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E. Deidre Pribram Ph.D.
Molloy College, dpribram@molloy.edu

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ELEVEN

Feeling Bad: Emotions and Narrativity in *Breaking Bad*

E. Deidre Pribram

In an interview that took place in January 1984, five months before his death, Michel Foucault relates an anecdote to illustrate what he means by 'relations of power':

For example, the fact that I may be older than you, and that you may initially have been intimidated, may be turned around during the course of our conversation, and I may end up being intimidated before someone precisely because he is younger than I am. (292)

His is a simple, almost offhand anecdote but one that has lingered in my mind precisely because of the inadequate means we possess to explain what occurs during this modest encounter and exchange.

In the interview, Foucault (1987) seeks to describe what he means by coercive power or states of domination versus strategies or relations of power. His interviewees remain more concerned with notions of dominance while Foucault repeatedly returns to relations of power that, for him, are both necessary to human society and quite ordinary. He acknowledges that states of domination do exist, in which power relations "are perpetually asymmetrical and allow an extremely limited margin of freedom" or strategy (292). In such situations, although the power differential cannot be reversed, certain strategies of resistance remain possible. Still, even a severely limited field of resistance constitutes the deployment of power relations.

Foucault (1987) is taking exception to the belief that his work is associated with a lack of freedom or agency, that "because power is everywhere, there is no freedom" (292). Quite the contrary, he insists, "if there

are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere" (291-292). Foucault is arguing that relations of power are linked with freedom and resistance, not static dominance or social paralysis. Instead, "in human relations, whether they involve verbal communication...or amorous, institutional, or economic relationships, power is always present" (291-292). Further, "these power relations are mobile, they can be modified, they are not fixed once and for all" (292). Power relations can only exist to the degree in which subjects are free and capable of some form of resistance. Without some measure to act, there would be no power relations, only powerlessness: stasis and solidification in social relations, rather than mobility and mutability.

And because such power relations appear everywhere in the social field, often occurring in minute and ordinary ways, he selects a suitably mundane anecdote as his example. His anecdote constitutes an instance of what he designates as "verbal communication" rather than amorous, institutional, or economic relations. At the outset the older participant possesses the ability to intimidate the younger. By the end, however, some modification has occurred so that the younger now intimidates the elder. In this minor event, the kind that transpires multiple times a day in every person's life, the recalibration of a power differential, however small, has taken place.

Perhaps initially age is associated with wisdom and the older party is treated with, and expects, the power to intimidate that attaches to respect or veneration. Then, in the process of conversation, alternative implications of age are taken up. Age may emerge as the sign of generational change in which the involved parties either wish to or are forced to recognize the passing of expertise from one generation to the next. Intimidation by a younger other may be precipitated through being made aware of one's own dwindling intellectual powers or influence. The meaning of 'age' modulates over the course of the conversation. Initially, the power to intimidate through age belongs to the older individual but during their discussion alternate meanings are produced and negotiated, with the result that the advantage of age—in the sense of being able to intimidate—shifts to the younger individual.

However, what Foucault fails to specify about his anecdote is that the relations of power he describes are enabled and enacted through emotions. Emotional dynamics render possible the negotiation and exchange of altered relations, in this instance whether through fear, awe, respect, sadness over diminished vigor, or other feelings entirely. Further, the emotions engaged and exchanged are quite likely different for each of the participating parties. Yet, regardless of the specific emotions put into play, they function as strategies in the circulation of power relations.

Foucault describes transactions of power relations as the ongoing set of circumstances "in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other" (292). I am suggesting a somewhat different understanding, in

which such power relations refer to situations in which one person attempts to *affect* the conduct of others. In Foucault's example, age is saturated with emotional meanings that become realized once they are *felt*. Emotions fluctuate, meanings are transmitted and accepted, rejected, or amended with the result that power differentials, however slight, become altered. The interrelationality of emotions, meaning, and power enables such routine, unceasing transactions. Emotions are strategies that allow such moves and counter-moves, negotiations and exchanges to occur. In order to elaborate on power relations as emotional strategies, I now turn from Foucault's simple anecdote to the more complex narrative of AMC's *Breaking Bad*.

EMOTIONAL ACTION

I have argued elsewhere that emotional action—usually described as 'talk' or character interaction—constitutes a form of narrative action as significant as physical or bodily endeavor (Pribram 2011). Yet acts of physicality are normally what we refer to when we speak of filmic or televisual action.

