The Effects of Neighborhood Disadvantage and Instability on Donated and Received Social Support: Examining Gender- and Race-Contingent Patterns among Older Adults*

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ABSTRACT

Does neighborhood disadvantage and instability influence donated and received social support? If so, are there gender- and race-contingent patterns? The social disorganization hypothesis predicts that disadvantage and instability diminish social support; the stress mobilization hypothesis predicts that they are associated with higher levels of social support. I also expect the mobilization predictions to be most apparent among black women. Results about the effects of disadvantage concur with the mobilization thesis for black women and the disorganization thesis for whites—although the effects on donated support are stronger among white men and the effects on received support are stronger among white women. In contrast, neighborhood instability is associated negatively with received and donated support among blacks only. I discuss the implications of these findings for theories about community-level effects on social relationships.

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Does neighborhood disadvantage and instability influence social support among older adults? If so, are there gender- and race-contingent effects? In his comprehensive assessment of social support research, House (1987) advocated more attention to social-structural influences on different forms of support. Despite that appeal, few studies have examined community-level effects on the receipt *and* provision of support. According to social-disorganization theory, neighborhood disadvantage and instability should weaken social bonds (Sampson and Groves 1989). Alternatively, disadvantage and instability may represent community-level forms of stress that mobilize social support processes (Wheaton 1985). House also encouraged further inquiry of the ways that "supports vary across individuals with varying social statuses or roles (such as gender and socioeconomic position)" (1987:141). Earlier ethnographic research by Stack (1974) provides a basis for expecting both gender and racial differences in support processes. Her observations described the ways that black women develop and sustain strong social ties in the face of socioeconomic adversity. Thus, rather than eroding social bonds, neighborhood disadvantage and instability may mobilize support, especially among black women.

Despite House's appeals, to my knowledge no studies have systematically examined the gender- and race-contingent effects of neighborhood disadvantage and instability—particularly on both received and donated support (House 1987; House, Umberson, and Landis 1988; Thoits 1995; Turner and Marino 1994; Turner and Turner 1999). In an attempt to address those deficits, I ask: 1) What is the effect of neighborhood disadvantage and residential instability on received and donated support? 2) Do those associations vary by gender and race? And 3) Do any observed

community-level effects remain net of controls for individual-level socioeconomic conditions, perceptions of neighborhood problems, and residential tenure?

BACKGROUND

Received and Donated Social Support

The stress process model identifies social support as an important environmental resource (Pearlin 1999; Wheaton 1983). Sociologists are interested in social support because of its social distribution across social roles and statuses, because its absence can diminish well-being, and because it can help people avoid or manage stress (Pearlin et al. 1981; Wheaton 1985). Supportive bonds can moderate the effects of stress by enhancing other personal resources such as self-esteem, confidence, and personal control (Thoits 1995; Turner and Roszell 1994). In this paper, I examine two forms of social support: received and donated support.

Much of the social support literature focuses on received support, which involves "the clarity or certainty with which the individual experiences being loved, valued, and able to count on others should the need arise" (Turner and Turner 1999:303). Received support often entails instrumental or emotional interactions with family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers (House 1987; Ross and Jang 2000). However, in addition to receiving support, many individuals provide support to others by being available when they need help, advice, or when they are feeling down. Donated support often involves empathic acts, such as listening and understanding other people's joys and sorrows. In turn, however, the costs of involvement in others' troubles may have detrimental effects on one's own well-being (Aneshensel, Pearlin, and Schuler 1993; Sarason, Pierce, and Sarason 1990), especially when one is dealing with personal adverse conditions or

has fewer psychosocial resources (Kessler and McLeod 1984; Rook 1984; Schieman and Turner 2001; Turner 1994).

The systemic view of community social organization identifies the complex web of social bonds that involve obligations, expectations, and relationships; such ties are typically a part of friendship and kinship networks (Kasarda and Janowitz 1974; Sampson 1991). Thus, social relationships are rooted in ecological, institutional, and normative community structures. Many individuals maintain close, reciprocal socioemotional bonds with people who reside in nearby geographic space—or the neighborhood. However, the overall quality of neighborhood life can influence the presence and quality of such bonds. In that regard, two constructs are potentially significant: neighborhood disadvantage and residential instability.

Neighborhood Disadvantage and Residential Instability

In their classic book, *Juvenile Delinquency and Urban Areas*, Shaw and McKay (1942) asserted that low socioeconomic status and residential mobility are among the most influential community-level conditions because they can erode social cohesion and organization. In turn, disorganization fosters opportunities for criminal activity and juvenile delinquency. Recent analyses of community effects on individual psychosocial functioning have examined responses to survey items about perceptions of neighborhood problems and aggregate measures of social and economic conditions in census reports. In the present study, I focus on the effects of aggregate indicators of neighborhood disadvantage and instability, *net* of individual-level socioeconomic characteristics, perceptions of neighborhood problems, and residential tenure. The most common indicators of neighborhood disadvantage are the percentage of families in poverty, single-parent female-headed households, overcrowding, and the percentage of

individuals without a high school education or a college education (Sampson and Raudenbush 1999; Wilson 1987; 1996). Some researchers contend that families in poverty and mother-only households represent core dimensions of neighborhood disadvantage because they tend to have the strongest impact on psychological outcomes like distress (Mirowsky and Ross 2003). Collectively, these indicators form an overall index of the socioeconomic realities of individual residents (Robert 1998).

Neighborhood disadvantage reflects limited socioeconomic opportunities (Wilson 1987, 1996) and lower quality health care, education, leisure, and transportation services (LaGrange, Ferraro, and Supancic 1992; LeClere, Rogers, and Peters 1997; Massey and Denton 1993; Robert 1998; Wilson 1987). A general shortage of legitimate channels for social and economic accomplishments fosters feelings of estrangement and abandonment from the broader society (Mirowsky and Ross 2003; Sampson and Groves 1989; Wilson 1991). Prior research documents that neighborhood disadvantage has an indirect effect on well-being, usually via individual-level socioeconomic conditions and subjective assessments of neighborhood disorder (Aneshensel and Sucoff 1996; Geis and Ross 1998; Ross 2000; Ross and Mirowsky 2001; Ross, Mirowsky and Pribesh 2001; Ross, Reynolds, and Geis 2000). At the community-level, structural disadvantages undermine social cohesion and social order (Massey 1996; Sampson 1991; Sampson and Groves 1989). The impact of socioeconomic disadvantage at the community level can impact more locale forms of neighborhood disorder and physical decay, further discouraging the development of intimate social interactions and close bonds (Ross and Mirowsky 1999; Thompson and Krause 1998).

