control, and completely alone. Cape (2003) identifiee four main stereotypes of alcohol and other drug users that appear perpetuated via television–the tragic hero, the demonized user, the rebellious free spirit, and the comedic user. Hershey (2005) examined the way in which recovering addicts are treated in Hollywood movies, concluding that shows demonstrate a common and unrealistic "stock" experience of addiction and an addict's experience at a treatment center. Oksanen (2013) investigated how treatment centers are portrayed in reality television, and at the rather limited ways addicts are illustrated within the show. Kososki and Smith (2005) inquired about the way addiction is portrayed in reality television, and concluded that the ideas presented concerning the nature and actuality of addiction, as well as the addicts themselves, are limited and relatively useless educationally. Sadly, the focus has been rather limited. Unfortunately, each of these examinations demonstrate television's tendency to perpetuate a limited conceptualization of the term addiction. In so examining and not questioning this limited representation, scholars themselves have served to perpetuate an incomplete social reality. This thesis seeks to address this limitation by showing that while the representative stereotypes have justification for being portrayed—they do, after all, conform to a grand narrative of addiction—they are not the totality of a definition of addiction. Representations of addiction, as this essay hopes to show, must also include those most people in society consider goal-accomplishing, successful, high-functioning, and enterprising individuals. Addicts, as will be discussed in the next section, come in a variety of forms.

Limited Definition

Addiction as a concept is limited in television and thus in academia. Part of this stems from the incredible difficulty inherent in defining the term. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) itself appears to have had difficulty arriving at an accurate and concrete definition of the term (O'Brien, 2011). West (2005) dove into the chaos that comprises the academic conceptualization of "addiction" and its attendant term "addict". He described how the concept within authoritative texts has changed throughout the years (p. 9), explained that addiction was once used to merely describe the physiological adaptation to the presence of a drug in the body: while an addict, "was someone who needed to take a drug in order to maintain normal physiological functioning" (p. 9). As his synthetic theory of addiction suggests, the terms "addiction", as well as, "addict" are social constructs (p. 229); and thus, are an object that cannot be uniquely defined. In narrative terms, one could accurately conclude that addiction itself is a narrative, an agreed-upon story.

West (2005) stated that although there is no true definition of addiction or of an addict (p. 11), the academic world has managed to provide a comprehensive, albeit highly dynamic, definition of the terms. Within his respected synthesis, for example, West says, "addiction can be usefully viewed as a behavioral manifestation of a chronic condition of the 'motivational system' in which a reward seeking behavior has become 'out of control'" (p. 229). Using such a definition appears to have an impact on current work in obsession, compulsion, and addiction (Lee, Chang, Lin, & Cheng, 2014; Orford, 2013). Yet, this definition appears to reflect a limited view of addiction, focusing narrowly on drugs and alcohol.

The general populace appears to follow this, albeit less carefully. Actually, the working academic definition appears disconnected from that of general mainstream society. The mainstream appears comfortable sticking to the more simplistic and standard conceptualizations of the term. To the average television viewer, for example, the terms addiction and addict may simply mean "heroin addicts suffering stomach cramps, runny noses and shivering or the alcoholic with hands shaking uncontrollably" (West, 2005, p. 9). For fairness sake, the mainstream connotation of addiction might also include the rich socialite with a nose for white powder, fast cars, and even faster sexual encounters. In short, the popular definition is often even more limited than that of academia.

Regardless of this difference, both groups do share several things in common. First, they both tend to subscribe to a grand narrative reference in terms of the characteristics of addicts. Meaning, both groups appear to believe that addicts exhibit certain common socially agreed upon traits and characteristics. For example, both may agree that addicts (including alcoholics) have a need to consume their narcotic of choice. Academia, of course, appears to have a more comprehensive understanding of the traits, perhaps being a little better at recognizing more of the subtleties that reveal addiction than many of the lay populations. Yet, and this is the second point, both appear to include only the narcotic or the alcoholic within their conceptualization of the term addiction. In so doing, they neglect a much more fuller and useful conceptualization of addiction; and thus provide justification for the belief in their being a skewed social reality surrounding the concept. This, as has already been discussed, has many potentially negative consequences.

Comprehensive Definition

As discussed, television, academia, and mainstream society appear to adhere to limited conceptualizations of addiction. These conceptualizations appear to be limited to what Schaef (1987) calls “ingestive addictions” (p. 19). Ingestive addictions include the ingesting of drugs and alcohol or other elements for the purpose of producing mood change. Schaef suggests that addiction ought to be viewed more comprehensively than consisting only of ingestive forms. Instead, it ought to be viewed as including “process addictions” (p, 22). These, she explains, pertain to a series of actions or interactions such as accumulating money, exerting power, controlling others, gambling, sex, work, religion, worry, and a handful of other behaviors that create mood changes, and that fundamentally involve the consumption of both an external or internal form of narcotic. What appears to link these two perceptions of addiction—what this essay will refer to henceforth as the grand narrative of addiction—are similarities of thought patterns, attitude patterns, and action patterns within the person suffering from addiction.

If social reality is to consist of accurate claims about the nature of life, and assuming that an accurate social reality of this sort should be deemed good, then demonstrating addiction in a more expansive and better representative way seems responsible. As a tool of cultivating social reality, television then should provide examples of addiction in all its various forms, and not continue perpetuating only a narrow representation.

What is problematic about this limited conceptualization is that there are many people who fail to view themselves as suffering from addiction because of the current social reality promoted on television and in talk. This means that there is a dearth of representations with which people suffering from non-stereotypical forms of addiction can identify. Assuming that talk and television do help our understanding of what it means to be an addict, identifying ourselves with an accurate and mutually shared grand narrative of addiction can help a person who might fight a non-stereotypical definition of the term recognize, accept, and deal with a set of thoughts, attitudes, and actions blocking their lives. Thus, television shows including representations of addicts outside the narrow definition has the potential for huge impact. Identifying examples of television that includes such, making these examples known, and formulating discussions of expanded ideas concerning addiction have the power to help society achieve a form of praxis. This is especially true if television has examples of people who choose recovery from their process addiction, and thus demonstrate unforeseen possibilities for living.

The Characteristics of Addiction

What then can we refer to as a grand narrative of addiction worthy of mutual sharing? Simply, it should include a description of the attitudes, actions, and thoughts consistent with both the ingestive forms of drug taking and process-oriented forms of drug taking.

In their discussions of the characteristic attitudes, actions, and thoughts present within people suffering addiction, Schaeff (1986; 1987), Nakken (1996), Schaeff and Fassel (1988), Twerski (1997), and the writers of several well known twelve-step programs argued that there exist striking similarities among all addictions. Although not a comprehensive list, the characteristics of any addict can include: emotional immaturity, extreme self-centeredness; denial; an unquenchable desire to control one's feelings, life, as well as the feelings and life of others; an attitude of craving or longing; compulsion; obsession; magical, emotionally-based "if-then" logic (for example, "If I have enough money, then I'll be happy"); lying; a noticeable mood change when ingesting or engaging in the substance of focus, as well as when not ingesting and engaging in the substance; chaotic thinking; morbid expectations; projection of one's own issues onto another; the tendency toward delusions of grandeur; confused notions about cause and effect; manipulative communication styles; increased tolerance for the previously unacceptable; hypersensitivity; increased risk-taking; unreasonable anger; mistaken ideas about the nature of time (for example, "I can quit anytime I want to"); resentful; fearful; exhibiting a lack of faith in anything other than self; defiance; unwillingness; low self-esteem that is often masked by the intensely good feelings brought on by engaging in the action of choice; a tendency to blame others or circumstances for ones own problems; the act of masking true feelings, inability to care properly for one's own self or one's loved ones; deeply internalized shame concerning one's own worth; rationalizations for behavior; an unhealthy dependency upon others; gluttony and greed for more; arrogance and cynicism; perfectionism; helplessness; laziness; and a variety of other possible characteristics.

One of the most noticeable characteristics within this grand-narrative of addiction, as well as the current academic definition of addiction, is the predictable life-cycle that makes up the addiction. First, a person suffering from addiction has typically begun their usage of their particular drug (from now on, drug will denote any ingestive or process-oriented addiction) in what is called an "experimental" stage (Australian Institute of Professional Counselors, 2012). This is where the person is first exposed to the drug, and begins to use it occasionally. Following this, things progress into more "regular use." Many people stay in this cycle for years, and actually never progress beyond it. There are problems that occur here, but the impact of the problems are often easily forgotten or corrected. The next stage, often called "risky behavior," is where the addict's circumstances begin to grow more troublesome. Chaos begins to ensue. Personality begins to change. It is here were the addict will begin lying to cover up their activities, as well as engage in various forms of rationalization and manipulation. Stage four is called "dependence." Despite daily use, addicts in this stage still view circumstances as being "not too bad." Reality, however, suggests otherwise. Usually deterioration of relationships and health become quite apparent. Self-denial is often strong in this stage. The family members of the addict typically begin showing signs of adjustment to the addict, including fearfulness of the addict's moods, extra-carefulness toward the addict, excuse-making for the addict, and engaging in a variety of ways to "keep the peace." The fifth stage is the full on "addiction" stage. This is where things begin to deteriorate even more. The deterioration occurs quite rapidly. Once in this stage, the addict is forced rather swiftly into stage six. Because of this, the evolution into stage five marks the beginning of the end of the addiction.

Stage six is a complex situation that marks the conclusion of the addiction, although that conclusion may take anywhere from a number of days to many years to reach fruition. Typically, an addict who has evolved through each stage and into "addiction" is presented with the four choices contained within a virtual sixth stage. In many ways, this stage is part and parcel of the fifth, yet it is also uniquely separate. The four choices inherent in the sixth stage are: (1) a person can keep using their narcotic until they inevitably die; (2) the person can keep using their narcotic until they find themselves admitted into a health institution of some sort; (3) the person can keep engaging in their addictive process until something occurs that results in their being locked behind the bars of a penitentiary; or (4) the person keeps using until the pain they inflict upon themselves becomes so bad they choose to cease using their drug of choice, and seek what is popularly termed "recovery"; a process that entails a degree of surrender to something bigger and more equipped than one's own individual self, a process of taking honest responsibility for oneself and one's actions, and an essential paradigmatic shift in ones attitudes and ideas. Sadly, it tends to be the least chosen option.

The Search for Comprehensive Representations of Addiction

If the social reality surrounding the conceptualization of addiction is flawed, and if there would be great benefit of improving this flaw, then it follows that discovering television shows featuring accurate representations of addiction would be important. To do this, it seems appropriate to conduct narrative analyses of television programs for the purpose of identifying examples. This essay is a step in this direction.

Narrative Analysis

As a narrative medium, a content analysis of a television program seems most appropriately carried out through a study of the respective narratives, often referred to as a narrative analysis. According to the definition of narrative given earlier, the term refers to a series of events or states, generally involves cause and effect, and can typically be said to comprise the totality of how we interpret and explain both our world and ourselves. The study of narratives, then, can be thought of as process of looking at various kinds of stories for the purpose of uncovering and understanding both their strategic and sensemaking implications. The study of narratives has been around since the time of Aristotle and his respective treatise on *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. Over the years, and within a variety of disciplines, many great philosophers and rhetoricians have discussed the subject. Propp, Chatman, and Berger (1997) are just a tiny few of the notable names in the field of narrative analysis. Communication scholar Fisher (1987), who published a highly influential treatise outlining the narrative paradigm, is another scholar who had major impact in the field. Narrative, Fisher claimed, is core to who we are as humans. His suggested paradigm shift challenged the many master metaphors that have governed humanity's view of itself for the past several hundred years, replacing concepts like *homo sapien* with *homo narrans*. The fundamental idea is, as was highlighted earlier, man is a storytelling being capable of a narrative rationality that is as powerful and useful as any form of strict logic. Such a claim has served to open the door to a variety of research opportunities, as will be discussed in a later chapter. In terms of its usefulness in the analysis of television programs, there appears little controversy that using it as a guiding theory to help uncover the truth quality of a television show's particular narrative representations. The paradigm's reliance upon *the logic of good reasons* serves to lend weight to a discovery of, as in the case of this thesis, more comprehensive representations of addiction. In using Fisher's ideas for carrying out a narrative analysis of a television program, this paper will be adding weight to its strength as a powerful interpretive tool.

Although many critics have taken issue with several of Fisher's ideas, one particular critic's ideas did more to augment Fisher's work than weaken it. William G. Kirkwood's work (1992, 1995, 2000) on *the rhetoric of possibility* was built upon the shoulders of John Poulakos' (1984) discussion of the Sophists added to a limitation within Fisher's treatise. While maintaining that Fisher got right the important aspect of narratively shared values and identification as a means of warranting belief and action, Kirkwood (1992), as will be elaborated upon later, took issue with the way in which narrative rationality dealt scantily with the power and paramount importance of stories that offer audiences fresh insights, suggest unfamiliar ideas and often unambiguously disclose ways of living and perceiving that are previously unimagined yet quite capable of being done. As an augmentation of Fisher's work, Kirkwood's ideas could help a narrative analysis not only identify true representations of addiction, but also identify the possibilities for living that such representations might possibly offer. Thus, this essay will employ, for the first time, a combination of Fisher and Kirkwood for a look at the narratives of a television show that can be considered as offering a more comprehensive representation of addiction. So, along with the fundamental goal of answering how the narratives in *Breaking Bad* may be said to lead audiences to a new view of addiction, this thesis also will attempt to answer whether or not Kirkwood and Fisher are in fact opposed or effectively compatible.

AMC's *Breaking Bad*

This brings us to a determination of an appropriate television show for such an analysis. Television programming over the years has shifted significantly. Some have referred to the shift as the evolution of television from its former simplicity into a hybrid of big-screen ideas told by a combination of big and little screen actors rightly termed "cinema-television" (Barrette & Picard, 2014, p. 122). The idea being that differences that used to exist between the big screen and the television screen are no longer there. Writing has changed. The acting has changed. The communicated ideas have changed. Today's television tells stories of mothers who are forced to sell marijuana (*Weeds*) instead of mothers who struggle through some simplistic domestic trouble (*The Donna Reed Show*), serial killers who moonlight as Miami Police Department investigative analysts (*Dexter*) instead of bumbling detectives that could just as easily double as a town drunk (*Columbo*), uptown white girls who are forced to serve a three year prison sentence in a penitentiary (*Orange is the New Black*) instead of the humorous mishaps of a strange and quirky young teen (*Punky Brewster*), and Mr. McGoo-style chemistry teachers who start cooking crystal methamphetamine as a way to offshoot limits to their financial legacy (*Breaking Bad*) compared to shows about a goofy guy who happens to have the power to save the world (*Superman).* This, of course, makes choosing the appropriate television show both important and difficult. The TV show would need to be dramatic, contain elements of tragedy, and offer viewers a significant demonstration of the characteristics of addiction examined earlier. The choices appear limited. However, AMC's hit series *Breaking Bad* manages to standout as highly representative of an appropriate and realistic definition of addiction.

Briefly, *Breaking Bad*, created by Vince Gilligan, tells the story of Walter White, a somewhat puerile, thick spectacled, deeply underachieving chemistry teacher. When Walter is diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, he decides to begin cooking crystal methamphetamine as a way to earn enough money to provide for his family. As can be expected, things are not as easy as he anticipates. In fact, life gets positively chaotic for Walter, and his former student-slash-sidekick, Jessie. As the show progresses, the audience is provided opportunity to watch a man turn from mouse, to lion, to sniveling waif, to a reasonably respectable maker of amends.

Through the process, as will be shown, Walter's transformation embodies the transformative life-cycle of addiction.

