

# Choice and trait theory

[Law](#), [Criminology](#)



Choice Theory and Trait Theory In Relations to the Arlington Crime. Choice Theory and Trait theory is important when considering reasons leading to criminal activity. Of the two the most appropriate to consider, while creating strategies for controlling and/reducing crime, is the Choice theory. It is necessary to understand both theories and how they affect the possibility of someone taking part in criminal activity. Cornish and Clarke (1986) construe rational-choice theory as a way of both "rearranging existing theories and data to throw new light on criminal behaviors" and as a "policy-relevant perspective on criminal behavior." In this belief, they are not alone (Felson and Clarke, 1998; Weisburd, 1997). In the Arlington crime the choice of robbery and murder was made by the criminal in aspects to the crime. So the choice theory is that the criminals choose to do the crime knowing what the possible outcome could be. With the trait theory it is said to be based on the biological and environment status of the criminal. This essay will explain both theories individually, the affects they have on law implementation, and the crime of the Arlington men found dead. I have decided to use the story of the two Arlington men found dead in their apartment complex. In this situation the men can with a gun in the thoughts of robbing the victim. In the end the robbers not only committed a crime of robbery but also a crime of murder. With the crime not being solved it was then committed again and could have been done by the same individuals. Therefore the crimes have not been deterred and wont stop until the criminals are caught or have the feeling of satisfaction in there mind to stop the crime on their own. Choice Theory Choice theory is the belief that criminals choose to commit crimes. These crimes are committed after the criminals weigh the potential benefits

and consequences of their criminal acts. Theorists, James Q Wilson (1980) observed that people who commit crime are unafraid of breaking the law because they value the excitement and thrills of the crime and are willing to take greater chances than the average person. In accordance to choice theory to deter crime the punishment should be as severe as the crime committed. Choice theory is best seen as a " framework, a rubric or a family of theories" that serves to " organize findings, link theoretical statements and logically guide theory construction" (Hechter and Kanazawa (1997). The importance of choice theory is to get the interpretation of crime and the justification for the crime in the eyes of the criminal and feeling of the victim. The most important part of the choice theory is the decision making process. It is a process of cognition and calculation in which a person pursues a desired goal, weighs likely consequences, and chooses the options to commit or not to commit a crime. Predictions based on rational outcomes are most accurate in large random population samples where idiosyncratic differences in decisions cancel each other (Friedman and Hechter. (1988); Hechter, (1996); Hechter and Kanazawa, (1997). Many decisions of everyday life are based on imperfect knowledge and crude, subjective assessments of utility. In many situations, for example, decision makers opt for what has become convenient and routine and based on the fact of if they feel they can get away with the crime of if they had already gotten away with the crime. Beyond rudimentary statements of crime-as-choice theory is a more complex understanding developed through critique, research, and theoretical elaboration. Its core is belief that " when faced with several courses of action, people usually do what they believe is likely to have the best overall

outcome" Jon Elster (1989). Choice theory views offending behaviors as involving decision making and the making of choices, which are constrained by time, cognitive ability and information, resulting in a 'limited' rather than a 'normal' rationality for the offender. Cornish and Clarke (1998) therefore stress the need to be crime-specific when analyzing offender decision making and choice selection, and to treat separately decisions relating to the various stages of involvement in offences. ). In the crime that was committed in Arlington the three criminals made the choice to commit the crime knowing the consequences of their actions. The three white males decided to rob the friend of the victim (Reginald Taylor) which led to the death of Reginald Taylor. The choice theory in this crime was a part 1 crime robbery which led to murder. It is clear also that decision makers are "fallible learners who seek to do as well as they can, given the constraints that they face" Elinor Ostrom, (1998). In this crime the criminals made the decision to rob the gentleman and since one of them had a gun, they knew the situation could possibly get out of hand. So when the victim was approaching them one of them shot him which brought murder into the mix. So the criminals were planning to rob these men by any means necessary including death. With the second crime in Arlington it seems as if it was committed by the same people. Every situation in both crimes have similarity in them. The criminals choose to rob the man and then shot him in both crimes. The choice theory is that because they were able to get away with the first crime they committed the second crime. Until the criminals are caught and punished to the severity of the crimes committed, they will continue to commit the crimes. Research demonstrates that recidivism amongst

convicted felons following release from prison is as high as 63% and that most prison inmates had arrest records and convictions prior to their current offense (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1989). So the choice of the crime was that they decided to commit the act of robbery. When the crimes were still unsolved the criminals decided to commit the same crime again regardless of the outcome and or death of another human being. Trait Theory Trait theory is the view that criminality is a product of abnormal biological or psychological traits. It is an approach to personality theory in psychology. The traits theory aspect states that a person's personal characteristics and social environment work together to create the criminal behavior. The emotions, thoughts, and behavior patterns that a person has are referred to as a personality (Kassin (2003) and can vary between individuals. Trait theory some times seems logical and or straight forth, but it has its good and or bad points. Understanding trait theory will help us to better understand people and what they think in relations to crime and life in general. Trait theory states that if a person's background is full of violence and crime then that person is more than likely to show those behaviors. This is one of the bad aspects in a way that it says if you are from a bad environment you will be a criminal and or no one can change. The Arlington crime was a crime of robbery and murder. In this crime the trait theory would suggest that the men committed the crime because of the social environment and the biological background of the criminals. The three men who shot the Arlington men could have been involved in a gang in which the social environment would have been the trait theory that was the reason of the crime. Whether the crime was a biological crime would be based on the background of the

criminals. The biological aspect of the crime can't and won't be determined until the criminals are caught. Then they will possibly have the chance to give a reason to why they committed the crime and or the motives behind the actions of the crime. The criminal in this crime went on the impulse of robbery and then ended in murder. By being able to get away it gave the criminals the impulse to do it again until they are caught. That impulse becomes a psychological trait which makes the criminals feel as if they are inferior and can't be caught so they continue until they are caught. When the criminals are caught the crime weight is basically lifted off of the criminal's shoulders and the future crimes by these criminals were deterred. In conclusion although different choice theories and trait theories are based on the criminal mind. Choice theory is based on the criminal having the option to choose whether to commit a crime or not to commit a crime. While the trait theory is described as a product of a person's biological and environmental background or status. Taking the choice theory into account is taking into consideration the next stages in life. The stages that combined with environmental and genetic makeup can contribute to the choice to act as a criminal. In this the criminal weighs the act of committing the crime which then leads to the trait theory where the biological background is considered and the environmental setting. This is true in the choice theory because every individual has a choice to decide if committing a crime is the right choice to make within their life. While trait theory could be based on parental background and the environment in which the person lives in. Both theories are true in the aspect of crime. Only choice theory helps to find a way to deter a person from crime while trait theory is depending upon where

you live and how you were raised in the aspect of crime. This implies that if you have a biological background in crime then most likely you will most likely commit crimes yourself. If you live in a neighborhood where crime is the forefront of the community than you will show those behaviors. So when determining why people engage in criminal behavior, the individuals should be considered biologically, socially, and psychologically. . With choice theory and trait theory being possible factors of these crimes they are and should be in relations when considering the reasons for committing crimes.

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