WELCOMING: THE DEVELOPMENT OF SENSE OF COMMUNITY POST-MIGRATION IN A SECLUDED NORTHERN AMERICAN CITY

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This study aimed to identify what contributes to immigrants' and refugees' psychological sense of community (PSOC) in a secluded northern American city with a very diverse and growing foreign-born population. Ten focus groups were conducted with 50 immigrants and refugees from more than 20 countries who had lived in the community for 1 to 40 years. Team-based reflexive thematic analysis was used to explore the development and maintenance of PSOC. While PSOC took time to develop, social networks catalyzed its formation. The process was quicker for younger immigrants who became more socially embedded due to the community resources they readily accessed. Equitable access to a wide array of high-quality community resources promoted PSOC. Diversity and belonging were critical for membership and the development of a shared emotional connection. Opportunities to contribute and influence the community maintained and strengthened PSOC, as did the community's social and ecological climates. Therefore, a variety of community initiatives across ecological levels may foster PSOC among newcomers.

Keywords: *Immigration, resettlement, context of reception, welcoming, psychological sense of community, qualitative.*

1. Introduction

All migrants have the potential to develop community in their new place of residence. However, the community's context is likely to shape migrants' *psychological sense of community* (PSOC; Sarason, 1974) – the subjective experience or feeling of belonging, connectedness, and identification with the community – as migrants' self-reported PSOC varies across communities (e.g., Buckingham, 2017; Buckingham et al., 2018; Maya-Jariego & Armitage, 2007; Townley et al., 2011). Positive PSOC supports both individual well-being (e.g., Pretty et al., 2006; Prezza et al., 2008) and positive community development (e.g., Bathum & Baumann, 2007; Talò et al., 2014). Therefore, individuals and communities alike would likely benefit from efforts to foster PSOC among diverse community residents. However, little empirical research to date has sought to understand what aspects of a community shape PSOC among immigrant and refugee community members in particular. Thus, this study sought to explore post-migration PSOC in Anchorage, Alaska, a secluded northern American city with a growing foreign-born population.

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1.1 Sense of community

Although PSOC has been operationalized in numerous ways, the most common definition of PSOC includes four dimensions: *Membership,* a feeling of belonging and identification with one's community; *shared emotional connection,* a sense of shared history and identification with one's community as well as community members' bonds to one another; *integration and fulfillment of needs,* a feeling that one's needs will be met by resources one receives from being a part of the community, be they practical and tangible (e.g., shelter, employment) or intangible (e.g., friendship, social support); and *mutual influence,* a sense that the community and its members both influence one another (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). PSOC can be in relation to a *territorial community*, such as a neighborhood or town, or a *relational community*, a community defined by its members' shared identities, values, and/or experiences, but not necessarily bound by geography. PSOC has most often been conceptualized and researched as a positive construct; however, research over the past few decades has also introduced the concept of *negative PSOC*; that is, if a community is dangerous, unhealthy, and potentially harmful, a person may actively distance themselves from the community in order to cope (Brodsky, 1996; Brodsky et al., 2002; Mannarini et al., 2014). People can have PSOC with different communities simultaneously, that is, *multiple psychological senses of community* (MPSOC; Brodsky & Marx, 2001).

Positive PSOC has been connected with numerous positive community and individual outcomes. At a community level, positive PSOC has been connected with higher levels of community participation (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Talò et al., 2014), belonging and community connectedness (Sonn & Fisher, 1996), and increased contributions from immigrants to their communities (Bathum & Baumann, 2007). At an individual level, positive PSOC has been associated with improved psychological well-being (Pretty et al., 2006; Prezza et al., 2008), perceived health (Ross, 2002), and life satisfaction among immigrants (Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2013; Novara et al., 2021; Ramos et al., 2017). Moreover, PSOC has been shown to mitigate the deleterious impacts of COVID-19 on one's well-being (Mannarini et al., 2022) and even negative consequences associated with discrimination (García-Cid et al., 2020). Among immigrants and refugees, weaker PSOC has been associated with psychological distress (Dillon et al., 2018), decreased sense of belonging (Dillon et al., 2018), less frequent community participation (Nuñez, 2009), and less engagement with non-immigrant community members (Perreira et al., 2006).

