Recent events have brought our private deliberations as the Co-Editors of Criminology, the flagship journal of the American Society of Criminology, under public scrutiny. Given the dissemination of misinformation on social media and in other formats, we have determined that it is necessary to provide a statement that (1) clarifies our approach to addressing problems brought to our attention about articles published in the journal, and (2) provides a more detailed timeline of our efforts to address specific problems concerning two articles published in 2011 (Johnson, et al.) and 2018 (Stewart, et al.).

I. First, a general statement about the Co-Editors’ approach to addressing concerns raised about its articles. We believe the preferred approach is to employ the classical comment-and-reply model. Critics submit a comment to the journal, presenting their objections. The journal editors review the objections for importance and relevance, focusing on the potential contribution to scholarship. If the editors have doubts about the contents of the comment, they seek the advice of anonymous reviewers. If the editors accept the comment, they offer the original authors an opportunity to provide an equally detailed reply. Depending on the circumstances of the case and the nature of the reply, the editors may offer the author of the comment a final opportunity to respond.

As Co-Editors, we believe strongly that the comment-and-reply approach has several advantages. First, it allows—and encourages—readers to make their own judgments about the work in question. This form of active participation by readers is consistent with the nature of the scientific enterprise, and it allows for the ambiguities involved in almost all creative work. Second, and relatedly, the approach allows for variations in the degree to which articles are problematic. It acknowledges a grey-scale world of more and less serious problems, and it does not impose black-and-white judgements that view articles as entirely correct or incorrect. Third, the approach is fair to all parties. It gives authors and their critics equal opportunity to outline and defend their positions, and it avoids a situation in which the journal leaves authors essentially defenseless against attacks. Authors put themselves in a vulnerable position in publishing with a journal, and the comment-and-reply approach allows them to respond to critiques and correct mistakes if and when necessary.

Obviously, this approach is not appropriate in every case. Although individual circumstances make it impossible to anticipate all situations, two general possibilities stand out. First, a comment-and-reply structure does not always fit the case. Problems in an article may become apparent in the absence of a complainant, for example, leaving no one to write the comment. Second, a comment may convincingly point to problems that the reply does not adequately address. An ineffective reply itself has significant consequences for an author that can serve as an important professional sanction. In rare circumstances, however, this process may not be sufficient to address the gravity of the problems in a paper.

In such situations, additional steps may be necessary. These include asking the authors to provide a more detailed explanation of their work or to allow an independent reanalysis of their data. More serious consequences may then follow, including involuntary retractions. We would nevertheless adopt such measures only when the evidence against a paper is strong, the authors are unable to
offer a compelling response, and we have first given them the opportunity to respond to criticisms and/or withdraw their articles themselves.

Maintaining the integrity and professional respect of *Criminology* is our highest priority. We believe that public discussion—as provided by the comment-and-response approach—can more effectively accomplish this goal than would a rigid and punitive system over which the journal’s editors preside. This is in keeping with our strong commitment to a fair process for all parties concerned, rather than starting with a heavy presumption of guilt that the authors have committed outright falsification or deception. Moreover, this is the standard approach in related fields such as sociology, as evidenced by multiple comment-and-responses appearing in recent issues of the *American Sociological Review*. To be clear, in an evident conflict between an author’s reputation and the journal’s integrity, the interests of the journal always come first.

II. The current Co-Editors of *Criminology* have adhered to the approach outlined above in response to concerns submitted to us about the above-noted articles, one of which was published prior to our editorship (in 2011) and one during our editorship (2018). Our decisions about how to respond to each of these concerns were made collectively as Co-Editors. Because one of the authors of the 2011 paper, Brian Johnson, is a current Co-Editor of the journal, he voluntarily recused himself from all decision-making related to the papers in question. We have also consulted with the Executive Committee and Publications Committee of the American Society of Criminology throughout the process.

