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Shared Communities: A Multinational Qualitative Study of Immigrant and Receiving Community Members

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Abstract

Community psychology is central to understanding how immigrants and more established residents of their new settings join together to develop a shared sense of community and membership. In our present study, we explored how newer (i.e., first- and second-generation immigrants) and more established community members form multiple positive psychological sense of community (PSOC) with one another. We conducted a multinational, qualitative study of PSOC through interviews with 201 first- and second-generation immigrants and third generation or more "receiving community members" in three contexts (Baltimore-Washington corridor of the U.S.; Torino, Italy; Lecce, Italy). Results indicated numerous similarities among the ways in which participants constructed PSOC in shared and nonshared communities, regardless of immigration/citizenship status, length of community residence, city, country, age, or gender. Small, proximal, and salient communities were often particularly important to building positive PSOC, which was formed around diverse membership boundaries. As intersectional beings, members converged and diverged on many characteristics, providing multiple opportunities for members to bring diversity to their communities while sharing other characteristics deemed essential to membership. Nonetheless, findings point to significant, structural challenges rooted in power and privilege that must be confronted to bridge the community-diversity dialectic and build strong, shared sense of community.

Keywords

Psychological sense of community; Intergroup relationships; Immigration; Receiving community

Introduction

Communities are constantly in flux as their membership changes. Such transformation is visible globally. Today, approximately one in every 30 people live outside the country of

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their birth or citizenship (United Nations, 2017). As newcomers join preexisting community members, they may share both their local communities and relational communities. How do these diverse members form and transform their sense of community in these shifting communities?

When this study was conceptualized in the early 2010s, there were clear indications that immigration was a growing topic of concern in the United States (U.S.) and Italy. Terror attacks in the U.S., a country built on immigration, and around the world unleashed anti-Islam rhetoric, prejudice and discrimination against Muslim immigrants and extended to many groups of chiefly non-European immigrants. A decade later, the U.S. experienced federal-level bipartisan support to enact progressive immigration reforms, while at the state and local levels, numerous restrictive immigration laws were passed (although many were later blocked in courts). Some states went so far as to make it illegal to be undocumented, requiring all people to carry residency papers at all times and giving local police power to detain anyone suspected of being in the country illegally.

Meanwhile, Italy was changing from a country of emigration to one of immigration (Bonifazi, Heins, Strozza, & Vitiello, 2009). Expansion of the European Union (E.U.) led to increasing immigration from Eastern Europe and Asia, while war, conflict, and economic breakdown in African countries pushed immigrants to and through Italy without authorization. Political turmoil in Libya reduced coastal controls, increasing human smuggling across the sea. Prevailing Italian rhetoric portrays immigrants as a threat and an “emergency” to be contained and controlled (Miglietta, Gattino, & Esses, 2014). Yet, there have been no effective policies pursuing immigrants’ integration or legal residency, resulting in overcrowded temporary immigration reception centers (UNHCR, 2009). While in 2017, Italian and Libyan governments signed a bilateral deal to reinforce border security and stem unauthorized migration, serious concerns remain regarding immigrant human rights (UNHR & UNSMIL, 2016).

The current backdrop is as conflicted. Rhetoric surrounding immigration has intensified since, as ongoing wars and genocides have led to more mass exodus of impacted civilians, including refugees and asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa (European Stability Initiative, 2017). Focus on attacks committed in the name of Islam by immigrants, refugees, and their descendants has fueled anti-immigrant sentiment. In the U.S., newcomers fleeing conflict, violence, and poverty in Mexico and Central America heightened concern for border security and fueled debate (Congressional Research Service, 2014). The election of a U.S. President who built his platform on nationalism and insularity marked an even more negative anti-immigrant tone in the U.S. Meanwhile, the Italian government shifted from Berlusconi’s anti-immigration stance to the more pro-immigration attitude of Paolo Gentiloni, a stark contrast to the extreme anti-immigration, right-wing parties that have been gaining power elsewhere.

Immigration and Community

Community psychology can aid in our understanding of the impact these and other issues have on immigrants and on the members of the communities that voluntarily or involuntarily become their homes. Moving beyond a narrow focus on individuals’ internal processes,

community psychology broadens focus to the many individual and contextual factors that influence people's experiences in their settings. Lewin's (1936) seminal work has demonstrated the simultaneous impacts of people on their settings and vice versa, and Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory outlines how person-setting interactions take place at multiple levels. In this way, a community psychology lens can illuminate how diverse people form and transform shared communities. In this study, we explore individual and contextual factors that shape these interactions among immigrants and established members of the communities who receive them, factors that profoundly impact the experiences and attitudes of all (Buckingham, Emery, Godsay, Brodsky, & Scheibler, 2017), and on their shared and nonshared communities.

Psychological Sense of Community

Psychological Sense of Community (PSOC) is a useful theoretical perspective for exploring these issues (Sarason, 1974, 1978). PSOC is used across contexts (e.g., Brodsky, 2009; Castellini, Colombo, Maffeis, & Montali, 2011; Sonn & Fisher, 1996) to explore experiences of person-insetting. Most apply McMillan and Chavis' (1986) conceptualization, with four components: *membership*, a feeling of belonging to the community; *mutual influence*, an ability to impact the community and vice versa; *fulfillment of needs*, a perception that association is beneficial; and *shared emotional connection*, a feeling of connection to the community and its members. These components may occur within *territorial* communities and within *relational* communities, defined by shared identities, values, and experiences, but not necessarily bound by geography. PSOC is related to numerous individual, community, and interactive outcomes, including higher subjective well-being (Davidson & Cotter, 1991), life satisfaction (Prezza & Costantini, 1998), quality of life (Gattino, Piccoli, Fassio, & Rollero, 2013), community connectedness (Sonn & Fisher, 1996), community participation (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990), union participation (Catano, Pretty, Southwell, & Cole, 1993), volunteerism (Omoto & Malsch, 2005), voting, and home ownership (Brodsky, O'Campo, & Aronson, 1999).

Multiple Psychological Sense of Community—Expanding upon the single referent community or "primary community" (Sonn & Fisher, 1998) of early PSOC work, recent research has focused on multiple psychological sense of community (MPSOC). MPSOC acknowledges that we belong to and identify with multiple communities, and that we live in an interconnected world, in which transportation and technology provide ready and often inexpensive access to multiple geographic and relational communities (Brodsky & Marx, 2001; Pretty, Conroy, Dugay, Fowler, & Williams, 1996; Royal & Rossi, 1996). Some of these communities may be nested so that multiple micro communities (e.g., identity group, neighborhood, athletic team) exist within in a shared macro community (e.g., school, city, region, nation; Wiesenfeld, 1996).

Immigration and PSOC—As immigration is an ecological transition, immigrants can experience shifts in MPSOC for their original and new communities (Bathum & Baumann, 2007). In a study of how immigrants form new communities, Maya-Jariego (2006) found that incorporating both immigrants from one's country of origin and receiving community members into social networks aids in rebuilding PSOC. Creation of new relational micro

communities can support immigrants to experience shared cultural understandings, symbols, and histories in the context of the new macro, receiving community, thus developing shared emotional connections among members (Sonn, 2002). As immigrant communities are neither homogenous nor exclusive, immigrants likely identify with other micro communities (e.g., neighborhoods, pre- and postmigration; intra- and interethnic groups) along with larger macro communities (e.g., country; Sonn, 2002). With the influx of new members also comes the broadening of community diversity, shaping receiving community members' PSOC with their overlapping communities.

