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Putting Activism in Its Place: The Neighborhood Context of Participation in Neighborhood-Focused Activism

Megan E. Gilster, MSW, Ph.D.

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Abstract

Neighborhood-focused activism is one way residents enact their vision for their community. This study examines the neighborhood socioeconomic antecedents of participation in neighborhood-focused activism in a diverse sample of residents of Chicago neighborhoods to test three theories of neighborhood socioeconomic context and participation: 1) affluence affords participation, 2) activism addresses neighborhood needs associated with disadvantage, and 3) socioeconomic inequality creates contention that necessitates participation. Measuring neighborhood socioeconomic status as two unique dimensions, neighborhood affluence and neighborhood disadvantage, and accounting for both individual and neighborhood characteristics, I find support for each theory. Neighborhood socioeconomic context matters for participation, regardless of individual socioeconomic characteristics. Only when these three perspectives are considered jointly can they fully capture the socioeconomic context of participation in neighborhood-focused activism.

Keywords

neighborhood inequality; concentrated poverty; concentrated affluence; civic participation; activism; participation; neighborhood disadvantage; neighborhood affluence

The engagement of neighborhood residents in neighborhood civic life is an important component of healthy communities. It has also been an intensely debated concept. Scholarship on community engagement across disciplines has focused on social ties, participation in voluntary associations, volunteering in formal organizations, and individual and community social capital. Neighborhood-focused activism has received less attention. Neighborhood-focused activism has the potential to improve neighborhoods and address neighborhood inequality and is therefore an important indicator of neighborhood civic life.

I seek to understand how neighborhood socioeconomic conditions contribute to the likelihood that residents will engage in neighborhood-focused activism. First, I define and describe neighborhood-focused activism. I then describe three theories regarding the relationship between neighborhood socioeconomic status and participation: affluence affords participation; activism addresses neighborhood needs associated with concentrated disadvantage; and socioeconomic inequality creates contention that necessitates participation. I examine these theories by disaggregating neighborhood socioeconomic status into neighborhood disadvantage and neighborhood affluence, a strategy that improves our understanding of the role of socioeconomic status. I conclude with a discussion of the

implications of these findings for future research and for place-based efforts to increase participation and improve neighborhoods.

Neighborhood-focused Activism

Activism can take many forms. In general, activism is action intended to bring about social, political, economic, environmental or ideological changes (Emberck, 2008). Neighborhood-focused activism is therefore action to create changes in neighborhood conditions. Neighborhood-focused activism may be a form of participation in collective action (e.g., Foster-Fishman et al., 2007) though other researchers have labeled it as community participation for social change (Speer & Peterson, 2000) and participation in community organizing (Christens & Speer, 2011). Not only does neighborhood-focused activism have the potential to improve the neighborhood, but participation is also associated with higher psychosocial well-being (Gilster, 2012).

Recent scholarship identifies neighborhood-focused activism as an increasingly important form of activism. The work of Sampson, McAdam, and colleagues finds that while protest events have declined since the 1960s, both civic activities like neighborhood celebrations and hybrid events which combine civic activities with protest events—what they call collective civic action—have become more frequent (McAdam et al., 2005; Sampson et al., 2005). Their work suggests that social movement scholars tend to look at extreme organizations and miss activism that has become more peaceful, routine, and local in nature (McAdam et al., 2005). Similarly, criticisms of Putnam's (2000) popular work on civil society have noted that both his scholarly work and the resultant policy applications overlook activism (Mayer, 2003). Because neighborhood-focused activism captures what community members are *doing* for their neighborhood, it may be a more appropriate indicator of neighborhood civic life than other forms of participation.

Three Perspectives on Neighborhood Socioeconomic Status and Participation

What kinds of neighborhoods have more residents who participate in neighborhood-focused activism? In a review of research on volunteering, John Wilson (2000) noted that there has been no clear pattern of findings regarding the impact of neighborhood socioeconomic status on participation. Theory and empirical evidence suggests three seemingly contradictory hypotheses regarding the relationship of neighborhood socioeconomic status to multiple forms of participation. The resources perspective proposes that neighborhood affluence is associated with more participation. The neighborhood needs perspective suggests that neighborhood disadvantage is associated with neighborhood problems, which motivate participation. The inequality perspective predicts that participation will be highest in the presence of both affluence and disadvantage. This paper tests how each of these hypotheses relate to one kind of participation—participation in neighborhood-focused activism.

These three hypotheses, described in more detail below, may be better understood when neighborhood socioeconomic status is disaggregated into both disadvantage and affluence. The concept of concentrated disadvantage captures the high poverty, joblessness, and very low income neighborhoods described by William Julius Wilson (1987, 1996). Concentrated affluence describes the presence of educated and higher income professionals in communities. Interestingly, the presence of affluent neighbors has been found to be more protective of physical health than the presence of poor neighbors is detrimental to physical health (Cagney, 2008; Wen, Browning, & Cagney, 2003), supporting the notion that affluence and disadvantage are separate, independent dimensions of the neighborhood socioeconomic context. Accounting for the multidimensional nature of neighborhood

socioeconomic status may help understand how neighborhood context matters for participation in neighborhood-focused activism.

Socioeconomic Resources Afford Participation

A number of literatures suggest that neighborhood-level socioeconomic resources facilitate participation in neighborhood civic life among residents. At an individual level, we know that individuals with greater resources participate more in civic life (Musick & Wilson, 2008; Putnam, 2000; Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). For example, Verba and colleagues (1995) find that individual resources are a central aspect of civic participation. Musick and Wilson (2008) find that individual resources predict volunteering. Additionally, living in a neighborhood with concentrated advantage is thought to increase residents' likelihood of participation in civic life, even beyond these compositional effects.

