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Nature vs. Nurture in Albuquerque: What *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul* Teach Us about How We Talk about Criminals

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ABSTRACT:
Breaking Bad and *Better Call Saul* focus on the criminal transformation of their two main characters, Walter White (Bryan Cranston) and Jimmy McGill (Bob Odenkirk). While quite similar on the surface, Walter and Jimmy's narratives represent two different criminal transitions, evoking the classic nature vs nurture conversation. Both of these shows bring the conversation to the idea of inevitability. The nature vs. nurture argument is a popular one because it acts as a teaching tool for how we think and talk about criminal behavior. At first, it follows that since criminality was in Walter White's nature the whole time, his transition should feel the most inevitable, with the inverse being true of Jimmy. However, since *Better Call Saul* is a prequel to *Breaking Bad,* the opposite ends up happening. Even though Jimmy may only need the right people around him to be saved from his descent, his presence as Saul Goodman on *Breaking Bad* reminds the audience that it is Jimmy who is already fated to become a criminal. This dichotomy highlights the distinctive pedagogical opportunity present in both of these shows. Through their subversion of the concepts of nature and nurture, they allow for a unique teaching opportunity regarding how we talk about criminals. This article explores what they teach us and how their commentary can be used as a pedagogical tool for learning about criminal behavior in more nuanced ways.

Keywords: Breaking Bad, Better Call Saul, Nature, Nurture, Social Learning Theory, Classical Conditioning

While quite similar on the surface, the criminal transitions of Walter White (Bryan Cranston) and Jimmy McGill (Bob Odenkirk) on *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul* represent two different criminal transitions and in doing so, evoke the nature vs nurture conversation. This exchange traditionally surrounds reasons for a person's ill behavior, debating whether it was inevitable and always a part of who they were (nature), or if the environment they were raised in turned them into the person they became (nurture). Both Walter and Jimmy operate as compelling cases for these concepts. Despite Walter initially turning to a life of crime when learning he has terminal cancer, *Breaking Bad* emphasizes that he was always destined for this lifestyle, making the case for nature. Inversely, while Jimmy comes off as a person born for a life of crime, his personal upbringing as shown on *Better Call Saul* highlights that he was groomed for the criminal world, making the case for nurture.

The nature vs nurture argument is popular because it acts as a teaching tool for how we think and talk about criminal behavior. At first, it follows that since criminality was in Walter White's nature the whole time, his transition should feel the most inevitable, with the inverse being true of Jimmy. However, since *Better Call Saul* is a prequel to *Breaking Bad,* the opposite ends up happening. Even though Jimmy may only need the right people around him to save him from his descent into the criminal world, his presence as Saul Goodman on *Breaking Bad* reminds the audience that it is Jimmy, not Walter, who is already fated to become a criminal.

This dichotomy highlights the distinctive pedagogical opportunity in both of these shows. Through their inherent subversion of the concepts of nature and nurture, they allow for a unique teaching opportunity about how criminals are understood. By upending the paradigm of inevitability in regard to criminal activity through the use of the prequel format, they become an instructional teaching tool for criminality. This article thus explores what they teach us about criminality and how their commentary can be used as a pedagogical tool for learning about criminal behavior in more nuanced ways.

NATURE VS. NURTURE

The debate over nature vs nurture is seen as a continuum, with each extreme of the spectrum representing both sides of the argument. On one end are the Nativists (nature), while on the other end are the Empiricists (nurture). Nativists adopt the position that behavior and personality exist exclusively in our genetic code. Human beings are born with everything that defines their personality and the choices they make. Most major theories of nature speak toward humans' general biology and view these traits as inherited from our genes. Biological Psychology posits exactly that, saying that all traits and behaviors have a biological cause. This was a crucial aspect of Charles Darwin's theories of evolution, but has also been manifested in concepts of gender and sexuality (Shaywitz et al.; Quadagno et al.), as well as mental illness (Rosenhan). The basic concept here is straightforward: human beings are defined by what came before them genetically.