Only a few studies have measured PSOC among immigrants living in new communities, and this research generally demonstrates low levels of PSOC in reference to local communities. A study conducted in South Carolina found that both Latinx[1] immigrants living in predominantly U.S.-born neighborhoods and those living in predominantly Latinx immigrant neighborhoods reported low PSOC (Townley, Kloos, Green, & Franco, 2011). In Spain, Maya-Jariego and Armitage (2007) found that immigrants had a higher PSOC with their neighborhoods than with their immigrant communities, but that both PSOC levels were lower than they were in their countries of origin. In Italy, Mannarini, Talò, Mezzi, and Procentese (2017) found that PSOC with local and ethnic communities varied. The stronger Sri Lankan immigrants' PSOC was with the local community, the weaker it was with their ethnic community, whereas the stronger Albanian immigrants' PSOC was with the local community, the stronger it was with their ethnic community.

In the receiving community, one foundational study (Elias & Scotson, 1965) documented that established community members excluded newer members, even with no racial, educational, occupational, or income differences. Newer members then had difficulty forming relationships and developing attachments to the community. More recent studies on diverse ethnic and cultural community membership have tended to demonstrate that diversity is related to a lower PSOC among members (Castellini et al., 2011; Hombrados-Mendieta, Gomez-Jacinto, & Dominguez-Fuentes, 2009), although results are inconclusive. A few studies have concluded that the coexistence of different ethnic groups in the same territory does not affect feelings of belonging and attachment (Prezza, Zampatti, Pacilli, & Paoliello, 2008), whereas others have found that the perception of ethnic heterogeneity impacts PSOC with one's local community when the perceived exposure to diversity is experienced as a threat (Mannarini, Talò, & Rochira, 2016).

Based on this empirical evidence and foundational theory, community psychology scholars (e.g., Neal & Neal, 2014; Townley et al., 2011) have argued that because fundamental components of PSOC center on similarity, homogeneity, and proximity, it is not fully possible for PSOC to exist alongside and embrace diversity. Others, including Brodsky (2017), argue that these findings are an artifact of the social construction of power differences between groups defined as "us" and "them" and the operationalization of PSOC and diversity, particularly the fact that diversity is rarely the same as inclusion. Still, few studies have examined how new and established members of diverse communities simultaneously develop PSOC with one another.

[1]We use the term "Latinx" as opposed to Latina or Latino to move beyond binary gender.

Current Study

Many questions remain about how diverse community members may form and transform their PSOC in their many overlapping, ever-changing communities. Consequently, this study explores how newer—immigrants and children of immigrants—and more established—those who lived in the country for at least three generations —"receiving" community members in distinct contexts form PSOC. These settings vary in terms of their country, city, population, immigration sentiment, policies, histories, and cultures. Our guiding research questions were: (a) To which communities do immigrants, children of immigrants, and receiving community members report belonging?; (b) How do immigrants, children of immigrants, and receiving community members form PSOC in these communities?; and (c) In which ways do their experiences forming PSOC converge and diverge based on individual and/or contextual factors?

Method

Context[2]

To examine the formation of PSOC in distinct contexts, we conducted the study in three communities: the Baltimore, MD-Washington, D.C. corridor of the U.S., and Lecce and Torino in Italy. These contexts differ in a number of ways that we assume may have some impact on the experiences that immigrants and receiving community members (RCMs) have with each other and among themselves. Each setting's history and density of immigration, definitions of RCM and immigrant, laws surrounding immigration, and overall setting diversity may each play a role in community members' experiences with, opportunity for interaction, expectations of and attitudes toward those included in and excluded from one's communities.

Approximately 13.1% of authorized residents in the U.S. and 9.8% of authorized[3] residents in Italy are considered[4] foreign-born. Although both countries have entry requirements, citizenship policies diverge. U.S. citizenship is acquired through birth, marriage to a U.S. citizen, or residence in the country for 5 years and—unless exempted— additional requirements (e.g., speak English, pass a test, take an oath). In Italy, citizenship is acquired by being born to an Italian parent, marrying an Italian citizen, or residing in Italy for 4–10 years, and demonstrating income. Children born in Italy to non-Italian parents have 1 year after turning 18 to apply for citizenship; otherwise they are considered new arrivals. There are roughly 435,000 people in Italy and 11.3 million people in the U.S. unauthorized to reside in the countries (ISTAT, 2017; Krogstad, Passel, & Cohn, 2017).

While all study areas are metropolitan, each is characterized by distinct population mixes with unique immigration histories, successes, and challenges. The U.S. Baltimore-D.C. corridor has a growing immigrant population, with nearly 50% of foreign-born residents arriving since 2000. In 2010, 7.7% of Baltimore and 14.1% of D.C. residents were foreign-

[2]This research was conceived and all data collected by 2013, before the Syrian refugee crisis had begun and before the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign, in which immigration was a key issue in Donald Trump's platform.
[3]People cannot be innately legal or illegal; their residency in a nation, however, can be authorized or unauthorized.
[4]Many individuals born in Italy are labeled "foreign" because they were born to immigrant parents and did not seek citizenship within the allotted time frame (The Law Library of Congress, Global Legal Research Center, 2012).

born. Latinx immigration has substantially increased, with 40% of recent immigrants originating from Latin America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The area is multiracial: 50.7–63.7% of residents identify as Black or African American, 28.3–34.8% as White and not Latinx/Hispanic, 4.2–9.1% as Latinx or Hispanic, 2.3–3.5% as Asian, 0.3–0.4% as American Indian or Alaska Native, and 2.1–2.9% as multiracial, depending on locale. Although the region has the country's highest median income, almost 1/5 of residents live in poverty. Despite overall diversity, neighborhoods greatly vary; some are home to 40% foreign-born residents and others to none (Logan, n.d.).

Lecce, in southern Italy, is home to 94,989 people (Italian National Institute of Statistics, 2017). Immigrants make up a small portion of the population; approximately 7.4% people (N = 6,690) are foreign-born, and most—or their ancestors—have emigrated from the Philippines (12%), Sri Lanka (11.3%), and Albania (9.4%; Italian National Institute of Statistics, 2017). Immigration is a recent regional phenomenon, beginning largely in the 1990s with an influx of immigrants from nearby Albania. Although most migration was not initially processed through the legal system, in 2005 many Albanian immigrants obtained legal permanent residency (King & Mai, 2009).

In Torino, a northern Italian city of 900,000, approximately 15.5% are considered foreign-born, and most emigrated—or their ancestors emigrated—from Romania (39.7%) and Morocco (13.7%; Italian National Institute of Statistics, 2017). Race/ethnicity data are not collected in Italy, and thus this information is not known for Lecce or Torino (Ambrosetti & Cela, 2015).

