

**Theory Comprehensive Exam  
Fall 2013**

**Instructions: For this exam, please answer any four (4) of the following questions  
All responses are to be turned in at 4:00. You may contact Margarita if you have any  
problems requiring faculty attention.**

1. Many scholars have highlighted how America is “exceptional” among nations both in the relative number of people to whom criminal justice sanctions are applied and in the continued use of the ultimate sanction – state executions. Write an essay in which you describe the extent to which America is, in fact, exceptional in punishment practices and why this may be the case.
  
2. Demographic and social status correlates of crime have received significant theoretical and empirical attention. Pick one of the correlates below and systematically review empirical evidence on its relationship to criminal involvement and discuss the theoretical framework(s) most relevant to explaining the link between this correlate and crime.
  - a. Race/ethnicity
  - b. Social class/poverty
  - c. Sex
  
3. Criminological theories have been advanced to explain both stability and change in antisocial behaviors over the life course. Present a detailed discussion of the research examining behavioral stability and change as it relates to criminological research. Then, provide two explanations from the literature that can be used to explain behavioral stability and/or behavioral change.
  
4. Discuss the development of strain theory from Merton to Agnew. In doing so, be sure to explicate the main propositions of each theory. How did Agnew expand and build off of Merton’s work. Discuss the empirical literature testing both of these theories. Are they supported empirically?
  
5. According to official statistics, the U.S. violent crime rate has dropped considerably since the early 1990s. Describe the nature of the violent crime drop and thoroughly examine the literature purporting to explain such trends. Be sure to clearly discuss the possible explanations for past trends/current levels and provide your assessment of those explanations. Finally, present convincing arguments in favor of the explanation that you believe best explains the crime drop.

6. Describe what is known about racial OR gender differences in relation to disparities in criminal justice outcomes and identify which theory or theories best account for such outcome disparities.
7. What is the established empirical relationship between neighborhood characteristics and violent crime? What criminological perspectives are most relevant to its explanation? Be certain to summarize the possible theoretical interpretations of the link between neighborhood context and levels of violence and assess which of these interpretations has the most support in the literature.

**Note: If you answer question 7, do not answer question 8. Also, if you answer question 8, do not answer question 7.**

8. Social disorganization has been an important and seemingly “timeless” concept informing criminological inquiry. Discuss the origins and uses of the concept up to the present and briefly assess its current empirical status.