Combined with a stress process perspective (Pearlin 1999), neighborhood disadvantage and instability may indicate the overall level of exposure to social and economic stressors

encountered not only by the individual, but also by family members, friends, and neighbors (Boardman et al. 2001). In turn, individuals who reside in areas with greater disadvantage and instability may have fewer social resources that foster supportive exchanges. Moreover, in the context of such structural strains, some supportive exchanges may actually exacerbate the psychosocial effects of one's own personal experience of stress (Belle 1982). In one recent study of Illinois adults, Geis and Ross (1998) found that residents in high poverty neighborhoods report less frequent interaction with and provision of instrumental support to their neighbors. Those researchers documented a negative correlation between neighborhood poverty and social ties ($\beta = -.107$), although adjustment for perceived neighborhood disorder reduced that effect to nonsignificance. Although that finding tends to support the social disorganization thesis, to my knowledge, those researchers did not report gender- and race-contingent effects of neighborhood poverty on social ties.

Although related to community-level disadvantage, residential stability represents a distinct aspect of neighborhood life. Instability can diminish favorable attitudes about and behaviors toward the broader community and the quality of social ties. According to Kasarda and Janowitz (1974), "since the assimilation of newcomers into the social fabric of local communities is necessarily a temporal process, residential mobility operates as a barrier to the development of extensive friendship and kinship bonds and widespread local associational ties" (p. 330). Moreover, the effect of community-level residential stability appears to have an effect on social processes such as integration *net* of individual-level residential tenure (Sampson 1988). For example, in a 1984 national sample of residents in Great Britain, Sampson (1991) found a positive association between residential stability and individual-level friendships and acquaintances in the community and among immediate neighbors, and those effects remain net

of individual-level residential tenure and other sociodemographic characteristics. Sampson reports that "community-level instability apparently reduces local friendship ties by increasing anonymity and constraining individual friendship choices" (p. 57). In that study, the measure of "local friendship/acquaintanceship ties" asks respondents to consider the number of friends or acquaintances who live in the same area. However, respondents who report having only one or two friends would score low on that measure—even if those friends are intimate confidants.

In sum, although it seems clear that neighborhood disadvantage and instability may have negative psychosocial consequences, two questions remain: Does disadvantage and instability affect donated and received support, net of individual socioeconomic conditions, perceptions of neighborhood problems, and residential tenure? And, if so, are those effects contingent upon gender and race?

Gender- and Race-Contingent Effects

Existing studies document that women tend to provide more social support to others, especially emotional forms of support (Belle 1982; Burda, Vaux, and Schill 1984; Kessler and McLeod 1984). Specific to *neighborhood* ties, Campbell and Lee (1992) found that women know more of their neighbors by name and tend to talk or visit with neighbors more frequently than men. Social role constellations and expectations about the moral sense of caring for others contribute to gender disparities in support provision (Gilligan 1982). Moreover, traditional gender segregation in the occupational and family domains have placed women in more nurturing work roles that require greater interpersonal skills, particularly nursing and teaching jobs (Kilbourne, England, and Beron 1994) and caregiving for their children and aging parents (Kessler and McLeod 1984). Because women tend to provide intimate and self-disclosing forms

of emotional support, both women and men may experience more health-promoting effects through supportive bonds with women (Rook 1987). These socioemotional abilities, however, may have costs. Some evidence shows that women are not only more exposed to other people's stressors in their social network, but that they also tend to experience greater distress associated with them (House 1987; Turner 1994), especially if they have their own adversity to manage (Fischer 1982; Kessler and McLeod 1984). Thus, it seems plausible that under higher levels of community-level adversity, women will engage in more socioemotional support exchanges.

In addition to gender, however, it is also important to examine potential race differences. Stack's (1974) ethnographic analysis of the black urban poor found that many single mothers experience supportive bonds within an intricate and resilient network of kin and friendship bonds. Other scholars have also suggested that ethnic minority groups, more generally, have more supportive social bonds in order to compensate for socioeconomic disadvantages or alienation from the broader society (Keith, Kim, and Schafer 2000; Markides and Black 1996). Blacks are more likely to reside in areas with greater neighborhood disadvantage, which, in turn, implies greater exposure to other families in poverty, female-headed households, and adults with less formal education (Jargowsky 1997; Massey and Denton 1993; Wilson 1996).

Households in highly disadvantaged areas face stressful challenges that can reverberate through a network of obligatory ties (LeClere et al. 1998). Social supports needed to face such challenges often include a wide range of family, fictive fin, and friends—and these informal supports, some scholars suggest, are more prevalent among older blacks relative to whites (Taylor 1988). For example, the absence of fathers or other elements of economic disadvantage may influence the extent to which many black elder women become critical sources of emotional and instrumental support (Dilworth-Anderson and Burton 1999; Gibson and Jackson 1987;

Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg 1993; Hogan, Hao, and Parish 1990; Ralston 1997; Taylor 1982). Relative to whites, blacks tend to have larger extended families, interact with family members more frequently than whites and receive more support from extended family members (George 1990; Johnson 1995; Taylor 1988). According to Johnson (1995), elder blacks are "less likely to have a spouse or child as a supporter" but they "can usually draw upon relatives, friends, and fictive kin who serve them well in their old age" (p. 323). Some evidence suggests that when family sources of support are deficient, black elders are more likely than their white counterparts to have a caregiver outside the family (Burton et al. 1995) and a wider pool of potential sources of assistance (Dancy and Ralston 2002; Gibson 1982). Yet, supportive exchanges may not always be positive (Rook 1984). Hogan and his colleagues (1993) assert that "older blacks especially find themselves facing significant demands with limited resources" (p. 1450). Therefore, social support can be a source of both comfort and strain for everyone, especially older black women.

Other related research has focused more specifically on neighborhood ties. Higher levels of discrimination in housing have historically constrained blacks' options for residential mobility, resulting in concentrated segregation in urban neighborhoods (Lee, Campbell, and Miller 1991; Massey and Denton 1993; White 1987). The social consequences increase the likelihood that many black individual's friends and kin also reside in the neighborhood or nearby areas (Feagin 1970; Martineau 1977). Blacks tend to have a higher level of obligatory extended kin within the immediate neighborhood, a pattern especially true among single black mothers (Hogan et al. 1990). Moreover, evidence suggests that blacks tend to report higher levels of intimacy with their neighbors, interact with them more frequently and in a greater variety of ways, and have longer standing relationships with them (Campbell and Lee 1992; Lee,

Campbell, and Miller 1991; Martineau 1977; Nohara 1968; Tomeh 1967; Warren 1981). Disadvantaged conditions may mobilize such social relationships in order to help individuals compensate for deleterious socioeconomic conditions (the "stress mobilization" thesis) (Wheaton 1985). One study documents that enduring forms of reciprocity in social exchanges within neighborhood networks are stronger among people of lower socioeconomic status and blacks (Campbell and Lee 1992). Disadvantage and estrangement from the broader society may elevate the need for stronger, reciprocal bonds with proximate neighbors (LeClere et al. 1998).

