Analyzing ABC’s *Scandal* With the Narrative Paradigm

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Abstract

ABC’s *Scandal* is a unique television series that is perfectly analyzed by the narrative paradigm theory. *Scandal*, a nighttime drama inspired by the famous crisis manager Judy Smith and created by Shonda Rhimes, centers around Olivia Pope, a brilliant crisis communications expert who fixes people for a living, not excluding the President of the United States. Her professional life often coincides with her personal one. Throughout her tumultuous relationships with those around her, a narrative is easily visible. By discovering Walter Fisher’s narrative paradigm, the dialogue is analyzed using the twin tests, narrative fidelity and narrative coherence.

Seeing ABC’s *Scandal* Through the Narrative Paradigm

I. Introduction

You want to be her. You think if you're near her, if you stand in her light, then you'll finally do stuff that matters. Because you need to believe that there's something greater than a 9:00 to 5:00 crap job, that there's a higher purpose, that your life has meaning, because the world feels big and you feel lost. Am I right? Olivia Pope fixes things. That's who she is. You need fixing. I don't know your story. I don't need to know. We all have a story. Everyone in this office needs fixing. You're a stray dog, and Olivia took you in. Don't question it. No crying. We don't cry, ever (Rhimes and McGuigan, 2012).

*Scanda*l, a television show that premiered in April of 2012, has broken the mold of nighttime dramas. Its fast-paced dialogue and intriguing characters that refuse to fit into a typical archetype leaves viewers with a plethora of emotions. Olivia Pope, crisis communication extraordinaire and center of the mesmerizing hour of drama, elicits religious-like followings from her employees, all having been “saved” by her at some point. Her complicated relationship with the Commander-in-Chief and the White House keeps the audience enraptured. After three seasons, the show is still sweeping the world by storm.

How does this weekly hour-long drama relate to Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm? What key roles do race and gender play in the visually stunning and intellectually stimulating ABC drama?

Although *Scandal* is an entertainment-driven television drama, its interesting portrayal of race, gender roles, and romantic relationships through crisis communications can be thoroughly analyzed by using Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm theory.

II. Description of Artifact

Where did the idea for *Scandal* come from? Judy Smith, high profile crisis communications expert, inspired the creation of this phenomenon. Smith is an undergraduate alum of Boston University and law graduate of American University Washington College of Law (“About Judy”, 2011).

Smith combined the work of communication and law to develop her unique business. According to her website, after a versatile career first as a writer and public affairs specialist, then as an Assistant United States Attorney, Smith caught the eye of the White House (“About Judy”, 2011). In 1991, she became White House staff as Special Assistant and Deputy Press Secretary to President George H. W. Bush. After leaving the White House, served as Chief Spokesperson for NBC and was partner at multiple Washington D.C. based public relations firms. After all this, Judy Smith finally founded her own company, Smith and Company (“About Judy”, 2011).

Ms. Smith honed her skills through her experiences with some of the most historic and sensational events of our time, including the Iran Contra investigation, the prosecution of former Washington D.C. Mayor Marion Barry, the 1991 Gulf War, the Los Angeles riots, the Supreme Court confirmation hearings of Justice Clarence Thomas, the President Clinton scandal involving Monica Lewinsky, the congressional inquiry of Enron, and the United Nations Foundation and World Health Organization response to the SARS epidemic. Perhaps best known in media circles for her expertise as a crisis management advisor, Ms. Smith has served as a consultant for a host of high profile, celebrity and entertainment clients over the course of her career including, but not limited to, Monica Lewinsky, Senator Craig from Idaho, actor Wesley Snipes, NFL quarterback Michael Vick, and the family of Chandra Levy (“About Judy”, 2011).

What is crisis communication? According to Jonathan Bernstein (2013), crisis is “any situation that is threatening or could threaten to harm people or property, seriously interrupt business, significantly damage reputation and/or negatively impact the bottom line” (¶ 2). Therefore, crisis communication is attempting to communicate clearly regarding the crisis and mitigate damage to the company. Judy Smith has made a career out of it and *Scandal* is effectively entertaining millions with the concept. Smith is a co-executive producer on *Scandal* (“About Judy”, 2011).