Even poverty scholars argue that the presence of affluent residents is important to all residents in poor areas. Poverty scholars argue that the absence of individuals with socioeconomic resources in disadvantaged neighborhoods leads to lower overall participation (e.g., Wilson, 1996). Concentrated poverty theory suggests that the lack of resources—particularly resources brought by educated, middle class families—in disadvantaged neighborhoods creates a dearth of social organization (Wilson, 1996). Furthermore, high-poverty neighborhoods are socially isolated from middle-class leaders and role models. Middle class families sustain social organization—the ability of communities to respond to neighborhood problems (Wilson, 1996).

Social capital theories also suggest that individual human capital predicts social capital and therefore more advantaged communities have residents with more opportunities to participate (e.g., Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1988). Affluent, suburban neighborhoods have been found to have neighborhood-focused social action events (McAdam et al., 2005). Indeed, foundation-sponsored community change initiatives usually target residents of poor, disadvantaged neighborhoods. These initiatives often assume that residents of these neighborhoods are less involved in their community and disconnected from individuals and resources needed to meet their needs (Brown et al., 2004).

In sum, both civic participation and poverty researchers view the presence of affluence in a neighborhood to be an important predictor of participation and other positive outcomes. These perspectives have informed policy and foundation initiatives aimed at increasing integration of the poor with more affluent communities. One such example is the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Hope VI program demolishes public housing buildings to build mixed income developments.

Neighborhood Problems Fuel Participation

Another perspective is that residents of disadvantaged neighborhoods organize to deal with neighborhood problems, or incivilities, including crime, violence, disorder, and physical hazards. Both community psychology (e.g., Perkins et al., 1990) and qualitative urban sociology (e.g., Venkatesh, 2000) have suggested that, inasmuch as disadvantaged neighborhoods have more problems, residents are more likely to engage in neighborhood-focused activism.

The community psychology literature examines the relationship between neighborhood problems and participation in neighborhoods. Some studies of poor communities have found that neighborhood problems motivate residents to take action (e.g., Foster-Fishman et al., 2007; Saegert & Winkel, 2004). Neighborhood problems are associated with participation in organizations that solve those neighborhood problems (Perkins et al., 1990). For example, individuals aware of substance use problems in a neighborhood were more likely to

participate in community prevention initiatives (Peterson & Reid, 2003). The extant community psychology literature on the neighborhood context of participation has two key limitations. First, most studies investigate these relationships in only disadvantaged communities, limiting neighborhood variation and comparisons. Second, the majority of these studies employ only a resident's own perception of neighborhood problems to understand contextual effects—these assessments may be dependent upon individual factors such as exposure to the community—rather than neighborhood-level or objective measures of neighborhood problems.

Neighborhood problems have also been highlighted as a motivator of participation in disadvantaged communities in the work of qualitative urban sociologists. These studies have found that problems in disadvantaged neighborhoods are often solved by neighborhood resident activists working, in many cases, with those in the community who might otherwise be causing some of the problems with which they are concerned. For instance, Venkatesh (2000) describes a number of organizations in neighborhoods working to address problems with public housing, gang violence, and other community needs. For example, he describes a tenant association working with a gang (whose territory included their public housing buildings) to create playground areas for the youth in the buildings. This suggests that participation in neighborhood-focused activism happens when residents share common ideas about problems that need to be addressed.

Inequality Breeds Contention

The role of neighborhood socioeconomic inequality—heterogeneity by income or education within the community—in promoting participation may account for the seemingly contradictory propositions of the two previous perspectives. The neighborhood inequality perspective suggests that the disparate visions of neighborhood problems among diverse residents increase the likelihood of participation. Community-level income inequality contributes to participation because of the divergent standpoints of individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Oliver, 2001).

Sociologist Mary Pattillo (2007) examines a neighborhood in Chicago that is transitioning from extreme poverty to a more class-integrated neighborhood. Despite gentrification, this neighborhood still has poverty rates of approximately 60%, placing it, by most definitions (Jargowsky, 2003; Kingsley & Petit, 2007), among very-high-poverty neighborhoods. The new, affluent, gentrifying residents are concerned with improving the neighborhood and participate in neighborhood-focused activism. She finds that these middle class residents perceive poor residents as a threat to their vision of the neighborhood. They are uncomfortable with the priorities of the low income residents who they feel have “too much of a voice,” (Pattillo, 2007, p. 99) in shaping neighborhood demands. This is one example of how neighborhood inequality fuels participation in neighborhood-focused activism, especially among those with more resources.

The inequality perspective may also account for inconsistent findings in two studies that found nonlinear relationships between neighborhood poverty and participation in neighborhood groups. First, in an African American sample in poor and middle-class neighborhoods of Chicago, poverty was not associated with organizational participation among mothers. However, poverty rate was associated with participation in fewer organizations among all family members (including youth activities) except in high poverty neighborhoods (i.e., neighborhood poverty rate of 40% or greater) where poverty levels were associated with participation in more kinds of organizations (Rankin & Quane, 2000). Second, and in contrast, Swaroop and Morenoff (2006) found that neighborhood poverty was associated with more organizational and problem solving participation among adult

respondents in all Chicago neighborhoods but became negative among the highest poverty neighborhoods (those above the 10th percentile in disadvantage).

Neighborhood inequality theories might suggest that the one-dimensional measures of socioeconomic status in these studies might explain why they found non-linear but contradictory effects. Measures of neighborhood disadvantage alone may not capture the socioeconomic inequality within neighborhoods that matters to a range of outcomes, including neighborhood-focused activism.

