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## Layers of Identity: Multiple Psychological Senses of Community Within a Community Setting

### Niveles de la Identidad: Múltiples Sentidos Psicológicos de Comunidad en un Entorno Comunitario

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This article explores psychological sense of community (PSOC), a feeling of belonging to, importance of, and identification with a community. In much of the research on PSOC, there has been a focus on identifying a *single* PSOC for an individual in a setting. Qualitative and quantitative data are used here to investigate the presence and operation of *multiple* psychological senses of community for individuals. These multiple PSOCs are explored in two macro, territorial settings and a subcommunity of one of these settings: a job training and education center for underserved women in Baltimore City. Exploration of multiple PSOCs at the macro- and subcommunity levels expands our conceptualization of the operation of PSOC and has real-life implications for fostering positive outcomes in multicultural communities. © 2001 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

El presente artículo explora el sentido psicológico de comunidad (PSOC), un sentimiento de pertenencia, importancia e identificación con la comunidad. Gran parte de la investigación realizada sobre el PSOC se ha focalizado en identificar un *único* sentido de comunidad para un individuo en un contexto determinado. Datos cualitativos y cuantitativos son usados aquí para investigar la presencia de *múltiples* sentidos psicológicos de comunidad para los individuos. Estos múltiples PSOCs son explorados en dos contextos territoriales a nivel macro, y en una subcomunidad de uno de estos contextos: un centro de capacitación laboral y educación para mujeres de escasos recursos en la ciudad de Baltimore. La exploración de múltiples PSOCs en los niveles macro y subcomunitario expande nuestra conceptualización del funcionamiento del PSOC y tiene implicancias en la vida real, para promover resultados positivos en comunidades multiculturales.

When we think about one's psychological sense of community (PSOC) –the feeling of belonging, mutual influence, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection with other members of one's group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)– we conceptualize a feeling that exists in relation to some referent community. While McMillan and Chavis (1986) stated that their refinement of Sarason's (1974) idea applied to both territorial and relational communities, much of the literature on PSOC has focused on communities that were territorially defined. These have included neighborhoods and block groups (Brodsky, O'Campo, & Aronson, 1999; Perkins, Floris, Rich, Wandersman, & Chavis, 1990; Unger & Wandersman, 1985), housing complexes (Sagy,

Stern, & Krakover, 1996), and towns and cities (Buckner, 1988; Glynn, 1981, 1986).

Heller (1989), among other social scientists, has noted that the increased complexity, changing technologies, and increasingly varied and mobile life styles of today have affected the meaning and importance of territorial communities. Royal and Rossi (1996) wrote that "the significance of community as a territorial phenomenon has declined, while the significance of community as a relational phenomenon has grown" (p. 395). Hill (1996) suggested a need for the study of PSOC in a "variety of [other than geographic] contexts" (p. 433). In keeping with these concerns, PSOC has been explored more recently in relational communities; among students in school (Pretty, 1990; Pretty, Andrewes, & Collett, 1994; Royal & Rossi, 1996), employees in the workplace (Royal & Rossi, 1996), and among communities of identity, such as "coloured" South African émigrés in Australia (Sonn & Fisher, 1996, 1998).

Whether explored in reference to a territorial community or a relational community, most of the

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extant literature has limited exploration of PSOC to one referent community, or “primary community” in Sonn and Fisher’s words (1998, p. 461). While aggregate PSOC comparisons are made between different communities, such as Glynn’s (1981) comparison of the towns of Hyattsville, Maryland, Greenbelt, Maryland, and Kfar Blum in Israel, each individual is limited to one community. This makes logical sense if one is thinking in territorial terms, in which the laws of physics as well as economics dictate that most people live in only one locale.<sup>1</sup> However, these physical limitations aside, individuals have multiple identities and multiple roles, and these identities and roles connect them to multiple communities. Thus an individual may likely have multiple psychological senses of community in reference to these multiple, separate communities. As an example of this, Pretty et al. (1994) explored students’ PSOC in two communities, their home neighborhoods and their schools, hypothesizing that the correlation between the two settings would be higher if they had a best friend who shared both communities with them. While they did find neighborhood and school PSOC to be correlated, sharing a relationship across settings did not significantly impact these correlations.

Beyond the exploration of the multiple psychological senses of community one individual might have in references to multiple, separate communities, there is another way in which multiple PSOC might operate. Weisenfeld (1996) points out that the “common denominator” across multiple definitions of community is a focus on within-group “similarity... as a necessary condition for the group identity to develop” (p. 339). Hunter and Riger (1986) add that people do not ‘live’ in one community, but in a series of nested communities referred to as a “hierarchy of symbolic communities” (Hunter, 1974, in Hunter and Riger, 1986, p. 65.) And even within the most homogeneous community, “individual... subcultural and intragroup differences” (Weisenfeld, 1996, p. 339) exist, which are another reflection of the multiple roles and identities held by any one person. Weisenfeld conceptualizes a definition of community belonging that allows for both commonalities and diversity. In her terms, “macrobelonging” is the sense of community that incorporates all members of the larger community “beyond the polarizations and

discrepancies which arise within it” (p. 341). An analogous “microbelonging” co-exists among “the multiple collective identities” that make up the subcommunities within the larger community and, according to Weisenfeld, is “redemptive of diversity” (p. 342). McMillan and Chavis (1986) also acknowledge that individuals belong to multiple communities and use the Kibbutz as an example of how nested subcommunities co-exist within a territorial community.

