

The jack-roller: a delinquent boy's own story



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In the book *The Jack Roller* author Clifford Shaw is a criminologist who has researched many different youthful deviants to see exactly when the deviance begins and how it evolves. The book dives deep into the mind of a particular case of a boy named Stanley in Chicago during the 1920's. From the beginning of the book Stanley is abused by his stepmother often being set aside so she could tend to her actual children. I believe this book is most accurately depicts the social learning theory.

Stanley has been exposed to a multitude of positive outlooks of crime from his family and friends at an extremely young age. I support the blank slate theory because in the very beginning of the book Stanley's stepmother encourages him to act in deviant behavior. " One day my stepmother told William to take me to the railroad yard to break into box-cars. " (52-53). So Stanley has been taken under the wing of his step-brother who is stealing stuff for their stepmother, in return they are rewarded for stealing. This is a perfect example of an exposing Stanley to a positive outlook on crime.

With this happening it kick started Stanley's deviant behavior he began stealing for fun for many years, constantly being picked up by the police and taken to detention homes which were not much of a punishment for him. Stanley enjoyed being in the detention home more than his real home so the consequence for his criminal behavior almost was a reward for him. In the detention home, Stanley was able to meet other criminals that furthermore gave him positive reinforcement of crime, " I was really awed by the bravery and wisdom of the older crooks. Their stories of adventure fascinated my childish imagination, and I felt drawn to them. (57). These criminals that Stanley met inspired him; they gave him someone to look up to, someone

that he could aspire to be through crime. After being released Stanley was picked up by his step mother only to run away yet again to survive a couple days then be picked up by the police on the street. This process happened a multitude of times until eventually he was sent to the St. Charles School for Boys. " The strict discipline, hard punishment, no recreation, fear, and unfair breaks made life miserable. " (68). St. Charles was the first negative consequence for his crimes.

Stanley was absolutely miserable there and yearned to get out just to go back to stealing. In observing this book you realize that all Stanley knows is crime, he frequently is in and out of a job, and keeps one for rarely over a month. Stanley knows nothing but crime it has been engraved into his " clean slate", and he has learned how to survive off of it. After serving 16 months Stanley was released for St. Charles only to be arrested not soon after and return back to St. Charles for another month. After being released Stanley makes somewhat of an attempt at earning his money honestly and goes through a multitude of jobs.

He starts out living with this stepsister, only to be kicked out because of missing rent. He then meets a very friendly woman who takes him into her home and lets him live. Stanley enjoys the company of this woman and uses her as somewhat of an emotional release, " This time I was not afraid, but felt a wave of depression and sadness come over me, because a woman was offering me sympathy; something I had never received before. " (76). Stanley lived with this woman for about a month soon to find out she was a prostitute, although he was shocked he did not condemn her for it and Stanley understood.

He still left her to go to the YMCA only to return to the detention home. The interaction with Stanley and the prostitute enforces the social learning theory because it is exposing Stanley to his first mother figure that is a criminal. The only positive female influence in his entire life makes her living based off of crime; one could see how this could impact such an impressionable youthful mind. Eventually the vice president of a company he worked for took in Stanley, the man had no children and was very wealthy.

Stanley enjoyed living with him and his wife but yearned for the freedom of his city, and at the first opportunity gather up his money and ran away. After this Stanley began to become involved in much more elaborate burglaries and " Jack Rolling", he became with a " gang" of other boys and was making a large amount of money robbing and stealing. " So we plied our trade with a howling success for two months. Sometimes we made as much as two hundred dollars in a single day. " (97), this expressed an enormous positive reinforcement of crime to Stanley.

Stanley has never made this type of money in his life before, it is much more fun and easier in his opinion than working a job and you can make much more than a job. In this book I believe Stanley was raised on a life of crime, nearly everything he was exposed to provided a positive outlook on this crime. He simply never was exposed to any real punishment before it was too late. All of the friendly people he met were criminals, such as the prostitute and his gang, he made a large amount of money " jack rolling", and he enjoyed the ego from his criminal record with all the respect it earned him from the youth.

The social learning theory supports Stanley's case because his family, peers, school, and his environment all directed him into a life of crime. The other possible theory I could see one choosing would be the control theory, assuming that people are naturally inclined to commit crime could seem like it could fit Stanley's case. The reason I did not choose it is because the environment that Stanley was in I feel created him. His stepmother, his siblings and stepsiblings, the detention home, his gang, and people such as the prostitute all impacted his deviant life an extreme amount.