

## Deconstructing Masculinity in 'Breaking Bad': A Character Study of Walter White and Jesse Pinkman in Season 1

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### Abstract

The characters of Walter White and Jesse Pinkman in the well praised television series "Breaking Bad" delve deeply into the topic of masculinity throughout the complex storyline of the first season. The main episodes of "Crazy Handful of Nothin'" and "A No-Rough-Stuff-Type Deal" are focused on in this study in order to analyze the complex portrayals of masculinity in American society. Walter White and Jesse Pinkman break conventional gender norms, as the research reveals through painstaking text analysis. The idea of masculinity as the giver and protector is challenged by Walter's metamorphosis from a timid high school chemistry teacher to a powerful drug king. His take on the "Heisenberg" character represents a change in morality and power relationships. Jesse's role, on the other hand, emphasizes the complexity of manhood by embodying a continual fight between assertiveness and sensitivity. The characters' complex masculinity is revealed by this analysis, which highlights the complex interactions between society norms, power relationships, and personal decisions. To this is added the symbolic act of Walter shaving his head, which represents a revolt against social mores and expectations. These representations question established gender norms and add to the current conversation about changing gender identities. Inspiring viewers to consider the complex mechanics of gender norms, "Breaking Bad" offers a compelling narrative that highlights the flexible and always changing nature of masculinity in modern American culture.

**Keywords:** Character analysis, gender norms, masculinity, Breaking Bad, and society expectations.

### Introduction

The critically acclaimed television series "Breaking Bad," which was developed by Vince Gilligan, is well-known for its deep examination of moral complexity and captivating characters. The show tells the tale of Walter White and Jesse Pinkman, two people dragged into the grim world of cocaine production, and is set in the heart of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Their respective journeys towards masculinity are central to the story as they explore the criminal underground. Media representations of masculinity have changed substantially in recent years. Because these depictions frequently reflect, influence, and subvert cultural ideas of what it is to be a man, it has become more and more crucial to look at how male characters are portrayed. With its complex and multifaceted characters—especially Walter White and Jesse Pinkman—"Breaking Bad" provides an engrossing setting for this kind of investigation.

With an emphasis on their histories, character development, and interpersonal dynamics, this study attempts to do a thorough character analysis of White and Pinkman. With the use of this research, the researcher hopes to comprehend how "Breaking Bad" examines the complexity of male identity and subverts conventional ideas of masculinity. The researcher intends to shed light on the larger conversation about masculinity in modern media by examining the development of these characters in the context of their criminal activity, familial dynamics, and personal challenges. The researcher will also talk about the way these characters are portrayed in the show affects how it is perceived to understand masculinity.

A captivating story and well-developed characters have kept viewers of the critically acclaimed TV show "Breaking Bad" enthralled for years. Examining masculinity and how social standards affect the two main characters, Walter White and Jesse Pinkman, as they work their way through the criminal underground, is one of the show's core themes. Through a thorough character analysis of the first season of the show, this study explores the nuances of masculinity as portrayed by Walter White and Jesse Pinkman.

Statement of the Problem. Within the television series 'Breaking Bad,' Walter White and Jesse Pinkman represent divergent aspects of masculinity, ranging from the conventional provider to the unconventional anti-hero. With the backdrop of the American society portrayed in the series, their characters offer a singular chance to analyze the changing idea of masculinity.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To analyze the ways in which Jesse Pinkman and Walter White represented masculinity in "Breaking Bad" Season 1.
2. To explore the variables influencing Walter White and Jesse Pinkman's characters' maturation as men throughout "Breaking Bad" Season 1.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do the characters Jesse Pinkman and Walter White from "Breaking Bad" Season 1 represent different aspects of masculinity?
2. What are the main influences that shapes Walter White and Jesse Pinkman's masculinity in "Breaking Bad" Season 1?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is important because it examines how, in the first season of "Breaking Bad," protagonists Walter White and Jesse Pinkman represent various aspects of masculinity. Through an analysis of the intricacies of their representations, the study illuminates the ways in which cultural expectations, individual encounters, and personal decisions impact the formation of masculinity. This analysis advances our knowledge of the characters and the show while also advancing larger conversations about how media portrays and influences ideas of masculinity in modern American culture.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

The final two episodes of "Breaking Bad" first season, "Crazy Handful of Nothin'" (Season 1, Episode 6) and "A No-Rough-Stuff-Type Deal" (Season 1, Episode 7), will be the exclusive subject of this research. By focusing just on these episodes, the analysis will be able to go deeper into the most important and game-changing times in the lives of Walter White and Jesse Pinkman. This will enable a more thorough examination of their different interpretations of masculinity and the forces that have shaped them within the framework of the show. With a focus on specific episodes, this method guarantees a thorough and detailed analysis of how the show's growing masculinity notion has been impacted. This accuracy guarantees a rigorous and thorough analysis of the

thematic aspects within this constrained scope by enabling a more in-depth investigation of the characters' development and responses to the problems they encounter.