HYPOTHESES

Based on the literature cited above, I propose the following hypotheses:

1. Disadvantaged social and economic conditions and a higher rate of residential turnover might weaken social relationships. In that regard, the *social disorganization hypothesis* predicts that neighborhood disadvantage and instability are associated negatively with levels of received and donated social support.
2. It is also possible that neighborhood disadvantage and instability, as stressors, mobilize higher levels of received and donated social support. I refer to that scenario as the *stress mobilization hypothesis*.
3. Prior research suggests the possibility of gender- and race-contingent effects. I propose that the patterns predicted by the stress mobilization hypothesis should be the strongest among black women. In addition, I suspect that the effects of social disorganization may be the strongest among white men.

METHODS

Sample

The data in this sample derive from face-to-face interviews with 1,167 people 65 years and older residing in the District of Columbia and two adjoining Maryland counties, Prince Georges and Montgomery. Consistent with the purpose of the project to investigate health disparities that are associated with status inequalities, we sought a sample that is socially and economically diverse. The three locales in which respondents reside subsume this diversity. Sample selection and recruitment went through several stages. It began with the Medicare Beneficiary files for the three areas. In addition to the names of all people 65 years and older who are entitled to Medicare, the files provided information about the race and gender of each beneficiary, as well as residential address. The next step entailed the selection of potential participants from the large pool of potential participants. To maximize the social and economic diversity, we randomly selected a total of 4,800 names equally divided among the three locales, African-Americans and whites, women and men. The result of this division was the creation of twelve groups, each containing 400 names. Our goal was to enlist a final sample of about 1,200 people living independently, with approximately 100 in each of the 12 groups.

One vital piece of information missing from the Medicare files is the telephone number of the beneficiary. Consequently, it was necessary to match names and addresses with telephone numbers, for which we used a firm specializing in such tasks. Matches were made with almost 56 percent of the names—an amount, according that firm, which is above average for this age group. The matching process eliminates people with private lines, those who exclusively use cell phones, those living in homes where the listing is in the name of another person, people whose move from the area had not yet been registered in the Medicare files, and people living in

institutional settings without a personal telephone listing. The 2,679 names and numbers for which matches were made were then targeted for screening interviews that in part were designed to identify people with cognitive problems that would intrude on the validity of interviews with them. Prior to the interviews, letters were sent were sent to potential participants, describing the inquiry and advising them that their participation was voluntary and the information they provided confidential. Approximately 65 percent of all eligible respondents (1,741) who were contacted agreed to participate, yielding 1,167 cases. The sample used in this analysis eliminates cases that we were unable to link to a census tract, leaving 1,146 cases. Although it was not our explicit goal to obtain a random, representative sample of older adults in these locales, it appears that the age, gender, and racial composition of our study sample roughly mirrors that of the population. This can be seen in Appendix Table A1, which compares the age, gender, and race distributions of the study sample and the Census 200 data for the District of Columbia, Prince George's County, and Montgomery County.

Measures

Donated social support. To measure donated support, respondents were asked the extent that they agree or disagree with the following: "There are people you know who depend on you when you need help or advice," "People count on you when they are down or blue," "People seem to tell you things about themselves that they don't tell other people," and "Other people count on you to understand what they are going through." The response choices are "strongly agree" (1), "agree" (2), "disagree" (3), and "strongly disagree" (4). I reversed the codes such that higher scores reflect a greater sense of donated social support and averaged the items ($\alpha = .880$).

Received social support. Received support items ask respondents the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following: "There is no one who really understands you," "You have a friend or relative whose opinions you trust" "You have people around you who help you to keep your spirits up," "You have at least one friend or relative you want to be with when you feel down or discouraged," and "You have at least one friend or relative to whom you could confide your deepest secrets." The response choices are "strongly agree" (1), "agree" (2), "disagree" (3), and "strongly disagree" (4). I reversed the codes for the last four items such that higher scores reflect greater received support. The index averages the items ($\alpha = .780$).

Neighborhood disadvantage. The index of neighborhood disadvantage is composed of the six items from the Census 2000 (shown in Table 1). Principal components factor analyses indicate that the items load highly on one underlying construct. To create the index, I standardized and averaged the items; higher scores indicate more neighborhood disadvantage.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Residential instability. One of the Census 2000 items measures the percentage of people in a tract who have resided in the same location for the past five years. I reversed those percentages such that higher scores indicate greater residential instability.

Gender is coded 1 for women and 0 for men.

Race is coded 1 for blacks and 0 for whites.

Controls. Age is coded in years. Married, widowed, and divorced marital statuses are each coded 1, with the never married group as the contrast code. The number of children is simply a count of the total number of children or stepchildren in the respondent's family.

A question about educational attainment asks respondents: "Can you tell me how far you went in school?" Response choices are "8^{th} grade or less" (1), "some high school but did not

graduate" (2), "high school graduate or GED" (3), "specialized (vocational) training" (4), "some college but no degree earned" (5), and "college graduate or more" (6).

Household income is measured with an item that asks respondents: "Would you please tell me the number that gives the best estimate of your total household income before taxes, last year (2000). By total household income I mean the total salaries for all of the people living in your home plus all other sources of income. Other sources of income would include such things as money market funds, social security, pensions, real estate, or government entitlements." Respondents were presented with a card that contained the following categories: "less than $10,000," "$10,000 - $19,999," "$20,000 - $29,999," "$30,000 - $39,999," "$40,000 - $49,999," "$50,000 - $59,999," "$60,000 - $69,999," "$70,000 - $79,999," "$80,000 - $89,999," "$90,000 - $99,999," and "$100,000 or more." I imputed the mean value ($50,000 - $59,999) for the 22 percent of cases with missing values and include a dummy code to adjust for missing income (1 = missing, 0 = not missing).

Five items ask respondents about current economic hardship: "Thinking of current times, how difficult is it for you to meet the following needs?" Items include housing, food, transportation, medical, and clothing expenses. The response choices are "not at all difficult" (1), "somewhat difficult" (2), and "very difficult" (3). I averaged the five items to create the current economic hardship index ($\alpha = .812$).