Within the PSOC literature, Royal and Rossi (1996) are among the few who have begun to explore nested subcommunities within settings. Their research in schools compared four groups of students in terms of their PSOC. One group of students had membership in smaller, specialized learning communities and was told to answer a PSOC survey in reference to this subcommunity. Another group of students from this subcommunity answered in reference to the school as a whole. The last two groups were not members of the smaller subcommunity and answered the PSOC survey in reference to either the larger, nonspecialized subcommunity or in reference to the school as a whole. Royal and Rossi found that student membership in the smaller learning communities was positively related to their subcommunity PSOC. Further, membership in this subcommunity was positively related to PSOC at the level of the larger community; in this case, the school as a whole. Thus, subcommunity membership did not seem to disrupt larger group PSOC. This study, however, is still missing the crucial next step of measuring the same student’s PSOC at both the subcommunity and the macrocommunity level. The current study uses qualitative and quantitative methods to explore multiple PSOC, both in reference to two territorially separate communities as well as in reference to the “microbelongings” that exist in the subcommunities within one of these macrocommunities.

## Methods

### *Community Setting*

Caroline Center is a holistic job-training and education center serving low-income women in Baltimore City since 1996. Founded and run by The School Sisters of Notre Dame, a Catholic order whose mission is the education of women, the goal of the Center is to prepare and support women in the acquisition and retention of living wage jobs. The Center serves women leaving welfare as well as those working in non-living wage jobs. Caroline Center provides work, educational, psychosocial, and family-related services to approximately 150 students per year. In addition to the job-

<sup>1</sup> Even this is a too simplistic notion of physical community. Many people live, work, recreate, commute, etc. in and through multiple territories in any week.

readiness training, the Center provides GED preparation classes, computer classes, internships with community business partners, specific skill training in clerical and commercial house-painting, and certificate programs for child care and geriatric nursing assistants. Caroline Center also offers counseling services, community and cultural excursions, after-school and summer camp programs for the children of Caroline Center and neighborhood parents, and alumnae programming for successful program completers.<sup>2</sup>

The Caroline Center program is divided into two phases. Students enter, as part of a class of 25 to 35 women, into a 6-week program called Phase 1, which provides basic job-readiness, GED, and specific skill training. During this phase, students are aided in meeting their child care and other needs that might impede their abilities to come to Caroline Center on a regular and timely basis, as well as their later ability to obtain and keep a job. Drug testing is also done during this phase, and a positive screen results in dismissal from the program, with a referral to drug treatment. Attendance requirements must also be met during Phase 1. At the end of this 6-week period, a graduation ceremony marks the successful completion of Phase 1 and "member" status in Phase 2 and Caroline Center as a whole. The focus during Phase 2 is attaining a GED and/or job skills and certificates necessary to obtain and keep a living wage job. During Phase 2, most students attend internships 1 day per week. Phase 2 lasts as short as 1 month or as long as 1 year, depending on individual need, and is successfully completed when a student member obtains a living wage job.

### *Community Participants*

The students at the center are all women, are predominately African American, and range in age from 19 to 62. Based on administrative data on all women who have been students at Caroline Center, approximately 60% of students do not have a high school diploma, 78% have children, and 37% of those with children have children under age 5. Ten percent of women were employed when they entered Caroline Center, while 68% of students report receiving TANF (Temporary Aid for Needy Families, the program that replaced AFDC) on entry. Thirty-one percent of all students were referred to Caroline Center from the Department of Social Services. The remaining 69% were self-referred or recruited through posted fliers, neighborhood organizations, churches, and word of mouth. Students are all Baltimore City residents and predominately live in low-income urban neighborhoods with all the stresses and limited resources found in many postindustrial, northeastern, urban centers.

All but one of the Caroline Center staff are women. The 16 staff members are predominately European American, range in age from 22 to 75, and just over half are Catholic Sisters (56%). The staff members include professional educators, job trainers, counselors and support staff. The Catholic Sisters are generally older than the other staff members and all have prior experience in K-12 and/or postsecondary parochial education. Most staff members do not have previous experience in adult education or with urban women from low-income communities. Staff members generally live in more prosperous communities than do the students. Fifty-six percent of the Sisters reside in communal living arrangements.

### *Procedure and Analysis*

This article presents findings from two studies, one qualitative and one quantitative, which were iteratively analyzed. The qualitative study led to hypotheses that were tested quantitatively, which then were followed up with a refined analysis of the qualitative data. For ease of understanding, both parts of the qualitative analysis are presented first, followed by the procedures for the quantitative analysis.

