

Theory Comprehensive Exam  
Spring 2018

Day One

Instructions: For this section of the exam, answer any two (2) of the following four questions. If more than two answers are submitted, the committee will read only the first two and the third will not be counted in any way. All responses are to be turned in no later than 12:45.

Once a student takes possession of the examination, this will be regarded as an attempt to take the exam regardless of whether the student completes the exam, hands in any answers, or remains for the full exam period.

1. Sampson and Laub's life-course approach has dominated research on desistance from crime. Describe their basic perspective and the empirical research that bears on it. Then, critique their perspective—what are its problems, limitations, or omissions? How might these be addressed or mitigated?
2. Research on the causes of formal social control maintains that social control is a function of social and community context. Assess the empirical evidence regarding social/community context and formal social control. Does social/community context matter, and if so, how does it matter? What are some limitations of the extant research? What directions would you recommend for research that might shed light on the relationship between social/community context and formal social control?
3. A debate has emerged over whether or not the gender gap in violence has declined during the past three decades in America. Describe the theoretical perspectives that have been offered for why the gender gap may have declined during this period. Next, outline the contours of the debate about the empirical evidence on the matter, drawing a conclusion about whether the gender gap has or has not changed significantly.
4. Scholars often note that there is a disconnect between criminological research and the policies that are created by policymakers. Pick two examples that you feel best demonstrate the disconnect between research and policy. Explain (1) what the topic is, (2) what research has revealed about the topic, (3) what the current policies are (i.e., what is currently being done?), and (4) what research suggests about how the current policies should be reformed. Be sure to cite relevant empirical research.

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1. The United States has the highest incarceration rate among industrial democracies in the world. What theoretical perspective(s) might best account for this and what empirical support might warrant your choice.

2. Tittle (1995:35) has critiqued criminological theories as being too simple, in part because they often fail to “identify the contingencies that influence the strength with which the causal processes operate.” In short, they fail to identify conditioning (“moderating”) factors.

Identify a theory that matches this description, and show how it could be amended to better incorporate hypotheses on conditional effects. Discuss the empirical evidence supporting your suggested changes.

3. 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 the parental socialization literature.

4. Most theories state that the level of some causal factor is associated with the level of another. They frequently say nothing about change. What is the difference between “level” effects and “change” effects? What implications does the distinction have for theory? Illustrate this with a theory of your choosing.