Who is the genius behind *Scandal*? It is Shonda Rhimes, the creator of the iconic *Grey’s Anatomy*. Shonda, born January 13, 1970 in University Park, Illinois attended Dartmouth College and earn a degree in writing and literature. She went on to the University of Southern California School of Television and Cinema, earning a Master’s degree in Fine Arts (“Shonda Rhimes”, 2014). Following her education, she worked as a feature-film screenwriter, writing for movies like Britney Spears’ “Crossroads” and Anne Hathaway’s “The Princess Diaries.” However, after adopting a newborn daughter in 2002, she found that was at home more often than usual due to caring for the baby. There, she rediscovered her love of television (“Shonda Rhimes”, 2014).

After creating the very popular *Grey’s Anatomy,* Rhimes went on to produce a spin-off, *Private Practice* and in 2012 graced the world with *Scandal* (“Shonda Rhimes”, 2014).

Now, in order to pull off a drama about such a successful and legendary woman such as Judy Smith, Shonda Rhimes knew she had to find the best person to portray Smith. Kerry Washington was that woman.

Kerry Washington, the daughter of a professor and real-estate salesman, was born in the Bronx on January 31, 1977 (“About”, 2013). She attended The George Washington University and graduated with honors. She started in multiple films such as *Save the Last Dance, Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Ray,* and *Django Unchained.* Her most notable acting credit, however, is *Scandal*. Washington is also a political activist, having campaigned for President Obama in the 2008 a 2012 election. In addition, she was appointed by the President of the United States to the President’s Committee of the Arts and Humanities in 2009 (“About”, 2013).

With these three powerhouse women, *Scandal* was poised to take over evening television. However, there was a long road to travel. Shonda Rhimes was “so taken” with Smith that she knew she must create a show based on her fascinating life (Andrews, 2013). In an interview with NPR, National Public Radio, Judy Smith talks about her and Shonda’s first meeting.

We started on this, believe it or not, about a year and a half - almost two years - before we got it on the air. And, when I met her, it's probably like your typical interview in the sense that, you know, someone says pull me out in 10 minutes. You know, call me so I can get out of the meeting. So it was originally supposed to be a 15-minute chat, and we ended up just talking for two-and-a-half hours, just about crisis (Hurtado, 2012).

Rhimes, in an interview with the Huffington Post (Furlong, 2012), said, "She walked out of the room and I turned to Betsy and I was like, 'Oh my god,' because I suddenly saw 100 episodes of television. I saw all the things you could do” (¶ 3).

Like Rhimes said, she saw all the things that could be done and did them. Before production could even begin, Rhimes had to learn what Smith’s life was like. Research and time had to happen to really understand Smith’s life.

“Before the pilot, we spent a lot of time together -- like a year -- and they got to know what I do for a living. Shonda clearly has a sense for what I do. They've taken this high-stakes, chaotic, hectic feel of crisis communications and have done a great job of dramatizing it for television. It's incredible” (Furlong, 2012, ¶ 4).

After the research came the casting. Bellamy Young, who plays First Lady Mellie

Grant, recalls that moment she walked into casting. Although her experience was lesser than some of the others auditioning, her passion was unmatched.

“They were already underway, and it was far and away the best pilot I read that year,” she says. Since she’d worked with Tony Goldwyn on *Dirty Sexy Money*, Young says, “I kept trying to think who would be a good partner to Tony and I just had a really specific idea of it and did my best to realize it in the room,” she says (Loewenstein, 2013).

Young said that although the First Lady’s part was originally just supposed to be a background character, her determination helped win her a series regular part.

Kerry Washington, the drama’s star, said, “I keep saying it over and over, but I feel like the luckiest broad in showbiz. I don't quite know how this happened, but I do feel like every time I read a new episode, it is Christmas morning” (Furlong, 2012).