Previous studies of the relationship of neighborhood socioeconomic status with numerous forms of participation have rarely measured socioeconomic inequality. When they do, they often use measures like the Index of Qualitative Variation (IQV; e.g., Oliver, 2001) that do not capture the status hierarchy, or ordinal structure, of income groups. More appropriate measures of socioeconomic inequality, like the Gini coefficient, are more useful for larger scale geographies (like counties) but overstate within-neighborhood inequality because they do not account for the range of incomes throughout the city. This suggests that alternative methods may be fruitful in measuring socioeconomic inequality. First, neighborhood income alone may not capture neighborhood socioeconomic status. The literature suggests that measuring both affluence and disadvantage are important for capturing the neighborhood environment. Furthermore, the simultaneous presence of disadvantage and affluence as a measure of inequality may be most important for participation in neighborhood-focused activism.

The Current Project

This paper tests three theories of the neighborhood socioeconomic context of participation by investigating whether they explain resident participation in neighborhood-focused activism. I propose that measuring neighborhood socioeconomic status along two dimensions—neighborhood affluence and neighborhood disadvantage—is crucial to understanding how neighborhood socioeconomic status is related to participation in neighborhood-focused activism. The measurement of neighborhood socioeconomic status as two-dimensional is an important contribution of this paper. First, I test the hypotheses described below while treating the two socioeconomic status measures as linear variables. Then, to capture neighborhoods characterized by concentrated affluence, concentrated disadvantage, and inequality (the presence of both affluence and disadvantage), I create categories derived from both linear dimensions. I then test the hypotheses with these categorical variables.

The first hypothesis tests the resources perspective, which proposes a positive relationship between neighborhood affluence (e.g., more college educated, professional residents) and neighborhood-focused activism:

H1: Neighborhood affluence is positively related to resident participation in neighborhood-focused activism.

The neighborhood needs perspective suggests that neighborhood disadvantage has a positive relationship with participation in neighborhood-focused activism that is explained by neighborhood problems. This theory suggests the following two hypotheses:

H2a: Neighborhood disadvantage is positively related to resident participation in neighborhood-focused activism.

H2b: Neighborhood problems will fully mediate the positive relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and resident participation in neighborhood-focused activism.

The inequality perspective predicts that participation will be highest where both affluence and disadvantage are present in the neighborhood. In particular, neighborhood inequality might motivate those with more resources to participate. I therefore test three possible hypotheses about how inequality matters:

H3a: Unequal neighborhoods with both disadvantage and affluence will be positively associated with participation in higher disadvantage neighborhoods.

H3b: Individual education is more strongly positively associated with participation in more disadvantaged neighborhoods.

H3c: Individual education is more strongly positively associated with participation in more unequal neighborhoods.

Methods

Data

Data come from the Chicago Community Adult Health Study (CCAHS). Respondents are 3105 adults from a neighborhood-based sample of residents of Chicago, IL between 2001 and 2003. One adult was interviewed from each sampled home, with a response rate of 72%. Respondents were asked about their health, mental health, activities, and their neighborhood. Respondents live in 343 Chicago neighborhood clusters that are aggregations of contiguous census tracts, previously found to be an appropriate unit of analysis for understanding neighborhood effects (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Neighborhood clusters had 1 to 21 respondents with an average of 9.06 respondents per cluster. CCAHS also included systematic social observations (SSO) of neighborhoods to collect data on the physical characteristics of neighborhoods, as described previously (Sampson & Raudenbush, 1999). Additionally, data on crime were amassed from the Uniform Crime Reports. Finally, the 2000 US Census provides summary data on neighborhood clusters, aggregated from census tract-level information.

Variables

Neighborhood-focused activism—The measure of neighborhood-focused activism comes from two items selected from a civic participation scale. The questions ascertain activities in which respondents may have participated in the last 12 months. Of these, two were selected for their neighborhood focus: have you participated in a community project; have you participated in any group that took local action for reform? Participation is operationalized as a dichotomous variable—no participation in neighborhood-focused activism compared to any participation in neighborhood-focused activism. In additional analysis, this outcome measure was checked against dichotomous outcomes for participation in each of the two component measures separately, and those results will be reported later.

Individual-level variables—Respondent gender was obtained by interviewer observation. Employment status was asked by the question “are you working now for pay, looking for work, retired, keeping house, a student, or something else?” While 134 respondents gave a response of “something else”, these responses were all recoded into the appropriate original categories based on their volunteered responses. Years of education are measured with an ordinal variable, categorized into four groups: less than a high school education (<12 years), a high school diploma (12 years), some college (13–15 years), and a college diploma or beyond (≥ 16 years).

Income is measured by a categorical variable based on a survey question with five income categories (\$0–5000, \$5000–9999, \$10,000–29,999, \$30,000–49,999, and more than \$50,000). Because many individuals (n=577) were missing on income, another dummy

variable is used to identify those with missing income data. Financial stress was also included. Respondents were asked how satisfied they are with their present financial situation and how difficult it is to meet monthly payments on bills. The range on this measure is 1 to 5, where 5 indicates the highest level of financial stress. The alpha for this scale is .644.

Respondent race and ethnicity was ascertained by first asking if the respondent identified as Hispanic or Latino, then a set of race questions were asked to identify as one or more races: white/Caucasian, black/African-American, American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, other race. Because of small sample sizes, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian a non-Hispanic “other race” were all grouped into an “other” category. The Latino category is comprised of Hispanic/Latinos of any race. White includes all non-Hispanic whites/Caucasians and African American includes all non-Hispanic blacks/African Americans. Marital status is measured by five categories: married, separated, divorced, widowed, and never married. Age is a continuous variable and the age quadratic is mean centered.

