FROM INTERVENTION TO REHAB:
RHETORICAL AGENCY IN ADDICTION AND RECOVERY
REALITY PROGRAMS

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by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Carlos, whose positivity and encouragement help me to remember why I do what I do. If not for your support, I may still have finished my thesis, but I would have been a miserable person doing it. Thanks for listening to my many complaints, for pouring a glass of bubbly to celebrate the little milestones, and for finding tiny ways to make every day a better day. You bring tremendous joy into my life, and I am so excited for the years to come with you!
No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the
main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory
were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were: any man’s death diminishes
me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell
tolls; it tolls for thee.

—John Donne, Meditation XVII
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

From Intervention to Rehab:
Rhetorical Agency in Addiction and Recovery Reality Programs
by
Lauren M. Amaro
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One of the central questions pertaining to addiction is if the addict has capacity to change. This question is part of a larger scholarly debate about rhetorical agency, or the capacity of an individual to enact change through symbolic means. This thesis undertakes a dialectical approach to rhetorical agency to examine two popular reality television shows about addiction. The first season DVD of Intervention and the second season of Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew provide data for analysis. The shows argue that agency not only exists within addiction but that it can powerfully motivate personal, relational, and group change.

The thesis begins with an overview of addiction as a cultural dialogue in the first chapter. The second chapter presents a rationale that situates the study of agency and narratives of agency in the dark side of communication. The third chapter uses five propositions of the nature of agency to discuss how Intervention and Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew present a narrative of agency as a grueling process that seeks personal, relational, and social change with dark and light consequences. According to this narrative, change for the addict begins with personal change, which is helped or hindered by experiences of trauma. After personal change, the addict may seek relational change, which is moderated by idyllic or deviant relationships. After relational change, the addict may seek social change, which is heavily influenced by the existing narrative of the group. The fourth chapter delves into theoretical implications by contrasting the findings of the study and central propositions with a theory of agentic orientation. The study concludes with a discussion of contributions to the field of communication.
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I must include my parents in this as well. The sacrifices that you made in putting me through undergrad astound me. My education at Westmont was invaluable, and it made my continued education possible. While working on my M.A., I have watched you go through the hardest two years of your lives as you have struggled through a cancer journey. In that time I have been amazed by your love for each other, your constant commitment to family and mutual service, and your persistent faith. To all of my other dear family members (on both sides now!), I am deeply thankful for your love and support. In short, my agency is as communal as I argue in this thesis.
CHAPTER 1

POPULAR CULTURE AND ADDICTION

In contemporary American culture, a person can show signs of addiction to alcohol, any variety of drug, sex, video games (Stern, 1999), overeating or undereating (Gold, Frost-Pineda, Jacobs, 2003), celebrities (McCutcheon, Ashe, Houran, & Maltby, 2003), the Harry Potter books (Rudski, Segal, & Kallen, 2009), the internet (Hansen, 2002; Stern, 1999), or gambling (Hansen, 2002). Addictions, or at least the diagnosis thereof, are increasing in Western society (Alexander, 2008).

From this increase comes a new generation of rhetoric about addiction. Non-fictional and fictional books on the topic head best seller lists. Strains of codependence, dependence, and newfound sobriety blare from popular radio stations. Some of the most powerful and popular television networks and shows generate an image of addiction. Primetime “dramedies” such as Nip/Tuck, House or Grey’s Anatomy depict fictional accounts of characters experiencing various addictions. Cable reality shows like A&E’s Intervention and VH1’s Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew, Sober House, or Sex Rehab with Dr. Drew address stages of treatment and recovery.

Questions of control and willpower arise in the broader conversation of addiction. A primary question is if the addict is able to control and change his or her behavior or if some other factors determine choices. This question pertains to rhetorical agency, the idea that a person can affect change through his or her symbolic actions (Geisler, 2004). Many of these shows depict addicts seeking recovery in a rehabilitation center with other addicts. These
programs depict the experience of addicted individuals and their efforts to recover. Recovery initiatives attempt to revive a person’s capacity to make healthy choices, to revive rhetorical agency. The focus of rehabilitation is to refashion tendencies for personal, relational, and group destruction to become tendencies for positive change. In filming this endeavor for conversion from dark to light, programs on addiction create a construction of agency and how it might realize personal, relational, and group change.

This chapter will describe the specific programs that this thesis will utilize as data, as well as their placement within reality entertainment. It then will examine a deeper context from which these rhetorical artifacts emerge, focusing on prominent American perspectives on addiction as a disease, a decision, or a social construction. The final section will begin to discuss the significance of the study.

TELEVISION ADDICTION

Two of the most popular shows about addiction are A&E’s Intervention and VH1’s Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew. The first was selected for critical acclaim and the second for its high viewership and topical specificity. Intervention’s first season DVD and Celebrity Rehab’s second season online were examined and annotated to produce data for analysis.

Intervention first aired on A&E’s network in March 2005. It will conclude its eighth season in mid-2010 (Intervention, 2010). A popular and influential show, the program received an Emmy for Outstanding Reality Program in 2009. The documentary style of the show features one or two stories per episode and highlights the obviously negative effects of addiction on the lives of men, women, and their families. Addicts and family members speak about their experience in interviews. Each show concludes with family and friends confronting the addict in an intervention. The addict may elect to travel to a rehabilitation
center. The program does not film the addict’s time in rehabilitation, though the addict does give follow-up interviews in the DVD for season one. This DVD is representative of the series as a whole.

Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew continues the story where Intervention finishes with added dramatic flair in the form of celebrity antics. Celebrities from various backgrounds join Dr. Drew Pinsky, fellow celebrity and medical doctor, at the Pasadena Recovery Center, where they attempt rehabilitation. The episodes track the progress of the celebrities as they encounter various challenges in therapy and communal interaction. The celebrities in treatment undergo detoxification for their various drugs, and spend time in psychotherapy, examining the effects of past traumas, family tragedies, and the stressors of fame. The program enacts the popular narrative of addiction as disease and the necessity of communal support for recovery.

Both of these programs share the qualities of reality entertainment. Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, the number of reality shows on broadcast networks and cable programming has dramatically increased (Ferris, Smith, Greenberg, & Smith, 2007) and continues to grow. Reality shows are now a staple of television programming for their inexpensive production costs, scheduling flexibility, relative independence from traditional actors, topical diversity, and openness to spin-off shows (Hall, 2009; Sender & Sullivan, 2008). Communication scholars analyze reality shows for topical issues as well as concerns for authenticity (Hall, 2009) and voyeurism (Baruh, 2009; Sender & Sullivan, 2008). Intervention and Celebrity Rehab envelop these concerns while providing themes that cross the boundaries of fiction or non-fiction. The messages of these shows pertain to profound and
complex issues, perhaps more so than other popular reality programs. As such, their construction of a concept like agency becomes more pertinent than the veracity of characters.

**PERSPECTIVES ON ADDICTION**

The narrative in *Intervention* and *Celebrity Rehab* reflects a diversity of American perspectives on addiction. American psychologists, self or mutual help organizations, and popular culture have assumed over the last century a number of different positions on addiction and recovery. Theorists, practitioners, and nonprofessionals continue to debate the role of compulsion in issues of dependency, perhaps because of its moral ambivalence (Watson, 1999). As mentioned, the conversation centrally addresses responsibility, or agency. If addiction is truly compulsive, then addicts might be absolved from some responsibility. In response, many claim that addicts need help, not blame. Others posit that such absolution is morally evasive and, therefore, counterproductive in treatment (Watson, 1999). Each of these ontological perspectives finds representation in modern rhetoric about substance abuse.

**Addiction as Biological Dependency**

One view emerges from the medical community. Research into the physiological effect of substance intake suggests that reward centers in the brain are stimulated by addicting drugs, which evoke a perpetual desire in the consumer (Gardner, 1999). The addict receives positive physiological reinforcement for consumption, stimulating any future desire for the substance. Compounded with an identification of genetic factors, personality and temperament traits (Gardner, 1999), this position contends that the pleasure centers of the brain control the addiction, not the individual. From this concept emerges a definition of substance addiction as “a chronically relapsing disorder characterized by compulsion to seek
and take the drug and loss of control in limiting intake” with the possible emergence of a negative emotional state when denied access to the drug (Koob, 2009, p. 62).

**Addiction as Choice**

On the opposite end of a compulsion continuum is the philosophical angle that speculates that substance abuse is free, intentional action. This view grants some allowances, but maintains that “as long as we do what we want when we act, we clearly enjoy freedom of action” (Gjelsvik, 1999, p. 29). A dominant economic theory of rational addiction supports the conception of addiction as a knowledgeable consumption of goods that submit to the law of diminishing returns (Becker & Murphy, 1988; Gjelsvik, 1999; O’Donoghue & Rabin, 1999). This model, however, does not address problems of self-control. Other models assume that addiction is a rational choice, but that decisions are moderated by over-attention to immediate gratification (O’Donoghue & Rabin, 1999).

**Addiction as a Family Disease**

Perhaps the most familiar rhetoric on the issue emerges from Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.), the spiritually oriented organization that encourages progression through twelve steps to heal the psychological aspect of the disease of alcoholism. Since the Great Depression, the dominant metaphor for addiction has been driven by A.A. Originally addressing a culture of post-prohibition privacy, A.A. brought the question of addiction into the public sphere by introducing the concept of recovery through community or association with other addicts (Kurtz, 1979). Other addicts, according to this worldview, share the same disease and can help support each other through dialogue (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001).

This perspective, largely supported by psychologists, includes an effort to understand not only the physical behavior of addiction, but also the emotional context within which it
occurs. Sharon Wegscheider Cruse, whose work has been influential in developing an understanding of addiction as a family disease, takes a blended approach. Addicts, she asserts, have unrealistic standards of perfection that stimulate feelings of isolation. Because of this isolation, the addict seeks the substance of choice to experience relief. This relief catalyzes feelings of guilt that in turn create a desire for induced catharsis (Flanigan, 1987; Ramsey, 1987). Wegscheider Cruse (1989) maintains that as this cycle continues, the alcoholic becomes “trapped in a pattern of compulsive behavior that is controlled by his physiological dependence and his psychological defenses—both completely out of his [or her] awareness” (p. 67). Rehabilitation should occur on the same levels of addiction: the psychological, physiological, and familial level. This maintains the A.A. and popular culture premise that family members who “enable” destructive behaviors also have the disease of codependency (Beattie, 1987; Wegscheider Cruse, 1989). Neither addict nor codependent is likely to recover without the recovery of the other; each will make attempts to sabotage these efforts from a fear of change or of losing the loved one (Beattie, 1987; Wegscheider Cruse, 1989).