The entire cast feels that way. Tony Goldwyn, who plays President Fitzgerald Grant, has a particularly soft spot for Rhimes. In addition to working with her while directing episodes of *Grey’s Anatomy* and *Private Practice*, he says her work is “literary” (Furlong, 2012).

“You find that when you hit Shonda's rhythm, suddenly, the scene makes sense and comes to life. And it's playable. You can wrestle it and try to figure it out, but as soon as you hit it the way that she heard it, it suddenly is like magic and easy” (¶ 5).

What is *Scandal* exactly?

“*Scandal* is a new drama that centers on Olivia Pope (Kerry Washington), a former media relations consultant to the President who has the power to "fix" things for everyone. Now, she is on her own working for herself with a new law firm. However, as it always is, the past starts to come back into her life when slowly it is clear that her staff, who are specifically trained in fixing the lives of other people, can't seem to quite fix their own issues” (*TV Rage*, 2013).

That is the essential plot of the show. However, *Scandal* is more than a show. It is redefining the societal view of women and minorities. One scene in particular revolves around a Congresswoman who is vying for the democratic nomination for president. Olivia, who is handling her campaign, schedules an interview with a top reporter. However, the interview is biased from the beginning. The candidate, Josephine Marcus, questions the appearance of women as Commander-in-Chief.

During a television broadcast inside the Congresswoman’s home, she finally confronts the interviewer about the sexism of the election. After the interviewer, James, uses the lead-in to describe Marcus as a “real life Cinderella story” and thanks her for inviting him into her “lovely home” she responds to his subtle sexism. She then rebukes him. “It reminds people that I am a woman without using the word” (Rhimes, 2013, Appendix I).

Women are to be regarded as just as powerful as men in Rhimes’ *Scandal*. However, she not only redefines gender roles but also does away with the focus on diversity. Yes, her characters are diverse in every way, but are not celebrated for their diversity. Moreover, every character has equal footing.

“It’s possible that *Scandal’s* post-racial fantasy will feel refreshing, for black viewers and non-black ones, in varying ways. It removes the weight of both race and racism: Pope is never referred to as the “first black” anything” (Nussbaum, 2012).

By using this “post-racial fantasy,” *Scandal* moves into a new generation of television and entertainment. In Rhimes’ show, everyone is equal. They occasionally question their equality, but at the end of the conflict, the footing is equal yet again.

What are people saying about *Scandal*? There are both negative and positive reviews. Some reviewers do not believe that the show is worth that much credit. Matt Zoller Seitz, *Vulture* reviewer, thinks that the characters are flat.

I'm tempted to argue that Olivia's entire world, including its assorted supporting players, are mere projections of Olivia's personality. It would certainly explain why none of them seem to have personalities; if they weren't of different ages, nationalities, and ethnicities, it would be difficult to tell them apart (Seitz, 2012).

One feminist news source, the *Feminist Wire*, thinks that even though there is a lot of diversity on the show, Shonda Rhimes still plays into the “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (Maxwell, 2013).

These reviews make a clear point. Although race is not a prominent part of the show, one person’s happiness is the goal throughout each plotline and episode: the President’s. Coincidentally, he is a white, middle-aged man. Is this true? Is all of Rhimes’ work done in vain?

Regardless of the negative reviews, *Scandal* has something going for it that is pretty revolutionary itself: amazing social media involvement. One accomplishment that critics praise is the use of social media to give a community feel to the viewers of Scandal.

It’s a connected community. Though there are so many people tweeting, never does it feel like the tweets are scattered. They all seem connected by fans – it’s like a giant party. The show is exciting in its own right with a storyline that continues from week to week. So in between episodes, these tweeting fans are building excitement toward next week. The social portion never really stops (Garcia, 2013).

Each week, the cast of the show comes together and “live tweets” the show. They occasionally tweet as their characters, but mostly connect with viewers as themselves. The tweets feature jokes, commentary, and the occasional photo.