Purpose & Rationale

As stated throughout this introduction, television is a powerful tool in the formation of a culture's social reality. Sometimes that social reality is flawed. This appears especially the case regarding addiction. This stereotype is the dominant social reality both academically and in popular culture. The perpetuation of this stereotype hinders many who struggle against alternative forms of addiction from recognizing themselves, and thus taking action to seek treatment. Thus, there is an impetus to find examples of television that portrays addiction more accurately according to a more comprehensive grand narrative of addiction. AMC's *Breaking Bad* may to be an excellent example of this kind of television. In fact, this paper takes the position that the overall objective of the show may be seen as an argument for changing the current limited social concept concerning addiction into one that coheres with a more comprehensive grand-narrative of addiction.

Using the entire series of *Breaking Bad* for a data set, this analysis will employ aspects of both Kirkwood's *rhetoric of possibility* (1992) and Fisher's *narrative rationality* (1987) to answer the question: In what way do the narratives in *Breaking Bad* reveal a new way of perceiving addiction? In answering this question, the essay will hopefully add answer to the question of compatibility between Kirkwood and Fisher. Likewise, since the aim of this paper is to demonstrate how the narratives in *Breaking Bad* ultimately act to educate audiences toward a new conceptualization of addiction, it also seeks to answer (although not a tested phenomenon) whether or not the show could possibly be included as a potential modality within a therapeutic context. As will be discussed in a later section, the need for good examples of both film and television offering accurate representations of addiction is doubly acute when addiction therapy is considered. Thus, one significant motivation for conducting this analysis is the possibility of discovering the applicability of Fisher and Kirkwood as a practical tool for selecting television shows that can be usefully used within the therapeutic modality of *Cinematherapy* (Sharp, Smith, & Cole, 2002).

To achieve all of this, this essay first describes both *Breaking Bad* and the context into which it was born (Chapter 2: *Breaking Bad*: The Show & The Context); then provides a description of methodological considerations (Chapter 3: Theoretical & Methodological Considerations); followed by the analysis of *Breaking Bad* (Chapter 4: Analyzing *Breaking Bad*), and the concluding remarks (Chapter 5: Implications & Conclusions).

BREAKING BAD: THE SHOW & THE CONTEXT

In order to show how *Breaking Bad* offers viewers a fully comprehensive demonstration of addiction, the show and its context need to be described. Following a brief factual illustration of the show's impact and a comprehensive synopsis of the series (spoiler alert), this chapter concludes with an illustration of the show's creator, Vince Gilligan, and will highlight some of the socio-political aspects surrounding its 2008 premiere.

AMC's *Breaking Bad* has had a gigantic impact on a significant portion of the North American population. If a person googles "AMC's *Breaking Bad*," they will find that nearly one billion results appear. If they try googling "love *Breaking Bad*," it yields six hundred million results. Read a list of the show's awards nominations and winnings ("*Breaking Bad* Awards," 2014), and see how it has won 59 out of 135 nominations from various award consortiums throughout the United States and beyond. Read related blog posts, news articles, Twitter, and Facebook comments; the social impact of the show will become immediately apparent. Skim through a letter written to Bryan Cranston (Walter White) from Academy Award winning actor, Sir Anthony Hopkins ("Anthony Hopkins," 2013); learn how the show impressed one of Hollywood's greatest talents. Search viewership statistics for the series. Discover how throughout the shows five season (62 episode) lifespan, viewership grew from 1.7 million at the end of the first season to 10.3 million at the series finale. This number, of course, neglects to factor alternative viewing methods like illegal downloads and streaming sites. Sadly, those figures are uncountable. In short, *Breaking Bad* can be labeled a highly impactful and influential form of 21st Century cinema-television, and thus warrants analysis from a variety of different perspectives. The fact that it deals primarily with the drug trade, methamphetamine addiction, and gangsterism, appears to warrant the attention of this analysis. In addition, the show's original writing, as well as, its original plot suggest a new way of looking at life, perhaps addiction in particular.

AMC's *Breaking Bad*: The Show

Breaking Bad tells the story of Walter White and the many people in his life. It features a host of colorful characters, including his wife Skylar, his son Walter Jr., his DEA brother-in-law Hank, and Hank's wife, Marie. It also features his former student Jessie, a drug kingpin named Gus, Gus's right-hand toughguy Mike, and a very resourceful lawyer named Saul. Also in the mix is a sinister business-woman named Lydia and a psychopathic killer named Todd. These, as any viewer of the series will report, are only a few of the very interesting group of people who populate Walt's world.

Breaking Bad Season 1 begins ("Full Series Recap", 2012) with underachieving, high school chemistry teacher, Walter White, working out early one morning on a cheap and flimsy stair stepper. While exercising, his eyes turn to a plaque on the wall. It reads, "To Walter White: In Commemoration of His Contribution Toward the Nobel Prize in Chemistry." He is obviously highly intelligent. It is Walter's 50th birthday. He is clearly a henpecked husband, who has neglected his calling, and is fighting off depression. His wife is pregnant, and his son has cerebral palsy. Bad goes to worse, when Walter discovers that he has terminal lung cancer. Desperate to provide for the financial future of his family, Walt learns of the money that can be made producing methamphetamine (meth). He requests to ride-along with his DEA brother-in-law to watch the takedown of a methlab. During the bust, Walt sees his former student, Jessie Pinkman, escaping from the scene. Later, Walt approaches Jessie and blackmails him into working together to cook and sell meth: "You know the business. I know the chemistry," he tells Jessie. The two buy a Winnebago RV, and begin cooking. Jessie is impressed with the high quality of Walt's meth, and believes he and Walt can make a lot of money. In his attempt to sell the product to Emilio, a local kingpin, things go wrong. Walt is forced to kill both men. Walt begins to change.

Skylar becomes aware of the changes in Walt. Having survived the near death experience with Emilio, coupled with his terminal fate, Walt's confidence and boldness grows. His awareness of his own mental abilities fill him with a newfound strength. Although he maintains the mask of dumb Mr. Nice Guy at home with his family, his timid self actually fades into the emergence of a confident true self. Skylar knows something is different with Walt, but cannot guess.

Walt's family finally learns of his cancer. They begs him to see the best oncologist in the area, but Walt balks because of the cost. Eventually, Walt relents and secretly decides to use drug profits to pay for his treatment.

Walt's former school-mate and now Nobel Prize-winning business partner, Elliot, hosts a birthday party for himself at the house that he and his wife Gretchen own. Elliot, having used much of Walt's original work, has grown extremely wealthy. When he learns of Walt's illness, Elliot offers to pay for Walt's treatment. Walt refuses the assistance. But, after Walt's family pleads for him to take Elliot's charity, he lies and says he will. Secretly, Walt continues to use his drug profits. The costs grow, and so Walt urges Jessie to find ways to sell more.

As the popularity of Walt's product increases, his brother-in-law, Hank begins investigating. Yet, he is still far from suspecting Walt. Meanwhile, Jessie sets up an interview with "Tuco," Emilio's insane replacement. Tuco instantly becomes a fan of Walt's meth. After an altercation with Jessie, Walt is forced to confront Tuco in order to receive their money. With his increased confidence, he brazenly blows up Tuco's headquarters. Impressed with Walt's bravado, the shell-shocked Tuco agrees to do business with him. When Tuco asks Walt's name, he replies, "Heisenberg." This marks the birth of a legend in the Albuquerque area.

Walt and Jessie begin making a lot of money working with Tuco. "Heisenberg's" blue meth skyrockets in popularity. Yet, Tuco's insanity grows worse. At the end of Season 1, it grows to the point where Walt and Jessie begin fearing for their lives.

To take care of the situation, in the beginning of season 2, they decide to poison Tuco. Before they can, however, Tuco kidnaps them. He whisks them off to his secret hideout, where they meet Tuco's mute Uncle Tio. Meanwhile, Agent Hank becomes convinced of Jessie's involvement with the blue meth, and starts tracking him down. After a series of events, Walt and Jessie escape from Tuco just as Hank shows up at Tuco's hideout. Hank and Tuco engage in a gunfight which results in Tuco's death. Hank takes uncle Tio into custody, but despite knowing exactly what happened, Tio says nothing.

The Tuco affair forces Walt to concoct a believable story for his wife and family. The lie works, but Skylar's intuition tells her there's more to the story. Her trust in Walt begins to falter.

Walt and Jessie are forced to go into business for themselves. When Jessie falls in love with his next-door neighbor, Jane, problems begin to create a rift between he and Walt. Jessie and Jane begin injecting heroin together, and both fall into an addictive chaos.

Walt's lies grow deeper when he tells Skylar that Elliot and Gretchen have cut off funding for Walt's treatment. Nervous, Skylar goes back to work at her old job as a bookkeeper for Beneke Fabricators. Skylar learns that Beneke is committing tax fraud, but agrees to help the owner cover things up.

Miraculously, Walt's cancer goes into remission. Walt's extracurricular activities, however, do not,. He and Jessie hire a lawyer named Saul Goodman to help them with finances and other matters. Goodman arranges a meeting with Gus Fring, the owner of 16 fried chicken franchises. Gus' franchises, however, contain a secret. They cover as a distribution network for meth. Gus and Walt agree to work together, resulting in a 1.5 million dollar sale to be split between both Walt and Jessie. Walt withholds Jessie's share, stating that he refuses to give it to a junkie. Upset, Jane convinces Jessie to blackmail Walt into giving them the money. Walt gives the money, which Jane and Jessie proceed to inject into their arm. Walt returns to save Jessie. He breaks into Jessie's house while Jane and Jessie are passed out. Jane rolls on her back and vomits. Instead of helping her, Walt watches as she chokes to death beside sleeping Jessie. When Jessie wakes up, he is shocked and confused to find Jane dead. He cracks, blames himself, and checks himself into rehab. Walt acts as if he is surprised to hear the news of Jane. Shortly after Jessie enters rehab, Walt has surgery on his lungs. While falling under the anesthetic, he lets slip something he had lied to Skylar about previously. The dominoes fall in her mind, and she is able to put together that he has been lying for quite some time. After Walt recovers, she confronts him. Reluctantly, Walt admits to being a drug manufacturer. She agrees to stay quiet provided he grants her a divorce.

Season 3 begins with Walt alone; Skylar has moved out to give him chance to pack his bags and move out. When he refuses, Skylar sleeps with her boss, Ted.

Despite the depressing relationship with his wife, Walt's professional life remains solid. Gus offers him $3 million to cook meth for three months in a state-of the art superlab. Walt agrees. He begins working with Gale, a highly qualified chemist. The two proceed to make blue meth in extremely high quantities.

Meanwhile, having learned of Walt's part in their cousin Tuco's death, two murderous cartel twins seek revenge. They travel from Mexico into New Mexico with a vendetta. Greedy for his own goals, Gus negotiates with the cartel boss, and arranges for the twins to postpone their revenge until Gus and Walt finish their arrangement.

After Jessie finishes rehab, he begins to cook by himself. Agent Hank, still convinced of Jessie's involvement with the blue meth, targets Jessie. Walt learns that Hank has concluded Jessie's involvement with the Tuco situation. In order to protect both himself and Jessie, Walt rushes to intercept Jessie before Hank can catch him. The two lock themselves inside the Winnebego as Hank arrives on the scene. Still oblivious of Walt's involvement, Hank attempts to get Jessie out of the RV. Walt and Jessie devise a trick to get Hank away from them. A prank phone call forces Hank to rush off, after which Walt and Jessie are able to destroy the RV. Upon learning of the prank phone call, however, Hank goes to Jessie's house and beats him senseless.

Now suspended from the DEA, Hank becomes the target of Jessie's revenge. To pacify Jessie, Walt manipulates Gus into allowing Jessie to cook together with Walt. When the three month term is complete, the murderous twins want their due. Gus diverts their focus from Walt to Tuco's real killer, Agent Hank. Happy, the twins seek to murder Hank. Their plans, however, are dashed. They are both killed in the process.

Wounded from the war against the twins, Hank is now confined to a hospital. He faces a very long and expensive rehabilitation process. Distraught, Marie does not know what to do. Skylar creates a story about Walt being a gambling genius, and just happens to have enough money to cover Hank and Marie's costs.

As Walt's product makes Gus more and more money, Gus' ambitions increase. He plans revenge upon the cartel, to which he has been a virtual slave for many years. He arranges for the Mexican authorities to kill the cartel boss in Mexico. When Walt learns of Gus's strategy, including the part he played in diverting the twins from himself, he grows to respect Gus. Admitting it, the two make a deal worth 15 million dollars.

However, Jessie's relationship with Gus begins to falter after learning of Gus' involvement in the murder of Jessie's friend. His dislike for Gus becomes pure hatred, when he learns his involvement in the murder of a little kid. Despite Gus' directive, Jessie seeks revenge upon the men Gus hired to carry out the murders. High on meth, Jessie walks to face them with gun in hand. Surely, he is about to die. Seconds before the gunfight begins, Walt rams his car into Gus' two guys, splattering them all over the sidewalk. Now fully aware of the trouble this caused, Walt knows his time is limited. He orders Jessie to go into hiding, and begins planning to solve the situation.

In the final episode of season 3, Jessie is in hiding. Gus rehires Gale. Walt knows that the only reason he remains alive is because Gale needs to learn from him. When Gale finally admits he knows the process well enough, Gus' guys come for Walt. After picking him up, they take him to the superlab where they plan to shoot him. Walt begs Mike, the leader of Gus' toughs, to let him call and set up a fake rendezvous with Jessie. Mike agrees. When Jessie answers the phone, Walt pleads for Jessie to track down Gale and kill him. Hesitantly, Jessie does what Walt asks. Now, without an alternative cook, Gus cannot kill either Jessie or Walt.

Season four begins with Gus demonstrating his psychopathy and power when he slits the throat of one of his henchmen in front of Jessie and Walt. After which, without skipping a beat, Gus orders Walt and Jessie back to work.

Agent Hank begins to recover. Asked to review the case of Gale's murder, Hank is suspicious of the theory that Gale was Heisenberg. Still ignorant of Walt's involvement, Hank becomes convinced of Gus' participation in the Heisenberg empire.

With money pouring in, Skylar devises a story that will enable her and Walt to launder the cash. Together, they decide to buy a car wash. Jessie falls back into the chaos of addiction. Gus gets Mike to help Jessie recover. Reluctant and useless at first, Jessie demonstrates his ability. Gus starts trusting Jessie with more responsibility. Convinced that Gus is planning revenge, Walt becomes both jealous and anxious. He in certain that Gus is planning a coup to turn Jessie against Walt, so Walt manipulates Jessie to use the same poison, ricin, they tried to use with Tuco on Gus. Reluctantly, Jessie agrees, but is unable to follow through. Instead, the bond between Jessie, Mike, and Gus grows stronger.

When Walt learns that Gus is taking Jessie to Mexico to train the cartel to make blue meth, he and Jessie have a fist fight. Jessie again proves his value and worth to Gus, which results in even more respect and trust. Gus plans revenge.

Several years previously, before he suffered a stroke and became mute, acting on behalf of the Cartel, Tuco's Uncle Tio murdered Gus' first business partner in front of him. As a result, Gus had been holding resentment for many years. So, Gus, Mike, and Jessie travel to meet the newest Cartel boss. Gus tricks the boss and his men to drink poison. Gus succeeds in killing them all, but cannot escape without being wounded himself. Mike also gets wounded. Jessie, however, saves them both.

Meanwhile, Hank's case against Gus increases. He reveals his theory to his former colleagues at the DEA. They are skeptical, since they all know Gus' public nice-guy image. Still, after hearing the plausibility of Hank's story, they decide to interview Gus. After healing, Gus returns to the US. Summoned to the DEA interview, he slips through the interview without revealing anything. The DEA dismisses Hank's ideas, but Hank cannot let go.

After being interrogated by the DEA, Gus goes to the retirement home where mute uncle Tio is living. Gus gloats of his victory over the cartel to Tio. Tio, a mute invalid victim of a stroke, is powerless and heartbroken.

