

Heisenberg: An American Hero?

Martin Tuček

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Uvedte definici hrdiny podle **Josepha Campbella**.
Charakterizujte představu amerického snu.
Analyzujte situaci **Waltera Whita**.
Rozhodněte zda **Walt White** dle **Campellovy** definice zosobňuje hrdinu a zda jeho činy splňují představu splněného amerického snu.

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doc. Ing. Anežka Lengálová, Ph.D.
děkanka




PhDr. Katarína Nemčoková, Ph.D.
ředitelka ústavu

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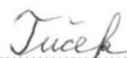
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ABSTRAKT

Walter White, hlavní postava amerického televizního seriálu *Breaking Bad*, jenž byl vysílán v letech 2008 až 2013, je nedoceněný středoškolský učitel s politováníhodným životem. Jeho manželka neplánovaně otěhotněla, jeho syn má mozkovou obrnu a celkově rodinu trápí existenční potíže. Jako by toho nebylo málo, hlavnímu hrdinovi je diagnostikovaná nevléčitelná forma rakoviny a má před sebou nanejvýš dva roky života. Walter nemá co ztratit a aby dostal rodinu z bídy, rozhodne se vstoupit do světa organizovaného zločinu, kde pod pseudonymem Heisenberg vyrábí metamfetamin. Aby zajistil peníze pro svoji rodinu, riskuje Walter všechno a není nic co by ho svedlo z jeho cesty. Skutky, které vykonal během posledních let jeho života nebyly vždy jednoznačné a zcela ospravedlnitelné. Cílem této práce je zjistit, zda Walter White může být vnímán jako hrdina, jenž si splnil americký sen.

Klíčová slova: *Breaking Bad*, televizní seriál, Walter White, Heisenberg, americký sen, hrdinství, Joseph Campbell, metamfetamin

ABSTRACT

Walter White, the main character of the American television drama series *Breaking Bad*, which was broadcast from 2008 to 2013, is an undervalued high school chemistry teacher with a miserable life. His wife is pregnant with an unplanned child, his son has cerebral palsy, and on the whole the family is struggling to make ends meet. On top of that, he is diagnosed with inoperable cancer and at most two years of life ahead. Walter has nothing to lose, and to prevent his family from destitution when he is deceased, he enters the illegal world of methamphetamine production where he is known under the clandestine pseudonym Heisenberg. Walter puts it all on the line to obtain money for his family, but nothing is to stop him from achieving his goal. Walter opted for an illegal way to provide for his family, and the actions he took were not always unambiguous and fully justifiable. The aim of this thesis is to ascertain whether Walter White can be perceived as a hero who achieved the American dream.

Keywords: *Breaking Bad*, TV show, Walter White, Heisenberg, American dream, heroism, Joseph Campbell, methamphetamine

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“It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future.”

Yogi Berra¹

¹ Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House, 2007), 136.

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INTRODUCTION

“What does a man do? A man provides for his family.”² These are the words which drove the main character of the American television drama series *Breaking Bad*, Walter White, into drug production and distribution. Approaching his fifties, Walter’s life story is pitiful. He works as an underpaid and unappreciated high school chemistry teacher, supplementing his income with a part time job at a car wash. At home, his wife is pregnant with an unplanned child and his teenage son copes with cerebral palsy. Meanwhile, his brother-in-law is a successful Drug Enforcement Administration agent, and a company that he in his youth helped to found but was forced to leave is now worth 2 billion dollars. His life gives an impression of unfulfilled potential and dissatisfaction. On top of this he is diagnosed in the first season with terminal lung cancer, giving him at most two years of life, and leaving him haunted with the vision of his unborn daughter who will never know her father, and a family which is left in poverty and debt if he undertakes the treatment. This prompts him to act in a way that is illegal, but presumably the only way to guarantee his family a better life when he is deceased. Walter decides to live his life beyond the law with the best of intentions and for the greater good of his family. Although a criminal whose actions directly or indirectly hurt others, some might consider him a hero who achieved the American dream, therefore the purpose of this thesis is to ascertain whether or not this consideration is justified.

²Breaking Bad, “I.F.T.,” 305, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 7, 2011.

1 BREAKING BAD SYNOPSIS

Breaking Bad is an American television series set in New Mexico about an overqualified high school teacher, Walter White, who is known under the clandestine nickname Heisenberg. The series has 5 seasons, however, it was broadcast in 6 years, from 2008 to 2013, since the last season was split into two parts. When Walter learns about his cancer, he decides to cook crystal methamphetamine to obtain money for his family. He teams up with his former student Jesse Pinkman, as Walter knows chemistry and Jesse knows the business. Their product has a distinctly blue color and is of second to none quality.

As time passes they are more and more drawn into organized drug trafficking, and since Walter's treatment is expensive and he needs to pay the bills there is no way back. His family believes that the bills are paid by the Elliott's, Walter former colleagues. The couple has to deal not only with volatile distributors, but also with Walter's brother-in-law Hank Schrader, a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent. Meanwhile, Walter's cancer is in remission, and Walter and Jesse sell their product to a major distributor in the American Southwest, Gustavo "Gus" Fring. At first Gus is reluctant to deal with them, as Jesse is a drug addict, but eventually agrees and further offers Walter \$3 million for three months of cooking in his super laboratory. After hesitation, Walter agrees and works with a meticulous assistant, Gale Boetticher. However, they fall apart, and on Walter's request Gale is substituted by Jesse.

Meanwhile, Walter's daughter Holly is born and he undergoes a surgery that immensely improves his health, but his wife Skyler wants to divorce him, as she believes he is lying to her and is having an affair. Walter discloses he cooks methamphetamine and that he himself has been paying all the bills, nonetheless his wife insists on divorcing. Later, Jesse gets in a fight with two distributors of Gus, since they have been using a child of his girlfriend to sell drugs. Walter intervenes, and to save Jesse's life he kills the distributors. Walter foresees Gus will retaliate for the murders, and since his former assistant Gale is already able to cook his formula, he persuades Jesse into shooting Gale. Jesse does so, and Gus cannot kill them as if he did, he would not have a cook to produce methamphetamine. However, Walter is afraid for his life, since he knows Gus will kill him as soon as possible, therefore he teams up with a former Mexican drug-lord, and together they manage to assassinate Gus.

Consequently Walter with Jesse and Gus's former employee Mike establish the drug empire anew. The DEA including Hank investigates people around Gus, and Walter is in

permanent danger of getting caught. His business flourishes, but after a few months he grows weary and quits. Nonetheless, a couple of months after Walter's departure from the organized drug trade, Hanks coincidentally finds out that Walter is Heisenberg, and is firm to do right by the law. Hank tells Walter he knows his secret, and Walter discloses he is going to die in a few months as his cancer is back. Despite this fact, Hank continues his search for evidence and with help from Jessie, he sets a trap in the desert and gets Walter to plead guilty, but a gang of thugs which Walter hired to kill Jesse arrives, against Walter's will kills Hank, and takes Jesse captive to find out whether he revealed anything to the DEA. Walter is now wanted by the police, and his life is coming to an end, but he is determined to retaliate for Hank's death. He concocts a plan to eliminate the whole gang. The plan succeeds, he murders the gang and sets Jesse free, but is shot and with no apparent sense of remorse he peacefully dies in a methamphetamine laboratory.