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Addiction is a pervasive concern in the United States. As of 2008, 23.1 million persons over the age of 12 needed treatment for an illicit drug or alcohol use problem, representing nearly 10 percent of the population older than 12 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Each of these individuals represents a network of others affected by the circumstance. Given this prevalence, there is no surprise that popular culture addresses the phenomenon frequently. When a large percentage of the audience of television shows have drug or alcohol problems or know someone who does, the messages become salient.
The programs that compose the artifact for this thesis are exceptionally popular, boasting high ratings after multiple seasons. *Intervention* and *Celebrity Rehab* communicate a construction of addiction, recovery, and rhetorical agency. This study will examine that message from the critical perspective afforded by the concept of rhetorical agency. The analysis will respond to the question of how media construct images of rhetorical agency for human change. Within the context of reality television shows about addiction, this image takes the form of agency that seeks personal, relational, or group change with dark or light results. This thesis contends that these shows argue that agency not only exists within addiction, but that it is a powerful motivator for personal, relational, and group change. The agency demonstrated by the participants in these shows is communal, rhetorically invented by individuals who reflect the constitutive communality of agency, artistic in nature, enacted through form, and morally ambiguous (Campbell, 2005). The analysis and discussion of these phenomena contribute a practical exemplar and understanding of agency in the lives of individuals as well as a culture. The goal of the study is to establish a sense what message popular culture television contributes to understandings of addiction, recovery, and agency.

**Chapter Précis**

The second chapter will describe the theoretical underpinnings for this study. The first section will begin with an explanation of the dark side of communication, a paradigm that fetches silver lining in dark clouds and dark shadows in silver clouds. The second section will overview rhetorical agency, then identify and explain various conceptions of agency in communication literature, beginning with humanist thought. The section will continue with posthumanist theories of agency, specifically the theory of agentic orientation proposed by Foss, Waters, & Armada (2007). Posthumanist positions will be followed by dialectical
theories with particular attention to Campbell’s (2005) five propositions of agency as promiscuous and protean. The third section will challenge the humanist position with a dialectical critique by Gunn and Cloud (2010) that will ground further discussion in the dialectical tradition. The fourth section will provide a synopsis of narrative theory, particularly narratives of agency that seeks the “good life” as manifested in self-help literature.

The third chapter will analyze the dark and light sides of rhetorical agency for personal, relational, and group change as illustrated by Intervention and Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew. Grounded in Campbell’s (2005) position of agency as a communal phenomenon, the chapter will begin with extended descriptions of Intervention and Celebrity Rehab, then will address the first unit of analysis, agency for personal change. To underscore the role of trauma in moderating how an agent seeks personal change, the analysis will highlight first Intervention’s Vanessa Marquez, a compulsive shopper, and then Celebrity Rehab’s Rodney King, an alcoholic. The third section will address the second unit of analysis, agency for relational change. To illustrate how “deviant” or non-nuclear relationships moderate how an agent seeks relational change, the analysis will first focus on Intervention’s Sara, a methamphetamine addict, then Celebrity Rehab’s Jeff Conaway, a painkiller and cocaine addict. The fourth section will address the third unit of analysis, agency for group change. To demonstrate the role of narrative in moderating an agent’s search for group or social change, the analysis will feature first Intervention’s Gabe, an addicted gambler, then Celebrity Rehab’s King. The final section of the third chapter will begin to address the theoretical benefit of Campbell’s (2005) work in explicating agency over that of Foss et al. (2007) theory of agentic orientation.
The fourth chapter will begin with a review of the analysis. It will proceed to a discussion of theoretical implications, focusing on each of Campbell’s (2005) propositions and challenging Foss et al.’s (2007) premises. The third section will address the dark and light implications of reality television as the context in which Intervention and Celebrity Rehab present their message. The final section will identify contributions of this case study to our understanding of how this type of communication works.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature pertinent to the discussion of popular culture and reality television’s constructions of rhetorical agency for addicts. The rationale begins with an explanation of the “dark side of communication” metaphor and its application to rhetorical inquiries. The second section explores three primary conceptions of rhetorical agency: the humanist, posthumanist, and the dialectical (Gunn & Cloud, 2010). The third section explains challenges to the humanist perspective from the dialectical approach, suggesting the existence of a dark and light side to conceptions of rhetorical agency. The final section discusses Fisher’s (1984) narrative paradigm and its manifestations in self-help discourse.

THE DARK SIDE OF COMMUNICATION

Traditionally affiliated with interpersonal communication and its antisocial, “darker” elements such as relational conflict (Messman & Canary, 1998;), child abuse (Morgan & Wilson, 2007; Munz, Wilson, & D’Enbeau, 2009), or stalking (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1998; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007a; Spitzberg & Hoobler, 2002; Spitzberg, Nicastro, & Cousins, 1998), the “dark side” provides a useful metaphor in discussing rhetorical texts as well (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007b). The principle of the “dark side” is not only to examine issues or behaviors that contrast the often exclusively optimistic or positive nature of research, but also to identify in all behaviors both the social or antisocial elements that make them “dark” or “light” (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1998, 2007b). Simply, the dark side seeks to understand phenomena in which “the silver clouds have dark linings and in which dark clouds have
silver linings” (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2007b, p. 6). Research in interpersonal behavior has found dark and light in most elements of human interaction. Twelve to 30 percent of individuals in intimate relationships report having too much closeness in the relationship, a “dark” shadow on the otherwise cloudless experience of intimacy (Mashek & Sherman, 2004). This may explain why intimacy is both “sought after and feared” (Vangelisti & Beck, 2007, p. 395). As the latter study demonstrates a derivation of dark from light, light may emerge from dark as well. One study on child abuse, an experience unanimously presumed traumatic, found that almost half (46.8%) of a sample of female victims could indicate positive experiences that emerged as a result of their abuse, such as improved ways of protecting themselves and their children (McMillen, Zuravin, & Rideout, 1995). These types of studies represent only part of what the dark side includes. Spitzberg and Cupach (2007b) set forth seven descriptors of the dark side of communication:

First, the dark side is about dysfunctional, distorted, distressing, and destructive aspects of human behavior. Second, the dark side dallies with deviance, betrayal, transgression, and violation, which includes the awkward, rude, and disruptive aspects of human behavior. Third, the dark side delves into the direct and indirect implications of human exploitation. Fourth, the dark side simply seeks to shed light on the unfulfilled, unpotentiated, underestimated, and unappreciated domains of human endeavor. Fifth, the dark side is attracted to the study of the unattractive, the unwanted, the distasteful, and the repulsive. Sixth, the dark side seeks to understand the process of objectification—of symbolically and interactionally reducing humans to mere objects. Finally, the dark side is drawn to the paradoxical, dialectical, and mystifying facets of life. (p. 5)

From a rhetorical perspective, many of the ontological or axiological questions posed have both dark and light answers, as suggested particularly by the sixth theme listed. This study delves into the typically “dark” topic of addiction and the interpersonal relationships of addicts as represented rhetorically on television. In doing so, it becomes appropriate to employ as a lens the dark side’s interpersonal principles.
Addiction, while generally termed harmful and destructive to the addict, may not be entirely dark. Some forms of substance abuse, such as binge drinking, may occur within the context of more cohesive relationships (Dorsey, Scherer, & Real, 1999) and may provide social lubrication and perceived acceptance (Johnson, Rodgers, Harris, Edmunds, & Wakabayashi, 2005). An individual who excessively pursues those benefits through a substance may find his or herself addicted to the substance, as the stories of addicts in the Alcoholics Anonymous manual indicate (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001). Similarly, relationships with addicts, commonly termed “codependent,” operate paradoxically so that a destructive behavior gains some perceived benefit. In many conceptions of codependency, the codependent partner focuses all energy on the addicted partner, allowing for reprieve from self-criticism and greater emotional and physical health in comparison to their partner (Beattie, 1987; LePoire, Hallett, & Giles, 1998). The obsessive other-focus, however, may cause great grief for the codependent, and the perception of greater health comes with a high burden of caregiving (LePoire et al.), demonstrating light and dark elements of the phenomenon.

**THE QUESTION OF AGENCY**

Much of the effort of the codependent moves toward “changing” the other (Wegscheider Cruse, 1989). The addict also cycles through a desire for change and a perceived inability to accomplish that change (Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, 2001; Flanigan, 1987; Wegscheider Cruse, 1989). If change receives its catalyst from rhetoric, then the importance of addressing the concept of rhetorical agency in the context of addictions becomes salient.
The concept of rhetorical agency has nourished scholarly discussion in many phases, and continues to provide fodder for theory generation. Though the discussion may assume the flavor of various philosophical movements, perhaps the key ingredient to a “common understanding of rhetorical agency is the capacity of the rhetor to act. As rhetoricians, we generally take as a starting point that rhetoric involves action” (Geisler, 2004, p. 12). However, the locus of that action and the conditions for agency remain unexplained. Geisler, in a review of a conference of the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies (ARS) that focused explicitly on the question of agency, considers the significance of the question. She claims that in the course of the discussion, the most productive perspective was agency as “a resource constructed in particular contexts and in particular ways” (p. 12). This contention is in line with Lucaites’ (2003) suggestion that “every rhetorical performance enacts and contains a theory of its own agency—of its own possibilities—as it structures and enacts the relationships between speaker and audience, self and other, action and structure” (p. 1).

Given this assumed ubiquity, agency becomes “not a problem to be solved or trouble to be resolved, but a central object of rhetorical inquiry” (Geisler, 2004, p. 13). This inquiry should and does include attention to the skill of the rhetorical agent and the conditions for agency, such as constraints present in the rhetorical situation. Conditions that encourage agency are not universally available, but the study and teaching of rhetorical texts and theories must commit to accounting for and transforming this disparity (Geisler). If the study of rhetoric is the art of “doing in language,” and agency is the capacity to act, then rhetoric must include studies of the concept.

This following section addresses some of the varied approaches to understanding agency, starting with the humanist tradition, focusing on the theory of agentic orientation
forwarded by Foss et al. (2007). The review then looks at the posthumanist tradition’s perspective, particularly at Campbell’s (2005) propositions. The next portion addresses Campbell’s (2005) dialectical propositions. The final segment examines Gunn and Cloud’s (2010) dialectical critique of Foss et al.’s (2007) humanist theory. Together these works assist in understanding the constructions of agency and provide the theoretical grounding to the artifact in the following chapter.

