KENT STATE UNIVERSITY/UNIVERSITY OF AKRON
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
Comprehensive Examination in
Criminology
Spring 2009

Core Questions (asked of all examinees)

1. Every criminological theory makes broad meta-theoretical assumptions such as about the nature of humans and their propensity to violate social norms, the role of society in reducing or facilitating crime, and what constitutes "good or accurate" data. For this question you need to do the following:

A. Select TWO of the following theories in criminology and compare them on their assumptions. Your choices are the following:
1) Strain, 2) Social Learning, 3) Social Disorganization or Ecological Theories, and 4) Control Theories (Social or Self).

B. Using examples from your readings, how do these assumptions guide AND limit the empirical work related to each of these theories?

2. Within criminology, many research questions could be best addressed using multi-methods, such as a mix of official (UCR / NIBRS / NCVS) and unofficial (Self-Report, Interviews, Observations) data, as well as qualitative and quantitative methods. Using appropriate examples and debates from your reading, discuss the merits of different methods for criminology.

A. Discuss the benefits of using official vs. unofficial data. What types of questions can be best addressed by these different types of data? What are the major limits of each type of data?

B. How do qualitative and quantitative methods contribute to our understanding of crime? How does each method address concerns of reliability and validity in studies?

C. What are the benefits of using multi methods for criminologists?

Extended questions

1. Within the field of criminology, as in sociology more generally, theories can largely be divided into those that focus on the importance of structure versus agency. Pick one theory that you have not already presented within this exam that fits into each of these broad classifications or structure or agency. Using appropriate references from your readings, address the following:
- A. Provide a summary of the theory, being sure to discuss how the theory fits into the structure or agency categories.
- B. What are the relevant strengths of each theory in explaining one major pattern of crime (e.g. findings related to race, class, sex, or age). Be sure that you fully describe what the pattern is and how well EACH theory explains, of fails to explain, this pattern.

2. Most theories of criminology are designed to explain behaviors that are legally defined as crime. However, a variety of alternative definitions have been presented. Using appropriate readings from the provided list and your own specialty interest areas, address the following:
- A. From a crime control perspective (e.g. critical, conflict, feminist, Marxist, labeling), what are potential problems with a legalistic type of definition?
- B. Framing your answer using a SPECIFIC substantive topic that you are interested in, discuss alternative definitions of crime and whether such alternatives may be more appropriate or useful.
- C. Again, thinking about your specific topic, how are the ways we define crime important for our understanding of the causes of criminal behavior?