Empiricists, however, operate on the basis of a "blank slate" or *tabula rasa*. This idea is traced back to the Age of Enlightenment and, more specifically, John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In this formative text, he argues against the concept of innate knowledge, alternatively suggesting that people learn and grow as the result of experience and reason (Locke). Psychologist John B. Watson was such an advocate for this philosophy that he believed he could take any baby and decide which profession they would succeed in based on how he raised them (Watson). Watson continued to favor the idea that conditioning was the primary factor in determining the things a person could and would do. John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth's attachment theory suggests that babies are born with an innate attachment to one primary figure –their mother – and that this attachment is fundamental for their wellbeing, particularly in the first two years of life. Failure to obtain this attachment purportedly results in increased aggression, delinquency, and possible psychopathic behavior (Ainsworth and Bowlby). Other Empiricist studies are well-known within popular culture, from Classical Conditioning (Pavlov), to Operant Conditioning (Skinner), and Social Learning Theory (Bandura

et al.), all of which suggest that environmental and social factors contribute to the formation of a person's life and behaviors.

Breaking Bad and *Better Call Saul* thus function as two helpful examples that depict the far poles of the Nativists and the Empiricists. Because each show exemplifies these two polarized ideas, an extended comparative analysis of them provides key object lessons about criminal behavior.

WALTER WHITE

The pilot of *Breaking Bad* begins with Walter learning that he has terminal lung cancer, leading him to leading him to cook and sell methamphetamine in order to provide his family with money after he dies. Considering Walter is established early on as a mild-mannered high school chemistry teacher with a nice and loving family, this abrupt change is quite jarring. The pilot makes an effort to justify this decision, but the entire hook of the series is based on the juxtaposition of the image of a middle-aged chemistry teacher as a drug dealer.

Breaking Bad effectively ramps up Walter's criminal and unethical activity as the show progresses. The first season alone is littered with moments where Walt is forced to cross another line that takes him down a darker path. In the third episode of the show, "And the Bag's in the River," after trapping the drug dealer Crazy 8 in his partner Jesse Pinkman's (Aaron Paul) basement, Walter is forced to choke Crazy 8 with a bike lock in self-defense. The decision shakes him emotionally, but the series is careful to frame it as a necessary moment of self-defense, almost giving the impression that this absolves him of some of his guilt. Moments like this are paired with more bombastic incidents of criminal behavior. In "Crazy Handful of Nothin'," Walter marches into drug lord Tuco Salamanca's (Raymond Cruz) office demanding more money for his product. When he refuses, Walter sets off an explosion using fulminated mercury as intimidation. Tuco relents and agrees to Walter's demands. When Walter returns to his car, he screams with adrenaline and excitement, ecstatic over what he has just done. This contrasts his reaction to killing Crazy 8, suggesting that at this point, while the cost for this new lifestyle is high, he is willing to pay it.

Season Two features multiple illustrations of Walter paying this high price – faking a medical emergency to cover up being kidnapped over the weekend ("Bit by a Dead Bee"), misleading the police by obstructing evidence ("Better Call Saul"), missing the birth of his child because of a big drug deal ("Phoenix") – but none are more striking or infamous than in the conclusion of the penultimate episode of the season, "Phoenix." After a massive drug deal goes through, Jesse and Walter are at odds because of Jesse's drug habit and new girlfriend, Jane (Kristen Ritter). While sneaking into his house late at night, Walter discovers both of them passed out after a night of shooting heroin. Walter, when entering the premises, causes Jane to turn onto her back and she begins to vomit, choking on her own bile and struggling to breathe. Walter initially snaps into action, but right before intervening he pauses. He recognizes that with Jane out of the picture, Jesse would be less distracted and could focus on cooking meth with him. The scene lasts for what feels like an eternity as Walter stoically watches a young woman suffocate on her own vomit. Contrasting Crazy 8's death from Season One, Jane was completely innocent to him. Walter chose to let her die because it was more beneficial for him on a professional level. Additionally, while he is emotionally distraught when Jane finally dies, this time he composes himself, the scene ending with Walter staring menacingly off into space. The action was still difficult to do, but Walter shows no remorse for his choice, representing another step toward the darkness.