From all sides, *Scandal* gathers concern in addition to a deliciously forbidden love when it comes to the main relationship on the show: Olivia Pope and the President of the United States. What is the moral right and wrong here? Is there a black and white answer? Tony Goldwyn, the actor who plays the Commander-in-Chief, believes not.

"I always find the moral gray areas really interesting to explore, and Shonda doesn't make a judgment about the characters. Fitz is a real ethical ... well, as you get to know him better, he's like bi-ethical” (Furlong, 2012, ¶ 5).

Kerry Washington agrees. “"In real life, nobody is all good or all bad. Sometimes on TV they are -- but not on our show” (Furlong, 2012 ¶ 6).

*Scandal* is not only entertainment, but also starts new dialogue in the communication realm. What is the show saying about gender roles, minorities, and relationships? Is it playing into the world that bleeds from black and white into gray? The narrative paradigm illustrates quite simply what *Scandal* is saying.

III. Description of Theory

According to Dainton (2011, pg. 3), communication theory is any systematic summary about the nature of the communication process. Communication is a complicated and necessary facet of life. Every step that humans take is punctuated by it. It narrates media, history, experience, and relationship. Whether the perceived act of communicating is verbal or non-verbal, it translates experience into meaning. That is what the Narrative Paradigm theory, developed by Walter Fisher, is all about.

The Narrative Paradigm theory is quite simple in and of itself. It involves five main facets, found in Fisher’s 1984 article titled “Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument.” Fisher is adamant about the fact that his new and interesting paradigm does not ignore the rational world paradigm – a formally accepted theory – but instead adds to it. The five areas of the narrative paradigm illustrate that this new theory explores areas of communication, which had not been widely accepted before, includes all people as a necessary part of processing the intricate and fascinating thing that is communication (Fisher, 1989, p. 7).

The first area of the narrative paradigm, says Fisher (1984) is that humans are essentially storytellers (p. 7). What does this mean? Does this say that humans, in essence, tell fictional stories all the time? That doesn’t seem practical and/or particularly true. No, Fisher (1984) points out later on that this is not the case (p. 2).

When I use the term ‘narration,’ I do not mean a fictive composition whose propositions may be true or false and have no necessary relationship to the message of that composition. By ‘narration,’ I refer to a theory of symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them. The narrative perspective, therefore, has relevance to real as well as fictive worlds, to stories of living and to stories of the imagination (Fisher, 1984, p. 3).

Human beings’ stories are not the fictive, childlike pieces of work that are

often associated with the term ‘storytellers.’ Instead, they are alive with complex meanings of symbols and words and deeds, meanings of deeper significance that take the surface level lives of people and delve into deeper stories – stories of history and art and love.

The second area of the narrative paradigm, as told by Fisher (1985) is “the paradigmatic mode of human decision-making and communication is “good reasons” which vary in form among communication situations, genres, and media” (p. 8). Humans make decisions upon good reasoning. They base these upon “meaning,” which according to Fisher (1985) is simply a balance of moral good (p. 8).

Morals are derived from the narrative. However, these forms of “good” vary in forms. Communication forms vary by language, culture, verbal and non-verbal cues, and understanding. Who measures “good” in a culture? The United States understanding of moral may not be the Japanese understanding of moral. In genre, the story could be fictional or non-fictional, fantasy, horror, and romance. Outside of the story itself, the genre could be the situation and context. Is it a loved one, a work colleague, a mentor, or an authority? When it comes to media, what media is the decision being made within? It could range from physical media to the understanding of the emotions. Depending on the situation, genre, and media, each decision is based upon a person’s unique worldview and understanding of the appropriate moral behavior.

The third area of the paradigm says that history, biography, culture, and character are the rulers of the “production and practice of good reasons” (Fisher, 1984, p. 7). How do these factors rule over good reasoning? If humans primarily make decisions based on good reasons, these four sections determine what a good reason is.

History is the first of the list. In order for a reason to be good, it must obey the laws of history. Has a similar decision surfaced before? What happened? History proves that similar types of communication often have similar ends. By letting history influence a decision, there is an example to learn from regarding the past.