A total of five focus group interviews were conducted with 45 students. Four were conducted by two members each of a graduate Qualitative Methods class under the supervision of the first author; the first author alone conducted one focus group. Each group consisted of between 7 and 11 students from both Phase 1 and Phase 2. All groups used the same interview guide, consisting of open-ended questions focused on goals, experience in the Center, stresses and resources both inside and outside the Center as they impacted participation and successful completion, plus early program exit. No differences in content related to PSOC were noted between groups or between Phase 1 and Phase 2 participants. Following the focus groups, the first author also conducted eight individual interviews with full-time staff members, including teachers, administrators, and support staff. Individual interviews were chosen because the small number of staff made this approach feasible and because we were concerned that combining line staff with administrators in a single focus group might have limited the expression of divergent or critical opinions. The staff interviews focused on content similar to that of the student interviews, asking their opinions of what worked and what didn't work within the Center.

Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, checked for accuracy, and team coded using a consensus-based, iterative coding framework (Richie et al., 1997). The codes identified both content and process themes and were developed from prior literature and questions and topics of interest to Caroline Center, as well as emerging from the data itself. Open-ended, qualitative interviews such as these are ideal for bringing participants' voices to the forefront and allowing for the emergence of concepts and themes (Agar, 1986). PSOC, which was never directly asked about by interviewers, was one of those emergent themes. In general, the codes focused on identifying the multilevel resources and stresses that related to the operation of, participation in, and successes at Caroline Center. Codes included, for example, children, transportation, expectations, attitude, reasons for entrance and exit, staff process, and PSOC.

The coded interview data were entered into NUD\*IST (Qualitative Solutions & Research Pty Ltd., 1997), a qualitative software package, and data were then sorted according to the process and content themes (Weiss, 1994). Analysis involved developing a cohesive model within and between codes and transcripts (see Agar, 1986; Weiss, 1994). The initial analysis of the data coded as PSOC suggested that PSOC was operating in multiple ways, in multiply defined communities. This led us to develop and test the quantitative hypotheses described below. Following the quantitative study, we returned again to this qualitative data, re-coding and re-analyzing all text that was coded originally as PSOC in order to explore more specifically the concepts and operation of membership, mutual influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection within multiply-defined communities. This iterative, multimethod approach, in which qualitative methods dovetail with quantitative, has

<sup>2</sup> Additional information on the Caroline Center is available from: Caroline Center, 900 Somerset Street, Baltimore, MD 21202. E-mail: pmclaughlin@USA.net

been explored in more detail as it relates to community psychology by Banyard and Miller (1998), and more generally by Brannen (1995).

In the quantitative study, 114 participants (101 students and 13 staff<sup>3</sup>) completed three revised versions of the Sense of Community Index (SCI) (Chavis, Florin, Rich, & Wandersman, 1987, in Linney & Wandersman, 1991) in two different administrations of the measures. This 12-item, Likert-scaled (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree) questionnaire measures PSOC in specific settings. While the original questionnaire measured PSOC in reference to respondents' neighborhood community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), this study focused on neighborhood community as well as on two other Caroline Center communities. The two Caroline Center referent communities were defined as the macro-or overall Caroline Center community and the Caroline Center subcommunities, defined for students as their Phase 1 class and for staff as membership in the staff subcommunity. Thus, participants completed the original version of the SCI in reference to their home community, as well as two other versions in which the words "my neighborhood" and "my community" were replaced with "Caroline Center" for the macrocommunity PSOC and "my Phase 1 class" or "staff at Caroline Center" for the subcommunity measures.<sup>4</sup> All participants completed all three versions of the revised SCI, as was appropriate for their student or staff status, and special instructions were given to alert the participants as to the differences among the three versions of the questionnaire. We hypothesized that all participants would report a positive PSOC for Caroline Center as a whole, that they would report a different PSOC for each of their three communities, and that students and staff would differ from each other on PSOC in each of these communities. Mean scale scores, descriptive statistics, paired-sample and independent *t* tests were computed in SPSS. Because our hypotheses were supported, we returned to the qualitative data to better understand the operation of these multiple PSOCs, as described above.

## Results

### *Overall Caroline Center PSOC*

In both focus group and individual interviews, students and staff spontaneously described having positive<sup>5</sup> PSOC for the territorially defined macrocommunity of Caroline Center. In one example of this, a student described elements of membership and integration and fulfillment of need:

When you first come into the building, first of all it's nice, clean, and you just feel comfortable... the surrounding people and everybody gives you love, I

like that. I like to feel warm and welcomed. And that's what I get.

A staff member also described this same positive PSOC:

Everybody sorta just clings together, the family which I don't think you'll find in most centers.

Analysis of survey data confirmed that all respondents, both students and staff, had a positive PSOC for Caroline Center ( $X = 1.98$ , when 1 = most positive response).

### *Neighborhood PSOC*

Students contrasted their descriptions of positive PSOC for Caroline Center with their descriptions of less positive PSOC for their home communities. Below, several students discuss this contrast, especially as it relates to Caroline Center's all-women status:

And another thing that I like about [the Center] is that while this center is a bunch of women, there's not a whole lot of bickering and arguing and fussing. Most of the time when a bunch of women get together it's a lot of trouble, but it's not [here].

I don't deal with women. Outside of here I don't have no women friends.

The only females I um, associate with is my family. I have a lot of females in my family and I don't have no woman friends.