2 A DEFINITION OF A HERO

The Hero with a Thousand Faces is a book written by Joseph Campbell, originally published in 1949. Making use of myths, legends and stories, the book identifies a universal pattern for a hero throughout history. Since its publication, the book has influenced a great number of writers, artists, and scholars. For instance, George Lucas admits the book was an inspiration for the storyline of his well-known Star Wars.³

Campbell discovered a pattern in each and every piece of writing containing a hero. Campbell claims that most of these pieces of art are basically one story, which is retold in different variations, and they all follow one pattern – one certain hero, one certain sequence of actions, and one deed done by many different people. However, every storyteller changes the myth and perception of the hero into his own conception, and therefore the hero is only one but with a thousand faces.⁴

A hero (or heroine) is someone who leaves his comfort zone, and achieves something beyond the normal range of achievement or experience, someone who has given his life for someone else or something bigger than himself. The hero is shown in his ordinary world, where he receives the call to adventure. A man becomes a hero either intentionally or he is lured into it from outside. The decision either comes from inside, which is Walter's case, as he himself decides to cook methamphetamine, or the decision is made by someone or something else, for instance, being drafted into the war or chosen by a higher power.⁵

³ “Hero with a Thousand Faces,” Joseph Campbell Foundation, accessed April 11, 2015, www.jcf.org/new/index.php?categoryid=83&p9999_action=details&p9999_wid=692.

⁴ “The Hero's Journey,” The Writer's Journey, accessed April 11, 2015, www.thewritersjourney.com/hero%27s_journey.htm.

⁵ Ibid.

3 THE AMERICAN DREAM

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines the American dream as the belief that America offers the opportunity to everyone of a good and successful life achieved through hard work. It is a vision of one nation which believes that one's life becomes greater, richer, and fuller if he or she is relentless and works diligently. This leads to the conclusion that America gives an equal chance to everyone, but this can be in many cases a misleading conception.⁶

The United States is often seen as a land of freedom and opportunity to achieve one's dreams. The American dream gives people hope that if they work hard every day, and persuade their innermost dream they can make it from “an errand boy to the top,” and make their dream come true, be successful, have money, respect and all the things that go with it. There are certainly many people who can fit this example, and who from almost nothing attained an immense fortune, but it is deceptive to presume that all the people in the United States have the same possibilities and an equal opportunity.⁷

Furthermore, almost nobody pays attention to all those people who did not achieve their dream, in spite of the fact that they worked hard, persevered in their effort and possessed all the other aspects various definitions state are needed in order to achieve the American dream. To give an example, every year thousands of people head to Los Angeles hoping they will someday become a movie star. However, only a small fragment of them achieve at least partial success in the film industry, and on occasions even though they are not actually distinctively good at acting. A larger number of those aspirants will never reach the silver screen, yet they are in many crucial elements (such as talent, perseverance, or time spent trying) on the same level with the ones who achieved their American dream. This leads to the upshot that from time to time success requires luck. This is not an idea easy to accept, as people most of the time have the tendency to reason the course of history out, and confidently claim they understand the cause of one's success. This can be also applied to Walter's life. He was an extraordinary chemist with perseverance and potential, yet his dream in chemistry was never achieved until he was forced to think outside of the box and step into the illegal business of methamphetamine production.

⁶ “The American Dream,” The Library of Congress, accessed April 22, 2015, www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/lessons/american-dream/students/thedream.html.

⁷ Ibid.

Malcolm Gladwell comes up with another way of thinking about the American dream and success in general. Gladwell contends there are a few attributes which seriously influence the fulfillment of one's American dream. He claims that no one is a self-made man, as there is always an external factor which directly or indirectly gives a helping hand. One of the factors can be the time and year of birth. Gladwell argues there is a perfect time to be born for various professions. For instance, the mid-1950s seem to be a perfect time to be born for IT programmers, since January 1975 was the start of the personal computer age and a time of a great expansion of computers. Indeed, most of the people who made a great fortune in the IT business were born in the mid-1950s – Bill Gates, Steve Jobs (both born 1955), Steve Ballmer (1956), or Paul Allen (1953) are some examples. Had all the mentioned people been born a few years later, they would have been too young and missed the coming revolution in the usage of personal computers. On the other hand, had they been born a decade earlier they would have been probably too old to quit a secure job and risk their career when they had to take care of children and pay the mortgage.⁸ This suggests people who achieved their American dream are not always fully responsible for it. Moreover, in some times, to achieve the American dream is easier than in others. Hardly one achieved their American dream during the Great Depression when people lived more in destitution than in abundance. On the contrary, it was much easier to achieve one's American dream in the decades after the Second World War when the American economy was in a much better state. Yet, this does not convey that it was impossible to fulfill one's potential during the Great Depression. A few people probably did, but the majority of people during the era were in a greatly disadvantaged position.

To conclude, the American dream is more of a myth, a myth which sounds good and fits the perception of the United States. It is a concept based on certain cases, ignoring the enormous majority of cases which prove the opposite. Yet, it is an idea which must be taken in the account, as it has become widely known and generally understood. Most importantly for our purposes, it is suitable to measure Walter's success in the methamphetamine business.

⁸ Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (London: Allen Lane, 2008), 64-65.

4 DEEDS OF WALTER WHITE

The series puts great emphasis on showing Walter in his ordinary environment. The audience is confronted with a man whose life is unhappy, and the bleakness of his life is sensed in every detail. Therefore, it is not surprising to see Walter “break bad” and become a criminal. Yet, many lower and middle class Americans can probably relate to Walter's situation, evoking sympathy - Walter is a common citizen and a state employee, but the government gives him little help in dealing with his deadly disease. The state's insurance covers so little that when he finds himself in an ambulance on the way to the hospital he asks to be dropped off at a corner so that he does not have to pay for the ambulance service. However, the ambulance medical technician refuses, increasing Walter's destitution.

4.1 Heinz's Dilemma

Walter's situation is reminiscent of the morality experiment known as Heinz's dilemma. Heinz's wife is dying from cancer. There is a medicine that can save her life, but it costs too much, and Heinz cannot afford it. Even though the cost of the medicine is only a fraction of the final price, the pharmacist is greedy and refuses to yield to a lower price. The husband is desperate and under the veil of night he steals the drug. The moral dilemma is whether Heinz's behavior is justifiable, and the theft was the right thing to do, or should he not have broken the law and accept the consequences of losing his wife.⁹

Walter faced a Heinz dilemma as to whether to break the law or not. However, Heinz was driven by a slightly different motive and broke the law only once, whereas Walter's reasons are not so unambiguous, and he breaks the law repeatedly. Furthermore, Heinz did not break the law for his own good, but for the good of his wife. Walter's initial reasons for breaking the law were unselfish as well – the primary reason for cooking methamphetamine was to provide money for the family after his death – but later on he re-enters the drug business for purely selfish reasons.

⁹ Saul McLeod, “SimplyPsychology.org,” accessed April 11, 2015, www.simplypsychology.org/kohlberg.html.

4.2 Refusal

When Walter learns about his disease, at first he decides not to undertake the treatment, as it is too expensive. He feels as if choice is denied to him yet again, for throughout his life he never really had a say. Therefore, in this last obstacle he faces – cancer – he would like to choose his own approach. This goes with the realization that neither choice is sound. Besides spending a great amount of money which they do not have, the treatment brings many negative side effects that reduce quality of life with no guarantee of survival. Walter is aware of this. He wishes to die without spending his last months in the hospital, and does not want his family to remember him slowly and pathetically dying. In all likelihood, Walter is led to this decision by his own experience with his father who had a dreadful disease, and left Walter with only one actual, vivid, scary memory: his father twisted up on his deathbed. Having lived through this, he chooses to forego treatment and accept the burden imposed upon him. However, in no way does he accept that his family will be left struggling, and this leads him to use his talent as a chemistry teacher to cook methamphetamine.