PSOC varies among members of a community and it also varies across communities. For example, people living in rural communities tend to report higher PSOC than their urban counterparts (Obst et al., 2002). Perceiving a community to have high quality public spaces (Francis et al., 2012) and living in a community with a shared interior courtyard (Naser & Julian, 1995) is associated with stronger positive PSOC. Who makes up the community also may impact the development of PSOC. Some studies suggest that ethnic, racial, and national diversity is related to weaker PSOC overall (e.g., Castellini et al., 2011; Hombrados-Mendieta et al., 2009), whereas others suggest that heterogeneous membership does not affect community belonging or attachment (Prezza et al., 2008). This may be related to members' divergent perceptions of whether exposure to diversity is a threat (Buckingham et al., 2018; Mannarini et al., 2016). Still, much of the research on predictors of PSOC is at the individual level. For example, feeling

attached to place (Long & Perkins, 2007), being involved in a community for a longer period of time (Prezza et al., 2001; Royal & Rossi, 1999), being married (Prezza et al., 2001), having children (Obst et al., 2002; Prezza et al., 2001), and even having certain personality characteristics (Lounsbury et al., 2003) have all been linked to PSOC. The factors likely are relevant because PSOC is formed socially. For example, people who perceive closer neighborhood relationships (Prezza et al., 2001) and who participate in local organizations have stronger PSOC (Obst et al., 2002). Note that bidirectional causality is likely, as the quality and quantity of community relationships and participation are described as both predictors and outcomes of PSOC.

There have been few studies explicitly examining what fosters PSOC among newcomers to a community, though a growing body of literature suggests that immigrants' and refugees' PSOC with their new communities of residence varies around the globe. For example, in Spain, Maya-Jariego and Armitage (2007) found that immigrants had a higher PSOC with their neighborhood communities than with their immigrant communities, but that both levels of PSOC post-migration were lower than their PSOC in their countries of origin. In a southeastern state of the U.S., Townley et al. (2011) found consistently low PSOC among immigrants across neighborhoods of different ethnic compositions. In a comparative study of cities in Italy and the U.S., Buckingham et al. (2018) found that across contexts, stronger PSOC was described as forming within the small, proximal, and salient communities within these larger cities.

1.2. *Contexts of reception*

We might turn to the concept of *context of reception* (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2014) to begin to consider why PSOC may vary among immigrants and refugees across different communities. A context of reception consists of: (a) the community's policies that impact immigrants' lives, (b) the social reception offered by longer standing residents, and (c) access to and reception by community institutions (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2014). Immigrants and refugees are simultaneously 'received' by different and nested contexts when they migrate, such as a municipality, state, and nation, all of which shape their experiences. Given its salience and immediate influence, a smaller local context, such as a municipality or county, may matter as much or more than a larger context, such as a nation, in terms of shaping experiences (Ellis & Almgren, 2009). Most contexts are not wholly positive or negative; rather, some of their aspects may support immigrants while others may present adversity (Schwartz et al., 2014). Positive aspects of receiving contexts include welcoming, openness, and acceptance from existing community members and structures alike, alongside opportunity structures and policies that support newcomers to pursue their goals and live their lives in the ways they wish; negative aspects of receiving contexts include hostility and discrimination, limited social support, and harmful policies that restrict newcomers' opportunities (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Stepick & Stepick, 2010). For example, some communities have policies in place that limit newcomers' basic rights and opportunities compared to nationals as well as curtail their options for long-term residence. In Canada, Salami et al. (2019) found that employment barriers, language barriers, and discrimination deterred immigrants' community belonging. Across different U.S. contexts, Buckingham (2017) found that Latina/e/o immigrants' PSOC was shaped by immigrants' access to immigration authorization, their interactions with existing community members, and the

degree to which they viewed existing community members as supporting their integration and desired acculturation.

