

**Doctoral Qualifying Examination
Theory Exam
Department of Criminology**

Spring 2020

Exam Rules:

The student's personal items will be kept in the office of the graduate director during the exam. The student will be provided with a writing pad, computer, pen, and exam.

During the examination period of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., the student must not utilize any outside resources. The student may not confer with any people or refer to any books, articles, etc. Students are on their honor to produce their own work on their exams. The University subscribes to a document-checking service that can be used to assess plagiarism; the Department of Criminology reserves the right to submit any examination to this service for evaluation.

Responses to exam questions may be typed; student should double-space and use a 12-point font. Students who use computers will save their exam as a single MS Word document to the notebook computer provided by the Graduate Director. **Clearly indicate which questions you are answering by providing the question number or quoting the text of the question on the exam. Indicate at the top or bottom of the exam how many pages in total your document is.**

Students may not withdraw from the exam after receiving it; if the student does not complete and turn in the exam, it will be recorded as a failure. Exam responses must be submitted to the Exam Proctor by 5 p.m.

Security: The exam computers have been stripped. The computers were checked before the exam. All non-program file were removed, Internet access has been blocked, and the computers were locked up until exam time.

After the exam, the computers will be checked to determine if any flash drive has been inserted or if the internet has been accessed. **DO NOT ACCESS THE INTERNET FOR ANY REASON.** The Graduate Director will have visual/audio contact with the room for the exam period.

There is a single Word file on the desktop with the exam. Write your answers IN that document. You, your computer and your exam have a number that identifies you. Do not change the name of the file; do not include your name IN the exam file.

If you would like to print your exam, bring your computer to the Graduate Director or Graduate Coordinator.

When you are finished, submit your completed exam to the Graduate Director or Graduate Coordinator.

Exam Instructions: You must pick at 4 questions from the 8 questions listed below. In total, you will answer 4 questions. For each, write an essay the scientific style of which resembles that found in scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles. Students should provide in-text citations to the best of their abilities; a reference list is not required. There are no minimum or maximum page limits.

1. Dr. Ron Akers has repeatedly argued that rational choice, social control, and deterrence theories *should* be subsumed under social learning theory. Write an essay describing *both* what is common and what is unique about social learning theory relative to the other three theories (social control, deterrence, and rational choice). Then discuss whether you feel the field would be better off by taking Akers' suggestion.
2. There is now a sizable literature seeking to understand the victim/offender overlap. Which theoretical framework best explains the above association? Please cite relevant literature and research. Identify and discuss at least one research topic where the theoretical framework you selected has difficulty or otherwise falls short in accounting for the overlap between victimization and offending. Then identify a theory that you believe is poorly suited to explaining the victim/overlap and explain why.
3. The "Code of the Streets" has been widely tested since it was first conceptualized by Elijah Anderson over two decades ago. First, describe the main concepts and review relevant empirical assessments of the Code of the Streets' validity and generality. Do you think this is a "good" theory – why or why not?
4. Robert Sampson writes "Criminologists have traditionally addressed the causes of crime by studying why some individuals and not others commit crimes, leading to between-individual comparisons and a well known list of correlated attributes (sex, race, personality, family background, and so on). Although this research tradition is obviously important, a different way of approaching the problem is found in life-course criminology." What is the research tradition in life-course criminology? What does it offer that is missed by traditional criminology? The biggest critics of life-course criminology are Gottfredson and Hirschi. What is the thrust of their criticism? What is your position regarding the Gottfredson and Hirschi and Sampson and Laub debate?
5. Theoretical explanations of desistance from crime have proliferated in recent years. Desistance theories differ in their emphases on structural versus subjective explanations. Subjective explanations for desistance focus on internal, self-initiated changes that facilitate desistance. Structural explanations point to external events/states that influence individual offending patterns. Assess the adequacy and empirical support for two leading theoretical perspectives on desistance: one that emphasizes a subjective explanation, and another that emphasizes a structural explanation. In what areas should desistance research and theorizing move in the coming years?

6. Many explanations have been offered for the dramatic reduction in US crime rates during the 1990s. These explanations generally have not made significant use of theory; they have instead emphasized a single variable (e.g., the strong economy, increased incarceration). Use a prominent criminological theory to explain the reduction in crime during the 1990s. Discuss the basic perspective and arguments of this theory, but give maximum attention to fully using its concepts and hypotheses to explain why crime decreased in the 1990s. Extend your discussion of the utility of this theory to support why the US has experienced an increase in violent crime over the last few years in major cities.

7. In 2017, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared opioid abuse as a public health emergency. The opioid epidemic specifically refers to the growing number of deaths and hospitalizations from opioids, including prescriptions, illicit drugs, and analogues. In recent years, death rates from these drugs have ramped up to over 40,000 a year, or 115 a day, across the US. Drug overdose is now the leading cause of accidental death in the United States, largely due to the opioid epidemic. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that the total "economic burden" of prescription opioid misuse alone in the United States is \$78.5 billion a year, including the costs of healthcare, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and criminal justice involvement. Choose the theory that you think best explains the opioid crisis, either on the individual-level or community-level. Be sure to fully explain the theory and identify the empirical literature that supports your use of the theory. Based on the theory you propose, provide policy and/or program recommendations to address the opioid crisis.

8. Mainstream criminological theories have been criticized for not considering and incorporating demographic characteristics (which are robust predictors of criminal behavior). Furthermore, some scholars have suggested that theories of criminality need to move beyond sex or race or class etc. comparisons to considering these constructs in tandem (e.g., Collins, 1991; Lynch, 1996) – a theoretical perspective often called intersectionality. These demographic characteristics represent social status and as such they interact to inform experience, agency, and power. Choose any of the theories below and speak to this issue. Does considering gender and race in tandem change the nature of the explanation of crime? In other words, how might our knowledge of the gender and race literatures (which are fairly voluminous) interact to inform one of the theories? A thorough answer will discuss the basic tenets of the theory and then propose how, when gender and race are considered, aspects of the theory may change. Or, alternatively, construct a convincing argument that the theory is truly gender and race invariant.

General Strain Theory	Social Bonding/Control
Self-Control	Social Learning
Developmental Criminology	Social Disorganization
Differential Association	Rational Choice
Biological theories	Routine Activities