Respondents were asked whether they owned their current home or rented/had some other arrangement. Respondents were asked about their length of residence at their current address. The residential tenure variable is the continuous length of time in years that respondents have been at their current address. The “has children” variable indicates that the respondent has one or more children under the age of 18 in the home.

Neighborhood socioeconomic status—US Census data provide information on the demographic composition of neighborhoods. Informed by the dominant factor loadings of census-based neighborhood factors (Morenoff et al., 2007), I created the neighborhood-level affluence and disadvantage variables by standardizing and averaging census measures. Neighborhood disadvantage is an index of rates of low family incomes, poverty, public assistance, unemployment, female-headed families, never-married adults, and owner-occupied homes (negative loading). Neighborhood affluence is an index of the proportion of residents with higher education and in professional/managerial occupations.

Finally, I constructed a categorical measure of six neighborhood types. Types were constructed from the distribution of the neighborhood disadvantage and affluence measures. Concentrated affluence neighborhoods include those neighborhoods with z-score values of affluence of 1 or more and disadvantage below 0. Moderate affluence includes neighborhoods with affluence z scores from 0 to .999 and with disadvantage scores below 0. The low disadvantage, low affluence category includes neighborhoods below 0 on both affluence and disadvantage. The moderate disadvantage category includes neighborhood affluence below 0 and disadvantage scores from 0 to .999. The concentrated disadvantage category includes neighborhoods with affluence z scores greater than or equal to 1 and disadvantage scores under 0. Finally, unequal neighborhoods are identified by the moderate affluence and disadvantage category, which includes all neighborhoods with a z score of above zero on both affluence and disadvantage. Figure 1 graphically represents these neighborhood types.

Neighborhood problems—Neighborhood problems include crime, violence, physical disorder, and social disorder in neighborhoods. Two measures of neighborhood problems are used—one measuring perceived problems and another measuring objective problems. These measures were identified from a factor analysis of resources and problems in Chicago neighborhoods (Karb, 2010). The measure of perceived neighborhood problems captures shared resident perceptions of the problems in the neighborhood and is composed of survey data aggregated to the neighborhood level. Four scales are included in this standardized summary variable with an alpha of .92: neighborhood disorder, neighborhood perceived

violence, neighborhood hazards, and neighborhood services (with a negative loading). Observed neighborhood problems captures crime and problematic physical conditions of the neighborhood and is composed of administrative data and research-team assessments—Uniform Crime Report data on homicide, robbery, and burglary rates; SSO data on disorder, deterioration, vacant lots, and street condition; and US Census data on vacant housing. The standardized summary variable have an alpha value of .89. Higher scores on each measure indicate more perceived or observed neighborhood problems. Perceived and observed neighborhood problems have a neighborhood-level correlation of .714 ($p < .001$, $n = 343$). A detailed list of items included in each of these variables is in the appendix.

Sample Characteristics

Weighted individual-level sample characteristics are detailed in Table 1. With survey weights applied, the sample is 25.8% Latino, 38.4% white, 32.1% African American, and 4.8% individuals of other racial or ethnic groups. The sample is also diverse in educational background. While 23.4% have less than a high school education, 23.8% have a high school diploma, 24.9% have some education beyond high school, and 27.9% have at least a college degree. About one quarter (25.2%) of respondents participated in at least one form of neighborhood-focused activism.

Descriptive characteristics of the six neighborhood types are displayed in Table 2. More neighborhoods are of the low disadvantage and affluence type and the moderate disadvantage type. Although race was not included in the components of the affluence and disadvantage measures, the concentrated affluence neighborhood types have an average of only 10.3% non-Hispanic Black and the concentrated disadvantage neighborhood types are 96.2% Black on average. Only 23 neighborhoods are unequal neighborhoods. These moderate disadvantage and affluence neighborhoods have high poverty and high percent Black (though the standard deviation for percent Black is 34.8% suggesting diversity in neighborhood racial composition within this type). The low disadvantage and low affluence neighborhoods are the most prevalent and have an average poverty rate of just 11.6%, higher average incomes than other low affluence neighborhoods, and only 18.9% of residents are Black, on average, though the standard deviation for percent non-Hispanic Black is also large. These neighborhoods also have the lowest proportion of residents engaged in neighborhood-focused activism. The concentrated affluence neighborhoods have the highest proportion of residents engaged in neighborhood-focused activism, followed by unequal neighborhoods.

The correlations of neighborhood variables are displayed in Table 3. While all correlations are statistically significant, the two neighborhood socioeconomic status variables are only correlated at $-.418$. Figure 1 demonstrates that this relationship is curvilinear, with a majority of neighborhoods being low on both disadvantage and affluence. Neighborhood disadvantage is more highly correlated with both perceived and observed measures of neighborhood problems.

Analyses

I conduct multivariate analysis using multilevel modeling. The dependent variable, participation in neighborhood-focused activism, is a dichotomous, individual-level variable. Survey weights are used so that the sample is representative of the population of Chicago. Because the data are grouped by Neighborhood Cluster, individual observations are not independent at the neighborhood level. The analysis is therefore conducted using two-level generalized multilevel modeling with a logit link function using HLM 6.06 (Raudenbush, Byrk, & Congdon, 2004) to account for the nesting of individuals within neighborhoods. Descriptive analyses were done with STATA 11 (StataCorp, 2009).