1.3. The welcoming movement

Across the globe, local governments have sought to create more positive contexts of reception, in part due to the recognition that newcomer integration is closely tied to the community's prosperity. One United States (U.S.)-based non-profit organization, Welcoming America, was launched in 2009 to support U.S. communities' efforts (Welcoming America, 2016). The initiative has spread worldwide, with countries across Oceania, Europe, and North America now participating, many with their own Welcoming Cities networks (e.g., University of Oxford, n.d.; Welcoming Cities Australia, n.d.). Although participation in welcoming networks is largely symbolic, Welcoming America has created what they called a 'Welcoming Standard' from a collaborative effort across stakeholders (e.g., academics, practitioners, business, and civic leaders) with public input. This Welcoming Standard outlines processes by which communities must collaborate to promote welcoming across: *Government leadership,* the local government's inclusive systems, agencies, and programs that also strengthen community efforts; *equitable access,* the availability of community services and opportunities; *civic engagement,* access to leadership and democratic spaces to promote civic participation; *connected communities,* ways of strengthening relationships between longer-term residents and newcomers; *education,* accessible and inclusive educational systems that support workforce preparation; *economic development,* accessible and inclusive economic development systems that support skill development and leverage community talent; *and safe communities,* methods for strengthening trust between community members, law enforcement, and safety agencies (Welcoming America, 2016). This standard reflects the best available research and practice evidence for immigrant and refugee integration and inclusion, and components of welcoming can be seen to foster newcomer PSOC. For example, *connected communities* is likely to promote PSOC by enhancing interpersonal relationships and community involvement, while *education* and *economic development* are likely to fulfill needs. However, little empirical research has examined if any welcoming strategies do indeed foster PSOC.

1.4. Current study and context

One U.S. city that has established a welcoming roadmap is Anchorage, Alaska. Situated in the northernmost U.S. state that is geographically disconnected from the rest of the country, Anchorage is a secluded port city of approximately 290,000 residents on the lands of the Dena'ina Athabascan people and the largest city for over 2,000 kilometers. As a result of colonization and neocolonial practices of the U.S. government, including incentivized migration of U.S. citizens from other states to Alaska, the majority of Anchorage residents are White. The municipality also has large population shares of Indigenous, Asian, Black, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, Latina/e/o, Hispanic, and multiracial/multiethnic peoples (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). International migration, both chosen and via resettlement, to Anchorage has greatly increased over the past couple of decades, with about 9% of its population born outside of the U.S. today

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Rather than having a foreign-born population that is predominantly from one region of the world, Anchorage is home to an incredibly diverse newcomer population. Foreign-born residents come to live in Anchorage for diverse reasons, among them employment and educational opportunities, to join family, to seek safety, and via refugee resettlement (Mbise et al., 2022). Whereas approximately 39% are from Southeastern Asia (predominantly the Philippines), the remainder are from around the globe: 13% from Eastern Asia, 9% from Central America, 6% from the Caribbean, 6% from Eastern Europe, 5% from South America, 4% from Africa, 4% from Oceania, 4% from South Central Asia, 4% from neighboring North American countries, 3% from Western Europe, 2% from Northern Europe, and 1% from Western Asia. In part due to this varied newcomer population, Anchorage has 27 of the 30 most diverse public schools in the U.S. and some of the most diverse neighborhoods as well (Farrell, 2018).

In 2014, the Municipality of Anchorage established a Welcoming Anchorage initiative within the local government. Working with community partners, Welcoming Anchorage developed the community's first strategic welcoming roadmap that included: *equitable access*, language access and addressing barriers to community services for people of diverse backgrounds; *civic engagement*, an annual Welcoming Week, civic engagement academies, diversity events, and civic-community partnerships; *connected, safe, and healthy communities*, public safety, law, education, and service providers' cultural competence; *education*, childhood and adult education and language education; and *economic development and entrepreneurship*, removing barriers to entry into careers and promoting entrepreneurship (Municipality of Anchorage, n.d.).

