

You are here: [Home](#) -> [17.04, Volume 17](#) -> [Breaking Dad Brad Gyori / Tribeca Flashpoint Media Arts Academy](#)

Breaking Dad *Brad Gyori / Tribeca Flashpoint Media Arts Academy*

Posted by [Brad Gyori Tribeca Flashpoint Media Arts Academy](#) on December 18th, 2012 [17 Comments](#) [Printer-Friendly](#)



***Father Knows Best* – NBC, 1954-1960**

Remember when TV dads were strong, intelligent and wise? Programs such as *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960), *The Donna Reed Show* (1958-1966), *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963), *Bachelor Father* (1957-1962), *Make Room for Daddy/The Danny Thomas Show* (1953-1965) and *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-1968) featured father figures that elicited the admiration, identification and emulation of young male viewers. These squeaky clean, all-knowing patriarchs were whitewashed caricatures of paternal poise. Unfortunately, such uncritical celebrations of fatherhood came at the expense of maternal figures. Early television represented women in a manner that was often condescending, if not openly sexist.

By the 1970s, the rise of the counterculture and second wave feminism challenged patriarchal commonplaces. Within a decade, these social forces had altered the root assumptions of televisual discourse. Today, young men and women are portrayed in a slightly modified way. While young female characters remain sex objects, young males are increasingly objectified as well. A far more striking change is the radical inversion of traditional gender roles regarding older male and female characters. For the last five decades, negative maternal stereotypes have been rejected and positive maternal stereotypes have been championed. Meanwhile, the once flawless patriarch has become TV's buffoon of choice, culminating in the character of Homer Simpson, a simple-minded locus of appetites and self-involvement who makes Falstaff look like Prince Hal in comparison.



Father Knows Nothing: Homer Simpson

For decades, TV dads have been the ultimate “fair game,” targets deserving mockery and willing and able to accept it. This may have helped to level the playing field and create more equality and opportunities for female workers, who have certainly made remarkable strides since the 1970s. Yet along with many powerful socioeconomic forces, popular representations of fictional patriarchs have likely contributed to the current crisis of masculinity with many real world and televisual repercussions.

Enter “Walter White.” Even the name is as bland as boiled celery. So how can this middle-of-the-road, middle class father figure possibly be transformed into a badass super villain? The idea sounded improbable at first, even ludicrous, yet that is exactly the challenge ***Breaking Bad*** creator **Vince Gilligan** set for himself when initially conceptualizing AMC’s critically lauded series. In 2011, Gilligan told the ***New York Times*** that the original goal was to turn “Mr. Chips into Scarface.”



***Breaking Bad*: Pants Optional**

In the show's debut episode, viewers are introduced to a familiar image of the television patriarch: a bumbling doofus, incapable of properly providing for this family, weak, ineffectual, comically inadequate, married to a feisty intelligent, attractive wife, who can be a bit overbearing at times, but hey, someone has to wear the pants! Actor Brian Cranston had played a similar role in the Fox series *Malcolm in the Middle*. By casting him in *Breaking Bad*, Gilligan provided an intertextual-shorthand for viewers, allowing them to instantly recognize this sweet but foolish figure. The portrait is quickly skewed, however, when in the same episode, Walt is diagnosed with cancer and something inside of him snaps. Soon, this underachieving high school chemistry teacher begins manufacturing crystal methamphetamine and his alter ego, "Heisenberg," is born. The name is an allusion to the German physicist, but it is also a nod to his famous "uncertainty principal," a theory about the fickle nature of perception. Werner Heisenberg famously asserted that the closer we observe one aspect of a quantum phenomenon, the less we can know about its other characteristics. In other words, the very act of focusing on a single characteristic prevents us from seeing the whole picture. In a similar sense, the more *Breaking Bad's* narrative pins down Walter White as silly and ineffectual, the more the nature of his reckless outlaw bravado seems to elude us, and yet...from another perspective, it all seems perfectly inevitable.

