INEQUALITY IN CRIME ACROSS PLACE:

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SEGREGATION

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Segregation and disadvantage are fundamental aspects of inequality that affect crime (Krivo and Peterson 2000; Massey 1995; Massey and Denton 1993; Sampson and Wilson 1995; Shihadeh and Flynn 1996; Wilson 1987, 1996). However, the ways in which these inequalities interrelate to influence city and neighborhood crime patterns are not yet well understood because of conceptual and empirical failings of past research. Theoretically, the connections among racial residential segregation, disadvantage, and local crime have not yet been conceptualized in the critical holistic fashion required to more completely elucidate their interrelationships. Empirically, analyses have either examined how levels of city or metropolitan segregation and disadvantage impact crime rates for these highly aggregated units (e.g., Krivo and Peterson 2000; Logan and Messner 1987; Peterson and Krivo 1993, 1999; Phillips 1997, 2002; Shihadeh and Flynn 1996), or studied the effects of neighborhood racial/ethnic composition and disadvantage on crime within such local areas (e.g., Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Capowich 2003; Krivo and Peterson 1996; McNulty 2001; Morenoff, Sampson, and Raudenbush 2001; Peterson, Krivo, and Harris 2000; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). Past research has not considered the ways in which neighborhoods are embedded in more or less segregated macro-level contexts that affect how crime is inequitably distributed across areas within cities. In this paper, we seek to address the shortcomings of existing research by: (1) providing a broad perspective that views variation in local crime as an outcome of the racial and ethnic structure of U.S. society generally, and racial residential segregation in particular; and (2) conducting multi-level analyses of data from the National Neighborhood Crime Study (NNCS) that explore neighborhood rates of violence as

a function of both local neighborhood conditions and aspects of the overall urban context, particularly segregation.

SEGREGATION AND THE CONTEXT OF CRIME

We begin from the premise that crime is strongly situated within the racial and ethnic dynamics of U.S. society. Differences by race and ethnicity in levels of victimization and offending for a number of serious crimes are widely recognized, and some argue that this is a reflection of the way in which society is racially structured (Hawkins 1995; McNulty and Holloway 2000; Sampson and Lauritsen 1994, 1997; Young 2006). Crime is also situated in space, i.e., within communities. And, communities themselves are highly unequal in terms of the social and economic status of their residents, residential stability, economic viability, political power, their available services, and the like. The patterns of racial/ethnic and spatial inequality are strongly interconnected through the processes that sustain high levels of racial residential segregation in U.S. cities (Alba and Logan 1993; Logan and Molotch 1987; Massey and Denton 1993; Massey, Gross, and Shibuya 1994; McNulty 1999; Muow 2000). Communities are spatially segregated by race and ethnicity (especially so for Blacks and Whites), and race/ethnically distinct neighborhoods are highly differentiated along a variety of lines including various crime producing conditions (Charles 2003; Cutler and Glaeser 1997; Logan, Stults, and Farley 2004; Wilkes and Iceland 2004; Wilson 1987, 1996).

Compared to predominantly White areas, African American and Latino neighborhoods have higher levels of economic disadvantage, residential instability, and other aspects that produce social disorganization. As well, they have fewer powerful connections and are more

2

isolated from important social and economic networks than their White counterparts. Such differences in neighborhood conditions by race and ethnicity are partly due to the way segregation serves to concentrate the higher levels of poverty and disadvantage found among non-White populations (Krivo et al. 1998; Massey 1996; Massey and Denton 1993). Thus, as Massey and Denton (1993) argue, racial residential segregation is the critical force creating neighborhood differentiation by race according to conditions that produce social dislocations including crime.