Table 1  
*PSOC Means and Standard Deviations*

|                                  | <i>Respondent group</i> |                    |                  |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|------------------|
|                                  | <i>All respondents</i>  | <i>Students</i>    | <i>Staff</i>     |
| <i>Community</i>                 | <i>N = 114</i>          | <i>n = 101</i>     | <i>n = 13</i>    |
| Caroline Center (macrocommunity) | 1.98*a,b (.394)         | 2.07*,**c,e (.388) | 1.75**e,g (.382) |
| Student/staff (subcommunities)   | 2.14*b (.452)           | 2.20**c,d (.426)   | 1.67*d,g (.374)  |
| Neighborhood                     | 2.97*a (.823)           | 3.01***f (.841)    | 2.65***f (.590)  |

\* Significant difference;  $p < .001$ .

\*\* Not significantly different;  $p < .026$ .

\*\*\* Not significantly different;  $p < .142$ .

<sup>3</sup> Four students and five staff members were participants in both the qualitative and quantitative studies.

<sup>4</sup> Copies of the revised measures are available by request from the authors.

<sup>5</sup> See Brodsky (1996) for a discussion of the differentiation of positive, neutral, and negative PSOC.



See, I don't even associate with *them* [female family members].

Survey data also confirmed this difference. A paired-sample  $t$  test showed that participants, including staff, reported more positive PSOC at Caroline Center than in their home neighborhoods ( $t = -12.080$ ,  $df = 113$ ,  $p < .001$ , two-tailed) (See Table 1, superscript a). Interestingly, despite the presumed differences in neighborhood resources and characteristics between the middle-class staff members, and the low-income students, the two groups report of their neighborhood PSOC did not differ significantly ( $t = 1.480$ ,  $df = 112$ ,  $p < .142$ , two-tailed, superscript f).

#### *Subcommunity PSOC Within Caroline Center*

Initial analysis of the qualitative data also revealed the emergence of multiple, distinct PSOCs within different subcommunities (i.e., students,<sup>6</sup> Sisters). In the example below, a student differentiated membership between these two subcommunities:

It's a bond in here, it's a sense of warmth... maybe it is because of the *Sisters*, but I think it's mainly because of *ourselves*.

In order to examine the different ways in which subcommunity membership might lead to and impact multiple PSOCs within one setting, three different quantitative analyses were used to explore the operation of subcommunity PSOC. The first examined if respondents differentiated between a subcommunity PSOC and a macrocommunity PSOC. The second examined whether differences existed between how respondents in each subcommunity viewed their subcommunity PSOC. The third analysis examined whether there were subcommunity differences in respondents' macrocommunity PSOC. The means for each of these PSOC is also reported in Table 1.

A paired-sample  $t$  test found that overall mean Caroline Center PSOC was significantly different from mean PSOC for respondents' student or staff subcommunity ( $t = -6.647$ ,  $df = 113$ ,  $p < .001$ ) (See Table 1, superscript b). This shows that members of a subcommunity can differentiate between the

macrocommunity and the subcommunity and may feel differently about the larger community and their own subcommunity. Within the subcommunity groupings, students reported significantly higher PSOC for Caroline Center as a whole than for their student subcommunity, although the subcommunity PSOC was still in the positive range ( $t = -7.857$ ,  $df = 100$ ,  $p < .001$ ) (See Table 1, superscript c). Staff, on the other hand, did not report significant differences between the macro- and the subcommunity PSOC ( $t = 1.379$ ,  $df = 12$ ,  $p < .193$ ) (See Table 1, superscript g).

An independent-samples  $t$  test showed significant difference in the PSOC reported by students and staff for their respective student or staff subcommunities ( $t = 4.266$ ,  $df = 112$ ,  $p < .001$ ) (See Table 1, superscript d). This shows that members of these two subcommunities view the PSOC in their nonshared communities differently.

Another independent-samples  $t$  test found that the difference between student respondents' PSOC for the Caroline Center as a whole and staff's Caroline Center PSOC was not significant ( $t = 2.255$ ,  $df = 112$ ,  $p < .026$ )<sup>7</sup> (See Table 1, superscript e).

These quantitative findings served to further confirm the existence of multiple PSOC at both the macro- and subcommunity levels and suggest that subcommunity membership might influence these feelings. Our next step was a re-analysis of the qualitative data to further explore the existence, operation, and maintenance of subcommunity PSOC and its relation to the larger macrocommunity. To do so we turned our focus specifically to the components of PSOC (membership, mutual influence, fulfillment of need, and shared emotional connection) as they operated in the subcommunity of Caroline Center students.

#### *Multiple PSOC*

*Membership.* Membership, a sense of belonging and identification (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), is one way that subcommunity PSOC is defined. Membership is supported by such components as boundaries, belonging and identification, a feeling of emotional safety, and personal investment. At Caroline Center, subcommunity boundaries are inherent in the structure of the program, which divides people into such groups as administration, teachers, and students. These between-group boundaries are quite clear to staff and students, as one staff member describes:

<sup>6</sup> Because there were no significant differences between the PSOC of current Phase 1 students and of current Phase 2 students, across any of the three measures of PSOC, these two groups were collapsed into one "student" subcommunity.