In 2010, two years after *Breaking Bad's* debut, the **Atlantic** reported that the recent "Great Recession" had cost Americans eight million jobs and that over 3/4ths of the newly unemployed were men. That same year—for the first time in U.S. history—more women were employed than men. The Atlantic additionally projected that the trend was likely to continue because for every two men who receive a B.A. annually, three women do the same. What's more, of the fifteen U.S. job categories projected to grow the most in the next decade, women primarily occupy all but two. The postindustrial economy appears to value traits traditionally associated with women, including social intelligence, open communication, and multi-tasking.

Nonetheless, in some quarters, male privilege is as entrenched as ever. Above the glass ceiling, the immense wealth of the billionaire boys club radically skews income statistics. Male executives continue to horde power and thwart the advancement of female executives. The imbalance is so great that the average woman is told that she makes 30% less than the "average man." Via this number crunching slight of hand, wealthy males share all of the blame but very little cash with the vast majority of working men who inhabit a very different landscape below the glass ceiling.

As familiar gender roles continue to turn upside down, the American patriarch has good reason to identify with his bumbling television counterpart. He too is a failure on many fronts. He fails to support his family with a single income. He fails to increase his wages apace with the skyrocketing cost of living. If he loses his job and becomes "Mr. Mom," he will be stigmatized as less than masculine. And if he is fair-minded enough to care about gender equality, he is expected to call himself a "feminist." Still, he is unlikely to complain about any of this because that would seem "unmanly."

***Breaking Bad* Trailer**

So what is the appropriate response? Retreating to one's "man cave" and accepting the Neanderthal-like male caricatures served up by reruns of *Home Improvement* and *The Man Show*? Lashing back with the reactionary zeal of Rush Limbaugh? Rejecting fatherhood altogether and joining the deadbeat dad epidemic? Clinging to adolescence, like the Peter Panish man-boys cleverly lampooned by the films of Judd Apatow? Or maybe it's better to simply dive into the heart of darkness and accept the role of ultimate evil personified? Given a choice between feckless fool and criminal kingpin, Walter White increasingly opts for the latter.

This is certainly not "your father's father figure." In fact, it is hard to imagine early television viewers identifying with Walter White in any respect. The undisputed head of a single income household would not know what to make of this patriarchal anti-hero's slide into darkest villainy. He would likely view Walt as nothing more than a freakish aberration, a creature whose manhood is easily threatened and whose pride is constantly injured, clearly suffering from terrible self-esteem issues. So why are contemporary male viewers so fascinated by this character?

Breaking Bad's narrative structure centers on two opposing trajectories: Walt's descent into hell and Heisenberg's rise to power. This central paradox is a key ingredient of the show's addictive appeal. Male viewers who've been downsized, marginalized, laid off and underemployed may experience more than moral indignation when watching the show. Consider a key moment from episode six, season four. Walt's criminal life and domestic life are beginning to converge, and his wife, Skyler, fearing the threat of eminent violence, begs him to consider the safety of his family. Walt responds by asking: "Who are you talking to right now? Who is it you think you see?" These are ontological questions, cutting to the very core of his being. They speak to, and perhaps for, a generation of American males searching for some type of renewed social significance. Walter continues, "Do you know how much I make a year? Even if I told you, you wouldn't believe it. Do you know what would happen if I suddenly decided to stop going into work, a business big enough that it could be listed on the NASDAQ goes belly up, disappears. It ceases to exist without me." Walter isn't exaggerating. He actually *has* become a significant economic force, albeit through illicit means. Next comes a staggering revelation that resonates with the shows

central paradox, equal parts shameful confession and prideful boast. “No, you clearly don’t know who you are talking to, so let me clue you in. I am not in danger, Skyler. I *am* the danger.” When Walter White, the disempowered, disrespected high school chemistry teacher, speaks these words, he is, in some respects speaking for a largely male audience eager to reclaim some notion of self-respect by any means necessary.