In this paper, we consider that, over and above the effects of segregation on local crime producing conditions, macro-level racial residential segregation could affect neighborhood crime in two important ways. First, racial segregation may directly heighten local crime such that *neighborhoods* in more segregated *cities* have higher crime than those in less segregated cities. A high level of segregation signals a place with separate and unequal groupings that do not necessarily perceive their common interests, nor work together to fulfill common goals or solve shared problems including those that foster crime. Indeed, when Blacks and Whites live apart, they likely have few vested interests in the institutional and social viability of all areas of the city. Groups may act independently vis-a-vis their own interests which will serve some, but not all, communities well. To the extent that this results in a general disregard for maintaining and improving the social environment of many parts of the city, crime and other social dislocations may flourish. This would occur because the racial divide means that the social and political will and means are lacking to address the conditions that promote deviance and unlawful behavior or to provide the services (e.g., police protection, street lighting, community recreation for youth) and social environment (e.g., informal networks, public monitoring) that keep crime at bay. In

addition, segregated communities, which tend to have large populations of disadvantaged minorities, may evidence substantial portions of the population that are detached from social institutions or who perceive existing institutions (including agencies of criminal justice) as unjust. Such broad detachment and levels of perceived injustice could contribute to crime through creating disregard for the law, undermining citizen cooperation in crime control, and promoting a law violating atmosphere.

Second, city-wide segregation may interact with neighborhood disadvantage in its effect on local area rates of crime. In other words, the influence of neighborhood disadvantage on neighborhood crime may vary depending on how segregated the city is. Two alternative ways in which this might operate seem plausible. On the one hand, higher racial segregation may intensify the importance of neighborhood disadvantage for local crime because of the associated differential distribution of resources and power. Thus when greater levels of disadvantage (with their negative consequences for crime) combine with segregation the result is a particularly high level of criminal involvement, i.e., an intensification of the impact of disadvantage. Alternatively, neighborhood disadvantage may be less important for local crime in more segregated contexts as the consequences of segregation for the differential distribution of resources and power take on an overarching importance of their own. In other words, in the most segregated contexts increases in neighborhood disadvantage may be less important in intensifying crime than in less segregated cities.

DATA AND METHODS

Sample and Data. Our analyses examine crime for 7,273 census tracts in 75 large cities for 2000 from the National Neighborhood Crime Study. We draw on data from the NNCS because it provides the only source that includes crime rates for census tracts for a large set of cities throughout the country. These data include reported crimes from police departments and sociodemographic information from the census for all tracts within a representative sample of cities with a population of at least 100,000. They also include social and demographic characteristics for the city in which the tracts are located. The NNCS sample includes central cities and large suburbs, places in all regions of the country, those with declining manufacturing bases and healthy economies, and of particular interest here, cities that vary in their levels of racial residential segregation. The places in the sample are highly representative of cities over 100,000 population, with means for the crime rate, Black-White residential segregation, poverty, and racial composition for the sample differing by at most 5 percent from the population of large places.

Dependent Variable. The operationalizations of all variables along with their means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1. Three year counts (1999-2001) of robberies reported to the police provide the dependent variable. Multi-year counts are used to minimize the impact of annual fluctuations for small units. Substantively, we are interested in predicting rates of reported crime and this is taken into account in the non-linear multi-level modeling strategy applied (see details below in the section on statistical analysis).

Independent Variables. Predictors reflect both neighborhood and city characteristics. For neighborhoods, we include measures of socioeconomic disadvantage, residential instability,

5

racial/ethnic composition, and age/sex structure. Disadvantage is an index (average z-scores) of the extent of joblessness, professional or managerial occupations (reverse coded), high school graduates (reverse coded), female-headed families, secondary sector workers (those in the 6 occupations with the lowest average incomes), and poverty. Residential instability is an index (average z-scores) of the percent of renter occupied units and the percent of residents age 5 or over who lived in a different dwelling in 1995. Two variables indicate tract racial/ethnic composition: percent of the population that is non-Hispanic Black and percent of the population that is Hispanic. Finally, we control for the percent of the population that is male and between 15 and 34 years old.

At the city level, we incorporate a set of factors that reflect Black-White residential segregation and other theoretically relevant conditions that have been argued to affect crime. Besides segregation, these include city population size, secondary sector workers, manufacturing employment, income inequality, percent non-Hispanic Black, region, and suburban location. Segregation is measured with the widely used Black-White Index of Dissimilarity (D) for census tracts. At the city level, the prevalence of secondary sector workers is operationalized in a parallel manner to its neighborhood counterpart reflecting the percentage of adult workers in the six occupations with the lowest average incomes. Income inequality is incorporated as the Gini index of household income. Region is measured with two dummy variables, South and West, with the remainder of the country as the reference category.

