

Doctoral Qualifying Examination  
Department of Criminology  
Fall 2011

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.<sup>1</sup> 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. Sampson has argued that criminologists have historically examined the causes of crime by focusing on explaining why some individuals commit crime and others do not. This type of approach has produced between-individual comparisons that have empirically identified a number of key correlates of crime (sex, race, personality, family background, and so on). Notwithstanding these theoretical and empirical contributions, an alternative developmental/life-course criminology tradition has recently emerged. What are the theoretical origins of 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?
2. 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

3. 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.
4. 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?
5. Control theory has undergone several changes, especially since Hirschi's (1969) proposal and test of "social bonding" theory. Describe in detail the evolution of control theory since 1969 and highlight the similarities and differences among the various iterations of this theoretical tradition. Finally, evaluate the degree to which this evolution in control theory has produced meaningful improvement, from both a logical and empirical standpoint, in our understanding of crime and delinquency.
6. In 1998, Akers advanced a multi-level version of his widely tested social learning theory, which he named the "social structure-social learning" (SSSL) model. Krohn (1999), however, has argued that the SSSL model is theoretically underdeveloped and that the causal linkages between the structural (macro and meso-level) and processual (micro-level) variables in the model are not adequately explicated. Assuming that Krohn is correct, provide the missing theoretical discussion of how the structural variables are related to the processual variables in the SSSL model. Provide examples and draw upon extant empirical research to support your theoretical arguments.
7. 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.
8. Different criminological theories—even those from very different intellectual traditions—often agree on what variables are statistically associated with one another. The disagreements between different theories often relate to their interpretations of those correlations. As an example of this issue, discuss the positive correlation between past and future offending, and then describe in detail two different theories' competing interpretation of this correlation. For each theory, give a thorough explanation of its interpretation, being sure to show how this interpretation fits within its overall explanation of involvement in crime. Then, to conclude, indicate which interpretation most accurately describes the association between these two variables and describe relevant research.