Breaking Bad’s high ratings, multiple **Emmy** wins and **critical plaudits** indicate that this gangster-patriarch strongly resonates with today’s audience, especially the men (like AMC’s other top series, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad* has a primarily **male demographic**). Thus, long after Walter White has imploded into a fireball of inglorious self-loathing, characters like him will surely continue to colonize the popular—and the private—imagination.

Bryan Cranston Predicts Fate of *Breaking Bad*’s Walter White

Image Credits:

1. Father Knows Best
2. Homer Simpson
3. Walter White

Please feel free to comment.

Comments

- **Steven Hopkins** said:



This is great. As a father, I’m not one to bemoan the loss of the father’s of the 50s and 60s, nor care too much about the idiot fathers on TV that are there to get smacked in the nuts for laughs, I know they are both falsehoods and I don’t identify with either. But Walter

white is something different. I feel his pain. I feel the pull to bang my chest and kill antelope myself to feed it to my family like he does, but I know I am limited by the society I live in and the way I was raised, and will always, at some level, feel bad asking for help. Luckily, I'm not as stupid as Walter and I can ask for help and accept it when I need it instead of doing unthinkable things. I appreciate this contextualization of Walter White because it allows me to find a place as a father in a society that, as you point out, has learned to largely ignore our contributions.

-December 19th, 2012 at 12:52 pm

- ***Brian Faucette said:***



While I agree with much of your thesis about the series and the way it taps into the overarching sense of male angst that has been building in America since the late 1970s and has only increased since the 1990s I disagree with your reading that the show offers men a positive outlet for their frustrations. Instead I would argue that Walter's transformation is illustrative of how hegemonic masculinity continues to dictate gender norms and in the process harm all men's hopes of embracing the positive qualities of feminism and including them in their own lives. As Michael Kimmel has repeatedly pointed out this notion of American masculinity based on stoicism, control, and violence is one that we must challenge and ultimately eradicate if there is to ever truly be a sense of gender equality in this nation.

-December 19th, 2012 at 1:08 pm

- ***Varun Bhargava said:***



The male ego is something that is difficult to break, which is something that is clearly shown in the show Breaking Bad. Although Walter White should never be considered anything close to a role model, you can't deny that his intentions were honorable, which has started to become a conundrum in the male society today. Times have changed where the male figure doesn't have to be the main bread winner, but male ego is a strong presence, and leaves men in a position where making rash decisions could be the only method of one retaining his honor. This article explains how Breaking Bad personifies this well, but in a very extreme manner. Not very many people well established in society would turn to cooking meth to get by instead of taking help, but in the end of the day asking another man for directions while lost in something no man enjoys doing. That is why Breaking Bad gets so many male viewers, because as men we like to know that if everything went wrong, we'd be able to make something right out of it in the end.

-January 30th, 2013 at 5:18 pm

- ***Alex T Reinhard said:***



I think the transformation the TV Dad has endured throughout the last fifty years of TV history culminates in the character of Walter White. His dual personality and the dichotomy between his journey downward in his personal life and his rise to the top of the drug world makes for excellent drama. Before reading this article I had never really thought of how the TV dad has changed over the year, but it was very interesting to think of how the modern

male can be in such a state of identity crisis. Walter's refusal for to ask for help illustrates the most classic of dramatic flaws, Hubris. The shift from strong TV dad's to the ever in crisis modern dad is a fascinating thing to research.

-January 30th, 2013 at 11:24 pm

- ***Tyler Lister said:***



There is more to Walter's backstory in terms of his quest to reclaim his position as head of the household. Not only does he struggle with the more recent social and economic inversion of traditional gender roles, he also experiences a personal struggle as a human being. His bout with cancer and the fact that he lost his stake in a major corporation that he helped develop both threaten a sort of natural right that he feels entitled to. As a highly intellectual person, his sense of social entitlement goes beyond issues of male and female. Sure, there is a part of him that feels emasculated, but he was born with a mind that is worthy of more than cleaning cars for peanuts. He knows this and lives with the bitter resentment of regret. He feels that his superior knowledge of chemistry is being grossly misused and knows that his menial life could have been more fulfilling had he chose another path.

