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WHAT MAKES THEM CRIMINALS?

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Heston was born in a dysfunctional household. His mother was an alcoholic and his father a recidivist who was serving time in prison. Heston would constantly get bullied in his school because of his family background. He did not have any friends and even the ones he had left him after they got to know about his father. Heston's peers isolated him and thought him to be someone dangerous. Heston had outbursts which led him to be aggressive and break things in his house. Heston's mother would call him his "father's son" because he was short-tempered just like his father and this infuriated Heston even more because he did not want to be his father. Heston decided to endure all this until he could leave school and live by himself. Hence, he worked hard in school. Until one day, on his way back home, he was ambushed by one of his bullies who demanded money from him to which Heston refused. Matters escalated quickly and Heston was brutally beaten up. Before Heston could stop himself, he took a brick to crush the other kid's skull. The kid died and Heston fled the scene.

Heston's family and his environment as seen above were precarious. Despite everything that was going on in his life and no one to support him other than his alcoholic mother, he had a strong resolve. Then what caused him to lose all that resolve and kill another person?

Psychologists, criminologists, and forensic psychologists alike have been studying criminality and criminals for decades. To this day they focus their research and studies on mapping out the mindset of a criminal before and after the crime has occurred. If these studies are brought to fruition and backed up with strong arguments and evidence, they can help in crime prevention and help control crime rates in countries. In the early 1800s, Cesare Lombroso aimed to study the causes of crime and proposed a biological theory that indicated that criminality is inherited.



Then came the “Golden Age of Research” which showed a rapid proliferation in research and other studies which also included criminality and criminal behaviour. Scientists proposed various approaches which could help ascertain the exact causes of crime. However, not all the theories were consistent with everyone since human behaviour comes with its discrepancies. Undeniably, the crime commission cannot be explained without using a multifaceted approach.

Let us go into a little detail about the biological approach to studying crime. This mainly proposed that criminality can be inherited. The main proponent for this approach was Cesare Lombroso who assumed that some people are “born criminals”.

The theory that I will be focusing on is the Diathesis-Stress Model. This model is occasionally used in psychopathology and is used to explain the development of psychological disorders. As the name suggests, it studies the interaction between a diathesis and stress caused in an individual. Diathesis is a genetic predisposition that is inherently present in the individual. Simply put, diathesis is a vulnerability. Therefore, this theory can also be called the Stress-Vulnerability model.

Diathesis can include genetic, biological, physiological, cognitive, and personality-related factors. For example, an abnormality in a gene is passed down to an individual from one of his parents. Diathesis can also be acquired at an early stage in life, for example, the loss of a loved one. Stress can be explained as a life event that disrupts the equilibrium of an individual. The model proposes that when an individual with a genetic predisposition or vulnerability encounters a stressor, which pushes them beyond their threshold, it can result in the development of a disorder. This theory can also be used to understand criminal behaviour.

In the case of Heston, let us say that he had a vulnerability passed down by his father who was an offender. This vulnerability might be the quick temper that he had in common with his father. His upbringing was nowhere near a stable environment for him. Despite this, Heston had a re-

solve to be different from his father. However, things went off course when he was ambushed by one of his bullies. This was his stressor. Thus, when Heston, who had obtained the diathesis factor from his father, encountered a stressful event, he succumbed to violence.

What if Heston had never inherited the diathesis from his father? Would he still have committed the deed? It is improbable but then again there is no certain answer. However, a way to cope with the diathesis would be to have a protective factor in the person's life. In Heston's case, it would have been a caring mother and good peers.

The Diathesis-stress model has its shortcomings. It does not stand true with the offspring of all offenders or any individual with a diathesis. The Diathesis-stress model is one among many theories that have been put forth to understand criminal behaviour and emphatically understand its origin.

References:

- Monroe, S. M., & Simons, A. D. (1991). Diathesis-stress theories in the context of life stress research: implications for the depressive disorders. *Psychological bulletin*, 110(3), 406. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.110.3.406>
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Myth - If a fingerprint residue comes in contact with water, it will be destroyed.

Fact - Fingerprint residue is made up of sweat, amino acids, oils, etc. When fingerprint residue comes in contact with water, only the water soluble portion is destroyed while the non-soluble portion still remains and the fingerprint can still be used.