Fully confident of Jessie's ability, Gus decides it is time for Walter to die. Jessie, however, refuses to allow it. He tells Gus to let Walt go, or he will not work for Gus anymore. Gus agrees. Instead, Gus threatens Walt and his family, stating that if he ever sees him again, he'll kill Walt's infant daughter. Walt believes this as a threat, and tries to run away. Unable to run, he is left with no choice but to try and kill Gus. To do so, however, he needs Jessie's help. Walt quickly concocts a plan that involves poisoning a young boy Jessie is related to. At first, Jessie believes it was Walt, and seeks revenge. Walt, however, manipulates Jessie into believing that it was Gus' doing, citing how Gus had once before let a child get murdered. Convinced, Jessie turns his hatred toward Gus, and agrees to help Walt.

In the process, Walt learns of the long-standing hatred between Gus and uncle Tio. Walt seeks Tio's help, despite Tio's hatred for Walt. Regardless, the two agree to work together. Several days later, Gus learns that Tio recently visited the DEA. Convinced the purpose of Tio's visit was for telling them about Gus' activities. Gus decides it is time for Tio to die. Gus goes to the old age home where Tio is staying. He sits facing Tio. Right when Gus is about to inject Tio with a poison, Tio purposefully triggers a bomb Walt had planted underneath Tio's wheelchair. The bomb kills both Gus and Tio. Season 4 ends with Walt victorious, the master of his fate. He has successfully manipulated Jessie, and has killed the threat to his life, and the life of his family.

Season 5 opens with a Walt's hubris reaching epic dimensions. He and Jessie continue cooking, only now in a new environment. Having teamed up with Gus' former tough, Mike, Walt and Jessie purchase an insect removal company to act as cover for their business. The three work together to make lots and lots of money. As time proceeds, the three are forced to ask the help of Todd. Todd, who works for the insect company, is a psychopath. This fact is revealed when Todd shoots a young boy point blank. Walt, Jessie, and Mike are forced to clean up the mess. This forces Jessie and Mike to get out of the business. Disgruntled, Walt hires child-killer Todd as his new assistant. The two continue to cook.

The DEA continues its search to understand the story behind Gus. As blue meth remains on the street, Agent Hank remains steadfast in his attempt to find the real "Heisenberg". When Walt learns that the DEA is close to capturing Mike, he calls him to warn him. Mike barely gets away. When Walt meets Mike later on, he asks him for the list of Gus' former employees. Until now, Mike had been continuing to pay off the former employees. Uncomfortable with this, and having now grown quite comfortable with killing, Walt attempts to persuade Mike to help him kill the loose ends. Mike refuses. In a fit of rage, Walt shoots and kills Mike.

Now in possession of the names, Walt hires Todd's skinhead uncle to orchestrate the murder of Gus' men. The hit is carried out perfectly, which results in the perfect death of Hank's case.

With every threat now eliminated, Walt continues to produce meth and make millions of dollars. Blue meth and the name "Heisenberg" go global. Walt has achieved empire status. When Skylar shows him a stack of over 80 million dollars, she asks if he is ready to quit yet. Proudly, Walt agrees.

Months pass. Walt, Hank, Skylar, and Marie are enjoying barbeque at Walt and Skylar's house. Everyone is laughing and joking. It looks like life is good for Walt. That night, Hank discovers something of Walt's that acts as the linchpin in the case of Heisenberg. Suddenly, all the pieces fall into place, and Hank knows without doubt that the great Heisenberg has been under his nose the whole time. Walt is Heisenberg! Immediately, Hank goes to work putting together a case against Walt. When Walt learns that Hank knows, he manipulates things to keep Hank from proceeding. Yet, the one thing Walt forgot to manage finally comes back to hurt him. Jessie learns the truth about Walt poisoning the little boy as part of his manipulation of Jessie against Gus. Furious, Jessie agrees to work with Hank to bring down Walt. Forced to keep things quiet from the rest of the DEA, Hank, his partner, and Jessie trick Walt into leading them to the place where Walt stashed his drug money. Finding it would be the irrefutable evidence they need to put Walt away for good. Trapped, Walt resorts to asking for Todd and his uncle's help. Just as Hank is handcuffing Walt, Todd and his uncle's crew arrive. A gunfight follows, in which Hank is killed, and Jessie is kidnapped. Todd's uncle steals 70 million of Walt's money, and leaves Walt with 10. He tells him to never show his face again. Walt races home, and attempts to have Skylar and his children run away with him. They refuse after learning that Walt caused Hank's death. Desperate, Walt takes his remaining money and disappears to New Hampshire. In the months that pass, Skylar's life falls apart, and Jessie is forced into cooking meth for Todd and Todd's uncle.

Walt's condition worsens. His hubris fades into self-loathing. When Walt eventually attempts reconnecting with his family, they refuse his efforts. Walt is utterly defeated; he hits bottom so to speak. What makes matters worse,, Walt's cancer returns with vengeance.

Determined to not die a shameful death, and to make something right out of this horrid situation, Walt decides to seek justice for Hank. He devises a final plan that will enable him to get the 10 million dollars he has to his wife and son, as well as, exact revenge against Todd and his uncle. He drives a stolen car back to New Mexico from New Hampshire. Once there, he forces Elliot and Gretchen to give Walt's family a donation of 10 million. The money, Walt's money, will only be received if Skylar and Walter Jr. know it is not from Walt. Then Walt creates a machine gun device to use on Todd's uncle and his crew. In the final showdown, of the final episode of the final season, Walt arranges a meeting with Todd and his uncle's crew. In the process, Walt learns that Jessie is still alive. In a final act, Walt once again saves Jessie. To do this, he fakes a fight between he and Jessie. While the two roll around on the floor, Walt triggers the machine gun device. It blasts away and kills all of the gang members. In the process, Walt is mortally wounded. When he begs Jessie to kill him, Jessie, who has grown tired of Walt's manipulation, refuses. Instead, he gets into a car and drives away redeemed and free. As Jessie drives away, Walt watches somewhat wistfully. He has a look of pride. The sound of police sirens grows louder. Walt, bleeding from his side, walks into the meth lab and looks at all the top quality equipment. His pride is real, humble. Lovingly, he places his bloody hand on a stainless steel cauldron. As the police lights begin to show behind him, Walt falls to the ground, dead. The credits roll.

Throughout seasons 1 through 5, Walt is a living metaphor of chemistry. In season 1, he tells his students that chemistry is the study of change. Over the course of the series, Walt becomes change as he transitions from a simple chemistry teacher into a murderous lunacy driven by greed, fear, and a quest for power.

Throughout the process, he messes up his entire life. The very thing he wanted to create—a legacy—is destroyed. His quest for fame and honor has led to notoriety. Is it, however, all for nothing? The purpose of this essay is to show that the story of Walt's change is not for nothing. Instead, the story of Walt may be seen to offer an important message to viewers. However, before getting to that, having just described the storyline of *Breaking Bad*, a brief description of the socio-political context surrounding the series is necessary.

AMC's *Breaking Bad*: The Context

Passion and perhaps a bit of obsession brought *Breaking Bad* to the small screen. Sheer determination drove Vince Gilligan, the show's creator, to press on despite being turned down by studio after studio. In retrospect, had he stopped to give a solid think about the nature of his story, he very well may have dropped it (Team Coco, 2012). In truth, the idea was absurd; a meth-cooking chemistry teacher who slowly transforms into Scarface was not necessarily a politically correct notion. Somewhere along the line, the viewing public had appeared to accept a marijuana-dealing mother in Showtime's *Weeds*, but meth cooking chemistry teacher still seemed a little vulgar. After all, the meth problem had begun growing toward its current epidemic numbers in 2006 (Kelley, 2013). Yet, Vince Gilligan refused to surrender. The story needed to be told.

The idea was born in 2007, near the beginning of the Writers Guild of America writers strike. Then unemployed, Gilligan and his friend were tossing around possible job opportunities for themselves. His friend joked that they could always start cooking crystal meth in the back of an RV. The idea exploded in Gilligan's mind, and the obsession to make it was born. Lucky for him, the American Movie Classic's (AMC) channel, a channel that had been traditionally focused on delivering classic movies to viewers, was in the midst of a transition of brand. AMC's goals had recently shifted toward more emphasis on original programing and shows demonstrating profound storytelling. *Breaking Bad* aired on January 20, 2008. The first season consisted of only seven episodes, due to the writers strike. Yet, the short season proved to be a blessing in disguise. Many of the original plans for the characters changed, giving birth to a new originally unintended direction (Davis , 2013). Gilligan remains somewhat quiet on the changes that were to have occurred, except to say that Jessie was not originally to have survived the first season.

When *Breaking Bad* aired, the US was thick in the middle of the Presidential election, only months away from electing its first African-American Commander in Chief. The list of issues commanding the attention of the candidates included several high stress topics: the financial meltdown was on the forefront, as real estate prices crumbled, and companies fired employees in absurd numbers. War continued to rage in the Middle East. Education appeared to be wasting away, and drooping health care seemed a joke not worth repeating. The people were no doubt on the verge of a subtle panic (Macke, 2013). For some, the future looked bleak. For many, times of panic brought increased substance abuse, violent behavior, or both. No one knew what to expect, what the truth really was, and what tomorrow might bring. A variety of comfort seeking behaviors was, for many, the best way to cope with the brutal reality around them (Newman, 2008). So, when the very first scene of *Breaking Bad* hit the screen, viewers were instantly hooked. The stark image of a desperate Walter White standing in the middle of a desert road wearing only tighty-whitey Fruit-of-the-Loom underwear and a lime green shirt, holding a Colt .45 captured viewers imaginations much like a drug itself. No doubt, a feeling of cathartic bliss from this absurd yet pleasant and original image served as lovely distraction. For there, upon the television screen was a man who indeed had it as bad or worse than the viewer him or herself. The timing, it seems, was perfect for breaking political correctness with *Breaking Bad.*

The combination of an audience's need for enthralling televised escape, coupled with Gilligan's need to tell a story that addressed audience-relevant issues made for what many have called one of the most perfectly written television shows (Writers Guild of America, West, 2014. According to Pierson's *Breaking Bad: Critical Essays on the Contexts, Politics, Style, and*

Reception of the Television Series (2014), an edited collection of scholarly essays on Gilligan's masterpiece, Vince Gilligan's work can be seen as having addressed the issue of poor public education in America. It can be seen to have addressed the issues of poor health care, the controversial "war on drugs," and illegal immigration. Authors have discussed *Breaking Bad*'s discussion of failing masculinity in America (Hudson, 2013). Gilligan provided audience members with a metaphoric look at neoliberalism, he addressed issues related to masculinity, and he is said to have dissected the criminality associated with capitalism, offering viewers a comparison and contrast between the business ethics of the streets and the ethics of the white-collar world of high finance, often with street ethics coming out as better than the latter (Pierson, 2014). In addition, the various authors in Koepsell and Arp's edited collection of philosophical essays about *Breaking Bad* (2012) suggest Gilligan also offered viewers a vast amount of philosophical considerations, including discussions of consequentialism, Kantian moral theory, as well as Nietzsche's will to power. Not too many shows on the television screen can be said to reveal such rich considerations.

Clearly, then, the show has proven impactful. When both scholars and philosophers, along with well-known media critics find something important to say about a television show, its import tends to be affirmed. Couple this with the thousands of related blog posts, Twitter, and Facebook comments, and it can be called a socio-cultural phenomenon. Yet, despite all the topics discussed concerning *Breaking Bad*, there is almost zero discussion of the show as a representation of the life and characteristics of addiction. Neither has anyone asked Gilligan about the concept of addiction, and its role in the story. This thesis desires to fill this gap, especially when considering the importance of the subject. It argues that Gilligan's *Breaking Bad* addresses some of the false social ideas surrounding the concepts of addiction and addicts.

Gilligan's work offers a narrative and metaphoric demonstration of what it means to suffer from addiction, what it means to be an addict, and the consequences that an addict can expect to experience. He goes further than merely discussing a limited example of addiction, instead providing an educative demonstration of how the term addict can apply to nearly anyone. What makes *Breaking Bad* so interesting, is that he also offers viewers a way out. As will be discussed in chapters 4 and 5, Gilligan includes a subtle message about how one can expect to recover from addiction.

Interestingly, this was not the first time Gilligan delved subtly into the phenomenon of addiction. While writing for the television series, *The X-Files*, Gilligan penned at least two episodes pertaining to the characteristics of addiction. In *Pusher* (s3 e17), we see a man who's absolute desire for control ultimately leads to his own destruction along with the destruction of many others. In *Hungry* (s7 e3), we see a character whose taste for the forbidden blossoms into a complete obsession. Gilligan's full-length feature film, *Hancock* (2008) starring Will Smith tackles the weaknesses caused by alcoholism and addictive relationships. It offers the audience a possible solution to such addiction, demonstrating clearly the correct way. With addiction being a part of some of his previous subject matter, perhaps we can guess that Gilligan may have some experience with addiction himself. At present, there appears no way to support this, outside a one on one conversation with Gilligan. In the course of writing this essay, the author did try arranging a one-on-one conversation with Gilligan, but has currently been unsuccessful.

In short, the rhetorical situation surrounding *Breaking Bad*, both as a creation and as consumable content seems a perfect set up for both the success of the show, and it's ultimate impact. One of the ways this television show may offer impact is, as this thesis hopes to show, through its narrative telling of a story about a non-traditional addict. Do the changes Walt goes through signify something? Is there a pattern related to a grand narrative of addiction?

In the next chapter, the theoretically based method used to analyze the narratives in *Breaking Bad* is outlined. Then, in chapters 4 and 5, the question of the television show's ultimate impact, specifically a hard look at its educational objective toward shifting the social reality surrounding the concept of addiction, will be discussed.

THEORETICAL & METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

So far, this thesis has discussed the need for discovering examples of television that contribute to a more realistic social reality surrounding the concept of addiction, as well as offered a description of one particular example of television that can be said to offer such a contribution. The story of AMC's *Breaking Bad* has been told, as has a description of the socio-political context surrounding the show. Now, we turn to a description of the method that was used in conducting a narrative analysis of the show. However, before delineating the method of inquiry, the method's theoretical underpinnings of the method should be discussed. The first section of this chapter introduces the ideas of narrative rhetorician Walter R. Fisher. Following this, the second section describes the possibilities and potentiality inherent in merging both William G. Kirkwood's *rhetoric of possibility* and Fisher's paradigm. Then follows a detailed description of the narrative work of William G. Kirkwood.

Walter R. Fisher

Walter R. Fisher's *Narrative Paradigm* was penned in response to questions concerning how people come to believe and act on the basis of communicative experiences. Convinced that communication is a symbolic imitation of action and thought simultaneously, he wanted to understand the role of rationality and reason in these experiences, and to understand the role of values in human decision-making and action. In addition, he hoped to discover a way to assess both reasons and values (Fisher, 1987). Unimpressed with the prevalent and assumed superiority of what he terms "the rational-world paradigm"—a paradigm that 1) advocates the primacy of argument based decisions that stem from clear-cut implicative structures, 2) adheres to specific rules within communication contexts, and 3) calls rational only that where the arguer has subject matter knowledge, argumentative ability, and skill in employing the rules of advocacy in given fields—he determined to counter it with a proposed return to the basics of *mythos*.

Fisher argued that communication was originally seen as mythos, which, simplistically, was a form of discourse that combined logic, poetics, and rhetoric as ways of assessing the world and encapsulating knowledge. As Fisher explained (1987, p. 27), Aristotle proposed the three forms be broken apart, and then advocated the primacy of logic as a tool for knowing. This essentially gave birth to our modern day reliance on the scientific model of knowing, positivism, or what Fisher terms the "rational-world paradigm." Aristotle's break essentially resulted in the neglect of values in human decision-making, and caused their diminishment as a tool for determining truths of situations. As a result, reliance on the rational world model alienated nearly all who were not formally trained in "right thinking," essentially calling only certain kinds of discussion valid for consideration of ways of living and thinking. In many ways, this reliance on strict rules of logic and communicative norms led to much advancement in knowledge, particularly in the *knowledge of how*, and the *knowledge of that*. It neglected, however, the *knowledge of whether* or not some things are desirable to do (Fisher, 1995). Fisher states that the knowledge of the rational-world paradigm, which is the essential legacy of positivism, "ill serves questions of justice, happiness, and humanity" (p. 172). To deal with these issues, Fisher believed a new paradigm needed constructing, one that included the validity of good reasons based on values.