**DISCUSSIONS OF AGENCY**

Much of the discussion surrounding agency suggests a preoccupation with postmodern and poststructural theories that critique the autonomous agent (Geisler, 2004). Current concern with the challenges of discerning agency emerges from the challenges posed to the “self-transparent, fully conscious agent” by various philosophers in the last two centuries (Gunn & Cloud, 2010, p. 53). A useful delineation of traditional perspectives on agency in rhetorical studies may be that of the humanist, dialectical, and posthumanist (Gunn & Cloud).

**Humanism**

The traditional humanist perspective of agency places strong emphasis on pragmatism and pedagogy (Geisler, 2004; Gunn & Cloud, 2010), and assumes that agency has the potential to direct the course of a person’s life. Within this view, agency exists and assists to the extent that humans allow it. Structure is the most influential factor in considering the ability of an individual to act. This position is advocated by Foss et al. (2007) in an article forwarding a theory of agentic orientation.

The term “agentic orientation” comes from the work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998), which does not represent a primarily humanist conceptualization of agency, but
instead begins “to reconceptualize human agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement” (p. 963) to provide a “new perspective upon the age-old problem of free will and determinism” (p. 964). The theorists (Foss et al., 2007) use the term more lightly than originally implicated (Gunn & Cloud, 2010). Using the German film *Run Lola Run*, they identify three agentic orientations, those of victim, supplicant, and director. These orientations bear three proposed hallmarks of agency: “a particular interpretation of structure, the selection of a response to that interpretation of structure, and the experience of an outcome in line with those choices” (Foss et al., 2007, p. 207).

Their basic humanist premise regarding structure emerges from their interpretation of Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) contention that “agency is always agency toward something, by means of which actors enter into relationship with surrounding persons, places, meanings, and events” (p. 973; Foss et al., 2007). The interpretation argued by Foss et al. suggests that agency exists because of structure: “*Run Lola Run*, of course, has the requisite confrontational structure as exigence” (p. 207).

The second component of agentic orientation discussed by Foss et al. (2007) is “a response to structure rooted in processes such as categorization, invention, and symbolization as employed by the agent” (p. 207). This response, they argue, is where the artistry that Campbell (2005) values finds its root (Foss et al., 2007). Given the individual’s set of circumstances and the interpretation thereof, an individual will select a behavioral or emotional response that results in a particular, determined outcome, the third component of agentic orientation. They argue that “if agency is action that influences or exerts some degree of control, an agentic orientation must attend to the outcomes generated by particular enactments of agency” (Foss et al., p. 208).
To exemplify this tripartite theory, the authors extract three agentic orientations from
the three “runs” made by Lola to save her boyfriend in the film. The first, that of victim,
views “agency as dependent on structural conditions or external others” (Foss et al., 2007, p.
209). This orientation includes behaviors of mortification that “reinforce her victimimage”
(Foss et al., p. 209). Structure is perceived as oppressive limitations, the response is
mortification, and the result is, according to the data selected by Foss et al., failure or
tragedy. Victims accept this inevitability, as “adoption of an agentic orientation of victimimage
encourages an agent to see expected punishment as an indicator of the correctness of the
chosen agentic orientation” (Foss et al., p. 209).

The second orientation proposed is that of supplicant, which involves asking of,
bargaining with, or “enacting emotional, physical, and moral appeals to those who appear to
control the structures that impose demands” (Foss et al., 2007, p. 212). In this case, the agent
has structural conditions that limit “by the requirement implicit in her supplicant orientation
that others recognize or validate her requests for resources” (Foss et al., p. 213). The
response is to try one’s luck and petition, “the effectiveness of which depends on her
perceived ability to receive a hearing and to appeal successfully to those who appear to
control resources that she desires” (Foss et al., p. 214). The outcome is ambiguous, as in the
film, while Lola is successful in achieving her desires, they are at her great expense and she
still experiences significant trauma, as does her boyfriend, who dies.

The third orientation, and the most powerful and commendable according to Foss et
al. (2007), is that of director. This is a form of agency in which the agent “directs structural
conditions and herself in such a way that her desires are affirmed and supported” (Foss et al.,
p. 215). This orientation is earmarked by “individual responsibility and independence” not
appealing to or controlling others, but by using rhetoric to act on and direct” the self (Foss et al., p. 215). Structural conditions are viewed as resources, and the natural response to this is innovation, which allows individuals to “move through the world with confidence” (Foss et al., p. 218). The outcome is overwhelming success, since “the choice of agentic orientation dictates the outcomes that agents experience in their lives rather than the strength, power, or persistence of material structure” (Foss et al., p. 219). The agent gains this orientation, like those of victim and supplicant, through decision and willpower, for an exigence of agentic orientation “is something that can be chosen and is under the control of the individual. No one can interfere with that choice because its location is internal, and it can be maintained and reinforced with every decision the individual makes” (Foss et al., p. 221).

**Posthumanism**

One of the primary methods by which scholars have addressed rhetorical agency has been to accept the tenets of the “posthumanist turn” (Gunn & Cloud, 2010, p. 53). The term “posthumanism” refers, for the purposes of this review, to “the critique of the self-transparent, autonomous subject that is sometimes said to begin with Heidegger’s critique of humanism” (Davis, 2000; Gunn & Cloud, 2010, p. 53). While not equivalent to postmodernism or poststructuralism, similarities exist primarily in a “decentering of the all-powerful, choice-driven, radically free subject and an attention to larger structural, material, or discursive objects that limit and/or constitute the subject” (Gunn & Cloud, 2010, p. 54).

The posthumanist opposition to the concept of the sovereign individual is marked well in Biesecker’s (1992) critique of Campbell (1989). Campbell’s early attempt to situate the role of women in the traditional history of rhetoric addressed individual suffragists who used rhetoric to argue for the rights and needs of “all” women. Biesecker (1992; 1993) points
out that this iteration of history reinforces, rather than subverts, the traditional view of individualistic, hegemonic structures. She claims:

I must admit that I find less than satisfactory the conceptualization of history and social change implied in Campbell's reformulation of female subjectivity, a conceptualization wherein the ideology of individualism and the old patriarchal alignments are reinscribed. In Campbell’s work, the possibility for social change is thought to be more or less a function of each individual woman’s capacity to throw off the mantle of her own self-perpetuated oppression, to recognize her real self-interests (interests that are her own as a woman and, thus, are shared by all women) and to intervene on behalf of those interests. (p. 146)

This reversal of agency from the individual to the exterior and the rejection of the grand narratives of previous centuries may be observed as well in Greene’s (2004) argument for the reframing of rhetorical agency as a form of “communicative labor” (p. 189) rather than political action. This labor does not require a determined locus, but varies with the individual. Lundberg and Gunn (2005) similarly resist final conclusions about the ontology or manifestation of agency, arguing that the role of rhetoricians in examining agency is not to pinpoint a specific locus, but to retain a flexible approach to the subject.

**Dialectics**

While the humanist trend attempts to contend with the tension of the individual and structure, the dialectical approach is to attribute agency entirely to the individual with little regard for constructed elements. Alcoff (1988), for example, suggests that rhetoricians should situate “individual intention as constructed within a social reality” while distinguishing “the subject’s ability to reflect on social discourse and challenge its determinations” (p. 417). Marxist scholars assume perhaps the most clearly dialectical perspective in arguing that power structures impose on both individuals and groups (Cloud, Macek, & Aune, 2006). Individuals must organize, then, to influence those power structures, and to do this requires agency that generates from personal experience and consciousness (Cloud et al., 2006; see
also Gunn & Cloud, 2010). Agency here “is not primarily characteristic of individuals; rather, the working class is a particular kind of collective agent that can manifest a real challenge to the capitalist system” (Cloud, 2005; Gunn & Cloud, 2010, p. 56). To rely solely on the strength of the individual or to believe that “one is powerless to effect political change, is to succumb to oppressive structures, economic or otherwise” (Gunn & Cloud, p. 56).

Campbell (2005) later summarizes a dialectical perspective on rhetorical agency. She argues that agency is:

(1) communal and participatory, hence both constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic; (2) is “invented” by authors who are points of articulation; (3) emerges in artistry or craft; (4) is effected through form; and (5) is perverse, that is, inherently, protean, ambiguous, open to reversal. (p. 2)

She contends that rhetorical agency “refers to the capacity to act, that is, to have the competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others in one’s community” (Campbell, p. 3). This perspective situates itself in dialectics by requiring the essential presence of both the individual and the other. Campbell’s propositions reflect this.

The first, that agency is constitutive, or “communal, social, cooperative, and participatory and, simultaneously, constituted and constrained by the material and symbolic elements of context and culture” reflects the extensive feminist literature in the same vein (Campbell, 2005, p. 3). It also provides the foundation for the second proposition. Because rhetors are linked inextricably to cultures, they “must negotiate among institutional powers and are best described as ‘points of articulation’ rather than originators” (Campbell, p. 5). This point of articulation is perhaps rhetorical invention that conjoins history and the current situation to persuade, framing “agency as invention” (Campbell, p. 5). Campbell states: “Taken together these two propositions are designed to reject absolutely any binary that
forces a choice between the autonomous individual and some form of determinism or to separate the individual from culture and context” (p. 5).

Campbell’s (2005) third proposition maintains that agency is learned, as it is “linked to and effected through artistry,” in this case, invention (p. 6). Campbell contends that there are “tacit but clearly recognized cultural standards at any given time for performance,” allowing for a techné, an art of rhetoric (p. 6). Rhetors enact agency, then, through a techné which provides heuristic skills and stratagem, making it “possible to do what is propitious at the opportune moment” (Campbell, p. 6). That is, agency can become a habit. With continued application of these stratagem, “agency emerges out of performances or actions that, when repeated, fix meaning through sedimentation” (p. 7). As artistry produces agency through repetition, Campbell’s fourth proposition asserts that agency is textual. This claim upholds the importance of form by implying that texts have agency. Textual agency allows audiences to take in, understand, and respond to rhetoric (Campbell).

The final proposition posits that “agency is the power to do evil, to demean and belittle” (Campbell, 2005, p. 7). While the rhetor may or may not exert this power, this and the former ideas compellingly present the potential influence of a rhetor’s agency upon others. In the present study of constructions of agency for addicts, the power to harm and create a structure of harm become a prominent focus for discussion. Agency, in Campbell’s perspective, remains as complex as the humans and cultures that generate it.

