

# Applying social learning theories to mystic river



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Applying Social Learning Theories to Mystic River Name: Institution: Date:

Applying Social Learning Theories to Mystic River Many theorists and psychologists have found social learning theories in explaining criminal and deviant behavior. The social learning theories emphasize on the importance of association in developing criminal behavior. The theories observe the significance of the social environment in influencing a person's behavior. The main proponents of the social learning theory are Robert Burgess and Ronald Akers. Social learning theory advances on differential association theory, which was developed and formulated by Edwin Sutherland. Burgess and Akers developed Sutherland's theory to differential association-reinforcement theory. They added the elements of reward and punishment in determining behavior. They noted that positive rewards reinforce behavior, and diminished by punishment.

Akers contributed to the theory by adding definitions, which he stated were the attitudes, values, and meanings that people attach to behavior (Akers, 2009). The social learning theories are important in explaining criminal behavior, for they not only look at the individual's behavior, but the influence of that behavior within the society. The movie, "Mystic River" is the story of three boys who grew up together, but were separated by a set of circumstances. Jimmy, Sean, and Dave grew up together and they are the main protagonists in the movie.

One of the boys, Dave, was kidnapped and raped by two men. The movie then depicts the boys as men, all who have grown and lead different lives. The men are brought together by an unfortunate event, when one of the men's daughters is found murdered. Katie is the daughter of Jimmy, and she

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is found murdered. Dave comes home the night of Katie's murder with a wounded hand and blood all over his clothes. Sean is a detective, and he is working on the case. Throughout the movie, it is clear that Dave's abduction as a young boy affected them in different ways.

Jimmy and Sean realize that they could have done something to help Dave. Dave never recovered from the incident, and it has affected to deny it, although he does not like admitting it. The society can determine the level of crime that is present, based on the people tolerance to crime. A society that looks away from crime, and that does nothing to end criminal activities will suffer the consequences, as there will be higher rates of crime in that area. The social learning theories note the importance of interaction in learning criminal behavior. The people that someone spends a lot of time with will determine that person's behavior. The social context is important since it influences the learning environment.

As young boys, Jimmy, Dave, and Sean are seen writing in wet cement, something that they should not be doing. There is no one to stop them, until the men arrive in the car. The men lead different lives as adults, and they have different professions, which influence the people they interact with, and the type of behavior they display. Jimmy illustrates the concept of general beliefs, which are the attitudes that support and favor crime. As grown men, jimmy continue with criminal activities, and this is clearly seen by the fact that he is an ex con. He has many connections in the city, most of which are from friends with criminal activity. He also murders his Dave, after pressuring him to admit to committing a crime, which he did not (Rafter & Mitchell, 2011).

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The society tolerates crime in that there are murders and abductors within them. When Jimmy confesses to his wife that he has killed a man who was once his friend, his wife does not react with horror or fright as one would expect. She instead comforts him and reassures him of his importance. She tells him that what he did will benefit him, since it will increase their importance in the neighborhood. When Dave was abducted and sodomized as a young boy, no one took the initiative to help him deal with the trauma he had faced. The society did not help him in any way. Dave sees a pedophile and he kills him.

He bashes his head in rage, with the obvious remembrance of what he went through as a child. Sean knows that Jimmy killed Dave in an act of vengeance. Despite being a detective, he does not do anything much to recover any evidence and to seek justice for Dave.

The social learning theories note that people who commit crime believing that they are justified to do so can commit crime again (Akers, 2009). This is clear in the case of Jimmy. Jimmy had killed Just Ray as a way of seeking revenge. Just Ray had been part of Jimmy's gang, but he had betrayed him when he testified against him.

This led to Jimmy spending two years in prison, and once he was out he killed Just Ray in act of revenge. Jimmy feels justified killing Dave for he sees it as a form of revenge. He thinks that Dave has killed his daughter, and he forces him into admitting it.

A person's experiences can determine their present behavior. Dave has a son, and because of the experiences he went through as a child, he wants to

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be close to him and protect him. This is also the reason for his anger, and his act of killing the pedophile he met. The social learning theories note the importance of the society as a learning ground. The society influences behavior in many ways. It influences criminal behavior in the way it reacts to it, and in the manner in which it treats offenders and known criminals. From the movie, it is clear that the society tolerated criminal behavior, and unfortunately, this has led to more crime.

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