However, emotional action, like bodily activity, shapes and propels a narrative. If we understand action as that which impels and, ultimately, resolves the narrative problems posed, then narrativity is more accurately understood as a dialectic relationship between emotional action and physical action. In these terms, a narrative becomes the accumulated effects of both forms of action. In contrast, film and television studies largely have established an erroneous dichotomy based either on emotional talk or physical action, rather than tracing the crucial relationship between them as equally productive modes of action in popular narrative forms.¹

The relationship between emotional and physical action is made evident in the initial episodes of the series, *Breaking Bad*, because the usual trajectory of developing characters through dialogue and interaction with other characters, which then builds to resolution through physical confrontation, becomes reversed. In the most familiar analysis of narrative structure, character development through the establishment of social and emotional stakes exists in order to 'set-up' some later climactic physical confrontation. In this configuration, physical acts are viewed as that which generates the resolution of the social and emotional stakes earlier placed in jeopardy.

In contrast, the first episodes in season one of *Breaking Bad* sustain a series of fast-paced, exciting events culminating in the talking sequence or "verbal communication" between Walter White (Bryan Cranston) and Krazy-8 (Max Arciniega) in the third episode, ". . . And the Bag's in the River" (2/10/08). The normal narrative sequence is inverted so that physi-

cal action serves as establishing activity that leads to an emotional dramatic payoff.

Focusing only on the scenes that involve Walter, the pilot episode of season one (1/20/08) begins with a mysterious pair of pants falling from air to ground in slow motion, followed by shots of an RV driving frantically. In the front, sit a pantless Walter and an unconscious Jesse Pinkman (Aaron Paul), both wearing gas masks. In the back, we spot two male bodies on the floor—either unconscious or dead. They slide around uncontrollably in response to the frenetic movements of the RV. Presented as a series of quick cuts and rapid changes of camera angles, Walter then accidentally runs the RV off the road as, in the distance, we hear police sirens. Walter grabs a gun from one of the male bodies and exits the RV, where he videotapes a farewell message for his family. He then raises the gun, aiming it at what we assume are the oncoming police. We then cut to the events leading up to this moment beginning, as a title tells us, “Three Weeks Earlier.”

In swift succession, we see Walter turn fifty, teach a high school chemistry class, work a humiliating second job at a car wash for the sorely needed money, suddenly pass out and get taken to the hospital by ambulance, and learn he has inoperable lung cancer. Later, he goes for a ride-along with his DEA brother-in-law, Hank (Dean Norris), to the take down of a meth lab. Here he encounters his former student, Jesse, who has managed to escape the drug raid. Cornering Jesse later, Walter threatens to turn him into the DEA if Jesse refuses to partner with him in making and selling methamphetamine. Having no choice but to agree, Jesse purchases an RV in which to cook the meth, which the two do in the desert beyond Albuquerque.

Jesse takes the pure-grade crystal meth to Krazy-8 to sell. However, he is forced by Krazy-8 and Emilio (John Koyama) at gunpoint to lead them to the RV in the desert to show them where he obtained the drugs. In order to save his and Jesse’s lives, Walter agrees to show Krazy-8 and Emilio how to make the pure meth. Instead, he concocts a mixture that causes an explosion, rendering Krazy-8 and Emilio unconscious and presumably dead or dying, while he and Jesse escape by donning gas masks.

Walter frantically drives off with Krazy-8’s and Emilio’s bodies rolling around in the back of the RV. Walter’s pants, which he has taken off in order to preserve his ‘good’ clothes while he cooks, fly off the RV and into the air. We then return to the opening of the episode with Walter now turning the gun on himself, preparing to commit suicide before being apprehended by the approaching police whom, he believes, are coming for them. Instead, fire engines pass him by, hurrying to put out a fire started by their activities at the RV’s original location. Later that night, Walter returns home and has what we are led to believe is unusually passionate sex with his wife (Skyler: “Walt, is that you?”), at which point the pilot episode ends.

The second episode, "The Cat's in the Bag . . ." (1/27/08), is more comedic in tone than the pilot, centering on sometimes gruesome, black humor as Walter and Jesse attempt to "clean up the mess" they have created in the pilot. But in both episodes much ground is covered through short scenes and a continually forward-moving series of events. "The Cat's in the Bag . . ." chronicles a succession of mishaps as Walter and Jesse attempt to dispose of Emilio's body and kill the badly wounded but still alive Krazy-8. Through the flip of a coin, Jesse is charged with dissolving Emilio's body in acid while Walter becomes responsible for killing Krazy-8 whom, in the meantime, they have shackled to a column in Jesse's basement with a rigid, motorcycle U-lock around his neck, rendering him immobile. Walter, however, cannot bring himself to murder Krazy-8. Instead, he provides the shackled Krazy-8 with water, a bologna and cheese sandwich, a waste bucket, toilet paper, and hand sanitizer, as if preparing him for a prolonged stay. Walter's inability to act heightens the suspense as we wait for the inevitable encounter between him and Krazy-8.