**CHALLENGING HUMANISM WITH DIALECTICS**

In a challenge to Foss et al.’s (2007) presentation of agentic orientation, Gunn and Cloud (2010) argue for an alternate label for agentic orientation: magical voluntarism, which “refers to any theory of agency that suggests one can fulfill one’s needs and desires through
Magical voluntarism is a throwback to ancient ideas of enchantment and magical thinking, encouraging ignorant bliss and “a deliberate misrecognition of material recalcitrance, an inability to recognize the structural, political, economic, cultural, and psychical limits of an individual’s ability to act in her own interests” (Gunn & Cloud, p. 51). This form of idealistic humanism views the efficacy of symbolic action not only as preeminent, but as limitless. Gunn and Cloud (2010) uphold a dialectical approach as superior to the humanist approach, suggesting that magical voluntarism is the dark side lens to the pollyannaish agentic orientation view.

The criticism of Foss et al.’s (2007) theory of agentic orientation argues against the use of fictional *Run Lola Run* as supporting data, positing that the authors overlook many accepted and more complex readings of the film (Gunn & Cloud, 2010) and inappropriately apply its material to real situations. Gunn and Cloud state that the popular book *The Secret* (Byrne, 2006) better demonstrates a construction of the idea that “human agency is simply a matter of consciously choosing among differing interpretations of reality” (Gunn & Cloud, 2010, p. 51). *The Secret*, made popular to millions of readers by Oprah Winfrey, contends that money and success come to a small percentage of the population who know the secret of visualization, or the power of positive thinking. This visualization involves imagining that one is wealthy, which magically leads to wealth (Byrne, 2006; Gunn & Cloud, 2010). Gunn and Cloud argue that both the theory put forth by Foss et al. (2007) and *The Secret* are informed by the same tenets of humanist voluntarism: “(1) wish fulfillment through free choice and will; (2) social constructivism; and (3) radical individualism” (Gunn & Cloud, 2010, p. 61).
The criticism continues to challenge the outcomes suggested by magical voluntarism (Gunn & Cloud, 2010). Foss et al. (2007) argue that all individuals may make choices in perceiving their conditions and their agency, even those most harshly oppressed such as victims of genocide and imprisonment. If chosen, the agentic orientation of director “opens up opportunities for innovating in ways unavailable to those who construct themselves as victims” (Foss et al., 2007, p. 223, emphasis added). Gunn and Cloud (2010) argue that the outcome of this perspective is “narcissistic complacency” (Gunn & Cloud, 2010, p. 65). As seen in The Secret, the idea of adding negative thoughts to conditions, such as anger over war, creates the negativity of that condition (Byrne, 2006; Gunn & Cloud, 2010). Social protest, for example, lends energy to things despicable. Gunn and Cloud (2010) argue that “the real world outcome of the constructivism that supports magical voluntarism is ultimately selfish inaction” (p. 65). While Foss et al., and The Secret maintain some distinct differences, “both their article and The Secret counsel passivity” that may overlook or gloss over the exploitation and oppression of true victims (Gunn & Cloud, p. 66).

The fault of Foss et al. (2007) in failing to discuss the full reality of personal, interpersonal or cultural suffering suggests the need for an alternate theory in a discussion of addiction and agency. Gunn and Cloud (2010) argue for dialectical theories to address the idea that “individuals do not exist in isolation, but bear the traces of other individuals, institutions, collective social relations, and histories” (p. 72). Campbell’s (2005) dialectical theory of agency, as promiscuous and protean, also actively rejects “a simplistic, humanistic view of agency” (p. 8). The next chapter will employ Campbell’s approach to understanding agency in the context of the addiction recovery narrative.
NARRATIVES OF AGENCY

The dialectical perspective represents most clearly the agency of addicts in recovery. Cultures contribute to the construction of agency for an individual “point of articulation” (Campbell, 2005, p. 5). If agency is constitutive, then culture influences agency and agency in turn influences culture through its rhetorical invention. In the case of a group of agents coming together to support each other, what emerges is a shared invention, or narrative (Fisher, 1984). Narrative remains a driving metaphor for understanding human communication as a rhetorical endeavor. The rhetorician understands narrative as “historical as well as situational, as stories competing with other stories constituted by good reasons, as being rational when they satisfy the demands of narrative probability and narrative fidelity, and as inevitably moral inducements” (Fisher, p. 2). Fisher extends Burke’s (1968) idea of the human as “symbol using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal” (p. 16) to conceive of humans as a homo narrans, a species made unique and motivated by storytelling.

Effective storytelling is evaluated by two criteria: narrative probability and narrative fidelity (Fisher, 1984). Narrative probability refers to the inherent concept of what makes a coherent story; narrative fidelity is the resonance of a story with other stories known to be true in life (Fisher). These constructs of narrative rationality apply to the individual, communities, and cultures, arching over time and place (Fisher). As such, the stories that individuals tell each other become the stories of communities and cultures, pointing out differences and similarities, but mainly striving to tell of the quest for “the good life” for all persons” (Fisher, p. 18).

The narrative for the good life extends to all, but becomes more desperate to individuals struggling to survive. Achieving the good life can be seen as a question of the
preeminence of agency. A great deal of narrative surrounding agency and the pursuit of the
good life exists in the multi-million dollar industry of self-help literature addressing
relationship escalation or deescalation, parenting improvements, house cleaning techniques,
and every other minor or major concern (Carlone & Larson, 2006). These works “commonly
profess that the good life is entirely in the individual’s control” (Grodin, 1991, pp. 406-407).

Discourse surrounding the narrative of helping oneself overcome hindrances to the
good life, or the self-made person (Grodin, 1991), considers the narrative as either
empowering or oppressive (Kline, 2009), or light or dark in its effects. Kline defines
empowerment as “recognizing or receiving recognition for one’s status as an active subject
able to make choices or engage in self-determination of one’s identity” (p. 192). That is,
empowerment is advancing agency in the self or another, an element of light if the rhetor
uses the agency for prosocial ends. Self help, Kline argues, “can foster autonomy and self-
determination, reinforce group identity and serve as an activist means of challenging
hegemony” (p. 192). It can also foster blaming of a victim or simply scapegoating of others,
that is “the individual is positioned (by powerful others) as solely responsible for an
individual’s own successes or failures” (Kline, p. 194). This sets up a darker element of
blaming the individual for socially constructed problems (Kline; Mastronardi, 1995;
Woodstock, 2006). Kline (2009) posits, however, that empowerment is manifest in self-help
literature under certain conditions, namely:

When (a) the interaction is embodied by self-help interactants who are part of a
collective and who, as members of that collective, attempt to achieve social
parity, as well as when (b) the goal is to share knowledge gained from personal
experience. (p. 196)

This empowerment may not be found in one self-help manual, but rather in the
narrative as a whole, as readers piece together information from multiple sources of help
(Grodin, 1991). In this, readers perceive that they may help themselves through agentic means rather than receiving assistance from others (Grodin). This perception encourages an individualistic ethos encouraged by the same self-help narrative. Jones (2008) examines the rhetoric of Dr. Phil McGraw, a psychiatrist stylized as “Dr. Phil” by Oprah Winfrey’s production company. This popular persona maintains a staunch position on personal responsibility that “cultivates a narrow perspective where individuals immerse themselves in their own world and they hardly ever consider the larger communal context” (Jones, p. 73). Oprah Winfrey’s television show and personal ethos also contribute to the narrative of the self-made person and the pursuit of the good life. While her show emphasizes the importance of relationships as part of self-transformation (Parkins, 2001), the narrative remains focused on the individual as the agentic “point of articulation” (Campbell, 2005, p. 5).

Similar narratives exist within the context of “mutual help,” where the rhetoric of Alcoholics Anonymous, rehabilitation centers, and support groups exist (Rotskoff, 2002, p. 106) and the present thesis situates itself. This narrative denies the role of the individual agent as the primary focus and moves to the group and the community as agentic entities who socially construct stories (Rotskoff, 2002). One study by Hollihan and Riley (1987) directly addresses the narrative probability and narrative fidelity of a “Toughlove” parental support group. The Toughlove program provided parents of delinquent children a space for discussion, ideation, emotional support, and hope for transformation through highly disciplined parenting practices. These practices attempt to regain control of households from wild children, to clear parents of guilt feelings, and to allow parents and well-behaved children the opportunity for normalcy (Hollihan & Riley). Observations of group meetings revealed a perspective explicated well by the narrative paradigm. The meetings functioned as
“extended storytelling sessions” in which the members created a “powerful, compelling, and cohesive story” (Hollihan & Riley, p. 17). The parents, in the pursuit of the good life, believed that they were “good people who had been misled” (p. 19). The narrative appealed because it confirmed this belief and pardoned them of mistakes such as excessive leniency or kindness, placing the blame on their children “who had really failed because they took advantage of their parents’ kindness” (Hollihan & Riley, p. 19). The story was probable because of its plea for the return of old-fashioned values, the restoration of social order, and the “appropriate” placement of blame (Hollihan & Riley). The story also resonated with the experience and feelings of each parent, thereby meeting the fidelity requirement (Hollihan & Riley).

The narrative in this case, then, becomes compelling because it “so completely absolved parents of their guilt and relieved sense of failure” (Hollihan & Riley, p. 23). Despite the risks of punishing a child who lacks coping skills and the risk of extending such a narrative to all children and all situations, the pressure to adopt and enact such a story was great (Hollihan & Riley). The risk in such a circumstance is clear. As individual agents join with other agents to construct a narrative, the narrators may easily adapt the narrative for the agentic light or dark side.

Alcoholics Anonymous (A. A.) rhetoric similarly proposes a goal to empower an individual within a group, but the marginalization of other groups occurs through a risky narrative of blame and shame. The employment of compelling narrative for patient recovery contains both dark and light elements that invite exploration. These narratives and the agency that initiates them are the focus of this thesis. The following chapter argues for a dialectical approach to understanding the televised representation of the role of agency for the
individual, the relationship, and the narrative of the agentic group in the lives of addicts, both before and during recovery attempts.
CHAPTER 3

FROM INTERVENTION TO REHAB

Human communication spurs a sense of darkness (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1998). Interpersonal interaction forces recognition of light and dark in others. The person is born into relationship and instinctively and necessarily connects to another and to a larger group. This phenomenon creates communities and cultures. It is the relationships to others and communities that arbitrate the decisions for change or stability that a rhetorical agent makes. That is, the rhetorical situation and the audience vary the rhetorical choices of the rhetor (Bitzer, 1968). This is not to suggest that others determine the agency of the individual, though both the individual and society construct agency (Campbell, 2005). Instead, an agent will consider certain moderating variables before or during action. This chapter will illuminate these variables in agency that seek personal, relational, and group change. Reality television shows, while representing a dubious “reality,” construct nonetheless popular ontological perspectives about their topics. Television shows that depict the lifestyles and recovery attempts of addicts, specifically Intervention and Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew, intimate that rhetorical agency assumes three interrelated, but moderated, aims: personal, relational, and group change, all of which bear light and dark consequences.