<sup>7</sup> To correct for possible alpha inflation due to multiple  $t$  tests, Bonferroni correction was used to set alpha at  $p < .005$  for all tests.

I said to [a group of students]... "I thought everything was cool, you guys ate lunch together" and they were like, "Well, you don't come downstairs, you don't eat lunch with us ... you don't hang out with us". You know so I don't know all this stuff. And certainly we're somewhat removed from the more social situations. So it would be interesting to hear, you know like what goes on just among women, when we're not around.

The student boundaries are further shaped through Caroline Center's admission process. Screening interviews and drug testing affect who has the potential to be included and to stay in the subcommunity of students. As several students comment below, this boundary separating women at Caroline Center from just any neighborhood woman works to further strengthen the sense of membership, belonging, and identification among the students:

I think with them testing you, and all that goin through tha process, you know, it eliminates a lot of different people... you know, that's a lot of it, I believe, them testing you, cause a lot of people just come in programs and they just don't care.

Most of us have something positive in mind . . . most of society's so negative. I mean you got negativity everywhere you go but when you in a place that is structured with more positives than negatives you know it helps. (Agreement from group).

While the program structure influences which women are admitted as students, the students themselves maintain boundaries that define who belongs and who does not. Because the students place a high value on the goals they share with one another (e.g., attaining jobs, education, and independence), they do not want to be disrupted by the "foolishness" or poor attitude of those who do not have the same values and goals:

...those that really do not want to participate, want to give them [the staff] a hard time, open the door for them, because that's stopping someone else, that's messin up someone else's day. They gotta to say, look so and so, "Stop, don't do that, go somewhere else."

Establishing boundaries that exclude others also works to provide emotional safety and foster group

intimacy and safety (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) for those within the subcommunity, as the quote below describes:

When you come here... once you feel that love and affection, and... get to know people you'll like start opening up and they'll get "this is what I want", because some places [are] meant for some people...

Maintaining the boundaries of the subcommunity of students, which exclude those with negative attitudes, also leaves room for potential students. The women describe permeable membership boundaries that include women who do not yet belong to the subcommunity, but otherwise would fit the "requirements" for membership. There is an allegiance to those women who are not yet attending Caroline Center, but are "like us."

[If] you leave, you lose and I gain-(many say this together). Because there going to be more women like us to come in.

Another way that students "invest" in their membership at Caroline Center is through the service requirement. In lieu of monetary payment for the Caroline Center program, each of the students cleans a part of the building. As the following participants explain, this investment symbolizes a commitment to Caroline Center as a whole and further defines subcommunity boundaries and shared values.

Now, all they ask is for us to clean up. I agree with them. It's like 5 or 10 seconds. You know. It's nothing wrong with it and anyone who finds something wrong with it need to bend their [membership] card up and just go on about back home.

I do what I supposed to do, I do it fast cause I want to get out of here. But I will never leave and say I ain't going to do this cause it's not right.

The structure of the macrocommunity supports the boundaries of subcommunity membership and distinguishes the subcommunity members from others within the macrocommunity of Caroline Center, as well as from others in the local neighborhoods. The emotional safety among the subcommunity is strengthened as members make "investments" into the sub-and macrocommunities. Thus, the women feel a sense of membership within the Caroline Center community as a whole as well as within the community of students.

*Mutual influence.* The operation of mutual influence within the participants' subcommunity was particularly visible as it influenced women's emotions and behaviors. Women described how they shared and celebrated each others' successes and supported one another during times of difficulty, all the while shaping each others' behavior to create conformity and cohesion. In Barker's (1968) terms, the women are operating as deviation countering circuits. They have accepted the structure set by the macrocommunity setting, and work to support and sustain that setting's structure and goals by correcting and shaping the behaviors of their fellow subcommunity members. In the examples that follow, it is clear that there is mutual influence operating at the level of the participants, rather than just at the level of the center as a whole:

...the doors been open, we came in and accepted the rules... And it works for a lot of us... we... say to that very few others... "No, this is the way". You know, "don't join in"... I don't join in the foolishness... we shouldn't put them down, we should show them the way. "No, this is the way... let the negative self go." And that's what this place does, it help let go of negative things in your life, things that you thought you could never let go before.

Their actions suggest a desire to protect the Center for their own benefit, but also imply a feeling of responsibility to Caroline Center and to each other:

...but when it's time to get the work done, it's time to get the work done... Then we pull together and pull each other up. "Look girl, look, for real, slippin' a little bit... get it together, you know. I hate to see you come this far and [fail]."

And this commitment to help comes in part from understanding each other's experience:

I was listenin to what she was sayin, and sometime I just wanta say one day, "hey, it's gonna be all right"... I always want to tell you, "it's gonna be all right." I know sometimes you be draggin in here, sister, and you be rollin in here a little late and stuff, your little friends be tellin you [things] ...some people don't know how to say, "well, come on girl, you can hang in there", but I'm gonna tell you, "come on, you can hang in there."