The pace and tone of the third episode, ". . . And the Bag's in the River," vary from the initial two. It is slower and more contemplative, including a flashback to Walter's past. Character development and character interaction play a more prominent role, and do so in an especially noteworthy manner between Walter and Krazy-8. The first time we see the two together in ". . . And the Bag's in the River," Krazy-8 insists that Walter look at him, complaining that the lock around his neck is degrading. Walter apologizes, indicating his susceptibility to feeling guilty for the inhumane way he is treating Krazy-8. Krazy-8 then exerts additional emotional pressure by challenging Walter to either kill him or let him go. Krazy-8 has sized Walter up, telling him that he isn't suited for "this line of work" — the drug business. Again increasing the pressure and playing to Walter's vulnerabilities, Krazy-8 emphasizes that Walter's choices are either to let him go or to commit cold-blooded murder. In their initial to-and-fro, Krazy-8 extends a challenge to Walter, based on the guilt and fear the prisoner has accurately identified as his captor's emotional 'weaknesses.'

For his part, Walter has just learned that Krazy-8 knows who he is and where to find him if released. Walter attempts to make his decision on whether to commit cold-blooded murder through rational means, in a situation and over a choice that is wholly unreasonable within the terms of Walter's existence heretofore. Nonetheless, he draws up a pro and con list over whether to kill Krazy-8 but finds that next to six 'cons' he can only come up with one 'pro': "He'll kill your entire family if you let him go."² As the subsequent sequence between them makes clear, Walter must act by making a decision based on emotions—his 'gut' feelings—with which he is not particularly comfortable or adept at, rather than relying on his accustomed, 'calm,' 'scientific,' powers of reasoning. Thus

begins an intricate emotional encounter between the two, in which they each attempt to gauge the other's feelings and influence the other's emotions over life and death stakes.

Walter again makes Krazy-8 a bologna and cheese sandwich, this time cutting off the bread crusts, having previously noticed that Krazy-8 does not like them. This seems an odd gesture of thoughtfulness in view of the situation facing the two men, but one that Walter strategically hopes will help 'seduce' Krazy-8 to engage with him. Walter places the sandwich on a yellow Fiestaware plate and heads down to the basement. Before he reaches Krazy-8, Walter suffers another coughing fit and passes out.³ When he comes to, Krazy-8 informs him that he has been unconscious for ten to fifteen minutes. Then, in a startling admission given the context, in which Walter must decide whether to kill Krazy-8 or not while Krazy-8 knows full well this is the decision Walter must make, Walter confides in Krazy-8 that he has lung cancer. The two men share similarity of circumstances, both facing the threat of impending death that creates a certain bond between them. And, as we are beginning to understand, Walter is attempting to entice Krazy-8 to his side in order to escape having to kill him. Here, though, it is the captor who is trying to humanize himself to the prisoner.

Walter returns to the kitchen to make Krazy-8 another sandwich, throwing the pieces of broken plate in the garbage, and returning to the basement. This marks the beginning of a remarkable set-piece, lasting twelve minutes—a full quarter of the episode's running time—establishing an emotional intimacy between the two that belies the reality of the circumstances, and in which Walter's decision whether to kill Krazy-8 becomes a mutual determination.

The two now sit down, taking up more casual, less confrontational bodily positions. Walter rolls a can of beer to Krazy-8 from the six-pack he has brought with him to the basement, then asks Krazy-8 what his given name is: Domingo. Walter next questions Krazy-8 about his background. Instead of answering, Krazy-8 counters that getting to know him will not make it easier for Walter to kill him (nor, narratively, for the audience to witness). Krazy-8's frankness in warning Walter about the dangers of 'personalizing' him serves as a strategic move on Krazy-8's part, singling out his sincerity and capacity for truth telling because he does not immediately jump at the chance of humanizing himself to the clearly uncertain Walter. Rather than opting to establish the familiarity that is in Krazy-8's best interests for survival, he appears to consider the predicament from Walter's position as well. Krazy-8's ability to appreciate Walter's circumstances is critical to the encounter, as we will see. Further, Krazy-8 is being honest in that he is genuinely resentful of the situation, finding himself in a position of emasculating humiliation after having been outsmarted by a neophyte in the drug business, in which he

perceives himself as having attained a certain status of prominence and toughness.

In a surprisingly honest—or desperate—countermove, Walter tells Krazy-8 that he is searching for a good reason to not kill him and Krazy-8 should tell him one. Here, Walter admits to what motivates his apparent gestures of kindness. Again, Krazy-8 returns the volley with a mixture of pride and defiance, telling Walter he could promise not to go after him if released, but that doing so is pointless because Walter will never know if he's telling the truth or not. Thus, Krazy-8 initially rejects Walter's efforts to establish a sympathetic connection between the two. He refuses to beg, grovel, or be submissive, even with his life at risk. Krazy-8's courage must strike Walter as admirable, especially in light of his own failure of nerve. Both men have clearly staked out their positions in this encounter that is simultaneously a battle of wills and an intimate exchange.