To address this claim, this chapter will examine the first season’s DVD of Intervention and the second season online of Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew as exemplars of artifacts concerning addiction. Each of these television programs will be described in detail. The first analytical section of the chapter will begin with a discussion of agency for personal
change. Two examples from shows will demonstrate representations of agency that aim for personal change. These examples will also indicate how trauma functions as a structural limitation that hinders the development of personal agency. The dark and light implications of agency for personal change will be addressed. The second section will address agency for relational change. Two examples from the programs will establish how the partner functions as a limitation that hinders or helps the development of structural agency. The dark and light implications of agency for relational change will be covered. The third section will focus on agency for group change within the context of the narrative paradigm, with the narrative itself as a structural limitation. Again, light and dark themes will be delineated. The final section will begin to apply Campbell’s (2005) propositions of agency to these structural limitations and will demonstrate the insufficiency of Foss et al.’s (2007) theory of agentic orientation for this artifact.

THE TELEvised STORY OF ADDICTION AND RECOVERY

The televised story of addiction and recovery emerges from a variety of programs both fictional and non-fictional in nature. This analysis illuminates the messages of two popular shows.

Intervention

The A&E reality show, Intervention, first aired on the network in March 2005 and will conclude its eighth season in mid-2010 (Intervention, 2010). The program received an Emmy for Outstanding Reality Program in 2009, indicating both the popularity and influence of the show (Intervention). The DVD of the first season was selected for analysis, as the show made few deviations in format or content since its introduction. The DVD strays
slightly from the established formula in that it features follow up interviews with the addicts and their families some three, six, or nine months after the original filming of the program.

Filmed in documentary style, both the show and the released DVD include a methodical or formulaic presentation of the disturbing nature of addiction. Each episode begins with segments focusing on the addicts as they go about normal activities such as interacting with family, driving to work, or spending time with friends (Partland, 2005). The opening concludes with the addict directly stating that he or she is dependent on a drug of choice, typically alcohol, methamphetamine, or heroine, and occasionally shopping or gambling (Partland, 2005). The show continues with interviews with family members who affirm the addiction and its destructive qualities (Partland, 2005). While images of the addict as a child flash on the screen, the family speaks of “happier” times, when the addict was a child: carefree, sweet, and obedient (Partland, 2005). In most cases, parents claim that their son or daughter had a wonderful childhood and showed no signs of their current behavior (Partland, 2005). The family members describe the multiple ways in which the addict has hurt or wronged them (Partland, 2005).

The program then covers the nature and complexity of the person’s addiction and includes graphic pictures of drug consumption (Partland, 2005). These scenes include some of the only close up shots in the documentary, implementing strong pathos appeals. The show indicates other problematic behaviors and relationships, including interaction with addicted friends (Partland, 2005a) or drug dealers (Partland, 2005d), or concerned parenting behaviors (Partland, 2005c). In this depiction, the program consistently includes harmful or hurtful behavior to family members, giving them justification to respond. Communicating feelings
of desperation, the family members convene with one of two board certified interventionists, and together plan a surprise intervention for the addict (Partland, 2005).

The show concludes with the intervention, also in a consistent pattern. One family member or concerned friend will trick the addict into arriving at a designated place, where those participating wait (Partland, 2005). Participants usually include close family members, friends, coworkers, or employers. Upon the arrival of the addict, the Intervention participants read letters that document their personal pain and their perception of the ways in which the addict harmed them (Partland, 2005). The interventionist moderates the discussion with the occasional probing question or silencing of excessive emotion in the participants, and the participants offer an ultimatum: go to a rehabilitation center or the addict will lose relationships, funding sources, housing, or any other “enabling” device (Partland, 2005). The addict then makes a choice. If he or she chooses to go to the rehabilitation center, the interventionist promptly takes him or her home to pack belongings and leave within hours. The show concludes with images of the addict “voluntarily” walking into the center (Partland, 2005).

The first season DVD then follows up these concluding scenes with an update on the addict. If this person has become sober, he or she typically appears much healthier, with makeup and a glowing smile. Interviews demonstrate improved quality of life and happy relationships with intervention participants. If the addict has not become sober, the interview tends to include justifying language, blame, and continued resentment toward loved ones. The intervention participants make statements about any change in the addict or their relationships, though in most cases, participants indicate a decline in satisfaction or the discontinuation of the relationship with the non-sober addict.
Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew

The VH1 series, *Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew*, aired in January 2008 and rapidly became popular entertainment for VH1’s youthful audience. Selected also for its popularity and its depiction of rehabilitation, where *Intervention* stops, the second season of *Celebrity Rehab*, available in full on the VH1 website, offers compelling communication about recovery attempts in the context of a community. The show tracks the progress of a small group of B-list celebrities whose credentials occasionally include some feature films and television work, but more frequently consist of a string of reality shows or general media coverage (Irwin, 2009a).

The opening show of the season follows each celebrity as they check in to the Pasadena Recovery Center. The rehab technician checks luggage for any paraphernalia, occasionally uncovering forbidden odds and ends such as mobile phones, sleeping pills, or sexual devices (Irwin, 2009b). Patients, usually and admittedly under the influence of drugs, respond with varying levels of drama. The patients then meet with Dr. Drew Pinsky, a celebrity doctor of LoveLine fame, who maintains board certification in both internal and addiction medicine (Irwin, 2009b). A self-proclaimed “addictionologist,” Pinsky evaluates the patient’s general medical history, as well as history with drugs, family, and life traumas. The patients leave the evaluation to return to their rooms, unpack, and meet other patients (Irwin, 2009b).

Other episodes follow the progression of detoxification (Irwin, 2009c), therapy (Irwin, 2009d; Irwin, 2009e), relational interactions among patients and with visiting family members (Irwin, 2009c; Irwin, 2009g), and personal discoveries that aid in the treatment and recovery of these individuals (Irwin, 2009d). The recovery center creates situations for the
patients to glean social and coping skills, including volunteering in the community (Irwin, 2009h), fishing at a lake (Irwin, 2009f), or hosting a beach barbecue for friends and family (Irwin, 2009g). These events meet with varying responses from patients, who often cannot handle instructions, pressure, or high expectations. Patients may leave at any time, and while several threaten to do so, few follow through on their promise. The show acknowledges the dramatic preference or nature of its patients (Irwin, 2009b) and therefore closely follows conflicts, tantrums, flirtations, or emotional breakdowns. The season closes with the graduation of patients who have adequately completed the program (Irwin, 2009j). This is usually met with joy from family members and friends, whose perspectives throughout the show do not receive as much focus as on Intervention. Instead, the show emphasizes the experience, perspective, and decisions of the addict.

Celebrity Rehab maintains a more casual style than Intervention, which promotes an educational and serious approach to addiction. Celebrity Rehab, targeting a different audience, infuses the show with humor as well as poignant moments of self-realization or pain. While Pinsky offers some facts and information about addiction, the show centers its message on the upward recovery process of the person and his or her relationships, rather than on the addiction process. As such, it complements Intervention’s accent on the downward spiral associated with addiction, both personally and socially. In one sense, these shows represent the “dark” and “light” side of the addiction and recovery processes. Both programs represent the chiaroscuro nature of addiction and recovery. As a united artifact, these shows share similar representations of the addict and his or her agentic capacity in personal, interpersonal, and group circumstances.
AGENCY FOR PERSONAL CHANGE

The nature of addiction brings into question a person’s ability for self-control. Discourse about addiction questions if the person (O’Donoghue & Rabin, 1999) or a genetic proclivity (Gardner, 1999) controls behavior. Intervention and Celebrity Rehab consciously or inadvertently takes a position on the nature of self-control and the ability to change, in a word, agency. In both of these television shows, an individual’s agency affects them on at least three levels: that of the personal, the relational, and the social (or group). For each of these levels, the building block is personal change. This is consistent with Campbell’s (2005) assertion that agency is invented by authors, but inherently communal. Much as an individual moves through phases of recovery in many treatment centers, so agency manifests itself progressively and molds itself according to structural limitations such as trauma, relationships, and narrative. By placing emphasis on the individual’s need to be in rehabilitation without interaction with non-addicts or loved ones, the shows argue that relational and social change cannot occur without first reconstructing the individual. The agent, then, must apply agency for personal change.

The Lonely Shopper

As the participants in these shows discuss their personal lives, choices, and feelings, the common theme of trauma emerges. Many addicts on the shows claim some sort of trauma, whether sexual or physical abuse, perceived or actual abandonment, suburban oppression, or even fame and wealth. One episode of Intervention highlights an actress, Vanessa Marquez, whose compulsive shopping the show equates to a chemical addiction (Partland, 2005c). In her interviews, Marquez identifies shopping as her “comfort and security,” despite deep credit card debt (Partland). Marquez claims that the shopping is not
about owning new things, but “it’s about not having love in my life” and not having a partner, a baby, a career, or “anything [she] can wake up for in the morning” (Partland). Her loneliness becomes part of the explanation of her addiction. The show’s subscript text states that Marquez never knew her father and remains estranged from her mother (Partland). It also explains in detail a series of psychological troubles Marquez faces, including depression, a panic disorder, agoraphobia, bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Partland). One scene shows her experiencing a highly emotional panic attack while driving, in which she gasps several times, cries, and narrowly avoids two accidents (Partland). Marquez cites fame as a “fabulous, but stressful” aggravation for her emotional fragility (Partland).

These details and depictions function to label Marquez by the light and dark of her experience. The light side identifies her as a trauma survivor. Despite many obstacles, the show emphasizes her success as an actress, having worked for three seasons as a character on ER (Partland, 2005c). While her career may be foundering in part because of her addiction and emotional instability (Partland), the show suggests that her circumstances are too powerful for her agency to overcome, so she requires the intervention of loved ones. On the dark side, however, Marquez is a victim who experienced childhood trauma that may have permanently affected her ability to cope. The show films issues such as her panic attack in the car (Partland) to render her helpless and vulnerable, a person struggling to act as an independent agent and who therefore requires loved ones to become the agents of change for her. A confused representation of agency ensues with this case. The show makes no overt statement about the role of trauma, but instead points to the idea that each person’s ability to change belongs to the person even if influenced by trauma. The interventionist recommends
that Marquez detoxify her body from the wide variety of prescription drugs for psychological problems in order to deal actively with the emotional issues that drive her addiction to shopping (Partland). At the end of the show Marquez undergoes an intervention and a short rehabilitation, but decides to continue with shopping (Partland). The show’s subscript states that she decided this behavior, implying that her agency is her own and not imposed by intervening friends or the addiction itself. In this case, her agency is destructive (Campbell, 2005), though perhaps better understood by being contextualized against the trauma in her past and the continuing trauma of her compulsive behavior.