Analytic Strategy. To examine the roles of citywide segregation and neighborhood disadvantage on neighborhood crime, we estimate a multi-level model for robbery count data with tracts as level-one and cities as level-two. We specify a non-linear Poisson model with

6

variable exposure by tract population (which makes the analysis one of rates). We control for overdispersion in the level-one variance (which is significant in our model). All the variables are grand-mean centered.

The analysis proceeds in several stages. We first estimate a model of robbery with neighborhood characteristics alone, giving us a baseline assessment of the effects of neighborhood disadvantage and other factors. We specify a random effect for tract disadvantage, i.e., we allow the effect of disadvantage to vary across cities. Next, we estimate the two-level model which incorporates the effects of city racial residential segregation and the other macro-structural characteristics. We then test for the interaction between tract-level disadvantage and city-level racial segregation.

RESULTS

Examining the descriptive statistics in Table 1 indicates that, during the three year period of 1999 to 2001, the mean robbery count was nearly 45 per tract representing an average rate of 4.8 robberies per 1,000 population. Additional descriptive analyses (not reported) show that neighborhood levels of robbery vary systematically across cities depending on their extent of Black-White segregation. Robbery counts for cities with low ($D < 30$), moderate ($30 \leq D < 60$), and high ($D > 30$) segregation are 15, 34, and 59, respectively. A corresponding pattern holds for robbery rates--1.3, 3.4, and 6.4 in low, moderate, and highly segregated cities. These trends provide the first indication that more highly segregated cities have heightened levels of local crime.

Table 2 presents the results of the regression analyses. We first explore whether the set of neighborhood factors affect robbery when a large set of tracts and places are examined. While there are many studies of neighborhood crime (including of robbery), virtually all have been conducted for samples within a single city or very small number of places. Our analysis for local areas across a large set of places shows that widely examined predictors of crime are broadly important across cities. Neighborhoods that are more disadvantaged and have greater residential instability have higher rates of robbery. Percent Black, but not percent Hispanic, is also positively associated with robbery rates, even though other important neighborhood factors are controlled.

Additionally, in this model, we explored whether the positive effect of neighborhood disadvantage on robbery varies across cities. In other words, we tested whether the random effect of this factor is significant. Indeed, the neighborhood disadvantage effect on robbery does vary, and significantly so, across the cities. Thus, disadvantage has a stronger (or weaker) influence on neighborhood robbery in some cities than it does in others.

Next, we examine the two-level model that includes city-level residential segregation and the set of macroeconomic and sociodemographic characteristics. The results of this analysis show that, even after taking into account local area conditions, neighborhoods in cities with more manufacturing employment have lower robbery rates, although the size of the secondary sector has no net effect. The pattern for manufacturing is consistent with Wilson's (1987, 1996) arguments about the benefits of a strong manufacturing economy (and the negative consequences of deindustrialization). In addition, neighborhoods in cities with larger Black populations and

those located in the West have higher robbery rates. Unexpectedly, local communities in Southern cities have lower robbery levels than those in the Midwest or Northeast.

Finally, and of central concern here, neighborhoods in more highly segregated cities have higher rates of robbery. This is the case even though we have taken into account both racial composition and disadvantage at the neighborhood level (both of which continue to have strong effects on rates along with tract-level residential instability). The coefficient for city segregation shows that the robbery rate is 1.3 percent higher ($[e^{.013} - 1]*100$) in a city where D is one point higher. A larger 10 point difference in citywide Black-White segregation is associated with a 13 percent higher neighborhood robbery rate.

Consistent with our concern with racial segregation as a central dynamic in the U.S., and as a critical force interconnected with urban crime patterns, the third model explores whether city racial segregation alters the effect of neighborhood disadvantage on local crime. As noted, the influence of local disadvantage varies significantly across cities. Here we ask whether this variation in effects is partly caused by citywide segregation. As seen in the third model, the answer is clearly yes: racial segregation interacts significantly with neighborhood disadvantage to influence robbery. The negative coefficient for the interaction shows that the effect of neighborhood disadvantage on robbery is weaker in more segregated cities.