Participants

To examine the formation of PSOC by diverse community members, we included both newer and more established community members in our sample. In each site, 60–80 people (total n = 201[5]) participated in an in-person interview. One half had lived in their country for three generations or more and were considered RCMs, and approximately one quarter each were first-generation and second-generation immigrants. All first-generation immigrants had lived in Italy or the U.S. for at least 5 years and were conversant in Italian or English, depending on the setting. All second-generation immigrants were born in the receiving country or had immigrated before age 6. U.S. first-generation immigrants were from Peru (4), Bolivia, Columbia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Puerto Rico.[6] Parents of second-generation immigrants were from El Salvador (4), Mexico (3), Chile, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Panama, and Peru, and multiple Latin American countries (2). In Torino, all immigrants or their parents were from Morocco, and in Lecce, from Albania. Across all sites, half of RCMs self-identified as having high contact with immigrants and the other half reported low

[5]The goal was to recruit and interview 60 participants in each region (15 first-generation and 15 second-generation immigrants, 15 low and 15 high contact RCMs). Purposive sampling was used. Recruitment was done simultaneously by multiple interviewers, with actual participant demographics unknown until the interview was underway, thus some participant groups were oversampled. One setting collected data until all groups were equal, and then all data were analyzed. A technology failure in one setting led to the loss of one participant's data.

[6]Puerto Rico is a culturally and linguistically distinct U.S. territory. Puerto Ricans hold U.S. citizenship, but they are without full rights granted to U.S.-born citizens in the 50 states. Thus, we allowed Puerto Rican participants to select whether they identified as immigrants or U.S.-born receiving community members.

contact. All Italian RCMs identified as White. Of the U.S. RCMs who reported high contact, 60% identified as White, 20% as Latinx, 13% as Black, and 6% as multiracial; of those who reported low contact, 53% identified as White and 47% as Black. All were at least age 18 (see Table 1). While all participants resided in their respective geographic regions, they did not live in the same neighborhoods and were not necessarily connected to each other in any other way.

Data Collection

Qualitative methods, which allow for a rich understanding of complex community dynamics, were used to explore the ways in which immigrants and RCMs develop psychological sense of community (PSOC) in territorial and relational communities. We recruited participants from public settings (e.g., festivals, soccer matches, laundromats, parks) and through snowball sampling, word-of-mouth, and fliers. Participants received oral and written informed consent; signed consent was waived to protect confidentiality and allay immigration status concerns. Audio-recorded, 1- to 2-hour interviews were conducted between January 2012 and October 2013 in homes and public settings (e.g., libraries, community centers, universities) by trained interviewers using a semi-structured interview guide. Interviews were conducted in Italian (in Italy) or English (in the U.S.)[7] and included such topics as follows: community experiences and PSOC, interactions with RCMs and immigrants, family make-up and immigration history, acculturation, and attitudes toward immigration, immigrants, and RCMs. Demographic information was collected. In Lecce, participants were not compensated; in Torino, they were given a choice of pencils or a shopping bag; in the U.S., they received $15. Interviews were transcribed verbatim in their interview language and checked for accuracy by the team that collected them. Identifying information shared by participants was removed to protect confidentiality. The institutional review boards of the universities all approved the protocol.

Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were analyzed in the interview language by each team following a shared thematic analysis approach. Open and axial coding was used to allow iterative thematic categories to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). An iterative coding framework was developed across all settings through successive approximations to capture both convergent and divergent content, cultural context, themes, and processes related to participants' experiences in their communities. As data analyses progressed, this coding framework was continuously applied, expanded, and adjusted to fit the data in each setting. While the U.S.-based research team worked exclusively in English, the bilingual Italian team translated their emergent codes and combined them with the U.S. team's work to create a coding template. We continued to expound upon the template as our full teams came to consensus. Then, pairs within each team coded each transcript separately with the finalized template, compared their coding, and came back to full team to discuss any divergences in coding between them. In addition to meetings, we wrote memos about the analytic content to ensure coding remained consistent across pairs and within and among the site teams. Coded data

[7]This ability to speak the language of the receiving community was assumed to be a basic necessity for participants to have the potential to have formed meaningful relations with the other groups being studied.

were entered into ATLAS.ti software. Analysis was conducted through parallel queries posed to all data sets and explored through discussion within and across site teams. Italian quotes were translated into English for this paper.

Trustworthiness

The study's trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was bolstered in multiple ways. Credibility (i.e., accurate depiction of multiple realities) and dependability (i.e., consistency of findings) were enhanced through diverse participant interviews, observations, negative case analyses, and member checks. Confirmability (i.e., objectivity of data collection and analyses) was supported through broad, neutral, flexible questioning, reflexivity, and team data collection and analyses. Transferability (i.e., applicability of findings to other settings) was improved through open questions and observations that allowed for substantial detail so that readers can determine how results may apply to their settings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Results

Our analyses revealed that first- and second-generation immigrants and RCMs across contexts reported belonging to multiple communities, though the types of communities to which they belonged diverged in some ways. Moreover, all participants reported forming and experiencing PSOC in numerous, yet similar, ways (see Table 2). Indeed, although we probed for differences, we were struck by the many similarities that emerged among participant groups (i.e., immigrant, RCM, city, country) and between- and within-demographic groups that emerged as meaningful in analysis (e.g., gender, age). We discuss convergences that arose in constructions of multiple psychological sense of community (MPSOC) and highlight instances when themes diverged.

Multiple Psychological Senses of Community

Consistent with the literature (e.g., Brodsky & Marx, 2001), across locales, all participants in our study belonged to and experienced PSOC with multiple shared and unique communities.

Micro and Macro Belonging—Most immigrants described simultaneously belonging to their or their parents' countries of origin and/or ethnic communities along with the local community. While RCMs often described local, territorial communities as meaningful in their entirety, immigrants across locales tended to define local communities as overlapping relational micro communities (e.g., local immigrant community, friend group, co-workers). Rather than including everyone in the territory as part of "their community," immigrants' local communities comprised "the people I get in contact with in this place and who matter for me now," as a first-generation immigrant in Lecce stated. Reflecting this phenomenon, no U.S. first-generation immigrants viewed territorial communities as most important, but one third of U.S. RCMs did. Nonetheless, RCMs and immigrants alike were inclined to identify relational communities (e.g., interest groups, friends, family), as opposed to territorial communities (e.g., towns) as most important.

Community Size—Aligned with prior PSOC research, participants across locales tended to describe a stronger PSOC with smaller communities. An RCM in Torino stated,

> I consider community people I have relations with. Others are conational, not of the very community. We are conational, we are part of the same nation, we have the same rights and duties but they are not in my relational and close sphere.

A U.S. RCM highlighted challenges considering larger territories "communities":

> I am not sure what defines Americans as a community. There's so many different types. … I don't really think of [the U.S.] as a community. When I think of a community, I might think like a small city or a neighborhood.

Still, many Latinx and Albanian immigrants, along with RCMs with international experiences, considered themselves global citizens. Although they didn't often describe strong PSOC from this membership, such a broad community allowed people with different nationalities and immigration statuses to belong. As a first-generation immigrant in Lecce stated,

> I feel neither 100% Albanian nor 100% Italian. I'm a world citizen, somehow. … I know one more culture, one more language. All these things help me to interact with people. I think I would understand immigrants, be they Africans or Arabs, better than Italians could.

A Lecce RCM shared, "Since I lived many years abroad, my reference community has always been that of a global tribe." In contrast, Moroccans rarely referred to a global community; when they did, it sounded abstract, as a second-generation immigrant illustrated:

> Concerning community, I see myself as a world citizen; I don't classify myself as something. I see more a whole world community, but specifically, my relations are with my friends, my family and people I meet every day, so the Italian society.