Season Three finds Walter moving further away from the domestic lifestyle he began with and shifting his criminal behavior from a physical aspect to one that is psychological and emotional. His wife, Skyler (Anna Gunn), finds out about his cooking business and kicks him out of the house, while at the same time he gets involved with a big-time drug manufacturer – Gus Fring (Giancarlo Esposito) – and gets access to a high-

end meth lab in order to cook. However not until Season Four does Walter truly begin to embody his drug dealer name, Heisenberg. Walter is initially sidelined both in screen time and plot, with the show allowing Jesse more time to shine. By the season's end, Jesse is in good favor with Gus and Walter's selfish behavior puts him and his family in grave danger. Walt has to pull a Hail Mary in order to make it out alive. He concocts an elaborate plan that involves hiding a bomb in the wheelchair of an elderly man ("Face Off"). Crucial to this plan is winning Jesse back over to his side after alienating him earlier in the season. He is able to do this by convincing Jesse that Gus was responsible for poisoning a small child with whom Jesse had grown close. This gets Jesse to join forces with him and together they are able to defeat Gus and keep Walter and his family safe. However, in the closing moments of the episode, the audience learns that it was Walt himself, not Gus, who was responsible for poisoning the child. This is an escalation on a completely different level. Not only does this conclusion involve Walter killing multiple people and emotionally manipulating Jesse to a degree unlike anything he has done on the show up to this point, but in the Season Four finale, Walter needlessly poisons a completely innocent child as a strategic ploy, not showing anything that resembles remorse. This is the perverse culmination of a series' worth of immoral decisions, showing a version of Walter White completely unrecognizable to the one audiences saw in the pilot.

This perversity cuts loose in the fifth and final season. Walter completely adopts his Heisenberg persona and unleashes chaos on the Albuquerque drug scene. Actions that originally would have been laborious and calculated decisions are executed on a whim, most notably when Walter coordinates a mass prisoner execution in order to keep potential snitches silent ("King Pen"). His behavior in this season is less defined by a single action of falling deeper into his own sinister persona and instead focuses on the consequences of four seasons of this culminating behavior. The show enters its last act with Walter's empire crumbling to ashes, him losing all his money and having to go on the run, and his cancer nearly overtaking him. While Walter is able to come back to Albuquerque, figure out how to get money to his family, and get revenge on the people who destroyed him, nothing seems to suggest Walter feels any regret over his actions. After failing to successfully reconcile with his family, he eliminates the group of Neo-Nazis who have taken over his business, receiving a fatal gunshot wound in the process. As the police rush to the scene of the crime, Walter stumbles into the meth lab. In this scene, Walter does not seem sad or regretful, but almost happy or nostalgic. The whole scenario is framed as if Walter is saying goodbye to an old friend. He lovingly looks at all his equipment as he slowly succumbs to his wounds. The series fades to black as Walter dies in the one place he was truly happy.

Considering how careful the series is to show a believable journey from mild-mannered teacher to drug kingpin, the natural inclination is to assume that this emphasizes the doctrine of Nurture. Because of the circumstances Walter was placed in as a result of his terminal cancer diagnosis, it follows that he was cultivated into slowly becoming more criminal and devious the more time he spent in those conditions. However, the show complicates the narrative a little bit more as his journey progresses.

It is impossible to talk about the circumstances of Walter's decline without also talking about Elliot and Gretchen Schwartz (played by Adam Godley and Jessica Hecht, respectively). While *Breaking Bad* refuses to give out specifics, we know that years before the show takes place, Walter co-founded a science research organization with Elliot Schwartz called Gray Matter Technologies and dated Gretchen seriously for several years, nearly marrying her at one point. There was then some sort of fallout between them all; Walter broke up with Gretchen, sold his share of Gray Matter and left them behind. After he left, Elliot and Gretchen got married, their company exploded, and they became millionaires. The share that Walter sold for the company at the time was worth $5,000, and by the time the show takes place his share would have been valued at $720 million.