Perceived neighborhood problems. To measure respondents' assessment of neighborhood problems, I use a modified version of the Ross and Mirowsky (1999) "neighborhood disorder" scale. Respondents were asked the degree to which the following statements describes what they see and experience in their neighborhood ("the area around where you live"): "Your neighborhood is noisy," "There is vandalism," "There are run-down houses or buildings," "There

is trash on the streets," "People hang around on the streets," "There is crime," "There is alcohol and drug use," "There is heavy traffic." The response categories are "not at all" (1), "somewhat" (2), "quite a bit" (3), and "very much" (4). I averaged the items to create the index; higher scores indicate a greater extent of perceived neighborhood problems ($\alpha = .828$).

I also include a measure of "residential tenure" because, as Sampson (1991) asserts, "length of residence is the key exogenous factor that influences attitudes and behavior toward the community" (p. 45). This measure asks respondents the number of years that they have resided in the same residence.

Taken together, I include these controls because they may be related to gender, race, neighborhood disadvantage, or instability. For example, blacks and the less educated tend to have fewer economic resources and reside in neighborhoods with more social and economic problems. Overall, my aim is to examine the gender- and race-contingent effects of community-level neighborhood disadvantage and instability, *net* of individual-level characteristics.

Analytical Strategy

I use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression techniques in these analyses. In the first model, I regress the dependent variable (either donated or received support), on neighborhood disadvantage, neighborhood instability, gender, race, and the first set of control variables (age, marital status, and number of children). This step allows the examination of a base model prior to interactions and controls for socioeconomic conditions, residential tenure, and perceived neighborhood problems. In the second model, I test for gender- and race-contingent effects by multiplying gender and race by neighborhood disadvantage and instability and including those four terms in the model. I also examine possible three-way interactions between gender, race,

and disadvantage or instability. However, I only report results for the statistically significant three-way interaction in the case of received social support (described later).

In the third model, I adjust for education, income, and economic hardship to examine the interaction effects net of those socioeconomic conditions. That step explicitly tests whether or not education, household income, and economic hardship mediate any observed gender- or race-contingent effects of disadvantage or instability. To test the potential mediating effects of perceived neighborhood problems and residential tenure, I include those variables in the fourth model.

Generally speaking, hierarchical linear model techniques tend to be used to analyze multilevel data. In some instances of multilevel data analyses, the use of traditional OLS regression methods may yield somewhat less efficient estimates than hierarchical linear models. However, as Robert (1998) asserts, such techniques "were designed for data sets that have both within-group and between-group variation, requiring many cases within each of many groups" (p. 24). In the present study, the majority of census tracts have fewer than 5 cases. Only 7 tracts contain more than 10 cases and only 1 tract has more than 20 cases. According to Duncan, Connell, and Klebanov (1997), using census data as indicators of community-level socioeconomic conditions—such as neighborhood structural disadvantage—should not raise too much concern about inefficiency. At most, the serial correlations produced by clustering cases in the census tracts can be handled with adjustments that yield more robust standard errors. Standard OLS regression assumes that observations are uncorrelated. However, because some census tracts contain more than 1 case, I employ Stata's "cluster" extension to the "regress" command. This clustering technique relaxes the assumptions that observations are independent and allows observations to be correlated within census tracts. The final regression estimates

reported here are re-weighted by the variance-covariance matrix allowing for correlations across observations within census tracts.

RESULTS

Donated Social Support

Model 1 in Table 2 shows that neighborhood disadvantage and instability are unrelated to donated support. However, as expected, women and blacks tend to report significantly higher levels of donated support. Among the first set of control variables, only the age coefficient is statistically significant: older age groups tend to report the lowest levels of donated support.

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

As shown in Model 2, the effects of neighborhood disadvantage vary by gender and race. Specifically, the overall effect of neighborhood disadvantage is negative and significant. However, that negative association occurs only among white men. Two statistical patterns converge to produce that effect. First, the positive neighborhood disadvantage × women interaction coefficient (b = .095) indicates that the negative effects of disadvantage on donated support occur *only among men*. In addition, the positive neighborhood disadvantage × black coefficient (b = .131) indicates that the negative effects of neighborhood disadvantage on donated support occur *only among white respondents*. Taken together, these significant interactions suggest that among black women there is a positive association between neighborhood disadvantage and donated support; however, among white men, that association is negative. Among black men and white women, neighborhood disadvantage has little effect on donated support.

Model 2 also shows that neighborhood instability is associated negatively with donated support among blacks only—as indicated by the negative and significant neighborhood instability × black coefficient (b = −.557). In addition, the nonsignificant neighborhood instability × women coefficient indicates that those effects do not also vary by gender. Therefore, neighborhood instability takes a significantly greater toll on the provision of social support among both black women and men, but has little impact on white respondents.

To test whether or not socioeconomic conditions mediate the gender- and race-contingent effects observed in Model 2, I adjust for education, income, and economic hardship in Model 3. Among those conditions, only income is associated positively with donated support. Although the sizes of the significant interaction coefficients decrease slightly from Models 2 and 3, each coefficient remains significant net of socioeconomic controls. Similarly, to assess the mediating impact of perceived neighborhood problems and residential tenure, I include those conditions in Model 4. Perceived neighborhood problems are associated negatively with donated social support. In contrast, residential tenure is associated positively with donated social support. Taken together, however, the adjustment for those conditions has no effect on the gender- and race-contingent effects of neighborhood disadvantage and instability. Overall, a comparison of the equations with and without the interactions indicates there is a statistically significant improvement with the inclusion of the interaction terms ($F = 3.640$, $p = .006$). In a separate analysis that enters each of the interactions independently revealed no signs of multicollinearity.

To better illustrate the gender- and race- contingent effects of neighborhood disadvantage, I plot the regression predictions in Figure 1. I solved the equation in Model 4 for married individuals. All other variables are centered (actual score – mean score) so their means equal 0. Substituting other values for those controls will change the intercept only slightly but

will not influence the slopes. Figure 1 shows that at low levels of neighborhood disadvantage, each group has similar levels of donated support. However, increasing levels of neighborhood disadvantage are associated with higher levels of donated support among black women and lower levels of donated support among white men. Conversely, the effects of disadvantage on black men and white women appear to be roughly similar.

In Figure 2, I plot the predicted regression lines based on the equation in Model 4, substituting the same values used to derive Figure 1. The negative instability × black coefficient indicates that neighborhood instability is related negatively to the provision of social support, but *only among black women and men*. Among white respondents, the slopes are slightly positive.