RCMs across locales, particularly those who reported low contact with immigrants, rarely defined themselves as global community members.

Community Salience—When speaking about the multiple communities with which they identified, participants across locales frequently defined their communities through close and consistent relationships. This was the case across multiple settings, including neighborhoods, universities, schools, workplaces, and places of worship (particularly for Moroccan immigrants and Christian U.S. participants). These relationships were often further defined as involving people with whom they felt some similarity. Thus, their sense of belonging was based on proximity, ongoing interaction, closeness, and perceptions of similarity. A U.S. RCM described her most important community as her sports team because,

> The people I spend majority of my time with is my coaches [and] my friends … We all share the same interests, we all like the same things … enjoy the same sports and things like that.

A first-generation immigrant in Torino affirmed, “Community is the group of people I talk, I live, I work with. To me, this is the community. Not the Arab, French or Italian community. To me, the community is … people I share things with.”

The Components of Immigrant and RCM MPSOC

There were many convergences in how participants reported forming their PSOC across the many communities to which they belonged. Below we describe themes that arose in their experiences of PSOC, which we organized under McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) framework.

Membership—Although participants often referred to the community as a whole to define membership, as noted above, in describing community members, they often distinguished between those who were similar or different from them in particular. A Torino RCM illustrated:

> I distinguish who is part of my community from who is not because I can choose the former, so they are people with expectations, aims similar to mine; we think in a similar way. … We are not all the same, but, more or less, we all make the same reasoning.

As discussed further below, immigrants and RCMs developed membership along lines of shared values, goals, problems, and support. For immigrants, citizenship was seen as needed for membership, as stated by a second-generation immigrant in Lecce: “How can I feel myself to be a member if I don’t have the right to vote?”

Threat and shared problems.: Across locales, membership divisions often occurred around safety and threat. In particular, many U.S. RCMs who had low contact with immigrants explicitly defined immigrants as threats to RCMs’ culture and well-being. This was reflected in one woman’s dislike of multilingual telephone answering systems because, to her, they signified immigrants’ gain at RCMs’ expense: “There’s some power with this group. … All of a sudden now we have to use that. … In my age, I’m not trying to learn too much of anything.” In Italy, threat descriptions were less explicit, yet visible in concerns that immigrants would not assimilate to RCM culture. A Lecce RCM explained, “If [immigrants] want to live permanently in our country, they have to integrate themselves into our society without losing their cultural traditions but only when these traditions are consistent with our culture.” Meanwhile, some immigrants viewed RCMs as threats to their relational communities, negatively impacting values they wished to instill in their children or causing harm for unauthorized immigrants. A U.S. first-generation immigrant shared: “Blacks and Hispanics, we don’t go along.… Blacks say we don’t like you ‘cause you taking our jobs, and we tell them, well, we do the job that you don’t want to do.”

Threats not only separated immigrants and RCMs but also united them. Participants across locales described shared local territorial community problems, including issues with property management, parking, crime, and cleanliness. A first-generation immigrant mirrored the concerns of U.S. RCMs:

> Most people feel like downtown Baltimore is not secure … There are bars, a lot of drunk people who get robbed … a lot of car accidents … a lot of issues with the rats too, which is pretty disgusting.

A Torino RCM echoed,

> This neighborhood has always been a very difficult one. Before the risk was drug consumption, but also now the cultural level is very low. … Only two parents in my daughter's class are college graduates. … People go away, and lodgings are rented to just arrived immigrants who are disoriented too.

For many participants, but not all, problems like these eroded the positive image of community and PSOC.

Language.: One way of becoming a member of the shared local community was to speak the community's majority language, explained both RCMs and immigrants. A first-generation immigrant in the U.S. explained that he no longer felt treated as a guest when he learned English:

> That changed everything because that way you can communicate with people a lot more. … Learning English changes a lot, because you let people know how you feel and what you're thinking. … I even started dating an African American girl after that, so I felt comfortable then 'cause I could speak to anybody.

RCM opinions matched immigrants' experiences, as an Italian RCM expressed:

> Who's not Italian needs to learn the Italian language. That helps a lot. … If one shows that he is trying to understand things, others' reactions show that they are happy. Therefore, who wants to fit in here has to make this effort.

Second-generation immigrants concurred that learning the majority language was important because, "You live in this society, you should understand it, and do not lock yourself in your house," according to a second-generation Torino immigrant. In this way, language both created membership and excluded others from membership. For immigrants not fluent in the local community's majority language, their language of origin served as a basis for forming important relational communities. In detailing who belonged to the Latinx community, a U.S. first-generation immigrant shared, "They get together because that's the only way they communicate, because they don't speak [English]… So that makes them still together in this country, they help each other." Second-generation immigrants agreed that language united immigrants: "The biggest thing at this point is language, like a lot of people in the Latino community maintain Spanish as their primary language even after living here for a long time." Albanian immigrants did not seem to experience language-based exclusion, as many were familiar with Italian premigration.

Common activities.: Interests that facilitated participation in shared activities created common membership among individuals who diverged in other ways. For example, some U.S. RCMs developed community around sports because "those are signs of like American traditions, American values, American football, American baseball." Across locales, immigrants and RCMs formed communities in places of worship. Particularly for

Moroccans in Torino, mosques served as places of worship and for socialization, making them a significant community site even for Moroccans not practicing Islam. A second-generation immigrant explained, “The mosque and all people inside are a community. Religion ties us together strongly. Although you don’t really know people, you feel that they are part of the same ‘family’.” Schools and workplaces also presented important settings for fostering membership. An Italian RCM shared, “The school is really a very strong focal point among parents, the founding core, say, it’s what started to build this [neighborhood].” Finally, particularly for immigrants but also for RCMs who wished to connect with their heritage, cultural festivals and events allowed for deeper membership.

Shared values and diversity.: Membership boundaries were often permeable for RCMs and immigrants across locales, based on openness, acceptance, and diversity. Centered on these values, communities could be open to membership changes. When asked what it took to be a member of the Latinx community, immigrants frequently responded with themes of respect and appreciation that extended beyond ascribed traits:

> Just being interested and enjoying it. You don’t necessarily need to have Latino in your blood. … One of my cousins—she’s Filipino and she’s dating a Mexican American. She knows the language, she’s so involved in the Latino community.

For many U.S. participants, diversity was seen as typical of local communities and often celebrated. An RCM described her community as, “People from all over, from different countries.” Immigrants also noted diversity: “The only way to explain how America is: It’s very diverse. There’s people who are born here, there’s people who are not born here. … It’s very open.” For Italian and U.S. RCMs who reported high contact with immigrants, their welcome to newcomers was important, as diversity was seen to enhance community. An Italian RCM shared,

> In this neighborhood, we teach our kids not to be afraid of foreigners, not be afraid of the poor, of the other. Therefore, there is a climate of calm and trust. One of the characteristics that defines this community is multiculturalism. It has always been the neighborhood that welcomed.

While participants were hesitant to label characteristics needed for membership, analyses revealed beliefs that unity was essential for community. An Italian RCM explained: “Community is that body where there is union, commonality of goals, where people cooperate and get along.”

