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Faculty of Arts and Philosophy**

**The Definition of Community as Reflected in *The Big  
Lebowski* by the Coen Brothers**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this Bachelor's thesis is to analyze community in the film *The Big Lebowski* by the Coen Brothers. This paper is simply arranged. The first part of the work is focused on the Coen Brothers and their lives, the description of their movies and specific features, according to which the Coens can be identified. The second part of the paper deals with the research of community, specifically with general definitions of community, with the sense of community, the types of community, community strength elements and community boundaries. The community research is then used within the third part of the paper, in which all the above mentioned research parts are applied to the film *The Big Lebowski*. Thanks to the research, two main communities in the film are established, it is discovered why they exist, what type of community they represent, how strong the communities are, and how the communities are experienced by the members and non-members.

**Keywords:** The Coen Brothers, *The Big Lebowski*, Community, Sense of Community, Community Boundaries, Community Strength Elements

## **Abstrakt**

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analýza konceptu komunity ve filmu *The Big Lebowski* od bratrů Coenových. Tato práce je jednoduše uspořádána. První část se zabývá bratry Coenovými a jejich životy, popisem jejich filmů a specifickými rysy, podle kterých se dají Coenovi bratři jednoduše identifikovat. Druhá část této práce se týká výzkumu konceptu komunity. Tento výzkum zahrnuje všeobecné definice komunity, smysl pro komunitu, typy komunit, prvky síly komunit a hranice komunit. Tento výzkum komunity je potom použit ve třetí části této práce, ve které jsou výše zmíněné části výzkumu aplikované na film *The Big Lebowski*. Díky tomuto výzkumu jsou ve filmu ustanoveny dvě hlavní komunity, u kterých je zjištěno, proč existují, jaký typ komunity představují, jak jsou silné a jak tyhle komunity pociťují jejich členové a nečlenové.

**Klíčová slova:** Bratři Coenovi, *The Big Lebowski*, komunita, smysl pro komunitu, hranice komunit, prvky síly komunit

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# 1. Introduction

The subject of this paper is establishing a general definition of community and its aspects, which are then applied to a film by the Coen Brothers. The main theme is focused on the exploration of a comedy film *The Big Lebowski*, which was very well received by both the critics and the audience.

The first part of the thesis will focus on the brilliant Coen brothers – their lives and the process of creating their films. The second part will illustrate the definition of community and the last part will use the community research in order to establish two main communities, which are clearly depicted in the film *The Big Lebowski*, and then to analyze them in terms of the sense of community, the type of community they represent and their strength.

## 2. The Coen Brothers

### 2.1 Brief Biographies of Joel and Ethan Coen

The “Two-Headed Director” is the nickname for the Coen brothers, whose full names are Joel Daniel Coen and Ethan Jesse Coen, given by the film industry for their ability to work alongside each other. The Coens have been pushing boundaries of film-making for almost thirty years and that is why they are often regarded as two of the most groundbreaking directors in the world (simons-rock.edu, 2008). Joel and Ethan were both born in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, USA but they are not twins. The older brother, Joel, was born on November 29<sup>th</sup> 1954, whereas Ethan was born three years later on September 21<sup>st</sup> 1957. Both Joel and Ethan successfully graduated at Simon’s Rock College of Bard in Massachusetts, after which Joel Coen spent four years studying at the New York University Institute of Film and TV, while Ethan studied philosophy at Princeton University in New Jersey (Johnson). The siblings’ passion for film was already clear at an early age when they used a Super-8 camera to remake films they had



seen on television (2008, simons-rock.edu). To save money for the camera, Joel mowed lawns (imdb.com). Both of the brothers have families. Ethan and his spouse, Tricia Cooke, were wed on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1990 and they now have two children. (imdb.com). Joel and his wife, Frances McDormand, who is an Oscar winning actress, were married on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1984 and have adopted one child (biography.com).

It has become a custom for contemporary directors to work alone, but the brothers work as a team to write and direct all of their motion pictures. This may seem to be a disadvantage, but in fact it is the exact opposite because the Coen brothers have developed a special bond over the years and with the aid of their education they are able to complement each other very well. It is said that Joel takes care of the visual side of their projects and Ethan handles the plot. When combined they make a well balanced and extremely successful writing, directing, and editing team. The two Coens always share credit for screenplay while Joel receives the credit for directing and Ethan is given the credit for producing (Wichlacz, S., 1997). Before the brothers started working as a team, Joel Coen knew that theory alone does not translate into good filmmaking so he decided to sign on as an assistant editor with director Sam Raimi to gain experience. At the time Sam Raimi was not a well-known director but he went on to have a successful directing career. As an assistant producer, Joel Coen discovered a real editing talent, which then led to the idea of editing his own film along with his brother, Ethan. In 1984, their debut film *Blood Simple* was released (Adam, D., 2010, my translation). Raimi was just as enthusiastic about breaking into the industry as the Coens. Joel and Sam worked on a horror film called *The Evil Dead* with a very tight budget. *The Evil Dead* proved to be a surprise hit when after screening at the festival in Cannes even the novelist Stephen King approved of it. After that *The Evil Dead* won a commercial release which made more than one million dollars in its first week. This number is even more striking considering the fact that the exhibition of the film was nationally limited. Raimi's enthusiasm and determination showed the Coen brothers that breaking into writing and directing was indeed possible, if they had the right project (Palmer, p. 6).

## **2.2 The Coen Brothers as Auteurs**

Max Hermann says that “the Coen brothers are true modern day auteurs (p. 60).” Auteur is a director who represents the main creative element in a motion picture (Britannica.com) and this is indeed the case of the Coen brothers because as R. Barton Palmer describes:

“They have exercised nearly complete control over the ten "small" Hollywood films they have released through 2003. At the very least, considering the Coens as their author (sharing creative responsibilities, Joel and Ethan can be considered for critical purposes to be an "individual") offers a revealing perspective on a body of work that has made a considerable impact on the contemporary scene (p. 1-2).”

Even though the work of the Coens is full of their personal influences and their authorship is strongly announced, the siblings have decided to select a sort of anti-authorial attitude towards the industry. In contrast to the directors such as Steven Spielberg who have become less prominent in the eyes of academic criticism but more important within the film industry in the broadest sense. Over the last two decades the true nature of the word auteur has been changed and directors like Steven Spielberg have been commercialized which means that the status of being an auteur is a chief function for them, which allows them to very effectively promote the films they help manufacture. The danger of such a development might be obvious as Corrigan points out that, “today’s directors are always on the verge of being self-consumed by their status as stars (p. 106).” But this is not the case of the Coen brothers. In fact, it is the exact opposite since Joel and Ethan have refused to become these so called auteur-stars in any way. Unlike the other commercialized directors who struggle to cultivate their well-known “personalities”, this writing and directing duo has decided to concentrate all of their efforts on not remaining inconspicuous and on making movies that are characteristic, clever and more than a little mysterious (Palmer, p. 2-3, 2004). Palmer even uses simpler words when he describes that “their small-scale productions (which they write, cast, direct, and often edit) reflect deeply their shaping influence (p. 3).”

The Coen brothers’ attitude towards the film community is more than unwilling. They have not shown even the slightest interest in becoming public figures, which is proven by the fact that they have constantly declined invitations to appear on talk shows or at industry-sponsored events. Then there are interviews, which have become a

custom for famous people to give but since Ethan and Joel do not consider themselves to be famous, their approach to giving interviews is very similar. It is very interesting and significant that the Coens, despite their attitude towards media, communicate with a French journal *Positif*, whose circulation in the United States of America is very limited (Palmer, p. 4-5).

### **2.3 Distinctive Features of the Coen Brothers' Films**

The brothers' shaping influence is very distinctive and Max Hermann says, "All films must begin with a story (p. 60)," and such a story is usually written by the Coen brothers themselves as an original except for a few, which the Coens have adapted. Once the story is fully arranged, it is written in the form of a screenplay. Every film the Coens have made or adapted has been based on an original script written by the brothers. The story in their films usually begins with an average human being who becomes involved in a plot, which at first seems to be simple but the reality is radically different than what is first expected and is beyond the control of the character. A fine example of this is the character of The Dude in *The Big Lebowski* when he says, "There's a lot of in's, a lot of out's, a lot of what-have-you's and, a lot of strands to keep in my head (Hermann, p. 60)."

The plots of the Coen Brothers' stories usually revolve around a problematic chain of events which is typically triggered early in the story after the plan has been set in motion. Something which seems to be simple goes terribly wrong and everything starts to unravel. Following such events, the themes of death and murder are often found in the subsequent story lines of their films. The reason these events are triggered is often a misunderstanding of what has been happening between the main characters. The involved characters know less than us, the viewer, the whole time and secondary characters that are close to the main ones do not want to get involved but they do anyway. The endings of The Coens' films such as *No Country for Old Men* and *Blood Simple* are very often full of dramatic culminations and open confrontations between the main characters. After this there is a short dénouement, which is not always happy or

satisfying and where the viewer is left to his or her own devices, which exemplified in *No Country for Old Men* (Hermann, p. 60).

