

Oral Defense Announcement

University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Criminology and Criminal Justice

Benjamin Hamilton

M.A. in Criminology and Criminal Justice, 2016, University of Missouri – St. Louis
B.A. in Criminal Justice (Summa Cum Laude), 2014, University of Maine at Presque Isle

Examining the Interrelations between Rational Choice Inputs: Implications for Criminological Theory and Research

An essential component of any rational choice theory of criminal behavior is the notion that crime decisions are driven by an individual's expected gains and losses to illicit activities. More specifically, offenders are typically presumed to balance the pleasures of the various benefits to crime against the pains associated with crime's risks and costs, the presumption being that the offender will pursue criminal acts in the event he or she believes the expected utility to crime exceeds that which can be achieved through strictly legal means. Although criminologists have managed to test some of the more basic implications of this choice calculus, so to speak, many of the more nuanced predictions of this calculus have received relatively minimal scholarly attention. In particular, little is currently known about the extent to which a person's perceptions of the rewards, risks, and costs to crime will exert a *combined influence* on his or her criminal proclivities. Put differently, we have yet to rigorously examine whether the perceived incentives to crime will be *interdependent* on one another in shaping an offender's involvement in criminal activities. Not only is the criminological literature largely bereft of any formal discussion of any such interdependencies (insofar as what theory would seem to imply about the interrelations between rational choice inputs), but also any direct empirical examination of those interdependencies still has yet to be carried out. This dissertation sought to fill this gap in the literature by deriving three primary sets of hypotheses from prior scholarship on rational choice theories of crime (namely, Becker's [1986] model), each of which outlines the directionality, and overall functional form, of the potential interdependent relationships between the rewards, risks, and costs to crime. Each hypothesis was then examined using self-report data derived from the Pathways to Desistance Study, the results of which were largely supportive of the existence of a generally interdependent link between rational choice variables.

Defense of Dissertation Committee

Kyle Thomas, Ph.D.

Chair

Lee Ann Slocum, Ph.D.

Chris Sullivan, Ph.D.

Thomas Loughran, Ph.D.