Unity often came from common values and practices, and so, in some cases, receiving community membership was seen as coming at the expense of maintaining one’s original culture, at least in public. While not described as uniformly positive or negative, most immigrants and RCMs discussed expected assimilation. “I guess everybody shares the same values that’s in the constitution,” contended a U.S. RCM. A Lecce first-generation immigrant stated that for an immigrant to become part of the local community, “Surely, you have to demonstrate that you are a regular person. That you have a different culture, but you are still a person. … It becomes difficult when immigrants behave differently than they are expected.” A U.S. second-generation immigrant explained that one gains local community membership by,

> Doing norms. You're gonna find it weird if … you're eating lunch [and] Sally has [a] sandwich. Joe has [a] sandwich, and Jose has tortilla, steak, and rice. … The little things make the difference. What shows you watch, what music you listen to.

Despite "respect for diversity" permitting shared membership, immigrants across locales reported being excluded from membership in the community they shared with RCMs. Exclusion was performed through discrimination and policies, a first-generation Torino immigrant illustrated: "Sometimes you can feel different.… At the airport, Italians go first to the check in [safety control], and then immigrants. So, there, you feel to belong to the other community."

Immigrant-specific issues.: For immigrants across locales, policies related to citizenship, voting rights, and employment access were seen as vital for becoming territorial community members. As explained by a second-generation immigrant in Lecce, "I feel like a black swan here, because we are really few, I mean the foreign people who are really integrated and have a regular job." A first-generation immigrant in Torino echoed, "[Since I cannot vote] I feel like an unrecognized son." Citizenship was seen to strengthen membership, as a U.S. first-generation immigrant described: "It gives me a sense of responsibility … as far as the community and being a good citizen."

Shared Emotional Connection—Participants often reported emotional connections within study-designed groups (immigrants, RCMs) due to common histories and cultures. They also formed this connection across other groups through proximal and distal shared experiences.

Same plight, common goals.: Many immigrants described feeling connected to a larger immigrant community—particularly those who shared their legal status, immigration generation, and/or ethnicity, but also immigrants of all backgrounds. A first-generation immigrant in Lecce elucidated, "My community, right now, embraces foreigners, also from other countries [than mine], who live in Italy and have the same experience I did. They came here as I did, we share the same experiences." Statements like "I believe that every Latino is after the same goals. … Most members of the community want to help and support each other" were expressed among immigrants and echoed by RCMs in the U.S., who turned to their ancestry for understanding:

> There's a sense of home that happens when you [spend time with people from your country of origin]. … You don't have to speak English [or] try to figure out how you're supposed to do X, Y, or Z 'cause it's totally foreign. … You share a cultural history … even if you may be from two totally different parts of your country, there's some similarity … faced with a sea of un-similarity that some of the differences that may have kept you from not knowing each other in your home country may have [dissipated].

While immigration is not as common to the national narrative in Italy, children of immigrants across locales described bonding with second-generation immigrants, regardless of their parents' origins:

> We share those same things. We are children of people who immigrated here. … We might be the one who speaks English for our family, and so that's a common theme … you have the kids filling out the tax papers. If the boss calls, they answer … 'cause mom and dad don't speak English well. … At the end of the day, it doesn't matter if you are from the Middle East or from Central America … you go home to the same story.

These connections also joined them with their local communities:

> The Italian community I see has … an increasing number of 2nd generation people from other nations who, sooner or later, will obtain Italian citizenship. … Many of my friends have grown up in Italy and while they do not have Italian citizenship, they feel Italian. For example, I learned the Romanian language thanks to them. This community is made up by young people who share feelings and thoughts, who have different dreams … and they experience feelings similar to mine [referring to lack of interest in going back to their parents' country of origin], simply because they see Italy as their original country.

Culture.: Common backgrounds and practices of the local community, including shared memories, celebrations, interests, lifestyles, ideas, and food, were important to the development of PSOC. An RCM in Lecce explained,

> There are several local celebrations. During summer, there is a festival that takes place for 5 days. During winter, we have a festival to celebrate food. All of these traditions strengthen our sense of belonging to our community. These are the moments to celebrate the community.

Culture was defined and enacted locally; certain locales supported and passed on traditions that nourished collective memory more than other locales. In Lecce, all participants agreed that religious ceremonies and holidays created a foundation for families, while in Torino, local traditions were less important and rarer for RCMs, as one woman highlighted: "In our community the contrary of tradition is deeply valued: trend, innovation, temporary. Compared to the past, today everything is quickened, changeable." Lecce, where RCMs appeared to value traditions, is largely rural, whereas Torino is a large metropolitan area with a social and cultural life under rapid change. In the U.S., participants' discussion of cultural festivals and shared holidays seemed to suggest efforts to enact shared culture as well.

Common experiences.: RCMs and immigrants also developed shared connections through positive and negative common experiences. In the U.S., connections sometimes formed among people who shared experiences of racism related to being a racial minority. A first-generation immigrant explained how she was thankful to live in an African American community

> because we see how they progress, how they fight, how they struggle. … I was infatuated with all of them, for all the history, for what [they] have been able to develop and the rights that they have been able to conquer.

For immigrants raised in inclusive local communities, this connection developed through experiences shared with RCMs. Another immigrant reasoned,

> Since I was raised here as a young kid, I really have a lot friends that are Spanish, but majority of them are born here and most of my friends are also African Americans, the guys that I grew up with.

A second-generation immigrant in Torino similarly shared: “My community is the one I [spend time] with. So … my friends, ‘cause I play soccer with them. … We walk around, we eat together.

Fulfillment of Needs—Across all samples, participants often spoke of need ful-fillment at the individual level rather than “community needs” or their integration. Depending on the need, immigrants and RCMs counted on multiple communities of varying types and sizes:

> I turn to everybody. I knock at doors again and again. And if a door slams in my face, I go around to the back door … If this organization doesn’t work for you, then there will be another one. … Write to [the president] again … until you get an answer. If you never get it, so turn to the media. Find your resources.
>
> (US)

> I ask my mom or my family, then my boyfriend and my friends. It depends on the kind of problem. I look for someone who is relevant to it.
>
> (Lecce)

> There are needs for which I can easily ask my family, or if I need something else, I can ask my Italian friends. It always depends on the kind of need.
>
> (Torino)

Relational communities.: Participants across locales usually reported relying on relational communities to meet their needs. A Lecce RCM echoed many participants:

> I turn to my family, my mom, my dad, friends, the closest friends, my girlfriend, people I trust. I turn to people I do know can help me. If I have a specific problem, I would go to the persons I know can help me but, always, they are friends or someone I already knew for a long time.

Often, needs fulfilled by these communities were intangible, such as emotional and social support, though sometimes they fulfilled material needs, such as food and shelter. For immigrants, larger relational communities, such as ethnic and cultural groups, could also meet needs of companionship and belonging. A second-generation immigrant in Italy shared, “If I have a problem, I talk about that to an Arab friend more than an Italian, because I think he/she can understand better, because we have the same point of view.” A U.S. first-generation immigrant concurred,

> It brightens up your day if you go to a Latino store or … restaurant and everybody welcomes you with a big smile, and [if] you’re having a bad day … you just forget about it ‘cause you feel like you’re back at home.