In the first instance, we received an email from “John Smith” on May 29, 2019 alerting us to “data irregularities in two articles published in the journal,” identified as “part of a larger set of five published by the same set of coauthors using data from two surveys.” This email was sent anonymously and did not ask for or suggest a course of action. After deliberating about how best to respond, we invited “John Smith” to submit a comment or comments about the articles in question, and ensured him that neither Dr. Johnson (current Co-Editor) nor Dr. Stewart (who at that time had been approved to join the editorial team by the ASC Board but has subsequently withdrawn) would have any involvement in its assessment. We also provided guidance on length and content. “John Smith” rejected our invitation. Nonetheless, we were notified by Dr. Johnson that the authors, who also received a version of the anonymous email, were working through the concerns raised in order to respond, with the goal of submitting a correction. This was confirmed by Dr. Stewart, who has repeatedly assured the Co-Editors that he is working through the concerns raised by “John Smith” in both articles published in *Criminology*.

We also wish to clarify the circumstances surrounding Stewart et al.’s Corrigendum of the 2018 article, published in the journal in August 2019. The authors’ submission of this Corrigendum was unsolicited and occurred months prior to our receipt of the complaint by “John Smith.” Because it appeared to be an ordinary author correction of errors they had discovered, it did not undergo the review process documented above and was in production at the time we were alerted to deeper concerns about data irregularities.

The second instance followed quickly from the first. On June 27, 2019, Dr. Justin Pickett sent the Co-Editors a request that the 2011 article, which he co-authored, be retracted. He also provided a
detailed account of his concerns, which he subsequently posted online. As with the “John Smith” email, the Co-Editors reviewed Dr. Pickett’s email and supporting materials and made a collective decision about how to proceed. Though we did not rule out the possibility of a retraction, we were unwilling to take this step without first providing the remaining authors the opportunity to address the concerns raised. Thus, we informed Dr. Pickett that the other co-authors were reanalyzing the data and expected to submit their findings to the journal within a few months, with the goal of publishing a Corrigendum. We offered Dr. Pickett the opportunity to review their response once received, and to write a formal comment for publication. We also noted that his decision to post his concerns about the paper to a preprint server was entirely his and did not involve the journal. He did so on July 6.

Social media attention to Dr. Pickett’s online statement led to what we perceive as a rush to judgment against the authors and the journal, including the mischaracterization that we are not taking the issue seriously and are not committed to resolving it. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have taken several steps aimed at obtaining a fair and transparent resolution. In consultation with the ASC Publications Committee and Executive Committee, we released a formal statement later that month about our procedures for addressing the concerns that were raised:

**Criminology Editor Statement, July 26, 2019**

The Editors of *Criminology*, an official peer-reviewed journal of the American Society of Criminology, have been made aware of the concerns about the potential data irregularities and conclusions related to the 2011 paper “Ethnic Threat and Social Control: Examining Public Support for Judicial Use of Ethnicity in Punishment.” The Journal Editors and the Society take issues of research integrity seriously and have asked the authors of the 2011 paper to prepare a response to these concerns. Journal Editor Brian D. Johnson has recused himself from involvement, as he was a co-author of the study. *Criminology* strongly believes in fairness to all parties involved, and we are moving deliberately to achieve that end. We will make a decision based on a review of the authors’ response to our request.


At this time, we are awaiting the authors’ erratum for the 2011 article, which we have asked include a detailed response to each potential data concern. The same process is being applied in regard to concerns raised over the Corrigendum to the 2018 article. In both instances, the authors have been responsive to these requests. We are in the process of a careful evaluation of materials submitted addressing errors in the 2018 article and its original Corrigendum, and we anticipate receipt of materials addressing the 2011 article in the coming months. We stand opposed to a rush to judgment, but instead choose to make decisions based on full information after providing the researchers with the time needed to carefully identify errors and correct the scientific record. The submission will undergo review by the three non-recused editors of *Criminology*, and by outside reviewers without ties to the parties involved. At that time, we will make a collective decision about whether a comment-and-reply approach adequately attends to the concerns raised, or whether additional remedies are necessary. This is in keeping with the serious and unbiased approach we detail above, in which fairness to both authors and critics is paramount.