## 2.4 The Coen Brothers and their Low Budget Work

There is absolutely no doubt that the Coen brothers have become sort of celebrities and there is no one in contemporary Hollywood who has not been introduced to their signed work, whose originality and quality have been recognized by critics and their peers. Their methods of work have put them in an ambiguous spot because while their names become bigger and are known to everyone in the industry, their films are independent, small and they do not require such large funding. A shining example of such a film is *Fargo*, which is a film that does not cast any stars and lacks any merchandising possibilities and yet it has been placed on the American Film Institute's list of Hollywood's top one hundred films of all time (Palmer, p. 3, 2004).

This fact speaks for itself and it has been proven that though with less money, the Coen brothers can accomplish tremendous success quite a lot. And this is exactly what being a true auteur means, the Coen brothers stay true to themselves and they choose to work with lower budgets to avoid being dependent on a big Hollywood producer who would constantly tell them what to do. That is why they, as producers, seek the required funding on their own and even then they must be very careful about keeping everything right on schedule and within the low budget. Less money is still some money and now one question arises, how did Joel and Ethan acquire the money to begin with? The Coens were very lucky to choose Barry Sonnenfeld, who also studied at New York University, as their cinematographer<sup>1</sup>. The Coen brothers signed him for a small fee and it was he who created a two-minute trailer, which then served as a money raising engine for the actual production (Palmer, p. 7). Even those people who were unwilling to invest

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<sup>1</sup> "While a film director may have a general idea of how a scene should look, it is the responsibility of a cinematographer to make it happen. A cinematographer is an expert in both the technical and artistic capabilities of a movie camera. He or she works closely with the director during principal shooting in order to properly frame each shot according to the script and/or the director's personal vision. The head cinematographer may also be credited as *director of photography* or DP, although the two titles are not as interchangeable as one might think (wisegeek.com)."

were asked to refer the brothers to other prospects and that is why every time they talked to someone who seemed interested in their project, they would visit them and exhibit their trailer (Litwak, 1999).

As has been mentioned, it is not just money that is important for good film-making, but it is also the time management that counts. In order to save time and thus do good film-making, the Coen brothers spend many hours on preproduction tasks, during which they use a very useful film-making tool that allows them to make it all possible (Hermann, p. 60; Palmer, p. 7). This tool is called a storyboard, which is a board that visually tells the story just as comic books do (accad.osu.edu). The Coen brothers' use of storyboards allows them to be better prepared for the actual filming of a motion picture because storyboards are graphic organizers displayed in sequence for the purposes of pre-visualizing a strong notion of how their film is going to look. In other words, there is no waste of time or money (Hermann, p.60).

## **2.5 Joel and Ethan as Editors**

Throughout the process of film-making, the Coens usually assume most of the roles required for a motion picture to be filmed, one of which is the editor. The editor of a film begins his work after the director has finished filming. An editor's work consists of creating a coherent motion picture by going through dozens of hours of shots that are provided by the director and connecting them into one continuous and connected stream of scenes. The Coens, indeed, assume the role of the editor, but the credits always say that the editor is Roderick Jaynes (Hermann, p. 61).

Roderick Jaynes is a native of Britain whose career as a film editor began in the 1930s when he was minding a tea cart at Shepperton Studios. From the 1950s to 1960s after he moved into the editing department, he had the opportunity to work on some films that were more significant for the British film industry (F., Alex, knol.google.com). Roderick retired from film editing after the *Carry On* series, which was the U.K.'s most popular series of low budget comedy films ever released (learnaboutmovieposters.com), was cancelled. When Joel and Ethan Coen were going to

film their first motion picture *Blood Simple*, Roderick Jayne returned to editing so that he could work with Joel and Ethan on their first film, and all their subsequent films. The reason this particular editor has been mentioned is because Roderick Jayne is, in fact, a made up character and an alias that the Coens share. The truth is that the brothers edit all of their films themselves (F., Alex, knol.google.com).

## 3. Community

### 3.1 What is Community?

Pavel Hartl (p.24, 1997, my translation) has conducted a research concerning community and as far as the definition of community is concerned, his findings mention two Czech dictionary definitions of community. The first definition is from the *Czech Encyclopedia Dictionary* and it defines community sociologically as, “A group of people, who live within a certain defined area, where they do their daily activities and usually form an autonomous unit,” and psychologically as, “A type of organization, where the superiority and subordination relationships are removed (i.e. between the patients and the personnel), thanks to which better communication and cooperation is achieved.” The second definition comes from *the Czech Great Dictionary of Sociology*, according to which community is “a sort of togetherness, which is defined by a special type of internal bonds and its inclusion into the wider social environment.”

Despite the fact that the two mentioned Czech dictionaries each contain only one definition of community, it is a different case for dictionaries from abroad. For example, the most common *English Collins Dictionary* contains sixteen different entries for the term community. Surprisingly, the *American Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia* far exceeds the amount of entries for the term community as there are one thousand three hundred and sixty three different entries (Hartl, p.24, 1997, my translation). The point is that the word community in terms of social sciences is a vast concept and having only one definition for it would not be suitable. According to Phil Bartle (Bartle, 1967, 1987, 2007), a community is a model or a construct, which cannot be touched or directly

experienced. It is as if you imagined, “the words “hill” or “snowflake,” a community may come in one of many shapes, sizes, colors and locations, no two of which are alike.” This Phil Bartle’s statement directly corresponds with Hartl’s findings, which indicate that it is possible to have more than one definition of community and furthermore, it would not be a good idea to only have one since a community may come in many different shapes, colors, sizes or locations.

Hartl’s (Hartl, p.24, 1997, my translation) research also covers the international encyclopedia by P. JARVIS, in which the number of entries that have the word community in them equals thirty. It is also mentioned that in sociology there are over ninety definitions of this term to be found, but these definitions can be summarized and divided into five different spheres. The first one says that *people who are living or working together* form a community. The next sphere is represented by a group of *people living in any geographical region*. The third one is very similar to the previous one except that *people living within the same geographical community are also interacting together*. The fourth sphere states that a community is a group of *people who are educating themselves outside the public school system* and finally the last one describes community as an ideal group of *people living and working in complete harmony* (Hartl, p.24, 1997, my translation).

All of these five spheres of definitions described community as a group of people in one way or another but it is important to say that community is not just the people in it but for the bigger part it is the thoughts and actions of the people themselves. Members who have temporarily moved to other locations are also a part of a community, which leads Bartle to the statement that,

“A community usually was already existing when all of its current residents were not yet born, and it will likely continue to exist when all of the people in it have left. It is something that is beyond its very components, its residents or community members (Bartle, 1967, 1987, 2007).”

### **3.2 Sense of Community**

The general definition of the term community and its aspects have been described but in order for a community to be built there is something that makes people organize themselves in such manners. This “something” is called the sense of community and in order to better understand why communities all around the world are formed, an example of a person who becomes a part of a community will be illustrated. Jolo Bacon (p. 4, 2009) and his three friends launched a new small fun radio podcast in 2004. The sense or essence of community is well represented by a follower of Bacon’s podcast named Ben Thorp. Thorp is a thirty year old Englishman living in Scotland who used to listen to the show and liked what he heard. In order to get people together around this new project, Bacon and his friends set up wikis, channels and forums online. Ben Thorp also known as **mrben**, which is his forum name, was the 22<sup>nd</sup> member to join the forum, which was the first released online media related to Bacon’s project. The podcast lasted four years, during which **mrben** did not miss a single day. Thorp contributed over 3.000 posts, involving himself in every aspect of the project such as the chat channel, the wiki or running an episode download mirror.

Despite the fact that Mr. Thorp had a job, a wife, a child, and attended church on a weekly basis, he spent countless hours becoming deeply involved with a group of people online whom he has never met. In doing so he sacrificed time away from his family and friends to contribute to a project, led by four strangers from a different country, which was not beneficial to him financially or to his career. Some people might say that working this hard on something, which is not financially beneficial, is strange. Some people might even say that Ben Thorp is a socially challenged “nerd”<sup>2</sup> who can only interact with people like him, but as Jolo Bacon says that was definitely not the case since he had to pleasure of socializing with him on multiple occasions when **mrben** was a guest in Bacon’s home.

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<sup>2</sup> “A nerd is a technically bright but socially inept person. The classic image of the nerd has been the wild-haired genius kid with thick-lensed glasses surrounded by test tubes and computers. Microsoft’s Bill Gates is sometimes considered the walking embodiment of the older, successful nerd. As computer technology becomes less frightening and “nerdish” to larger numbers of people, society seems to be developing a more tolerant, even benevolent view of the nerd (Maltese, 2006).“



The reason why Ben was so involved in this project and why community members around the globe get together is hidden within one word: **belonging**. This word is one of the main inspirations for building communities, because as Jolo Bacon says, “If there is no belonging, there is no community (Bacon, p. 5, 2009).” Jolo Bacon is not the only one who thinks that belonging is one of the most important elements concerning the sense of community. In addition to the sense of belonging, David W. McMillan and David M. Chavis (p. 9, 1986) have added three more elements to the sense of community pattern. The first element they added is *influence*, which means a sense of making a difference to a group, a sense of mattering to a group, and a group mattering to an individual. The second element they added to the sense of community is *reinforcement or integration and fulfillment of needs*, which when put in context means an individual’s feeling that through their membership in a group, their needs will be met. The final element which McMillan and Chavis added to the sense of community is *shared emotional connection*, which is the belief that members of a group have shared or will share time together, they will share history and they will meet at common places which ultimately means they will share the same memories. This is the sort of feeling that can be seen high school friends’ faces when they are at a reunion as they reminisce about what they have been through together and how many laughs they have shared. Combining the previously mentioned elements, McMillan and Chavis have proposed a definition of the sense of community as follows:

“Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together (p. 9, 1986).”

