

Theory Comprehensive Exam—August 26-28, 2021
Exam Committee: Abby Fagan (Chair) and Becca Hanson

Part One (answer ONE of the following questions)

1. Theorists have proposed many different underlying “causes” of crime and criminal behavior. What do you think is the strongest influence on criminal offending?
 - a) Defend your answer by describing findings from empirical studies that demonstrate this factor’s relationship to crime.
 - b) Then, identify, describe, and compare two theories that include discussion of this cause. Compare and contrast the theories in terms of how they describe the relationship between this factor and crime.
 - c) Which theory provides the most logical and complete explanation of this factor? Explain and defend your response.

2. Social (dis)organization and geography have long been studied as factors that contribute to crime and delinquency.
 - a) Describe how Shaw and McKay initially defined social disorganization and the neighborhood factors they associated with social disorganization. Also, explain the relationship between social disorganization theory and the city where Shaw, McKay, and other criminologists in the mid-20th century originally developed the theory.
 - b) Next, describe how social disorganization theory has changed and developed over time, drawing on the work of Robert Sampson and co-authors. Identify at least three ways in which research by Sampson and co-authors differs from the original theorization by Shaw and McKay.
 - c) Finally, explain how social disorganization theory has been critiqued and developed by later theorists/researchers who analyze how broader urban geographic and political contexts and *surrounding* neighborhoods’ demographics and characteristics affect crime and deviance within socially disorganized spaces.

Part Two (answer ONE of the following questions; remember that your response must be substantially different than your Part One response)

1. Tittle (1995) has critiqued criminological theories as being too simple, in part because they often fail to identify factors that may influence the strength with which the causal processes specified in the theory operate to predict crime. That is, they fail to identify conditioning (“moderating”) factors.
 - a) Identify one theory that matches this description and discuss how it could be revised to incorporate tenets and hypotheses about two different conditional effects. Provide relevant empirical evidence to justify your suggestions.
 - b) Identify one theory that incorporates conditioning effects. In doing so, describe the theory’s main propositions and hypotheses as well as the propositions and hypotheses that describe moderating effects.
2. Incarceration in the US disproportionately affects people of color. Identify and summarize three theories that explain why people of color are more likely to be imprisoned. Next, select one of these theories and develop two policy recommendations that this theory would recommend to address this problem.