**The Abused Drinker**

Similar themes run through the rhetoric of rehabilitation patients on *Celebrity Rehab*. The idea of fame as a trauma becomes rather popular as many patients describe the stress and temptations of fame, or the effect of a family member’s fame (Irwin, 2009d). Most members of the cast point to this and occasionally another form of trauma as the cause of their addiction. One member of the cast, however, receives special attention for another kind of trauma. Rodney King, who became famous as the victim of police brutality in the 1990s, appears on the show to address his alcoholism.

Admittedly a heavy drinker and drug user before the trauma, King does not interact as much with the other cast members. The first episode depicts him playing billiards, swimming, and reading books alone (Irwin, 2009b). Other cast members gather around tables to smoke and share stories of epic parties and classic movies (Irwin). From the beginning, King is unknown to many of the cast members. The first episode films a conversation between three other cast members discussing King. One member states, “I thought that was the guy who got beaten up by the cops, Rodney King” (Irwin). Another cast member
responds, “No, man. He’s an actor. He was in *Boyz in the Hood*” (Irwin). Dr. Drew expresses concern for King and presses him to discuss his history (Irwin). King eventually discloses his story and emotions with both the rehab staff and the cast members (Irwin, 2009e). He rapidly becomes a leader in the rehab community, a “rock in group” as Dr. Drew tells him. He supports and encourages other members in their recovery, volunteers to assist in service projects (Irwin, 2009h), and participates actively in group discussions. One scene depicts Rodney massaging the back of Jeff Conaway, a chronic back pain patient (Irwin, 2009b); another scene pictures him patting the shoulder of another patient as she cries in support group about her sexual abuse (Irwin, 2009d).

Dr. Drew encourages King to own his personal decisions to stimulate recovery. Dr. Drew states, “Trauma plays a huge factor in contributing to addiction” (Irwin, 2009c). He claims that King must also allow himself to “feel fully” the pain of his victimization, rather than suppressing it with a substance (Irwin, 2009d). Dr. Drew brings King’s daughters into the show to talk with King about his sobriety and their relationships. King shows his pursuit of personal change and leadership by apologizing for his long absence from their lives and states, “It’s been way too long. So, I gotta be the dad that I’ve been put on this earth to be. No matter what, I gotta be there” (Irwin, 2009f). He claims later, “I can’t be me until I be truthful… if it’s the truth that will save my soul and get me back to sanity, then that’s what I have to do” (Irwin, 2009g).

In much the same way as *Intervention, Celebrity Rehab* presents King’s agency as fundamentally invented by the individual (Campbell, 2005), but altered toward destruction because of unhealed injuries. This destructive agency led to his repeated actions in favor of alcohol, eventually becoming an addiction. As King’s emotional injuries from trauma begin
to emerge through disclosure and psychological treatment--the communal element of agency (Campbell, 2005)--the bend for personal and interpersonal destruction in his agency converts to construction.

The depiction of King’s story represents again both light and dark elements of communication on this topic. On the light side, King’s agentic turn toward positive behavior demonstrates the flexible, promiscuous nature of agency (Campbell, 2005), lending a hope-filled reminder that an individual may use rhetorical agency for positive personal and cultural change. King’s progress required no scapegoating or mortification (Burke, 1950), suggesting instead that while agency is communal, it may also stand alone by accepting responsibility for one’s own actions while concomitantly denying responsibility for victimization. King adjusted his own behavior on the show, but did not excuse or lessen the pain of his trauma. He did not justify the behavior of his abusers, but instead directly claimed their error, as well as his own (Irwin, 2009e). This suggests that personal change can occur in the acknowledgement of humility, thus owning both victimization and empowerment. While victimhood played a role in deterring King’s recovery, it did not prevent it, suggesting that agency not only exists within addiction but is highly powerful to motivate when invoked appropriately.

On the dark side, however, the constructiveness in King’s agency received little to no activation until broadcast in the public context of a popular reality television show. King’s daughters appear on the show to discuss his prior drinking patterns and their experience of emotional neglect from their father, asserting that the show in particular brought about obvious positive change. To the extent that a rhetorical situation affects the rhetorical choices
of an author or “point of articulation” (Campbell, 2005), King’s ethos becomes affected by his choice to appear on the show, potentially negating part of its positive message.

**AGENCY FOR RELATIONAL CHANGE**

Once the individual assumes a stance of readiness for personal change, the rehabilitation process depicted by these shows encourages the transformation of personal relationships as a next step toward achieving a healthier lifestyle. Both *Intervention* and *Celebrity Rehab* emphasize the importance of family and romantic partnerships in establishing and maintaining sobriety for the addict. As mentioned in the descriptions of the programs, loved ones play different roles in the shows. Both shows, however, maintain a specific ontological ideal for familial and romantic relationships. This ideal unquestionably favors a nuclear, heterosexual marriage with children, as neither show in their early seasons depict any alternative relationships. This ideal moderates the agentic choices for relational change. Non-addicts such as family members stigmatize persons who threaten this ideal, whether the addict or a partner. For relational change to happen, a personal agentic shift must occur for not only the addict but the threatening partner as well. The problematic relationship becomes a structural limitation to constructive agency. This suggests that the healthy relationship or desire thereof enables constructive agency.

**The Meth Addict Mom**

*Intervention* depicts agency for relational change in an episode about Sara, a young mother and methamphetamine addict (Partland, 2005b). Sara is 24 years old, living with her parents, and visiting her daughter on weekends (Partland). The program states that Sara lost custody of her daughter, her house, and her marriage to addiction (Partland). Sara’s parents maintain that she was a happy child “raised with morals,” but Sara has stolen money from
them to support her addiction (Partland). The parents state that Sara’s behavior is disrespectful to them and negatively affects their daily functioning, including sleeping patterns (Partland). Sara’s behavior opposes the role of the obedient daughter in the nuclear family. Sara’s status as a divorced mother without child custody also alienates her from the nuclear family standard. She needs relational change. Sara seems aware of this, as she emotionally claims, “I’m not a good mom, I’m not a good daughter. I’m nothing. I’m nobody” (Partland). While this emotion may merit motivation for positive agentic change, the family’s attempts to convince her to change result in more drug use.

Sara’s grandmother gives an interview that cites Sara’s failed marriage as a cause of her addiction, rather than a result (Partland, 2005b). Her grandmother takes Sara to coffee and tearfully shows her baby pictures, stating that she can see the difference in that “sweet, hopeful girl” (Partland). Sara responds in an interview, “I know they want to help, but alls they’re doing is making me want to go out and get high” (Partland). With the notable exception of a friend who Sara’s mom escorts out of their home, the episode does not show any individual except Sara as threatening to family health, interestingly exempting Sara’s parents from any responsibility (Partland). This rhetorical standard intimidates Sara. She appears paralyzed by expectations that she feels she cannot meet (Partland), a structural limitation to what later becomes agency for constructive change.

Sara agrees to go to rehabilitation during her intervention, claiming that she will go for other people, but not because of her own desire (Partland). She remains in rehab for four months (none of which is filmed), and now lives a sober life, employed as a correctional officer and with custody of her daughter (Partland). The key factors here are both her family’s push for her to rejoin the normalcy to which they accustom themselves as well as
Sara’s expressed intention of pleasing others in joining rehabilitation. She claims that it is not her desire that takes her to rehabilitation (“I’m not going because I wanna”), yet her own desire to please her family enables her choice, perhaps her first positive agentic choice.

Sara’s relationships moderate her agency for change and suggest light and dark implications. From a light (rose-colored?) lens, the rhetoric may present a compelling portrayal of the strength of social support and interpersonal love. Her parents and grandmother, while frustrated and making destructive and constructive agentic choices of their own, stay with Sara. They use the advantage of their relationship with her to confront her on her unhealthy addiction rather than demonstrating apathy or a lack of concern. Sara’s agency for relational change demonstrates the communal nature of agency. That is, others not only influence choices, but agency itself becomes constructed by the individual and the context in which they live and move (Campbell, 2005). The rhetorical gesture of intervening in their daughter’s life, and Sara’s rhetorical gesture of mortification emerge from the specific context of their relationship, both allowing for Sara’s agency for personal and relational change and shaping its form.

Darker themes run through Sara’s story, particularly in the reinforcement of traditional, hegemonic family values. Sara’s grandmother labels her divorce and separation from her daughter as “failures,” rather than as the outcome of choices and events that may have been healthier for Sara, Sara’s former partner, and their daughter. Sara’s parents also claim moral superiority by pointing to Sara as the central cause of their emotional disturbance. Her father declares, “You have taken away the will for me to keep going” (Partland, 2005b). By doing so, he denies his own agency to determine his will and effectively places all responsibility for change on Sara, mirroring the technique that she
herself uses to justify behavior. This appeal may persuade Sara toward change, but it also functions as a hypocritical expectation for Sara as an agentic point of articulation (Campbell, 2005).

The Chronic Pain (Im)Patient

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Celebrity Rehab exposes a relationship that influences agency for negative relational change. Jeff Conaway, made famous by his role as Kenickie in Grease, appeared on the first season of the show and again on the second. In the first episode of the second season, Conaway’s longtime girlfriend, Vikki Lizzi, checks into a separate rehabilitation program on the same premises (Irwin, 2009b). Dr. Drew names Lizzi as a “challenge to [Conaway’s] recovery,” because Lizzi does not challenge Conaway’s addiction to painkillers, cocaine, and alcohol, but instead participates with him in substance abuse of various kinds (Irwin, 2009b). Conaway, identified by Dr. Drew as a difficult patient (Irwin, 2009b, 2009e), struggles with chronic back pain and an evident expectation that Dr. Drew, all rehab technicians, and all other patients should wait on him (Irwin, 2009c). Lizzi functions as caretaker and partner, but their relationship is volatile and violent. Upon entering the season, they have had a physically violent fight in which she kicked him in the spine a number of times while under the influence of an unnamed substance (Irwin, 2009b). Lizzi cites this fight as “events that have ruined our lives” and follows up by claiming, “[Conaway] is not the only one who needs treatment” (Irwin). They part with tearful apologies and promises to make things better for each other (Irwin).

