



**MIT Department of Urban Studies and Planning Course # 11.469  
BU Metropolitan Studies Program Course # MET SO 502 Urban Sociology**

**Urban Sociology Study Guide for Week 11  
Neighborhood Effects: Order, Disorder, and Collective Efficacy**

The central concern of “neighborhood effects” research is not only the “what” of spatial patterns but the “so what” (consequences), the “why” (how do neighborhoods contribute to those consequences), and the “now what” (options for change). Researchers have had a variety of foci in those domains, but ultimately scholars are concerned with whether and how where one resides affects one’s life chances and well-being.

We read previews of these concerns earlier, for example in DuBois, the Chicago School, Mario Small, Robert Sampson, and David Harvey. Unlike the political economy tradition, which is focused on the contest over space centered primarily on a class-based analysis of interests and ideology, “neighborhood effects” research interacts with a much broader array of intellectual traditions, across disciplines:

- economists’ concerns for how human capital and other factors shape economic mobility, and for how housing markets function (how much do individual preferences versus discriminatory transactions or larger structures matter?);
- psychologists’ concerns with “ecological” and other influences on healthy human development (what are the “pathways” of influence?);
- concerns in medicine and public health with so-called structural determinants of health (such as exposure to environmental risks in one’s home or neighborhood or chronic stressors associated with living in dangerous neighborhoods) over and above biomedical and behavioral determinants of health (medical treatment on one hand, diet and exercise on the other).

1. What has the Moving to Opportunity (MTO) experiment contributed to the social science theories of “neighborhood effects”? What critiques do you have of this intervention, both from theoretical and practical perspectives?
2. How do neighborhoods matter to individual outcomes over different moments in the life course? What did you learn about methods and measurement from these pieces? How would you design a sociological study to evaluate if and how a neighborhood affected the life and experiences of a teenager? The elderly?
3. How has the neighborhood effects literature changed your understanding of the concept of community and the definitions of social capital? What types of outcomes and experiences do we see for individuals’ whose neighborhood is not their community?

4. Do the MTO findings support an “invest in place” approach to concentrated poverty or an “invest in people” prescription? Which approach do you support to address the problems associated with concentrated poverty? Why?

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