Yet, after a time he changes his mind, and agrees to undertake the treatment. In the series no straightforward reason is given as to why he has changed his mind. It seems as if he realizes that by cooking methamphetamine he can also earn money to pay for his treatment.

4.3 The Elliott's

Shortly after Walter is diagnosed with cancer he makes another noteworthy decision, which at first might appear senseless. The Elliott's offer to pay for his treatment, yet Walter politely declines their offer. If he accepted the offer, he would not have to continue in the methamphetamine business, and the problem with paying the bills for the treatment would be solved, but once again there is more than meets the eyes. The Elliott's built their immense wealth thanks to Walter's research, but Walter has never profited from it. He feels spite and believes he should be the rich one basking in the glory of success. This comes as one of the most crucial points of Walter's life, and one can claim he should bow his head and kindly accept the offer, but this is not the way heroes behave, and probably accepting the money would not give Walter more satisfaction than the moments which happened

during the following 18 months in the methamphetamine business. Moreover, this is one of the last big decisions of Walter's life, and he decides to go his own way.¹⁰

4.4 Krazy-8

Already in the third episode Walter becomes a murderer. There is a drug dealer (Krazy-8) kept prisoner in the basement who attempted to kill Walter and Jesse, and it is Walter's task to end his life. Walter is reluctant to do it, and searches for any reason not to. This is a hard task, and way beyond anything Walter expected from his participation in the drug business. Cooking methamphetamine is illegal, but in Walter's situation the reasons are acceptable and with the little support of the government the only way. However, taking a life is a different level. On one side of the scale is an unstable, untrustworthy drug dealer who is prone to strike back if they let him go and take his revenge not only on Jesse and Walter, but also on Walter's family. On the other side of the scale, it is wrong to kill a human being, immoral and against religious principles to take a life. On top of that, Walter is not a murderer. At this point he is still more of a common citizen than a criminal, and with a little bit of imagination it is not hard to picture ourselves in his shoes. Even if he decides to end Krazy-8's life, it is going to be hard. A person forced kill can be haunted by post-traumatic stress disorder. Nightmares, flashbacks, loss of interest and joy in life are some of many consequences which someone after a traumatic experience might have to cope with.¹¹

After serious contemplation, Walter believes Krazy-8 is going to listen to reason and is on the point of letting him go, but a lucky coincidence makes Walter realize Krazy-8 has no intention of peace and Walter strangles him. This is the first and one of many events where Walter teeters on the edge of good and evil. Walter sins, and without knowing his reasons, he appears guilty. However, if the reasons, especially the intention of letting the prisoner go, are taken into account, Walter's action, while certainly sinful, is worth forgiving. Walter was compelled by a sudden glimpse of the truth to execute an act which he hoped would never come. This experience brings Walter to a halt. He does not want to

¹⁰ Robert Arp and David R. Koepsell, *Breaking Bad and Philosophy: Badder Living Through Chemistry* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 2012), 139.

¹¹ "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)," HelpGuide.org, accessed April 11, 2015, www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/post-traumatic-stress-disorder.htm.

cook anymore, but his situation gives him no choice of turning back and he proceeds with cooking.

4.5 Werner Heisenberg

At the end of the first season, Walter is forced to deal with a volatile and violent distributor Tuco, and in this situation he for the first time uses the alias Heisenberg. This is an important threshold of the series, since after this milestone, Walter is no longer an unsatisfied teacher with a stillborn life, but instead a man with courage and power to make and follow his own choice. Later in the series, the nickname Heisenberg becomes a synonym for a legendary, unknown man who cooks the best-quality methamphetamine. Therefore it is worth mentioning the relation between Walter White and Werner Heisenberg.

Werner Heisenberg was a German physicist most known for his theory of the uncertainty principle, and there are a few straightforward parallels between Werner Heisenberg and Walter which might have led the producers of *Breaking Bad* to choose this pseudonym. They both were teachers, died from cancer, and they both conducted research which led to a Nobel Prize. However, the uncertainty principle signifies the main link between Walter and the real Heisenberg. Whether intentional or not, when the principle is applied to Walter's life there is a pretty clear correlation. The Uncertainty Principle has moved from being clearly scientific method to speculative philosophy. It claims that the more precisely you define one side of an equation, the less precisely it is possible to define the other side of the equation, irrespective of how precise the equipment is or how hard one tries.¹² This parallels Walter's life. On one side are Walter and his family life, and on the other is Walter as Heisenberg and his life in the methamphetamine business. The more he is successful in the methamphetamine business, the less his family life flourishes. Moreover, as he is more and more entangled in the methamphetamine business his behavior becomes more and more inconsistent and led by contrasting principles – what was once unacceptable and out of the question now becomes acceptable and sound.

¹² Stacy Conratt, "Beyond *Breaking Bad*: Meet the Real Heisenberg," accessed April 11, 2015, www.theweek.com/articles/459448/beyond-breaking-bad-meet-real-heisenberg.

4.6 Jane Margolis

The end of the second season brings another essential moment which taints Walter's life. Jesse's new girlfriend Jane, a former heroin addict, returns (partly due to Jesse) back to heroin addiction, and takes Jesse with her. When Walter learns Jesse switched from smoking methamphetamine to injecting heroine, he refuses to give him his part of the earnings (\$480,000) from methamphetamine production, as he believes Jesse would keep using heroin and overdose. However, after Jane's blackmailing he reluctantly gives Jesse his part, but later that day comes back and sees both intoxicated. Then Jane begins to retch and Walter is about to help her, but then refrains and lets Jane asphyxiate.

This is another death in Walter's life which he could have stopped. It is a controversial point, since even if Walter's point of view and his best intentions are taken in consideration, it is bold to claim this act is justifiable and for the greater good of Jesse. Jane was no friend of Walter, and she manipulated Jesse into letting her blackmail Walter. Further, she was the one who taught Jesse to use syringes and heroine. From Walter's point of view, Jane impersonated doom in Jesse's life. Walter possibly wanted to save Jane's life, but he realized if he had saved her life, Jesse would continue injecting hard drugs and destroy himself.

4.7 Brock Cantillo

At the end of the fourth season, comes another inharmonious moment in Walter's life. Walter purposefully poisons the eight-year-old son (Brock) of another Jesse's girlfriend to win back Jesse's trust and turn him against Gus. Jesse believes Walter's story and gives him information which helps Walter to eliminate Gus. Poisoning a child is certainly not a tool worthy of a hero. However, history has witnessed an act of similar quality, and hardly anybody would not recognize and acknowledge the person as a hero.

In spring 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. came to Birmingham, Alabama to continue his struggle for the civil rights of African Americans. At that time, King's movement was in crisis, as the previous nine months he spent in Albany, Georgia without winning any significant concessions. King had no illusions that he could fight racism in a conventional way, and therefore he and the people around him came up with a cunning plan which required hundreds of schoolchildren to face possible severe consequences, and jeopardize their futures. The plan consisted of using children for a demonstration which was forbidden, and on top of that the local Commissioner of Public Safety Eugene "Bull"

Connor announced that any child that would skip the school that day would be expelled. By the end of the day, over 600 hundred students were taken to jail. The following day brought more arrests, and since the jails were full Connor had to resort to more violent treatment, which was what King and his fellow men hoped would happen. They wanted Connor to tip his hand and show the world his ugly face. Connor did resort to violence, and as a consequence a photo was taken which turned the tide of the African American struggle for equality, and changed the course of American history. The photo depicts a serene African American boy being bitten by an unleashed dog. The following day the photo shocked the world, and the upcoming year the American government passed the Civil Rights Act.¹³

Both King and Walter used irresponsible acts to accomplish their goals, however, there are two diametrical elements which need to be taken in consideration – necessity and potential risks. In King's case, the necessity was substantially higher. His previous stay in Albany had not brought any significant accomplishment, and therefore in Birmingham where King was initially unsuccessful as well, he was compelled to take such an action. Meanwhile, Walter did not seem to have any particularly vital reason to use the child in his affairs, and therefore the necessity appears more subtle.