As the season progresses, Conaway stands out as consistently rebellious in the rehabilitation program, often throwing childlike tantrums when refused more than the maximum for anti-inflammatory pain medication (Irwin, 2009c), or when challenged by
another patient (Irwin, 2009f) or Dr. Drew (Irwin, 2009d). Conaway presents himself as the victim, overtly claiming this status on more than one occasion (Irwin, 2009c, 2009f, 2009i). He shows resistance to personal change, regularly indicating preference for life with Lizzi over sobriety (Irwin, 2009c, 2009e). This illuminates his perception that life with Lizzi must include addiction; Conaway sees sobriety and Lizzi as mutually exclusive. A few episodes film Conaway and Lizzi in contact at the rehab center, through a door (Irwin, 2009c), over the phone (Irwin), and a few times face to face (Irwin, 2009g). In each circumstance, Conaway and Lizzi communicate a need to be with each other, that they “need [each others’] strength to make it through” (Irwin, 2009c) though this requires leaving the facility entirely. The season concludes with Conaway’s forced exit from the program after another physically violent fight with Lizzi in which he kicks her repeatedly in the ribs (Irwin, 2009i). Upon entering his home with a reconciled Lizzi and while still on camera, Conaway immediately resumes consuming pain killers (Irwin, 2009j).

Conaway’s choice to avoid personal change in order to retain relational stability again illustrates the importance of relationships in influencing agentic behaviors. A sober and healthy relationship did not seem possible to Conaway, and he elected to maintain his relationship with Lizzi rather than turning toward constructive life circumstances. Again, silver lining exists in the dark clouds and shadow deepens the silver cloud in this circumstance as in all others. While Conaway’s selection of his addiction and clearly problematic relationship certainly merits a dark side classification, he nonetheless exercised powerful and perverse agency that overcame structural limitations in the rehabilitation community. This destructive action rejects the victimhood that Conaway’s rhetoric claims. As with Sara on Intervention, Conaway enacts Campbell’s (2005) proposition of the agent as
a point of articulation with links to cultures and communities that “must negotiate among institutional powers” to gain the objective (p. 5).

**Agency for Group Change**

A complex dynamic occurs for the agent in a group setting such as a rehabilitation center. Once an individual attempts personal and relational change, they may employ agency for a higher level change. This change occurs within the narrative of the group. The agent may also accept a narrative without question or contribution. This act does not remove agency from an individual but allows the group power to hinder or help an agent’s effort for change. Agency for group change can emerge also from group change. If a group is cohesive to the degree that a narrative receives no challenge, the agent receives little encouragement to deviate from the group’s story. An agent may have more power to alter the story if the group has less cohesion.

*Intervention* and *Celebrity Rehab* share similar narratives in which their participants operate. The formula of both shows demonstrates a complex story. It begins with a happy child who encounters some challenge or trauma in life which reveals deficient coping skills. A substance enters the picture as a survival mechanism and the user consumes it frequently enough to become addicted. At the point of addiction disease overtakes the individual’s emotional and social development. After addiction the addict acts only according to necessity, trampling relationships both professional and personal in growing desperation. As the intensity of the ramifications of the disease increase personally, socially, financially, and professionally, the addict needs family and friends to intervene collectively. This sense of both social support and condemnation should spur the addict to attempt recovery. The presence of similar others in recovery lessens feelings of judgment and increases social
support as each individual shares personal narratives that have fidelity and probability for the group.

A guide from outside the circle who empathizes with these personal narratives (such as Dr. Drew) helps the addict to sort out disease, victimage, and agentic wrongdoing and to move forward toward sobriety. This requires physical detoxification, individual counseling, extensive sharing and purging of emotions and hidden information, and participation in collaborative activities. These actions can restore the addict to appropriate developmental levels. By participating in this physical and symbolic purification process, the addict no longer acts as a “burden” to society, but may return as a redeemed, contributing member. This return may include temptations and traps, and the addict may fall into them, but with continued adherence to the idea of a communally cured disease, all will be well.

Within this larger narrative presented by the shows, each individual participant brings a personal narrative that either matches the addiction-to-recovery narrative or contrasts so starkly that it can actually be made to fit. The contrast, the uniqueness of the individual, becomes the trauma or challenge that fuels addiction at the beginning of the addiction-to-recovery narrative. The narrative presented by the shows subsumes the personal narratives to the extent that exclusivity of an individual is virtually impossible. The narrating group is the highest authority and power. The narrative group depicted is the intervention/rehabilitation group, but it merits mention that the shows themselves operate as a still larger narrative group for its audience. The shows’ selection of participants and cast members construct what agentic group change ought and ought not to be.
The Childish Gambler

*Intervention* features the story of Gabe, whose addiction is to gambling (Partland, 2005c). A child prodigy with an IQ of 156, Gabe graduated from college at 14 years old, then dropped out of a Ph.D. program to pursue entertainment without success (Partland). He is now 30 years old and lives with his parents who, shortly before filming, sold their home to pay part of their son’s debts and continue to finance all of his expenses (Partland). His parents are financially unable to pay for his debt any longer (Partland). They inform Gabe that they refuse continued support. He responds with what can only be called a temper tantrum in the street in front of his home. Though spiced with advanced vocabulary, his childish behavior involved shouting, flailing his arms, and stamping his feet (Partland). When Gabe’s parents stage the Intervention, they offer the ultimatum of recovery or severed relationships (Partland). Gabe calls the plan “diabolical” and shouts, “I don’t have control over anything!” (Partland). He finally agrees to leave for recovery after extracting an agreement from his parents to pay in cash for further debts (Partland). Gabe leaves treatment early and the show’s subscript states that his parents continue to pay for 75% of his expenses, including rent (Partland). By the follow up segment, he relapses twice, losing more than 10 thousand dollars each time (Partland). The episode concludes with Gabe playing a keyboard song that he had written and dramatically crooning its lyrics with his eyes closed (Partland). The scene’s awkwardness demonstrates Gabe’s childlike and socially inadequate or unacceptable status within the established narrative.

Gabe rejects the narrative offered by treatment facilities. His rhetorical agency does not shift toward constructive behavior, but continues in its perverse nature. He views himself as a character detached from the story encouraged by the intervention. He accepts no
probability or fidelity, though the interventionist cites Gabe’s behavior as “typical” of an addict who cannot or will not move toward change. For the non-addict participants, then, Gabe’s story is probable and faithful to the narrative.

Gabe’s behavior also demonstrates the communal nature of agency (Campbell, 2005), as he responds to the lack of consistency from his parents by adjusting his decisions accordingly. He need not change his behavior if they do not as well, for the opportunity remains available for him to rely on others. Because Gabe does not make personal or relational change, he cannot and does not contribute to the narrative in any way but to confirm it. Gabe rejects the conventional story established by his interventionist and the recovery community. His behavior instead suggests the power of the disease metaphor in the “plot” of this story.

Certainly a sad example of struggle, Gabe’s behavior retains elements of light. Again, he exercises agency. Against advice, Gabe checks out of the rehabilitation center on his own, choosing in spite of pressure, to return home (Partland, 2005c). This at least demonstrates the existence of willpower in the face of difficulty. Whether that willpower is influenced by disease, trauma, relationships, or other factors, he nonetheless exercises a fundamental rhetorical capacity for change, a human act meriting recognition, if not respect. While his parents continue to care for their son, the long term effects of this certainly reflect dark side principles of codependency, enabling behaviors, and perhaps an experience of manipulation by their son.

The Tender King

Rodney King’s role on Celebrity Rehab stands out as a clear example of agency that seeks group change and progress. Perhaps more than any other on the show, King
demonstrates narrative fidelity. As illustrated earlier, King uses agentic means for not only personal and relational change, but also for change within the community at the Pasadena Recovery Center. Dr. Drew thanks him for “being such a rock in group” (Irwin, 2009c), and King extends his ability for constructive development to include the people surrounding him, to whom he has no personal connection except a shared part in the narrative at hand. King steps into leadership roles such as serving as a mediator in an ongoing conflict between Conaway and Gary Busey. As King assumes this role, he contributes to the narrative upon which the program is founded, asserting that if he’s “not part of the solution, [he’s] part of the problem” (Irwin, 2009f). He accepts the narrative as a means to assist him in constructive decisions. The other members of the group observe his willing attitude and openly admire him, calling him “the nicest person ever” or recognizing him as “just the guy” to handle the situation with Conaway and Busey (Irwin, 2009e, 2009f). Dr. Drew’s placement of King in this circumstance and the community’s acceptance thereof indicate the positioning of his character within the storyline of this rehabilitation effort.

King symbolizes for the other rehab participants the potential for positive change toward the light side in the midst of a dark disease. He exemplifies how trauma can both assist agency and hinder constructive agentic choices for personal growth and relational prosperity. He also obviates the power of agency in changing one’s life. King moves from a quiet, non-participatory addict to a calm, gentle voice for peace and health in his mediations and developing relationships with his daughters (Irwin, 2009g). The group inadvertently designates him as a leader, which presents an adjustment to the narrative in that the leading figure is no longer exclusively the non-addict, but is now a person who lived the story. This
may not be an adjustment, but a confirmation that demonstrates the latter part of the narrative—the success of an agent.

While clear themes of light run through King’s apparent growth on Celebrity Rehab, the darker question of real agency arises again. Does narrative dictate or merely influence the agentic choices made by an individual? While the show asserts no psychological determination of this on King’s behalf, his behavior and language suggests a genuine desire to change that then motivates those around him. He is under no obligation to present the full story of his abuse (Irwin, 2009g), but he supports his claim that “the truth will save my soul” with open sharing about his life, addiction, and relationships (Irwin). His turn toward constructive agency adds narrative fidelity to a group that needs to see the effectiveness of the story before moving forward in their own narrative. This narrative initially includes only the show’s participants but extends upon broadcast to the audience as well.

**PROMISCUOUS AND PROTEAN**

Intervention and Celebrity Rehab demonstrate the structural limitations encountered by agents who seek personal, relational, and group change. Personal trauma, relational ideals, and the dominating group narrative all function to help or hinder the agent in his or her quest for recovery or gratification. These limitations mandate a response from the agent. Those responses vary but they navigate in some way the currents of these limiting influences. Campbell’s (2005) propositions shape agency as communal, invented, artistic, effected through form, and perverse and assist an understanding of the rhetoric displayed on these programs. These propositions allow for limitations. Other conceptions of agency such as the theory of agentic orientation proposed by Foss et al. (2007) envisions the agent as uninfluenced by others in decision making. If these limitations affect the agent as these
programs indicate, then the agent is not isolated but part of a network. The following chapter discusses these theoretical contributions in greater depth.
CHAPTER 4

A COMMUNAL AGENCY

Chapter Three outlines the structural limitations that hinder or help agency for personal, relational, and group change as presented by two reality shows. These programs argue that personal trauma, relational ideals, and a dominant group narrative contribute to the progress of recovery for the agent. The agent chooses a response to these limitations, either dark or light in nature. The analysis tracks several participants in the reality shows *Intervention* and *Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew*. These participants indicate agentic behaviors throughout the addiction process as well as the ways in which agency, constructed communally, may motivate a person to seek the personal, relational, and group change illustrated in the shows. Campbell’s five propositions of agency help to explain agency as these programs construct it for viewers. This construction upholds agency as communal, invented by the rhetor who is a “point of articulation” for culture, generated artistically and strategically, effected through rhetorical form, and perverse or morally ambiguous (Campbell, 2005, p. 2). Agency, here, is not a question of orientation or “magical voluntarism” (Foss et al., 2007; Gunn & Cloud, 2010). The agent is deeply and inextricably linked to other agents whose rhetorical choices affect and shape each other.

