

College of Criminology & Criminal Justice
Theory Comprehensive Exam
Spring, 2021

Day One

Instructions: Answer any two of the following questions. Please notify the proctor when you are finished. 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. 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 period.

1. Assess the empirical evidence regarding racial threat and formal social control. What are some ways researchers have attempted to test this hypothesis and in what ways is the threat hypothesis supported or not supported? What limitations do you see in the existing empirical literature and what directions would you suggest for future research?
2. Discuss genetic confounding and how it represents a significant threat to criminological studies that use standard social science methodologies (SSSMs). In doing so, be sure to discuss heritability, gene-environment correlations and biosocial methodologies that are able to account for genetic confounding.
3. What are the core assumptions and theoretical arguments of social bond theory? What is the state of evidence on the theory? What would you argue are the most important research gaps in the theory and why do you think these are the most important?
4. What does ideology have to do with theory? Use either of the three major schools of Criminological thought (Classical, Positive, Critical) to illustrate your answer.

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Day Two

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1. Residing in certain neighborhoods has its advantages and disadvantages. Using theory and prior empirical research, explain the following: (1) factors that are believed to cause crime in neighborhoods; (2) factors that are believed to buffer crime in neighborhoods and (3) policies that may be gleaned from neighborhood effects research. Be sure to discuss and cite the empirical evidence.
2. A growing body of knowledge has examined the collateral consequences of mass incarceration for society. Review the current state of knowledge with respect to the effects of mass incarceration on children and families, employment and neighborhoods. Following this review, discuss the three most pressing questions for researchers to examine related to mass incarceration and social inequality.
3. Describe the gender gap in crime. Identify the theory you see as most useful for explaining the gender gap and explain its theoretical relevance. Then describe the research evidence supporting your conclusion.
4. Much research indicates that having delinquent friends is one of the strongest correlates of offending. However, questions about measurement, causal order and spuriousness have directed attention to whether this relationship reflects a causal effect of peers on behavior. Describe the theoretical arguments that present delinquent friends as a cause of offending, and then assess the empirical evidence. What ultimate conclusions should be reached?