### **3.3 Types of Community**

The following paragraphs will contain examples of community, which will help define the types of community as reflected in *The Big Lebowski*. All of the below mentioned examples, fall within a basic division of two categories. Both Hartl (p. 37, 1997, my translation) and McMillan along with Chavis (p. 8, 1986) divided community

in two similar categories. Although both authors have different names for them, the idea behind them is the same and the examples belonging to those categories are the same.

Even though Hartl used the name residential category, for the purposes of this paper, the first category is called *territorial notion of community*, which is the name used by McMillan and Chavis. By this definition the members of such communities are related in terms of inhabiting the same socially defined physical spaces (Hartl, p. 37, 1997, my translation). The possible examples for this category are *gatherings*, which are groups of people together in one place or a *parish*, which is a local church community. Further examples could be *people sharing a language or dialect*, which is called a speech community, or a *neighborhood* where people live near one another. *People living in small towns, villages, settlements smaller than town* can also be considered to be communities (Bartle, 1967, 1987, 2007). The last example of territorial communities, which is mentioned in this paper, is *districts*, which are primarily occupied by private residences. An instance of a district community can be a *housing development*, which is a residential area that is under a single management built by property developers. Living *uptown*, which means living away from the central commercial district, could also mean living in a community. The *outskirts* of a city or the suburbs are communities too (Bartle, 1967, 1987, 2007).

McMillan and Chavis (p. 8, 1986) called the second category *relational*. This category develops community around interests and skills (professional, spiritual, etc.). Hartl's (Hartl, p. 37, 1997, my translation) category is named moral and it has the notion of people's origin, faith or values and according to him, "The members regularly and intensively spend time together and their mutual relations and contacts are very tight." The first community example for this category is a *community of interests*, in which the people in the community agree upon their goals (Bartle, 1967, 1987, 2007). Another group of people that form communities are **those** who have *ethnic, cultural or religious characteristics* in common; for example "old people". A Convent<sup>3</sup>, where members of a religious community live together, is another example of a community.

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<sup>3</sup> A community of people, especially nuns living together in a religious order (Bartle, 1967, 1987, 2007).

The above mentioned approaches to community may also overlap in particular instances, which means that the territorial notion may well coincide with the relational one (Smith, 2001, 2002). The instance of such an overlap might be a group of nations who have common interests such as NATO or other global or international organizations and alliances. Not only do these organizations have common interests but the factor of locality also plays its part because these international organizations are spread around the world thus sharing the same territory – our planet. When explaining the overlap of the two categories of community, it is important to mention the specific type of community, which consists of the body of people in a learned occupation. Legal community, health profession, business community, scholarly community and priesthood are perfect instances of such an overlap. For example while individuals qualified to practice law have the same interests, they do not necessarily have to practice law in the same jurisdiction. Similarly, Doctors helping patients maintain their health do not have to work or live in the same area in order to have the same interests. Just as people, who have advanced academic degrees, thus possibly having common interests, do not need to live in the same geographic location in order to be able to discuss these interests (Bartle, 1967, 1987, 2007).

### **3.4 Family**

Family is also an example of a community because not only does it contain the features of the two main categories, but it is also probably the most important community to every human being on the planet and to the society itself since it is its basic social unit. It is in the family where children first learn to love, to share, and to help. Some families effectively try to provide their members with the necessary support for becoming a strong member of society; other families do not (arfamilies.org). If a family does not put any effort into preparing their members to be strong, it may result in a loss of the sense of belonging, ultimately resulting in the possibility that the members may find themselves in unhealthy places – with inappropriate friends, drugs, gangs, etc. (middleearthnj.wordpress.com).

Families cultivate the following six characteristics in order to overcome their challenges and weaknesses. These six characteristics can be indicators of the community perspective of a family. The first characteristic is a *family commitment*, in which family members are recognized and valued, and are committed to help each other succeed. All of this evokes a sense of allegiance to the family, where the family is a top priority. Second, strong families express *appreciation* as it is one of the deepest human needs. People seek to be appreciated and for strong families it is a habit to express gratitude while compliments and positive communication are common. The next characteristic is *the time families spend together*. This case not only requires quality time, but the quantity is also a key factor. Strong families do things together frequently and enjoy their time together. If a family wants to be strong, their members must choose family activities over other activities so that they can share experiences and memories, thus uniting and strengthening the family bond. Fourth, *families develop spiritually*, in which case, their community of faith provides extra support thus providing them with a second family. A spiritual bond can also provide perspective, direction or purpose. The fifth characteristic is *the effective coping with stress, conflict or crisis*. Each family member brings a unique perspective to a problem, which allows them to resolve the issue respectively. Furthermore, strong families try to minimize the stress by planning ahead and managing their resources wisely and when a crisis hits them, they unite and support each other. The final characteristic is *the rhythm* that families have, the routines, rituals and traditions which shape the daily flow of life. They live by patterns, which bring stability and clarification of family roles. Family needs change and that is why the healthiest families are also open to change. They can grow new creative traditions and rhythms (arfamilies.org).

### **3.5 Community Strength Elements**

The six characteristics that families cultivate can also be considered community strength elements but there are more elements, which can be applied to different types

of community. The first element of community strength is called *Altruism*, which is the degree to which the individual members of a community are willing to make sacrifices in order to benefit the whole community. These sacrifices include loyalty, generosity, camaraderie etc. The second element includes *The degree to which individuals have access to human settlements facilities and services* such as roads, education, and health services. The next element concerns *Communications* within and outside of a community. The two main mediums of communication are electronic and printed. Electronic communication includes the telephone, internet, TV or radio, while printed media includes tools such as books, newspapers and magazines. Finally the most important aspect of communication within a community is a mutually understood language combined with both the willingness to communicate and the willingness to listen (Bartle, 1967, 1987, 2007).

The fourth component of strength is *Confidence*, which concerns a vision that whatever a community wishes to do can ultimately become a reality. There is a difference between the confidence shared among a community and the confidence expressed in individuals. Increased confidence means increased strength and in order to gain healthy confidence, a community must maintain positive attitudes, self motivation, enthusiasm, willingness and optimism rather than avoidance of apathy and fatalism or dependency attitudes. The following element is called *Context* and it suggests that having a strong community also depends on an environment that supports the strengthening. This environment is either political or administrative. A political environment includes the attitudes and values of national leaders, laws and legislation while the administrative environment depends on governmental regulations and procedures as well as the attitudes of civil servants and technicians. Overall, communities can be stronger when existing within a more enabling context; which occurs when politicians, leaders, technocrats and civil servants take an enabling approach to the community acting on a self-help basis rather than on laws and regulations (Bartle, 1967, 1987, 2007).

The next important community trait is *Leadership* and in order to have a strong community, the resourceful, charismatic and willing leaders who have the power,

influence, and ability need to take an enabling and facilitating role. Leaders need to operate so that they follow the desires and decisions of the given community as a whole. The following component concerns the degree, to which individuals in a community see themselves as having a role thus supporting the whole. This includes decision making processes, effectiveness, division of labor etc. If a community had a mere collection of separate individuals, it would be weak. The next inherent element is *Skills* such as technical, management, organizational or mobilization skills, which are manifested in individual people. The more skills a group or an individual can contribute to the organization of the community, the stronger the community will be (Bartle, 1967, 1987, 2007).

*Unity*, which includes the sense of belonging, is the next element of community strength. When part of a community, it is important to tolerate and accept the differences and variations among individual members and to be willing to cooperate and work together. The last strength element is *Wealth*. Communities try to have relatively strong control over actual and potential resources, and the production and distribution of goods and services. The stronger this control is, the stronger the community is. This element also bares risks in the form of greedy individuals, families and factions, who put their interests ahead of the interests of the organization as a whole, which would weaken the community (Bartle, 1967, 1987, 2007).

### **3.6 Community Boundaries**

As far as community boundaries are concerned, there are two ways to approach them, first of which is based on defining the identity of a community because knowing what a community does and how it does it is a need-to-know for all communities. The second method for defining community boundaries is to group people together who share something in common with one another. This second method distinguishes communities from each other base on commonalities.

According to the first approach, in a community that has no boundaries, the roles of the community become meaningless (Anderson, psawa.com). The following sentences perfectly demonstrate this concept,

“Does a sporting community focus on transportation or scientific research? While transportation or scientific research may be a part of the community, they are not a part of the role on the community in society (Anderson, psawa.com).”