A straightforward way to view this finding is in a graph of predicted robbery rates (per 1,000 population) across levels of neighborhood disadvantage for cities with differing levels of Black-White residential segregation (here for low-D=23; medium-D=45; and high-D=73). Figure 1 presents such predicted values from the interaction model holding all other factors constant at their mean levels. This graph shows that, as disadvantage increases, robbery rates

9

increase somewhat more sharply in the least segregated cities (bottom line) than in the more modestly, and particularly the most highly segregated cities (top line). Neighborhoods with the lowest levels of disadvantage that are in *highly* segregated cities have substantially higher average levels of this violent crime than neighborhoods that have similarly low levels of disadvantage in cities that are not very segregated. Considering only the neighborhoods with the lowest disadvantage, average robbery rates are over 2.5 times higher in highly segregated cities than in cities with low levels of racial residential segregation. However, because robbery increases less sharply in highly segregated cities than in other places, rates become more similar as neighborhood disadvantage increases. Indeed, among the most highly disadvantaged neighborhoods, robbery rates are only about 1.2 higher in highly segregated cities than in cities with the least segregation.

However, this picture does not take into account the way in which citywide segregation and local disadvantage are themselves connected in the socially and spatially stratified U.S. society. In fact, most highly disadvantaged neighborhoods are located in highly segregated cities. Conversely, cities with low levels of segregation have few very highly disadvantaged neighborhoods; in fact, the least segregated cities in our sample rarely have any neighborhoods with levels of disadvantage much above the overall mean. As a result, notable portions of the distributions of predicted robbery rates in Figure 1 are not empirically realistic. To take this into account, it is important to consider levels of neighborhood disadvantage actually found in cities with different levels of segregation. Thus in Figure 2, we present the predicted robbery rates for tracts between the 10th and 90th percentiles of observed neighborhood disadvantage within the low, moderate, and highly segregated places.

Figure 2 provides a dramatic picture of how macro-level racial segregation and local area disadvantage combine in affecting one type of violent crime. Most striking is the extent to which robbery rates for neighborhoods in the least segregated cities differ from their levels in the most segregated cities. Because cities with low segregation have less robbery *and* few highly disadvantaged census tracts, even the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in such cities experience relatively low levels of robbery. Indeed, in low segregated cities, robbery rates do no exceed 6.6 per 1,000 residents when considering just neighborhoods with the levels of disadvantage actually found. This rate is slightly lower than that found in the *least* disadvantaged areas within highly segregated places (6.7 per 1,000). In these most segregated cities, which have higher local robbery and a substantial prevalence of highly disadvantaged neighborhoods, many areas within the city have extremely high rates of robbery, reaching peak levels of over 16.3 per 1,000 in the most disadvantaged local areas. These rates are over four and a half times the national rate of robbery of 3.5 per 1,000 for all cities over 100,000 population (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2000), and virtually no areas within highly segregated cities have rates as low as this national level. Comparatively, many neighborhoods in cities of low segregation have predicted rates at or below this level. Thus under conditions of high segregation and high neighborhood disadvantage violent crime is an excessive concern for residents.

CONCLUSIONS

These findings have two broad implications. First, the work underscores the critical role of citywide segregation. In addition to its influence on crime-producing community conditions, racial residential segregation directly heightens crime within neighborhoods. In fact, areas within

11

the most segregated cities have the highest levels of violent crime. The consequences are profound for African Americans and reflect the fundamental racial structuring of society. Most notably, 69% of Blacks in the 75 cities studied here live in the 18 highly segregated cities in this sample. And, a full 62% of all Blacks in the U.S. live in 100 metropolitan areas that are highly segregated.

A second aspect of segregation's critical role in crime stems from the way in which segregation and disadvantage combine to affect this outcome. Recall that disadvantage has a somewhat weaker effect in the most segregated cities, but this seems to be because of the ways in which segregation and disadvantage are interconnected in U.S. society; segregation tends to be low only where there are not as many disadvantaged (or minority) households that appear threatening to advantaged (and majority) populations. In this regard, segregation appears to have dual functions. On the one hand, it serves as a mechanism for more privileged communities to distance themselves from the vagaries of social disorganization, and what their residents might define as threatening or problem populations. On the other hand, in doing so, racial segregation serves to isolate less well-off communities, leaving them vulnerable to neglect, discrimination, and other social forces that serve to intensify problems including crime, as seen in our work.

