



2023 Special Issue of *Justice Quarterly*

Choice, Social Structure, and Crime

Description of Special Issue

Scholarship in criminology has seen a growth in studies assessing rational choice and offender decision making over the last several years. Yet, considerable skepticism remains concerning the utility of rational choice models for explaining crime and deviance (Cullen, 2017; Pratt & Turnovic, 2018). This skepticism is rooted primarily in the historic disciplinary divide between sociology and economics, the latter of which was the incubator of contemporary criminological rational choice theory (Becker, 1968). The distinction between economically motivated choice theory and more sociologically oriented explanations of crime is perhaps neatly summarized by the highly caricatured distinction of the two disciplines offered by the economist James Duesenberry (1960: 233): “economics is all about how people make choices; sociology is all about why people don’t have any choices to make.” As a result, scholars interested in choice and decision-making have tended to focus almost exclusively on cost-benefit analysis internal to the individual, sometimes even going as far as outright dismissing social and structural risk factors of crime. At the same time, as Sampson (2012, p. 374) pointed out, sociologically inclined criminologists have often been too dismissive of the notion of “choice” out of misplaced fear that “choice renders the environment impotent.”

While rational choice and sociological theories have typically been seen at odds or even competing perspectives, considering it through a different lens suggests they can be seen as compatible, and in fact perhaps even complementary, aspects of larger processes of social action. In the end, it is likely that considerations of the compatibility of choice-based perspectives within the framework of varying levels of sociological thought has the potential to add considerable insight into the study of crime and delinquency, because, after all, intentional action is best understood in *context* (e.g., Coleman, 1996; Matsueda 2017; Nagin, 2007). The papers in this special issue will explore and advance the compatibility of sociological theories and economically motivated choice theories of crime. Specially, we anticipate receiving papers focused on advancing (though not limited to) two main themes which marry structure and choice:

A. Structural and Social Influences on Subjective Belief Formation

To the extent that scholars have examined perception formation, research has focused almost exclusively on “private” information such as direct experiences with arrest. Yet, there are theoretical reasons to suspect—and a growing literature supportive to the idea—that subjective belief formation can be a function of “public” information from social and structural factors that feature prominently in sociological theories, such as family, peer groups, area-level characteristics, and beliefs about the justice system. We therefore seek papers that explore the influence of relevant structural and social factors have on legal and extralegal perception formation, as well as studies that link contextual/environmental and individual factors to explore the interrelated influence on perception formation and decision-making more generally.

B. Culture, Preferences, and Constrained Choice

Choice sets and preferences, too, while receiving considerably less attention than subjective beliefs, are likely to be influenced by key ideas developed in sociological criminology. For example, insights from cultural sociology often discuss the transmission of norms and values that can lead individuals to be tolerant of the risks and costs associated with crime and to hold greater preferences for the social and intrinsic rewards that offending incurs, such as spending more time with delinquent peers. Further, structural barriers that block paths to economic and educational success limit or constrain perceived choice sets among individuals leading some to believe that crime is their best or only worthwhile choice. Thus, we are also interested in studies that explore the cultural and developmental processes that shape people's preferences for the risks and rewards associated with crime, as well as, studies that explore how structural influences, such as economic inequality and neighborhood disadvantage shape or constrain individuals' perceived choice sets.

Submission Guidelines

Extended Abstract

To be considered for the special issue you must submit an extended abstract with the following information:

- Title page
- Summary of theoretical contribution (1 – 2 pages)
- Primary hypothesis and/or motivating research questions
 - Researchers are not required to present findings at this junction. Evaluations will be made in terms of the relevance and quality of research questions and hypotheses
- Summary of proposed data, measurement, and analyses (1 – 2 pages)

Submission of Extended Abstracts are due May 31, 2022. Decision to invite full manuscripts will be made and distributed by June 15th, 2022.

This special issue is in collaboration with the Criminology Department at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Crime, Security, and Law. The co-editors of *Justice Quarterly*, Marv Krohn and Bryanna Fox, along with the special issue co-editors, Tim Barnum, Tom Loughran, and Jean-Louis van Gelder, have agreed on terms regarding the submission process to ensure an equal and open selection process. In addition to the opportunity to publish in the special issue, authors of accepted papers will be invited to participate in the two-day Symposium on Choice, Social Structure, and Crime to be held in October of 2022 at the Max Plank Institute for Crime, Security and Law in Freiburg, Germany.

For inquiries about the submission guidelines please contact Tim Barnum (t.barnum@csl.mpg.de) or Tom Loughran (tal47@psu.edu).