[INSERT FIGURES 1 AND 2 ABOUT HERE]

Received Social Support

As shown in Model 1 of Table 3, neighborhood disadvantage is associated negatively with received social support. However, instability, gender, and race are unrelated to received support. Among the first set of control variables, age is associated negatively with received support. In addition, compared to the never married, the currently married and widowed respondents report significantly higher levels of received support.

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

A test for a three-way interaction between gender, race, and neighborhood disadvantage indicates a positive and significant coefficient (b = .192). This suggests that gender and race *jointly combine* with neighborhood disadvantage to influence the level of received support. Specifically, neighborhood disadvantage is associated negatively with received support among white women only. In contrast, among black women, disadvantage has a positive association

with received support. The effect of disadvantage on received support is similar among black and white men.

The negative and significant neighborhood instability × black coefficient (b = −.693) in Model 2 indicates that neighborhood instability is associated negatively with received support among blacks only—a pattern similar to that found for donated support. However, the nonsignificant instability × women coefficient indicates that those effects do not vary by gender.

Model 3 shows the positive effects of education and household income, and the negative impact of economic hardship, on received support. Adjustment for those socioeconomic conditions reduces the size of the neighborhood instability × black coefficient by about 19 percent, although the interaction coefficient remains statistically significant. In addition, the size of the three-way coefficient is reduced by a trivial amount. Moreover, the adjustment for perceived neighborhood problems and residential tenure also has little effect on the size of the interaction coefficients. Overall, a comparison of the equations with and without the interactions indicates there is statistically significant improvement with the inclusion of the interaction terms ($F = 2.750$, $p = .012$). There are no signs of multicollinearity among the interactions.

Interpreting three-way interactions can be tricky. To help illustrate those complex patterns, Figure 3 plots the predicted levels of received support associated with neighborhood disadvantage by gender and race. The regression lines reflect the equation in Model 4, substituting the same values used to obtain Figure 1. It shows that increasing levels of neighborhood disadvantage are associated with higher levels of received support among black women and lower levels of received support among white women. Conversely, the effects of disadvantage on black and white men appear to be roughly similar.

In addition, Figure 4 illustrates the significant and negative neighborhood instability × race coefficient (b = −.579) in Model 4 of Table 3. That is, neighborhood instability is associated negatively with received social support, but *only among black women and men*. Among white men and women the slopes are slightly positively, which reflects the marginally significant and positive coefficient for neighborhood instability in Model 4 (b = .359, p = .086).

[INSERT FIGURES 3 AND 4 ABOUT HERE]

DISCUSSION

The quality of neighborhood life influences social relationships—but it does so differently across different social groups. I frame my analysis around two broad hypotheses. The social disorganization hypothesis predicts that neighborhood disadvantage and instability should weaken supportive ties. Alternatively, the stress mobilization hypothesis predicts that levels of donated and received support are highest under the most disadvantaged conditions. Moreover, previous studies suggest the potential for gender and race differences in social support processes, especially in the context of neighborhood disadvantage. Black women, in particular, should have the highest levels of socioemotional support under adverse structural conditions.

Overall, my findings support the social disorganization thesis for whites and the stress mobilization thesis for blacks—but gender disparities in those effects contribute another layer of complexity. Higher levels of neighborhood disadvantage are associated with higher levels of donated and received support among black women only. In contrast, higher levels of neighborhood disadvantage are associated with lower levels of donated support among white men and lower levels of received support among white women. Neighborhood disadvantage has little effect on donated or received support among black men.

These findings challenge the contention of social disorganization theory that neighborhoods with greater structural disadvantage *uniformly* erode or diminish social bonds. Although such disadvantage appears to have a negative effect on white respondents, among black women the impact is quite different. In fact, the patterns are in accord with Stack's observations about the structure and processes of social support among black families, especially black women. To my knowledge, however, these findings are the first to systematically document the positive effects of structural disadvantage on two different forms of social support, net of individual-level socioeconomic conditions, subjective assessments of neighborhood problems, and residential tenure. Thus, the higher levels of support associated with disadvantage remain significant even after taking into account black women's personal circumstances. These findings also reinforce and refine previous studies that suggest that many black women in mid- and late-life have a unique role in the temporal and intergenerational exchange of social support, especially under high levels of structural adversity (Burton et al. 1995; Dilworth-Anderson and Burton 1999; Gibson 1982; LeClere et al. 1998).

In contrast, the findings for whites are in accord with the predictions of the social disorganization thesis. Overall, as expected, women tend to report higher levels of donated support. That pattern is consistent with literature that suggests both women and men prefer to receive support from women. However, somewhat more surprising is the finding that disadvantage seems to have a negative effect on donated support among white men. The nature of support provision probably differs by gender. For men, it may tend to involve more instrumental forms of support. However, residing in an area that contains a higher level of social and economic problems may present obstacles to such provision or leave white men feeling a greater sense of interpersonal estrangement. Although there are probably more people in

disadvantage areas who need help, advice, and practical support, such adversity may also restrict or limit ties between white men and others. On the other hand, among white women the levels of received social support are the lowest at the highest levels of neighborhood disadvantage. Under such conditions, white women may feel a greater sense of interpersonal estrangement or abandonment. It may be more difficult to sustain stronger socioemotional bonds in the face of neighborhood disadvantage. Overall, these patterns are consistent with social disorganization theory's prediction that neighborhood disadvantage should constrain social bonds.

The findings about the race-contingent effects of residential instability, although consistent with social disorganization theory, are the opposite of the findings for neighborhood disadvantage. The effect of instability on both donated and received support is negative only among black women and men. This is consistent with previous research that shows the importance of neighborhood ties among blacks. My findings reinforce and extend previous studies by showing the detrimental social effects of residential instability—net of neighborhood structural disadvantage and individual-level socioeconomic status, perceived neighborhood problems, and residential tenure. In sum, black elders may have greater difficulty forming intimate social bonds when they reside in neighborhoods with a greater level of residential instability. It may be that discrimination in housing, racial segregation, and other economic restrictions constrain blacks' opportunities for residential mobility. South and Deane (1993) found, for example, that even after adjusting for racial disparities in home ownership, blacks are much less likely to be residentially mobile than whites. Such residential concentration, however, has meant that many blacks tend to have more friends and kin living nearby in the neighborhood or proximate locales. As I mentioned before, other studies document that blacks tend to report higher levels of intimacy with their neighbors, interact with them more frequently and in a

greater variety of ways, and have longer standing relationships with them. Therefore, in neighborhoods with greater instability, some older black women and men may feel stuck in a place where in- and out-flow of residents takes a greater toll on their social relations.