As a human being, having cancer heightens his world perception and provides him with a greater sense of urgency. He wants to get more out of his life, not just financially, but emotionally. Walter realizes that the cancer will kill him soon and if he continues to live the way he has been, meagerly and undervalued as an individual, there is no point in fighting to live at all. He wants to make his mark on the world but his decisions have led him to achieve this in a less popularly desired manner.

Although I agree that certain threats to his masculinity such as not being able to provide for his family, not being assertive, and failing to make a man out of his son are legitimate driving factors for his behavior, I feel that there is more to his character's wants and needs on a human level than just merely repositioning himself in a more traditional gender role.

-January 30th, 2013 at 11:30 pm

- ***Jared Wicklund said:***



Walter White is seemingly much more than rebuttal to the "typical TV dad." While he certainly strays off the path of TV dads in the past, Walter represents more of the struggle of the fading American dream, in a much bleaker reality that we currently live in. In a world of winners and losers, Walter refuses to be that "loser" by any means necessary. Life has beaten him down mentally, physically and spiritually and it has turned him into something frightening. Ultimately Walt is the transformation of the darker side of our capitalistic society, the ugly epitome of the "self-made man." Asking for help would be an act of cowardice, admitting weakness is unacceptable and there is no such thing as "too much." The road to hell is paved with good intentions, and Walt's aspirations certainly go along with that saying.

-January 31st, 2013 at 6:27 pm

- ***Brad Gyori said:***



Brian above disagrees with the claim that “the show offers men a positive outlet for their frustrations.” I also disagree with that claim, which is why I didn’t make it. What I said is, “Breaking Bad’s high ratings, multiple Emmy wins and critical plaudits indicate that this gangster-patriarch strongly resonates with today’s audience, especially the men.” This isn’t a value judgment, it’s a conclusion regarding the show’s critical and popular reception related to ratings, demographics, awards and reviews. Actually, although I am a fan of the show, I do find its portrayal of the modern patriarch unsettling, which is why I chose to write this piece. It’s interesting that a reader should assume I am uncritically celebrating Walter White’s decent into hell as a “positive outlet” for male frustrations. Is Brian seeing something that I’m not? Or conjuring something that isn’t there? And if so, why?

-February 2nd, 2013 at 10:58 am

- ***Robert Panico*** said:



This is a fascinating read! I, myself, have identified greatly with the Walter White character as I am struggling to secure a career path in a crippled economy while supporting a loved one who is employed herself. It seems that the story of Walter White is a metaphor for the grueling uphill battle for the current young generation, who struggle with unemployment that leads to a emasculating state of being.

Another important element of the show is Walter’s brother in law, Hank Schrader, who represents these very “above the glass ceiling” elites you mentioned in your article. He works for not only the very force that could destroy Walter, but for the government itself. Despite acting sympathetic toward Walter’s problems, he seems to care far more about his own family’s well-being and wealth and the power of his position in life. Much like the dynamic contrast between the wealthy and those below the glass ceiling.

-March 13th, 2013 at 12:18 am

- ***Amy Ebersole*** said:



TV HISTORY CTCS 504
Flow Comment #1

Brad Gyori begins “Breaking Dad” by reminiscing about a TV time long past when fathers were “strong, intelligent and wise,” and “elicited the admiration, identification and emulation of young male viewers” — but not at any cost, as the female characters’ portrayal was often “condescending, if not openly sexist.” Gyori’s focus is on examining the degradation of the patriarchal male figure over time and the championing of maternal stereotypes. He highlights two fathers: Homer Simpson (“TV’s buffoon of choice”) and Walter White (TV’s “middle-class father figure ... transformed into a badass super villain”).

