

Theory Comprehensive Exam—January 6-8, 2022

Exam Committee: Abby Fagan (Chair) and Becca Hanson

Select TWO of the following questions; remember that your responses to the two questions must be substantially different

1. Choose a current debate that is ongoing in your area of specialization. Clearly state the area of specialization and provide a brief summary of the ongoing debate in this area. Select two different theoretical approaches and discuss how theorists from each approach might resolve the debate. Since a theoretical “approach” does not refer to one or two texts but a body of scholarship, be sure your response draws from the theoretical approach and its tenets as a whole, as well as multiple texts from the approach.
2. When asked two decades ago to evaluate the ability of various criminological theories to explain delinquency and crime, a group of ASC members ranked social control as one of the best able to do so and labeling theory as one of the least able. Evaluate the merit of these ratings in your response and discuss the degree to which you agree with these assessments. In doing so, be sure to describe each theory’s main tenets and propositions, its empirical support, and any other relevant factors that support or do not support the rankings.
3. Ronald Akers contends that social learning theory encompasses many of the concepts and propositions found in other criminological theories and, as such, can be considered a grand theory. Defend this assertion by describing in detail the central concepts and propositions of social learning theory. Then explain the degree to which social learning theory overlaps with TWO other theories. Last, identify ONE other major criminological theory that cannot be considered to overlap in any way with social learning theory. Defend your position by explaining why the theory is completely distinct from social learning theory.
4. Since its introduction in the 1990s, life course theory has become a leading theoretical perspective in criminology. However, it has also been critiqued by particular theorists, notably Gottfredson and Hirschi. Certain theoretical approaches, notably feminist theory, also call into question some of its core claims and tenets. In this response, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of life course theory in explaining crime by 1) describing its main tenets and propositions, 2) discussing its contributions to criminological theory, and 3) summarizing and evaluating the merits of the criticisms that have been lodged against this perspective.