The other aspect is the potential risks of the taken actions. In King's situation the risk was essentially higher, and the outcome uncertain. In the end the students were not expelled, but hundreds of them spent a few uncomfortable nights in jail. King was aware of all the dangers, and the risk he took was quite high, but on the other hand he had to use what he had, and in all sincerity African Americans at that time had few means to make a change.

In Walter's case, it is hard to gauge the risk. He used the plant Lily of the Valley which is freely available and not exceptionally dangerous. However, the boy had to be taken to hospital where he spent a few days. Certainly, Walter had no intention to severely hurt the child and since the exact way he did it remains unknown, the circumstances remain uncertain.

The parallel is apparent, yet background circumstances diverge widely. King was an extraordinary person who did use children after profound contemplation. The possible risks were high, but King realized something had to be done, otherwise it might have taken

¹³ Malcolm Gladwell, *David and Goliath* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2013), 167-186.

much longer before something would turn the tide. It is impossible to predict what would have happened if he had chosen other way, and taken into consideration all the circumstance King's decisions are justifiable. Meanwhile, Walter could have come up with a different way to win over Jesse's favor. The boy was not necessary in his plans, and could be left out. Nevertheless, he decided to use an innocent child. Children should not be used by adults in their affairs, unless there is a serious reason, which in Walter's case is missing.

4.8 Prison Slaughter

In the first half of the last season, Walter gives a command to murder ten inmates who are on the point of revealing information behind Gus's drug empire, and jeopardizing Walter's freedom. Walter acts swiftly and hires a gang of thugs to carry out this task. This is another vicious moment in Walter's life, but from the previous acts this one is diametrically different, and entirely depicts Walter's dark side.

Walter is aware that if he does not silence all ten guys, at least one of them will start to talk to the DEA, and once he does, the others will talk too, since they are to face a long time in prison if they do not participate in the investigation. The consequence of this would lead to Walter's arrest, and therefore he decides to kill them all. However, this time he does not have the slightest doubt about the rightness of the act, and shows no compassion towards the victims. He knows what needs to be done and does not hesitate. At this point in the series there is undoubtedly nothing left from the mild-mannered Walter who was intimidated by his boss and scared of life. For Walter, those ten prisoners represent nothing more than pawns in his game. His decision is cold-blooded and seemingly without remorse.

There is little to justify. This action is miles away from heroism. It is true that Walter had no other choice if he wanted to avoid being caught, but this time Walter crosses the line way too apparently, becomes less sympathetic in the eyes of the audience, and further removed from reality. He chooses his own well-being over the well-being of the ten men implicated in Gus's drug empire.

5 RELATIONSHIPS

Analyzing the relationship between Walter and almost anybody else from the series is a tricky task, since many characters go through a great deal of change, and especially in Walter's case the analysis of his behavior might lead to many conclusions. He is inconsistent and at the end in many ways indistinguishable from the Walter who was not a part of the methamphetamine business. It is most likely that Walter developed two personalities, and it is not always clear which one is acting in the foreground. The first personality shows the old Walter that has gained courage and belief in his actions, but stays moral, human, selfless and righteously assertive. The other personality for which the nickname Heisenberg is most suitable is more self-centered, vicious, and for his own success is willing to sacrifice people. Yet, at the end of the series either personality contains elements of selfishness and psychopathy, and both are burdened by human weaknesses and shortcomings.

5.1 Jesse Pinkman

Walter and Jesse are the two main characters of the series, and the relationship between them is complex. At the beginning, Walter is the sympathetic and human protagonist, generally liked by the audience, who is just down on his luck and seeks a way to help his family, and his decision to step into an illegal business evokes little dissonance. Meanwhile, Jesse is more similar to the opposite description – a less human drug addict, far away from being well-ordered and with poor future prospects, arousing little sympathy from the audience (originally Jesse was not supposed to appear in the second season). At first, Walter's behavior towards Jesse is clearly businesslike. Walter does not know anybody else who would help him to enter the methamphetamine business, and since Jesse is reluctant, Walter must compel Jesse to partner up. Nonetheless, as time passes by, it is not all about drug business, and they seem to build a friendship. However, they appear to be amicable towards each other only in calmer and flourishing times, for when something unexpected and distressing happens their behavior rapidly changes and they get apprehensive, which is mostly understandable since the situations they are put through are immensely stressful. Therefore, on occasions it is hard to determine whether they are only partners who need each other in order to continue in methamphetamine business, or they actually care for each other.

Walter initially sees Jesse as an incompetent bum who lacks motivation to make his life better, and since he does not think that he will be cooking methamphetamine a long time, Walter wants to have little interaction with Jesse, and also he does not want to have any interaction with the world of organized crime. Nevertheless, this conception crumbles almost as soon as he begins to cook, and with Jesse he is forced to stand side by side against all the unpleasant moments that are to come. Many times they helped one another, and even saved each other's lives. This created between them a strong bond of loyalty, and even when their partnership is broken, they are still able to stand on the side of the other one. For instance, when Gus no longer needs Walter for cooking, as Jesse is able to run the laboratory on his own, and contemplates killing Walter, Jesse speaks up for Walter:

Jesse: Let Mr. White go. Pay him off or fire him. Don't kill him.

Gus: You know that won't work.

Jesse: Then you've got a problem.¹⁴

Walter was the same way protecting Jesse's life just a few episodes earlier when Jesse's irresponsible behavior represented a serious problem for Gus, and he wanted to get rid of Jesse.

On the whole, there are times when Walter cares much about Jesse, but there is more evidence to the opposite. Many times Walter manipulates Jesse into something he thinks is good for Jesse, despite the fact Jesse does not feel like it. For instance, in the second series Walter persuades Jesse to aggressively resolve a problem with a drug addict who stole a part of their product. Jesse does not want to resort to violence, but in the end he does and the drug addict accidentally dies, not directly due to Jesse, but he started the course of actions. From the beginning Walter looks as if he wants to have control over Jesse, and in many moments he does. Walter often acts as if he believed his actions are the best ones leading to better outcomes, yet, needless to say, frequently the opposite is true.

There is not much information about Jesse's life before he teamed up with Walter, but by all accounts he had been already in high school involved in the methamphetamine business, and later on his parents disowned him. Yet, since Walter crossed his path, his life is in even bigger turmoil. He is many times struck by misfortune, people around him die, and he constantly drifts between times of relative tranquility and times when he is feeling numb, using drugs and not knowing what to do with his life.

¹⁴ Breaking Bad, "Crawl Space," 411, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 5, 2012.

In the middle of the third season, Jesse and Walter fall apart, and Jesse wants to cook on his own, which endangers Walter's future. Walter tries to lure Jesse back on his side, and offers him a place as his assistant in Gus's laboratory. Jesse at first declines, which Walter does not accept:

Walter: Let me understand this. You're turning down one and a half million dollars...