Concluding that Krazy-8 is not willing to respond to his questions, Walter moves to leave the basement, spurring Krazy-8 to begin talking about himself, his educational background, his family. Krazy-8's father owns a furniture store with which Walter is familiar. He explains that he knows who Krazy-8's father is from the store's TV commercials. His prisoner's concession in responding to Walter provides the latter with a sense of victory, a moment in which Walter has exerted his power over the physically constrained and trapped Krazy-8. Effectively using the asymmetrical power relations between them, at this point Walter has prevailed.

Walter builds commonality on the basis of Krazy-8's divulgences, telling his captive that he bought his son's crib at the family's furniture store, infusing a current of innocence into what, at its core, is a vicious encounter. His anecdote connects the two through their parallel relations as father or son, in a conversation in which the theme of family is woven throughout. Walter hands Krazy-8 another can of beer and the two sit in what appears to be or, at any rate, mimics comfortable familiarity. Walter is trying to prove that he is not a threat, even as he threatens Krazy-8, in order to convince Krazy-8 to view Walter in similar terms.

Krazy-8's next comment signals a pivotal turning point in their emotional engagement, his apparent acceptance of Walter's desired arrangement. Krazy-8 asks Walter if Jesse or Walter's family know he has cancer. Walter acknowledges that Krazy-8 is the only person in whom he has confided because it's not a conversation he is ready to have with his family. This is a crucial moment in their encounter because it signals that Krazy-8 understands Walter and what he is going through. He recognizes what Walter is experiencing emotionally and how important his admission of illness has been. This is a moment in which Krazy-8 extends awareness and empathy by acknowledging what Walter is unable to speak, an act of recognition that does much to constitute the scene's strange tone of intimacy. Krazy-8 further affirms his empathic under-

standing by recognizing that Walter is cooking meth in order to take care of his family after his death. Krazy-8 thus validates that which Walter most wants acknowledged or, perhaps, to himself believe: that his illegal activities, up to and including murder, are undertaken out of his deep love for and commitment to his family and that, therefore, his actions are justified and his motives acceptable in terms of this perceived greater good. It is at this point that Walter decides not to kill Krazy-8. More accurately, the two reach the decision together. Walter returns to the kitchen to retrieve the key for the U-lock so that he can let Krazy-8 go. His eye is drawn to the pieces of broken plate in the garbage. He hastily begins reassembling the pieces, discovering that a large shard is missing. Krazy-8 had managed to reach it and conceal it while Walter was passed out.

Walter returns to the basement and grips the U-lock. But instead of unlocking it, he pulls it as tightly as he can against the concrete column, choking Krazy-8 to death. This is a prolonged act that requires his full strength, as Krazy-8 desperately tries to resist. Walter has fulfilled the act of “cold-blooded murder” that Krazy-8 predicted.

For Walter, their interaction has been about desperation: he has asked Krazy-8, almost pleaded with him, for another way out. But, for Walter, the encounter has also been about trust. He must come to believe, or be convinced, that he can trust Krazy-8, as unreasonable a proposition as that may sound. On Krazy-8's part, also acting out of desperation to save his own life, he must convey honesty and sincerity in order to assure Walter that he is neither lying to nor manipulating his warder. This is why his frankness and defiance in refusing to promise he will not go after Walter is effective.

However, all of these emotional transactions, negotiated and exchanged, are undermined by the piece of broken shard in Krazy-8's pocket. The fragment of broken plate becomes the marker of his broken word, extinguishing Walter's unreasonable but heartfelt desire to trust Krazy-8. Ultimately, it is the breaking of trust—not the threat to Walter or his family—that, in contrast to his previous days of lethargy and procrastination, imbues him with the angry energy required to kill Krazy-8.

The set piece between Walter and Krazy-8 is action as transaction, constructed from moves and counter-moves: a strategic maneuver deployed, its effects sized-up, a corresponding response awaited, then delivered. There is an ongoing series of thrusts and parries, all in terms of emotional, not physical, action. Their engagement takes shape as a negotiation, an exchange that moves forward, building to an inevitable but not initially predetermined outcome. This is the freedom or agency described by Foucault in the ability to either exert or resist power in ongoing transactions of social mobility.

