

Theory Comprehensive Exam Practice Questions

This document contains questions that students may choose to prepare written responses to for review by a professor as part of their preparation process for the comprehensive exam. These questions were chosen to provide students a breadth of topics as well as a variety of critical thinking applications. These questions will not appear, as written, on any comprehensive exam.

- 1) Criminology theorizing is criticized for being male-centered and unable to account for female experiences (including participation in crime and delinquency). Briefly summarize the main points of this critique and assess the empirical evidence around these claims. Also describe and evaluate one theory in particular that purports to account for gender similarities in crime and another theory that purports to account for gender differences in crime. Discuss the implications of your evaluation for future theory and research.

- 2) Describe the historical development of social learning theory, including its origins in differential association theory. What elements of differential association theory are retained in social learning theory and in what ways has social learning theory extended or elaborated upon the original differential association theory? Cite relevant research that supports and/or refutes the theoretical elaborations provided by the social learning model and draw a conclusion whether social learning theory has made a substantive contribution to the explanation of crime beyond that provided by differential association theory.

- 3) Control theory has undergone several changes, especially since Hirschi's (1969) proposal and test of "social bonding" theory. Describe in detail the evolution of control theory since 1969 and highlight the similarities and differences among the various iterations of this theoretical tradition. Finally, evaluate the degree to which this evolution in control theory has produced meaningful improvement, from both a logical and empirical standpoint, in our understanding of crime and delinquency.

- 4) Deterrence theory and labeling theory offer two contradictory positions on the effects of legal punishment. Please describe these two positions and, for each one, provide a comprehensive review of the empirical evidence and assess which theory most accurately captures the effects of legal punishments.

5) Discuss thoroughly the criteria used to evaluate the quality of criminological theories for explaining crime and detail why each of these criteria produce stronger theories. Which current criminological theory do you believe does the best job and which does the worst job of meeting those criteria? Thoroughly defend your answers to those who would disagree with you.

6) Compare and contrast the Anomie theories of Durkheim, Merton, and Messner & Rosenfeld.

7) Describe the current state of labeling theory. In doing so, be sure to emphasize (1) the definition of labeling, (2) the factors that should increase one's exposure to labeling, (3) the reasons why labeling should affect later crime, and (4) the factors that may amplify or diminish its effects on crime. Where relevant, discuss empirical evidence on the accuracy of labeling theory's predictions.

8) Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) self-control theory (and Hirschi's 2004 revised version of self-control theory) and Akers (1973) social learning theory are classic criminological theories. Describe the similarities and differences between these two theories (including Hirschi's 2004 revised self-control theory) with regard to how they would explain crime and delinquency. In addition, make an argument whether or not these theories could be integrated, and if so, how.

9) Contemporary social disorganization theory identifies several structural correlates of crime rates across communities, but acknowledges that additional factors mediate the relationship between these structural factors and crime. Discuss in detail both the exogenous structural conditions of disorganization necessary for crime as well as the factors that mediate the effects of disorganization on crime rates. Review the research that tests the relationships proposed by contemporary social disorganization theory and take a position on whether or not variation in crime rates across communities can be explained by variation in the community's level of disorganization. Be sure to defend your answer thoroughly.

10) Use theory to explain the mass looting and violence following Hurricane Katrina. Identify the elements (i.e., concepts and propositions) connected to the theory, as well as what the theory would predict in terms of empirical findings. Finally, discuss the limitations of the theory to explain the post-Katrina crime.