Fisher (1987) assumed that humans as rhetorical beings are as much valuing as reasoning animals. His proposed narrative paradigm and its logic of narrative rationality contended that good reasons include warrants for accepting or adhering to any advice fostered by any form of communication: "My conception of good reasons maintains that reasoning need not be bound to argumentative prose or be expressed in clear-cut inferential or implicative structures. I contend that reasoning can be found in all sorts of symbolic actions—nondiscursive as well as discursive" (p.57). Furthermore, "The concept of narrative rationality asserts that it is not the *individual form* that is ultimately persuasive in discourse. That is important, but *values* are more persuasive, and they may be expressed in a variety of modes, of which argument is only one" (p. 48). Such values are what result in an audiences ability to identify with a rhetor and or the rhetor's claims. Thus, it was in this way that Fisher advocated an informed return to the original concept of mythos, where all forms of communication are said to provide knowledge, representations of reality, and reason.

Fisher's proposal (1995) is that "narration is *the* most appropriate, useful paradigm for understanding and assessing whatever is taken as an instance of knowledge" (p. 169). The narrative paradigm sees people as storytellers, Fisher explained (1987): It sees them as authors and co-authors who both create, interpret, and evaluate the texts of life and literature. His argument assumed that narration referred to a conceptual frame that is intrinsic to the nature of humans (p. 170), based on the idea that life itself can be interpreted in narrative terms. Although he included traditional forms of narrative as existing within the narrative paradigm, he saw narrative more as a way of imagining humanity. He presupposed (1987) that:

> 1) Humans are essentially storytellers. 2) The paradigmatic mode of human decision-making is "good reasons", which vary in form among situations, genres, and media of communication. 3) The production and practice of good reasons are ruled by matters of history, biography, culture, and character… 4) Rationality is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings—their inherent awareness of *narrative probability*, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing *narrative fidelity*, whether

> or not the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives. 5) The world as we know it is a set of stories that must be chosen among in order for us to live life in a process of continual re-creation. In short, good reasons are the stuff of stories, the means by which humans realize their nature as reasoning-valuing animals. (p. 64)

Fisher (1987) believed that seeing humans as narrative communicators puts stress on them as being fully participatory in the making of messages either as audience members or agents. This notion that people are actors, he wrote, leads to the supposition that human behavior is to be assessed by a presentational standard, and that all people have the fundamental ability to do so. The presentational standard Fisher promoted is the concept of narrative rationality.

Narrative rationality is the logic of Fisher's (1987) proposed *philosophy of reason, value and action* (p. 47). Narrative rationality is a logical criteria used to test human communication against. The logic consists of probability (coherence) and fidelity (reliability and truthfulness). The tests of probability are a way of determining whether the communication (story) hangs together. This test for coherence is measured by both the organizational and structural elements of narrative, and is based on three types of consistency. 1) Structural coherence, or the way a story flows as a whole. 2) Material coherence, or the way the story corresponds to other related stories. 3) Characterological coherence, or the way the characters maintain believability throughout the story. This essay's method, since we are looking at how the narratives in *Breaking Bad* communicate a fuller representation of addiction, will include an analysis of the show's structural and characterological coherence. This treatise argues that the narratives within

Breaking Bad cohere both characterologically and structurally to the grand narrative of addiction held in regard by many academic and addiction-related specialists.

Fisher (1987) also described *narrative fidelity* as pertaining to "the individuated components of stories—whether they represent accurate assertions about social reality and thereby constitute good reasons for belief or action (p. 105). The tool Fisher proposed in assessing fidelity is "the logic of good reasons." This he defined as an expanded version of good reasons typically used in argumentative form proposed by Wallace (1964) and Booth (1974). Fisher's version (1987) ought to be viewed as, "those elements that provide warrants for accepting or adhering to the advice offered by any form of communication that can be considered rhetorical" (p. 107). Such a conceptualization allows for the assessment of reasoning, or "modes of warrant" in a variety of different kinds of communication, including film, television, novels, anything with narration, character, and scenes that induce an audience to think, feel, or behave as an author intends (p. 108). If it proves true that the narratives in *Breaking Bad* do cohere with the grand-narrative, then it is possible to assess whether or not the show communicates an argument with a fidelity to which some audiences might adhere. Though the concept of fidelity does not factor into this study too deeply, it is a valuable consideration when we discuss the relatedness of Kirkwood's possibility rhetoric to Fisher's narrative rationality.

Once determined, the individuated forms an analyst locates are subjected to a five-question assessment of truthfulness specific to the logic of good reasons. They are questions of fact, relevance, consequence, consistency, and transcendence. This will be better explained during the delineation of the method.

All things considered, the basics of Fisher's theory can be summed up in the words of Scott Stroud (2004): "Narratives are seen as possessing good reasons for action if they are internally coherent and if they "ring true" with auditors' past experience and values" (p. 64). Those that are not seen as possessing good reasons and lack internal coherence will be rejected. "Compelling stories that fit these criteria will be persuasive in the same way as a clearly stated syllogism—both are accepted by audiences and can become reasons for belief or action" (p. 64).

Over the years, many have employed Fisher's work: Slater and Rouner employed elements in their study toward understanding narrative persuasion (2002); Rodden (2008) also used Fisher's work to clarify the persuasive power of narrative; Hollihan and Riley's (1987) well-known work on the rhetorical power of group storytelling employed Fisher's paradigm to determine the risk involved in "toughlove" rhetoric; Bush and Bush (1994) instituted Fisher's paradigm as a way to help determine the potentially ill-effects of advertisements prior to their being published; and Schrag's (1991) work on the importance of assessing the first stories children hear employed Fisher's narrative rationality, particularly narrative fidelity. Fisher's work has been used to help assess the appeal of popular movies (Stroud, 2001), the truth of the narratives discussed in reality television programs (Eaves & Savoie, 2005), the impact of popular speeches (Rosteck, 1992), and the ways that the rhetoric of sexual etiquette encourages young women to maintain the stereotypical feminine roles (Garner, Sterk, & Adams, 1998). It has also been used for discovering ways to help job applicants tell better stories, as well as help interviewers test the truth of such stories (Ralston, Kirkwood, & Burant, 2003). Although not a fully comprehensive look at all the kinds of academic questions Fisher's work has help scholars answer, the usefulness and importance of his work appears well supported by these examples.

Fisher’s work has not been without criticism, however. Rowland (1987, 1988, 1989) appears to have disagreed most with Fisher’s ideas. His criticisms include: Fisher’s paradigms’ failure to properly denounce hierarchy associated with moving from a rational-world paradigm to one based on narrative; Fisher’s definitions of the rational-world paradigm, narrative paradigm; and, the paradigms actual usefulness as an assessment tool. Fisher addressed only one of these criticisms (1989), simply asserting that Rowland misunderstands Fisher’s work. An in-depth reading of Fisher’s text (1987) appears to explicitly demonstrate answers to the questions Rowland raises. Barbara Warnick (1987) criticized Fisher’s logic of good reasons as being prone to ethical difficulties, citing the reasonability of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* when analyzed through narrative fidelity. Her criticism, however, also neglected a complete understanding of Fisher’s work, particularly his reliance upon “the bedrock value of praxial consciousness” (1995, p. 186) which he defined as love, or “an abiding concern for the welfare and well-being of others” (p. 186). Since Hitler’s work advocated the destruction of others, such work should not be considered as offering good reasons. Others, including Lucaites and Condit (1985) offer additional criticisms which Fisher answers well in his later works (1987, 1995). One critic, however, presented an interesting notion concerning a weakness in Fisher’s description. Kirkwood’s essay (1992) exposed an unclear element within Fisher’s work that at first appeared to undermine parts of narrative rationality. Yet, as the next section will show, Kirkwood’s work, although insightful, appears to do just the opposite of what was initially suspected. Instead of exposing weakness in Fisher’s work, it actually suggests an augmentation of an idea originally expressed by Fisher.

The Theoretical Marriage of Walter R. Fisher & William G. Kirkwood

Although Kirkwood (1985) concurs with Fisher's contention concerning the centrality of narrative as a paradigm of human communication, as well as, the need of a way to assess moral argument; his primary criticism against Fisher's account of rhetoric (Kirkwood, 1992) is that its narrative rationality is too conservative. He contended that Fisher implies that good stories cannot and perhaps should not exceed people's values and beliefs, whether or not these are admirable or accurate. Given narrative rationality's reliance upon people's current beliefs and realities as a basis for assessment of good stories, Kirkwood argued that there is a disconnect in Fisher's theory regarding a person's ability to be persuaded by stories outside the realm of something someone already knows to be true. In short, he argued that according to Fisher, if we hear a story that is true yet without known relevance to our life, we will not be persuaded. Although Kirkwood's criticism has support from both Stroud (2002, 2003) and McClure (2009), Fisher suggested (1987) that Kirkwood's claims were a well-reasoned extension of Fisher's work rather than an exposition of its flaws.

Fisher (1987) posited that the narrative paradigm does not deny that certain people have the genius to both create and adopt new stories that better account for their lives or the mystery of life itself (p. 67). He also suggested that work on the narrative paradigm is unfinished and needs to be improved (p. 194). Therefore, Kirkwood's ideas, as will be demonstrated, help to improve the effectiveness of the narrative paradigm rather than only pinpoint a flaw.

Fisher (1987) wrote that his narrative paradigm offered an appropriate response to Gadamer's exigent request for a way to preserve and validate the great heritage of knowledge and wisdom. He argued that the way such can be done is through formulating a theory of human communication that "recognizes permanence and change, culture and character, reason and value, and the practical wisdom of all people" (p. 98). This statement seems to suggest the inclusion of possibility rhetoric within narrative rationality.

True, as Kirkwood supported (1992), Fisher treated the suggestion of unknown possibilities only minimally (p. 30), but he appeared to assume it as an aspect of common sense inherent throughout his work. Support for this can be found in Fisher's earlier work (1970), where he offered four communicative motives identifiable in all rhetoric: 1) the rhetoric of reaffirmation, which concerns itself with revitalizing an image; 2) the rhetoric of purification, which concerns itself with correcting an image; 3) the rhetoric of subversion, which concerns itself with undermining an image; and, 4) the rhetoric of affirmation, which concerns itself with giving birth to an idea (p. 132). It is this last motive that shows how Fisher leaned toward the inclusion of possibility within his ideas.

Adding to this, Kirkwood's own ideas (1992) were grounded in the arguments of John Poulakos (1984). Poulakos identified the problems concerning the supremacy of Aristotle's metaphysical thought calling for a closer look at sophistical thought. How Poulakos described such thought and its benefits aligns with Fisher's narrative paradigm, specifically in the sophist reliance on possibility rhetoric as an alternative to the "rational-world paradigm" (p. 216). Following Poulakos' logic, one could argue that Fisher can be seen as partial to sophistical thought.

So, there are several arguments that support more of a connection between both Fisher's ideas and those of Kirkwood. In the next section, a look at Kirkwood's contribution to communication may help close the apparent gap even more.

William G. Kirkwood: The Rhetoric of Possibility

Kirkwood believed in the power of stories as an agent of change (1983, 1985, 1992, 1995, 2000). Discussing parables, he wrote (1983) that stories confront, creating opportunities for people to face themselves and possibly choose new ways of living. He suggested that stories evoke states in listeners that allow them to experience the new possibilities firsthand (p.73). Stories do more than describe the reality of the human condition or create a shared understanding of the world; they "call forth a new reality in that person's life, a reality which is intrapersonal, private, and at least initially non-intellectualized" (p. 73).

Comparing narrative to theory, he argued that , "stories are not meant to explain as a theory explains, but involve the agent in a way of life" (p. 62). Adding to this, in his discussion of metaphors and examples (1985), he explained that well-told stories have the power to inspire ideas that are far off and yet conceived, to bring attention to forgotten or never-before-considered possibilities, and generate vitality of an idea by revealing through demonstration: "the act of storytelling can affirm that a communicator is attuned to living realities, not just 'abstractions'" (p. 435).

Kirkwood (1992) contributed to Fisher's work by providing his description of a method for helping viewers see beyond the important pre-existing beliefs Fisher stated as a key aspect of narrative rationality. Kirkwood pointed out the flaw in Fisher's statement regarding a persons ability to arrive at their own conclusions about a story's soundness through several examples. He wrote that sometimes a person cannot reason with such self-reliance, that they need to be told what to conclude. This proves the need for augmentation of Fisher's work. Although Kirkwood's understanding of Fisher is debatable, his proposed solution to Fisher's presumed weakness, together with his call for narrative critics to approach stories as not only value-laden acts, but also as being possibility-laden is useful in helping us understand the rhetoric of innovation. This will hopefully become apparent through a description of Kirkwood's clarification of how stories reveal.

Stories that reveal, demonstrate how certain specific states of mind are possible. These are contrasted against stories that do not reveal, which Kirkwood (1992) declared as those performances depicting a state of mind attributable to any number of mysterious or ambiguous causes within an individual character. The latter offers a listener only something general to wish for, whereas the former has the power to offer a listener an exact description of what to wish for. Concrete specifics are more compelling than ambiguous generalities. Kirkwood called stories that reveal concrete specifics a "revealing account," and labels those stories that offer ambiguous demonstrations "nonrevealing" (p. 36). How stories reveal can be determined through what Booth (1961) discussed in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction*: telling or showing.

Telling serves the purpose of calling attention to performances that might otherwise be overlooked, or ambiguous. As well, commentary helps reinforce the appraisal an audience member might have of a situation (Kirkwood, 1992). In television, a narrator might achieve this goal, as well as, characters themselves when discussing another character. *Showing* serves the purpose of displaying ideas and states of mind that are completely unfamiliar. Kirkwood provided an example of a parable, wherein a monk demonstrates grace toward another person. This revealed possibility is demonstrated through the storyteller's ability to stipulate essential narrative details. Such details, Kirkwood maintains, effectively eliminate several rival views about a state of mind (p. 42). Often, however, no one story relies on only one form of revealing. Instead, both telling and showing are often used in tandem. When viewing *Breaking Bad*, for example, in *Pilot* (Gilligan & Gilligan, 2008) we see Walt contemplating solemnly by his pool, lighting matches, watching them burn, then tossing them into to the water. This repetitive process illustrates deep contemplation before he acts, a value worth emulating. Not only is this idea communicated through the demonstration of his action, it is suggested via the fact of Vince Gilligan's choice to include it as a part of the story. In an alternative version of the same scene, we might hear audibly the voice of a narrator telling of Walt's deep considerations. Obviously, however, both techniques serve different rhetorical purposes. The former serves to engage an audience more cerebrally.

However, there appears to be one question that remains unanswered in Kirkwood's work. How does an auditor validate the truthfulness of the suggestion of possibility to which he or she has been exposed? Would not persuasion that serves the promotion of truth require verification with something that is reasonably known? For example, if a rhetor suggests the idea that people can live underwater, and this idea has never been heard before, then would it not require confirmation? It appears that it would. Thus, this analysis of *Breaking Bad*, in addition to determining how the narratives reveal a new way of perceiving addiction, examines whether or not possibility rhetoric necessitates reliance upon coherence and fidelity. The answer would serve to further establish Kirkwood's work as useful, but also further solidify the reality that Kirkwood actually serves to augment Fisher's paradigm.

Method of Analysis

Having reviewed both Walter Fisher's work on narrative, as well as, Kirkwood's work on the *rhetoric of the possible*, we now turn to the method used to reveal the mind and presence of an addict within *Breaking Bad*.

Fisher (1987) speaks of the concepts of "felt-belief," "aesthetic-belief," and "aesthetic proof" (pp. 161-2). Each of these refers to the ultimate way in which drama argues, which he calls “the process of suggestion” (p. 161). Together, they form the framework of the method employed in this analysis.