Jesse: I am not turning down the money. I am turning down you. You get it? I want nothing to do with you. Ever since I met you, everything I've ever cared about is gone. Ruined, turned to shit, dead, ever since I hooked up with the great Heisenberg. I have never been more alone. I have nothing! No one! All right? It's all gone! ... What do you even care, as long as you get what you want?¹⁵

Yet afterward, Jesse changes his mind, and Walter once more gets what he wants. Every now and then a similar situation occurs, and in most of the cases Walter persuades Jesse to follow his ideas.

Unlike Walter, Jesse feels responsibility for the unfortunate things which happened and tries to ponder over the consequences of their actions. He does not rationalize these actions so that they look as necessary or inevitable, and often, even though it is not his fault, blames himself. Jesse does not believe that one can be in such a type of business and avoid accidents, and when in the last season he wants to definitely depart from the methamphetamine business, Walter does not approve of it, and looks for a way to make Jesse stay. Walter tells Jesse that the thing they do – cooking methamphetamine of the best quality – is a very rare thing, and one does not toss something like this away and squander his potential. Further, Walter slanders Jesse's lifestyle, saying, “Look at you. What have you got in your life? Nothing. Nobody. Oh, wait. Yes, video games and go-carts. And when you get tired of that, what then? And how soon will you start using again?”¹⁶ Walter maliciously emphasizes Jesse's dark side, and contends Jesse will have nothing to live for if he does not continue working with him in his methamphetamine empire. Yet, Jesse is dismayed from all those unanticipated accidents and determined to quit. Walter once again claims that no one else is going to die or get hurt, as now he is finally in control, but Walter has said this line so many times that Jesse no longer has confidence in him, and eventually stops living in this delusional myth created by Walter.

Jesse might be a drug addict, but he is able to see the truth much clearer than Walter. Walter lives in deception. He believes that he can control the uncontrollable and is blind to his own flaws and faults. On the contrary, Jesse realizes the true essence of the

¹⁵ Breaking Bad, “One Minute,” 307, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 7, 2011.

taken actions, and tells Walter “You either run from things or you face them, Mr. White. It's all about accepting, who you really are, and I accept who I am ... I'm the bad guy.”¹⁷

It might not first appear so, but Jesse is, deep within, fragile and still good. He is 26 years old, but Walter still sees him as his student who needs to be pontificated to and protected. But since Walter's depiction of the world is crooked, it does not have a tendency to turn out well. Jesse's deeds make him a bad guy. He knows it and acknowledges it, but in the end his naivety and belief in goodness make him a better man than Walter.

Walter's presence in Jesse's life greatly changed the quality of his life. It is true that Jesse already was in the methamphetamine business and his future did not look bright, as there was a high probability he would sooner or later hit rock bottom and end up in prison. Yet, the circumstances which came into his life after he partnered up with Walter are probably harsher than prison. It is not possible to place all the blame on Walter, but it was Walter who mostly decided future steps. Walter brought to Jesse's life success in the methamphetamine business, but the bad things along the journey outweigh the good ones. In the end, Jesse is left moneyless with two of his beloved ones dead, for which he undoubtedly blames himself, and on top of that he is left with the past which he can hardly bear.

5.2 Skyler White

At the beginning of the series, Walter and Skyler are living relatively happily. True, they have financial problems, but this does not diminish their love for each other. Nor does Walter's cancer diagnosis. Skyler stands by Walter's side and wants to provide Walter with expensive treatment even though she knows it will burden the family with a great debt. Yet, Walter's strange behavior confuses her, and she comes to suspect Walter of having an affair, leading her to desire a divorce. She has no idea that Walter produces methamphetamine, and she does not realize that Walter's behavior is peculiar due to the fact that he is earning money for his family, and for that reason she is not at this point to be blamed. However, when Walter reveals he is a methamphetamine manufacturer, Skyler loses a lot of sympathy in the eyes of the audience, since she is unable to accept and bear the truth, and gives Walter a choice – either he grants the divorce and stays away from the

¹⁶ Breaking Bad, “Say My Name,” 507, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 4, 2013.

¹⁷ Breaking Bad, “No Mas,” 301, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 7, 2011.

children or she will turn Walter in to the police. Skyler does not approve of this way of earning money, as she does not believe it is a righteous and honest way, but on the other hand she does not take into consideration the unlucky fate of Walter – he never smoked, but has lung cancer. In the eyes of many viewers this completely justifies his actions in the beginning of the series, and Skyler's surprising course of action leads some viewers to feel spite towards her. On top of that, this sequence of actions takes place at the moment when Walter stopped cooking methamphetamine, and refused Gus's offer of \$3 million for three months of work. This results in the situation where Walter has more money than he hoped he would have, but does not have his family. It is a paradox, since Walter entered the drug business to get money for his family, and once he obtains enough money he loses his family.

With money but no family, Walter partly loses the meaning of his life. Thanks to the cure and surgery which he could afford only with the drug money, his cancer is in remission, and he has got more time which he would like to spend with his family, but cannot.¹⁸ Furthermore, Gus is trying his best to lure Walter back to cooking methamphetamine. Walter does not want to, but Gus is a skillful manipulator and gives reasons which in the end persuade Walter to return to methamphetamine production.

Walter: I have made a series of very bad decisions and I cannot make another one.

Gus: Why did you make these decisions?

Walter: For the good of my family.

Gus: Then they weren't bad decisions. What does a man do, Walter? A man provides for his family.

Walter: This cost me my family. (refers to methamphetamine)

Gus: When you have children you always have family. They will always be your priority, your responsibility. And a man, a man provides. And he does it even when he's not appreciated, or respected, or even loved. He simply bears up, and he does it, because he's a man.¹⁹

Walter steps into the drug business once again, and does not let Skyler blackmail him.

He is aware of the fact that she has no choice and cannot divulge his drug activities, since if she does, it will destroy the family and the dissonance which Walter Jr. feels to her at this point of the series will only increase. Skyler accepts the fact, but resorts to revolt in form of

¹⁸ Pablo Echart and Alberto N. García, "Crime and Punishment: Greed, Pride, and Guilt in 'Breaking Bad'" (paper presented at the conference Apocalypse: Imagining the End, Oxford, England, July, 2013), accessed April 11, 2015,

www.academia.edu/3601041/Crime_and_Punishment_Greed_Pride_and_Guilt_in_Breaking_Bad_draft.

¹⁹ Breaking Bad, "Mas," 305, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 7, 2011.

an affair with her boss, which Walter bears with difficulties. However, later on Skyler returns to Walter, and as a professional bookkeeper is willing to manage his drug money. At this point Skyler seems to acknowledge that her family deserves the money. She no longer thinks that the money is dirty, as she formerly did, and painstakingly searches for a way to launder it. With money and Walter's cancer in remission, the whole family lives seemingly peacefully again. But Walter's presence in an illegal activity still endangers the family, and Skyler lives in a permanent feeling of danger, claiming “someone has to protect this family from the man who protects this family.”²⁰

Furthermore, after the successful plotting of Gus's demise, Walter's behavior deteriorates, and he becomes estranged not only from Skyler but also from reality in general. Skyler psychologically collapses as she cannot go on living in indefinite danger, and decides to leave the children with Hank and Marie (Hank's wife), which Walter strongly dismisses, arguing that it has never been more safe in their house. Skyler does not agree and contends - “I will count every minute that the kids are away from here, away from you, as a victory.”²¹ Skyler also feels guilty for some of the past actions, since she is not like Walter and cannot see certain things as a coincidence. Walter tries to convince her by telling her:

“Skyler, you can't beat yourself up over this thing. You didn't set out to hurt anybody. You made a mistake, and things got out of control, but you did what you had to do to protect your family. That doesn't make you a bad person, it makes you a human being.”²²

Walter is used to justifying and rationalizing everything he does. Throughout the series, there were almost no moments when he would regret doing something. He is accustomed to molding reality into his perception which fits in with his goals. Skyler does not have this habit, and therefore cannot see certain things as clearly as Walter does. Skyler decides to bear the consequences of her decisions, but she is not going to endanger the children:

Skyler: I'm in it now. I'm compromised. But I will not have my children living in a house where dealing drugs and hurting people and killing people is shrugged off as “shit happens”. We're back at it? Fine. But the kids stay away, and that's that.”²³

This leaves Skyler in a completely hopeless situation:

²⁰ Breaking Bad, “Cornered,” 406, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 5, 2012.