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York University Press.

Table 1. Operationalizations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Variables

Variables	Operationalizations	Mean	St. Dev.
Dependent Variable			
Robbery Count	Number of reported robberies in tract from 1999 to 2001	44.91	50.03
Robbery Rate	Three year (1999-2001) average reported rate per 1000 tract population	4.76	6.42
Independent Variables			
Tract Level (N=7,273)			
Disadvantage	Average of the standard scores for six variables:	.00	.86
	% of population 16-64 who are unemployed or out of the labor force	33.44	13.18
	% of employed civilian population age 16 and over working in professional or managerial occupations (reverse coded in index)	32.08	16.60
	% of population age 25 and over who are high school graduates (reverse coded in index)	76.15	16.77
	% of households that are female-headed families	17.20	12.20
	% of employed civilian population age 16 and over employed in the six occupational categories with the lowest average incomes	18.53	8.98
	% of population that is below the poverty line	18.11	13.98
Residential Instability	Average of the standard score of two variables:	.00	.87
	% of occupied housing units that are renter-occupied	47.35	24.44
	% of population age 5 and over who lived in a different residence in 1995	50.94	14.86
Percent Black	Percent of the population that is non-Hispanic Black	26.71	33.50
Percent Hispanic	Percent of the population that is Hispanic	17.06	22.94
Percent of Males 15-34	Percent of the population that is male age 15-34	15.84	5.91

Table 1 (*continued*)

Variables	Operationalizations	Mean	St. Dev.
Independent Variables			
City Level (N=75)			
Segregation	Index of Dissimilarity across census tracts between non-Hispanic Whites and non-Hispanic Blacks	46.11	18.37
Population	Total city population	387,158	458,403
Secondary Sector Low-wage Workers	Percent of employed civilian population age 16 and over employed in the six occupational categories with the lowest average incomes	16.51	3.60
Manufacturing	Percent of employed civilian population age 16 and over working in a manufacturing industry	12.57	4.88
Income Inequality	Gini index of household income inequality	.45	.04
Percent Black	Percent of the city population that is non-Hispanic Black	17.71	16.55
South	Dummy variable for South	.31	.46
West	Dummy variable for West	.29	.46
Suburb	Dummy variable indicating the city is a suburb	.27	.45

Table 2. Multilevel Poisson Model (with Variable Exposure) of Neighborhood Robbery, NNCS 2000

Variable	B (s.e.)	B (s.e.)	B (s.e.)
Tract Level			
Intercept	2.055 ***	1.914 ***	1.931 ***
	(.060)	(.042)	(.040)
Disadvantage (random effect)	.507 ***	.509 ***	.550 ***
	(.067)	(.039)	(.046)
Residential Instability	.305 ***	.308 ***	.305 ***
	(.030)	(.019)	(.022)
% Black	.007 **	.007 ***	.008 ***
	(.003)	(.001)	(.002)
% Hispanic	.001	.001	.001
	(.001)	(.001)	(.001)
% Young Males	.005	.005	.005
	(.005)	(.003)	(.004)
City Level			
Segregation		.013 **	.013 **
		(.004)	(.004)
Population		.000	.000
		(.000)	(.000)
Secondary Sector Low-wage Jobs		.020	.008
		(.018)	(.018)
Manufacturing Jobs		-.015 *	-.015 *
		(.009)	(.008)
Gini		1.795	1.269
		(1.334)	1.294
% Black		.013 ***	.012 ***
		(.003)	(.003)
South		-.185 ^	-.203 ^
		(.102)	(.101)
West		.222 *	.213 *
		(.124)	(.124)
Suburb		-.081	-.126
		(.123)	(.113)
Disadvantage*Segregation			-.007 ***
			(.002)
VARIANCE COMPONENTS			
Intercept	.284 ***	.106 ***	.095 ***
Disadvantage slope	.055 ***	.038 ***	.029 ***

*p<.05   **p<.01   ***p<.001 (one-tailed tests)   ^ p<.05 (two-tailed test)