Early on in the fifth season, Walter informs Jesse that the net worth of Gray Matter is around $2.16 billion, something he knows because he checks its net value weekly ("Buyout"). Most noteworthy from this scene is the fact that he does not make the distinction that he only recently started doing this. The implication

is that he has been checking the net worth weekly for most of his life since leaving. This particularity is crucial. The obsessive behavior of doing this before he ever got involved in the criminal world shows that Walter's pettiness and lust for power were always present in him. He was not crafted into a villain because of his exposure to the drug business but was able to become one because it was always a part of him.

That reality is made even more evident when Walter has the chance to sell his supply of methylamine to a competitor for $5 million and leave the business for good. Considering that the whole point of selling drugs was so he could make enough money to support his family, this should be exactly what he wants, but he refuses to accept the deal. When Jesse pushes him on this counterintuitive business decision, he coldly responds, "You asked me if I was in the meth business or the money business. Neither. I'm in the empire business" ("Buyout"). This conversation happens right on the heels of his conversation about the net worth of Gray Matter and is impossible to view outside of that context. Walt is uninterested in doing this for his family and instead views this as his second chance to be recognized for the genius that he insists he is. In his mind, he deserves all the money that Ben and Gretchen got in their business. To make the situation even more explicit, all indications of their former relationship suggest that Walter's pride and pettiness was to blame for leaving Gray Matter all those years ago (his pettiness not a result of leaving) (Bradley). His desire to cook meth is not a result of the conditions around him, but a consistent trend of greed and selfishness that has clearly plagued his life from the beginning, irrespective of the situation he was in.

If all of this is true, then why did Walter wait until he was 50 to indulge in what was within him all along? The finale of the series provides the audience with that answer. About midway through "Felina" Walter successfully sneaks into his wife's apartment to say his goodbyes to her one final time. A running sentiment Walter continued to express was that everything he did was for his family. However, in these last intimate moments with his estranged wife, he finally confesses the brutal reality, "I did it for me. I liked it. I was good at it…I was alive" ("Felina"). This admission of guilt confirms that despite whatever Walter said to himself and others, his pursuit had always been a selfish one. The desire to do something like this had always existed; getting cancer just finally gave him a proper excuse to cut loose. This reality becomes even more evident when compared to Jesse. Leading up to the finale, Jesse only ever killed one person. But Jesse's emotional trauma became so unbearable that he spun out into an existential depression that the audience never truly gets to see him recover from. Walter, on the other hand, is completely energized by his actions, getting completely engulfed by this lifestyle. Jesse was trapped in this lifestyle; Walter was made alive in it. That desire was within him from the very beginning.

Breaking Bad seems acutely aware of the discussion of whether Walter always internally possessed this criminal disposition. This is made evident in the conversation surrounding his parents. While there is minimal information given about his family, and they are never actually seen on screen, the little we can glean from this data is quite telling. Walt clearly has an estranged relationship with his mother. Despite continual pestering from Skyler to let his mother know about his cancer diagnosis, Walter refuses to make her privy to that information, once even lying about going to see her in order to cook meth with Jesse instead ("4 Days Out"). Walter makes it clear that he and his mother were never close. At first, this seemingly suggests a connection to Bowlby's Theory of Attachment. Walter's behavior after he starts cooking meth covers all of the common symptoms mentioned in the study. However, in the one conversation we know Walter had with his mother, a different narrative is presented. His father died from Huntington's disease when Walter was only six. Walter recounts that his mother feared that Walter could inherit this disease from his father and eventually had him tested. The actual results of the test are inconsequential, but what stands out as more significant is the fact that a dialogue of nature emerges from this. A primary concern in Walt's family was the fear of inherited disease. Since Walter also laments that he wishes he had a better relationship with his father, there is an implicit linking between the failures/shortcomings of Walter's father and the shortcomings of Walter himself.

So while the link at first suggests a maternal failure from a nurtured perspective, it is just as easy to make the case for an inherited paternal failure from a nature perspective as well. This instance, in conjunction with everything discussed above, only continues to highlight Walt's basis of natural criminality.