Biography is next. How does biography affect good reasoning? Who is the person making the decision? How does he or she react to the general reasoning? The personality and experiences of each individual person influence the decisions he or she makes. It also defines what a “good reason” is.

Culture is the third deciding factor in good reasoning. Depending on the culture in which a person lives, his or her decision will be affected. For example, a person’s decision in Western Europe will differ greatly than a decision made by a citizen of Eastern Asia. Culture is a defining factor in a person’s decision.

Character is the last factor in good reasoning. This is the last and most important factor in determining whether a reason is good or not. Why? Character is what a person measures their morals with. If human beings decide things using good reasoning, then it is their character that ultimately rules over this process. What a devout Christian’s character sees as a good decision and what a convicted felon’s character sees as a good decision will most likely vary by far.

The fourth area of the narrative paradigm is next. It says the following:

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 the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their life (Fisher, 1984, p. 8).

Stories exist through the communication of everyday life. How do human beings process what is true and what is false? They process this through the rationality they have because of their natural narrative being. This is often how human beings can inference on true and false arguments.

The final area of the narrative paradigm says “the world is a set of stories which must be chosen among to live the good life in a process of continual recreation” (Fisher, 1984, p. 8). The entire world is full of stories – sad and dark, uplifting and encouraging, and inspiring and demanding stories. It is an endless opportunity to see what is beyond yourself and your communication. The narrative paradigm says that stories make up who humans are, what they see, and where they live.

The methodology of the narrative paradigm does not need education, unlike the rational world paradigm. The rational world paradigm, a staple of communication theory since Aristotle’s time, says that people are primarily rational being and decisions are made based on educational inference (Fisher, 1985, p. 4). However, this reinforces that for people to communicate and make intelligent decisions, they must be properly educated. What about the people who have not been educated? Can they communicate? Can their communication be researched? Through the narrative paradigm, this is possible.

The narrative paradigm takes the lives of people, educated and uneducated, and gives them meaning. It gives all communication a deeper meaning through the use of stories. Because all humans are essentially storytellers, according to Fisher (1984), everything they do has a deeper symbolism (p. 7).

In all forms of media the narrative paradigm can be applied. To properly apply the theory, each piece of communication must be looked at from a story perspective – in symbols and plot devices. Depending on the media, the technique may differ. For a television show, the dialogue, setting, and relationship context will play into the narrative translation. Everything from a coffee cup on set to a harsh voice during a conversation can give insight to the story of what is happening.

The narrative paradigm theory began almost entirely by accident. Walter Fisher, the creator, wrote an article in 1981 entitled *Toward a Logic of Good Reasons.* At that point, he was unaware that he was working towards a new theory. After experimenting and looking at some different artifacts, Fisher began looking at the nuclear argument that was a big cause in 1984. Upon reading *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, a study by Alasdair MacIntyre, previously quoted, Fisher was struck by MacIntyre’s observations that people, in everything they do and say, in addition to the stories they tell, are “storytelling animals” (Fisher, 1985, p. 4). After being inspired by this very idea that is a main characteristic of his new paradigm, Fisher began looking more into the idea of narration and human communication. The narrative paradigm does not disregard other theories, specifically the rational world paradigm, but uses and adds more to it.

Walter Fisher is a distinguished expert in the field of communication. He is most well known for formalizing Kenneth Burke’s Dramatism theory and creating the theory of the narrative paradigm. His theory revolutionizes communication.

Fisher earned his doctorate in communication studies from the University of Iowa. According to the University of Southern California, “he specializes in rhetorical theory and criticism, political communication, and argumentation, addressing in particular problems in reason and ethics (USC Annenburg School for Communication and Journalism, 2014, ¶ 2).

Fisher has won multiple awards, written over forty articles, authored or edited five books, chaired thirty-eight dissertations, held multiple offices, and is a emeritus professor at the University of Southern California Annenburg School for Communication and Journalism. His work has impacted and changed the face of communication in the modern age (2014, ¶ 3).