First, I examine the association between individual-level characteristics and participation in neighborhood-focused activism, first with a random effects model and then with a fixed effects model (modeled as the analogous neighborhood mean-centered model because traditional dummy variables in fixed effects models do not produce accurate results in non-linear models), which provides within-neighborhood estimates of individual-level effects. Next, I add neighborhood-level affluence and disadvantage to the individual level random effects model. I then examine meditational effects of both measures of neighborhood problems to understand whether the relationship of neighborhood disadvantage to participation in neighborhood activism is explained by neighborhood problems. Next, I examine neighborhood socioeconomic types to better test the theories of the effects of neighborhood socioeconomic composition on participation in neighborhood-focused activism. Cross-level interactions between neighborhood socioeconomic status and respondent education are performed to test the final hypotheses.

Results

Table 4 presents results of multilevel models in which neighborhood socioeconomic context is measured as two continuous variables. Model 1 includes only individual-level variables. In this model, homeowners, students, those who are older, and those with more education have higher odds of participating in neighborhood-focused activism. Both immigrants and African Americans are less likely to participate. An analogous fixed effects model, in which individual-level characteristics have been group-mean centered (i.e., centered at the neighborhood mean) to control for all neighborhood variation was performed, but is not displayed. The fixed effects results showed little variation in the odds ratios for individual characteristics from Model 1, which means that neighborhood variation does not explain the relationships between resident characteristics and participation in neighborhood-focused activism.

The next models in Table 4 include neighborhood-level predictors to test Hypotheses 1, 2a, and 2b. Both neighborhood disadvantage and neighborhood affluence are associated with significantly higher odds of participation in neighborhood-focused activism, when individual characteristics are accounted for, lending support to both Hypotheses 1, that affluence would be positively associated with participation, and 2a, that disadvantage would be positively associated with participation. In Models 3 and 4, perceived problems and observed problems are entered to test Hypothesis 2b. While perceived problems are positively associated with participation in neighborhood-focused activism, they are only marginally significant and only partially explain the effects of neighborhood disadvantage. Observed problems do not significantly contribute to the odds of participation in activism, and do not explain the relationship between neighborhood disadvantage and activism. While these results are in the direction hypothesized, the association between neighborhood disadvantage and activism is not explained by neighborhood problems, as proposed in Hypothesis 2b.

Additionally, though not reported in the table, I found no support for Hypotheses 3a and 3b when interaction terms were added to these models. Neighborhood affluence and disadvantage were interacted to test whether those high on both disadvantage and affluence had a higher odds of participation and found no significant interaction. Then, I performed cross-level interactions between education and neighborhood socioeconomic context and found no significant variation—the association between one's education and their participation in neighborhood-focused activism does not vary by the level of neighborhood affluence or disadvantage.

Next, I test the hypotheses again, but by modeling neighborhood socioeconomic context using the six neighborhood types. Neighborhoods that are low on both measures (low affluence and low disadvantage) are the excluded category in each of the models displayed in Table 5. Four of the five types of neighborhoods are associated with higher odds of participation compared to neighborhoods low in both poverty and affluence. Of the five other types, only moderate disadvantage neighborhoods (which have low affluence) are not associated with significantly higher odds of participation (compared to low affluence, low disadvantage neighborhoods) when individual characteristics are included in the models. Concentrated disadvantage neighborhoods are associated with the highest odds of resident participation in neighborhood-focused activism ($OR=2.650, p<.001$), compared to the low affluence low disadvantage neighborhoods, lending support to Hypothesis 2a. Unequal neighborhoods characterized by both high disadvantage and high affluence also have higher odds of participation ($OR=2.551, p<.001$), supporting hypothesis 3a, followed by concentrated affluence neighborhoods ($OR=1.891, p<.01$), lending support to Hypotheses 1.

When neighborhood problems are taken into consideration along with neighborhood socioeconomic types in Models 2 and 3 of Table 5, the perceived problems measure is significantly associated with increased odds of participation in activism and partially explains the effects of concentrated disadvantage neighborhoods, partially supporting Hypothesis 2b. Observed neighborhood problems are still not significantly associated with resident participation in neighborhood-focused activism. Finally, cross-level interaction terms were tested. Interactions between respondent education and the neighborhood socioeconomic status types were not significant, suggesting no support for Hypothesis 3c. Neighborhood context does not affect the association between individual educational advantage and participation.

In additional analysis, I checked the outcome measure against dichotomous outcomes for each of the two participation component measures separately. The community project component drove most of the results, and participation in local reform had smaller, less statistically significant associations with neighborhood socioeconomic status, but the directions and relative magnitude were consistent. I also examined additional individual characteristics of health and functional limitations as predictors but found no significant relationships with participation in neighborhood-focused activism, suggesting that any effects of these characteristics are captured by one's socioeconomic status, employment status, and age. Neighborhood-level socioeconomic status component were also found to be consistent with findings.¹

Discussion

Consistent with prior research on other forms of participation (Musick & Wilson, 2008, Verba et al., 1995), I find that individuals with higher levels of education are much more likely to participate in neighborhood-focused activism. Education is important regardless of

¹I conducted additional analyses to examine whether each component variable of the neighborhood-level socioeconomic status measures operated similarly to each other and to the overall indices. Using multilevel models again, I find that the neighborhood affluence measure and both of its components were significantly associated with increased odds of participation in neighborhood activism in bivariate analyses. There was more inconsistency with the components of the neighborhood disadvantage index. In bivariate analyses, the index of neighborhood disadvantage was not significantly associated with increased odds of participation in neighborhood activism. Among the component variables of the neighborhood disadvantage index, the bivariate associations with neighborhood activism were significant and positive for proportion of owner occupied homes (reverse coded) and proportion of never-married adults. However, the proportion of low-income families (less than \$50,000 a year) was significantly associated with lower odds of neighborhood activism. None of the other four component variables of the neighborhood disadvantage index was significantly associated with neighborhood activism. Nevertheless, in analyses adding individual controls, the neighborhood disadvantage index and five component measures were significantly associated with more participation and two components were not significantly associated with participation. These additional analyses support the use of the two summary measures of neighborhood socioeconomic status.

the type of neighborhood one lives in. However, my findings suggest that neighborhood socioeconomic context also matters for participation, even when controlling for one's education and other individual characteristics. Indeed, I demonstrate that neighborhood socioeconomic context matters in ways not summarized well by previous neighborhood studies.