As the idea of mutual influence suggests, in addition to influencing others, they feel and appreciate the influence the subcommunity exerts on them:

Then me and my mother get to talking and she be like, "you frustrated?" I be like, "yeah, ain't got no job", she say "your job gonna come, just go to school, it'll be alright." And once I get down here and get to talkin to everybody I feel a little bit better about coming... I don't be as frustrated as I was when I was home...

Notably, this influence comes with an understanding of the impact they have on one another, and care is taken to not abuse that influence:

when we study we don't make each other feel bad... I don't know how to do um, fractions, but she doesn't make me feel bad about it, she jumps in and starts helping me get it, along with the instructor. You know we help each other.

Even staff members, who are not part of the student subcommunity, notice the operation of mutual influence within this subcommunity:

Um, but the GEDs I just think encourage them so much because... when five women go in and take it and four of them pass, that's huge for us... Um, that's really encouraging to the women when they've been studying with this person and... they get really excited for each other. So I think definitely, it's just more upbeat... working a little bit harder... taking an extra tutor... coming in with a cold... They kind of feed off of each other, no matter what class they were.

Although in these examples mutual influence is operating at the subcommunity level, it is both impacted by and impacts the macrocommunity. As one participant explains below, this mutual influence was learned from and encouraged by the staff and macrocommunity:

I watch a lot of the women that's here... they were like a big inspiration to me, because even though I didn't know them personally or... well, [it] was like... hey if they can get there, I know I can... [W]ith a little hard work and a little determination, shoot, I can do it. And, they gave me... that [encouragement] like keep on coming... they smiling... a pat on the back every now and then. And that what they teach us to do to the women that came behind me.



The mutual influence felt within the subcommunity also works to maintain the macrocommunity. It is in part the commitment of the women to maintaining their community that leads them to act in ways that protect the program circuits (Barker, 1968) of the macrocommunity. In one example of this, focus group members discussed protecting Caroline Center from the threat posed by women involuntarily referred to the program because of welfare reform:

I want to take back somethin I just said about not lettin Caroline Center be one of the referral places for Social Service... I was thinkin, well, they come here, the people that don't want to be here, they're gonna turn the Caroline Center out<sup>8</sup>... I said, well, this place done nothin but good, how can God let that happen?

I don't think that's gonna happen... I think that the Caroline Center will turn them out<sup>9</sup> ...

Because there's too many of us to let that happen!

That's right!

That's what I like about the Caroline Center...

They might come here with the wrong attitude... you know, but if they keep gettin up, comin here, they gonna be turned out...

Importantly, if the subcommunity didn't endorse and support the program circuits of the macrocommunity, the macrocommunity could not survive. That is, mutual influence operates not only within the macrocommunity level and within the subcommunity of students, but also between the sub- and macrocommunities.

*Integration and fulfillment of needs.* Integration and fulfillment of needs, which operate, according to McMillan and Chavis (1986), to reward and reinforce community members for their involvement, is another component of PSOC seen at the subcommunity level. McMillan and Chavis (1986) theorize that the status associated with community membership, the success of the community, and the perceived competencies of the other members are factors that lead to integration and fulfillment of needs. In addition, when community members share values, they have further reason to believe that they might share needs and goals. This

increases the probability that their relationship with each other might allow them to fulfill their needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Some examples of the role of status, success, and other members' competencies have been noted above, where they also impact membership and mutual influence. For example, in one quote above, other members' successes in the GED exam bring pride and success to all the women and both act to motivate them to try harder themselves, thereby reinforcing their feeling that Caroline Center is the right place for them to be.

The role of shared values within the subcommunity in promoting a positive PSOC is seen by Caroline Center students as existing within the subcommunity and relates to their impression that this is a community that can fulfill their needs:

Question: Is it different here than in your neighborhoods?

Yes, I don't deal with women. I don't deal with women, outside of here, I don't have no woman friends.

Question: So why do you think it's different here than in the neighborhood?

Because we don't just come here to see each other you know, every day, all day long.

Most of us have something positive in mind. You know what I'm saying, um I don't know you know, most of society's so negative. I mean you got negativity everywhere you go but when you in a place that is structured with more positives than negatives you know it helps. (Agreement from group).

Students shared other examples of how the subcommunity led to integration and fulfillment of needs. Some of these needs were relational:

A lot of different things keep you coming back here...

I have to comment on this... I mean it is really solid that you could get a group or place where they pull Black women together like this and there's no fighting, arguing, bickering, a bunch of juveniles having stuff. You know we all get along, there's a lot of different things I like about the Caroline Center and keep us coming back.

Other participants described how shared values led to both relational and instrumental needs being met:

<sup>8</sup> "(T)urn the Caroline Center out" suggests changing the Caroline Center for the worse.

<sup>9</sup> Here, "Caroline Center will turn them out" suggests changing women for the better, not expelling them.

Um, I don't care for too many women, but these women here are pretty good. You know I like associating with them, you know. I get some good information cause I take um negative stuff and, and try to make something positive out of it...

Question: You had said... that the women who are here you're enjoying being around... what do you think makes it that way?

I guess it's because we all got a sense that we in this together. We are either gonna sink or swim together. And, it's like days where you know, she may be feeling real bad, and we all like try to cheer her up like come on, it can't be that bad. And we talk about our little problems to each other.