And ultimately, it is Walter's encounter with Krazy-8 that enables him to go home and entrust his wife with the news of his illness—if not of his

drug-related, violent activities. The man Walter kills is the first person in whom he confides, making it possible to admit his own impending mortality to others, to his wife, and perhaps to himself. Although Walter's and Krazy-8's relations end in a brutal act of murder, the impact of their startling sequence together rests not solely in that final event but in the process taken to arrive at that point and in the unveiling of Walter's motivations as he comes to believe that he must commit such an act. Their encounter stands as emblematic of the development of Walter's character over the entire course of *Breaking Bad*, in which suspense and fascination are engendered by Walter's process of determining what actions to take and the feelings, more than the reasons, he uses to justify his choices. The impact of the series does not derive solely from the audaciousness of Walter's actions but, also, through the emotional process by which he comes to believe he must commit those acts and how he justifies them to himself and others. The physical action of the series' opening two episodes serves to establish the emotional payoff of "... And the Bag's in the River," located in the drama, strategy, desperation and, ultimately, poignancy of the lengthy encounter between Walter and Krazy-8 that, in turn, renders the finale to their time together all the more ruthless.

RELATIONS OF POWER

The relationship between Walter and Krazy-8 in the third episode is based on a disequilibrium or asymmetry of power, in Foucault's terms, because Krazy-8 is held captive in the basement while Walter is charged with ending his life. In contrast, Walter's relationship with his wife, Skyler, over the course of his increasing involvement in drugs and her increasing awareness of his involvement, more closely resembles the way Foucault defines relations of power in purer form.

For instance, Walter's dealings with Gus Fring (Giancarlo Esposito) are dominantly situated within the framework of coercive power through Gus' very overt threats of violence or death to Walter's person or to members of his family. In turn, these threats demand the response of similar acts of coercive power: physical actions such as executing Gale (David Costabile), Walter's former lab assistant and, ultimately, killing Gus (although it is worth noting that in both instances Walter finds someone else to commit the actual act of murder).

In contrast, relations of power based in emotional strategies dominate Walter's relationship with Jesse. The two draw the line at engaging in coercive power—acts of physical harm beyond the fist fights they have with each other—nor will they allow others to do so, on occasion each having committed murder to rescue or protect his partner. However, emotional strategies of power between the two are fair game and, to Walter's mind, do not have to be played fairly.⁴

None of this is to suggest that emotions are absent from coercive acts of power. Between Walter and Gus pride, anger, frustration, and the desire to prove oneself superior all figure as motivations in their engagement. And certainly, coercive power enacted through physical deeds clearly is possible in domestic relations, for instance, through physical abuse, economic deprivation, and so on. In the case of Walter and Skyler, however, these do not predominate. Instead, acts between them principally are committed for their emotional value and impact.

At the beginning of season three, having realized that her husband is involved in illegal activities, Skyler demands that Walter move out of the family home and starts divorce proceedings. Skyler threatens to turn Walter into the authorities if he does not stay away from the house and their two children, whom she believes Walter has placed at risk as a result of his involvement in the drug business. Skyler's leverage, then, is constituted in her ability to give Walter up to legal forces which, if put into effect, would comprise a coercive act. Simultaneously, however, she repeatedly refuses to explain to her teenage son, Walter Jr. (R.J. Mitte), or to her sister Marie (Betsy Brandt) and brother-in-law Hank, "what Walter did," despite their frequent demands or requests to know.

Skyler's refusal to allow Walter to see his own children seems especially harsh and punitive to Walter Jr., Marie, and Hank. However, she cannot explain the situation to Marie or Hank, the DEA agent, because doing so, in fact, would be to turn Walter in. Further, as Skyler explains to her lawyer, she does not want her son to find out that the father he so admires is a criminal. As a result, she bears the opprobrium for the marital separation and Walter's estrangement from his children, the negative perceptions of which she does nothing to refute or clarify to others. The blame she incurs from her teenage son is particularly cruel; he either rails at her with fierce anger, for example, calling her a "bitch," or ignores her, refusing to speak to her or otherwise interact.

For his part, Walter denies the gravity of the situation, insisting their separation is temporary. He believes Skyler will alter her stance once he has explained to her that everything he has done has been unselfish because he has acted in what he believes is the best interests of the family. Referring to the great sacrifices he made for the family, Walter fails to listen to Skyler or respect her wishes. Perhaps most disconcertingly, he allows—even encourages—his son and other family members to believe the marital separation and his banishment from the children are the result of Skyler's inexplicable, unreasonable impulsiveness. He does so, in part, because Walter cannot bear to be perceived as a bad guy and so permits that characterization to fall to Skyler. Additionally, he believes he can use her apparent status as guilty party in order to exert more emotional pressure on Skyler to relent, due to the pain her son's anger is causing her.