### **Literature Review**

The critically acclaimed television series "Breaking Bad" has garnered a lot of accolades for its portrayal of nuanced characters and examination of masculinity dynamics in the context of the American criminal underworld. This study focuses on the final two episodes of the first season, "Crazy Handful of Nothin'" and "A No-Rough-Stuff-Type Deal," in order to acquire a deeper understanding of the two main characters of the show, Walter White and Jesse Pinkman, and their disparate representations of masculinity.

In a study conducted by Peters (2015) examines the language used to create Walter White's masculinity in Breaking Bad, questioning the naive "Mr. Chips to Scarface" metamorphosis story. Using gender performativity and speech act theory, it highlights the significance of language in character development and highlights the complex aspects of Walt's masculinity. This helps to explain how male anti-hero characters are portrayed on television. Similarly, in an article by Ledwon (2017) argues against the frontier idea and its connection to the American Dream and hazardous masculinities through Walter White's cunning business practices. It examines how Breaking Bad depicts retrograde masculinity in the setting of contracts that resemble Western conflict.

Much attention has also been focused on how the media shapes views about what it means to be a man. In "Tough Guise: Violence, Media, and the Crisis in Masculinity" (2000), Klassen explores how popular culture—especially television and movies—often portrays masculinity in ways that promote harmful behavioral patterns and reinforce stereotypes.

All things considered, the literature on masculinity—which has been influenced by academics such as Connell, Katz, and Kimmel—as well as insights from television studies, offer a strong basis for comprehending the nuances of masculinity and how it is portrayed in "Breaking Bad." This study attempts to provide a knowledgeable analysis of the different representations of masculinity in Walter White and Jesse Pinkman throughout the final two episodes of Season 1 and the variables influencing their development

There is a noticeable lack of research on how "Breaking Bad" as a cultural text may either question or uphold established gender standards outside of the context of individual episodes, despite the fact that the body of existing literature offers insightful analyses of the complex reality of masculinity. Research on the complex connections between the complex representations of masculinity in "Breaking Bad" and larger conversations about masculinity in modern American society is also lacking. This is especially true of Walter White and Jesse Pinkman.

Walt behaves as though he definitely deserves authority, going beyond just desiring it. According to Kimmel (2008), the majority of us "have to" work because of our duties to our families and our jobs. "But unlike women, men feel entitled to power even when they feel powerless" (pp. 59-60). Walt believes he should have the chance to take charge despite—or perhaps especially because of—how life has broken him. When he is explaining to Jesse why he wants to continue cooking in a scene from the show's last season, he expresses his desire to create something that he controls. Walt responds, "Jesse, you asked me if I was in the money or drug business. None of them. My business is empire building (V. Gilligan, 5.06). A significant portion of Walt's fears stemming from his fear of failing as a man are connected to this preoccupation with building an "empire."

Further studies in this field might focus on the long-term character development of Jesse Pinkman and Walter White over the whole "Breaking Bad" series, analyzing how their depictions of masculinity change and impact viewers' opinions as the program progresses. The possible real-world ramifications of these representations in terms of evolving societal views about masculinity and its influence on gender norms could also be investigated by this research. A more thorough

grasp of the series' contribution to the current conversation on masculinity in the media and society may be provided by such a study.

The theoretical basis for this study's examination of masculinity in "Breaking Bad" is R.W. Connell's idea of "Hegemonic Masculinity." According to Connell's theory, masculinity is a dynamic and diverse concept impacted by societal norms, power relations, and human action rather than a static, monolithic construct (Connell, 2005).

The characters of Walter White and Jesse Pinkman in "Breaking Bad" perfectly capture the complexity of hegemonic masculinity. The transformation of Walter from a polite chemistry instructor into a vicious drug dealer subverts accepted ideas of masculinity and masculine identity. By disobeying traditional gender roles, his adoption of the "Heisenberg" persona signifies a profound shift in power dynamics.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine the portrayals of masculinity in the last two episodes of Season 1 of "Breaking Bad." Content analysis, theme interpretation, and data collecting were all part of the research design. A thorough analysis of the chosen "Breaking Bad" episodes, "A No-Rough-Stuff-Type Deal" (Season 1, Episode 7) and "Crazy Handful of Nothin'" (Season 1, Episode 6), provided the researcher with the data for this study. The significance of these episodes in the development of Walter White and Jesse Pinkman's arcs led to their selection. Carefully watching these programs and recording pertinent scenes and conversations were necessary for data collecting.