The felt, or aesthetic belief, is the “immediate, emotional, intuitive response to a representation of an enclosed fictive world” (p. 161). This is the spontaneous non-rational response we get when we first view a dramatic or literary piece of work. The first stage of this analysis, then, involves watching the entire *Breaking Bad* series twice in order to achieve a felt belief about the objective of the show. Albeit a highly subjective decision-making process, locating the objective of the show, which is supported both by Fisher (1987) and Foss (2009), is a necessary step in any narrative criticism of a dramatic work. Foss explained that as a story goes out into the world, it performs an action, produces an outcome, or accomplishes some objective (p. 310). A critic’s job is to take the perspective of an audience member and glean *an* objective instead of *the* objective of the show. This grammatical distinction is important given the inevitability of multiple interpretations of a narrative event. What she is describing is a simplified version of Fisher’s “felt-belief” of a show. Thus, the method of analysis for this essay will begin by attempting to discern an objective that the show may be performing in the world.

Interestingly, this felt-belief often gives rise to reasoned belief and conviction within the mind of the auditor (Fisher, 1987). However, this requires identifying proof that can justify the reasoned belief. So, to segue into the next stage of the analysis, locating “aesthetic proof” becomes the goal. Fisher calls “aesthetic proofs” those “representations of reality that fall somewhere between analogies and examples,” and that are, “constituted in verbal and nonverbal ways” (p. 162) within a dramatic work. Both he and Foss (2009) say such proofs include things like the actions the characters engage in, the words they speak, the cause-effect relationships between different characters, or the interactions between the characters and their environment.

Proofs can also include theme, narration, and the nonverbal gestures of the performers (Fisher, 1987, p. 164). Identifying these elements as aesthetic proof for supporting the aesthetic belief is necessary for a reasoned interpretation of an argument within a dramatic work. Thus, each episode throughout the series was scanned for narrative examples that support the identified objective. Since the goal of this analysis is answering whether or not the television show functions to expand the social reality concerning addiction, locating one particular episode that contains a strong representation of stereotypical addiction was essential. The particular dimensions that helped identify addiction are what Nakken (1996) refered to as the character's thoughts, as expressed via dialogue; the character's actions, expressed through the ways he or she engaged with the world around them; and, the character's attitudes, as expressed through much of the character's non-verbal behaviors. The way in which an actor uses the body often speaks loudly as proof in support of an objective (Fisher, 1987). So, using Foss' principles of frequency and intensity (2004), each episode is scanned for examples of character actions, attitudes, and thoughts that stand out through intensity or frequency as coherent with the grand narrative of addiction. Once specific episodes were chosen as meeting this requirement, one episode in particular was chosen for its clear revelation of stereotypical addiction. Once analyzed, a baseline for comparison was established. From this baseline, coupled with the grand narrative of addiction presented earlier, discovery through frequency and intensity of the dimensions within Walter White throughout the series was identified.

Once coherent examples of the characteristics of addiction were found within Walt, and additional characters if frequency and intensity dictated, the analysis turned to an examination of Walt's life-cycle throughout the entire show. Doing this revealed if and how the show revealed what Kirkwood (1995) refers to as "previously unsuspected possibilities of thought and action."

In other words, whether the show revealed the mind of an addict outside the stereotypical conceptualization, and whether it revealed previously unimagined outcomes for those dealing with addiction.

It is this last point that formed the basis for the final stage of this analysis, and fundamentally concerned the concept of *Breaking Bad* functioning as moral argument. As will be discussed in the final chapter, if the series does in fact function as moral argument, its overall objective of seeking to expand social perception concerning addiction has an additional benefit of being useful in the therapeutic aims of Cinematherapy, a therapy using films and therapeutic discussion to help people overcome a variety of emotional, spiritual, and psychological difficulties.

In summary, in the analysis that follows the organizational sequence will first include a discussion of the reasoning behind the discerned felt-belief objective of the show. Second, will include the dimensional analysis of one particularly revealing account of the stereotypical addict. Third, will look at how the characteristics of addiction are revealed in Walter White. Next, the analysis will demonstrate how the characteristics of Walt can be extrapolated to form an overall structural coherence of the series itself. Lastly, the analysis will target the narrative examples of outcomes for those considered addicts; which may or may not form the fundamental moral argument of the show.

ANALYZING *BREAKING BAD*

Throughout the previous three chapters, this study has discussed television's affect upon social reality, its tendency toward cultivating limited representations of addiction, the problems that can result from such, and the need to find examples that promote more accurate demonstrations. Also, AMC's hit television series *Breaking Bad* and the context into which it was born have been discussed, wherein the series was introduced as a potential example that may be said to cultivate a more accurate representation of addiction. In the third chapter, given television's primacy as a narrative medium, two well-known theorists in the field of narrative rhetoric were reviewed for their ability to help rhetorical critics assess narrative for the purpose of promoting a clearer understanding of a rhetorical phenomenon. As well, grounded in the work of those theorists, the third chapter outlined a method of inquiry that will be used in assessing *Breaking Bad* to answer the question: In what way do the narratives in *Breaking Bad* reveal a new way of perceiving addiction? The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate whether the narratives do in fact suggest a new way of perceiving addiction, and to reveal how they may be said to do so.

Following the recommended approach offered by both Fisher (1987) and Foss (2009), this analysis begins with a discussion of objective the show appears to be performing in the world; which Fisher calls the *felt-belief* that an auditor has regarding the overall rhetorical aim of the dramatic work. In discussing the show's objective, several episodes are discussed for the way in which they may have contributed to the felt-belief. Following this, exploration will begin of one particular episode for the purpose of identifying a stereotypical example of addiction. This episode will form a basis from which a comparison will be made against the main character of the show, illustrating how he is narratively represented as an addict despite standing perceptually well outside the stereotype. This section segues into a description of how the entire series can itself been seen as a show about addiction, thus acting to reveal the mind of a non-stereotypical addict. Finally, the last section turns to the way in which the show can be seen to function as a moral argument through demonstrating the outcomes available to those who are actively suffering from addiction.

The Felt-Belief of *Breaking Bad*

Fisher (1987) claimed that the mode in which dramatic and literary works argue is through the process of suggestion; he states that "through the revelations of characters and situations that represent different value orientations in conflict with each other and/or with the environment, the reader or auditor is induced to a felt-belief, a sense of the message that the works is advancing" (p. 161). In this first section, the various revelations of characters and situations that represent different value orientations in conflict which give rise to the felt-belief of the show will be delineated. First, however, what exactly is the felt belief of the show?

After two viewings of the show in its entirety, one possible objective of the television series is to challenge audience perceptions concerning the nature of addiction. True, *Breaking Bad* discusses a variety of topics like the American education system, the health care system, and the dialectic between masculinity and feminism; however, it only touches piecemeal on these subjects. Contrarily, nearly each and every episode contained suggestions and references to addicts and addiction. It might be easy for a casual viewer, in his or her quest to find a deeper more literary meaning, to gloss over the base fact of addiction due to its being glaringly obvious throughout the show. Nonetheless, it is there; and it is loud and clear.

There are four particular episodes that help lead a viewer to the felt-belief mentioned above. Viewed in order, they suggest a strong coherency with the narratives of addiction discussed in the first chapter of this essay, and thus produce a profound effect that implies strongly the goal this essay believes the show seeks to achieve.

In the opening scene of the *Pilot* episode (Gilligan & Gilligan, 2008) the audience is exposed to the deeply unexpected; in the middle of a no-name desert, a khaki colored pair of mans slacks float dream-like from the sky to the side of a dirt road, whereupon they are run over by a speeding Winnebago. Inside the Winnebago, a half-naked man is driving frantically while wearing a gas mask. There is someone that appears dead or passed out in the passenger seat next to the driver; this person is also wearing a gas mask.

Making matters even more unusual, there are two bodies in the back of the automobile face-first on the ground slipping and sliding side to side as glass and garbage smash around them. Only then does it become apparent that the inside of this RV is absolutely unlike the inside of any normal RV; where a person might expect to see a refrigerator, a mini-kitchen, a table and chair unit that can be transformed into a place to sleep, there is nothing but a work bench tacked up on the side of the wall. This scene, this RV, these characters are all unexpected, which sets the stage for a show that will be dealing most likely with subject matter that is not within the normal gamut of television topics. Perhaps the audience will be introduced to a new concept, or a new perspective regarding the nature of life. Whatever the motive, it is clear that the writer and director—in this case, Vince Gilligan—has an important story to tell; one that needs an introduction that thoroughly captures the attention of the audience immediately. It is as if he is hooking them to his aims through the very first hit.

Drawn into the story, the audience is introduced to Walt; his pain, tragedy, and his weakness. Also, the audience is given a chance to witness a man becoming, growing in courage, growing in fearlessness. In *Crazy Handful of Nothin'* (Mastras & Hughes, 2008) the audience sees Walt fully emerge into fullness. They see him become a new kind of person, so much so that the episode could easily be called “Walt’s Becoming.” After a ruthless drug dealer beats his partner, Walt takes to facing down the vicious lunatic in an attempt to reclaim the money owed for the product he produced. Fully aware of the potential for death, and having already conceded to the reality of his own impending death, Walt bravely walks into the dealer’s office. When confronted, Walt—with nothing to lose—causes an explosion, destroying nearly everything, and nearly killing everyone in the office. Impressed with Walt’s bravado, the dealer agrees to work with Walt. Walt walks away with a bag of money in his hand, a slight drip of blood rolling from his nose, and gets into his car. He is shaking. From his body language, the audience can see he is charged with adrenaline. He opens the bag of money, fingers the rolls of cash, and delivers a warrior’s victorious yawp from deep within. The surge of power, the surge of energy, and the adrenaline all appear to be charging through Walt’s body. He is ecstatic for doing what he had been so afraid of doing throughout his entire life before this moment: living fully and adventurously. In this moment, the birth of an addiction is revealed; the hint of it coheres to the way an addict reacts to the first real hit of a drug. The audience sees his charged energy, in it is revealed the hint of Walt the junkie, mainlining a power surge that he will no doubt want to repeat.

After being drawn in by the mysteriousness of the first episode, and being witness to the emotional charge Walt gets from having faced and defeated a bully, the series shifts into its second season. Walt’s behavior changes, secrets abound in the storyline; there’s a strange half-burned pink bear that keeps making its appearance in the intro to several of the second seasons episode. It hints of the first season, the enticement for the audience to keep watching, the invitation to pay attention because there is something important that needs to be discussed. And so the audience continues to watch as Walt and his partner, Jessie, continue to cook their blue product much to the satisfaction of those who use and abuse it. In *Breakage* (Wally-Beckett & Renck, 2009), while selling the product, an employee of Walt and Jessie gets robbed. Both his money and his product are stolen by two hardcore filthy-clothed, emaciated, scab-riddled methheads. As the audience learns in *Peekaboo* (Roberts, Gilligan, & Medak, 2009) the methhead's names are "Spooge" and "his woman." When challenged by Walt to get the money back from the two, Jessie finds out where they live and breaks into their house. Their place is a disheveled wasted-filled litter barn caked in dirt and darkness. While waiting inside for them to return, Jessie learns the couple has a little boy living with them. The boy is unkempt and neglected. He is hungry, so Jessie tries to find him something to eat in the house. Marshmallow spread is all he can find.

When "Spooge" and "his woman" return, chaos ensues as Jessie attempts to get his money. What follows is an episode that includes a comparative montage that alternates back and forth between Jessie in the methhead's house, and Walt demonstrating his deception of both his wife and son, as well as, his greed-riddled pride with his former lover. Viewed carefully, the auditor is presented with a very artistically designed juxtaposing between the life of two stereotypically created addicts and the life-behavior of Walter White. The audience is presented with the two versions of neglected children, two versions of destructive love relationships, two versions of the greed for more of what each believes each person needs. What is troubling about this comparison is the similarity between each "family" despite their outward differences.

So now the viewer has experienced the unique invitation into the series as presented in the first episode, and he or she has witnessed Walt injected with his first real hit of power. Too, the viewer has experienced an episode wherein it is possible to cut a comparison between the chaotic addicted life of two meth-abusing junkies and the chaotic life of a plain-clothed chemistry teacher. As the series progresses, additional episodes offer hints and suggestions that can be said to cohere with the grand narrative of addiction. Yet one episode in particular speaks so loudly in coherence with the life cycle of addiction that it is impossible not to conclude the series with a belief that one has just witnessed a compelling treatise on the nature of addiction.

Throughout the series, the audience witnesses Walt throw away hope and discard the idea that man is not in control of his destiny. Both the presence of a lack of hope for the future, as well as, a lack of belief in anything other than self as a determiner of one's own destiny are often dominant attitudes according to the grand narrative of addiction. After one of his first chemotherapy sessions, Walt is presented with a pin that states, "There is always hope." As he leaves the hospital, he tosses the pin into the trash with a soft gesture that seems to suggest an attitude of uselessness (*Breakage*, Wally-Beckett & Renck, 2009). It is a significant enough gesture for someone not to conclude as having deep symbolic reference. Later in the series, Walt sits in the dressing room after finishing a session of chemotherapy, and listens to a young man tell a sob story about how he had been living a great life, then boom one day found out he had cancer. The young man confesses how hard it has been for him to "let go of control," and how difficult it has been for him to accept the adage, "Man plans, God laughs." At hearing this, Walt replies contemptuously, "That is such bullshit". "Never give up control. Live life on your own terms . . . each month I come in here knowing full well that one day I'll hear bad news. But until then, I'm the one who's in control" (*Hermanos*, Catlin, Mastras, & Renck, 2011).

So here the audience has seen Walt as a man of self-will. He believes only in his own power, only in his own ability. Again and again, he has proven to be the solution to his own problems, and the source of all his power. Yet, as the series winds down, as Walt's life grows more and more out of control, the audience is provided with an opportunity to see Walt give up his all consuming belief in self. In *Felina* (Gilligan & Gilligan, 2013), Walt is near to death, and truly without help or hope. It is the middle of winter, he finds an open car, crawls in and plans to steal it so as to travel back from Connecticut—where he has been in hiding the past few months—to Phoenix in order to attempt to rectify the damage he left behind. Sitting in the snow-covered car, Walt searches the glove box for a screwdriver, or some kind of tool he can use to hotwire the car. A police car with lights flashing drives past him. He stops moving, slouches down in the car, and appears genuinely afraid. As the police cars flood light attempts to penetrate past the snowy windows to see if anyone is inside the car, Walt sits as still as a frightened dear. Then, in a move completely out of character, Walt closes his eyes and he whispers not to himself, but to something other, "Just get me home. I'll do the rest." Shortly there after, the police car drives away. As if suddenly inspired with common sense, Walter then reaches up to the sun visor, flips it down, and the audience watches as a car key attached to a white key fob falls into his hand. Upon close examination, however, unbeknown to the audience, the white key fob is unique to *Narcotics Anonymous*, a twelve-step program dedicated to helping addicts recover from their addiction. This particular white fob is often referred to as the surrender chip in their program; it reads, "Just For Today", and is typically given to a newcomer into the program who is seeking to change the course of their life. In this scene, the audience is able to conclude that Walter has in fact turned a corner in his life. He has surrendered of sorts, realized his need for help beyond himself, is willing to take ownership of his situation, and sincerely wants to try and heal the brokenness he created.

Although determining the felt belief of a show is often only gleaned intuitively, there are always key elements of a dramatic event that one can point to for their impact upon a viewers intuition. These four particular episodes were highly impactful representations of the entire series acting as a story aimed at educating audiences of a deeper scope surrounding the nature of addiction. So, having been presented with a unique opening scene that trumpets the coming of something very important, a scene that reveals the making of an addict without a stereotypical face, an episode that appears to illustrate a significantly comparative relationship between the stereotype and the non-stereotype, and an episode that shows a man whose life has hit bottom surrender, the viewing audience has been introduced to a show that can certainly be said to perform the work of suggesting a new way of perceiving addiction.