JIMMY MCGILL

The opposite narrative is present in the prequel series to *Breaking Bad*. *Better Call Saul* focuses on lawyer Jimmy McGill as he transforms into Walter's scumbag lawyer Saul Goodman. The story of Jimmy McGill on *Better Call Saul* is a different kind of story in almost every way. Jimmy's turn toward darkness is less grandiose than Walter's and less linear. Instead of being a presumed icon of decency, Jimmy is constantly fighting an uphill battle to be taken seriously and not assumed to be the scum of the earth.

This was true even when Jimmy was a child. *Better Call Saul* gives the impression that he was always something of a schemer, even as a child working part-time at his dad's local convenience store. Chuck (Michael Mckean), the older brother that Jimmy idolized, at one point says that "Slippin' Jimmy" had been conning ever since he was nine, that he "couldn't keep his fingers out of the cash drawer" ("Chicanery"). While it is never made explicit, it is implied on several occasions that Jimmy's "borrowing" was instrumental in the eventual closing of his dad's business. For instance, Chuck offhandedly mentions that Jimmy stole as much as $14,000 from the store as a child ("Rebecca").

The majority of the show follows Jimmy as he tries to make it as a legitimate lawyer in Albuquerque. The general concept of the show focuses on his constant battle with whether or not to take the short and unethical route to success. This is exemplified even in the pilot, which is bookended by Jimmy defending a couple of belligerent teenagers in court and working with a pair of amateur conmen to make a quick buck. The first time he caves significantly is midway through the first season when he stages a fake accident in order to look like a hero, thereby gaining sympathy and attracting a client base for his practice ("Hero"). A similar incident occurs in the front half of the second season when Jimmy manufactures "evidence" after the fact to get his client off of criminal charges ("Cobbler"). This behavior is in constant conflict with the standard set by Chuck, who bitterly despises Jimmy and finds him unworthy to practice law, an institution that Chuck holds above all else.

Jimmy's taste for cutting corners goes off without a hitch early in the show, until he goes up against his brother's firm, HHM. In order to win clients over to his side, he carefully doctors a document to confuse the clients and his brother alike. At first, his plan goes off seamlessly. The clients, Mesa Verde Bank, leave HHM to work with his best friend Kim Wexler (Rhea Seahorn) and Jimmy emerges victorious. Chuck, though, knows something is up. He pursues a rabid investigation, trying to connect Jimmy with the error, and eventually getting Jimmy to confess by pretending to have a psychotic breakdown.

This confession is the beginning of a dark path for Jimmy. He is forced to defend himself in court, directly against Chuck ("Chicanery"). The trial is long and dirty. By the end of it, two consequences emerge. First, Jimmy is barred from practicing law for an entire year. Second, prodded by Jimmy, Chuck has a complete breakdown and erupts in anger in front of the court, spewing his actual hatred for Jimmy and his status as a lawyer. Jimmy was already aware of Chuck's distaste for him, but here Jimmy receives the full blast of vicious hate from his brother. This completely severs the already strained bond between the two McGill brothers.

Since he cannot practice law, Jimmy tries to direct commercials. But when commercial directing is insufficiently profitable, Jimmy stages a series of cons to find extra cash – blackmailing his community service supervisor, staging an accident to get settlement money, and even stooping so low as to manipulate an elderly former client by alienating her from her friends to get her to settle out of court on a case that would net Jimmy some money.

Even though Jimmy eventually has enough remorse to undo most of the damage, he is unable to foresee all of the harm his desperate acts have caused. While trying and failing to obtain a refund on his malpractice insurance, he tips off the insurance agent that Chuck might also need to have his rates increased as a result of his behavior at the trial ("Expenses"). This petty action causes a ripple of events that eventually leads to Chuck being forced into retirement from HHM against his will. Forced retirement, on top of Jimmy evading total disbarment, finally pushes Chuck over the edge. Jimmy visits him one final time to make amends, only for Chuck to dismiss him, not angrily this time but condescendingly and without emotion, telling Jimmy that in the end he is bound to hurt everyone around him, before walking direct up to him and bluntly stating, "the truth is, you've never mattered all that much to me" ("Lantern"). As Chuck was someone Jimmy spent his entire life looking up to, this final twist of the knife absolutely destroys Jimmy. That pain is only worsened when later in that episode Chuck succumbs to his distress and commits suicide by burning his house down, making this the last thing he ever said to Jimmy.