Figure 1. Predicted Neighborhood Robbery Rates by Neighborhood Disadvantage at Varying Levels of City Racial Residential Segregation
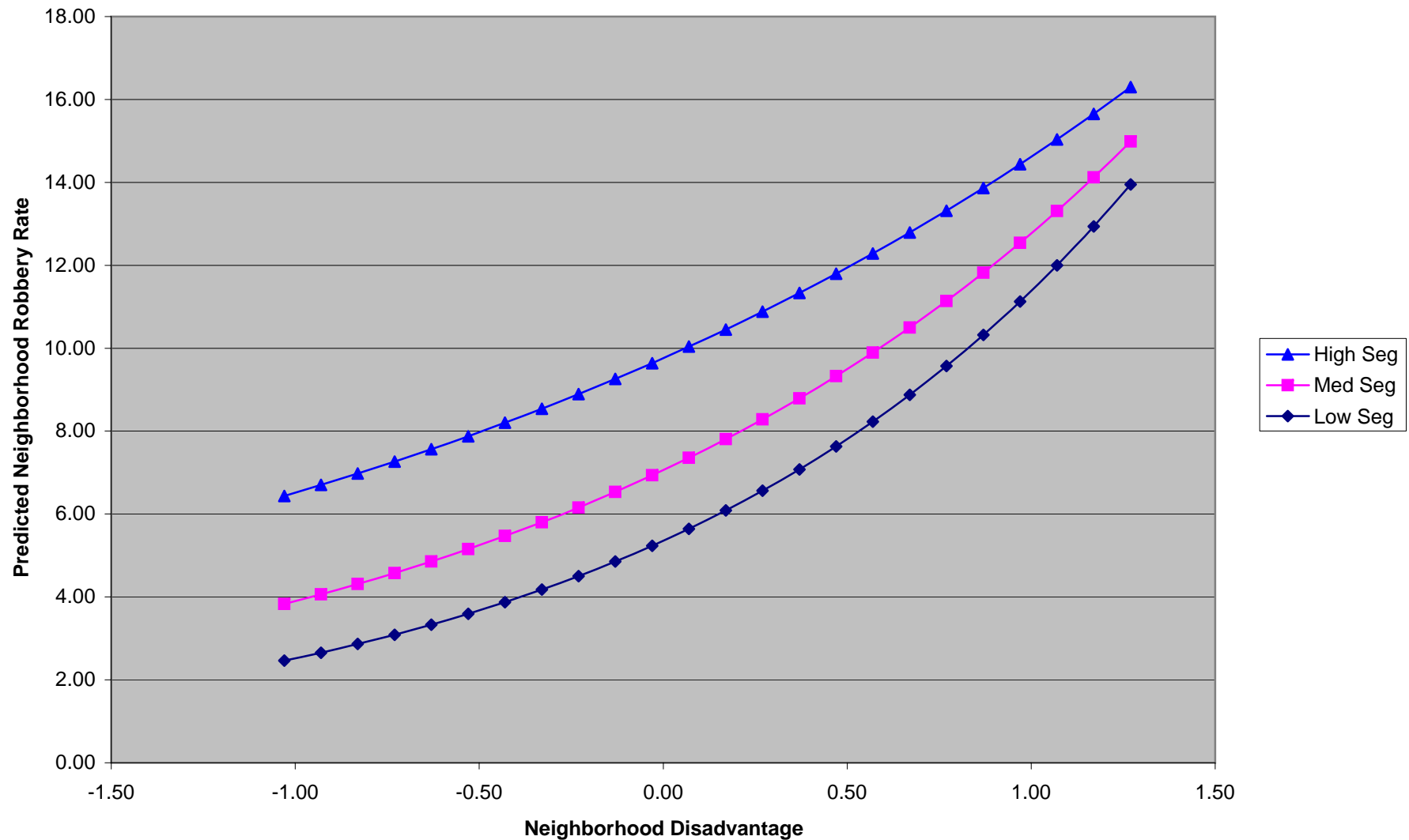
Figure 2. Predicted Neighborhood Robbery Rates by Observed Ranges of Neighborhood Disadvantage at Varying Levels of City Racial Residential Segregation