Consistent with the resources perspective, I find that those living in neighborhoods with concentrated advantage have high levels of neighborhood-focused activism. However, I also find that those living in concentrated disadvantage neighborhoods have the high levels of neighborhood-focused activism, consistent with the theory of neighborhood needs. Moreover, I suggested that the neighborhood inequality perspective integrates both theories and I tested whether neighborhoods with both affluence and disadvantage would be associated with the highest neighborhood-focused activism—explaining the relationships proposed by the resources and needs perspectives. Indeed, I found that residents of these neighborhoods also had higher participation than those in low affluence and low to moderate disadvantage neighborhoods. However, they did not have the highest levels of participation when individual characteristics are taken into account. The inequality perspective did not drive the relationships of neighborhood affluence and neighborhood disadvantage with participation in neighborhood-focused activism, as I suggested it would. It was those in neighborhoods with concentrated disadvantage that had the highest odds of participation in neighborhood-focused activism when individual characteristics were accounted for in multilevel models. Neighborhood problems only partially mediated the relationship of neighborhood disadvantage to participation, which might suggest that the neighborhood needs perspective does not fully explain high participation in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Results from the analysis presented here suggest that all three types of neighborhoods—concentrated affluence, concentrated disadvantage, and unequal neighborhoods—have higher participation in neighborhood-focused activism. Taken together, these results suggest that each of the three theories tested does not fully account for the neighborhood-level socioeconomic variation in participation in neighborhood-focused activism. Rather, findings suggest that the neighborhood context of participation in neighborhood-focused activism is best understood when all of the theories are considered jointly and neighborhood socioeconomic status is operationalized along two dimensions.

Perhaps more striking is the finding that low disadvantage and low affluence neighborhoods and moderate disadvantage neighborhoods have the lowest odds of resident participation in activism. Descriptive analysis showed that these neighborhoods account for over half of neighborhoods in Chicago. While both types of neighborhoods have few residents with college degrees, they are otherwise different in poverty rate, income, racial composition and problems. Moderate disadvantage, low affluence neighborhoods have higher poverty rates (26.1% on average), and lower average incomes (almost \$12,000 lower than the average for the low disadvantage, low affluence type). The three theories examined in this paper do not specifically describe these neighborhoods. Only when neighborhood socioeconomic context is operationalized along two dimensions, as done here, are these neighborhoods, which have low disadvantage, few problems and few resources associated with socioeconomic affluence, fully understood.

It is also important to note that the measure of neighborhood problems that was composed of respondent assessments is significantly associated with neighborhood-focused activism while the measure of observed problems, taken from municipal crime data and rater assessments of neighborhood conditions, is not. This could suggest that only when residents as a group acknowledge problems in their neighborhood do they respond with action. At the same time, it could simply mean that this more proximal measure is biased by how much

individuals interact with their neighborhood and neighborhood activists may be more aware of the problems in the community.

At the individual level, I find that individuals with resources (especially those with more education) are more likely to be involved in activism than those of lower socioeconomic status, which is consistent with literature on all forms of civic participation. While neighborhood-focused activism does retain the proposed relationship to socioeconomic resources at the individual level, the relationship of contextual level socioeconomic status is more complex. Residents of socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods are actually much more likely to engage in neighborhood-focused activism in multilevel models that account for both individual and contextual socioeconomic status. Individual socioeconomic resources do not account for the relationship between neighborhood resources and participation. Furthermore, the relationship of individual socioeconomic status to participation in neighborhood-focused activism does not vary by neighborhood socioeconomic context.

Individual-level findings of low participation among first generation immigrants may be indicative of different neighborhood reference points. Recent immigrants in Chicago may not perceive a need to work together to address neighborhood problems because they may not consider their neighborhood to have problems. What others call disadvantaged neighborhoods may seem resource laden in comparison to their home communities. Immigrants may also be more inclined to participate in other kinds of activities (e.g., hometown associations) or may have higher burdens of work hours and care for family members precluding participation. Future research is needed to understand the lower likelihood of participation in neighborhood-focused activism among first generation immigrants.

The results of this study need to be considered in the context of several methodological limitations that this study shares with much of the extant neighborhood effects literature. The cross-sectional research design prohibits the examination of changes in neighborhoods or residents over time. This impairs our ability to infer causal relationships between neighborhood-level conditions and individual-level participation. Individual- and neighborhood-level variables are also confounded by social stratification, a form of selection bias that similarly hampers causal inference (Oakes, 2004).

Furthermore, this study does not attempt to explain all possible pathways to participation. Rather, this paper examines theories of neighborhood socioeconomic conditions as they relate to one particular type of participation—neighborhood-focused activism. In recent research, neighborhood demographic characteristics did not predict participation in community organizing when organizational practices were accounted for (Christens & Speer, 2011). Certainly, research has found that other aspects of the community context such as religious, nonprofit, and social movement organization characteristics, political opportunities, and alignment of community and individual identities are all important for participation. Future research may examine how the multidimensional socioeconomic context might interact with these more proximal processes.