While the women obviously come to, stay at, and feel positive PSOC for Caroline Center as a whole because the Center meets their job training and educational needs, the needs which are met by the subcommunity are also important and integrate the women into both the sub-and macrocommunity. And while it seems clear that this particular subcommunity of students would not even exist without the macrocommunity, if the subcommunity did not also meet women's needs, the macrocommunity might be weakened or even irreparably damaged.

*Shared emotional connection.* Shared emotional connection is the fourth element of PSOC according to McMillan and Chavis' (1986) theory. The elements of shared emotional connection that appear especially salient at Caroline Center are a shared history involving contact, quality interactions, investment, and a spiritual bond.

Within the subcommunity of women, a strong shared emotional connection exists, based on common experiences and identifications that precede their association with Caroline Center. These include being women, predominately African American, mothers (for many), living in poor communities, having a sense of spirituality, as well as sharing common life struggles and risks. Some women know each other before they get to Caroline Center:

Um, I think some friendships have developed and some were already in place when they get here. Um, 'cause certainly a lot of our referrals come from the women word of mouth. Um, so we have a lot of sisters who are here, we've had a

couple mother-daughter teams, um, a lot of friends, neighbors, so they're already friends who are here.

Other women recognize that they have prior shared experiences even if they are strangers initially:

Cause we all basically come from the same spot, you know, we all had problems or we have children and you know... sometimes... when you got children, it's an instant bond between woman... if you can't do nothing but brag about your kids to another woman, you alright.

While this sets the ground for shared emotional connection between the women of the subcommunity, Caroline Center is important in this process because the meaning and value of these shared experiences and identities is very different within Caroline Center than in the community at large, as two quotes previously reported show:

I don't deal with women. Outside of here I don't have no women friends.

Most of the time when a bunch of women get together it's a lot of trouble, but it's not [here].

Caroline Center strengthens and lends increased significance and meaning to these initial common experiences and identifications by providing a context in which additional elements of subcommunity shared emotional connection are experienced. As one woman said:

And they unites us together, you know, we don't know each other when we came here. And the best part about it too is, when you come into Phase 1, you know no one, you know but you just connect with certain people and you enjoy yourselves and then you find true friends...

It is the setting itself then that provides the context for interactions (both mundane and profound) that build shared emotional connection. Smoking together on the Caroline Center's front stairs is an example of one of these more mundane shared emotional connections among the students:

...when we go outside to smoke, we go out there to gab and to talk and to release the tension that we have from maybe that class (agreement from group) or the class that's coming up. Like if a teacher just got on your nerves, you can go out

there and you know you can talk about it 'til the cows come home... and it's the thing, when you can say something to somebody and don't have to worry about, them going back and telling somebody else, and telling somebody else.

The shared sense of spirituality nurtured within the center is a more profound example of the development of shared emotional connection both at the sub-and macro-community level. Below, two different women describe the role of spirituality at the subcommunity level:

...if you come in here with an attitude, you know, you might have had some kind hard knocks in life, and you come in here... with all the walls built up... a lot of people are here because they have to be, because of the welfare reform you know... But I believe that when they leave that they have a whole new change in attitude from the prayers. I look at this, this center as a blessing...

I can tell by the um prayers in the mornings that we have. Everybody joins in. And that means something.

The fact that the Center is all women has also led to high quality interactions and has unexpectedly had a positive impact on their experience and sense of subcommunity shared emotional connection within Caroline Center. This is illustrated by another focus group exchange:

I think of um once that, once you get here you find it's sorta like womens of the world unitin' together again.

That is so true, when I first came... they asked me, 'how did you feel coming here?' And I said... "I was a little uncomfortable I think because there was a lot of women" and I realized we need to pull it together and... [accomplish something] it's time we... get it together.

When I first started here... I thought... "Oh my goodness a building full of women-you are not going to make it" (laughter from group) then when I met the staff I was like okay, they're Sisters... so it's like once I got here it was like oh my goodness I like it here. I didn't want to go home to be honest.

Subcommunity shared emotional connection, built on past and current shared history, experiences,

and identity, also highlights subgroup differences which are both immutable and quite important. This could lead the subcommunity shared emotional connection, and the subcommunity itself, to be seen as a potential threat to the community as a whole. However, because Caroline Center is responsible for bringing women of similar backgrounds together and provides opportunities to build shared emotional connection through the quality interactions which occur at Caroline Center, the development and maintenance of the subcommunity shared emotional connection is actually facilitated by the macrocommunity. Caroline Center as a whole might actually be strengthened by the fact that the subcommunity lacks meaning without its affiliation with the macrocommunity. The fostering of macrocommunity shared emotional connection and PSOC (as seen in the quantitative data) also acts to balance the potentially divisive nature of the subcommunity shared emotional connection. The students and staff of Caroline Center share past and current experiences related to gender, common educational and employment goals, as well as shared values related to religion and spirituality. Further, there is an appreciation and nurturing of the subcommunity diversity that is important to the operation of shared emotional connection at both the sub-and macrocommunity levels. Rather than seeing the differences between groups within the setting as divisive, they are appreciated and embraced as adding to the whole. As one of the Sisters noted:

...I've spent almost 40 years in religious life, I'm a professional at church... they are so reverent when it's a God time and... God is... such a natural part of their lives that, that is humbling and touching, edifying and providing blessing for me, I'm sure for the rest of the staff... I mean it's working both ways, it's bringing blessing to the center and the staff and the other women as well... In the chapel at our mother house yesterday, a friend of [a student's] was singing, "His eye is on the sparrow" ...I was watching the [students]... the nodding of their heads, and they're whispering, "yes Lord", like this affirming their faith and their belief in God, and, and... they were doing this little tiny sway... that hymn was prayer for them. I mean it was just beautiful. Yes, I feel very blessed to be uh, a recipient of that, faith atmosphere, which I only contribute a tiny bit of a part to.

## Conclusion

As this study illustrates both quantitatively and qualitatively, people participate in any number of distinct communities at any one time. Each of these distinct communities is also comprised of multiple, nested subcommunities, defined by individual and group roles, experiences and identities. This paper's focus on the existence, operation, and maintenance of multiple psychological senses of community expands our conceptualization of psychological sense of community and at the same time provides a means for exploring the operation of nested sub- and macrocommunities.

At Caroline Center, the operation of multiple psychological senses of community among the subcommunity of students and the macrocommunity of Caroline Center was seen quantitatively through the distinct SCI scores and qualitatively through the components of PSOC, as expressed in interview transcripts. Membership boundaries existed that supported and defined both the sub- and macrocommunity. Thus, students are both members of the Caroline Center community, and, specifically, members of the student community. Mutual influence worked *within* the subcommunity of students, promoting the program goals of the macrocommunity, as well as working *between* the sub- and macrocommunities. In this way, not only do individuals and communities impact one another, but the sub- and macrocommunities affect each other as well. Integration and fulfillment of needs occurred at both the sub- and macrocommunity levels. The Caroline Center experience might not have been as meaningful or fulfilling if needs were not being met in both communities. Shared emotional connection was created among the subcommunity of students through experiences shared in the macro setting, as well as through the increased salience of their past shared history when contrasted with the different lives and experiences of the teachers and staff. At the same time, shared experiences, values, and goals at Caroline Center brought the entire community together and built macrocommunity PSOC.

In the cases of all four of these components, there was a symbiotic relationship between the sub- and macrocommunities, as represented in the operation of the multiple PSOC. Without the cooperation and support of the students' subcommunity, Caroline Center as a whole would suffer, and without Caroline Center there would be no student subcommunity; thus, these nested communities are mutually dependent.

The relationship of the sub- and macrocommunities can be a delicate balance to strike. One way in which Caroline Center appears to strike this balance is by actively recognizing the subcommunity divisions that exist within the community as a whole and respecting, promoting, and supporting subcommunity PSOC, while at the same time forging PSOC within the entire macrocommunity. The subcommunity diversity is not viewed as threatening or experienced as divisive. Instead, it is appreciated as a necessity and resource. Caroline Center would not exist without both multiple subcommunities and the macrocommunity.

Our exploration of the existence, operation, and maintenance of the student and macrocommunities within Caroline Center focused on just one of the many subcommunities nested within Caroline Center. And many examples of other macrocommunities with multiple subcommunities exist in the rest of the world. Attention to the diversity which exists within settings is, as Weisenfeld (1996) states, in keeping with "the spirit of change and preservation of diversity that the pioneers of the Community Psychology movement sought to preserve" (p. 342). Weisenfeld is critical of community psychology's tendency to "sacrifice ...complexity for the sake of reductionism" (342), but it is not just community psychology that seeks to reduce differences. Many of our greatest social challenges today revolve around building community in an increasingly diverse world. We have a historical narrative stating that the U.S. was once a melting pot, which melded our differences into a smooth blend. This is quite different from the current recipe, in which the U.S. looks much more like a stew, with each distinct flavor and texture adding to the whole while still maintaining its integrity. But, there is an underlying fear that acknowledging, emphasizing, and even promoting our distinct individual and group differences in flavor and texture might damage the whole. We worry that subcommunity PSOC will make the macrocommunity less meaningful, important, and necessary.

But as the example of Caroline Center shows, diversity within a setting can operate to the benefit of both the sub- and macrocommunity. In the best of worlds, the macrocommunity respects, supports, and nurtures the unique experiences, concerns, and contributions of the subcommunity, meanwhile providing opportunities to build community experiences which connect subcommunities together. The subcommunity contributes by providing the local support individuals need, and also tying them



to the macrocommunity. Thus the answer to the "problem" of diversity isn't combining and erasing differences, but promoting and recognizing the necessity of diversity as a rich, textured whole. That psychological sense of community exists at both the macro-and subcommunity levels at Caroline Center shows this process in action. Our ability to preserve the complexity of the multiple communities we live in and study may depend on recognizing that both the whole and the parts can gain from their symbiotic relationship, and that not only is the whole greater than the sum of its parts, but that the parts also have greater importance than their mere summative value for the whole.

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