The principal technique employed for analyzing the representations of masculinity was content analysis. The chosen episodes were carefully examined for details that illuminated Walter White and Jesse Pinkman's developing masculinity, such as character interactions, talks, actions, and non-verbal signs. Finding examples of how they defied or adhered to conventional gender standards was the main goal.

After doing a content analysis, the researcher interpreted the masculinity-related themes that were found. During this stage, the data was qualitatively analyzed to find trends and subtleties in the way the show portrayed masculinity. The importance of the characters' individual experiences and cultural context in shaping their masculinity was emphasized. Ethical standards were closely followed in the study process. Since copyrighted resources were used in the study, every precaution was taken to guarantee correct acknowledgment and respect for intellectual property rights.

The study's exclusive emphasis on the final two episodes of Season 1 of "Breaking Bad" should be noted because it restricts the investigation of the characters' long-term growth. Furthermore, even with the greatest of efforts, subjectivity will always be present when interpreting qualitative data because it is an inherent part of the research process. The present study concludes that the research technique employed allowed for a thorough analysis of the many representations of masculinity in 'Breaking Bad' Season 1 and the variables affecting their evolution, as shown in the chosen episodes. A detailed examination of the changing idea of masculinity within the framework of the series was made possible by the qualitative approach.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

Upon analyzing the final two episodes of Season 1 of "Breaking Bad," "Crazy Handful of Nothin'" and "A No-Rough-Stuff-Type Deal," to explore how Walter White and Jesse Pinkman represent masculinity, a number of significant themes and patterns surfaced.

The content study dissected the subtleties of masculinity portrayal in the chosen episodes by closely examining pivotal situations, dialogues, character interactions, and non-verbal cues.

The 'Breaking Bad' content analysis of Episode 6 of Season 1 identifies the following examples of how masculinity is portrayed

**Table1: Breaking Bad Season 1 Episode 6 Masculinity Portrayals Content Analysis**

Scene/Dialogue	Masculinity Portrayal
Walter's Decision to Cook Meth	Walter White's bold decision to enter the drug trade and produce high-quality methamphetamine challenges the conventional male image as the provider and protector. This transformation marks a departure from his initial persona as a mild-mannered high school chemistry teacher, giving rise to a more complex depiction of masculinity.
Jesse's Interactions with Krazy-8	Jesse Pinkman's interactions with Krazy-8 in this episode portray his struggle with contrasting facets of masculinity. He often displays bravado and assertiveness, but his moments of vulnerability and empathy when contemplating the life-and-death decision regarding the captive Krazy-8 reveal a character marked by multifaceted masculinity.

The way that Walter White and Jesse Pinkman's multifaceted masculinity is evolving and challenging traditional masculine roles is highlighted in the content analysis of Episode 6. The thematic analysis of Episode 6 yields the following underlying topics.

**Table 2: Thematic Interpretation of Masculinity in "Breaking Bad" Season 1, Episode 6**

Theme	Description
Challenging Traditional Roles	The evidence demonstrates how Walter White and Jesse Pinkman defy traditional gender stereotypes. The power dynamic changes as a result of Walter's adoption of the "Heisenberg" persona, which challenges conventional ideas of the masculine protector and provider. Because he vacillates between assertiveness and weakness, Jesse's portrayal demonstrates the complexity of masculinity and the nuances of his character.

The intricacy of masculinity and challenging traditional masculine norms are topics that are reiterated by the thematic analysis of Episode 6. The content analysis of "Breaking Bad"'s Episode 7 of Season 1 shows the following instances of masculinity being depicted.