Territorial communities and institutions.: Participants diverged by country in their views of how territorial communities met needs. In the U.S., these communities were seen to meet

tangible needs (financial, basic necessities, safety) as opposed to the intangible needs relational communities met. Municipalities, states, and the country were seen to have safety net programs for both immigrants and RCMs. “Sometimes they give you money [and] food if don’t have food,” explained an immigrant. Many commented on education and job opportunities that territorial communities provided. Occasionally, communities were seen to fulfill intangible needs, such as a sense of belonging and exposure to diversity. When asked what needs a local community met, a second-generation immigrant replied, “Feeling like home … sense of security. Knowing I belong here.” When communities did not meet needs, it appeared to erode PSOC. Both RCMs and immigrants commented on similar tangible needs not being met by communities. An RCM commented, “I’ve been mugged twice and if I don’t know where my kids are I do worry.” Another shared, “I see poverty in Baltimore, I see homelessness is an issue in my community, I see drugs.”

Perhaps as a sign of their inadequacy and inefficiency, fewer immigrants in Italy made references to institutions in territorial communities. A second-generation immigrant in Lecce explained, “Several municipalities are expected to have offices dedicated to immigrants’ stuff, to meet their needs. Nonetheless, people are obliged to turn to fellow immigrants who are not professionals … because offices are lacking.” All immigrants in Italy turned to family, friends, or acquaintances—both immigrants and RCMs—before seeking institutional support. A first-generation immigrant shared, “If I need documents or papers but I don’t know the law, I count on my Italian friends … for some help.” Moroccan immigrants also turned to Muslim community members, colleagues, and employers to address legal and administrative matters: “Usually I go to Moroccan people. I also turn to my employer; he is 84, but he is very capable,” declared a first-generation immigrant. Similarly, Lecce RCMs were less apt to report their local community met specialized needs, such as health care, perhaps due to widespread distrust of public services and lack of availability in this rural community. One RCM stated:

> I would like to combine the approach in the north [of Italy], for instance, the bureaucratic effectiveness, with our southern lifestyle that is relaxed, warm and welcoming… We run into difficulties with … the health system. Luckily, I have never moved north for health reasons, but there are a lot of persons who do.

In contrast, the larger urban Torino community was seen as a proxy for the whole country and satisfied these needs: “Italy satisfies most of my needs, otherwise I would have already gone abroad.”

Territorial communities and their institutions were seen by immigrants and some RCMs across locales to require immigration-related policy changes to meet the needs of their newest community members. “The big [need] right now [is] immigration,” shared a second-generation immigrant in the U.S.

> There’s so many immigration laws that are crazy. … You come into this country and … you go through so many like security check ups. It feels like. … you’re classified as a different ethnicity than American.

A first-generation immigrant in Torino agreed:

> Laws do not permit a real integration. People who do not have Italian citizenship cannot vote, so they cannot take part in the decisions of the country. It is bad because you live there… but there is nothing to do.

Mutual Influence—When participants considered how they influenced and were influenced by their communities, they again focused generally on the individual level and to their relational micro communities rather than territorial macro communities. In this way, proximity and salience again emerged as significant to the perception of mutual influence.

Being influenced.: Immigrants and RCMs across locales generally resisted considering communities' influences. "No, I am not influenced by other people. I stick to my opinion when someone gives me some advice. I do things on my own," contended a Lecce RCM. When they identified influences, most referred to relational communities—family, friends, religion. "I would say my friends and to an extent, I guess my local community affect my choices," shared a U.S. RCM. Speaking for many, an immigrant in Torino echoed, "What my friends think is very important to me. So, I do refer to their advice. Then, there are some choices I have to do with my parents, necessarily." An immigrant in Lecce agreed,

> Each decision depends on my family: I could not choose to live in another city or to have a holyday without their permission. … If you want to do something that can hurt your family, you do renounce because the tie is stronger.

For those who admitted outside influence, immigrants more so than RCMs saw their local communities as coercive forces. A Puerto Rican who identified as an immigrant shared:

> I have to dress differently because that's kind of the way that is accepted here. … I like to wear … Puerto Rican clothes … shoes, they're more bright and more 'out there', and it was kind of frowned upon, so I've had to change the way I dress. … You are changed by this environment.

Recognizing influences facilitated purposeful actions to disrupt them, though this varied by group. In the U.S., resistance efforts were discussed:

> Being part of a minority group influences my personal choices in terms the priority I put on the types of jobs I want to have. … I am very social justice focused … working to like dispel stereotypes even on a daily basis, just having very purposeful conversations.

For many immigrants in Lecce, RCM and immigrant communities were seen as coercive forces to be opposed: "I ignore [the influence]. My native community wants me to be quieter but I think they are shallow. Therefore, I decided to ignore them." While Moroccan immigrants acknowledged receiving community influences, they did not indicate resistance. A second-generation immigrant stated,

> Since I'm a Moroccan living in Italy I have to respect the Italian community, because I will always have relationships of every type, at the supermarket, at University. … You will always take the Italian community into account since you live here.

Exerting influence.: Interestingly, regardless of citizenship status, most participants felt that they could influence relational micro communities. A Lecce RCM shared, “I can influence my family, the people with whom I live and study.” A U.S. first-generation immigrant explained that at his job, “the biggest community that I have, [the family of customers] love me … and so I teach them how to be good kids. … So that’s basically … how much I influence a lot of people.” Influence came through modeling, a first-generation immigrant in Torino said:

> I can be a reference point, because other Moroccans can think of me as a graduate immigrant, and students can think, ‘Some people did it!’ This can be encouraging, helpful. And I’m pleased to be seen as a positive example.

Nonetheless, participants did not believe they could individually exert much influence on larger territorial communities. A U.S. immigrant demonstrated this disconnect, stating that if we are “consistent in what we say … what we do … in our principles … [we] are always influencing people,” but then indicated she had no influence on local, state, or national communities. A first-generation immigrant in Torino similarly referred back to influencing smaller relational communities: “I have influence on my friends, some suggestions, but few. I was part of the board of [a religious association in Italy], so in this small association I had influence.” Participants often attributed this lack of influence to the salience and size of territorial communities. A U.S. second-generation immigrant shared,

> If you’re concentrated on one group, you’d probably have … a better chance. I probably have more of an influence on the Spanish community because they can communicate with me and I can communicate with them. And I can identify with their struggles.

A U.S. RCM explained, “It’s a giant state and I’m one person. So, I don’t do anything.… It is a big country, I’m one person. … I guess you can say about voting.” In Italy, citizenship was viewed as key for influence. In Lecce, immigrant interviewees stated that they could not exert influence on local and national communities because they lacked the right to vote.

While being politically active was seen as the primary way of individually influencing larger territorial communities, it had its limitations. A U.S. RCM shared,

> I do have a voice in the city, I vote there. … You can talk to your legislators, you can write letters, you can talk to other people, but it’s hard to know what, that having a say means more than that. … I’m not driving any agenda.

To have a greater influence, U.S. participants highlighted the importance of forming collective movements, although they often did not directly connect themselves with the movements. When asked if she influenced her state, a second-generation immigrant answered,

> Individually probably not, but collectively … humans in numbers with the same idea, the same goal are [a] very influential force. People think that their voice means nothing if they’re individual, but if you get thousands and thousands of people with that same voice booming, it’s a very moving and influential force that can definitely affect change.

Discussion

While heated immigration rhetoric reverberates globally, impacts of immigration are felt locally by immigrants and members of their receiving communities. Our study sought to examine how these members formed sense of community in shared communities. Although we probed for differences, we found copious similarities among participants—often irrespective of immigration status, nationality, age, gender, race, ethnicity, or context—in the communities to which they belonged and the ways in which they experienced and created sense of community.

