

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN
SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Spring 2010

CORE QUESTIONS – ANSWER BOTH 1 AND 2

1. Social psychology has a difficult time empirically verifying the existence of a “core” self, or self-concept in the face of the invocation of “situational” selves as an individual goes from one interaction to another. Use existing theory and empirical research to make an argument either for or against the idea of a single, “core” self as opposed to the self consisting of disconnected situations selves.

2. Select a specific substantive area of inquiry within sociological social psychology (e.g., development of self, emotions, the impact of role identity on mental health). Name and explain two methodological advances that have been made in this area of study in the last two decades. Detail/demonstrate at least two improvements that these advancements made in our knowledge and understanding. What gaps in understanding still remain despite these advances?

EXTENDED QUESTIONS – ANSWER 2 OF THE FOLLOWING 4 QUESTIONS

3. Identify an “exemplary” scholar or piece of scholarship within one of the main traditions (or “faces”) of sociological social psychology and discuss the following: What makes your choice an exemplar within the field? What specifically distinguishes this person or piece of work when compared to others you might have chosen in regard to theoretical, methodological, and/or empirical contributions? To what extent is your choice exemplary within only one of the traditions, or do you have evidence that others outside of this tradition (including sociologists who would not consider themselves “social psychologists”) have similar respect for the work?

4. One of the more recent innovations within sociological social psychology has been the study of the social dimensions of emotion. What distinguishes the sociological study of emotions from psychological research? What assumptions does sociological social psychology make about emotions, society, and the causal connections between society and emotion? Compare two different theoretical approaches used by sociological social psychologists in their studies of emotions.

5. Research on group interaction reveals an inevitable formation of a hierarchy within the group structure. An individual’s position within the group structure is based upon his or her status and power relative to other group members. Use existing theory and research in the areas of Expectation States/Status Characteristics, and Network Exchange to describe the processes at work in group structure formation. Discuss the differentiation processes as well as the role of legitimation in forming the hierarchy. Further, discuss the different conceptualizations of status and power set forth in these theories

6. What is mastery (or perceived control)? How is mastery differentiated from other aspects of the self, including self-esteem? Recent research indicates that women and racial minorities have lower mastery or perceived control compared to white males. What is the typical theoretical rationale for this finding? How do race and gender intersect to produce levels of mastery?