**Table 3: Content Analysis of the Masculinity Portrayals in "Breaking Bad" Season 1, Episode 7**

Scene/Dialogue	Masculinity Portrayal
Walter's "Heisenberg" Persona	In this episode, Walter's "Heisenberg" persona emerges, emphasizing a shift in his masculinity. He becomes into a vicious, powerful character in the drug trade, signifying a break from conventional morality.
Walter's Bald Head Reveal	Walter's choice to shave his head after treatment represents his defiance of social mores and expectations. His baldness casts doubt on the stereotypical ideas of masculinity associated with virility and physical prowess.
Jesse's Reluctance to Kill Krazy-8	Complexity in the representation of masculinity is evident in Jesse's moral quandary and eventual hesitation to kill Krazy-8. The complexity of his emotional qualities, moral depth, and fragility are all highlighted by his inner conflict.
The Heist Planning Conversation	As Walter and Jesse plan their cocaine heist, their conversation highlights the ways in which their masculinity is changing. It captures the complex, multifaceted essence of masculinity through a combination of risk-taking, strategic thinking, and a revolt against traditional social conventions.

The content analysis of Episode 7 shows how Walter White develops into a powerful individual who questions traditional notions of masculinity, and how Jesse Pinkman portrays multifaceted masculinity. The following major themes emerge from the thematic interpretation of Episode 7.

**Table 4: 'Breaking Bad' A Thematic Analysis of Masculinity in Season 1, Episode 7**

Theme	Description
Identity and Rebellion	Walter's decision to shave his head represents a revolt against social norms and goes against the typical male stereotype of masculinity. This action defies conventional roles and is a break from accepted gender norms.
Complexity of Masculinity	A complex representation of masculinity may be found in both characters. Simple notions of masculinity are refuted by Jesse's fragility and Walter's moral decline, which give both characters more depth. Their characters defy one-dimensional depictions because they are so highly detailed.

Thematic interpretation in Episode 7 highlights themes of identity and rebellion in addition to the complexity of masculinity. This research shows how masculinity is portrayed in 'Breaking Bad,' with a focus on the unique elements and character growth in every episode.

The examination of the final two episodes of "Breaking Bad"'s first season, "A No-Rough-Stuff-Type Deal" (Episode 7) and "Crazy Handful of Nothin'" (Episode 6), has shown intricate and nuanced depictions of masculinity in the personas of Walter White and Jesse Pinkman. Within the framework of the series, the study's unique patterns and thematic aspects illuminated how societal influences and individual experiences mold the characters' masculinity.

The choice made by Walter White to go into the drug trade and manufacture high-grade methamphetamine goes against what is typically associated with masculinity. This metamorphosis is a big change from his original character as a polite high school chemistry instructor.

The portrayal of Jesse Pinkman demonstrates a battle with opposing aspects of masculinity. Although he frequently exudes confidence and aggressiveness, his moments of sensitivity and empathy when faced with life-or-death choices reveal a complex and nuanced man.

After receiving chemotherapy, Walter shaved his head, symbolizing a defiance of social conventions and expectations. His baldness casts doubt on the stereotypical ideas of masculinity associated with virility and physical prowess.

A complex representation of masculinity may be found in both characters. Simple notions of masculinity are refuted by Jesse's fragility and Walter's moral decline, which give both characters more depth. Their characters defy one-dimensional depictions because they are so highly detailed. 'Breaking Bad' is a story that explores the changing notion of gender identity in modern American society, as the thematic interpretation of this data highlights the complexities of masculinity and questions traditional gender conventions. The study shows that masculinity is influenced by a variety of internal and external circumstances and is not a monolithic idea.

### Conclusion

In a nutshell a thorough examination of "Crazy Handful of Nothin'" and "A No-Rough-Stuff-Type Deal," the final two episodes of "Breaking Bad" Season 1, has revealed a complex tapestry of masculine depictions in the roles of Jesse Pinkman and Walter White. These episodes, which give nuanced representations of masculinity and question traditional gender conventions, are crucial turning points in the characters' arc. Traditional ideas of masculine roles are challenged by Walter White's transition from a mild-mannered chemistry teacher to a vicious drug lord, and Jesse Pinkman's portrayal captures the complex interaction between aggressiveness and sensitivity. In addition to adding depth to the idea of masculinity, Walter's act of shaving his head represents a

defiance against social standards. The complex ways in which "Breaking Bad" depicts masculinity add a great deal to the current conversation around gender identity by emphasizing how malleable and dynamic this idea is in modern-day America.

This research highlights the fact that masculinity is a dynamic concept that is influenced by societal influences, power dynamics, and personal decisions rather than a one-dimensional, static construct. The television characters Walter White and Jesse Pinkman from "Breaking Bad" serve as prime examples of how people challenge conventional roles and norms while navigating and negotiating their male identities. As a result, the show challenges viewers to consider the complex and dynamic nature of masculinity in a society where gender norms are continuously being redefined, in addition to captivating them with its compelling story.

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