While Skyler takes responsibility for what is not her doing in order to protect others, Walter refuses to be held responsible for that which he is indeed culpable. Further, as Skyler continues to spurn his attempts at reconciliation or to accept the justifications he makes for his actions, Walter grows increasingly frustrated and angry. His lawyer, Saul (Bob Odenkirk), assures Walter that Skyler will not make good on her threat to give him up to the authorities due to the ensuing repercussions. These include professional embarrassment and potential job loss for her DEA brother-in-law, trauma to her children because their father is a drug dealer and their mother turned him in to the police, and the risk of having her home confiscated as the proceeds of drug sales. Following this conversation, Walter unilaterally moves back in by breaking into the house in order to circumvent the locks Skyler has had changed.

When Skyler returns home, she finds Walter there refusing to leave and, thereby, forcing his presence upon her:

Walter: It's my house too, Skyler. I'm staying. End of story.

Instead of departing as she repeatedly demands, he openly challenges her to turn him in. Skyler does call the police but, perhaps for all the reasons Saul has outlined, cannot bring herself to provide them with the full story. She tells the police only that Walter is there "against my will." When the officer explains they need legal grounds to remove him and pointedly asks Skyler if Walter has broken any laws, we see her struggle over whether to speak. At this moment, the other officer asks Walter Jr. his impression of events.

Walter Jr.: It's my mom's fault. She won't even say what my dad did. . . . I don't know why she's being this way. My dad, he is a great guy.

Rather than react to the unfair accusations being made against her, Skyler is silenced by the feelings her son has for his father. She cannot bring herself to disillusion him. This marks the moment of Skyler's defeat and Walter's victory over her.⁵ The threat to surrender Walter to the authorities has been Skyler's only power over him. Her inability to make good on Walter's dare has undermined what little power she has within the family. Power now reverts to Walter. Skyler becomes his emotional captive, just as Krazy-8 previously was his physical prisoner, as Walter forcibly reclaims what he perceives as his rightful place in the home and with the family.

This complex series of events, occurring in the first three episodes of season three ("No Mas," 3/21/10; "Caballo Sin Nombre," 3/28/10; and "I. F. T.," 4/4/10), serve to narratively position the couple in emotional terms. Their relationship plays out in the form of increasingly escalating emotional maneuvers between the two characters, fought over the meaning of marriage and what each partner owes or does not owe the other.

Following Skyler's failed appeal to the police, she feels trapped in her own home, miserable and deeply resentful of the constraints imposed upon her by her husband. She spends most of the time locked in her bedroom with her infant daughter, Holly, while Walter continues 'playing house,' by performing a simulation of happy family, established primarily through the domestic tasks of cooking and child care. Dressed for work in the morning, Skyler waits until she hears a door shut elsewhere in the house, hoping to sneak out of the bedroom without having to encounter Walter. Instead, when she unlocks the bedroom door, she finds an open bag of money waiting for her on the hallway floor: Walter's black duffel containing half a million dollars. Walter itemizes the expenses for which the money is intended after his death (college tuition, health insurance, groceries, gas, the mortgage). When Skyler attempts to respond, he cuts her off, refusing to let her speak. Instead, he continues by explaining that he didn't steal the money; rather, he *earned* it. Walter explains that he must live with the guilt of what he did to earn the money. But, he insists, all that will have been for nothing if Skyler refuses to accept the money he has earned.

Walter's persistence that Skyler accept the money derives from several motivations. First, it would make him feel better, providing him with some measure of absolution for the bad things he did to earn it. Additionally, her acceptance of the money would draw her into his illegal activities, also making her guilty because she is aware of the money's origins. In effect, her acquiescence would render her 'moll' to his illegal ventures. But most relevant for this discussion, he stakes his claim for her to accept the money on the basis of an economic argument, located in his role as primary breadwinner for the family. For this reason, he earmarks the money for family expenses, for mortgage, groceries, health insurance, and the children's college tuition. Similarly, this accounts for why he repeatedly emphasizes that he has *earned* the money.

Walter's belief that he is fulfilling—even excelling at—his marital and familial role as economic provider constitutes his side of the story, which he earlier chastises Skyler that she has not yet heard. Indeed, he is convinced that his motivation is so reasonable, so evidently laudable, he fully expects she too will be won over by the dutiful selflessness he has exhibited for the sake of the family. At a certain level, Walter does not believe—cannot imagine—Skyler will fail to see events in his terms: not only acceptable but admirable because he carries out his role as husband and father, understood primarily as breadwinner. Yet clearly, Skyler does not accede to the situation within the framework Walter has established.

We may conjecture that she opposes Walter because he has acted in ways that affect the entire family without having consulted her and, as such, unilaterally has altered the family's fundamental operations, practices, beliefs, and values. We can suppose that she does not approve of Walter's drug involvement on moral grounds, as well as because they are

illegal. And certainly we can surmise that Skyler is in conflict with Walter's choices because they endanger not solely himself but the entire family, for example, as Gus' threats of physical harm or Saul's explanation of the economic risk make evident.