In accordance with this approach, a community without boundaries may become unfocused, too diversified and uncoordinated, which would result in its members not being adequately provided for their needs while the needs of the community itself would be experiencing the same phenomena. In addition, lacking boundaries would also create tensions within the community and a layer of bureaucracy could be created, which could eventually become a community in its own right. There are several factors that define these boundaries, among which the institutions of the community can be found. Furthermore, it is the members of the community, the settings either physical virtual or psychological, which could be considered factors for defining community boundaries. Local state or federal government policies or practices are also factors used to define boundaries (Anderson, psawa.com).

To put the previous paragraph in context Bartle’s (Bartle, 1967, 1987, 2007) example of a little village as a community will be used. Rural areas are filled with villages that are separated by a few kilometers from other villages. At first, the boundaries of such communities appear very simple because it may seem that the human interaction pattern only consists of the relations between the people living inside that location. Boundaries of this type of community are also defined by some of the above mentioned factors such as the members, who are precisely given by being domiciled in the same village, or settings, which is the village itself and these settings are at the same time defined by the government, which gives a village a municipality. The most important aspect of this approach is the fact that the members of such a village community know what they have to do and how to do it in order for the community to be united and coordinated. To accomplish this, there is usually centralized government which creates order, a mayor who makes sure that every

possible complaint by the citizens of the village is heard, there is a post office, possibly a pub, there are customs and values shared among the community. On the other hand, the residents of a particular village also interact with people outside the previously mentioned boundaries of a community, these people may marry persons from near or far, they may move out or bring a spouse in with them, which results in situations in which these people have sisters, brothers, parents, cousins or extended relatives living elsewhere (Bartle, 1967, 1987, 2007). In such case, the boundaries of the community become more complex, which means that many more factors come into play when defining the boundaries. In this event the boundaries of the community are best defined in terms of relationships the people have with others inside and outside of the community.

The idea of defining boundaries through relationships leads to the second method of defining community boundaries; by grouping people into communities based on common traits or interests. This means that both similarity and difference are implied within community. While some boundaries can be marked on a map, or in law, or by physical features like a river, others can be linguistic or religious. Other boundaries may not be so obvious and can exist in the beholders' minds. These boundaries may be perceived differently not only by people on either side, but also by people on the same side. In order to gain an appreciation of how people experience community, this symbolic aspect of community is fundamental. An obvious example of this is the observance of religious rituals. For example, there might be a discrepancy between the way people on the inside of a community perceive the rites of worship, the objects involved and the actions of the priest, or rabbi, and the how the people who are on the outside perceive them. Expressions like Christianity, Islam, Judaism, or Buddhism each have their own boundary defining markers and symbols, which indicate who is in the community and who is not. Belonging to a particular community or any other group has its own benefits, which are denied to non-members. "Gated communities" in the USA and UK are a perfect example of this fact, because the physical barrier is designed to keep out poor people or people who are seen as a threat (Smith, 2001, 2002).



## 4. Community as Reflected in *The Big Lebowski* by the Coen Brothers

The main characteristics of the idea of community have been described and these characteristics are going to be used to try to identify some communities within Coen brothers' films, which have already been labeled as very chaotic. First, the community perspective within these films will be analyzed on the film *The Big Lebowski*.

### 4.1 *The Big Lebowski* – Plot Overview

This film tells a story about a man named Jeffrey Lebowski (played by Jeff Bridges), who, himself, prefers the name “the Dude”. The dude does not work much. He spends most of his time bowling with his friends Walter (played by John Goodman) and Donny (played by Steve Buscemi), smoking, and drinking white Russians (a mix of vodka, milk, and coffee liquor). The dude does not waste much time stressing about what is going on around him and is generally known to be lazy and carefree. This stereotype is broken when one day the dude comes back from a liquor store and is attacked by three strange men who stuff his head, with his glasses still on, into the toilet while yelling at him, “Where is the money, Lebowski?” One of the three men urinates on the dude’s carpet, which he likes so much because it just fit the room quite nicely. The dude explains to the three men that his wife does not owe them anything since he does not have a wife and his name is the Dude and not Lebowski. After realizing that the attackers must have mistaken him for his namesake, who is a very rich, disabled man, he decides to seek compensation for the ruined carpet so he makes the decision to confront the rich man – the Big Lebowski. After being ignored and personally attacked by the Big Lebowski, the Dude leaves the building taking a nice looking carpet with him. On his way out he also meets the Big Lebowski’s, young wife, Bunny – a former adult film actress. The day after the Dude’s visit to the Big Lebowski, Bunny is kidnapped and the kidnappers demand a million dollar ransom. The dude’s reaction to this is very casual, he is not surprised. After some deep thought, Jeffrey Lebowski meets

with the Dude and asks him to be the one to personally deliver the ransom money to the kidnappers. He leaves the Dude in charge of saving his wife, Bunny. The dude calmly accepts to deliver the ransom to the kidnappers and decides to talk to his friend Walter about the whole ordeal. The Dude is also very calm about the fact that his friend Walter, who went on this very unique errand with him, wants to keep the ransom money and give the kidnappers a briefcase full of dirty underwear instead. After the unsuccessful exchange, the friends go bowling as if nothing important has just happened, but in the mean time, the dude's car, which contained the million dollars, was stolen. It would not be a Coen brothers film if they did not make sure that the story continued with a chain of crazy events, which includes a green painted, cut off pinky toe; a set of completely new criminals; a feminized, voluptuous daughter of a millionaire; a bowling match that the Dude was challenged to by a Mexican gay man named Jesus; or an ear bitten off in a fight with German nihilists, flying around in a slow motion. In the end the Dude and Walter discover that the ransom briefcase that they had been given by the Big Lebowski was empty all along and it was a scheme, which was supposed to allow the kidnappers to kill the Big Lebowski's wife – Bunny. In the mean time the wife is back home because as everyone discovers she just went on an unannounced trip. This all mean that the kidnapping was fictional. The film ends with the Dude and Walter paying a tribute to their deceased friend Donny, who died of a heart attack during a fight with the German nihilists ("*The Big Lebowski*", DVD).

## **4.2 Establishment of Communities in the Film**

In order to analyze communities in this film, these communities must first be found and established and this paper's section 2.1 will help establish the main communities in *The Big Lebowski*. The First of the two main communities and probably the one which has the potential to be analyzed the deepest, because the plot of the film centers on it, is *the friendship between the Dude, Walter and Donny*, this relationship will be referred to as the friendship. This friendship has no superiors or subordinates, it has no seniors or juniors, the members of this community interact on a daily basis and the togetherness of this group of people is primarily defined by their special bonds developed while playing their favorite game, bowling. As a snowflake comes in

different shapes, so does a friendship, and that is why this community cannot be established using every definition of community in section 2.1, which applies to all communities mentioned in this paper. The next main community established in *The Big Lebowski* is *the bowling league* itself. This bowling league can be considered a community because the members also interact on a regular basis developing all sorts of relationships with each other, they work together on building a solid league thus making sure that other members want to join it. This is the sort of community, which does not depend on whether individual members stay or not, because when one member leaves, another may join.

Other examples of communities in the film include the German nihilists and the family relationships between the Big Lebowski, his wife and his daughter. Because these communities are minor in the film, they cannot be analyzed deeply. The German nihilists as the name itself indicates could be looked at from the community perspective because they come from the same country – Germany. This would indicate that they have something in common, for example the same language, or in case of this film, the same English accent, which would mean the relationships between the members would have special bonds. Being a nihilist, which means believing in nothing, having no loyalties and no purpose (Pratt, 2001) would also almost definitely have the same effect on the members of this group of people, which would make the community perspective on it a valid perspective. Family as a concept has been given a whole section, in which it is described why families are also communities, which is why the community approach to the relationships between the Big Lebowski, his wife and his daughter could also be analyzed provided that there was more information. There is also another community, which is literally mentioned in the film, hence there was no need to try and identify it. This community is noted in a scene, in which the Dude is being interrogated by the local sheriff about why he was wandering around the streets under the influence of drugs and the sheriff explicitly expresses that he does not tolerate such behavior in his jurisdiction saying, “Now, we got a nice, quiet little beach community here in Malibu and I aim to keep it nice and quiet (*“The Big Lebowski”*, DVD).” Even though this community is only mentioned one time, it is possible to conduct a very brief analysis thanks to the community research in the second part of this paper. Malibu is a

town in Los Angeles County and it is situated on the beach and this analysis is based on the sheriff's statement about having a nice and quiet community, which could lead to an assumption that people living in this territorial community have the same interest in living their lives at a location, which is nice and quiet. Members of the community adjust their behavior in order to achieve this goal but, of course, sometimes there could be an individual such as the Dude who unconsciously or consciously disturbs the atmosphere that exists there. In the event that something like this happens, there is a sheriff role, which is supposed to help prevent these disruptive elements. Another assumption is that if there is a sheriff role, there are also other roles, which different people play in order to keep this community a nice location for living.

