

Doctoral Qualifying Examination
Department of Criminology
Spring 2012

Theories of Crime

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 from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm, 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.¹ Students may hand write their exams; the exams will be typed up by a staff person and the committee will receive both the typed and hand-written copies. 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 graduate director by 4 p.m.

Pick any four of the following eight 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) Select one of the following types of crimes: intimate partner violence, serious and violent juvenile offending, drug offending, white-collar crime, or homicide. Choose one criminological theory that you believe best explains the type of crime you selected and discuss why you consider it to be the best explanation. Illustrate in detail how the theory you selected accounts for this crime and cite relevant research that supports your argument.
- 2) Describe the historical development of social learning theory, including its origins in differential association theory. What elements of differential association theory are retained in social learning theory and in what ways has social learning theory extended or elaborated upon the original differential association theory? Cite relevant research that supports and/or refutes the theoretical elaborations provided by the social learning model and draw a conclusion whether social learning theory has made a substantive contribution to the explanation of crime beyond that provided by differential association theory.

¹ The exam computers are checked before the exam. All non-program files are removed, Internet access is blocked, and the computers are locked up until exam time. After the exam, software is used to detect use of USB ports.

- 3) Discuss thoroughly the criteria used to evaluate the quality of criminological theories for explaining crime and detail why each of these criteria produce stronger theories. Which current criminological theory do you believe does the best job and which does the worst job of meeting those criteria? Thoroughly defend your answers to those who would disagree with you.
- 4) Developmental/life-course criminology has witnessed substantial growth in the recent years. Two of the more recognized theoretical frameworks are that of Moffitt (1993) and Sampson and Laub (1993). Specifically, Moffitt (1993) has provided a typology where she describes adolescent-limited and life-course-persistent offenders. Comparatively, Sampson and Laub (1993) have proposed an age-graded theory of informal social control. For this essay, (a) discuss the central propositions of each of the two theoretical frameworks, (b) highlight the distinctions between the two, (c) review the evidence in support of or against their central propositions, and (d) indicate which one of these theoretical frameworks you think is most promising as an explanation for crime.

Moffitt, T.E. (1993). Adolescent-limited and life-course-persistent antisocial behavior: A developmental taxonomy. *Psychological Review*, 100, 674-701.

Sampson, R.J., & Laub, J. (1993). *Crime in the making: Pathways and turning points through life*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- 5) When students are asked to discuss “subcultural” theories of crime, they usually dredge up theorists like Walter B. Miller, Lloyd Ohlin, Richard Cloward, and maybe even Franco Ferracuti and Marvin Wolfgang. There seems, however, to have been a recent renaissance in subcultural theory in the study of crime. This new thinking has primarily come from Elijah Anderson and Sampson & Bartusch. Compare and contrast the classic and contemporary subcultural theories. What improvements/refinements—either conceptually or empirically—have these contemporary subcultural theorists made over the years? Do you think these contemporary subcultural theories hold promise? Why or why not?
- 6) The feminist critique of criminological theorizing claims that extant theory is male-centered and generally does not account for female experiences (including participation in crime and delinquency). Briefly summarize the main points of this critique, assess the empirical evidence around these claims, and describe and evaluate a theory that purports to account for gender differences in crime. Discuss the implications of your evaluation for future theory and research.
- 7) There is now a sizable literature seeking to understand the victim/offender overlap. Which theoretical framework(s) best explain(s) the above association? Please cite relevant literature and research.
- 8) Contemporary social disorganization theory identifies several structural correlates of crime rates across communities, but acknowledges that additional factors mediate the relationship between these structural factors and crime. Discuss in detail both the exogenous structural conditions of disorganization necessary for crime as well as the factors that mediate the effects of disorganization on crime rates. Review the research that tests the relationships proposed by contemporary social disorganization theory and take a position on whether or not variation in crime rates across communities can be explained by variation in the community’s level of disorganization. Be sure to defend your answer thoroughly.