Question 1: What is the criminal mind?

Answer 1: The criminal mind is a complex composite of motivations and drives as well as conscious and unconscious urges. As such, experts have spent literally hundreds of years plumbing its depths in an attempt to understand the way the criminal mind works. Those interested in what drives criminals to commit their crimes include psychologists, psychiatrists, sociologists, social workers, police professionals, and educators just to name a few. For some who choose these professions, the criminal mind presents the perfect challenge. Seeking to understand the criminal mind and criminal behavior can be a lifelong pursuit with the potential to benefit society at large by helping to unravel one of the biggest mysteries in the modern age.

Question 2: Who was Cesare Beccaria?

Answer 2: Cesare Beccaria was an Italian theorist in the 18th century and is known as the "Father of Classical Criminology." He published works such as "On Crimes and Punishments," and presented key theories regarding how criminals choose to commit crimes by exercising free will. Although others looked down on him for his ideas at the time, he and his ideas eventually gained universal acceptance. Cesare Becarria was one of the first theorists on crime and criminal behavior, and his work and ideas continue to influence modern thinking.

Question 3: Who was Cesare Lombrosso?

Answer 3: Known as the "Other Cesare" and the "Father of Criminology," Cesare Lombrosso also an Italian scientist succeeded Cesare Beccaria as the preeminent theorist of the time. While Beccaria’s ideas dominated the 18th century, Lombrosso's theories pervaded the thinking of 19th century scientists. Lombrosso's theories were biology-based, and sought to explain and predict criminal behavior by interpretation of physical characteristics and types. Lombrosso described traits such as jaw size and shape that he posited were indicators that a person was of a criminal type. Together with Beccaria, Lombrosso is credited with bringing the science of criminology to the forefront and legitimizing the study of criminal behavior.

Question 4: What is the Social Conflict theory?

Answer 4: Social Conflict theory is based on the idea that crime is a product of conflict created by social classes. Some social conflict theorists believe the
class conflict is primarily based on economic means while others believe the class inequity is based on social or political status. In short, conflict theorists believe the social elite use laws and the criminal justice system to stay in power while maintaining their advantage. As a result, members of the nonruling or lower class often find their normal behavior made criminal, or they are unable to obtain the necessities of living without committing a crime to obtain them.

**Question 5: What is an atavistic criminal?**

**Answer 5:** An atavistic criminal is one that has the characteristics of a more primitive man. Sometimes called *throwbacks*, atavistic criminals were described in detail by Cesare Lombroso and formed the basis of many criminal theories of the 19th century. It was believed atavistic criminals were more aggressive, less intelligent, and were prone to irrational thinking that caused them to commit crimes. In doing so, they were viewed as more primitive than "normal" men, incapable of leading a normal law abiding life in society.

**Question 6: Who is Travis Hirshi?**

**Answer 6:** Travis Hirshi is a prominent and accepted sociological theorist of today. Although he has not tried to explain specifically why offenders commit crimes, he has tried to explain why others do not commit crimes and conform to normally accepted behavior in an effort to prevent criminal activity. In his social bond theory, Hirshi claims there are four social bonds (attachment, commitment, involvement and belief) that tie people to conventional society. He states the stronger the bonds are, the less likely a person is going to choose to commit crime. Hirshi assumes all people, without societal controls, will turn to delinquency and crime. But, with the proper controls or ties to conventional life, persons remain law abiding and productive members of society.

**Question 7: What are some biological disorders or factors that may lead to criminal behavior?**

**Answer 7:** Biological affective disorders have been seen as risk factors for criminal behavior. Some of these are depression, mania, and bipolar disorder. There are suspected biological basis for these disorders such as chemical imbalances. Low serotonin and dopamine levels have been found in patients suffering from depression and bipolar disorder. Lower concentrations of N-
acetylaspartate (NAA) have been detected in the right hippocampus of bipolar subjects. Those who had suffered from the disease the longest had the lowest levels of NAA. NAA is the second most abundant amino acid in brain tissue, and researchers note that low NAA is an indication that the integrity of neurons and/or axons has been compromised in some way, either by damage, loss, or dysfunction. The decrease in NAA over time in bipolar subjects, they say, indicates that the disease causes progressive damage. Recent research in the area of nutrition has discovered that hyperglycemia, allergic reactions to common foods, food additives, and excess manganese may also contribute to aggressive behavior. Human hormones such as the male sex hormone, testosterone, have been linked to aggression but more so when in conjunction with low levels of serotonin. The fluctuation in the level of female hormones has been shown to cause irritability, aggression, and confusion. Other hormones such as low levels of cortisol and thyroid have been implicated in delinquency and poor impulse control. There has been a genetic attribution for some criminal behavior. The XYY or “Supermale” phenomenon links criminal behavior to an extra “Y” chromosome in males, but it is still being investigated.

Question 8: What are some sociological factors that may contribute to criminal behavior?

Answer 8: Criminality is caused by myriad events. Individuals cannot control the ethnicity or the socioeconomic status to which they are born. It can be these characteristics, however, that prove to be factors that lead to crime later in life. This is not to say that Individuals from high socioeconomic statuses are immune to crime. It is the majority of offenders, however, that are from minority groups—whether ethnic or socioeconomic. Many theorists believe social structure has a great deal of influence on crime and criminality. Émile Durkheim and Robert Merton theorized that all individuals seek the American Dream of having a home, two cars, and a family, but not all persons are given equal opportunity to achieve this. Consequently, some individuals seek alternative means of reaching success. Others theorize that economic oppression causes crime, and if everyone were treated fairly or equally, crime would be eliminated. Karl Marx argued for soft economic determinism that would provide more opportunity for everyone, not just the rich.

Question 9: What are some of the fundamental assumptions made about most psychological theories on crime causation?

Answer 9: The following is a list of some fundamental assumptions made in
most psychological theories on crime causation: the individual is the main proponent of concern, personality is the major motivational element, crimes result from abnormal, dysfunctional, or inappropriate mental functions within the personality, criminal behavior is purposeful for the individual and meets a certain felt need, and the defective or abnormal mental processes are due to either a diseased mind, inappropriate learning, improper conditioning, emulation of improper role models, or inappropriate adjustments to inner conflict.