

# Walter White's Motivation in TV Series *Breaking Bad* S01E01 *Pilot*

Miftah Faris Dimiyati and Retno Wulandari

American Studies Section, English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro  
University

Jl. Prof Soedarto, SH. Tembalang. Semarang 50275

**Abstract:** Motivasi merupakan elemen yang penting di dalam hidup. Ketika seseorang menginginkan sesuatu, mereka membutuhkan motivasi sebagai alat pendorong untuk mendapatkannya. Dalam skripsi ini, penulis tertarik untuk menganalisa elemen - elemen yang membentuk motivasi seseorang untuk mendapatkan apa yang dia inginkan. Penulis memilih TV Seri *Breaking Bad* karya Vince Gilligan sebagai bahan penelitian. Hal yang menjadi fokus dalam skripsi ini adalah bagaimana Walter bisa terdorong untuk membuat *meth* daripada menikmati sisa hidupnya bersama keluarga setelah mengidap penyakit kanker paru – paru yang tidak bias disembuhkan. Tujuan penelitian skripsi ini adalah untuk menganalisa faktor - faktor yang mempengaruhi tindakan Walter. Data yang digunakan berupa episode pertama di musim pertama TV Seri *Breaking Bad* yang berjudul *Pilot*. Metode penelitian menggunakan metode pustaka. Untuk mencapai tujuan tersebut, penulis menggunakan teori ekspektansi motivasi dari Victor H. Vroom. Penulis membatasi persoalan hanya pada analisa terhadap tindakan yang dilakukan Walter sebelum dan sesudah mendengar tentang penyakitnya. Hasil analisa menunjukkan bahwa tindakan Walter dipengaruhi oleh beberapa faktor yaitu kondisi kesehatan, kondisi finansial keluarga, dan latar belakang pendidikan yang membuat dirinya yakin untuk bisa mendapatkan uang dan keamanan finansial bagi keluarganya

**Keywords:** Motivasi, Ekspektansi, Vroom

## Introduction

Motivation is an essential thing in life. When people try to achieve something, they need motivation as their driving force to achieve better. Motivation can be referred as “a process governing choices made by persons or lower organism among alternative forms of voluntary activity.” (Vroom 1964:273). It can be concluded that motivation is connected to almost every aspect of life, one of them is job. When people try to get a better salary or a better position in their job, they are driven by their motivation to work harder.

In this research, I have two purposes. First, I want to analyze the intrinsic elements on TV Series *Breaking Bad* S01E01: *Pilot* that consists of its character, setting, and conflict. Second, I want to analyze Walter White's motivation in regards of his action on TV Series: *Breaking Bad* S01E01: *Pilot*.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

There are some narrative aspects that the writer would like to explain in this thesis, which are character, setting, and conflict. Character is a person / animal / non-living thing that have a role in a story. According to Abrams (1999:33) character has its own characteristic by showing moral, intellectual, and emotional which is showed by their action and their dialogue in the story. Furthermore, according to McKee (1997:101) character has their own characteristic that makes them unique to each other.

The next element in narrative aspect is setting. According to Abrams (1999:284), the overall setting of a narrative or dramatic work is the general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which its action occurs; the setting of a single episode or scene within such a work is the particular physical location in which it takes place

Besides character, characterization, and setting, there is also an element that are essential in making the story move forward, which is conflict. According to Holman (1985:98), conflict is the struggle between two or more opposing forces in a plot. It provides the element of interest and suspense in any form of fiction.

In cinematic elements, the writer will explain about cinematography, sound, and mise-en-scene. Pratista (2008:89) refers cinematography as to how filmmakers control the distance, altitude, angle, and shot of a camera to support the narrative aspects and to give an aesthetic value to the film. There are two aspects that the writer would like to explain, which are camera shot and camera angle.

According to Pratista (2008:105) shot by its distance can be divided into Extreme Long Shot, Long Shot, Medium Long Shot, Medium Shot, Medium Close-Up, Close-Up, and Extreme Close Up. Furthermore, Angle can be divided into two, which are high angle and low angle

According to Pratista (2008:149) sound is every voice that come out from a frame or picture, which are dialogue, music, and sound effect. Furthermore, Holman (1980:127) refers dialogue as a conversation between two or more characters in writing

According to Bordwell (2008:112) Mise-en-scene is the term to signify the director's control over what appears in the film frame. Pratista (2008:61) divides mise-en-scene into 4 aspects which are setting, costume & make up, lighting, and acting

According to Holman (1980:279), motivation results from a combination between character's temperament and moral nature in which the character is being put in.

Vroom (1964:127) mentions that a person always become subjectively rational. To determine how someone choose his rational decision, there are three key elements which are needed to be observe, which are valence, instrumentality, and expectancy

Vroom (1964:390) defines valence as person's affective orientations towards outcome. There are three aspects that can be analyzed to determine the person's valence value, which are verbal reports, measuring people's response, analyzing the valence value without external factor, and by watching the person's behavior

Vroom (1964:429) defines instrumentality as a relationship between two outcomes, which refers to how the first outcome will make the person get the second outcome.

Vroom (1964:425) defines Expectancy as a momentary belief concerning the likelihood that a particular act will be followed by a particular outcome. There are two aspects that can be analyzed to determine the person's expectancy value, which are verbal reports and analyzing the factor that supports the choice such as outcome difficulty, supporting background, and whether the person can keep the outcome continuously.