Gyori describes “Walter White as a “bumbling doofus.” This description was used to compare Mr. White to Homer Simpson; however, I argue that there is a significant and notable contrast between these two characters. Walter White is not a “bumbling doofus,” but is portrayed complex, intelligent teacher and a hardworking, committed father. While Mr. White does transform into a villain (or an egotistical drug dealer with an inflated sense

of pride), I would say that this character description it isn't that black and white. The audience is slowly introduced to this alter ego over time, providing us with situations where we can feel compassion for his character.

According to Gyori, Executive Producer Vince Gilligan said he was looking to turn "Mr. Chips into Scarface." But the way that this transition occurs adds complexity to *Breaking Bad*. During a Q&A session with Howard Rosenberg at University of Southern California's Television Symposium in the Fall of 2012, writer and producer of *Breaking Bad*, Sam Catlin, emphasized how the key to this transition is for the audience to understand where Walter White is coming from so that this character isn't demonized but rather the audience feels empathetic toward him. This series allows us to see the complex nature of the human experience that doesn't always offer easily answered solutions to complicated moral and economical dilemmas. Gyori says "in fact, it is hard to imagine early television viewers identifying with Walter White in any respect;" however, according to Sam Catlin, the whole point is for the audience to be able to identify with Walter White in order to empathize with his cleverly calculated but morally degradable decisions.

I would like to add to Gyori's discussion by offering an analysis of the degradation of father figures in television. This degradation mirrors a larger trend toward the increased portrayal of controversial characters in television historically sparked by technological innovation. From cable to remote to VCR to DVR, the economic model, production and audience viewership of television has been changed by these technologies. Beginning with the shift from a sponsorship model to one that offers multiple commercial advertisement spots, this transition allowed the companies and brands that funded the production of television to no longer be directly associated with the content, giving the networks an increased freedom to produce more controversial content. The proliferation of multiple channels across a variety of distribution platforms in the Post-Network Era contributed to an ever increasing niching and narrowcasting of audiences, allowing for a variety of interests to be addressed across hundreds of channels. Those patriarchal familial constructions, while initially a staple of broadcast situational domestic sitcoms, ruptured into a various array of characters who complicated traditional gender roles.

Since *Sopranos* in 1999, television networks and advertisers saw that a male anti-hero could attract large audiences. With Don Draper in *Mad Men* and Walter White in *Breaking Bad*, we are able to watch complex father figures. It is because of its subscription model that HBO was able to create anti-hero Tony Soprano, as HBO is able to seek critical acclaim instead of having to cater to advertisers' taste.

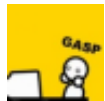
While Gyori's post contributes to a very much needed discussion of gender role transitions in television, attributing some of this move to the "Great Recession" and increased male unemployment, I argue that historical technological innovations paved the way to further character experimentation in television. There is an ever-mounting demand for "new" characters and content because of the increased competition and lengthening air times for channels. Historically, the television sitcom needed to cater to traditional notions of fatherliness since advertisers wouldn't want to sponsor or monetarily support such controversial depictions of families for sake of positive brand associations. Now, power has shifted to a content-seeking audience whose ratings show their interest in viewing the *Tony Sopranos*, *Don Drapers* and *Walter Whites*.

While there are more controversial father figures depicted in television, I also would like to point out that there are also still positive portrayals of male characters on TV who aren't stereotypical: think *Parenthood's* Crosby Braverman (Dax Shepard), for example. So while Gyori in "*Breaking Dad*," begins his discussion by reminiscing about a TV time long past when fathers were "strong, intelligent and wise," a time when "father figures elicited the

admiration, identification and emulation of young male viewers,” I would argue these fathers still exist, but because of technology offering multiple channels and distribution platforms, television can also offer unsterotypical, complex father figures.