²¹ Breaking Bad, “Fifty-One,” 504, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 4, 2013.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

Skyler: I don't know what to do. I'm a coward. I can't go to the police. I can't stop laundering your money. I can't keep you out of the house. I can't even keep you out of my bed. All I can do is wait. Hold on, bide my time, and wait. For the cancer to come back.²⁴

However, as months pass by, and Walter brings more and more money, she gets calmer, and by the end when Walter definitely leaves the drug business, she is psychologically well, and the family is ready to live together once again. Seemingly, Skyler seems to accept illegal activities, but she requires a certain amount of time to comprehend and acknowledge them.

A big reversal in Skyler's behavior comes when Hank learns who Walter really is. Walter knows Skyler talked to Hank and thinks she made a deal with him. Therefore, Walter is ready to give himself up, but he demands that Skyler will keep all the money and pass it on to their children, so that all his work was not done for nothing. Yet, Skyler made no deal with Hank, and stands firmly on Walter's side until the moment Hank dies. Skyler does not believe that Hank prefers the well-being of the family before the satisfaction of his own ego and concerns. She is of the opinion that Hank needs her only to prove Walter guilty so that he can press charges against Walter.

The next apparent change in Skyler's behavior comes when Walter has an argument with Jesse who tried to set their house on fire. Walter wants to resolve it in a mild way, but Skyler suggests killing Jesse, saying, "After everything we've done, we've come this far ... What's one more?"²⁵ It is apparent that Skyler agrees to do things that were previously completely out of the question, and declares it in a way which is at this point of the series more characteristic of Walter, who yet does not agree Jesse ought to be killed. Skyler does not have a warm relationship with Jesse, but this certainly comes as a surprise, since to this point Skyler has been rather restricted to more peaceful means.

Ultimately, when Hank dies and Walter is forced to leave the city, Skyler is interrogated by the DEA as a possible accomplice, and most of her property including the house is confiscated. Later on when she meets Walter for the last time, she looks thinner, and like a nervous wreck. She seems to be emotionally numb, and on the whole restrained towards Walter. Walter wants to give a proper goodbye, and when he is on the point of saying his countless-times-uttered justification about the reasons why he did it Skyler stops

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Breaking Bad, "Rabid Dog," 512, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 4, 2013.

him, saying, “If I have to hear one more time that you did this for the family...” Walter confesses, “I did it for me. I liked it. I was good at it, and I was alive.”²⁶

Skyler's character went through a great deal of change. She was exposed to a gruesomely stressful environment, and it had an effect on her behavior, actions and at the end also on her mental health. Skyler was used to being the one who is in control of the White family, and when Walter got confident and she was no longer in control, she did not acknowledge it easily. Yet, Skyler was pragmatic, and keeping the family together was of the utmost importance. In the end, however, Walter's actions leave her a fragment of the powerful and charming person she once was. Skyler is one of many characters in the series who paid a high price for consequences of Walter's actions. Walter's strategy to tackle cancer left Skyler in a harsh situation. If he had never entered the methamphetamine business, Skyler and the family would be probably left better off.

5.3 Walter “Flynn” White, Jr.

Walter's relationship with his seventeen-year-old son, Walter Jr., who likes to be called Flynn, also goes through a change. At the beginning, Flynn seems to look up more to Hank than to Walter, which naturally makes Walter feel lousy. Yet, when Walter gains confidence and self-esteem, their relationship improves. An important question is Flynn's attitude towards the fact that Walter is a methamphetamine cook. He learns this at the very end along with the DEA, but the circumstances around it do not allow him to formulate a dispassionate opinion, therefore it is hard to estimate. However, his behavior makes moral principles apparent, which give way to making an argument.

Flynn is told that illegal gambling is behind the sudden wealth, and he does not seem to mind the way Walter allegedly obtained the money. He says Walter deserves it and should enjoy it. Therefore, one can assume that if he had known the actual reality he would not have minded either. However, the reality appears to be different, for once he is told by Skyler and Marie he is at first crushed and refuses believe it, but then he tells Skyler - “If all this is true and you knew about it, then you're as bad as him,” which suggests that he distinguishes various illegal activities.²⁷ Obtaining money from illegal gambling is seemingly acceptable, but money from the drug business is not. Despite the fact that Flynn

²⁶ Breaking Bad, “Felina,” 516, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 4, 2013.

²⁷ Breaking Bad, “Ozymandias,” 514, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 4, 2013.

is still a teenager, he appears to be one of the most moral characters in the series. He has certain moral principles, and clearly distinguishes good and bad. His behavior is consistent throughout the series, and his character does not undergo a substantial change. Flynn is partly disabled, and his life has been always different and full of day-to-day struggles. Life has taught him that his body will never be perfect, and he looks as though he accepts it.

In the end, Walter's relationship with Flynn comes to the worst possible end. Flynn believes Walter killed his uncle Hank, and in a telephone conversation where Walter wants to send him money he finishes with saying "I don't want anything from you! Will you just leave us alone? Why are you still alive? Why don't you die already?"²⁸ From all the characters in the series, Flynn seems to have the worst end. His uncle who was a great inspiration to him is dead, supposedly, killed by his father, who is a nationwide wanted criminal. His mother is left devastated, and for now without money. In spite of everything Walter has done for his family, Flynn detests him, and has every right to do so.²⁹

5.4 Hank Schrader

Walter's brother-in-law Hank makes a point of catching the methamphetamine kingpin he knows only under the name of Heisenberg, and once he surmises that the murdered chemist Gale Boetticher was his Heisenberg he is done with the case. However, Walter at a family dinner nervously drinks wine, and when Hank praises Gale and calls him a genius who if he had applied himself to something legal could have helped humanity, Walter cannot hold his tongue and reacts:

"Genius? Not so much. I mean, there was no reasoning, no deductions in those pages. So to my eye, all his brilliance looks like nothing more than just simple rote copying. Probably of someone else's work. Believe me, I have been around enough students to know. This genius of yours maybe he's still out there."³⁰

Here Walter's inconsistent behavior once again changes the course of the series. Hank who deemed the case closed, looks for more information, accepts that Gale was not his Heisenberg, and proceeds with searching. At this point Walter committed another act which made his life troublesome. He could not accept that somebody else is considered a genius, a five star methamphetamine chef, and given all the credit for his work. Walter is

²⁸ Breaking Bad, "Granite State," 515, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 4, 2013.

²⁹ "Why Flynn is the real hero of *Breaking Bad*," Salon.com, accessed April 11, 2015, www.salon.com/2013/09/29/why_flynn_is_the_real_hero_of_breaking_bad.

