

Theory Comprehensive Exam  
Spring 2006

Instructions: For this exam you are to select any four (4) of the following questions. All responses are to be turned in at 4:00 p.m. Several faculty members have been assigned to monitor the exam, and their designated hours are listed below. You may contact them in their offices if you have any problem requiring faculty attention.

8:00 – 10:00am	Bruce Bullington	Room 316
10:00am – 12:00pm	Carter Hay	Room 320
12:00 – 2:00pm	Vanessa Barker	Room 323
2:00 – 4:00pm	Kristy Holtfreter	Room 325

1. 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.

To consider this issue, identify two variables that research shows to be correlated with one another, and then describe in detail two different theories' competing interpretations of that correlation.

For each theory, give a fair and 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 the relevant research.

2. Hirschi's (1969) social control theory often is seen as the most family-oriented theory of crime and delinquency causation. Sampson and Laub's (1993) *Crime in the Making* uses Hirschi's theory as a foundation for their empirical analyses, but in a number of respects, they move beyond the simple arguments found in Hirschi's theory.

Please discuss this issue by outlining the basic arguments of social control theory, and then reviewing some of the key contributions of Sampson and Laub's work. Be sure to address issues and findings related to their considerations of:

- a. the demographic/structural predictors of social bonds,
- b. the "latent trait" issue, and
- c. the longitudinal/lifecourse nature of the social control process

3. Motivation and opportunity are key concepts of rational choice theory. Within the rational choice framework, outline the way(s) in which these concepts are purported to explain the decision to commit both traditional (i.e., street) crime and white-collar/occupational crime (e.g., embezzlement, financial accounting fraud). What role does social context play, if any, in the decision to commit each type of crime? Are there other theoretical frameworks that you find useful in explaining both street and white-collar crime?

4. What is the link between criminological theory/research and policy? Why should policy makers pay attention to criminological theory and research? How does criminological theory and research inform (or not inform) policy makers regarding: (a) criminogenic circumstances and correlates; (b) crime prevention; and (c) correctional sanctioning?

5. America's drug wars have been featured elements of our national crime policy for a long time, and especially since the early Reagan administration took up the issue in 1981. Explain how several (at least three) different criminological theories could be used to assess the perceived national drug problem (what is it, which groups are involved and why, etc.), and the policy implications of these interpretations. What remedial actions, if any, would flow from each of the chosen theories?

6. Labeling theory enjoyed its criminological heyday during the 1960s and early 1970s, ultimately falling into disfavor. Describe the evolution of the theory, its principal proponents, and the social circumstances under which it prospered. What were the reasons for its demise? What is its current status?

7. The role of crime victims in the criminal justice system has changed tremendously over the past thirty years. Some scholars interpret victim participation as part of restorative justice while others see it as retribution. Explain how the role of crime victims has changed and what effect their participation has had on criminal justice practice and policy.

8. With the retention of the death penalty, the US stands alone among western liberal democracies. Why do you think the US continues to execute criminal offenders? Be sure to discuss scholarly debates about this phenomenon.

9. The relationship between social class and crime has been a source of considerable debate within the discipline. Describe the contours of this debate and assess the state of evidence in this regard. Then describe what you consider to be the most useful theoretical perspectives that might be used to make sense of what is known about that relationship.