-March 13th, 2013 at 1:43 pm

- ***Pat Williams said:***



Your analysis of Walter White's character is an interesting look at how far TV culture has come. It's not hard to find father figure buffoonery present on TV, and it is Walter White's shirking of this stereotype which produces such a strong draw. This in conjunction with the evolution of him as an anti-hero, something AMC enjoys portraying. I found your commentary on the Walter White representing the emasculated, unemployed bread winner, truly engaging. Tying it to the economic collapse of the late '00's had me questioning if there was more present in those first few seasons. I had only engaged with the Breaking Bad as a well written story, not a social allegory. It is ironic that when Walt chooses to attempt to regain some of his manhood, his chosen method is through illicit means. Now that six of the eight final episodes have aired and we're closing in on what is sure to be a finale for the record books, I will have to keep my eyes open for modern social parallels.

-September 17th, 2013 at 8:10 pm

- ***ewahlstrom said:***



I believe in this essay on Walter White and the father figure in US popular culture has hit on something really important as to why this show has had such a huge following. The idea that a big part of its impact was that it was rolled out just as the US economy and housing market was in collapse and, he points out, that the frustrations and sense of lost power among American males has never been greater. That ¾ of the newly unemployed were men, people were losing jobs, homes and seeing the trend of women becoming more highly educated, financially powerful and socially dominant in what use to be traditional male areas fits much of the boiling frustration of the Walter White character as the narrative begins. For the first time a character was no the traditional buffoon portrayed by the same character played by Brian Cranston in Malcolm in the Middle, instead using that familiarity with the audience and that role and creating the alter ego of Walter White, the Heisenberg side of him.

The acting, writing and directing is superior compared to just about any TV drama of the last 25 years, but the real genius and the reason it I believe it has a hook into the largely male audience that follows the show is exactly as Gyori states. That being audiences vicariously relate to the rage and the double sided nature of Walter as he struggles to maintain the outer appearance of the traditional, slightly emasculated and helpless male society had turned him into, all while the raging, hyper masculine Heisenberg alter ego is emerging, growing and taking him into a world of violence, control, murder and primitive power. That Walt likes the rush of that side is clear, even as he battles to remind himself of what he is “supposed to be”. I never thought of the tie in to what was going on in America financially and socially as this show has taken it's five year journey to the conclusion in a few weeks, but you can now see a deeper level of brilliance in the writing, narrative and what Vince Gilligan has created. I agree that Walter is for many males the embodiment of the frustration, rage and anger they feel and the vicarious rush of watching him build his empire as he destroys his classic image as father/provider that society has put upon him.

-September 18th, 2013 at 12:04 am

- **Lauren said:**



I think you bring up a great point about the metamorphosis of the father figure character on TV. From "Leave it to Beaver," where Ward was the quintessential "man's man." He went to work every day, made money for the family, and was the beacon of where the kids learned their life lessons. He was both respected and feared. Then, there was the shift, as the article talks about, to the "doofus dad." Homer Simpson is a great example as the total opposite of Ward Cleaver. Homer is lazy, doesn't perform well at his job, and doesn't have a great relationship with his children. He is the target of every joke and is neither respected nor feared.

This is why I think that *Breaking Bad* is one of the best shows of all time. Walter White's evolution into "Heisenberg" is a commentary on the "doffs dad" making a comeback. At the beginning of the series, Walter White is not respected, made fun of, and doesn't have a backbone to speak of. The article's reference that Walter White is exactly Bryan Cranston's "Malcolm in the Middle" character is hysterical. It's true! Anyway, the article does a good job of talking about how Walter's metamorphosis goes along with where television audiences are going today. The audience is very male-dominated, and men are looking for that "rise back in to power." (Even though it was never really gone.) They crave seeing the dad go from "Mr. Chips to Scarface," or the "doofus dad" to the well-respected patriarch of the family. I think that's where "*Breaking Bad's*" main success lies: these men are craving seeing this, but they aren't quite sure how they are to feel about Walt's total descent into evil and darkness. All fear and no respect.