The proceeding season is born out of the trauma that ended Season Three. Jimmy bottles up his grief and pushes on, refusing to deal with his complicated feelings toward Chuck. As a result, Jimmy's moral flexibility is even more pronounced. He starts a side business selling burner phones to the criminal underworld to make some extra cash. Even worse, he starts to rope Kim into his webs of deceit. They partake in a series of con jobs that get more ethically dubious as the season progresses. After getting denied the reinstatement of his law license a year after his disbarment hearing, Jimmy constructs an elaborate narrative to convince the committee that he is sincerity broken up about his brother's death and wants to do everything he can to be worthy of the legacy Chuck left behind. At his appeal hearing, he gets choked up, cries, and convinces the entire courtroom that he is completely and totally sincere. Only once when he is alone with Kim does he break his façade: "Did you see those suckers? That one asshole was crying. I had this energy going through me. It was like improv or jazz, and then boom! I sunk the hook in" ("Winner"). In the conclusion of the fourth (and at the time of this writing most recent) season, Jimmy shows that there is no length he will not go to in order to get what he wants and no line he will not cross, including expressing fake grief over his dead brother. Any chance of experiencing real grief disappears at this moment. Everything is now defined by how he can use something to manipulate people for his own selfish ends. This is reinforced in the final moments of the season when he declares that he will no longer practice law as Jimmy McGill but instead, as his conman alter ego Saul Goodman. He is Jimmy McGill no more–only Saul Goodman remains.

Even though the entirety of *Better Call Saul* is about Jimmy resisting what he knows to be the easy option and trying to do the right thing, his environment significantly influences the choices he makes and the person he ultimately becomes. This is set in motion even when he was just a child working for his dad. While Chuck continually accused Jimmy of stealing from his father, a flashback in the cold open to the Season Two episode "Inflatable" paints the situation with a little more nuance. In this sequence, we watch a conman enter the store and succeed in tricking Jimmy's dad into giving him money. Jimmy sees right through the scam and unsuccessfully tries to talk his dad out of falling for it. While Mr. McGill is in the back, Jimmy confronts the scammer, who offers to buy a pack of cigarettes for Jimmy to pocket the cash. While Jimmy contemplates that proposal, the conman imparts his last wisdom on Jimmy, saying, "There are wolves and sheep in this world, kid. Figure out which one you're gonna be" ("Inflatable"). Jimmy silently answers this question by pocketing the cash as the man leaves.

This scene highlights that what is actually in Jimmy's nature is not so much his scheming and lying, but his inherent ability to read people and understand them. When he grows up, Jimmy can sweet talk anyone and distill how to interact with them down to a science. He does this here when he accurately identifies the conman's plot. It also shows that his first impulse is not to make a profit from the scam himself, but instead to warn his father. It is only after this fails that he decides to cash in on it. Most importantly he only decides to

pocket the cash himself when the conman convinces him to do so. Jimmy internalizes his words and makes the decision then and there to be a wolf. This crucial moment in Jimmy's childhood mimics that of the Bobo Doll Experiment conducted by Bandura. Jimmy observes the conman steal from his dad as the child watches the scientist attack the Bobo Doll. Then once he is alone he follows suit and steals from his father like the conman, making the situation function as a textbook example of Social Learning Theory. This watershed moment helped shape Jimmy into the person he will become. He again is defined by irresponsible people in his life who help lead him down a dark path that he could have otherwise avoided.

While *Better Call Saul* does not give many details on the time before the beginning of the show in Albuquerque, the general impression is that Jimmy spent this time clean. He worked in the mailroom at HHM, took law classes at the University of American Samoa, and seemed to keep his head down until he became a lawyer. This is extremely telling because this is the major point in his life where he is surrounded by people who are focused on working hard and getting the job done. It is only once he is out on his own that he encounters shady people that send him back on the conman's path. In the pilot of the show, Jimmy finds himself in the crosshairs of a couple of amateur conmen, who try to convince him that he has run over one of them with his car. Since Jimmy is well acquainted with these schemes, he sees right through their plan. However, since he is also in a bind himself, he enlists them to help him land a client he is trying to secure.

