

**Theory Comprehensive Exam
Spring 2012**

Instructions: For this exam, you are to select any four (4) of the following questions (continued on the next page). All responses are to be turned in at 4:00 p.m. You may contact Margarita if you have any problem requiring faculty attention.

1. In *A primer in Theory Construction*, Reynolds notes that the primary functions of theory as a tool in the enterprise of social science include: (1) description (by choice of concepts to represent reality), (2) explanation (of what has been observed), (3) prediction (of anticipated observations) and control (of what has been explained). Control speaks to what an explanation suggests or implies could “be done” about that which is explained. Select relevant explanatory statements from three of the following perspectives and discuss what they suggest could or should “be done” assuming the statements are supported by evidence. The perspectives are: bio-social, cultural or social learning, labeling, and strain.

2. Citing relevant literature, discuss the development of two (2) of the following four (4) general theories of crime. For each theory, a) discuss its origins, b) evolution, c) how the theory explains offending and d) recent empirical investigations.

- A. Social Bond Theory
- B. Strain Theory
- C. Social Learning Theory
- D. Life Course Theory

3. Many explanations have been offered for the dramatic reduction in U.S. crime rates during 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, etc.) treated in isolation from theory rather than as part of a broader theoretical perspective.

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. Last, discuss empirical research that is relevant to the theoretical arguments you have made.

4. In the criminological research there is an ongoing debate about the existence of racial discrimination in justice outcomes. Does extant empirical research support the existence of racial discrimination? If so, please explain how and what empirical innovations have been utilized to identify its existence. If not, what are the voids in the research and what steps need to be taken in order to reconcile the discrepancy?

5. Discuss how Emile Durkheim and G.H. Mead have influenced the development of criminological theory.

6. The role that parents play in the development of delinquency occupies a central position within criminological theory and research. Using the works of Judith Rich Harris, David Rowe, Steven Pinker, and others provide a critique of this research. Discuss the various ways to overcome the shortcomings of parental socialization literature.

7. Among individuals, arguably the strongest correlate of criminal offending is one's past involvement in offending. Discuss the alternative theoretical explanations for why this is the case. Then review the research that has examined those explanations and provide your assessment of what best explains the strong association between past and future offending.

8. There have been several important correlates of crime discussed in the criminological literature. Pick two of the six correlates listed below and discuss how they explain offending. In answering this question, be sure to discuss the theoretical framework(s) linking the two correlates you selected to offending. Additionally, be sure to discuss empirical studies that have included your two correlates.

1. Race/Ethnicity
2. Social Class
3. Gender
4. Delinquent Peer Associations
5. Violent Attitudes
6. Neighborhood Context

9. Discuss the role of the brain/neuropsychological functioning in relation to serious violent behavior. Then discuss how research from the neurosciences could be integrated into at least two existing criminological theories.

10. Assessing empirical validity is an important component of evaluating theoretical frameworks. Unfortunately, in many instances there are considerable gaps that emerge between the concepts, propositions, and causal relationships tested in empirical research, and the concepts, propositions, and causal relationships specified in theoretical statements, which can yield empirical results that are interesting but not clearly relevant to the causal arguments made in the theory that motivates the effort. Some scholars have suggested that this is a particularly troublesome feature of the criminological literature on racial threat and social control. Write an essay in which you (a) summarize racial threat theory, highlighting the main concepts, propositions, and causal relationships implied in the theory; (b) summarize the empirical research, highlighting the concepts, propositions, and causal relationships most typically tested; and (c) discuss the conclusions that can be drawn about racial threat and social control from existing empirical research.