### **4.3 The Sense of Community in the Two Main Communities**

#### **4.3.1 The Sense of Community in the Friendship**

Finding the sense of community in the friendship between the Dude, Walter and Donny depends on the description of their characters, which is very well depicted in the film. The main protagonist, the Dude, calls himself a pacifist<sup>4</sup>, he does not like violence and he stays calm under almost every situation if it is either a situation whether it be his carpet being urinated on, or when his best friend Walter tries to lift a disabled man from his wheelchair attempting to prove that he can actually walk. Walter as a Vietnam veteran, who is still affected by his experience from a war where there are no rules, is the exact opposite because when there is someone who breaks the rules, or someone who tells him what to do or how to behave or when he is trying to prove a point in an argument, he becomes very aggressive. This aggression is often combined with features of complete calmness. An example of such a characteristic of Walter's is a scene at a restaurant, in which Walter is very calmly trying to explain his point of view on a situation from the previous seen while the Dude keeps reminding him of something

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<sup>4</sup> The word pacifism, itself, is derived from the word "pacific" (in other words peace-making), and it is a compound of two Latin words paci (from pax) – peace, and ficus – making. A pacifist is a non-violent person who is committed to peace and is opposed to war (Fiala, 2010)

else, which leads to a very aggressive and immediate response, which leads to the fact that he is told to lower his voice by the waitress, which makes him even more angry because as he says, "I got buddies who died face down in the muck so that you and I could enjoy this family restaurant." Immediately after this, he calms down and drinks his coffee as if nothing has happened. These are the sorts of situations which create the comedy aspect of the film. Apart from the aggression, Walter is also a loyal friend and is willing to help a friend in need. The last friend whose personality remains to be described is Donny. Donny appears to be a very shy and fragile man and he is the sort of person who, when there is an argument or a discussion, is just listening in and every now and then he makes an obvious statement, or an embarrassing comment. Most of the time when Donny says something, he is either called names by Walter or told to be quiet or he is being ignored completely. There are many instances of a situation such as this and an example can be found at the very beginning of the film where the Dude and Walter are discussing the rug, which was urinated on when the Dude says, "Walter, that guy peed on my rug!" This is followed by Donny's comment, "He peed on the Dude's rug." Walter is irritated by Donny and he calls him names and tells him to be quiet.

The last fact remained to be mentioned is what the three friends have in common. They all share the same passion for bowling. Each of them expresses this passion differently. It can be seen on Donny's face at the beginning of the film when he scores a strike and happily says, "I'm throwing rocks tonight." Walter's attitude towards bowling is rather different and probably the most passionate because he is willing to threaten an opponent with a gun for breaking the rules of bowling or when the Dude threatens Walter to quit the bowling team if he does not help in need, he is willing to break his rule of not doing anything on Saturdays because Saturdays are the days of rest for the Jewish people. These two examples perfectly demonstrate his dedication to his bowling team. The Dude plays bowling because he can. He has nothing else to do and he likes it.

It is very interesting that three people who are so different form a community and the description of their personalities will help form a few questions upon which the analysis of the sense of community within this group of people depends. Why does a pacifist

such as the Dude spend so much time with someone so violent such as Walter and vice versa? Why does Donny want to be part of a group of people who keeps calling him names and who seemingly respects him only for his ability to play bowling? As far as Donny is concerned, it has already been mentioned what he says or does is most of the time ignored except when he is talking about bowling. This is perfectly demonstrated by a scene, in which the Dude and Walter again talk about what has been happening with the Big Lebowski etc. During this discussion, Donny interrupts them saying, “They posted the next round,” which was again met with a lot of name calling and irritation but as soon as Walter realizes that Donny is not trying to interfere with what Walter and the Dude are talking about, but is actually talking about bowling, Walter starts paying attention to him immediately, forgetting about the Dude’s troubles. This action helps indicate that bowling is in this group a priority number one. For Donny, belonging is the key factor of the sense of community, because he looks like someone who does not have many friends and the fact, that there are two people who acknowledge his bowling contribution to the team, must make him feel as if he belongs somewhere in this world. All three of them love bowling and without him there would be no team, which means that he matters to the group and the group matters to him because through the group his need to play his favorite game is fulfilled. The Dude and Walter have the same need to play bowling and if they did not have a third player, this need would not be fulfilled. Another need associated with being in a friendship type of community is the need of having trustworthy members who can count on each other and this need is also met. The examples of this trustworthiness are shown many times in the film and they also prove the strength of this friendship.

### **4.3.2 The Sense of Community in the Bowling League**

The sense of community can be found within the bowling league itself. In this case, the belonging aspect does not play a major role because it concerns individuals and this bowling community consists of teams of three players, which form teams, friendships and communities. The main characteristic of the sense of community for the bowling league lies within the competitiveness of the league. In order for the team to be able to play bowling competitively and not just for fun, the teams must organize themselves in a community, in which they all matter to one another and to the league

itself. As long as the teams matter to each other, the league will exist and as long as it exists, the competitive nature of their need to play bowling will be fulfilled.

## **4.4 What Type of Community Do the Two Main Communities Represent?**

### **4.4.1 What Type of Community is the Friendship?**

Even though, this friendship community may carry the territorial notion of community, because the three members are from the same location, it would not be correct to apply it on this context because the location does not have any direct impact on how the members of the friendship community operate. What has direct influence on how the The Dude, Donny, and Walter operate is the relationships between them and that is why this community may be classified as the type of community that carries the relational notion, more specifically, it is a community of interests because its members develop their bonds around their passion and skills for bowling. The three friends are intimate because they spend a lot of time together. They bowl when they are happy or to calm down when they are upset and they all have the same goal to excel at playing the game as much as possible. Bowling is the interest that concerns all three members of this community, but the plot was not design to explore it or tamper with it. The creation of this interest is not displayed in the film because it serves merely as a background to the interest that is created in the film. This interest is basically the main plot and it only concerns the Dude and Walter while Donny is as Walter repeatedly says, “Out of his element.” Walter’s and the Dude’s common interest first occurs when the Dude tells Walter about how the three strangers attacked him in his home and urinated on his carpet. Because Walter is a Vietnam veteran who hates when people act like there are no rules that they have to follow, he becomes deeply involved in the Dude’s situation. At that moment they have the same goal in their minds to undo what happened to the Dude and to just go back to their normal lives using any means necessary. Walter truly uses any means necessary to accomplish his goal because unlike the Dude, who would rather do what the others tell him to do and be done with everything, Walter chooses more difficult paths, which include stealing money and destroying a completely new car

that does not even belong to the person who Walter thinks it belongs to. Because of their common interest, Walter and the Dude spend even more time together interacting under very unusual circumstances ultimately resulting in the strengthening of their bond after being tested by such unreal conditions.

#### **4.4.2 What Type of Community is the Bowling League?**

The bowling league is the type of community in which both the territorial and relational notions of community overlap. As far as the relational notion is concerned, it mainly develops around the interests in bowling that the individual teams in the league share. The teams in the league spend a lot of time interacting with one another which can lead to a diversity of situations. Examples of such situations can be found throughout the movie. One scene comes when Walter is confronting a man from another team named Smokey, who slightly violates the rules of the game by stepping over the line. Another instance may be demonstrated during the scene in which the friends have a conversation about a sex offender named Jesus, who is bowling next to them, and then Jesus and his teammate Liam come to talk to the Dude and Walter. Both of these scenes end badly in terms of the relations between the individual teams but this is still a sign of the strength of the community because the teams are willing to communicate. In addition, every single member of the bowling league community has the same goal to keep having a place where they can play their favorite game, to ensure a certain level of the game play etc. The territorial notion, which is not represented by the geographical location but by the bowling arena itself, is considered here because it directly impacts the members of the community. A bowling community could exist at many different locations but without a building, inside which the game could be played, there would be no community.

#### **4.5 How Strong are the Two Main Communities?**



Now that the two main communities in the film *The Big Lebowski* have been defined along with sense of community within them and the type of community that they represent, it is time to evaluate strengths and weaknesses that these communities have.

#### **4.5.1 How Strong or Weak is the Friendship?**

The first strength element seen within the friendship is *Altruism* within the group. This component contains both strengths and weaknesses because while the biggest strength may be found in loyalty that these three men have for each other, they are not particularly generous to each other. Altruism consists of the willingness to make sacrifices for the benefit of the community. In this film, it seems as if there is only one person who makes sacrifices for the others and that is Walter, but there might be one man, who makes the biggest sacrifice, and that is Donny. For example, when the Big Lebowski's wife is kidnapped and the German nihilists demand ransom commanding the Big Lebowski to send only one man to make the money exchange, Lebowski sends the Dude because as the Dude says at the end of the film, "You figure, oh, here's a loser." Although before the money exchange, Walter insists on going with the Dude, thus making a sacrifice by risking his own life in such a dangerous situation, but on the other hand, the Dude is also making a sacrifice by risking Walter's presence at the exchange because Walter has a very explosive personality and it is very hard to predict what he is going to do. The question is whether these sacrifices are made for the sake of the community or for selfish reasons. The benefits for the community would be represented by all problems being solved, while the selfish reasons have their roots in Walter's compulsive need to right the wrongs of those who break the rules. Nevertheless, whatever the reasons for making such sacrifices might be for them, which in this case is the weakness, the goal for the Dude and Walter remains the same, which is the strength. This example concerns the interest that only Walter and the Dude have in common, but there is also the interest of playing bowling and that is where Donny needs to be considered. His sacrifice lies within the fact that he is willing to overlook the way Walter and the Dude treat or ignore him. There are two perspectives as to the way it can be looked at. Donny can be making this sacrifice either to benefit the community in the form of keeping the team solid so that they can keep playing and

winning, or he is doing it because he wants to belong somewhere, which is selfish, but understandable. Nevertheless, whatever his reasoning might be, the goal, in the form of the team carrying out their common bowling interests, is strong. Both of these examples well illustrate the loyalty and generosity aspects of their community, because all three of the friends stay loyal to each other throughout the whole film in order to achieve their goals. The only unselfish gesture of generosity is displayed at the very end of the film when Walter and the Dude take care of Donny's cremation followed by the scattering of his ashes.