This marks the first return to "Slippin' Jimmy" in years, and one that is instantly filled with complications. While he tries to do things the "right" way and work hard to get the job done, his first major break into dubious behavior begins when Chuck finally lets Jimmy know how much he really hates him. At the conclusion of the penultimate episode of the first season, "Pimento," Chuck finally tells Jimmy why he never hired him to work at HHM: "I know you. I know what you were, what you are. People don't change…Slippin' Jimmy with a law degree is like a chimp with a machine gun." The realization that Chuck, in fact, loathed him as a lawyer is absolutely devastating. The rest of Jimmy's decisions are born out of the pain that this revelation has on him. In this era of his life, Jimmy's bad choices and scheming ways are the results not of the inclusion of a negative influence, but the removal of a positive one. With Chuck now positioned as the enemy, Jimmy becomes desperate to prove his brother wrong and does everything he can (including cutting corners) to make that happen.

This part of Jimmy's life is similar to Pavlov's dog and his theories of Classic Conditioning, as well as BF Skinner's work on Operant Conditioning. Jimmy is both the dog and the rat in these instances, while Chuck is always the scientist. Every time the bell rings, or Jimmy gets the chance to advance in his legal career, Chuck puts him down (in a much more perverse form of feeding him a treat) and Jimmy behaves poorly and unethically because it is what Chuck expects him to do. Once Chuck commits suicide though, Jimmy is no longer fed a "treat" when a legal opportunity arises, but he still salivates by cutting corners and behaving unethically because Chuck has conditioned him to do so. The same is true with Jimmy as the rat in Skinner's experiment. Jimmy has tried to win Chuck's approval as a lawyer time and time again, always getting punished by Chuck for this. After repeated failed attempts to do so, he recognizes that the path of least resistance is to stop playing the game altogether. The rat in the box found a path in the electrified box to the switch to turn off the power faster each time they were dropped in, and thus Jimmy does the same thing, resorting to criminal behavior more easily as he keeps getting shocked for trying to impress his brother by traditional means.

This psychological conditioning is the major fuel behind his decision to tamper with the legal documents in the Mesa Verde case. As expected, this decision sets off the chain of events that dig Jimmy into the proverbial hole he cannot get out of. Chuck records Jimmy's confession on a hidden tape recorder, Jimmy breaks in and destroys it with a private investigator present, he has to defend himself at a disbarment hearing, and he is suspended from practicing law for a year — all eventually leading both to Chuck's suicide and Jimmy adopting the Saul Goodman persona. So while Jimmy is responsible for the poor and unethical decisions he makes that lead him into eventually becoming Saul Goodman, it is also clear that at every junction of poor

decision making in his life he was always accompanied by people who sought to bring Jimmy down to their level, whether it be the conman from his childhood or his own brother. Therefore, reducing Jimmy's ultimate transformation as fundamentally part of his nature is to ignore large chunks of his life where he was nurtured, taught, and conditioned to do the wrong thing. As a result, Jimmy's journey to criminality is defined by nurture.

LEARNING ABOUT CRIMINALS

Even though Walter was destined for his criminal path, this was rarely the conversation surrounding his character as the show progressed. Even now, years after the finale aired, a popular topic of discussion online focuses on what point in the show Walter White truly became Heisenberg. This is true in part from the practical reality of long-form narrative television stories, which, unlike movies, are ongoing and constantly evolving. *Breaking Bad* is no exception in this regard – Gilligan reportedly planned to kill Jesse (the now fan favorite) at the end of the first season. In a real sense, the story of Walter White was evolving as it was being experienced. However, *Breaking Bad* also plays on our assumptions about character types in order to keep us guessing and hoping. Traditionally the main character of the narrative is supposed to be the hero. Walter seems so meek right off the bat that the audience is trained to expect some type of redemptive arc. Walter should only be allowed to become worse in order for him to learn and become better. This is the hero's journey. This is not Walter White's journey. But the audience can never be sure of that as it is not until the credits roll on the last episode that Walter's story is set in stone. As a result, Walter White's journey towards becoming the Heisenberg he always was is generally interpreted as fluid and unpredictable. In hindsight, it was always inevitable, but the arc to get there never felt that way.