Finally, results are generalizable to Chicago, but not to other cities or to the United States as a whole. While Chicago shares characteristics with other Midwestern, rust-belt cities, other research has found that it has lower social organization (as measured by the presence of formal organizations) in disadvantaged, predominantly Black neighborhoods than is found in other cities (Small, 2007). Levels of formal organization could relate to informal social organization like neighborhood-focused activism, but the relationship between the two may be positive (they could be mutually reinforcing) or negative (they could be competing).

Research in other cities, and particularly across cities, could help us understand whether the findings of the present study are unique to Chicago or representative of neighborhood processes across the United States.

Policy Implications

Previous policy interventions have been based on the theories examined here. Rather than changing neighborhood socioeconomic status to improve outcomes among residents, this research suggests that one fruitful avenue for intervening in disadvantaged neighborhoods would be to support the work of neighborhood-focused activism that is already present in these neighborhoods. One way to do this is by increasing the resources accessible to activist efforts aimed at improving neighborhoods. This implies policy changes that help *places*, not just to individuals. President Barack Obama is the first president in decades to emphasize the importance of place-based policy to help cities (Turner, 2010). To date, housing policies, for example, have focused on the person or family rather than the community. While some small efforts, such as HOPE VI, have focused on redeveloping place, this has only reached a small portion of residents of poor communities and has displaced many residents into even poorer areas (Sharkey, 2009). Place-based policy must balance resources to improve neighborhoods with efforts to retain residents.

Promise Neighborhoods is a funded program of the US Department of Education that helps communities work across systems to address child outcomes, college culture, and a college pipeline through large scale, evaluable programs. This is an example of a place-based approach that may help those involved in neighborhood-focused activism improve the infrastructure in their communities (Donovan, 2009). This place-based approach to improving individual educational attainment may also be important for promoting participation in neighborhood-focused activism because education has a large association with participation, as found in previous studies and in this study. Policies that improve access to education among youth growing up in low affluence neighborhoods may be crucial for building a stronger base for participation in neighborhood-focused activism.

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APPENDIX

Neighborhood problem factor composition

		Questions/Data source
Neighborhood Perceived Problems	Neighborhood disorder	How much broken glass or trash on sidewalks and streets do you see in your neighborhood?
		How much graffiti do you see on buildings and walls in your neighborhood?
		How many vacant or deserted houses or storefronts do you see in your neighborhood?

Questions/Data source		
Neighborhood hazards		How often do you see people drinking in public places in your neighborhood?
		How often do you see unsupervised children hanging out on the street in your neighborhood?
		How would you rate the quality of air in this neighborhood, 1=Excellent, 2=Good, 3=Fair, 4=Poor
		How often do you see rats, mice, or roaches in your neighborhood: index codes: 4=Very often, 3=Sometimes, 2=Not very often, 1=Never
		How dangerous do you think traffic is in your neighborhood either to people driving in cars or walking on the street: index codes: 4=Very dangerous, 3=Somewhat dangerous, 2=Not very dangerous, 1=Not dangerous at all
Perceived violence		How noisy would you say your neighborhood is: index codes: 4=Very noisy, 3=Somewhat noisy, 2=Not very noisy, 1=Not noisy at all
		How often do you encounter potentially toxic substances in your neighborhood?: 4=Very often, 3=Sometimes, 2=Not very often, 1=Never
		During the past six months, how often was there a fight in this neighborhood in which a weapon was used?
		During the past six months, how often was there a violent argument between neighbors?
		Gang fights?
Services		A sexual assault or rape?
		A robbery or mugging?
		How would rate your neighborhood on its accessibility to parks or other areas where people can jog and exercise or kids can play?
		How would you rate the quality of street cleaning and garbage collection in this neighborhood?
Neighborhood Observed Problems	Disorder	Systematic Social Observation (SSO)
	Deterioration	Systematic Social Observation (SSO)
	Vacant lots	Systematic Social Observation (SSO)
	Street condition	Systematic Social Observation (SSO)
	Crime rates	Administrative data on homicides, robberies, burglaries
	Vacant housing rate	US Census data

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Figure 1. Scatterplot of Neighborhood Affluence and Neighborhood Disadvantage with neighborhood types superimposed (N=343)

Table 1

Weighted Descriptive Statistics of Sample (N=3105)

	Mean/ Percent
Neighborhood-Focused Activism	25.2%
Female	52.6%
Race/Ethnicity	
Latino	25.8%
White	38.4%
African American	32.1%
Other	3.8%
First Generation Immigrant	26.9%
Age	42.5
Marital Status	
Married	41.8%
Separated	4.0%
Divorced	10.8%
Widowed	6.7%
Never married	36.7%
Income	
<5K	5.2%
5–15K	14.9%
15–40K	26.4%
40K +	34.9%
Missing	18.6%
Employment Status	
Employed	64.4%
Unemployed	8.8%
Retired	15.7%
Home caregiver	7.8%
Student	3.4%
Education	
Less than a high school education	23.4%
High School	23.8%
Some College	24.9%
College +	27.9%
Homeowner	41.1%
Financial Stress	2.49
Has children	32.1%
Residential Tenure (in years)	11.15

Table 2

Neighborhood-level descriptive statistics of neighborhood types (N=343)