On the other hand, there is a slightly positive association between residential instability and received social support among white respondents. This may be an indication that higher levels of turnover in an area are linked to whites seeking supportive bonds to compensate or buffer against feeling estranged in their own residence. At high levels of residential turnover, elders may come to feel like strangers in their own home, surrounded by a sea of unfamiliar faces. To counter that feeling, whites appear to have a greater likelihood of having other sources of socioemotional support.

Given the nature of the sample in my study, several potential limitations warrant attention. The generalizability of the findings is somewhat limited. Although the sample is similar to the overall gender, age, and racial composition of adults over age 65 in the three locales, the sample is not representative of elders in those areas or other locations. That limitation, however, does not diminish the internal validity of the patterns presented here. It may be that our sample has somewhat better health and is wealthier than others. Thus, if anything, the estimates reported here may actually underestimate the extent that neighborhood disadvantage and residential instability affect social relationships.

Selection bias may be another potential limitation. Individuals who reside in more disadvantaged areas, especially those with fewer social and economic resources, are less likely to survive or reside in the community. That may be particularly the case among elder black men. Therefore, to some degree, the sample may reflect what some have called the "successfully aged." The patterns might vary if we had poorer, less healthy, and less socially integrated

individuals in the sample. On the other hand, people who have survived in disadvantaged areas over many decades may have developed a sense of resiliency that buffers against community-level adversity. It is also plausible that undesirable conditions increase the motivation to leave disadvantaged neighborhoods. Individuals with the resources can do so; others have fewer choices (Fischer 1977; Taylor 1996). Wealthier individuals are more mobile, but moving may severe social ties with neighbors. Conversely, the less advantaged may be trapped in a vulnerable neighborhood, but longevity in an area fosters the development of stronger social ties.

Future research might consider these processes across the entire adult age range. Social support and disadvantaged conditions probably mean different things to people at different points of the life course. Among the young, disadvantaged economic circumstances may take a greater toll on psychosocial resources and create more distress because it impedes their efforts to establish economic security for themselves and their families. Older adults, on the other hand, may be more sensitive to the lack of social cohesion in an area because it poses a greater threat to their sense of self, social relationships, and well-being, especially if they face increasing physical impairment.

Future research should seek to examine in more detail the specific ties within the social networks of older blacks and whites. It would be interesting to examine the gender, racial, SES< and age composition of those networks and their effects on the receipt and donation of social support (Felton and Shinn 1992). Another angle might include the extent to which community-level disadvantage and individual-level forms of social support combine to influence mental and physical health outcomes. Such support provision may exact a toll on mental and physical functioning—ideas consistent with the "cost of caring" thesis (Kessler and McLeod 1984). In that regard, potential variations across important social statuses such as race and gender are

worthy of further investigation. The provision of social support may be more strongly associated with distress for individuals in neighborhoods with greater disadvantage—perhaps more so for black women with fewer socioeconomic resources.

CONCLUSION

Previous studies document the impact of the neighborhood on the inner lives of individuals. The present study contributes to that literature by reporting the effects of community on older adult's social lives. Moreover, I show that these patterns vary by gender and race—and remain net of individual-level socioeconomic conditions, perceptions of neighborhood problems, and residential tenure. House's encouragement to examine the social-structural and community-level determinants of social support, as well as potential status-contingent effects of those determinants, inspired the present study. By documenting the divergent impact of neighborhood disadvantage and residential instability on two different forms of support, this study makes strides toward addressing those gaps. However, much more remains unknown about the specific nature of support under adverse community conditions and the ways that such effects may also vary across the life course.

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TABLE 1. Principal Components Factor Analysis of Neighborhood Structural Disadvantage Items

Census Items	Factor Loadings
Households Below Poverty Line	.842
Overcrowded Households	.783
Individuals Receiving Public Assistance	.816
Mean Household Income*	−.805
College Education*	−.789
High School Education*	−.904
Female-Headed Households	.857

Notes: Eigenvalue = 4.815; α = .924; * reverse coded.

TABLE 2. Donated Social Support Regressed on Neighborhood Disadvantage, Instability, Gender and Race, Gender and Race Interactions, and Controls

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Neighborhood Disadvantage	−.008	−.149***	−.095*	−.094*
	(.021)	(.041)	(.043)	(.044)
Neighborhood Instability	−.171	.134	.043	.143
	(.124)	(.207)	(.211)	(.210)
Women = 1	.082**	.090**	.104***	.101***
	(.029)	(.029)	(.029)	(.029)
Black = 1	.097**	.121***	.133***	.137***
	(.031)	(.033)	(.034)	(.034)
Interactions				
Neighborhood Disadvantage × Women	—	.095**	.082*	.082*
		(.036)	(.036)	(.036)
Neighborhood Disadvantage × Black	—	.131**	.107*	.118**
		(.045)	(.045)	(.045)
Neighborhood Instability × Women	—	−.047	−.021	−.048
		(.225)	(.226)	(.226)
Neighborhood Instability × Black	—	−.557*	−.475*	−.495*
		(.235)	(.242)	(.242)
Controls				
Age	−.010***	−.011***	−.010***	−.011***
	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)
Married [a]	.086	.088	.041	.030
	(.061)	(.063)	(.065)	(.066)
Widowed [a]	.049	.052	.028	.020
	(.059)	(.061)	(.063)	(.064)
Divorced [a]	.046	.054	.036	.040
	(.077)	(.078)	(.079)	(.080)
Number of Children	.005	.003	.007	.008
	(.006)	(.006)	(.006)	(.006)
Years of Education	—	—	.015	.014
			(.009)	(.009)
Household Income	—	—	.014*	.013*
			(.006)	(.006)
Economic Hardship	—	—	−.087	−.074
			(.061)	(.060)
Perceived Neighborhood Problems	—	—	—	−.069*
				(.035)
Residential Tenure	—	—	—	.002*
				(.001)
constant	3.032	2.980	3.007	3.014
R^2	.046	.064	.076	.082

† $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (2-tailed tests)

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

[a] Compared to never married respondents.