The next section will present the way in which one particular episode functions to reveal to the audience something they already know to be true. In short, how it reveals a stereotypical representation of addiction that coheres near perfectly with the generally accepted grand narrative of addiction.

Peekaboo

In the previous section, discussion of the episode titled *Peekaboo* (Roberts, Gilligan & Medak, 2009) mentioned its significance as juxtaposition between the two stereotypical addicts—“Spooge” and “his woman”—and the main character, Walter White. This section will specifically examine the presented stereotypes for the purpose of identifying characteristics that can be said to cohere clearly with the narrative of addiction.

Outwardly, there are significant indicators that reveal the mind of an addict. First, the relationship between “Spooge” and “his woman” appears to be a clear example of what Nakken (1996) referred to as an addictive relationship (p. 31). They are constantly fighting, they get high together, they commit crime together, they presumably copulate, and they ultimately put the good of their own self above the good of the other when necessary. To the viewer, the relationship between “Spooge” and “his woman” is dysfunctional. Some might use a word like “insane” or “chaotic” to describe it. This insanity and chaotic is, according to Nakken (p. 33) common to addicts in relationship. The addicted often mistake this chaotic intensity as intimacy; which appears the case in *Peekaboo*. Their being together would most likely never happen if they were not both addicted. Next, the audience is presented with the state of their home. It is dark, it is disheveled, empty food boxes, other garbage, and random items are littered around the place. For some audiences, it may remind them of “crack-houses” they may have seen illuminated on television, or in some sad cases may even have experienced personally. As for their personal appearance, “Spooge” and “his woman” are both dressed in unkempt dirty clothing, and engage in unnatural behaviors (they keep their drugs in tied baggies inside their anuses). “Spooge” is unshaven, balding, missing teeth, and grossly underweight. His face is marked with the kinds of sores audience members might also have experienced via television or in personal experience. “His woman” is no different. She speaks with a high-pitched whiney cackle, is twitchy, has tangled dirty long hair, also appears to have rotting and missing teeth, and too boasts the standard facial and body sores. From their physical appearance, and the physical appearance of their home, the audience is given access to attitudes the two have toward both themselves and others, a coherent picture of what Nakken referred to in his description of life breakdown, where the addict no longer cares about what happens to others or self, but only for the getting high that comes from acting out (p. 54). The two subscribe to the value of personal pleasure above and beyond all other values. Theirs is self-centeredness run riot.

Their addictive inward state is further revealed in five powerfully coherent ways. First, through the state of the child that lives in their house, obviously sick and uncared for, viewers are exposed to further revelation about these addicted parents whose minds are focused on their own selfish and self-destructive pursuits; and though “his woman” attempts to demonstrate motherly tenderness toward the boy, hers is actually a selfish ploy designed to gain the upper hand over Jessie who holds the two addicts at gunpoint. To the manipulative pair, the boy is a means to an end; a trait often alive and well in Nakken’s (1996) narrative of how addicts treat themselves and others.

Second, the audience is offered a story of the kinds of chaotic ideas and thinking processes that drug-induced desperation can engender. When Jessie demands his money back, “Spooge” tells him he has his money, and that it is in the back yard. Outside, Jessie sees an ATM machine that the addicts have recently stolen and dragged home. Their goal, “Spooge” states, is to break into it and get the cash. The baffled look upon Jessie’s face speaks volumes, non-verbally demonstrating that the thoughts of “Spooge” and “his woman” have slipped far away from normal rationality. Though “Spooge” appears to exhibit at least a form of rationality in his explanation, his is a logic that makes sense only to him and “his woman.” This example of a self-serving non-rational rationality coheres with the logic Twerski outlines in his work on addictive thinking processes (Twerski, 1997), as well as what Nakken cites as addictive logic (1996).

Third, the lies and denial expressed by both “Spooge” and “his woman” illustrate coherence to Nakken’s (1996) narrative of the denial patterns inherent in addictive personalities. Twerski (1997) also supported Nakken’s findings. For instance, while explaining to Jessie how he and “his woman” obtained the ATM, “Spooge” twists the facts of their heist to paint the two as being extremely skilled and undetected in their execution of the theft. While “Spooge” weaves his version of events, the camera shifts viewers to the truth: the store from which they stole it. On the floor lies the owner. He is covered in blood with a gaping hole in his chest: “It was a victimless crime," "Spooge" says. Jessie, not too intelligent himself, appears to believe the story.

The murder of the storeowner is the fourth example of a coherent narrative of an addict's reality. With growing addiction comes the increase of ethical decline. Nakken (1996) calls this the breakdown of life stage of addiction, wherein the addict has entered into an out-of-control state identified by spiritual emptiness and moral corruption. According to the life-cycle narrative of addiction identified in the first chapter, this is the fifth stage of the cycle: full addiction. This is not to suggest that all people suffering from addiction murder people, but the spiritual emptiness and moral decline are noticeable in many highly self-destructive forms of addiction. In this episode the audience is privy to the extent to which someone with a self-destructive need for their narcotic is willing to go. This narrative is extended even further when the audience sees the insanity-filled rage reaction from "his woman" when she decides to murder "Spooge" by crushing his head underneath the ATM. His crime: he called her a bad name one too many times.

Finally, the audience is presented with a coherent demonstration of three common outcomes that those suffering from addiction can expect to meet (Australian Institute of Professional Counselors, 2012): jails, institutions, and death. First, undeniably related to his addiction, "Spooge" dies while "his woman" lies passed out stoned on the couch. Second, having called the police, Jessie ultimately sets up a guaranteed prison sentence for "his woman." Finally, albeit not directly specific to an actively using addict, the little boy will be placed within the institution of foster care. Illustrated here is how an addict's life cycle always includes others in the path of the destruction an addict can potentially carve. Although, in this case, the outcome of institutionalization does not involve the addict him or herself, it involves the child of the addict, who having grown up in an addictive household may—according to those authors comprising the majority of this essay's grand narrative of addiction (Schaef, 1987; Nakken, 1996; Twerski, 1997) —be prone to inheriting the same troubles as the parents. In short, *Peekaboo* holistically explores addiction very coherently albeit rather stereotypically. Fortunately, as will be demonstrated in the next section, the audience was presented with opportunity to contemplate more than the limited focus on stereotypical "Spooge", "his woman", and their red-headed love child. Instead, through the artful work of Vince Gilligan and his team, the audience is offered a comparative look into the ways addiction too manifests itself in the life of Walter White.

Peekaboo On You, Walter White!

"A well-told story can enliven otherwise remote ideas, call attention to forgotten or unsuspected possibilities, and confront listeners' attitudes and actions" (Kirkwood, 1985, p. 422). In *Peekaboo* (Roberts, Gilligan, & Medak, 2009) viewers are given glance into the way in which Walter White demonstrates the thoughts, attitudes, and actions of an addict. It is in this demonstration that viewers are provided a new way of perceiving addiction; a perception that goes beyond the limited representation offered by "Spooge" and "his woman." Thus, they are offered an opportunity to contemplate the enlivened idea of one very unsuspected possibility: that someone who does not fit the stereotype of addiction can in fact be that very stereotype. Outwardly Walter, "Spooge," and "his woman" appear distinctly different. Yet, as this section will show, Walter White's character illustrates similar characteristics as the stereotype, and in actuality demonstrates them much more deviously. For he is truly an addict in sheep's clothing. This section looks at how the narratives of Walter presented in *Peekaboo* and in previous and consequent episodes cohere to the narratives of addiction.

Walter, the Addict

In contrast to "Spooge" and "his woman," who actively use external means of controlling their emotions—meth and heroin, Walter's drug of choice is what Schaef (1987) referred to as an inside drug. This, typically refers to chemical hits that occur when a person engages in some intensely emotional situation. For example, when someone gambles, they experience the surging feelings associated with winning or losing. When someone worries excessively, they experience the gripping emotion of fear. When someone robs a bank, or jumps from a plane, they experience a burst of adrenaline. In each of these, a chemical is released in the brain that can be said to temporarily and pleasurably distract a person from reality. Actions that have the ability to produce predictable and pleasant emotions tend to create consistency of use by people who are seeking refuge from the pains of reality. This consistency is the catalyst of habituation, which is the precursor to addiction (Nakken, 1996).

Throughout the series, there are several narratives that support the idea that Walter White is addicted to the inside drugs that result from his engaging in and obsessively seeking intensely exciting situations, attaining power and money, and accomplishing things that demonstrate his self-reliant brilliance; all of which cohere with activities included in the narrative of addiction (Nakken, 1996; Schaef, 1987). Adding weight to the claim that these activities are used as escape from painful realities are narratives illustrative of painful realities in Walter's life.

In him, the audience sees a henpecked underachiever with a billion dollar resentment. *Pilot* (Gilligan & Gilligan, 2008) introduces a sad looking Walter White exercising on a cheap stair climber, while he stares at a plaque stating his contribution toward someone else's winning of the Nobel Prize in chemistry. The audience sees his frustration at teaching high school students who clearly do not care. They witness his humiliation at being caught polishing the tires of a student's car, the result of his needing an extra job to help support his family. They learn that his wife appears to rule the household through the way in which she tells him what he should and should not do with regard to his jobs, finances, and sexuality. They watch as the meekness with which he walks through life incurs the same domination from his boss at the carwash. Finally, they witness his ultimate humiliation: being diagnosed with terminal lung cancer. Clearly, Walter has a painful reality from which he would like to escape.

In *. . . And the Bag's in the River* (Gilligan & Bernstein, 2008), the audience is introduced to Walt's former lover, Gretchen. In *Gray Matter* (Lin & Brock, 2008), they learn that Gretchen has married his former business partner and college friend, Elliot. *Peekaboo* (Roberts, Gilligan, & Medak, 2009), in addition to the story of "Spooge," tells of the mixed up confusion that was the end of the relationship between Walt and Gretchen, expressing vividly the pain and resentment that remains in Walt so many years later. In the conversation between Gretchen and Walter that follows her learning of his lying to Skylar, the audience witnesses how he has not let go of the pain of that former relationship, nor has he forgiven the loss of the company Gretchen and Elliot own, which is now worth over a billion dollars. "What happened to you? Because this isn't you," Gretchen asks; to which Walt replies, his face communicating deep disdain, "And what would you know about me, Gretchen?" Their argument gathers momentum, from which the audience is given a picture of what happened between them. Confronted with Gretchen's view of the facts, however, Walt attempts to keep the argument on his version of what happened; he stands firm to his perception of himself as the victim of their conspiring against him. "You abandoned me," Gretchen claims. Walt responds not to her claim, but with, "you rich girl, just adding to your millions." In so doing, he conveniently neglects responsibility for his part in the dissolution of their relationship. His body language signals a man not comfortable with himself, a man lying to himself, and a man ignoring the facts.

So, cancer, plus underachievement, plus the potentially self-caused loss of a beautiful relationship and a bright future suggest pain enough for Walt's susceptibility to the addictive trance-like solace that comes from the kinds of activities that he eventually chooses to engage in. Walter's previous life is, in meth-making terms, the "precursor" necessary for the chemistry involved in the changing of his personality. What exactly, then, are Walter's trance-producing activities?

Walt's Drug of Choice: Excitement

The audience witnesses Walt's love of, or obsession for, excitement. What is meant by obsession for excitement refers to the obsessive seeking of a charge of subjective energy that comes from doing something dangerous and possibly life threatening. *Pilot* (Gilligan & Gilligan, 2008) shows Walt's first taste of excitement when he escapes death by drug dealers, death by his own hand, and imagined capture by the police. Returning home from what must have been Walt's most exciting day in his life, he climbs into bed with his wife, and takes her sexually with a masculinity she has never known. In *Cancer Man* (Gilligan & McKay, 2008) the audience watches as Walt expresses his growing love of risk-taking when he blows up in broad daylight the car of a blue-tooth headphone-wearing loudmouth who had earlier robbed Walt of his parking spot. Walt's excitement-seeking behavior is repeated throughout the entire series, and can actually be said to be much of what drives much of the story. Even as subplots, his love of excitement creates change. In *Over* (Wally-Beckett & Abraham, 2009), for example, the audience witnesses Walt on what appears to be a dry drunk (Nakken, 1996, p. 26) wherein he is tentatively "out of the meth business" and is now at home. A dry drunk refers to a person who exhibits all the chaotic behaviors of actively using alcohol or drugs, without actually using the drugs. Without his emotional intensity fix, the audience sees an obsession-riddled man with a compulsion to find and fix all that is wrong in his house. In one scene, he demonstrates neglect of his wife and son during breakfast. His wife asks, “Are you going to work today?” Walt responds, “Skylar, there’s rot,” then shrugs as though her question is ridiculous given the state of their home. She and Walter Jr. share a look that suggests Walt’s incomprehensibility.

After weeks of being obsessed enough to refinish much of the foundation of his house, Walt identifies a small-time meth manufacturer while shopping in a hardware store. Deducing his intentions from the materials in the guy’s shopping trolley, Walt offers unsolicited advice that he should instead try and buy the items at different stores to avoid detection. The man runs away scared. After thinking on it a while, Walt drops what he had come to buy, exits the store and goes looking for the guy. In the parking lot, he spots him talking with a tough looking man with tattoo-filled arms. Walt walks up to them both, steadies himself confidently, and with menacing eyes says, “stay out of my territory!” As the two back down and walk away, Walt’s communication style has illustrated loudly to viewers that his homebody life has ended, and that he is going back into “the business.” The excitement and power of it appears to have won the day.

Walt’s Drug of Choice: Attainment

The audience witnesses Walt's obsession for attainment in several scenes. Obsession for attainment refers to a person’s quest for more: more love, more security, more of any substance or process that produces good feelings. In Walt’s case, his desire is to attain more money, more power, more of a legacy. In *Seven Thirty-Seven* (Roberts & Cranston, 2009), he says he requires $737,000 dollars to be able to care for his family’s future. In *Buyout* (Hutchison & Bucksey, 2012), however, he tells Jessie that that number was not enough, and that now he is interested "in the Empire building business." This scene demonstrates Walt's growing love of attaining more money; it also demonstrates his increasing hubris brought on by his push for more power. An example of Walt's push to attain more of a legacy is illustrated his is conversation with Elliot and Gretchen in *Felina* (Gilligan & Gilligan, 2013). He conveys that under no circumstances are they to pay any of the taxes or fees on the money they are funneling for him to his family. In so saying, Walt has attained pride in doing what he originally set out to do.

Walt's Drug of Choice: Accomplishment

The audience also witnesses Walt's obsession for accomplishment. An obsession for accomplishment might include the push to accomplish goals that fundamentally prove one's worth, one's strength, one's power and effectiveness. The audience is provided with many examples of Walt's accomplishments. From solving a dead battery issue through the genius of chemistry in *4 Days Out* (Catlin & MacLaren, 2009), to outsmarting and killing Gus Fring in *Face Off* (Gilligan & Gilligan, 2011), to rigging a killing machine with power enough to wipe out the gang in the final episode *Felina* (Gilligan & Gilligan, 2013), the audience has opportunity to see Walt's thinking at its best, his accomplishment of things that no average person could create and accomplish. Like the progressive nature of his attainments, his exciting situations, Walt's accomplishments must grow larger and more elaborate. His ego appears to depend on it. In *Cornered* (Hutchison & Slovis, 2011), after having survived a number of near death experiences, and having successfully proven himself immensely intelligent by thus outsmarting his deviously conniving employer, Gus Fring, Walt retorts to Skylar's fear-based suggestion that he might be in over his head. She says to him, "Admit you're in danger." He turns to her, demonstrating a clear attitude and personality change through a shift in posture, tone of voice, and facial tension. With a strength she has not seen before, she sees that he is no longer the controllable and henpecked man he used to be. Condescendingly, he asks, "Who do you think you are talking to right now? Who is it you think you see? Do you even know how much I make a year? Do you know what would happen if I stopped going into work tomorrow? . . . I am not in danger, Skylar: I am the danger!" With this claim, Walt paints a picture of his accomplishments; he alerts the audience along with his wife that he knows he has achieved much.