-September 18th, 2013 at 10:11 am

- **Prabhash Sharma said:**



The idea of the TV Dad has been exploited in many different shows that are on air today. In *Breaking Bad*, Walter White's character takes the idea of breaking dad to an extreme but there are other shows on television today that resonate the idea of the TV dad living two lives. Mr. White faces challenges through out the series on keeping a balance between being a family man and running a drug business. Other shows where the father tends to have multiple persona are shows like *The Walking Dead*, *Mad Men* and *Dexter*. All three shows contain a lead character that is a father who deals with adversaries of having to make decisions that strike a balance between fulfilling their desire of immoral actions and keeping their sanity with their family. Walter White's character shows the viewers the extent Mr. White is willing to go to save his secret of being a drug kingpin from his family. Don Draper's character from *Mad Men* hides his true identity from his children and also cheats on his second wife where his daughter catches him. Draper battles through living a life filled with lies and deceit but the way he is able to live amongst people who have no knowledge of his true identity shows Don Draper is capable of fulfilling his desires of sex, drugs and alcohol and have a family.

The trend of breaking dad continues with *The Walking Dead* where the lead character, Rick, deals with having to be ruthless towards humans or zombies because of the apocalyptic state they are in but also teach his son ways to cope with encounters with other humans. In the show, Rick heads towards a path of insanity so he faces a challenge of getting over the death of his wife and taking care of his son and newborn daughter. Another example of breaking dad is *Dexter*, where the lead character is a serial killer but also a father who constantly struggles with trying to live a normal life but is faced with

problems of having to kill criminals who deserve justice through his methods of killing. The concept of breaking dad makes the viewers sympathize with the character because of the way they care for their family even though they tend to be successful in living life of a drug lord cooking meth, a serial killer killing criminals, an alcoholic ad man sleeping around and a cop losing his sanity with a world full of zombies.

-September 18th, 2013 at 3:33 pm

- ***Mike Brilliant*** said:



At the time that Father Knows Best debuted on television, it was when the United States was just coming back from a war. People felt uncertain, distraught, and were tired of the fighting and conflicts. What was more pleasing to them was watching what seemed to be a perfect life on television. After all, the reason that people watch TV is to get away from their everyday life, right? Having an answer to everything is something that made people feel comfortable and confident about the future. It is what got them through the day. As time went on, people became sick of the everyday perfect lifestyle that TV shows represented. The people of the United States wanted to feel something- they wanted to feel normal.

A character like Homer Simpson is an exaggerated personality of our everyday lives. He says things that we think and shows what would happen if we were to truly give up our morals. His humor provided a comedic look into everyday lives and what we deal with on a day-to-day basis. The stupidity that is referred to in the article of Homer Simpson brings us back to why we watch television. It's to take our minds off of daily life and let us enjoy just twenty-one minutes of life at home without thinking of consequences. His oddball humor makes the show relatable to audiences, yet keep the plot varied so that you never know what will happen in his life inside the screen.

-September 18th, 2013 at 4:17 pm

- ***Elyse Fornefeld*** said:



The comparison between characters Jim Anderson and Walter White do show a shift between the portrayal of the father figure. Jim Anderson and the cast of 'Father Knows Best' illustrate a time when father's were consistently seen as the provider and master of the house. Characters like this were good citizens who were idols that their kids looked up to. Now, I still see similarities in television shows today, including Breaking Bad. Walter White begins his journey into cooking meth because he is seen as the provider of the house and a figure to look up to. For example, in the episode where Walt is celebrating being cancer free, he pressures Walter Jr into drinking along with him. Although Walter Jr. hesitates he drinks because his father told him to. Thus, while Walt illustrates a more in depth, dark father figure he still represents certain traditional fatherly roles.