³⁰ Breaking Bad, "Shotgun," 405, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 5, 2012.

proud of his achievements, and sees himself as an essential key in the Southwest methamphetamine business. This is certainly true, since the methamphetamine he produces is of second to none quality and possibly the best ever produced. At the dinner, Walter is irritated, as he has to lie about the way he obtained the money and on top of that feel guilty, and listen to lies. This is a sign of an inner struggle which Walter every now and then needs to resolve. It seems a part of Walter's wishes to be caught, as then he would reap all the credit for his achievements. Moreover, Skyler seems to race to the same conclusion, yet her reasons differ - "Walt, I think you're scared. I think last night was a cry for help. I think some part of you wants Hank to catch you."³¹

Another important moment comes when Hank learns Walter is his Heisenberg. Hank is shattered but convinced to bring Walter to justice, and when the two meet alone there is no place for hiding anything:

Hank: I swear to Christ, I will put you under the jail.

Walter: Just take a breath, okay? Just listen to yourself. These wild accusations, they could destroy our family. And for what?

Hank: Damn, like you give a shit about family!

Walter: Hank, my cancer is back.

Hank: Good. Rot, you son of a bitch.

Walter: I'm sorry you feel that way. I wanna beat this thing. I do. I'm back on chemo, and I am fighting like hell. But the truth is in six months, you won't have someone to prosecute. But even if somehow you were able to convince anyone I was capable of doing these things, you and I both know, I would never see the inside of a jail cell. I'm a dying man who runs a car wash. My right hand to God, that is all that I am. What's the point?³²

At this point Hank has two choices. Either he will let Walter live his last months at large or he will bring Walter with no mercy to justice. The first choice consists of breaking the law which seems in Hank's case as something he would never do, no matter who is involved. Walter has his last months of life ahead, and it is sure that he would not live by the end of the investigation, therefore he would not pay for his crimes. Yet, Hank does not even contemplate letting Walter go. He strongly believes in the law, which makes him in a way blind, as he is unable to look at the situation through the Walter's eyes. At this time Walter is out of any illegal activities, therefore there is a possibility to wipe the slate clean and have a new beginning. Hank is the only DEA agent who knows about Walter's past,

³¹ Breaking Bad, "Cornered," 406, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 5, 2012.

³² Breaking Bad, "Blood Money," 509, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 4, 2013.

and if he keeps the secret a few more months, this secret will die with Walter and not ever come back.

Another aspect of the first choice is the havoc it will cause to the whole family. First of all, it will crush Walter Junior, whose life has been already harmed many times. Further, all the property of the Whites will be confiscated, and lastly Hank and Mary will tear the family ties and lose their best friends. These are the reasons why Hank ought to consider the consequences of his actions.

Yet, in the end, Hank goes with the latter choice, abides by the law, follows his duties as a DEA agent, and gives the series a new dimension. He prefers his work values over the family, and is on the way to prove Walter guilty, which eventually seals his fate, and brings his life to an end. He is engulfed in a fever of anger and spite, and blind to all the consequence that it is going to bring.

Moreover, shortly afterward Hank finds out another startling fact. In the third season, Hank was seriously injured by the Mexican drug cartel, and he might not have ever walked again. His insurance did not cover the best treatment, so Skyler offered Marie to pay the bills, claiming Walter got money from illegal gambling. Marie accepted it, but did not tell Hank, and got him the best and most costly treatment, to the tune of \$177,000. When Hank learns about this, he does not deem this fact as something which would stop him prosecuting Walter, and only blames Marie for not telling him. He does not realize that his case is a small parallel to Walter's case. Hank is a state employee with average insurance who on account of his job got severely injured, and the state despite all his merits did not offer him the best medical treatment. Hank would probably never walk properly again if the Whites had not paid the bills with their drug money, which is an irony as Hank devoted his life to fighting drug trafficking. Hank feels no gratitude and continues his search for evidence to prove Walter guilty.

On the other side, Walter never wanted to do Hank any harm, which cannot be said the other way around. For Walter the family is everything, and despite the fact that he has murdered in the past, killing Hank is completely out of the question. Hank is trying to find evidence to prove Walter guilty, and with help from Jesse sets a trap in the desert. Walter takes the bait, accepts that Hank wins, and the game is over. Yet, despite Walter's order to not come, the gang of thugs he hired to kill Jesse arrives and against Walter's will cold-bloodedly kills Hank.

Walter is devastated by Hank's death, and even though Hank was against him, he wants to retaliate for his death and eliminate the whole gang of thugs that murdered Hank. Hank's death cannot be directly related to Walter. Certainly he played a part in it, but he pleaded for Hank's life, and was not the one who pulled the trigger. Walter has at times a tendency to think he can control all the loose ends. Therefore he blames himself for Hank's death, and since he wants to leave this world with a clean slate, the last thing he does before dying is killing the gang that murdered Hank.

Hank died with no regrets, and no doubt about his actions. Hank's relationship with Walter underwent a significant development. At the beginning, Hank appeared to be a common boastful policeman with little respect for Walter. However, as the series progressed he developed into a more complex, savvy and profound character that could be perceived as the ultimate hero of the series, since he opted for his work duties, and adamantly persevered until the end.

6 WALTER WHITE: AN AMERICAN HERO?

This chapter is to give reasons not only why Walter might be seen as a hero, but also reasons claiming the opposite. In the previous chapters were analyzed crucial deeds of Walter, and his relationships with others. Further, the idea of the American dream will be brought back, and applied to Walter's life to ascertain whether he achieved and lived it.

6.1.1 Provided for Family

In the end, Walter manages to pass on a part of his drug money to his family. In the last episode he forces the Elliott's to accept all the remaining money (\$9.72 million), and makes sure they will give it to Walter Jr., with the hope that he will use it for his college education and the betterment of the family. Earning money to provide for his family was Walter's initial goal. At the beginning of the series, the goal was only \$737,000. Thus, in the end he manages to leave the family a much bigger amount. Walter has this goal in sight until the end, even when he is on the run from the police: "God, you think I want to run?! This is the last thing that I want. This [being wanted by the police] changes nothing. What I do, I do for my family. My money goes to my children. And then, and only then am I through."³³

Walter was courageous enough to enter the methamphetamine business and take advantage of it, but he did not create it. If he had not enriched himself in this illegal way, someone else would have, and many different bad things would still happen, just without Walter's contribution. Walter set his sight on getting money for his family, and in the end he did so.

6.1.2 Self-confidence

Another reason why Walter can be perceived as a hero is his change from a mild-mannered, timid man who is humiliated by his boss into a strong, self-confident man who is audacious enough to take care of his life in an unpleasant time.³⁴ There are a few moments when Walter expresses this change of his life in words:

"I have spent my whole life scared. Frightened of things that could happen, might happen, might not happen. Fifty years I spent like that. Finding myself awake at 3 in the morning. But ever since my diagnosis. I sleep just fine. And I came to realize it's

³³ Breaking Bad, "Granite State," 515, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 4, 2013.

³⁴ Ensley F. Guffey and Dale K. Koontz, *Wanna Cook?: The Complete, Unofficial Companion to Breaking Bad* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2014), 376.

that fear that's the worst of it. That's the real enemy. So get up. Get out in the real world, and kick that bastard as hard as you can right in the teeth."³⁵ Walter says these words to Hank, who at that time is afraid to get back to the real world as he suffers from psychological problems, which were caused by horrors that as a DEA agent he witnessed. Similarly Walter talks to a patient in the hospital. The patient explains how cancer made him change all his plans, give up control, and come to terms with life as “a man plans, and God laughs”. Yet, Walter sees his cancer differently:

Walter: Never give up control. Live life on your own terms.