All participants reported simultaneously belonging to multiple communities, with relational communities generally reported as more meaningful than territorial ones. Coinciding with extant literature (e.g., Obst & White, 2007; Royal & Rossi, 1996), small, proximal, and salient communities appeared most important for fostering nearly all aspects of PSOC. Whereas macro (primarily territorial) communities were often viewed as merely places where individuals were situated, these micro (primarily relational) communities were places in which people chose and valued membership, felt strong bonds and connections, fulfilled their needs, and could shape and impact outcomes. Participants regularly sought out relational communities to fulfill most needs, turning to territorial communities only for specific tangible needs. Even then, for many immigrants and some RCMs, territorial communities were less adept at meeting these needs than family, friends, and colleagues. Similarly, while participants—particularly immigrants—often viewed territorial communities as coercive forces to be resisted, they were apt to consider bidirectional effects of relational communities on their decisions. Participants believed that they had a stronger influence on micro relational communities and limited abilities to exert change on macro territorial communities. Results suggest that enhancing opportunities for immigrant and RCM engagement in relational micro communities may be most attainable and impactful.

Restrictive policies impacted immigrants' membership in territorial communities. Without citizenship, immigrants were blocked from exerting institutionalized influence, such as voting, and also struggled to fulfill basic needs, such as from lack of access to living-wage jobs. Citizenship was seen by immigrants to enhance one's ties of membership and connection to the community and increase the feeling that one was viewed by RCMs and institutions as "belonging." Findings suggest that while belonging to relational micro communities is important and more accessible for seemingly all participants regardless of immigration status, we must not divorce the study of PSOC from structures of power that privilege certain groups. It is incumbent upon us to consider structural changes, such as immigration policies, in order to shape PSOC.

Shared membership emerged as a primary component through which new and established community members could develop relationships and form PSOC. While this happened most directly in settings with more diversity and those in which specific opportunities existed for newcomers and RCMS to interact (e.g., public schools, work, organizations, clubs), immigrants and RCMs across contexts developed shared membership around common activities, traits, and values. Valuing diversity enabled belonging by new and existing community members, as those who valued diversity believed including members

with nonshared characteristics strengthened their communities rather than detracting from them. However, these convictions of “embracing diversity” were often paradoxically coupled with concrete expectations for conformity and unity in order to form community. While participants noted multiculturalism benefits, they also expressed beliefs that members needed to align with certain established community norms to be “accepted” as a member. Often, newer members (i.e., immigrants) were expected to abide by the expectations of more established members (i.e., RCMs). Expectations were enforced through overt and covert expectations leading to individual and systemic discrimination. When immigrants resisted and spurred community change, RCMs often viewed this as a threat to their shared communities, reflecting a desire for power structures and the status quo to go unchanged.

Even when unity and conformity were not directly expressed as needed for membership, participants noted how shared impactful experiences, histories, and cultures strengthened bonds with the community. Often this belief was manifest in participants’ convictions that immigrants were most comfortable with other immigrants from their countries of origin. In shared experiences, however, the bounds of membership were not so concrete and exclusionary. Particularly in the U.S., immigrant participants developed meaningful connections to the immigrant community as a whole, regardless of their countries of origin, due to their similar immigration challenges and common goals. Likewise, their children described how experiences of growing up with immigrant parents in receiving communities led them to identify with other second-generation immigrants, regardless of their parents’ nationality or ethnicity. In Italy and the U.S., bonds were created across immigrants and RCMs due to shared problems in living (e.g., crime, lack of services). In the U.S., many immigrants also developed connections with nonimmigrant people of color, bonding over their shared need to resiliently respond to racial oppression. Findings point to how expectations about another’s preferences can lead to conditions of exclusion, nonshared community experiences, and lack of belonging while openness to higher order shared experiences (immigration, racism) led to the opposite. While individuals may not have sought to associate only with people exactly “like” them, those who focused only on differences most often did so, perhaps due to a lack of opportunities to find and build shared values, interests, and experiences. Without opportunities to learn otherwise, assumptions of difference and exclusion remained untested and expansion of communities was not possible.

In all, the findings highlight the importance of locating shared interests, values, and experiences, and making space for both micro and macro belonging. All participants converged and diverged on numerous characteristics that could set the stage for membership in many communities beyond immigration status—locale, values, life stages, activities, to name a few. At the macro community level, a shared territorial sense of community may be enhanced by attention to the shared needs, desires, and experiences of both immigrants and RCMs in a given context. A second site of overlap is those characteristics that are not bound by culture, nationality, geography, nor length of time in a place. In the U.S., the lack of shared immigrant-RCM PSOC was often explained as immigrants not being given a chance to belong, through a not always malicious, but often misguided, sense that immigrants preferred associations with others who were more “like them,” nearly always described as “other immigrants.” The problem is in who gets to define who is like another, that is, the boundaries for exclusion. As intersectional human beings, all community members brought

diversity to their communities along with many important shared characteristics, recognition of which could also lead to unity.

These findings also point to ways in which the community-diversity dialectic can be bridged, though they also bring to light significant challenges we must confront in doing so. In particular, the meaning of diversity varies based on the context. For example, in our study, diversity was conceptualized and experienced differently across geographic regions, and in the visible and invisible dimensions of diversity among immigrant and receiving community members. Moreover, for the U.S. and Italian communities, structures and systems of racial hierarchy and oppression continue to make macro belonging challenging for minorities who are defined by visible aspects of diversity associated with power and privilege. Therefore, we must consider what macro belonging does, can, and should look like in communities that remain stratified and segregated along racial, economic, and/or other social lines. Results demonstrated that individuals tended to find more belonging in micro, relational communities rather than macro, territorial communities, perhaps as a result. Thus, in addressing the community-diversity dialectic, we must consider larger structures of oppression and power. Aiming to recognize both differences and similarities within intersectional identities might be an important step. In the U.S., for instance, attention to racial and ethnic differences has often trumped shared economic challenges that might otherwise unite seemingly diverse community members in shared social and systemic struggles. Recent social movements, such as #MeToo, March for Our Lives, Black Lives Matter, the Women's March, and #NoBanNoWall, provide examples of communities formed around systemic issues whose membership otherwise diverges in terms of their characteristics, such as race, immigration status, gender, age, and socioeconomic status. In addition, these results remind us that communities do not form in a vacuum; societal power structures, embodied in political, economic, and legal systems impact their shape, membership, and relationships. For example, in Italy, it is particularly crucial to address to what extent resettlement programs and, more generally, the type of public support provided by immigration policies contribute to making immigrants deemed undesirable members of their new communities (Rochira, 2018; Rochira, Fasanelli, & Liguori, 2015). Shaping PSOC through both societal structures and individual relationships may thus allow for the incorporation of diversity.

Limitations

While a primary strength of this study is its inclusion of the narratives of both immigrants and RCMs in multiple, distinct contexts, the cross-national nature of the study also presents important limitations. We took great care to engage in consistent data collection and analyses across sites; however, linguistic, geographic, and cultural differences created challenges for our research teams to reconcile. The backgrounds and experiences of the interviewers, ranging from undergraduate- to graduate-level training, and across ethnicity, gender, age, and other diversity dimensions, may have influenced responses. Alternative findings from other interviewer–participant combinations are unknowable; however, rapport, open-ended, and neutral questions and interviewer training were used to reduce any inconsistencies. Although we worked closely to come to consensus across teams throughout

all stages of the work, some level of meaning is necessarily lost, confounded, or changed through such a multilingual, cross-national study.