Ultimately, Skyler manages to recoup some power later in the episode "I. F. T.," if only temporarily. The turning point occurs when, at work, she resolves to have sex with her boss, Ted (Christopher Cousins). Approaching Ted in the photocopy room, she kisses him, then asks the divorced Ted if his children are at home with him. This scene then immediately cuts to Skyler returning home later that night. None of the sexual encounter between Skyler and Ted is shown. For, the point of her 'extra-marital' affair, in a situation in which the couple disputes whether their marriage remains intact or not, does not rest with the act of having sex with Ted. Therefore, their sexual encounter is treated in a narratively expedient manner, implied not visualized. Rather, the significance of the event resides in the emotional impact it has on Walter when Skyler tells him. The motivation for and importance of Skyler's affair with her boss lies not in the physical action but in her ability to *affect* her husband.

Thus, she returns home that evening to find Walter reveling in his domesticity, cooking a family dinner for the waiting Walter Jr. and his friend Louis (Caleb Jones). Wearing an apron, Walter calls Skyler into the kitchen where, while preparing a salad, he pretends family normality as he asks Skyler how her day was and chatters away about inviting Walter Jr.'s friend to stay for dinner. He also tells her that he feels better about their talk that morning—although she was not given the opportunity to speak—concerning the drug money and his motivations for earning it.

Skyler remains silent, simply staring at Walter from the doorway as he cheerily prattles away until, finally, she approaches him, picks up the finished salad, looks him directly in the eye, and utters a mere three words: "I fucked Ted," the I. F. T. of the episode's title. Now their positions are reversed as Skyler takes the salad into the dining room and calls the two teenagers in to dinner, her turn to chat in a normal family manner while Walter remains stunned and speechless in the kitchen, leaving him as the spouse who feels alienated in his claimed home, as the episode ends.

Skyler's hard-won victory provides her with some measure of feeling she retains control over her own life, however fleeting that sensibility. Walter has prevented Skyler from voicing her own position or has failed to actually listen to her when she does. By having sex with Ted, Skyler has managed to command Walter's attention, making her presence *felt*. Initially, her act of having sex with Ted may seem disconnected from the core of the couple's conflict, concerning Walter's drug-related activities. On further reflection, however, we can see that Skyler also stakes her claim on the rights and responsibilities involved in marriage and family.

Walter conceives of Skyler's objections as existing *only* in the means he has taken to reach his end goal—providing financially for the family. He cannot comprehend that she could object to the end he has achieved. For this reason, Walter remains firmly convinced that his wife will accept his behavior once she has heard his viewpoint, constituting *why* he has done what he has done. Yet Walter's end goal, in addition to his means, is precisely that to which Skyler takes exception. For, the couple contest different meanings of what it is to 'protect' or 'take care' of the family; indeed, of what 'loving' one's family means. Walter situates his role in taking care of the family in financial terms. In contrast, Skyler prioritizes guaranteeing the family's safety from physical harm and, in addition, from emotional harm or pain, as events involving her son make clear.

On the one hand, Walter's and Skyler's characters are intended to represent role-reversal or gender neutrality, exemplified by his participation and delight in domestic tasks and her strength and independence as woman, wife, and mother. On the other hand, to the degree that Walter asserts his economic role as breadwinner while Skyler fights for the physical and emotional safety of her family from her position as nurturing mother, the two take up traditional gender stances.

Skyler and Walter are arguing their divergent views of 'marriage' and 'family,' given that Skyler's sexual act addresses expectations between the couple—from Walter's perspective regarding marital sexual fidelity. Her action is not intended simply to grab his attention but is intimately connected to the contestation they are engaged in over the emotional values and ethical meanings of marriage and family. Walter pauses in his headlong rush to justify his actions to Skyler only once he believes she has betrayed him, in terms of the rules and expectations of their marriage.

Yet, from Skyler's perspective, Walter as spousal partner has betrayed her by failing to listen to her "side" of the story, in refusing to consult her over drastic changes in the way the family operates, by taking unilateral actions that affect the entire family and, perhaps most of all, in failing to preserve the family from physical danger or emotional harm. Skyler, then, attempts to convey the marital betrayal she feels through an act she recognizes Walter will perceive as the breaking of a marital trust. The emotions negotiated and exchanged between Walter and Skyler are effective precisely to the degree that they link closely to the meanings of marriage and family because, in light of recent changes to the ways they have previously functioned as spousal partners and as a familial unit, the meanings and feelings each holds now differ sharply. At stake are their expectations, rights, and responsibilities as spouses, contested over their divergent meanings of marriage and family, and enacted through their respective emotional feelings and expressions, that is to say, performed via their affective positions. *Breaking Bad*, then, recognizes and frames

marriage as an emotional institution as well as an economic and legal one.

