

Florida State University College of Criminology and Criminal Justice
Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination in Theory, Spring, 2022
Day One of the Exam

INSTRUCTIONS

Answer two questions. Please notify the proctor when you are finished. Please note: Once a student takes possession of the examination at the start of the exam period, this constitutes an attempt at taking the exam, regardless of whether the student completes the exam, hands in any answers, or remains for the full exam period.

1. Identify a theory that can be used to explain disparities in criminal justice punishment. Describe the theory and its logic. Discuss the state of research on the theory. Show how it explains disparities in punishment. Finally, present and evaluate limitations of the theory in explaining these disparities.
2. Scholars have well documented that violent crime rates tend to be higher in neighborhoods with higher levels of poverty, yet despite more than a century of research the true meaning of this association remains ambiguous. Summarize two theoretical interpretations of the link between neighborhood poverty rates and levels of violence. In your discussion, please assess which of these interpretations has the most support in the empirical literature.
3. Sampson and Laub's life-course approach dominates research seeking to explain 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?
4. Falsification is key to the advancement of science and yet criminology rarely falsifies and discards theories. Discuss two theories that, based on empirical evidence, should have been discarded but have not. Support your position by citing and discussing the empirical evidence bearing on these theories.

Florida State University College of Criminology and Criminal Justice
Ph.D. Comprehensive Examination in Theory, Fall, 2022
Day Two of the Exam

INSTRUCTIONS

Answer two questions. Please notify the proctor when you are finished. Please note: Once a student takes possession of the examination at the start of the exam period, this constitutes an attempt at taking the exam, regardless of whether the student completes the exam, hands in any answers, or remains for the full exam period.

1. Exposure to delinquent/criminal peers has long been one of the most robust predictors of offending at the individual level. Why? Discuss the role of delinquent peers in three different theories of crime, choosing theories that give contrasting portrayals of that role. Use this as a vehicle for comparing and contrasting the central themes of the theories. Critique the theories on the basis of their consistency with available evidence concerning peers and crime and the logical adequacy of their approach to this topic.

2. One of the few core “facts” within criminology is that there are sex, age, and race differences in crime. Specifically, rates of crime and delinquency tend to be higher among males, juveniles, and people from marginalized racial groups. Choose a theory you have not discussed before on this comprehensive exam (on either day) and use it to explain why these sex, age, and race differences exist.

3. Over the past several decades, Gottfredson and Hirschi’s (1990) self-control theory has dominated research on self-control and crime. Describe the current empirical status of Gottfredson and Hirschi’s theory, focusing specifically on their propositions regarding (1) the sources/development of self-control, (2) the stability of self-control over time, and (3) the unidimensionality of self-control.

4. 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.