### **III. RESEARCH METHODS**

In analyzing this film, the writer uses mimetic approach. According to Abrams (1991:51) Mimetic criticism views the literary work as an imitation, or reflection, or representation of the world and human life, and the primary criterion applied to a work is the "truth" of its representation to the subject matter that it represents, or should represent

In addition, the writer applies the theory of expectancy theory of motivation by Victor H. Vroom in his book *Work and Motivation*

### **IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Walter White is an overqualified high school chemistry teacher that is suddenly being diagnosed having inoperable lung cancer. His role as the only family member with permanent jobs makes him important to his family. Walter then faced with two options, whether to live the rest of his life by accepting the truth and try to survive longer by chemotherapy, making him unable to have a permanent job in the future or to live the rest of his life by making a lot of money until he dies.

After he hears about his illness, Walter meets Skyler at his house asking about his day. But instead of telling her about his illness, he chooses to hide it and call Hank Schrader instead to see the meth lab more closely. This action shows Walter's response with the choice that he is in favor with the second option rather than the first one. There is also a verbal report by Walter making his choice when he asks Jesse Pinkman to be his partner in making meth, that makes him more preferable to the second option rather than the first one.

To compare, both options have their own advantages and disadvantages. If Walter chooses to reveal his illness to his family, then he can prolong his life with chemotherapy with his insurance. Even though it will not cure his cancer, it can prolong his life by a few months. But then, he will have to face the side effects of chemotherapy such as baldness, being weak, and feeling nauseous. He will also no longer be able to work because he will be too weak to do anything. By doing this, it can complicate his family financial situation because Walter is the only one who has a steady job. His wife, Skyler, still cannot work because she is pregnant and his son, Walter Jr. White, is not able to work because of his condition with cerebral palsy. In addition, the family will be left devastated with a lot of financial problems than before when Walter dies. In contrast, if Walter chooses to hide his illness and to make meth, Walter can use his knowledge as a chemist in a full potential while making a lot of money in a short amount of time. By doing this he will also not be affected by chemotherapy and can still provide for his family by teaching while quietly making meth as his side job. But, his remaining time will be short because it is not prolonged with chemotherapy and he will be doing a criminal job which is opposed to his personality.

By comparing both of the options, we can see that the second option has more value rather than the first one because it will solve all of Walter's financial problems in the present and the future after he dies.

Walter's willingness to pursue the outcome is affected by his level of confidence to attain the outcome. When Walter chooses to make meth, he feels that he will be able to attain the outcome that makes the high expectancy value of the outcome.

The verbal report in Walter's expectancy is shown when Walter offers Jesse to become his partner in making meth, when he says that he knows about the chemistry but he has no expertise in the meth distribution.

As for the factor that supports his expectancy value, Walter's factors are divided into his educational background, acknowledgement about his ability in chemistry, the difficulty of making money from meth, and his ability to continuously attain the outcome

As mentioned before, Walter is an overqualified chemist expert that waste his knowledge by only teaching the high school chemistry class. The award on his room stated that his help in a research that lead into a Nobel Prize shows that Walter has an expert level knowledge in chemistry. There are two people that acknowledge Walter's expert, which are Hank Schrader who praise him as someone with big brain and Jesse Pinkman that praise his first product that meets the highest quality of meth he has ever seen.

Walter, as a chemist expert, can cover for himself in the meth production. But, he needs someone in the distribution, someone who knows the way the meth world works. This is where Jesse is needed. He is already familiar with the meth business and knows about the distribution network. This clearly helps Walter to overcome the difficulty in his expectancy.

As for the continuity, even though Walter can only do this for only a few months, he is already being prepared. He uses his privilege as a chemist teacher to steal some lab equipment for making meth. He also buys an RV for his mobile meth lab so that it will be difficult for police to track him. By doing this he will be safe from the police and can keep the continuity going as long as possible.

When Walter makes his choice to make meth, it shows that his desirable outcome is money. The writer considers this as the first outcome. Furthermore, the second outcome is Walter wants to make his family escapes from the financial problems they are having. If Walter decides to take the first option, his family will be left in agony. In contrast, if he chooses the second option his financial problems will be solved. To achieve this, Walter believes that he needs to attain the first outcome to get the second one, in which has the true valence value.

This can also be proven by seeing the satisfaction that he gets from the outcome. With his inoperable lung cancer, Walter can only survive for a few months. Hence, he will not be able to get satisfaction from the money alone. By knowing that his money will save his family from financial problems after he dies, it will make him feel that the second option is worth to be attained.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

There are three factors that determine Walter's motivation, which are valence, instrumentality, and expectancy. When Walter is given the choices, all of the proves point him choosing to hide his illness and finding money by making meth. This shows that the choice has higher valence point than the other one, and the fact that money is the outcome he is looking for (outcome 1). Furthermore, if it is seen from the outcome value, Walter will not get much satisfaction from the money itself. By analyzing his family's financial problems, the writer can conclude that Walter only attains the first outcome because he believes that the money will help his family to escape from their financial problems, which makes it the second outcome. On the other hand, his education background and his condition with lung cancer with a little time left to live make him feels confident to attain the outcome which makes high expectancy value in the second options

## References

Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms Seventh Edition*. Boston: Earl McPick, 1999.

*Breaking Bad*. Dir. Vince Gilligan. Perf. Bryan Cranston and Aaron Paul. 2008. CD.

Bordwell, David and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art: An Introduction 8th Edition*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008.

Holman, C. Hugh. *A Handbook to Literature Fourth Edition*. Indianapolis: ITT Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing Company, Inc. , 1985.

McKee, Robert. *Story*. New York: Harper-Collins Publisher, 1997.

America, United States of. *New Mexico DMV*. n.d. June 2015.

<<http://www.mvd.newmexico.gov/>>.

Pratista, Himawan. *Memahami Film*. Yogyakarta: Homerian Pustaka, 2008.

Siswantoro. *Metode Penelitian Sastra*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010.

Vroom, Victor H. *Work and Motivation*. San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1995.