With Jimmy McGill on the other hand, the exact opposite is true. From the first frame of *Better Call Saul,* the audience is never in doubt that well-meaning but easily distractible Jimmy McGill will transform into the selfish and insincere Saul Goodman by the time the show is over. The most basic reason for this is quite obvious: *Better Call Saul* is a prequel series. Its entire existence is based on the ties to *Breaking Bad* and Saul Goodman in that series. Part of the fascination of the show is the predetermined knowledge that no matter what small glimmers of hope they give the audience, it can only end with the desolation of everything loved about Jimmy McGill. Therefore, Jimmy's transition into Saul Goodman is completely inevitable, and can never be put in doubt. Jimmy is predestined for this by the existence of Saul Goodman on *Breaking Bad.*

When it is all laid out, this dynamic is actually quite peculiar. If Walter White has Heisenberg in his nature, then his journey should feel inevitable, while the exact opposite should be true for Jimmy becoming Saul Goodman. This highlights a complete subversion of the traditional expectations of the nature vs nurture discussion. It turns the conversation on its head and allows us to see the discussion in a completely different light. The debate is understandably quite complicated and cannot be settled plainly as one thing or another, which is what is so refreshing about how *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul* position their discussion about criminal behavior.

It is easy to excuse a great deal of what Walt does in his criminal career because of his situation. He is disrespected at work and by his family, and his terminal cancer diagnosis only lends more sympathy to a character the audience feels sorry for already. Even as his actions get viler they all take place with the backdrop of the terrible hand he has been dealt. However, *Breaking Bad* is intentional in making sure that it is understood that this impulse always existed in Walt. He was always cruel, selfish, and controlling, he was just talented at hiding it. That evil always existed within him.

It is also quite easy to simply write off a criminal as troubled or disturbed, evil or wrong at their core. That is exactly the impression Jimmy gives off in his secondary role in *Breaking Bad* and is definitely the impression that many have of him all throughout *Better Call Saul.* Yet the show is quick to dismiss Jimmy's

criminality as that straightforward. His decline is defined by poor choices and unfortunate circumstances, and despite the inevitability hovering over the entire series, it becomes abundantly clear—in retrospect—that Jimmy's transformation could have been avoided with a change in a few different factors. As such the audience extends Jimmy a newfound sense of sympathy they probably never experience on *Breaking Bad.* He is human now and is not defined exclusively by his mistakes. In the Season Four finale, Jimmy sits alone in his broken-down car and weeps. He weeps for the death of Jimmy McGill as we knew him. And miraculously, the audience weeps with him.

These shows take typical stereotypes of characters we are familiar with and push them in opposite directions. *Breaking Bad* is Mr. Chips meets Scarface while *Better Call Saul* is how a sleazy car salesman lost his humanity. These portrayals are filled with nuance and layers. They push back against simplistic understandings of criminality while at the same time help shed light on what years of literature have emphasized. Both of these shows can then be used as effective pedagogical tools for conversations about criminality. While humans are never just single shades, they are often portrayed like this in many forms of media. Considering the influence that television and media have on the average student, these more static portrayals can precariously animate what people assume about criminals and criminality. This does not mean that pure ideological representations of criminality are inherently flawed. Characters like Anton Chigurh from *No Country for Old Men* (2007) or The Joker from *The Dark Knight* (2008) are less about constructing a character and more about unpacking the ideology of justice or chaos. They are just easy to confuse with nuanced portrayals of human criminals. Even a complex character on a prestige TV series has its limitations. Any journey to criminality that may exist is secondary to the overarching narrative of the show. By creating an entire narrative about the descent of a person into the criminal world, the primary focus has to be the forces that cause the character to descend. This is where the twist of nature and nurture succeeds. By being subversive about the ways these characters fall from grace, a more overt and more nuanced understanding of their journey remains at the forefront of the shows' narrative. As such, *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul* create the opportunity for an accessible teaching tool to understand more complex concepts of criminality.

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