Later, in an argument with Walt's trusty lawyer, Saul Goodman, *Live Free or Die* (Gilligan & Slovis, 2012), upon hearing Saul suggest that Walt be done with the business, Walt responds toughly, arrogantly, and with a much larger bravado, "We're done when I say we're done." Walt's goal, as he states in *Buyout* (Hutchison & Buckey, 2012) is to accomplish more than what was taken from him by Gretchen and Elliot. His hubris and his sense accomplishment have only just begun to grow to the level he can feel satisfied with; more accomplishment, to Walt, appears a key to his happiness.

Revealing the Mind of the Unconventional Addict

From these examples of Walt's obsession for excitement, his obsession for attainment, and his deep desire to accomplish more, the audience has demonstrations of some of the kinds of inside drugs to which Walt may be addicted. Of course, these "drugs" are not all that might be included as his drugs of choice. They seem, however, the most evident. So, thus having a reason to use substances or events, and thus having a series of drugs that produce the escape Walt wishes for, the audience can reasonably see how Walt illustrates certain prerequisites of an addict. Like "Spooge" and "his woman," he has a reason to use, and he has a drug. Does he have the characteristics of an addict, however? Earlier in this chapter, the characteristics of

“Spooge” and “his woman” were described. The description included analysis of both the outward and inward state of their lives. This section will follow the same pattern to demonstrate how Walt character reveals an unconventional version of addiction.

Outwardly, in terms of physical traits, Walt bears little relation to the stereotype. Where the stereotype is unkempt, dirty, and messy, Walt is orderly, his house is arranged, his method is clean; he even cuts the crusts off of his peanut butter sandwiches. To look at Walt, audience members see a self-responsible, disciplined, adult man. When, however, the audience begins to look at his relationships, however, the chaotic life of an addict is subtly revealed.

Throughout the series, Walt’s relationship with Skylar grows progressively dysfunctional. It begins as a passive relationship, moves to a deceptive relationship, and slowly grows completely chaotic and destructive; a progressive tendency that coheres with Nakken’s (1996) narrative of addiction, which he termed the beginning of “people problems” (p. 47). Schaef (1986) supported this in her book on codependency. Thus, this changing nature of their relationship coheres with the addiction narrative. As the addict emerges, withdrawal and secrecy typically comprise the first stage. The emerging addict pulls away from the people he or she needs most. As a result, the non-addict reacts by trying to adjust and fill in the void. The result is growing dysfunction. In *Pilot* (Gilligan & Gilligan, 2008), Walt begins the change by merely keeping his diagnosis from his family. This deception grows larger with his partnering together with Jessie. Schaef (1986) referred to this as growing codependence, or an unhealthy interaction pattern. The result is a similar series of interactions between Walt and Skylar as the audience sees between “Spooge” and “his woman.” Throughout the series, Walt lies repeatedly to Skylar, threatens her, and manipulates her. For example, in *Bit by a Dead Bee* (Gould & McDonough, 2009), Walt fakes a fugue state in order to explain a drug-related disappearance. Later, he lies about his having a second cell-phone. Skylar reacts by mimicking him, when she disappears without word in an attempt to teach him a lesson *Down* (Catlin & Dahl, 2009). Later, in reaction to Walt's lies, deception, and lifestyle, she further tries teaching him a lesson by sleeping with her boss, Ted, in *I.F.T.* (Mastras & Maclaren, 2010). In time, she decides colluding together with Walt to be the best option, which fosters even more chaos and destruction. Matters culminate upon learning of Walt's involvement in the death of her brother-in-law. In *Ozymandias* (Walley-Beckett & Johnson, 2013), the audience witnesses a near death fight between Walt and Skylar similar in chaos to that the audience watches in *Peekaboo* (Roberts, Gilligan, & Medak, 2009) when "Spooge" and "his woman" fight for the last time. Skylar brandishes a large knife, then slashes Walt's hand. Walt retaliates by kidnapping their infant daughter. Although he eventually returns the baby, the point is clear: Walt's relationship with his wife is a disaster.

Similarly, looking at Walt's inward state, the audience is exposed to several significantly present characteristics that cohere with the narrative of addiction. Along with the poor relationship with his wife, the audience is witness to a poor and progressively destructive relationship with his son, Walter Jr.. It is in this destructive relationship, that Walt's self-centeredness in terms of their relationship emerges. For example, in *Over* (Walley-Beckett & Abraham, 2009), Walt gets drunk and attempts to exhibit superiority over his brother-in-law, Hank. Sitting poolside, Hank, Walter, and Walter Jr. are talking about Hank's exciting life as a DEA agent. Walt listens, unable to tell about his own accomplishments. He watches as Walter, Jr.'s admiration for Hank grows. In an attempt to win back some of the boy's admiration, Walter gives Jr. a shot of tequila. After Jr. excitedly gulps it down together with Walt and Hank, Walt pours him a second shot. Hank protests slightly, but relents. Jr. gulps down the second. Walter pours a third. This time, however, Hank tries to stop him by placing his hand over Jr.'s cup. Indignant, Walt pours the tequila over Hank's hand and into the cup. Jr. drinks again, although this time under the duress of his father. Eventually, Walter Jr. throws up, and Walt sits proud for having proven his power as the father. This is only one of many instances where Walt essentially ignores Walter Jr.'s actual needs in favor of his own ego needs. Although, Jr. is well fed, and reasonably well cared for, the neglect is present throughout the series. Walt's preference for his own ego needs fundamentally drives all of Walt's actions. His self-centered treatment of his son, and others, culminates in the final fight between Walt and Skylar. Finally realizing that his dad is not a good man, Jr. is forced to stand up to Walt in order to protect his mom and sister from Walter's rage.

Throughout the series, Walt continuously exhibits a similar chaotic logic to that illustrated by "Spooge." The fourth season begins with Walt's reasonable yet inaccurate conclusion that his boss, Gus Fring, plans to kill him. Without knowing the truth, Walt's paranoia grows rampant, causing much of the entire season's action. His paranoia leads him to conclude the best way to save himself is to kill Gus first. In *Thirty-Eight Snub* (Mastras & MacLaren, 2011), after having witnessed Gus murder one of his closest associates, Walt confronts Gus's right-hand man, Mike, with a request to help plot Gus' death. Upon hearing Walt's chaotic logic, Mike punches him. Mike, a person who trusts Gus completely, knows that if Gus wanted Walt dead, it would be done already. Mike's cool calm demeanor provide contrast enough for the audience to conclude Walter's extreme paranoia; a paranoia that actually ends up making matters grow worse for Walter until the final episode of the season. Walt's actions, attitudes, and thoughts illustrate an emotional logic that seems to drive Walt's conclusions. As Twerski (1997) explained, an addict often confuses feelings for facts. In essence, if something feels true, then it is true. The audience never really knows if Walt's feelings are facts, but the feelings that drive Walt's actions do create the eventual reality of Gus desiring Walt's death.

As mentioned earlier, Walter's lies, deception, and manipulation are frequent throughout the series. It is Jessie that bears the majority of Walt's manipulation. In fact, the entire series itself is a product of Walt's manipulation. In *Pilot* (Gilligan & Gilligan, 2008), the audience witnesses Walt blackmail Jessie into collusion. In mythic terms, Walt's threat to turn Jessie into the police unless he helps him cook and sell meth is Jessie's forced call to adventure. In *ABQ* (Gilligan & Bernstein, 2009), after doing nothing to help save the love of Jessie's life as she chokes on her own vomit, Walter pretends he knows nothing of the incident. Later, the audience experiences more of Walt's devious manipulations in *Face Off* (Gilligan & Gilligan), when in an attempt to keep Jessie's loyalty from switching from himself to Gus, Walt resorts to poisoning a young boy.

The entire series is a recurring and progressive display of Walt's working to achieve his selfish ego needs, his deceptions and manipulations, as well as addictive thinking. It is also a recurring and progressive display of his moral decline.

Walt's ethical decline starts in the first season. As if cooking and selling meth were not enough, the audience witnesses Walt murder two people. In season two, he is involved both directly and indirectly in the death and destruction of well over a hundred. His inaction concerning the death of Jessie's girlfriend, Jane, in *ABQ* (Gilligan & Bernstein, 2009) contributes to the mid-air collision of two planes over Albuquerque. When Jane's father learns of her death, his emotional condition is all but ruined. When he finally returns to work as an air traffic controller, in his distress he accidentally causes the crash. The crash and the ensuing media storm, *No Mas* (Gilligan & Cranston, 2010), result in his decision to take his own life. In *Half*

Measures (Catlin, Gould, & Bernstein, 2010), Walter chooses to shoot and kill two of Gus's henchmen in an effort to save Jessie, which leads to more and more deaths. When he witnesses the death of his brother-in-law *Ozymandias* (Walley-Beckett & Johnson, 2013), Walt's depravity has ultimately reached the bottom. Like "Spooge" and "his woman," Walt has become a man willing to do anything to get what he thinks he wants. Like "his woman," he is willing to experience the death of his own family for the sake of his need. This is not to suggest that all addicts kill people, but it does cohere with the slow degradation of morality that happens to the addictive personality over time (Nakken, 1996).

In terms of the outcome that awaits those suffering from addiction, Walt's narrative differs significantly from the outcome of both "Spooge" and "his woman." It is this difference that provides the audience with a previously unforeseen possibility of living. In *Felina* (Gilligan & Gilligan, 2013), the audience is given opportunity to witness an outcome of a different sort, not one involving a drug related death, an incarceration, or institutionalization. Instead, they are offered a story about a fourth outcome available to the addict who has hit bottom. In this sense, the episode illustrates a possibility for living for a non-typical addict seeking recovery from a life destroyed by non-traditional addiction.

As mentioned in the section on felt belief, *Felina* begins with Walt admitting his own powerlessness through a prayer, and the prayer essentially being answered in the form of a car key attached to a Narcotics Anonymous surrender fob. This change is significant when compared to Walt in previous episodes. Whereas before he was always able to think himself out of the situation, there in the snow-covered car, he is without options. Quietly, he calls out to a higher power, to something mystical and beyond himself. The result, he finds an answer to his problem, and begins what appears a transformation in the way he approaches life.

His goal in *Felina* is, albeit subtly, to right certain wrongs. His perspective appears to have changed in two ways. One, throughout the entire series Walt continuously returns to the same justification for his actions. Repeatedly, he tells people that he is doing the things he does for his family. After his surrender in the car, Walt demonstrates an honesty that allows him to admit that he never really did any of it for his family. He confesses to Skylar that he actually did it for himself, that he enjoyed it, and that he liked that he was good at doing it. Two, he seeks to right his wrongs. For example, when he discovers that Jessie is alive and has been treated like a slave by the gangsters who had stolen Walt's money and killed his brother-in-law, he tries to save Jessie and set him free. He also confronts Elliot and Gretchen, but his attitude one of serenity and selflessness. Although he resorts to tough methods to ask their help funneling money to his family, his request is for their functionary help only. Overall, his request indicates that he has shifted to putting another's interest first—that of Skylar, Walter Jr., and his infant daughter—and that his actions have no tie to his own ego need to be seen as "the provider." Although these changes do not cohere strongly with the kind of turn-around often seen by an addict in real-life recovery, his change is suggested largely enough for an audience to infer a recovery-like attitude in Walt, while the overall dramatic fidelity of the story remains in tact. In short, Walt's life reveals the mind of an unconventional addict; in so doing, it demonstrates possibility rhetoric by revealing the possibility that the definition of an addict can include someone outside the common stereotype, and by revealing how an outcome that may be somewhat common for a stereotypical addict can manifest itself in non-typical addiction.

The next section moves away from addiction on the individual level, and illustrates how the concept of addiction is communicated at the structural level. In short, it discusses how the unsuspecting audience was immersed in a story that structurally coheres to the life-cycle of addiction.

Breaking Bad: The Life-Cycle of Addiction

In his work on the Narrative Paradigm, Walter Fisher (1987) explained how narrative rationality operates on the principles of narrative fidelity and narrative coherence. He described three kinds of coherence that lend themselves to a coherent, thus believable or persuasive narrative. One, he labels characterological. One, he calls material. The other he names structural. Thus far, this paper has examined the characterological way in which Walter White's character coheres with a narrative of addiction. In so doing, it provides a good reason to believe the show functions to expand the definition of addiction within the general social concept of the term. This section seeks to add another good reason to support the idea that the show functions as story concerning itself with the nature of addiction. To do this, *Breaking Bad*'s structural coherence is assessed for the purpose of determining how the show reveals the mind of an unconventional addict.

Breaking Bad: Built Upon The Structure of Addiction

The first chapter of this essay discussed the narrative of the five stages of addiction (Australian Institute of Professional Counselors, 2012): 1) experimentation, 2) regular use, 3) risky behavior, 4) dependence, and 5) addiction. The sixth stage was added to this list titled the conclusion. The conclusion included the possible outcomes for those persons who reached the fifth stage in the progression of addiction. First, an addict can die as a result of their involvement with the narcotic. Second, an addict can find himself or herself incarcerated in the prison system for their involvement with the narcotic. Third, an addict can find himself or herself institutionalized for their involvement with the narcotic. Finally, an addict can seek a choice that will arrest the trouble, and fundamentally result in recovery from the lifestyle.

Breaking Bad as a series appears to have been built structurally in a way that coheres both to the five stages of addiction, and subtly to the sixth stage: Season 1 coheres with the experimentation stage; Season 2 coheres with the regular use stage; Season 3 coheres with increases in risky behavior; Season 4 coheres with the dependence stage; and, Season 5 coheres with full addiction; with Season 5 actually released in two parts (the first half was released in 2012; the second half aired in 2013). In this regard, it can be demonstrated that the show also coheres structurally with the additional sixth stage of addiction.

Season 1: Experimentation

In season one, Walt begins to use his substance. He gets his first taste of the excitement he has been missing. He attains a degree of power. He accomplishes things he had been too afraid to accomplish previously. Yet, he remains hesitant. He is not fully immersed into the life. He is still attempting to live wholly in the world of his family, while only dabbling in the world of meth. As the season comes to a close, despite trying to get out of the business, he is still involved. His explosive interaction with Tuco in *Crazy Handful of Nothin'* (Mastras & Hughes, 2008) has made leaving the life less attractive, the surge of power he has felt is a feeling he cannot easily let release.

Season 2: Regular Use

As Walt's near death interactions with Tuco continue, as his medical bills mount, as he is introduced to a major distributor offering a large payday named Gus Fring, Walt is continuously drawn back into the game. The excitement, the attainment, the accomplishments are too satisfying to push away forever. Throughout the season, Walt appears to believe that he can still go back to his old life once he has made enough money. His payday from Gus grants him a feeling of security. In *Phoenix* (Shiban & Bucksey, 2009) Walt takes his newborn daughter into the family garage. Stashed behind the wall insulation is over one million dollars he has just earned through a sale of meth to Gus Fring. In the quiet of the night, he shows it to her. Proudly, he tells her that he earned that for her. The stress in his style of communication is on the fact that he earned it. From this, the audience can infer that Walt is in love with the game, he simply does not recognize it yet. He will use again.

Season 3: Risky Behavior

Despite his attempts to stay out of the game, reality has again come crashing down upon Walt. His wife has filed for divorce after learning of his secret life. She sleeps with her boss. She will not let him see his newborn. The mounting pressure is too much, and Walt needs release. Gus offers him a deal of a lifetime. Despite his attempts to deny Gus' offers, eventually he relents and begins cooking in the superlab Gus has created for him. In so doing, he has more fully given himself over to the lifestyle of a drug manufacturer. He, as Jessie says in *No Mas* (Gilligan & Cranston, 2010), has somewhat conceded to himself that he is "the bad guy." Risks increase when he and Jessie are nearly caught by Walt's brother Hank, when he lets Jessie get away with stealing small amounts of meth from Gus, when he terminates two of Gus' drug slingers, and when he orders Jessie to carry out a hit against the chemist with whom Gus plans to replace Walt.