This chapter will explore first the theoretical implications of Campbell’s (2005) propositions in contrast to Foss, Waters, & Armada’s (2007) theory of agentic orientation. The second section will expand beyond *Intervention* and *Celebrity Rehab* to discuss the importance of the message in the broader context of reality entertainment. The third section
evaluates what the findings of the study contribute to our understanding of the structure of agency in communication.

**THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

*Intervention* and *Celebrity Rehab* argue that agency not only exists within addiction, but that it can lead to powerful light or dark consequences. This is a central finding of the study and informs the theoretical implications. The construction of agency on these reality programs reflects each of Campbell’s (2005) propositions.

**Communal Agency**

Campbell’s (2005) contention that agency is “communal and participatory, hence, both constituted and constrained by externals that are material and symbolic” (p. 2) manifests itself in the illustrated importance of trauma, relational ideals, and narrative. Trauma is a highly private experience, but almost never occurs simply within the individual. Another person can impose trauma, a physical force such as illness can catalyze trauma, or any good can lead to or exacerbate trauma when excessive in nature. *Intervention* and *Celebrity Rehab* exemplify each of these through Rodney King’s physical abuse, Vanessa Marquez’s psychological illnesses, and Gabe’s prodigious ability. Each of these participants enact agency that bears the mark of trauma. This depicts trauma as an external structure constitutes and constrains agency for light or for dark.

The external structure of relational dynamics, whether ideal or deviant, also constitutes and constrains agency for light or for dark. The ideal of the nuclear family becomes reinforced in an agent after repeated training. This does not negate agency, as the addicts in the shows make clear decisions for or against this ideal. Instead the ideal helps to form the support or encumbrance of agentic behavior. The deviant relationship functions in
much the same manner as the ideal. The relationships experienced by addicts on these shows illustrate the pushing and pulling, communal nature of agency.

The group narrative develops as a product of communality but also constitutes and constrains the individual agent in his or her pursuit for change. These shows articulate a narrative of overcoming disease through personal vulnerability and healing. When a person’s behavior confirms or disconfirms narrative probability and narrative fidelity, the narrative continues to develop for both the group and the individual. Like relational standards, the narrative influences the agent, but does not overwhelm the existence of agency.

Foss et al. (2007), in their theory of agentic orientation do not explain the communal element of agency indicated by this artifact. It is important to note, however, that the selection of this artifact as data may have predisposed the analysis toward particular theoretical implications. The nature of this artifact as entertainment may indeed predispose it toward a more communal perspective on agency in that it highlights interaction, perhaps a more desirable phenomenon for ratings. Another artifact may well be explained better by the proposed theory of agentic orientation. In this case, however, the critical perspective suggested by their theory—that an agent who has selected a victim or supplicant orientation cannot see available alternatives and so continues on an unsuccessful route toward a goal—does not explain the agents presented by *Intervention* and *Celebrity Rehab*. The theory’s lack of recognition of structural limitations contrasts starkly with the presented narrative’s strong emphasis on the influence of the other on an individual. Both *Intervention* and *Celebrity Rehab* present relationships as key factors to developing or hindering the agency of another person. The rhetoric of the participants implies that a simple classification of victim, supplicant, and director does not adequately reflect the complexity of human interaction,
particularly in challenging situations such as addiction and recovery. As in the case of many of the participants, an individual can view themselves as a victim and, perhaps because of that view, can direct their behavior for dark or light outcomes. Campbell’s (2005) proposition that agency is communal and constructed by and for the individual provides a richer explanation.

**Artistically Articulated Agency**

The message constructed by *Intervention* and *Celebrity Rehab* employs Campbell’s (2005) first proposition of agency’s communal nature to demonstrate the second and third as well. Campbell argues that the agent is “linked to culture and collectivities” and must negotiate limitations (p. 5). The agent negotiates these limitations through rhetorical artistry or invention (Campbell). These shows indicate that the agent operates as a point of articulation that generates strategic art for influence, whether positive or negative, perverse or pure, dark or light.

This articulation and artistry does not occur through whim, but through a daily use and abuse of symbols. Agency is not arbitrary. A theory of agentic orientation offers a proposition that the agent may choose to ignore the power or persuasion of another person or event. The presence of a compelling and faithful narrative denies the isolation of the agentic orientation. Rodney King and Gabe willingly or unwillingly participate in furthering a narrative according to their personal situation, background, and limitations. Their agency reflects their circumstances; they articulate a history. King and Gabe draw from available *topoi* to invent a strategy. This process may or may not be consciously performed, but it occurs nonetheless. If it is artistic, agency is learned and can develop into a habit (Campbell, 2005). These shows indicate for King and Gabe, as well as for Marquez and Conaway, subtle
shifts in behavior that result because of learning. Similarly, the individuals that observe King and respond to his leadership elect to make that story and its manifestation part of their own lives. King’s agency grows in effectiveness as he receives commendation. He builds with his colleagues a strategy that adjusts his personal circumstance. The participants’ behavior clearly reflects artistry in the capacity of a person to act.

As King and his colleagues build such a strategy, they also reinforce Campbell’s (2005) fourth proposition that agency is textual, or that texts have agency. The illustration suggests that through narrative—the form—individuals can identify and respond to each other. This represents a separate kind of agency that is the “foundation of all communication” (Campbell, 2005, p. 7). The nature of addiction recovery processes as illustrated in these programs forces kairotic stratagem from the agent.

**Promiscuous Agency**

Campbell’s (2005) fifth proposition holds that agency is “malign, divisive, and destructive” (p. 7). As filmed by *Intervention* and *Celebrity Rehab*, the agent may have capacity for good and evil, for light and dark. No single incident stands clearly as all light or all dark. Agency is a shape-shifting phenomenon that responds to structure and the rhetorical situation, not merely the intentionality of the actor.

Foss et al.’s (2007) theory of agentic orientation would suggest that addicts exemplify a victim orientation. Recovery stories such as *Intervention’s* Sara and *Rehab’s* King simply require a change in orientation to that of director. The descriptions of these orientations seem appropriate in that both failed to see alternatives to destructive behavior while wrapped up in the negative emotions evoked by traumatic experiences. The shows present the situations with a more complex narrative. The programs depict the structural
limitations of each participant, reflecting the criticism of Foss et al.’s (2007) agentic orientation that “one can fulfill one’s needs and desires through the independent, willful manipulation of symbols irrelevant of structural limitation or constraint” (Gunn & Cloud, 2010, p. 62). The primary limitation illustrated is the individual’s biochemical and emotional addiction to a drug or an emotional sensation. The secondary, moderating limitations are trauma, relationships, and narrative. This suggests that when held up to these reality scenarios, Campbell’s (2005) dialectical theory appears a better explanation by allowing for agency’s individual and social construction, for its promiscuity and flexibility. Personal change is depicted as more than a mere decision that brings good to oneself (Foss et al., 2007; Gunn & Cloud, 2010), but an arduous, artistic process that varies with structural limitations (Campbell, 2005).

THE DARK AND LIGHT OF “REALITY” AGENCY

Intervention and Celeb Rehab suggest that the innate human capacity for action does not lead to easy personal change. Change is a process that requires rhetorical invention for dark or light purposes. This message is shaded by its contextualization in reality entertainment. As agency is light and dark and effected through form, so the role of authenticity colors the ethics of such programs. The message attempts a demonstration of the power of an individual to enact change in the face of “disease” as well as the profoundly harmful effects of succumbing to addiction. The shows attempt to communicate the light and dark of a pertinent and pervasive issue.

Communicating through reality programming has clear benefits such as cost effectiveness and a less scripted and staged presentation, but the genre has clear pitfalls as well. The extensive duration of a recovery process is cut short by an hour of programming.
This allows recovery to appear less arduous than suggested by program participants’ rhetoric. The brief descriptions of participants’ personal histories also present lives as shaped exclusively by what is filmed.

The nature of selecting celebrities also distorts the “reality” of the message. The presentation of wealth and fame as traumatic (Irwin, 2009b; Irwin, 2009c) estranges the group and enables a voyeuristic appeal. *Intervention* avoids this to some degree, though the show does feature some minor celebrities. However, *Intervention* and *Celebrity Rehab* select famous and lay individuals whose addictions have overwhelmed functionality, representing only later and more deeply dramatic stages of the addictive process. The shows thereby represent addiction as dramatic fodder for entertainment while simultaneously condemning it as a social ill. These shows and the consumption of their messages mark the culture within which agents articulate communal agency. The promiscuous nature of textual agency then becomes salient in its morally ambiguous or contradictory messages.

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO COMMUNICATION**

This study addresses how media construct images of rhetorical agency for human change. The analysis finds that the image produced acknowledges structural limitations that help or hinder rhetorical agency, which is communally and culturally constructed. The analysis also presents the argument that constructions of agency for personal change extend to agency that seeks relational and social change. Agency is shown to be a complex and protean phenomenon that exists even in contexts that may appear to negate the existence of agency. These findings provide support for Campbell’s (2005) propositions pertaining to the nature of agency and challenge Foss et al.’s (2007) theory of agentic orientation with this artifact.
As the study utilizes Campbell’s (2005) position, it also provides support for the dialectical tradition. The analysis of the data demonstrates dialectical tensions in the nature of agency, particularly focusing on concepts of dark and light. The implementation of this metaphor also extends this study into the realm of the dark side of communication. This paradigm is more associated with interpersonal studies, but this study expands its application in rhetorical criticism as well. This thesis adds to the understanding that all communication has concomitant and constitutive dark and light features.

This study also contributes to the understanding of how popular culture demonstrates the role of interpersonal relationships and group narrative in shaping human agency. This culture emphasizes interconnectedness of humans and how communication profoundly impacts the lives of others. The goal of this study was to describe the importance laid by some media on a communally constructed agency. These media argue that if each individual lives and moves within a community, they are part of the lives and movements of others and thereby affect each individual’s agency.
REFERENCES