The next analyzed element is called *Unity*, which is directly connected to Altruism. Unity for this group of people is a very special term, because in the film there are examples in which the unity comes naturally. These examples concern both the interest in playing bowling and the interest in making the Dude's troubles disappear. An example of this comes when the Dude, Walter and Donny find themselves in the bowling arena having an argument about what really happened with the Big Lebowski's wife, Bunny. In the middle of this argument, a Mexican gay man named Jesus and his teammate approach the friends trying to insult and intimidate them, at which point they immediately forget about what they were having an argument about and unite together to completely ignore Jesus. This is a perfect example because not only are the three friends trying to resolve the Dude's issue with Bunny, but they are also bowling. The interest solving all of the troubles that the Dude unwillingly became a part of unites the Dude and Walter naturally on multiple occasions. One instance, which Donny is also a part of, comes at the end of the film when they are confronted by the German nihilists because they want the money that the friends were supposed to give them as the ransom, but the Dude, Walter and Donny know there was never any money and that they never kidnapped Bunny. This confrontation leads the three friends to fight together, united, as a unit against the Germans. There are also examples of Unity, which come unnaturally in the form of extortion, during which one member of the friendship extorts another member by using one community interest in order to point the focus on the other interest. An example of such a situation is represented by a scene before the end of the film, in which the Dude is calling Walter telling him about an emergency situation and that he needs to be given a ride. The problem is that it is Saturday, which

means that Walter does not do anything because for the Jewish people, this is the day of rest. To get Walter to agree to pick him up, the Dude threatens to leave the bowling team if Walter does not give him a ride. This phone call clearly shows that bowling is the number one priority for Walter, because once the Dude threatens to leave the team, he changes his mind immediately.

The analysis of how strong the friendship community in this film continues with two elements called *Leadership and Confidence*, which can be combined together. Even though in most cases Leadership is related to official communities, which have structures, and in which everybody knows exactly what they are supposed to do in order for the community to be prosperous, it is still possible to apply this element to the friendship because Walter, despite his unpredictable personality, is charismatic, has the power to influence people and thus assumes the role as leader of the group. Walter is good at reading people and adjusting his behavior in order to get what he wants from different people. He possesses many qualities that a leader should possess, but the most important one – good decision making, is not one of them because the decisions he makes in the film are mostly poor. In the film, there is a scene, which can easily demonstrate all of Walter's leadership style. The Dude, Walter and Donny head to the house where a teenager, who supposedly stole the Dude's car that contained the brief case filled with a million dollars, lives. Before they ring the bell at the teenager's door, Walter tells Donny to stay in the car. This is the first sign of Walter's leadership qualities because Donny is a shy man, who would not be of any use when confronting the teenager. Donny is very easily intimidated and all Walter needs to do is raise his voice and Donny does what Walter wants. After that they ring the door bell and a house maid opens the door. Using a very pleasant voice, thus making the impression of being a polite and decent man, Walter introduces himself and the Dude, "My name is Walter Sobchak. This is my associate Jeffrey Lebowski. We came to talk about little Larry. May we come in?" While talking to the teenager about the stolen money, the boy is completely silent and is just staring at the Dude and Walter, which makes Walter frustrated and this frustration gradually accumulates to the point, at which Walter loses his mind and makes a very poor decision to go out and destroy a new car thinking the boy has already spent the money on expensive things such as the car. Nevertheless,

Walter has no idea that he is destroying the neighbor's car, upon which the neighbor comes out of his house and destroys the Dude's car. This is not a strong element for this community, because having a leader who cannot control himself and who makes decisions that are not in the best interest of the whole community weakens the group as a whole. Not only did it deepen the Dude's troubles because his means of transportation was destroyed, it was not even helpful at all. Walter's bad leadership directly corresponds to his overconfidence in thinking that it will be his actions, which will help the community. Nobody can deny Walter his willingness and self-motivation but as opposed to the Dude, Walter has too much of these qualities while the Dude has too little. If there was better balance between the Dude and Walter as far as confidence is concerned, a situation like this could have been resolved more easily and quickly, but of course then there would be no film, because it is based on hilarities such as these.

The last elements of strength analyzed are *the Rhythm* and *the Context*. Even though it is not possible to apply the political and administrative context on this friendship community, it is possible to consider the environment, in which the members of this community find themselves in. There are two types of environment to be considered each corresponding to the two interests that this community is associated with. The first environment is the situations related to the Dude's troubles that the members go through. It does not matter if it is the German nihilists demanding the ransom or the teenager who stole their car with the money or again the German nihilists fighting with them at the end of the film, all situations are considered. All these situations, however, do not strengthen the community at the moment at which they occur, because they mostly result in immense frustration because of Walter poor decisions and the Dude's reaction to them. The strengthening itself occurs after these scenes when all three friends meet at the bowling arena, which is the second environment associated with the bowling interest. At the same time, this is a sort of routine for the members of this community, because every time something does not go according to the plan, they try to forget about it by bowling. The bowling arena could therefore be considered the strength and the most important context element not only for the obvious reasons, which are the satisfaction derived from bowling together, how the league is organized or with what happens in the league etc., but it also helps them cope

with the stressful situations arising from the Dude's troubles. However, at the end of the film, all those stressful situations lead to Donny's death, which brings the Dude, Walter and Donny together, making their community stronger than ever. Donny can still be included because for the first time Donny is honored by Walter's speech that says, "Donny was a good bowler and a good man. He was one of us."

#### **4.5.2 How Strong or Weak is the Bowling League Community?**

This bowling league community has a quite large number of members and these members can be divided into the leadership and the players. It is *the Leadership*, that is the strongest element of strength of this community and it is directly connected to the element of *effectively coping with conflicts*, which is only strong as long as the leadership is handling it because the players themselves are unable to. In the film there are several conflict situations, which are not effectively handled by the players and that is what the leadership is there for, to make sure that the league functions properly. For example, there is a scene at the beginning of the film, which takes place after the Dude confronts the big Lebowski about the urinated carpet. The Dude, Walter and Donny are at the bowling arena talking about why Walter has brought his ex-wife's dog to play bowling with him when Walter notices that a player from a different team named Smokey scores a strike by violating the rules of bowling by stepping over the line. This sort of situation seems to be easy to resolve but the opposite is true because of Walter's explosive personality. While Smokey is trying to resolve this situation peacefully with the Dude on his side who says, "Hey, Walter, come on, it's Smokey, so his toe slipped over. It's just a game," the Vietnam war veteran Walter is getting slightly irritated and says to Smokey, "This is not 'Nam, this is bowling. There are rules. This is a league game. It determines who enters the next round-robin." Then when Smokey attempts to mark his strike into the league score book, the mild irritation of Walter's develops into complete rage while saying, "Smokey, my friend, you're entering a world of pain," and then he draws a firearm from his bag pointing it at Smokey. Threatening fellow members with a firearm is not a healthy solution and it does not benefit the community in any way. In fact, this is not a solution at all and Smokey is very well aware of this,

which is why he decides against putting his life in jeopardy by doing nothing to escalate the situation himself and instead notifies the leadership of the community. Smokey is a fair player and chooses to leave a message to the Dude on his answering machine notifying him about his intention to submit an informal report prior to the actual submission. When the Dude receives the message, it is immediately followed by another message from Bill Sellinger of the Southern Cal Bowling League, who has already received the informal report, which indicates the element of strength that this community has in its leadership because even though the actual solution of the leadership is not displayed in the film, it can be assumed that the leadership is capable of handling these types of situations.

The fact that the player members of this community cannot resolve their conflicts on their own leads to the next element of strength - *Altruism*, which may be analyzed within this community. When watching the film it becomes more than clear that there is absolutely no altruism as far as the teams are concerned, which suggests that this community is weak. Similarly, there is no camaraderie, loyalty or generosity. The previous example of Walter drawing a firearm may as well be used to demonstrate this lack of Altruism. Another situation representing a lack of altruism comes when Jesus meets the Dude, Walter and Donny and insults and intimidates them. This shows that the teams in this community do not root for each other, they are not friends. They are merely acquaintances who only care about their prosperity within the community. But then again, Altruism may also be considered a strong element of community strength when the relations between the teams and the leadership are concerned. Not only does the leadership possess Altruism but they are also strong in terms of the element of strength called *Communications*. An example, which demonstrates these strengths, may be a scene that takes place in the bowling arena, in which Donny tells Walter that the next round of the tournament was posted, which again results in a conflict mainly motivated by Walter because the changed schedule says that the next round is supposed to take place on Saturday, which is not acceptable for Walter because as he says, "I don't roll on Shabbos." As Walter explains, Shabbos is the Jewish day of rest and that is why he does not work, does not drive a car, does not handle money, or does not turn on the oven. The match is eventually rescheduled, which indicates that the leadership of

this community is not only generous but is also willing to listen to what the members of the community have to say so that they can properly respond thus making sacrifices to benefit the community because there is not a single person who would want to make Walter mad after the previous experience with Smokey.