Patient: Yeah. I get what you're saying. But, cancer is cancer so...

Walter: To hell with your cancer. I've been living with cancer for the better part of a year. Right from the start, it's a death sentence. It's what they keep telling me. Well, guess what. Every life comes with a death sentence. So every few months, I come in here for my regular scan, knowing full well that one of these times, hell, maybe even today I'm gonna hear some bad news. But until then, who's in charge? Me! That's how I live my life!³⁶

Apparently cancer did not bring only unfavorable aspects into Walter's life. Walter spent fifty years living a life which was not satisfying, and once he is diagnosed with cancer his life takes a new turn which in many ways enriches his remaining years. This only confirms the saying that there are two sides to every coin.

6.1.3 Disruption of the Drug Empire

Despite the fact that Walter was self-motivated, he managed to destroy a huge drug empire, which would probably continue running for the foreseeable future. It was not Walter's aim, it was an indirect side effect of his narcissistic behavior, but notwithstanding, his actions inflicted enormous damage to drug trafficking in the Southwest. Moreover, once Walter dies, there is no one to take over the role of a major methamphetamine distributor. Hence, in the end he also substantially helped to diminish drug trafficking.

6.1.4 Lack of Morality

Heroes are supposed to be morally good, yet Walter for a great part of the series is not. Many of his actions lack morality, and he is way too often blind to the consequences that his actions bring. A few such situations were analyzed in the previous chapters. Poisoning a child, or ordering the assassination of ten men, are in no way signs of a morally-strong

³⁵ Breaking Bad, “Better Call Saul,” 208, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, March 16, 2010.

³⁶ Breaking Bad, “Hermanos,” 408, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 5, 2012.

man motivated by right principles. Further, heroes ought to accept things as they are, and not rationalize and justify their wrong actions.

6.1.5 Lust and Greed

There are many times when Walter achieves what he wants and can leave the methamphetamine business, but he is unable to realize that it is a high time to stop, leave it all behind, and return to his normal life. It becomes clear only in the last season that Walter wants to be a part of the business. It is no longer about getting money, but about doing what he is best at, notwithstanding what it brings or might bring to the people around him. Mike articulates this with fair accuracy:

“We had a good thing, we had Gus. We had a lab. We had everything we needed, and it all ran like clockwork. You could've shut your mouth, cooked, and made as much money as you ever needed. It was perfect. But, no, you just had to blow it up. You and your pride and your ego! You just had to be the man. If you'd done your job, known your place, we'd all be fine right now!”³⁷

This is Walter's true nature, but he does not acknowledge it until the very end. Moreover, since he got rid of Gus, he tends to think he has taken Gus's place in the methamphetamine business, which is far from reality, and Mike only confirms it, saying, “just because you shot Jesse James, don't make you Jesse James.”³⁸ Walter found something he is best at, but his greediness estranges him from the people close to him, and his own interests are preferred over interests of others.

6.1.6 Aftermath

Too many people on Walter's journey have to pay a high price for his actions. Many people directly or indirectly die on account of Walter, and even more people are left to deal with the consequences. This is most visible on his own family. At the end of the series, Skyler's life seems to be in ruins, Flynn loathes his own father, and Marie is a childless widow. It is a bitter truth that if Walter had not ever entered the methamphetamine business, his family would be in all likelihood better off, although likely in great debt, as Skyler would insisted upon Walter undertaking the treatment.

³⁷ Breaking Bad, “Say My Name,” 507, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 4, 2013.

³⁸ Breaking Bad, “Hazard Pay,” 503, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, June 4, 2013.

6.2 Walter White's Hero Journey

There were moments which proved that Walter is a hero in a number of aspects of his life, but on the other hand, there were also moments which make him appear anti-heroic. Walter obtained money for his family, which was his initial objective, became confident to live his life the way he wanted, which helped him to fulfill his human potential. On the contrary, immorality, greed, thrill-seeking, and a lust for power combined to undermine his good intentions, and reduced him to the status of a common criminal whose actions afflicted too many people. The decay of Walter's life was not sudden, but eventually clearly visible.

Seen through Joseph Campbell's conception, Walter completed the circle and achieved something extraordinary, yet he cannot be fully deemed a hero since on his hero's journey he committed deeds which are not characteristic for heroes. Initially he dedicated his life to his family, and he risked everything to accomplish the goal, but somewhere half-way through the journey Walter's priorities changed, he strayed from the path, and his objectives were no longer heroic.

Firstly, Walter was shown in his ordinary world, it was a bleak world that was not much worth living in. The call to adventure was delivered by cancer. Walter was not reluctant to leave the safety of his environment, and intentionally undertook the journey. Once Walter strangled Krazy-8, he was disinclined to continue, but the bridges had been burnt and there was no way back. Further, Walter was put through various tests and obstacles which showed his true nature, and only then Walter finally accomplished his goal and was rewarded. Nonetheless it was not the end as Walter did not return. Driven by greed he kept cooking, and returned later when he was no longer a proper hero.

6.3 Walter White's American Dream

Walter worked diligently, persevered in the effort following his goals, and eventually achieved the American dream. He attained high expertise in his field, earned a great deal of money, and gained respect. Irrespective of all the bad things which happened along the journey, he achieved what he had set his mind on, and became a legend in his field.

True, Walter's field of expertise is beyond the law, but it does not prevent one from achieving success and also being seen as a hero. Throughout American history there are examples of people who achieved their success in illegal businesses and were far from being well-ordered citizens, yet they achieved their American dream. To give an example,

Al Capone was a murderer and villain, nonetheless he is by some people considered a hero who achieved the American dream. Another example is Jesse James, an American outlaw and robber who has become a legend of the Wild West.

Walter did not yield to his unpleasant fate, and fulfilled his human potential, one thing which all humans ought to strive to achieve. He did not accept his conditions as unchangeable, and set forth into the dangerous world of methamphetamine production to guarantee his family a brighter future. His family would not have blamed him, if he had decided to undergo the treatment, put the family in a debt, and died. Walter White achieved the American dream, but it is a dream which lies outside the ordinary borders.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to ascertain whether Walter White was a hero who achieved the American dream in spite of the fact that he was willingly a part of illegal business. Walter's deeds have been analyzed, and his behavior towards others has been examined. Ultimately, reasons given in this thesis lead to the conclusion that Walter White was a flawed hero.

Walter lived the majority of his life in a bleak, unimpressive way, and cancer was to bring his life to an unenviable end, yet Walter found strength to completely alter his life, and live on his own terms, achieving satisfaction. Walter committed considerable deeds of a hero, and was an extraordinary man whose deeds were beyond the normal range of achievement. However, along the way his self-centered actions made him a hero with blood on his hands, and consequently it was a catastrophic downward spiral which harmed most of the people around him. Moreover, Walter stepped into the methamphetamine business with certain plans and ideas, which proven to be fallacious almost immediately, and until the very end he was unable to fathom and realize one cannot be in control in such an environment.

The quote of Yogi Berra from the beginning precisely relates to Walter's last years of life, and it also captures one characteristic of humans, that they tend to make predictions of future events, not taking in consideration how successful past predictions were. But life consists of so many variables that predicting the future is on many occasions misleading. This was particularly true in Walter's case. The world of drugs is an extremely volatile place, where predictions have an extremely low success rate. Ego-centrism and a lack of proper moral fiber, which would curb his greed and lust, eventually made Walter White a flawed hero who achieved his American Dream at the cost of his immediate family.

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