The narrative paradigm theory has been used and justified by communication specialists from across the globe. During the end of the 20th century and into the 21st, the theory has spread across different research areas, including the social sciences. Sue-Ann Harding (2012), in an article entitled *How do I apply narrative theory* construes a similar statement (p. 1).

The use of narrative as a tool for academic investigation beyond the confines of fiction and literature has steadily gained ground over the twentieth, and now into the twenty-first, century. From the narrative form of the case study developed in medicine, psychology and psychoanalysis, to a shift towards narrative in fields such as history, anthropology, law, biology, physics, education, philosophy, theology, gender studies, and political science, and the use of narrative in the study of contemporary topics such as gaming, street art, and urban geography, scholars from a wide range of disciplines and inter-disciplines have critically and fruitfully engaged with narrative (Harding, 2012, p. 1).

Randolph Barker (2009), a professor at Virginia Commonwealth University School of

Business, says that he uses narrative paradigm in his business communication classes.

Students are constantly amazed when you explain that the organizations they are going to work for, in truth, are not always incredibly organized or managed, so the rational and value-laden approach of NPT helps to enhance the believability and learning (p. 1).

Multitudes of people are using narrative paradigm communication theory in

all different areas of life. From universities to authors, people are being influenced by the unique and inspirational thoughts of Walter Fisher.

The narrative paradigm theory is a simple yet complex idea that all human beings can communicate and be valuable members of society, because human beings are in essence storytellers. A story can take a person to the highest mountain or the lowest valley, to the most wonderful moment to a terrifying nightmare, and the world is full of every story imaginable. *Scandal* does just this.

IV. Application

After a thorough education in both the television show *Scandal* and Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm, the questions remains, how do these coincide? How does the understanding that all people are essentially storytellers belong in the complicated plot and symbolism of *Scandal*?

Joana Poças (2013), in her presentation on *State of the Art Presentations* states that the story of the narrative paradigm must meet the “twin tests” of coherence and fidelity (¶ 7).

When you’re writing the story that will sustain your presentation, you need to ask yourself: Do the characters and events seem to be part of the same piece? Do the characters involved act in a consistent way? Does the story sound probable?  Also, for a story to hang together no important detail or fact can be left out, otherwise the audience won’t trust the story (Poças, 2013, ¶ 8).

*Scandal* is comprised of characters with difficult pasts, unique on their own. From the President of the United States to the ex-criminal, every person has their differences, but like a complex puzzle, they fit together.

From Olivia Pope, the strong and forceful “fixer” to Cyrus Beene, the miserable and vindictive chief of staff, each character develops relationship that relates to the next relationship. Do these people truly fit together? Do they pass the test of narrative coherence?

The other test your story needs to ace is the fidelity test – in other words, the quality test. If your story has enough quality to sound true, your words will strike a response in your audience, and so your story will change its listeners in a substantial way, which is the ultimate goal of every story. But remember, your story will have fidelity only if it rings true with the audience’s experiences and provides solid reasons to guide their future actions. People need to relate to your story if they’re going to buy into it (Poças, 2013, ¶ 8).

*Scandal’s* next feat is matching the test of narrative fidelity. For entertainment, the artifacts that pass the fidelity test are the successful ones – the ones that have an audience. How does *Scandal* make such a mark that its audience is in the millions? Even though the program is mostly fiction, it drives people with its controversial undertones centered around crisis communication and gender and race roles.

The first monologue that illustrates gender equality is the interview with Congressman Josie Marcus mentioned earlier (Rhimes, 2013, Appendix I). This conversation gives breath to the conversation about women in politics, especially the presidency. It is narrative by nature, using words as symbols.

Starting with the announcer, words and phrases like “breakout star,” “Cinderella story” and “down-home charm,” immediately bringing to mind imagery of what is known as a “southern lady.” Without realizing it, the viewers’ minds bring to the forefront images of feminine qualities, and the setting of the scene reinforces that.

In this scene, the interview takes place inside the home of Congresswoman Marcus, complete with a pitcher of sweet tea and flowers. Both the Congresswoman and James are sitting in decorative chairs. The image is friendly and non-threatening.