TABLE 3. Received Social Support Regressed on Neighborhood Disadvantage, Instability, Gender and Race, Gender and Race Interactions, and Controls

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Neighborhood Disadvantage	−.050*	−.093†	−.014	−.011
	(.021)	(.053)	(.051)	(.051)
Neighborhood Instability	.147	.469*	.326	.359†
	(.122)	(.208)	(.205)	(.208)
Women = 1	.049	−.010	.023	.022
	(.030)	(.049)	(.046)	(.046)
Black = 1	−.017	−.029	.001	−.001
	(.031)	(.048)	(.047)	(.048)
Interactions				
Neighborhood Disadvantage × Women	—	−.107	−.113	−.112
		(.073)	(.069)	(.069)
Neighborhood Disadvantage × Black	—	.041	.011	.016
		(.064)	(.061)	(.061)
Women × Black	—	.060	.047	.047
		(.059)	(.058)	(.058)
Neighborhood Disadvantage × Women × Black	—	.192*	.178*	.177*
		(.086)	(.083)	(.082)
Neighborhood Instability × Women	—	.061	.087	.075
		(.234)	(.228)	(.227)
Neighborhood Instability × Black	—	−.693**	−.562*	−.579**
		(.219)	(.219)	(.219)
Controls				
Age	−.006**	−.006**	−.005*	−.005*
	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)	(.002)
Married [a]	.151**	.154**	.084	.079
	(.055)	(.057)	(.058)	(.059)
Widowed [a]	.155**	.159**	.121*	.117*
	(.055)	(.057)	(.057)	(.057)
Divorced [a]	.109	.120†	.089	.089
	(.067)	(.069)	(.069)	(.069)
Number of Children	.007	.006	.013*	.014*
	(.005)	(.005)	(.005)	(.006)
Years of Education	—	—	.029**	.028**
			(.009)	(.009)
Household Income	—	—	.019**	.019**
			(.006)	(.006)
Economic Hardship	—	—	−.144*	−.140*
			(.059)	(.059)
Perceived Neighborhood Problems	—	—	—	−.035
				(.036)
Residential Tenure	—	—	—	.001
				(.001)
constant	3.072	3.057	3.096	3.101
R^2	.028	.049	.084	.085

† $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (2-tailed tests)

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

[a] Compared to never married respondents.

Appendix Table A1. Age, Gender, and Racial Comparisons between the Study Sample and the Census 2000 Estimates

	Sample N	Sample Age 65+ Percentage	Census Age 65+ N	Census Age 65+ Percentage
White Men	295		56,377	
65-74	136	46.10	30,058	53.31
75-84	124	42.00	19,228	34.11
85+	35	11.90	7,091	12.58
Black Men	285		30,675	
65-74	172	60.40	19,487	63.53
75-84	99	34.70	9,069	29.56
85+	14	4.90	2,119	6.91
White Women	293		77,505	
65-74	124	42.30	35,403	45.68
75-84	133	45.40	29,406	37.94
85+	36	12.30	12,696	16.38
Black Women	294		51,046	
65-74	146	49.70	27,558	53.99
75-84	108	36.70	17,131	33.56
85+	40	13.60	6,357	12.45

Note: Census Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau - 2000, SF 1 Data

FIGURE 1. Neighborhood Disadvantage and Donated Social Support by Gender and Race

