

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

**Spring 2018**

**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.

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 files 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 (which includes the exam questions). 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. You may print to the printer in SOC 351.

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

**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) 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
Control Balance	

- 2) A successful theory must meet both theoretical and empirical standards. In some detail, highlight the theoretical and empirical elements of a good theory. Which criminological theory does the best job of meeting these standards? What current criminological theory fails to meet these standards? Justify your answers to those who would disagree.
- 3) Criminology theorizing is criticized for being male-centered and unable to account for female experiences (including participation in crime and delinquency). Briefly summarize the main points of this critique and assess the empirical evidence around these claims. Also describe and evaluate one theory in particular that purports to account for gender *similarities* in crime and another theory that purports to account for gender *differences* in crime. Discuss the implications of your evaluation for future theory and research.
- 4) Deterrence theory and labeling theory offer two contradictory positions on the effects of legal punishment. Please describe these two positions and, for each one, provide a comprehensive review of the empirical evidence and assess which theory most accurately captures the effects of legal punishments.

- 5) 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.
- 6) 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 macro-level forces that influence individual offending patterns. Assess 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?
- 7) In his recent address to the American Society of Criminology as its 2010 Sutherland Award recipient, Frank Cullen (see Cullen, 2011 *Criminology*, 49(2):287-330) critiqued the discipline as having been dominated by a paradigm he referred to as “adolescence-limited criminology” (ALC). Cullen claims that this paradigm has privileged the use of self-report surveys of adolescents to test sociological theories of criminal behavior. Similarly, in their award winning book, *Mean Streets* (1997, Cambridge), John Hagan and Bill McCarthy also critique the discipline for its over-reliance on “school” criminology at the expense of “street” criminology. Please (1) summarize the arguments of Cullen and of Hagan and McCarthy, (2) critically assess the validity, strengths and weaknesses of these critiques, and (3) take a position to either (a) defend “school”/“adolescence-limited” criminology or (b) support these critiques; explain why you selected the position you have elected to take.
- 8) Since the late 1990s, the use of opioids has dramatically increased becoming one of America’s most pressing public health crises. For instance, in 2015, more than 33,000 Americans died from an opioid overdose, and more than 2 million people suffered from disorders stemming from opioid or heroin use. Unlike drug crises in the past, the opioid crisis disproportionately affects people who are older, white, and living in rural areas. First, describe the current state of the opioid crisis and how it differs from prior drug epidemics (e.g. crack). Second, what theories would you use to explain the opioid crisis, paying particular attention to the population characteristics of those most affected; and how are theoretical perspective(s) you chose to explain the opioid crisis similar or differ from those that may explain the crack/cocaine epidemic.