

CRIMINOLOGY AREA EXAMINATION

SAMPLE QUESTIONS FROM PREVIOUS EXAMINATIONS

(Revised February, 2005)

1. Two lists of theorists are given below. Select four theorists from each list and explain the contributions of the theorists to the sociology of crime/delinquency.

List A	List B
Robert Merton	Robert Agnew
Kai Erikson	John Hagan
Edwin Sutherland	Robert Sampson
Howard Becker	Jody Miller
Edwin Lemert	James Messerschmidt
Thomas Scheff	Delbert Elliot
Austin Turk	Terrance Thornberry

2. Much has been made of the need to reconcile structural and subjective accountings for crime. Provide examples of criminological theories that operate at each of these levels. Why is there such a serious breach between these two types of theoretical explanations? In your considered opinion, what is the best way to overcome this theoretical chasm?
3. Develop a graduate level course in criminological theory. How would you approach the course? What theories and perspectives would you cover and in what order? What would you identify as the key issues with which you would want the students to grapple in the course? What key readings would you require in the course and why would you require them?

4. Select a form of criminal behavior and develop a comprehensive theoretical explanation for that behavior.
5. Both “mainstream” and “critical” theoretical perspectives in criminology attempt to explain crime. Compare and contrast one mainstream theory and one critical perspective or theory in terms of their explanations of crime (i.e., how does each approach the task of explanation, how does each define crime, how does each explain crime, where are they similar, where are they different). In your view, is it possible to integrate these perspectives? Why or why not?
6. Theories of criminal behavior may focus on "micro" (i.e., individual-level) explanations or they may focus on "macro" (i.e., structural) explanations. Discuss and contrast efforts to explain crime and delinquency at these two levels with reference to a general type or particular form of criminal behavior (your choice). In your view, what are the prospects for merging individual and structural explanations?
7. Select a research topic based on your knowledge of the research literature in criminology. Briefly review the major research findings on your topic and identify a research question that needs to be addressed and hypotheses that need to be tested. Develop a research design that combines quantitative and qualitative methods to address the research question and to test the hypotheses. Be sure to discuss and justify the methods of data collection, operationalization of variables, and methods to be used in analyzing the data. What are the strengths and limitations in the research design you have proposed relative to previous studies in the literature?
8. Delineate the various quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches to the study of crime. Provide examples of research for each of the different methodologies, along with a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of each. Can the privileging of quantitative techniques in criminology be justified?
9. The Detroit Free Press recently published an exposé on burn deaths and injuries caused by exploding gas tanks in GM cars and trucks manufactured during the 1970s and 1980s and GM's efforts to cover up the problem. Design a study using multiple methods to examine this case. Be sure to discuss and justify the methods of data collection, operationalization of variables, methods to be used in analyzing the data, and any difficulties that you anticipate in conducting this study. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your proposed study?
10. Wayne County has just implemented a drug court program for juvenile offenders. You have been hired to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. In addition to collecting data for the program evaluation, as a criminologist you also want to use this opportunity to collect data that will allow you to test one or more criminological theories. Develop a research design to accomplish the dual goals of program evaluation and theory testing. Include a discussion of the theory or theories and hypotheses to be tested, a description of the sampling design, an overview of the data collection strategy, and a plan for analyzing

the data (including relevant statistical techniques).

11. What is the difference between macro and micro levels of analysis? Give an example of each in criminological research. Give an example of research that combines both levels of analysis.
12. Ralph Nader has been named Attorney General of the United States. He appoints you to revise the FBI Uniform Crime Report. In particular, he directs you to construct a new index of crime that reflects the actual injury and damage done to society and its victims. How would you accomplish this task? Be sure to address, but do not necessarily limit yourself, to the following points: a) justify your choice of crimes for inclusion in the new index, b) would you use officially recorded data, victimization data, self-report data, some other measure of crime, or a combination of these different indicators of crime?, c) what would be the advantages and disadvantages of relying on official law enforcement agencies to collect your data? Would retraining, reeducating, or redeploying "traditional" police be required?, d) what would be the impact, if any, on society and/or the media if each month the FBI released a crime index constructed according to your recipe?
13. Trace the history of attempts to measure "crime" in the United States. Critically evaluate these measures based on what you know from the research literature. Be sure to cite relevant sources. What do you conclude based on your critical evaluation?
14. The FBI and Bureau of Justice Statistics have hired you as a consultant to improve official measures of crime in the United States. Develop a set of specific recommendations to improve the reliability and validity of official measures of crime based on your knowledge of the literature?
15. You are about to begin an investigation into cross-national variations in violent crime. What measures of violent crime would you use in your study? How would you obtain these measures? What special problems are you likely to encounter in your cross-national investigation that you are unlikely to face with a study confined to a single nation-state?
16. Three of the better known methods of measuring crime in our society are the Uniform Crime Report, the National Crime Victimization Survey, and self-report data. Choose a specific form of crime and develop a detailed plan that will utilize one of the following alternative methods for measuring crime: a) observation studies, b) participant observation, or c) life histories.
17. Most empirical tests of theories of delinquency rely on self-reported delinquency to measure the dependent variable. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of this measurement strategy for theory testing.
18. As a new assistant professor at a respected research institution, you have been encouraged by the chair of your department to respond to a Request for Proposals (RFP) released by the National Institute of Justice. The RFP asks specifically that you study the relationship

between morality and violence. How would you proceed with such a study? The RFP requests that you (a) provide a theoretical model that accounts for the relationship, (b) indicate the type of data that you would gather to assess the efficacy of this theoretical model, (c) specify the analytical techniques that you would deploy, and (d) note particular threats to reliability and validity which this study will likely encounter.

19. Select one influential empirical article or book and evaluate the research design. Critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of the data collection method, sampling method, measurement of key concepts (conceptualization and operationalization), and analysis techniques. Given your assessment of the methods, comment on the appropriateness of the conclusions presented by the author(s).
20. Discuss the key components of, and distinctions between, quantitative and qualitative approaches to studying crime. Provide examples of research for each of these methods, along with a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages associated with each. Discuss the apparent privileging of quantitative techniques in criminological research and address whether such a privileging of methods is justifiable.