#### **4.6 Community Boundaries within the Two Main Communities**

The friendship community, consisting of the Dude, Walter and Donny, has no clearly marked boundaries in terms of a specific location because they do not interact together at only one specific location, which is what makes this community different from the example village community in section 3.6. It is also clear that there are no boundaries in terms of the roles each member play, which makes this community uncoordinated. Walter is a perfect example of this uncoordinated community. He promotes himself as the leader, but this role is not defined specifically because the Dude does not fully respect such an authority. Such incoordination then may result in situations such as the one when Walter and the Dude are interrogating the teenager about the stolen car. On the other hand, the boundaries of this community may be defined in terms of what its members have in common, which in this case is their passion for their favorite game – bowling. But as has been said, this community has two different interests, first of which – the bowling concerns all three members while the other interest – undoing what happened to the Dude concerns only the Dude and Walter. This is where the appreciation of how people experience community may be considered because while people who are not a part of this friendship may think that the three men are a solid unit, who works together to do their best at playing bowling and overcoming all obstacles they may face. The opposite is true because as has been mentioned, Donny is not in fact a real contributor to this friendship in anything outside of the realm of bowling and this is how the members of this community actually experience it.

The bowling league community is the exact opposite with respect to the roles within the community because these roles are clearly defined in the film. For example, in the beginning there is a man, who is cleaning the shoes the players borrow in order

for them to be able to participate in playing the game. Then there is the leadership that is in this film represented by a man speaking on the phone named Bill Sellinger whose task is to take care of any conflicts between the teams playing in the league etc. Without people who are in charge of the administrative tasks of the bowling alley, there would be no league, there would only be a group of people bowling for fun without any focus or coordination. Since the definition of community mainly depends on the interaction between two or more people, it is possible to state that this community also has clearly defined physical boundaries represented by the bowling alley since all interactions and league matches come within that building. Both of the two main communities have the appreciation of how people experience it in common. The bowling league community can also be observed differently by people outside of it. It is very different from what can often be seen on television where famous sports players are usually supporting each other and at the end of a game the players from opposite teams shake their hands as a symbol of respect. This is why people may consider this community a place where its members play their favorite game with a certain level of sportsmanship but this is not true for this bowling league. The teams in this community experience this community entirely differently when they usually try to intimidate each other and call each other names as has already been illustrated, for example in section 4.5.1.

## **5. Conclusion**

To Summarize, the first paper of the paper is focused on the Coen brothers. The research provides an insight into both their personal lives and their careers. These insights include for example their education, or their motives for becoming film directors, or how they became successful. Joel and Ethan are true modern Auteurs who despite their success continue to choose to remain inconspicuous, which allows them to be completely independent on Hollywood producers. The distinctive features of the Coen brothers' films are also described. The most important feature is the fact that the Coens usually write an original screenplay. This screenplay seems to be simple at the beginning, but in fact, the stories than revolve around problematic chains of events. The above mentioned independency of course means that the Coens have to work with low budgets, which is why they often use many different tools such as film trailers or



storyboards to either attract investors or to simplify their process of film-making in order to keep their schedule. Throughout the process of film-making the brothers usually assume most of the required roles included the editor position even though the credit for editing is always given to a man named Roderick Jayne who is in fact an alias for the Coens.

The second part of the papers revolves around the research of community. This research shows that defining community using only one sentence is impossible since different dictionaries from all around the world contain thousands of entries for the term community. Even though there are so many definitions, this paper contains a few summarizing definitions, which are used afterwards. The research also shows that the main ingredient of the sense of community is the word belonging, while the other elements are influence, fulfillment of needs and shared emotional connection. There are two types of community, which can also overlap in particular instances. The first type is called territorial notion of community and it centers on physical spaces, while the second type carries the relational notion of community, which centers on the interests of the members of a community and their faith, origin and their values. Both of these communities are exemplified. A special type of community called Family and a few characteristics that families cultivate are described next. The next chapter is focused on community strengths elements and their description and the research shows that there are many, for example Leadership, Altruism, Confidence or Context. The last section is concentrated on two approaches to community boundaries, without which a community may become uncoordinated.

The last part of the paper contains the plot overview of the film *The Big Lebowski*. This film is then analyzed with the aid of all the points mentioned in the community research. This analysis shows that studying plain theory does not always have to accurate because various definitions such as the community definitions represent ideal and perfect models or constructs but situations in real life are only very rarely perfect and ideal. This true nature of this statement is more than doubled in *The Big Lebowski* and saying that communities formed in this film are perfect would be utter nonsense because the communities as depicted in this film have many weaknesses.

These are usually represented by the means the members of the communities use to accomplish their goals. On the other hand, the said goals are the strengths. Combining the strengths and weaknesses, very unique communities are formed in the film and the goals the members of the communities have are ultimately what allows them lead a relatively comfortable existence.

## 6. Resumé

Coenovi bratři, jimž se přezdívá „Dvouhlavý režisér“, se svými celými jmény jmenují Joel Daniel Coen a Ethan Jesse Coen. Tato přezdívka vznikla kvůli jejich jedinečné schopnosti vzájemné spolupráce. Vášeň pro film u těchto dvou sourozenců byla patrná už v raném věku. Oba bratři vystudovali vysokou školu, která jim později pomohla, aby se mohli své vášni věnovat. Jak Ethan, tak i Joel mají rodinu. I když se stalo zvykem pro Hollywoodské režiséry, že pracují sami, Coenovi bratři pracují na všech svých filmech společně. Jejich dělba práce na filmech, kdy se každý z nich stará o něco jiného, z nich tvoří výjimečný spisovatelský a režisérský tým, z jehož filmů jde cítit, že právě režiséři představují v těchto filmech ten hlavní kreativní element. I přesto, že osobní vliv bratří Coenů a jejich autorství je silně deklarováno, Joel a Ethan zaujímají velice zvláštní postoj k filmovému průmyslu. Nesnaží se být jako například Steven Spielberg, který se stal v očích akademické kritiky méně výrazný, ale pro filmový průmysl se v širokém slova smyslu stal důležitým. Coenovi bratři se snaží tomuto komerčnímu způsobu vyhýbat, aby se mohli plně soustředit na točení filmů, které jsou pro charakteristické, chytré a záhadné. Jejich postoj vůči filmovému průmyslu je velice zdráhající, jelikož na nich nikdy nebyl vidět sebemenší náznak toho, že se chtěli stát veřejnými postavami. Tento fakt je prokázán tím, že bratři neustále odmítají pozvánky účastnit se různých pořadů, nebo událostí, které jsou sponzorovány filmovým průmyslem. Avšak tento postoj jsou jednou za čas ochotni přerušit tím, že komunikují s francouzským periodikem *Positif*, jehož oběh je ve Spojených státech amerických limitovaný.

Vliv bratrů Coenových na jejich filmy je velice čitelný, kdy jejich filmy většinou začínají originálním příběhem, pro který si sami napsali scénář. V centru dění jejich filmů je hlavní postava, která se zamotá do zdánlivě jednoduché zápletky, ale opak je

pravdou, kdy realita je pro tuto postavu daleko zamotanější. Zápletky jejich filmů se obvykle soustředují na problematický sled událostí, který často zahrnuje motivy smrti a vraždy. Coenovi bratři velice často pracují s malými rozpočty, aby se vyhnuli spolupráci s velkými Hollywoodskými producenty, kteří by jim říkali, jak mají svou práci dělat, a proto vždy hledají financí na vlastní pěst. Joel a Ethan obvykle zaujmout většinu rolí, které jsou vyžadovány při práci na filmu včetně té editorské, avšak zásluha za tuto pozici je ve filmech bratří Coenů vždy dána muži jménem Roderick Jayne, ale pravdou je, že toto jméno je jenom přezdívka pro samotné bratry.

Výzkum komunit prokázal, že definic komunity je nespočet, i když české slovníky definují komunitu pouze několika definicemi, a to ze sociologického, i psychologického hlediska. V zahraničí je tomu ale jinak, kdy různé encyklopedie a slovníky uvádějí přes tisíc definic, což potvrzuje, o jak rozsáhlý koncept se jedná. Komunita je abstraktní model, kterého se nedá přímo dotknout, a který přichází v mnoha podobách. Výzkum také prokázal, že tyto definice se dají shrnout do pěti rozdílných sfér týkajících se lidí žijících a pracujících společně; lidí žijících ve stejném geografickém regionu; lidí, kteří spolu ve stejném geografickém regionu i komunikují; lidí, že se vzdělávají mimo rámec veřejného školního systému; a nakonec lidé, kteří tvoří skupinu, která žije v naprosté harmonii. Nicméně, je důležité poznamenat, že komunity tvoří z velké části hlavně myšlenky a činnost lidí v komunitách.