Type	Description	N	Select Component Characteristics			Non-Component Characteristics			
			Poverty	Income	College Degree	Non-Hispanic Black	Perceived Problems	Observed Problems	Neighborhood-Focused Activists
A	Concentrated Affluence (low disadvantage)	48	6.3%	\$ 55,455	58.3%	10.3%	-0.666	-0.505	28.5%
B	Moderate Affluence (low disadvantage)	55	9.4%	\$ 44,606	27.0%	29.3%	-0.613	-0.518	22.3%
C	Low Disadvantage and Affluence	90	11.6%	\$ 40,855	12.0%	18.9%	-0.370	-0.443	13.4%
D	Unequal: Moderate Disadvantage and Affluence	23	24.5%	\$ 28,845	29.0%	54.6%	0.158	0.034	28.1%
E	Moderate Disadvantage (low affluence)	89	26.1%	\$ 28,198	8.4%	65.6%	0.694	0.504	16.4%
F	Concentrated Disadvantage (low affluence)	38	45.1%	\$ 17,738	5.8%	96.2%	0.885	1.237	21.5%

Table 3

Correlation coefficients (and p values) for continuous neighborhood-level variables (N=343)

	Neighborhood Affluence	Neighborhood Disadvantage	Perceived Problems	Observed Problems
Neighborhood Affluence	1.000			
Neighborhood Disadvantage	−0.418 (0.000)	1.000		
Perceived Problems	−0.465 (0.000)	0.741 (0.000)	1.000	
Observed Problems	−0.422 (0.000)	0.858 (0.000)	0.714 (0.000)	1.000

Table 4
Multilevel logistic regression models predicting neighborhood-focused activism (N=3105)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Odds ratio		Odds ratio		Odds ratio		Odds ratio	
Individual level								
Female	0.987		0.983		0.980		0.984	
Race/Ethnicity (White reference)								
Hispanic	1.111		1.195		1.156		1.199	
African American	0.727	*	0.631	**	0.635	**	0.638	**
Other	1.161		1.070		1.065		1.069	
First Generation Immigrant	0.353	***	0.373	***	0.370	***	0.372	***
Age	1.014	*	1.011	*	1.012	*	1.011	*
Age ^2	0.999	*	0.999	*	1.000	*	0.999	*
Education	1.655	***	1.602	***	1.608	***	1.602	***
Marital Status (Married reference)								
Separated	0.933		0.918		0.903		0.919	
Divorced	1.525	*	1.497	*	1.481	*	1.496	*
Widowed	1.359		1.373		1.365		1.373	
Never married	1.064		0.973		0.967		0.973	
Income (40K + reference)								
<5K	1.357		1.410		1.401		1.413	
5–15K	0.973		0.957		0.961		0.958	
15–40K	1.234		1.255		1.249		1.255	
Missing	0.886		0.955		0.950		0.956	
Employment status (Employed reference)								
Unemployed	0.837		0.809		0.813		0.811	
Retired	0.605	*	0.607	*	0.608	*	0.606	*
Home caregiver	0.939		0.922		0.914		0.922	
Student	1.954	*	1.825	*	1.829	*	1.828	*
Homeowner	1.285	+	1.400	**	1.403	**	1.402	**
Financial Stress	1.091		1.080		1.080		1.080	

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Odds ratio		Odds ratio		Odds ratio		Odds ratio	
Has Children	1.346	*	1.446	**	1.454	**	1.446	**
Residential Tenure	1.005		1.009		1.008		1.009	
Neighborhood level								
Affluence			1.326	***	1.348	***	1.326	***
Disadvantage			1.589	***	1.362	*	1.635	***
Perceived problems					1.228	+		
Observed problems							0.957	
Intercept	0.028	***	0.032	***	0.032	***	0.032	***
+ $p < .10$,								
* $p < .05$,								
** $p < .01$,								
*** $p < .001$								

Table 5

Multilevel logistic regression models of neighborhood socioeconomic types predicting neighborhood-focused activism (N=3105)

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	Odds ratio			Odds ratio			Odds ratio		
Individual level									
Female	0.984			0.971			0.978		
Race/Ethnicity (White reference)									
Hispanic	1.248			1.164			1.213		
African American	0.681	*		0.652	**		0.630	**	
Other	1.150			1.110			1.137		
First Generation Immigrant	0.364	***		0.359	***		0.367	***	
Age	1.012	*		1.013	*		1.012	*	
Age ^2	1.000	*		1.000	*		1.000	*	
Education	1.620	***		1.630	***		1.622	***	
Marital Status (Married reference)									
Separated	0.920			0.898			0.916		
Divorced	1.543	*		1.515	*		1.541	*	
Widowed	1.360			1.364			1.366		
Never married	1.018			0.996			1.009		
Income (40K + reference)									
<5K	1.386			1.377			1.372		
5–15K	0.950			0.950			0.944		
15–40K	1.255			1.244			1.254		
Missing	0.930			0.926			0.930		
Employment status (Employed reference)									
Unemployed	0.846			0.841			0.833		
Retired	0.598	*		0.596	*		0.599	*	
Home caregiver	0.930			0.909			0.923		
Student	1.822	*		1.841	*		1.820	*	
Homeowner	1.351	*		1.383	*		1.359	*	
Financial Stress	1.088			1.084			1.087		

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Odds ratio		Odds ratio		Odds ratio	
Has Children	1.393	*	1.415	**	1.401	**
Residential Tenure	1.007		1.007		1.007	
Neighborhood level						
Neighborhood Types (Low Disadvantage and Affluence excluded)						
Concentrated Affluence	1.891	**	2.019	***	1.876	**
Moderate Affluence	1.519	*	1.640	*	1.554	*
Unequal: Disadvantage and Affluence	2.551	***	2.120	**	2.329	**
Moderate Disadvantage	1.386		0.994		1.152	
Concentrated Disadvantage	2.650	***	1.780	+	1.927	+
Perceived problems			1.392	**		
Observed problems					1.264	
Intercept	0.019	***	0.023	***	0.022	***

+ $p < .10$,

* $p < .05$,

** $p < .01$,

*** $p < .001$,