Season 4: Dependence

By season four, Walt is fully immersed into the life. He is traumatized after watching Gus' slit the throat of one of his top employees in *Box Cutter* (Gilligan & Bernstein, 2011). His physical, emotional and financial life is fully connected to the relationship he has with Gus; and throughout the entire series, we see him high on excitement and risk. Although on the outside, Walt appears normal, and seems to have his life somewhat together, he is in reality slowly unraveling at the seams as his self-created drama leads to worsening circumstances. In *Crawl Space* (Mastras, Catlin, & Winant, 2011), Walt's dependency leads to a breakdown when he learns that all the money he had and intended to use to disappear with has been given to Skylar's boss, Ted. This forces Walt deeper into dependency upon the life in order to eliminate Gus, including his ultimate collusion with a member of the cartel in order to complete his goal.

Season 5: Addiction

Having survived the ordeal with Gus, and having seemed to get away with everything, Walt is not satisfied with the idea of simply quitting the life. Instead, he is fully addicted to the rush, the risk, the power, the accomplishment, and the attainments inherent in this way of life. In the first half of the season, he manipulates Jessie and Mike into forming an alliance to continue the business Gus had been building. For a while, things appear to be moving smoothly. Walt's insatiable desire for control, for complete power, makes matters worse. Soon he finds himself needlessly murdering Mike, abandoning Jessie, and ordering the mass execution of those remaining members of Gus' gang.

Season 5: Conclusion

Walt begins his precipitous decent toward the bottom once his brother-in-law discovers that Walt is the drug kingpin he has been looking for these past years. One thing leads to another, and Walt is eventually forced to watch as Hank is executed because of Walt. Attempting to explain this to his wife and son, finally, Skylar and Walter Jr. reject Walt. Walt is then forced to go into hiding. It is there that he finds himself realizing the dire nature of his situation. It is here, that he finally chooses to surrender, and to give up trying to control the thing he cannot, and to attempt to control only those things that he can. The result is an outcome that subtly resembles an addict's shift to recovery.

It is in the sense that each season coheres significantly with a different stage in the life-cycle of addiction (Australian Institute of Professional Counselors, 2012) that a conclusion can be made concerning how *Breaking Bad* can be seen to support the idea that it functions to express ideas about the nature of addiction. In so doing, the notion that the show functions as possibility rhetoric promoting the idea that addiction can be seen not only in stereotypical forms, but also in unconventional forms is supported. In the final section of this analysis, the series will be discussed as its function as a moral argument.

***Breaking Bad*: A Moral Argument**

In his treatise on *Narration, Knowledge, and the Possibility of Wisdom*, Fisher (1995) outlined a difference in the kind of knowledge that his narrative paradigm seeks to clarify. He discussed how the rational-world system tends to produce "knowledge of that" and "knowledge of how." One aim of the narrative paradigm is a way to discover "knowledge of whether" (p. 172). By this, he meant the discovery of knowing whether an action is good or not, whether something ought to be or ought not to be. He suggested (1987) that public moral argument is a) publicized for large audiences, b) aimed at untrained thinkers, and c) typically founded upon ultimate questions of life and death, or how persons should be defined and treated, or of preferred patterns of living (p. 71). He further differentiated legal, scientific, and theological argument from moral argument in that the moral argument is not typically bound to the standard rules of advocacy inherent in the initial three forms. His elucidation of narrative rationality was a way to enable untrained thinkers to assess the coherency and fidelity of an argument in the sphere of public moral argument. In this section, *Breaking Bad* is discussed at a kind of moral argument.

Simply, does the show function as moral argument? Thus far, this analysis has discussed the way in which the characterological factors and structural factors of the show cohere with a narrative of addiction. These coherencies have been discussed in terms of the way in which they lend support to the idea that *Breaking Bad* functions to advance a new concept of addiction. So far, these coherencies do appear to support an argument that *Breaking Bad* functions to compel audiences to adjust the way they conceive of addiction. In particular, the coherencies point to the idea that an addict can in fact be the person who in no way appears at first to cohere with the stereotypical version of an addict. They point to how an addict is one who, upon closer scrutiny exhibits certain common coherencies within a larger narrative concerning addiction; and, how that addict follows a certain coherent life-cycle narrative of addiction. Believing this to be the case, then, lends itself to the moral argument that is actually being advanced by the show. Simply, the argument appears to be the answer to whether or not addiction fits only into stereotypical categories, and if not, what the outcomes are for those that suffer such? Simply, the show discusses how persons should be defined and treated.

When looked at in its entirety, the audience is in fact presented with not only Walt as non-stereotype. They are also presented with Jessie, an addict of love and meth; Gus, an addict of resentment, desire for revenge, and for domination; and Hank, an addict obsessively seeking justice (the audience sees his obsession manifest in his love of minerals). In reality, a case may be made for several more kinds of addicts within the series. Viewed, then, as a whole, the show as a moral argument can be said to clearly answer no to the question of whether or not addiction fits into stereotypical categories. It also provides an answer to naturally emerging questions concerning the outcomes that are available for those identified as non-stereotypical addicts. For example, considering the way Gus dies, the way Jessie ends up temporarily institutionalized as the gang's slave cook before choosing ultimate freedom, the way Hank dies, and the way Walter seeks subtle redemption before his death, the audience is presented with possible outcomes roughly the same as those consistent with the sixth stage of the addict's life-cycle. In short, the show functions as a moral argument seeking knowledge of how certain persons ought to be defined, what happens to them, and how they should be treated.

To bring this chapter to a close, and to answer the questions that have driven this analysis, a summary is necessary. Overall, narratives within *Breaking Bad* suggest the television series functions as rhetorical communication. Given the subject matter, and nature of the argument, it can be said to function as a moral argument. Beginning with the felt belief of the series, which suggests the television show acts as a treatise advocating a new way of perceiving addiction, the narratives reveal addiction in a lucid way. The felt belief was intuitively extrapolated from the narratives within several key episodes and the overall narrative of the series. Supporting this are narratives where audiences experience the story of one man's brokenness and desperation, witness his experiencing the surging hyper-exhilaration from gaining power over his life, find him within the mirror of stereotypical addiction, and watch his rise and fall from desperation to dominance to destruction to surrender, and finally to death. All of which cohere firmly with a grand narrative of addiction.

Upholding this felt belief are specific coherent addiction narratives that suggest a non-traditional version of addiction. In an attempt to manage his impending death, his underachievement, and his psychological impotence, the life of main character Walter White mirrors that of stereotypical addicts. It does so in a non-stereotypical way. He has a strong desire to escape pain and suffering: he develops an addiction to three powerful stimulants: excitement, attainment, and accomplishment; he exhibits key characteristics of addiction: codependency, denial, withdrawal, hubris, neglect of important aspects of life, extreme self-centeredness, and a variety of other destructive tendencies. As well, his life, as represented through the television series' various seasons, mirrors the life-cycle stages of addiction. Taken together, it is possible to say that *Breaking Bad* acts as a moral argument that attempts to change audience perceptions concerning the nature of addiction.

IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION

This analysis began with a discussion of television's power in cultivating social reality. It discussed briefly the troubles that arise when television perpetuates a limited concept. Of particular interest is how a limited perspective of addiction is perpetuated. The purpose of this analysis, then, has been to determine if there are examples of television that communicate a larger more realistic perspective of addiction. Given television's quintessence as a narrative medium, it has employed a combination of Walter Fisher's narrative rationality together with William Kirkwood's rhetoric of possibility to determine the answers of several questions. The principal question driving this analysis concerned the way the narratives of the AMC television show *Breaking Bad* communicate a larger more expansive representation of addiction? Sub questions that the analysis hoped to offer insight into were the theoretical compatibility of Kirkwood and Fisher, and the hypothetical possibility of whether using a Kirkwood and Fisher combination might prove useful within the therapeutic modality of Cinematherapy.

Breaking Bad: A New Vision of Addiction

Critics have discussed a variety of statements that the series *Breaking Bad* makes regarding social reality. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, arguments have been made concerning the shows statement regarding the medical situation in the US. Also, writers have discussed its critique on masculinity in the 21st century, its illustration of the impotence of the war on drugs, as well as, its discussion of weaknesses within the North American educational system. Overall, *Breaking Bad* has been discussed in a multitude of ways. This essay has discussed it as an instance of narrative rhetoric designed to shift the prevailing stereotypes surrounding the nature of addiction.

To do this, after identifying a felt—intuitive—belief about the series, it looked at the coherency of the narratives of the stereotypical addict to a grand narrative of addiction supported by leaders in the field of addiction. It discovered that the stereotype was highly cohesive with that grand narrative. This essay also discussed the way Walter White, *Breaking Bad*'s main character, can be seen to cohere both with the stereotypical addict and thus with the grand narrative of addiction. The essay also looked into the way in which the series itself reveals structural coherency, wherein an identified non-stereotypical addict follows the life-cycle narrative of an addict from the beginning of addiction to the end of the addiction. Finally, the essay examined the show as a form of public moral argument, discovering that it can be seen to be arguing for a determination of the way in which addiction should be defined and treated.

From this analysis, it is possible to determine with a high degree of probability that the narratives of *Breaking Bad* work to create a new perception of addiction by using characters that cohere stereotypically to a larger narrative of addiction in juxtaposition with those characters not typically thought of a suffering from addiction. Through the use of juxtaposition, the audience is provided a way of perceiving coherent similarities. As well, this new perception is advanced in the way the story structure coheres significantly with the narrative of the life-cycle of addiction. Lastly, the narratives ultimately can be seen to support the idea that the show functions as a public moral argument that it is publicly presented for an audience of untrained thinkers with the purpose of answering a question about the way in which certain people ought to be defined. In these three ways, the narratives work together to generate a rhetoric event aimed at shifting the consciousness of the audience.

Theoretical Implications

The second question this essay sought to answer concerned the compatibility of Fisher's work with Kirkwood's possibility rhetoric. It was intimated earlier that the two theories were much more compatible than they were different. From this analysis, this is more clearly the case. Kirkwood's greatest claim against Fisher's work is the narrative paradigm's limited ability to locate possibilities for living and action that do not fit well within the known reality of an observer. In essence, Kirkwood believes that if a rhetorician illuminates a new kind of thinking that is beyond the life experience of a listener, according to Fisher's rationality the listener will not be able to see its truth because the new is beyond the listeners known. Yet, as this essay shows, Kirkwood's possibility rhetoric simply acts to augment the focus of what Fisher's rationality aims at.

In this analysis, new unsuspected possibilities appear to be revealed concerning addiction. In order for a listener to be willing to accept and act on these possibilities, however, that listener will likely check to verify the validity of such possibilities. They will seek legitimization of the new. This process of legitimization naturally requires elements of Fisher's rationality, mostly checks of coherency and fidelity against some larger narrative. New concepts require legitimization against what is known in the world. If a person does not seek such legitimization, and simply proceeds to act upon what is unverified, they are literally walking on pirate's plank in the pitch darkness of night. The Bible suggests the possibility that a man can walk on water. But the truth test of it is that as of now, without the help of strong chemicals, man cannot. One would be foolish to bolt headlong into a lifestyle suggested by that possibility rhetoric without testing its veracity against some accepted and reliable standard. In the case of revealing Walt the unconventional addict, audience members need a generally accepted standard narrative of addiction with which to confirm the reality of the possibility being presented.

This is to say, then, that Kirkwood's possibility rhetoric is not in fact revealing a hole in Fisher's work. Rather, it is augmenting it in that it is clearly stating something that Fisher only assumes. Namely, that any narrative analysis should include within its scope those instances of revealed unforeseen possibility.

Therapeutic Implications

The theoretical implications of merging Kirkwood's possibility rhetoric together with Fisher's narrative rationality make a strong statement in terms of the way a critic can proceed in their use of narrative rationality as a tool of analysis. As well, merging Kirkwood and Fisher may also have therapeutic implications in terms of helping to identifying rhetorically useful films within the modality of Cinematherapy. Thus, *Breaking Bad* may have influential potential as a tool in a battle against addiction.

Cinematherapy (Sharp, Smith, & Cole, 2002) is a therapeutic modality that uses a combination of television and film together with discussion therapy with a trained psychologist in order to help sufferers of a variety of mental maladies work through their issues. In its essence, a therapist using Cinematherapy will use various narratives in a film to help a patient visualize both problems and solutions to those problems, and then discuss with that patient ways to overcome their own related troubles. Cinematherapy was born out of Bibliotherapy, a therapy that employs the use of books in the same regard as Cinematherapy employs film and television. According to Sharp, Smith, and Cole (2002), research on the effectiveness of Cinematherapy is still limited. Yet, research on the effectiveness of its parent modality, Bibliotherapy, appears significant; from which it is somewhat reasonable to infer the effectiveness of Cinematherapy.

Powell, Newgent, and Lee (2006) discovered its effectiveness with young people struggling with low self-esteem. That said, a third question this analysis considered is whether or not a television series like *Breaking Bad* might serve well the goals of the Cinematherapy modality?

As this analysis of *Breaking Bad* has attempted to demonstrate, the series illustrates examples of non-conventional addiction. These examples can serve to expose and help people who are unaware of their having an addictive malady. It is arguable that many viewers of the *Breaking Bad* series identified with and liked Walter White because of reasons they could not explain. One reason for their attraction and identification could be relative to his demonstration of addictive characteristics. Since most active addicts deny their being addicted to anything, chances are viewers who identify with Walter White will deny being attracted to that part of his character. Yet, through Cinematherapy, this denial can be severed if a problem in fact exists. In severing it, people who have spent years suffering unnecessarily in confusion about their personal malady can through the revelation of a new non-stereotypical addict identify their own non-stereotypical addictions, and thus work toward a life previously unimagined. Thus, coupling Fisher and Kirkwood could possibly help Cinematherapists find more examples of film and television that illustrate expanded conceptualizations of addiction, as well as, other examples of film illustrating other psycho-social issues. Though no tests were conducted to determine this specifically, there appears reason to suggest it.

Limitations

As with any rhetorical analysis, there exist limitations. Within the context of this analysis, several limitations need mentioning. The first concerns the general nature of the study. To use a common idiom, this analysis attempted to bite off more than it could chew. In analyzing the entire series of *Breaking Bad*, many more subtle nuances were missed. If someone were interested in delving further into the way in which the show suggests an expanded concept of addiction, they might produce a deeper analysis by focusing on only one season or on only one dimension of what was discussed here. Second, the question of the usefulness of a Fisher/Kirkwood merger for determining impactful forms of television and cinema within the modality of Cinematherapy remains unanswered beyond speculation. It is nice to think that a show like *Breaking Bad* may have a profound enough story to influence the lives of those suffering from addiction. More research is absolutely needed in this area, thus any answer to the question has been qualified with a strong “may be.”

Concluding Remarks

Breaking Bad is clearly more than mere entertainment. Entertainment often suggests an inane use of communication. As a tool of communication, *Breaking Bad* has created much controversy and contributed to the evolution of the way television shows are consumed (Abrams, 2014). Much of the controversy over the series has been the way in which it discusses different important social issues. This essay has looked at the way the show deals with the social issue of addiction, specifically the narrow definition of the term that television may be said to help cultivate into social reality. No matter what view of the series a writer may take, however, it is indisputable that the show has had a profound effect on social consciousness.

The narratives identified within this analysis illustrate how the television series *Breaking Bad* may be said to offer audiences a treatise on the nature of one kind of mental illness: addiction. Specifically, the narratives throughout the television show cohere with addiction narratives inherent in the community of addiction therapists. Whether we are looking at stereotypical addicts within the television series, comparing them with an individual character, discussing the television show as a whole, or looking specifically at its arguments, the narratives can be said to support the aim of offering audiences a larger view of what it means to be an addict. In that sense, this writer is of the mind that *Breaking Bad* is a fine example of responsible television aimed at creating a freer and healthier society.

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