However, the imagery backfires. The congresswoman retorts with fiery words, pointing out the narrative symbolism and arranging it to her benefit. She uses words like “sexist,” “prejudice,” and “offensive,” calling out the obvious attempts to remind the viewers that she is a woman (Rhimes, 2013, Appendix I).

In an argumentative viewpoint, the congresswoman calls out the fallacies and wins. The imprint is still in the viewers’ minds, however. That is what this makes this scene so intensely powerful. It challenges the traditional view of modern women and the slight undertones that create an unequal viewpoint of men and women.

Does this past the twin test of narrative fidelity and coherence? First, do the characters

fit together in the storyline? Is it believable? The answer to those questions is yes. The characters when it comes to the narration of the language fit together, almost in a battle-like context. The images are battling against each other, and the feminist language wins out over the other.

Secondly, does the narrative pass the test of coherence? How does the audience react? In the episode, Olivia Pope, who is managing the congresswoman’s campaign, her staff, and Congresswoman Marcus’s staff rejoice. It boosts her numbers in the polls and gives her opponent bad press. This narrative inspires something in the heart of the audience – not just in the fictional episode but also in reality.

This narrative proves the fifth facet of the narrative paradigm, which says “the world is a set of stories which must be chosen among to live the good life in a process of continual recreation” (Fisher, 1984, p. 8). The conversation about women in power has happened over and again, but is constantly recreated. *Scandal* has managed to converse in a way that reaches millions of people.

Another narrative in *Scandal* is the treatment of race. In the episode “Happy Birthday, Mr. President,” Olivia Pope has recurring flashbacks about her relationship with the president. Alongside race, the conversation they have in the White House Rose Garden also deals with the “gray” in the world, not following simply black and white ideals (Rhimes, 2012, Appendix II).

The heated argument between the President and Pope begins because of a comment she made earlier in the show. “I’m feeling a little Sally Hemings – Thomas Jefferson about all of this,” referring to the interracial relationship that President Thomas Jefferson had with one of his slaves.

This statement immediately tells the story of force, slavery, anger, and one person having power over the other. The imagery brought is that of force. She continues, however, with words that are vaguely victimized. “You own me. You control me. I belong to you” (Rhimes, 2012, Appendix II).

These words reinforce the slavery narrative that Pope is trying to tell. However, President Grant refutes her words. “You own me! You control me. I belong to you!” he takes the narrative and spins it, like any great politician would.

“There's no Sally or Thomas here. You're nobody's victim, Liv. I belong to you. We're in this together” (Rhimes, 2012, Appendix II). The narrative that Pope was driving switched courses instantly when the president said these words. These words portray a partnership, an equal hold over the other person.

This dialogue passes the twin tests as well. Not only are the characters in a relationship, they work together. The conversation is that of a lover scorned. In addition, the conversation leaves both parties torn and the audience impacted. This narrative has both fidelity and coherence.

The narrative of this scene proves the third part of the narrative paradigm. It says “history, biography, culture, and character are the rulers of the ‘production and practice of good reasons’” (Fisher, 1984, p. 7). History and culture gave the narrative its intensity.

These are only two examples of the challenging conversations that the characters of *Scandal* take part in. In everything from the sets to the dialogue, the narrative paradigm comes into play. *Scandal* can be perfectly analyzed by using the narrative paradigm.

Imagine if the narrative paradigm were used to analyze all forms of entertainment. If every human being is a storyteller, then the potential discovery of humankind’s ideas is colossal. Stories make up the human world. The narrative of life is much larger than the simple decision, but a life of influence, explanation, and implications.

For further research, searches into other gender role and race discussions on other television series would be beneficial. Although the examination of *Scandal’s* interesting take on gender and race was fascinating, because of its brevity in popular culture, not much academic research has been done on its work.

Throughout researching how the narrative paradigm can properly analyze *Scandal’s* race, gender, and moral content, a new world of discovery has been made. Instead of viewing the series simply with an eye for entertainment, it can now be viewed through the eyes of Walter Fisher, the creator of the narrative paradigm, to see what he sees.