Skyler's sexual act has proven effective—and dramatic from the audience's perspective—because she has rightly gauged Walter's emotional response. He receives her sexual 'infidelity' as an act that destroys the sanctity of their marriage, even as he fails completely to see that his own actions have undermined the trust between the marital partners, from Skyler's point of view. Although Walter proves incapable of grasping the points that Skyler strives to express, arguably the audience does.

In order for her sexual act to prove effective, Skyler must recognize and operate upon the basis of Walter's system of values that, in turn, determines his emotional susceptibilities. Her familiarity with and correct assessment of his emotional makeup enables her to act on that which resonates for Walter in feeling terms. Indeed, the entire storyline of their relationship is dependent upon their mutual capacity to recognize and act upon the other's emotions, although usually in the negative sense of making the other 'feel bad.' The most significant point here, however, is that theirs are not 'private' or merely personal sets of feeling but, rather, a high stakes struggle, involving repeated acts of emotional contestation, to determine who holds power in the family and over the family.

FEELING BAD

The narrative line of Walter's and Skyler's relationship follows a complex and exponentially expanding range of characters' feelings, of emotional expressions and actions in response to the other's feelings, of attempts to make his or her counterpart feel certain ways, and of blaming the other for the way one feels. Such emotional action is not limited to Walter's and Skyler's relationship but permeates the series. Arguably, it is not solely Walter's physical actions (although certainly these too) that render the series such compelling drama. Equally, *Breaking Bad's* heightened sense of excitement and suspense are created by the rationalizations and motivations for Walter's actions, the basis upon which he decides it is necessary, or even his right, to commit the actions he undertakes.

It may well be that relations of power conducted through emotional strategy are more visible in instances of characters 'feeling bad' and, reciprocally, working to make other characters feel bad. However, emotions that we may perceive as more positive—cases of 'feeling good—also involve relations of power. For example, in Foucault's list of social circumstances in which relations of power are present, he includes "amorous" as well as "institutional" and "economic" relationships. To love another or to be loved involves ongoing emotional transactions, working to 'make' another feel certain ways.

Such efforts expended to 'make' others feel in specific ways are intended to *affect* others. As I argued at the beginning of this chapter, working to 'affect' others may be a more useful way of understanding the productivity of power relations in contrast to Foucault's vocabulary of attempting to "control" the conduct of others, precisely because so many ongoing, mundane acts of sociality are not accomplished through coercion but through emotionality. For social relations to exist, emotions must be transmitted and received, whether they are accepted, rejected, or amended. Such emotional negotiation and exchange produces the constant play of and modification in power relations.

In this reading of *Breaking Bad*, I have rather artificially distinguished between emotional action and physical action, although they are interconnected narrative processes, normally operating in tandem. I have made this distinction in order to examine the centrality of the representation of emotions to narrativity as a whole. Substantial value exists in bringing a more developed understanding of the functions of emotions into the critical analysis of narrative, from which they largely have been absent. Considering narratives within the framework of both emotional and physical action opens them up to new interpretations. The more typical approach of psychological readings based on characters' motivations and feelings tend to locate emotions as, and limit them to, internalized experience.

In contrast, thinking in terms of emotional action works to externalize characters' emotional feelings, expressions, and behaviors, rendering them eminently social. Through the intimate interaction of emotions, meaning, and power, ongoing social transactions of negotiation and exchange occur at all levels of the social spectrum, from the most routine to the grandest. Finally, I began with Foucault's anecdote about age and intimidation not because of something he explicitly states but, rather, due to that which he leaves out: the vital role of emotions in relations of power, that is, in all human relations.

NOTES

1. For example, see D'Acci (1994) on the television series, *Cagney and Lacey*, which I discuss in Pribram, 2011, 12-16.
2. Walter's reasons on the "Let Him Live" side of the page include: "It's the moral thing to do"; "Won't be able to live with yourself"; and "Murder is wrong!"
3. The fact that both Walter and Krazy-8 cough continuously serves as another link between them.
4. This indicates that emotional strategies come equipped with their own rules and procedures regarding what are acceptable versus abusive means to an end. Thus, when Walter poisons Brock (Ian Posada), the young son of Jesse's girlfriend, in order to get Jesse to agree with him on a certain course of action, Walter is understood to have gone too far. Yet, for most of the series Walter draws the line at directly endangering Jesse's life by, for instance, poisoning him in order to coerce agreement.

5. Skyler explains to her lawyer, the only person she ever confides in, that instead of having her family pay all the material and emotional repercussions for Walter's illegal activities, her plan is to wait until her husband's lung cancer 'resolves' the situation for them.

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