Our samples also diverged in important ways. Immigrant participants generally matched the immigration patterns of their communities, and thus were, on average, younger than RCMs. All interviews were conducted in the majority language of the receiving community. Thus, any differences in views of first-generation immigrants who do not speak enough English or Italian to engage in these interviews are also unknown. Moreover, 4 years have passed between initial data collection and the production of this manuscript. Those years have been marked by changing, and often increasingly negative, immigration rhetoric across our nations, suggesting that different responses may be found if the study were repeated now or in other regions of our countries or world. Finally, while these experiences represent the reported realities of our participants, as with all qualitative research, readers must decide the applicability of these findings to their communities.

Our results reflect the self-reported experiences of a diverse set of community members across three contexts. As such, while PSOC themes converged across participant groups and contexts, they were in reference to both shared and nonshared communities. In other words, we conducted an individual-level exploration of a community-level construct, a perennial challenge in the field of community psychology. Despite limitations, this study of PSOC among newer and more established community members presents novel commonalities—the important, often ignored finding of no differences—that can inform future work in this area.

Future Directions

The results of our multinational, multigroup study support what in quantitative terms is the null hypothesis; that is, individuals are more alike than they are different, and they experience and create PSOC in similar ways, regardless of their individual characteristics and geographic locations. Our study also highlighted numerous characteristics that newer and more established community members share beyond their divergence on immigration status, and highlights how findings of no difference where one is assumed can be as crucial as findings of difference. Through these characteristics, values, and locales, individuals may find commonality and form community with one another. Future multisite studies are needed to explore findings further. In particular, future research may help to illuminate the specific characteristics that RCMs and immigrants share and find most salient, from which interventions to enhance PSOC can be developed. Research should be undertaken through a framework that incorporates intersectionality, power, and MPSOC.

The findings also suggest that small relational communities are key to the development and maintenance of PSOC and include the people, groups, and institutions with which individuals regularly interact. Consequently, much work can and should be done to investigate settings in which immigrants and RCMs can develop shared PSOC, and ways in which these settings can be further shaped to strengthen diverse members and allow room for belonging, fulfillment of needs, connection, and influence. Our current social and political context presents an opportune time to explore the ways in which changes in macro level factors, such as public policies, and the everyday institutions that these policies impact (e.g., schools, neighborhoods, relational communities) may influence PSOC from the

perspective of both immigrants and RCMs. Research should explore the macro-level treatment of immigration and immigrants, particularly through the lens of media on individual perceptions of immigrants and immigration. An expansion of this work across other immigrant groups, including those who may be most negatively affected by the current social and political rhetoric (e.g., Muslim and Middle Eastern immigrants), is especially needed. Finally, researchers should undertake community-level analyses of PSOC in communities that are in flux.

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Highlights

- Immigrant and receiving community members co-construct sense of community in similar ways.
- Small relational communities are particularly important for developing positive sense of community.
- Members may belong to a community based on one shared characteristic while diverging on others.
- Systems that delimit membership and power may obstruct territorial community belonging.
- We must confront structural challenges rooted in power to bridge the community-diversity dialectic.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of sample

	Lecce, Italy				Torino, Italy				Baltimore/D.C, United States			
	Immigrant		Receiving Community		Immigrant		Receiving Community		Immigrant		Receiving Community	
Generation/Contact	1st	2nd	High	Low	1st	2nd	High	Low	1st	2nd	High	Low
n	18	13	14	16	20	20	20	20	15	15	15	15
Gender (% female)	55.6	42.9	52.9	50.0	50.0	58.0	70.0	55.0	66.7	60.0	60.0	60.0
Mean Age (*SD*)	33.4 (11.9)	22.1 (4.4)	31.6 (12.5)	31.4 (4.8)	31.4 (12.6)	21.0 (2.3)	45.3 (8.7)	36.4 (16.2)	36.3(11.3)	23.2 (4.8)	43.6 (19.3)	44.7 (19.3)

Table 2

Summary of themes

Theme	Subtheme	Divergence[a]	Notes on participants and contexts[b]
Multiple psychological sense of community (PSOC)	Positive PSOC with relational communities	None	
	Positive PSOC with local territorial communities	RCM/Imm.	More consistent for RCMs across locales
	Small community size facilitates PSOC	None	
	Global community facilitates PSOC among members who diverge on other characteristics	Nationality, RCM/Imm., Contact	More consistent for Albanian and Latinx immigrants, and some RCMs who have high contact with immigrants across locales
	Consistent and close interactions, proximity, and perception of similarities facilitate PSOC	None	
Membership	Perceiving “others” (RCMs/immigrants) as threats to one’s culture/wellbeing erodes one’s membership with them	RCM/Imm., Contact	Consistent for some immigrants and many RCMs who have low contact with immigrants across locales
	Shared problems unite community members	None	
	Shared language defines membership	None	
	Shared activities support membership	None	
	Shared values define membership	None	
	Appreciation of diversity supports membership among distinct people	RCM/Imm., Contact	Consistent for most immigrants and for RCMs who have high contact with immigrants across locales
	Citizenship, voting rights, and employment access are needed for membership in a local territorial community	RCM/Imm.	More consistent for first- and second-generation immigrants across locales
Shared emotional connection	Shared plights and common goals create connections to larger community with diverse members	RCM/Imm.	More consistent for first- and second-generation immigrants across locales
	Shared territorial cultural enactment facilitates connection	Locale	More consistent for participants in Lecce
	Shared positive experiences nurture connection Shared negative experiences (e.g., racism) nurture connection	None RCM/Imm., Locale	Consistent for some first- and second-generation immigrants in the U.S.
Fulfillment of needs	Relational communities fulfill intangible needs (e.g., emotional, social support)	None	
	Relational communities fulfill tangible needs (e.g., food, shelter)	RCM/Imm., Locale	Consistent for some participants across groups and locales; chiefly consistent for immigrants in Italy
	Territorial communities fulfill tangible needs	RCM/Imm., Locale	Consistent for most RCMs across locales, and most immigrants in the U.S.
	Immigration policy changes needed to fulfill needs	RCM/Imm.	More consistent for first- and second-generation immigrants across locales
Mutual influence	Relational communities are most influential	None	

Am J Community Psychol. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2019 January 31.

Theme	Subtheme	Divergence[a]	Notes on participants and contexts[b]
	Territorial communities are coercive forces, sometimes influencing participants in undesired ways	RCM/Imm.	More consistent for first- and second-generation immigrants across locales
	Individual influence over relational micro communities	None	
	Lack of individual influence over territorial communities	None	
	Collective movements influence territorial communities	Locale	More consistent across groups in the U.S.

[a] We indicate by which factor(s) the theme diverges. While many themes were consistent across groups (indicated as "None"), some diverged by receiving community member/immigration generation (RCM/Imm.), RCMs' level of contact with immigrants (Contact), personal characteristics (e.g., Nationality), or community (Locale).

[b] If not otherwise noted, the theme is consistent with most participants across contexts in this study.