Komunity po celém světě jsou z nějakého důvodu formovány, a tento důvod se skrývá za pojmem Smysl pro komunitu, jehož hlavní složku představuje pocit sounáležitosti, který pociťuje každý člověk, protože každý člověk na tomto světě chce někam patřit. Dalšími složkami Smyslu pro komunitu jsou vliv, díky kterému může skupině záležet na jednotlivci a naopak; dále pak naplnění potřeb, ke kterému dojde díky členství v komunitě; a poslední součástí je sdílené citové propojení, které se koná za předpokladu společně stráveného času, díky čemuž se vytváří společná historie a společné vzpomínky. Typy komunit se dají rozdělit do dvou hlavních skupin, z nichž ta první zahrnuje komunity, které se dají určit podle teritoria, ve kterém se nacházejí. Příkladem takovéto komunity mohou být sousedství, nebo malá města, vesnice a osady, kde lidé žijí na malém prostoru, sdílejí stejný jazyk, nebo i dialekt. Tou druhou hlavní skupinou komunit jsou komunity, které se dají určit podle toho, odkud lidé pocházejí,

jaké jsou jejich hodnoty, víry, a také podle jejich zájmů a schopností, kdy u lidí v takovýchto komunitách dochází k souhlasu nad stejnými cíly. Ty to dvě hlavní skupiny se mohou v určitých případech také překrývat, což znamená, že teritorium, ve kterém se komunita nachází, může obsahovat i prvky, které jsou nastíněny v druhé skupině komunit. Příkladem takovéto komunity může být mezinárodní organizace NATO, jejichž členy jsou země, které mají stejné zájmy a cíle, a které sdílí stejné teritorium – naši planetu.

Výjimečné komunity představují rodiny, které představují základní kameny pro utváření společnosti. Rodiny se snaží pěstovat šest vlastností, které představují jejich sílu, nebo slabost. Tyto vlastnosti zahrnují Oddanost rodině; Uznání v rodině; Čas, který spolu rodina tráví; Duševní vývoj; Efektivní boj se stresem, konflikty a krizemi; a Rytmus. Všechny tyto charakteristiky se dají aplikovat nejen na rodinu, ale na řadu dalších komunit a jejich analýza může přispět k určení silných a slabých stránek jednotlivých komunit. Ovšem, takových to prvků, podle kterých lze silné a slabé stránky určit, existuje celá řada. Mezi ty nejdůležitější patří například koncept Altruismu, což je stupeň ochoty dělat oběti ku prospěchu skupiny. Dalším prvkem může být Komunikace, která zahrnuje ochotu komunikovat a poslouchat. Sebejistota, která se týká vize, že cokoli si komunita přeje, se může stát realitou, je také jedním z prvků. Dalšími prvky jsou Kontext, který závisí na prostředí, které umožňuje pohodlnou existenci komunit; nebo Vůdcovství, které by mělo fungovat tak, aby následovalo touhy a rozhodnutí komunit jako celků. Jedním z společných prvků je Jednotnost, kdy je důležité umět tolerovat a akceptovat rozdíly mezi jednotlivými členy komunit.

Pro určení toho, kde komunita končí, a kde začíná, slouží hranice komunit, na které se podle provedeného výzkumu vztahují dva pohledy. První pohled se zaměřuje na fakt, že komunita se identifikovat při pohledu na to, jestli ví, co dělá, a jak to dělá. Druhý pohled je zaměřen rozlišování komunit podle toho, co mají společného. Podle prvního pohledu, komunita, která nemá hranice, se stává nekoordinovanou a role uvnitř jsou zbytečné. Existují ještě další faktory, podle kterých se hranice komunity u tohoto prvního pohledu dají určovat, například to mohou být samotní členové komunity, nebo i prostředí, jak fyzické, tak i virtuální a psychologické. Druhý pohled na hranice

komunity se týká vztahů v komunitě, které se nedají označit na mapě, zákonem, nebo jinými fyzickými hranicemi. Tyto hranice mohou být vnímány jinak lidmi uvnitř komunity, a jinak lidmi, kteří jsou vně.

Před samotnou aplikací výzkumu komunit na film *The Big Lebowski*, je děj tohoto filmu stručně popsán. Vzápětí jsou ustanoveny dvě hlavní komunity, které mají největší potenciál být analyzovány nejhluběji, protože se děj filmu na ně zaměřuje. Tyto dvě hlavní skupiny lidí jsou představovány přátelstvím mezi hlavními postavami filmu, které se jmenují the Dude, Walter a Donny. Druhou komunitou je bowlingová liga. Obě tyto skupiny lidí lze považovat za komunitu, jelikož jejich členové spolu pravidelně komunikují a vytvářejí si mezi sebou různé vztahy a pracují spolu na různých cílech. Ve filmu lze nalézt mnoho dalších komunit, které ale takový potenciál na analýzu nemají. Příkladem těchto komunit můžou být němečtí nihilisté; rodinné vztahy mezi the Big Lebowskim a jeho manželkou a dcerou atd.

Tím, proč tyto komunity existují, se zabývá část práce, ve které se tyto hlavní komunity podrobují aplikaci Smyslu pro komunitu, kdy každá ze dvou hlavních komunit je analyzována zvlášť. Určení Smyslu pro komunitu pro přátelskou skupinu záleží na popisu osobností členů této skupiny, a na tom, co jednotliví členové společného. Výsledkem této aplikace je pocit sounáležitosti, který je pro tuto skupinu důležitý; dále je to pocit, že této skupině na jednotlivcích záleží; dalším společným atributem je stejná záliba v hraní bowlingu; a v neposlední řadě je to potřeba mít kolem sebe důvěryhodné lidi. Co se týče bowlingové ligy, u té pocit sounáležitosti nehraje tak velkou roli. V tomto případě je důležitý soutěživý duch, který jednotlivé týmy mají, a který je nutí shromažďovat se v komunitě, aby mohla být touha nehrát jenom pro zábavu naplněna. Zatímco přátelství mezi hlavními postavami je ideální příklad typu komunity, která je založena na vztazích jejich členů, jejich zájmech, a jejich schopnostech hrát bowling, bowlingová liga obsahuje prvky týkající se, jak vztahů, zájmu a cílu, tak i teritoria. Členové této komunity se pravidelně scházejí a dostávají se do mnoha různých situací; mají stejný cíl, a to, aby mohla pokračovat existence jejich komunity. Teritoriální prvek této komunity je v tomto případě zastoupen halou, ve které

se bowlingová liga odehrává, protože bez takové budovy by žádná komunita takového rázu nemohla existovat.

Tato práce se dále snaží určit silné a slabé stránky dvou hlavních komunit. Tato část je poměrně dlouhá, ale dá se poměrně lehce shrnout, protože z ní vyplývá, že slabiny těchto komunit spočívají ve způsobu, jakým se snaží dosáhnout svých cílů. Tyto slabiny pro komunitu přátelství mezi hlavními postavami mohou být ilustrovány na příkladu Vůdcovství, kdy se Walter snaží dosáhnout cílů této komunity za použití velice špatných rozhodnutí. Příkladem slabiny pro bowlingovou ligu může být složka efektivního boje s konflikty mezi týmy, které se k sobě nechovají vůbec sportovně. Na druhé straně jsou tu silné stránky, které jsou v obou případech komunit reprezentovány dosaženými cíly. Mezi tyto cíle patří pro přátelství mezi hlavními postavami možnost hrát bowling a zbavení se problémů, se kterými se the Dude potýká. V případě bowlingové ligy se jedná o cíl zachování samotné bowlingové ligy, čemuž přispívá například silný prvek Vůdcovství, který má tuto ligu na starosti, a který se stará o to, aby liga fungovala, tak jak má. Celkově jsou obě komunity hodnoceny pozitivně, jelikož si i přesto, že se v nich vyskytuje tolik negativních elementů, dokážou obě komunity relativně pohodlně zachovávat svoji existenci. Tato existence nemá v případě přátelství žádné jasně označené fyzické hranice. Je také jasné, že tato komunita je poměrně nekoordinovaná, jelikož její členové nezastávají žádné role. Na druhé straně zde ale existují hranice ve formě toho, co mají členové společného, což je jejich vášeň pro bowling, a v případě Waltera and The Dude je to stejný zájem na zbavení se problémů, které the Dude má. S hranicemi u bowlingové komunity je tomu jinak, jelikož je ve filmu jasně poukázáno, že tato komunita jasné role má. Tyto role mohou být ilustrovány na příkladu Billa Sellinger, jehož telefonát uprostřed filmu prokazuje jeho roli, která se týká starání se o konflikty, které v lize vznikají. Tato komunita má i jasné teritoriální hranice, protože většina komunikace mezi členy této komunity probíhá uvnitř bowlingové haly.

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