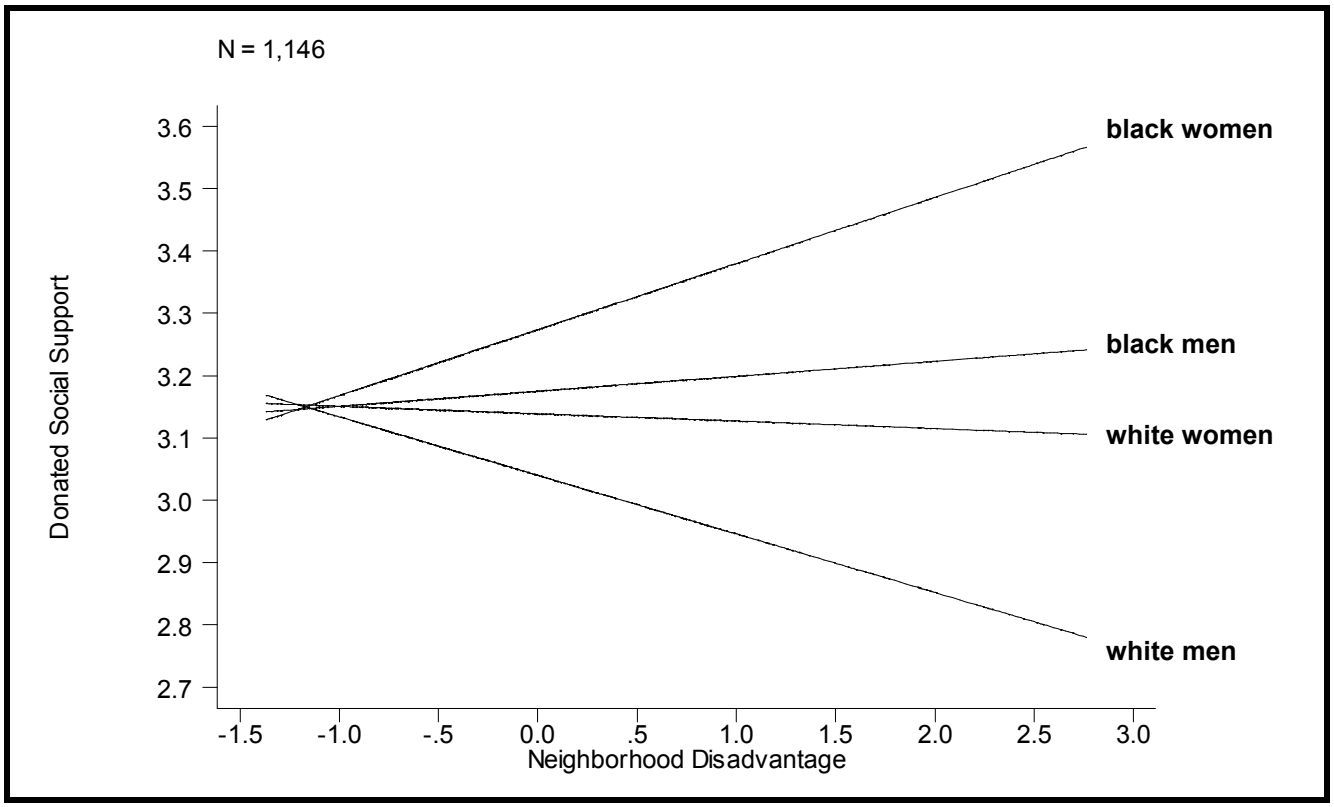

FIGURE 2. Neighborhood Instability and Donated Social Support by Gender and Race

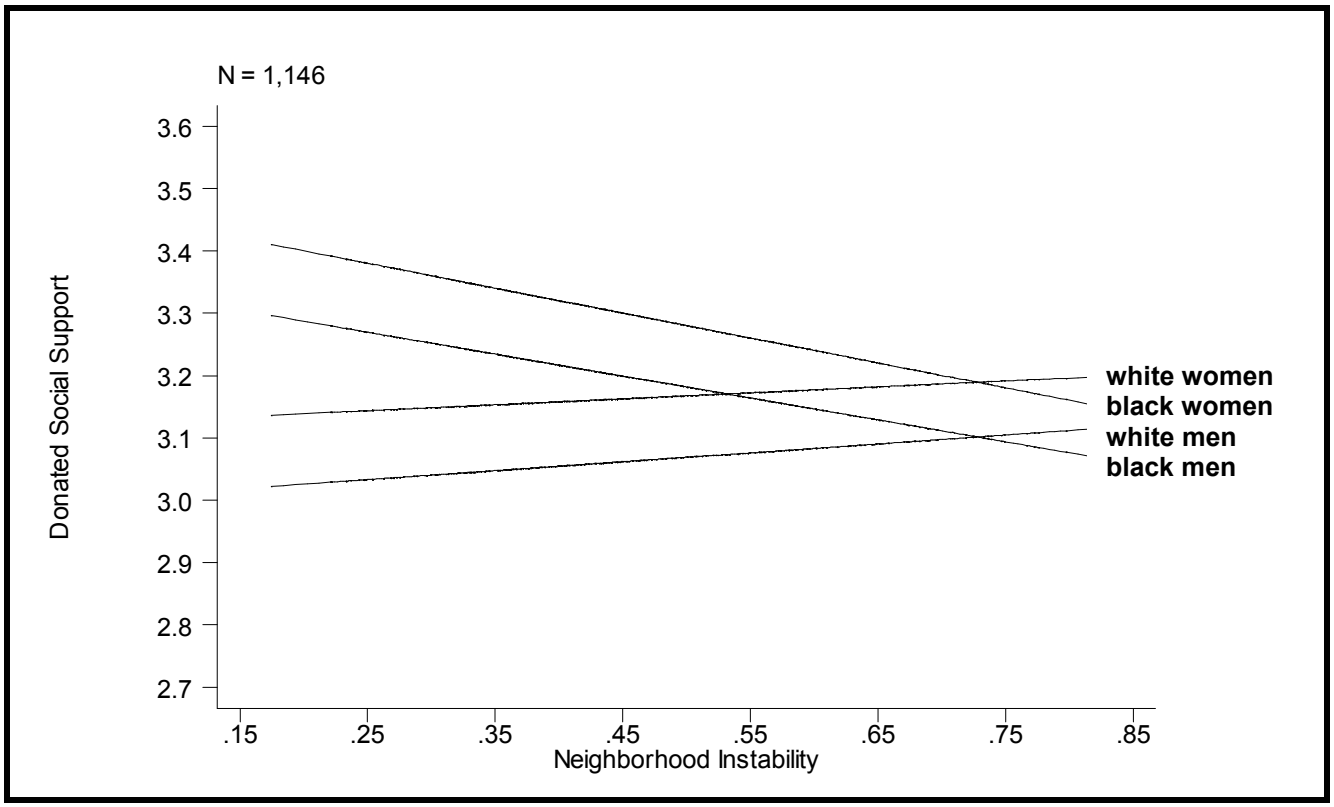

FIGURE 3. Neighborhood Disadvantage and Received Social Support by Gender and Race

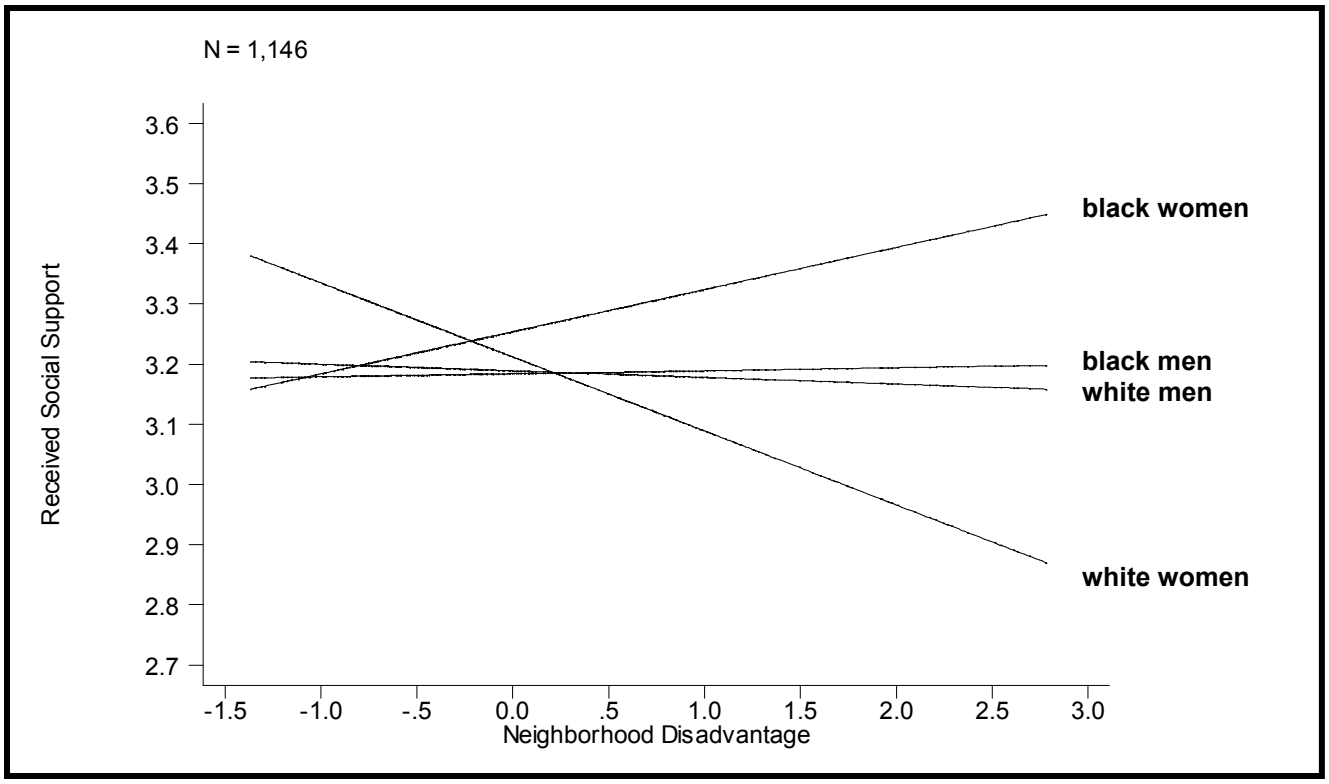

FIGURE 4. Neighborhood Instability and Received Social Support by Gender and Race