**Life-Course Theory**

Life-course theory uses the relationship of time and behavior as the foundation in that the factors of age, relationships, changes, and society all in respect to the passage of time are believed to be potent influences of behavior. This particular theory is inclusive of biological, psychological, and spiritual aspects of the human being in relation to their environment over the span of one’s lifetime.

This theory is multidisciplinary due to the development including elements of sociology, anthropology, historical, demographic characteristics, and psychology. This particular theory began as a result of a review of the findings of multiple longitudinal studies of individuals and families with respect to how historical or life events affected family life, education, and employment.

For example, a researcher today may interview the survivors and those personally affected by a school shooting and then continue to revisit these individuals over the span of 10 years. Initially, not only was their family life interrupted in terms of peace and confidence in the simple act of attending school, but also the educative process was interrupted as well as disrupted. Employment in terms of being able to focus on work may also have been difficult. Over time, some of these areas may have changed, but others may have not. According to life-choice theory, the changes that do occur would be determined on several environmental or nature-based factors.

The nature-based factors would be the existence or lack of physical support (which is also viewed as nurture related), biological issues such as health, and cultural and spiritual beliefs. Each of these factors invariably are viewed as determinants as to whether each individual will learn to overcome such a tragedy and become a strong person or choose to give up and even give in to their anger and become criminal in action. There is an old adage that time can heal all wounds. This appears to be the basis for life-course theory in that time is a factor that will either change one’s life for the better or the worse.

The nature-based factors related to life-course theory are categorized into five concepts: (a) cohorts, (b) transitions, (c) trajectories, (d) life events, and (e) turning points.

In brief, **cohorts** could be described as one’s support group, those who are around you, the group to which one belongs not only in terms of family, but also generation. **Transitions** are defined as changes in one’s course or plan with respect to their role in society, like going from being the eldest child to needing to accept the role of a surrogate parent. **Trajectory** is the an ongoing pattern over an extended period of time in which there has been stability as well as change and includes the various transitions that occur in life. As has already been described, a **life event** is a far-reaching or impactful occurrence or interruption to the flow of one’s life. Lastly, the **turning point**is exactly as the name implies, that moment when one’s life is significantly changed either for good or bad. Turning points can be moving a significant distance, witnessing or being strongly affected by a tragedy, or even winning the lottery! In other words, a turning point is a life altering occurrence.

The “bottom line” with respect to life-course theory is how one reacts and responds to life is represented by the choices made. In other words, those who face multiple risks or a major risk in life, such as poverty and neglect, may be influenced to make choices leading to a pattern and life of crime, whereas those who have limited or little risks in their lives are believed to not be as likely to make choices that would lead to crime.

In closing this discussion of life-course theory, one last comment regarding the concept of cohort. While the cohort is a nature-based or environmental factor, it also involves aspects of nurturing in that those who have a strong and immediate cohort available in terms of support during transitions as well as life events, the role modeling of this support serves as a type of nurturing.

**ENA Theory**

ENA theory more or less “straddles the fence” in terms of nature and nurture. The basic premise of the theory is that criminal activity is learned from being exposed to and having it modeled by others (nurture); however, ENA theorists also hold that the desire or motivation to commit criminal acts is biological or instinctual. In other words, ENA is founded upon evolutionary (learned/nurture) and neurological (nature) concepts.

The support for the belief that criminal activity is learned or a result of evolution is that rehabilitation has been shown to be effective with some criminals. However, there are other criminals, like serial killers, who do not respond favorably to rehabilitation or retraining efforts and ergo, ENA theorists maintain that the urge or desire to continue in criminal activity is not learned, but innately infused within the person’s biological make-up and evolution is at the root of this.

The overall basis for ENA’s biological or nature perspective is that mankind has evolved in terms of what females desire in future mates – the mate to be a strong provider. Therefore, the strong male providers have, over multiple generations, continued to evolve into stronger and more competent providers, which in turn has increased the competition to be viewed as the strongest and best. This competition can and has led to criminal behavior, particularly with respect to victimization – the learned part of behavior.

The implication of ENA theory is centered upon the issue that the majority of criminals are males. However, the explanation for female criminal behavior is similarly based on the concept of competition for the most successful provider serves as the motivator to commit criminal activities given the biological factors are present as well as the nurturing effect of having criminal behavior modeled. In other words, females who have the biological tendencies to commit crime and observe other females’ criminal behaviors resulting in attracting strong providers, leads to their commission of crime due to competition just like the males.

Interestingly, ENA theory focuses more on prevention of criminal behavior. Each of the preventative approaches involves the use of drugs that are designed to modify or alleviate the bio-neurological factors that are believed to cause deviant behavior as well as the inclusion of rehabilitation and retraining of those who have already committed crimes. However, ENA theorists do support the concept of long-term imprisonment of those who have committed serious and or heinous crimes in order to limit their contributing to the gene pool of society.