Also, when watching other types of television, father figures have completely changed from being a role model to the comic relief. Peter Griffin, much like Homer Simpson, demonstrates the reverse roles that men and women characters have taken on. Peter's simple mind and strange adventures should make Peter another child within the Griffin household. This is shown through Louis consistently having to correct or punish Peter for his dumb decisions. Sitcoms are also an example of the father and male figure taking on a less intelligent, dominating role. Specifically, How I Met Your Mother has great examples of unintelligent choices made by the male characters.

-September 18th, 2013 at 4:37 pm

- **Jason Yong Lee said:**



This is a great post that covers the transformation of the roles of “dads” in TV shows over the past generations of TV shows. Men’s gender role in society, have always been the one who provides for the family, protects the family and are always the head of the household. Hence, shows earlier in the 50s and 60s have always portrayed fathers to be the head of the household, intellectual, prim and proper. These characteristics of a father in television back then, gave families a sense of what a father should be like, or rather a role model character for fathers to follow and others to look up to.

However, shows that came up in the later years, showed father figures like Homer Simpson from the Simpsons or Peter Griffin from family guy, being the joke of the family with their infantile behaviors. This was a major transformation for father roles in TV, from the shows in the 50s, whereby fathers like them are not always right and always land up in trouble for all the dumb reasons.

When it came to Breaking Bad however, Walter White’s character as a father was completely new for the audiences. Walter’s character started off as an ordinary schoolteacher, who seemed to struggle with life and humiliation. However in turn of events, he unleashed his alter ego and his machismo personality comes out into play, in a large display of violence and power. This was a totally new kind of “dad” introduced in the show. This, in my opinion, was the captivating factor for the show. Men could now somehow relate to Walter’s character where he has been seen as a loser and had pretty much been having a crappy life. However, something triggered him and his inner “beast” unleashed. We all definitely have had those kinds of “no more Mr. Nice guy” moments in our lives, but not as exaggerating as Walter’s character in Breaking Bad. Due to this relation that most of us men have with Walter’s character, Vince Gilligan’s show had become successful in getting hold of the attention and interest of the audience.

On a final note, these are certainly not role models for anyone to follow, however, men could some how relate to these events in the shows, in terms of situations that occur in their own, everyday lives. There is however, one similarity in these fathers and that is the soft side to all of them. If you noticed, each of these fathers in the shows all have a soft side to them, that show their love and devotion for their families because at the end of the day, they are still fathers and husbands after all.

-September 18th, 2013 at 4:42 pm

- **Marlena S said:**



I don’t think the tale of Walter White’s transformation into Heisenberg is something that appeals just to the American male’s recent fall from being the economic front-runner. You make a valid point that the show’s success may correlate strongly with the effects of the Great Recession, but making this point implies that Breaking Bad wouldn’t be so successful had it come out 5 years earlier. Also, you don’t acknowledge the fact that Breaking Bad wasn’t hugely popular before it was put on Netflix in late 2011. If it’s success was a result of American men reeling from the loss of their jobs and searching for redemption, it would have become so popular right away.

That being said, I think Breaking Bad speaks to every American’s immense desire to

consume, to better themselves, to strive for a better lifestyle than the one they had growing up. Here is Walter White, who has achieved the “American Dream” in that he owns a home and has a family, but he feels as though he’s failed to reach his potential. There’s a flashback that shows the Whites viewing their home, and Walter thinks it’s below him. He wants a huge house and a huge family. He feels that his home, even his only son, is sub-par.

The question must be asked: had Walter never been involved in Gray Matter, would Heisenberg exist? His evil alter ego had, in a way, been growing inside him since he was left out of Gray Matter’s success. Vince Gilligan’s idea of turning “Mr. Chips into Scarface” speaks to the fact that Breaking Bad is popular because it pulls on everybody’s desire to succeed and their tendency to root for the underdog.

-September 18th, 2013 at 6:35 pm