Everyone has a story. Olivia Pope can tell you that. After all, *Scandal* is all about telling stories. “Olivia Pope fixes things. That's who she is. You need fixing. I don't know your story. I don't need to know. We all have a story” (Rhimes and McGuigan, 2012).

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Appendix I

(Congressman Marcus’s living room)

Announcer: Tonight, on "Top of the Hour," Congresswoman Marcus sits down with James Novak for her first prime-time interview since becoming the breakout star of this year's Democratic primaries. Is this a real-life Cinderella story or a political lightweight squeaking by on her down-home charm? You decide, on "Top of the Hour.”

James: Congresswoman Marcus thanks for joining us. Or I should say, thank you for inviting me into your lovely home?

Congresswoman: My pleasure.

James: Let's get right to it. The Reston campaign says that you lack the experience to be President of the United States. What's your response to that?

Congresswoman: Um, there's something my grandmother used to do whenever I'd start dating someone. I would tell her his name, and then she would say, "Oh, what part of town does he live in?" That was her way of asking if my boyfriend was white. Oh, yeah, my grandmother was an out-and-out racist. So I know what prejudice looks like. It's not about experience, James. It's about gender. Reston's saying I don't have the balls to be President, and he means that literally. It's offensive. It's offensive to me and to all the women whose votes he's asking for.

James: Uh, I'm sorry, are you are you saying that governor Reston is sexist?

Congresswoman: Yes. Yes, I am. And it's not just governor Reston speaking in code about gender. It's everyone; you included. The only reason we're doing this interview in my house is because you requested it. This was your idea, and yet here you are, thanking me for inviting you into my ‘lovely home.’ That's what you say to the neighbor lady who baked you chocolate chip cookies. This pitcher of iced tea isn't even mine. It's what your producers set here. Why? Same reason you called me "a real life Cinderella story.” It reminds people that I am a woman without using the word. For you it's an angle, I get that. And I'm sure you think it's innocuous. But guess what? It's not. You're promoting stereotypes, James. You're advancing this idea that women are weaker than men. You're playing right into the hands of Reston and into the hands of every other imbecile who thinks a woman isn't fit to be commander in chief. Yes, governor, I'm talking about you. Seven years I served in the United States army, which is seven more years than governor Reston ever served; a fact you conveniently omitted from my intro. How about soldier? Lieutenant?

James: Yeah, that was an oversight.

Appendix II

(In the White House Rose Garden)

Fitz: What's wrong? (Sighs) You pace in circles when something's wrong. When you're just thinking, it's back and forth, but when something's wrong Circles.

Olivia: Did you need something, Mr. President?

Fitz: See, you used to sound sexy when you called me "Mr.President." Now it just sounds like I'm a gym teacher.

Olivia: Did you need something?

Fitz: The Sally Hemings- Thomas Jefferson comment was below the belt.

Olivia: Because it's so untrue?

Fitz: You're playing the race card on the fact that I'm in love with you? Come on. Don't belittle us. It's insulting and beneath you and designed to drive me away. I'm not going away.

Olivia: I don't have to drive you away. You're married, you have children, you're the leader of the free world. You are away. By definition, you're away. You're unavailable.

Fitz: So this is about Mellie?

Olivia: N-no! This is (Crying) I smile at her and I take off my clothes for you. I wait for you. I watch for you. My whole life is you. I can't breathe because I'm waiting for you. You own me. You control me. I-I belong to you. I…

Fitz: You own me! You control me. I belong to you. You think I don't want to be a better man? You think that I don't want to dedicate myself to my marriage? You don't think I want to be honorable, to be the man that you voted for? I love you. I'm in love with you. You're the love of my life. My every feeling is controlled by the look on your face. I can't breathe without you. I can't sleep without you. I wait for you. I watch for you. I exist for you. If I could escape all of this and run away with you There's no Sally or Thomas here. You're nobody's victim, Liv. I belong to you. We're in this together.