In 2019, Welcoming Anchorage sought to build on their welcoming strategies by seeking to understand the experiences of immigrants and refugees in the municipality. Welcoming Anchorage stakeholders partnered with local professors to design and carry out a study to identify facilitators and barriers to immigrant and refugee integration and inclusion in the municipality. A robust theme, "sense of home" emerged across study focus groups, which mapped onto the construct of PSOC and led to this paper. Specifically, we explored PSOC development and maintenance among immigrants and refugees living in Anchorage from narratives of their experiences in the community post-migration.

2. Method

2.1 Design

This research is part of a larger sequential explanatory mixed-method (Ivankova et al., 2006) study of immigrant and refugee integration and inclusion in Anchorage that consisted of a multilingual survey followed by multilingual focus groups. This paper reports on reflexive thematic analyses that were conducted on the concept of "sense of home" from the multilingual focus groups. Primary project partners consisted of a health education coordinator who had resettled in Anchorage with her family from South Sudan during childhood; a special assistant to the mayor who was born in South Korea and raised in Anchorage; an assistant professor of psychology who was born in the U.S. and had migrated to Anchorage from the continental U.S. for employment; an assistant professor of social work who had immigrated to Anchorage from

Tanzania by way of Denmark and another U.S. region for employment; and an assistant professor of communication who had migrated to Anchorage from Taiwan by way of Kuwait and another U.S. region for employment. A PhD student born in the U.S. who had moved to Anchorage for her graduate education also supported data analysis and the drafting of this paper. The multidisciplinary team was intentionally multinational and multicultural with divergent experiences and roles in the community. We brought together broad perspectives that supported study design and implementation. We identified our strengths, skills, competencies, and areas for growth to share leadership, and we developed shared norms, objectives, research principles, and agendas. Our community-engaged research process helped develop trust among the team; strengthened our capacities; and enhanced the quality, relevance, and usefulness of the research (Mikesell et al., 2013). The study was approved by the University of Alaska Anchorage Institutional Review Board. A more detailed account of the study's methods is available from Buckingham et al. (2022).

2.2   Participants

Participants were eligible for the study if they were born outside of the U.S., were at least 18 years old, and lived in Anchorage. Fifty people participated in ten focus groups. With the exception of the overrepresentation of women (78%), the sample was otherwise very diverse. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 77 (M = 43, SD = 14.5). Some had directly moved to Anchorage from their countries of origin, whereas others had lived in other parts of the U.S. or other countries prior to Anchorage. Participants had lived in Anchorage for less than one year to 47 years (M = 17, SD = 10.5) and in the U.S. for less than one year to 60 years (M = 23, SD = 14.1). Both immigrants and refugees participated. All world regions were represented; participants were born in Canada, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Jordan, Mexico, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Samoa, South Korea, South Sudan, Sudan, Thailand, and Ukraine.

2.3   Procedures

Participants were recruited in two ways. At the end of a quantitative survey for the broader study, participants could indicate interest in participating in a focus group. Those who indicated interest were invited via phone by the first author. Others were invited through a collaboration with immigrant and refugee community leaders with wide networks who could share information about the study with people of diverse backgrounds, including time lived in Anchorage, age, education, profession, and income. We sought a diverse sample to examine commonalities in the formation of PSOC across immigrants and refugees living in the community.

Ten focus groups were held via videoconferencing technology over the span of two months. A different pair of research team members facilitated and took notes for each group to promote a variety of perspectives; at least one team member with personal experience of immigration or resettlement was involved in each group. Groups were organized around the seven most common languages spoken in the community: Spanish, Samoan, Hmong, Tagalog, Korean, Arabic, and English. Informed consent was provided and documented orally in the language of the focus

group. All groups not held in English were facilitated via interpretation by local professional interpreters so they were responsive to the context of Anchorage and had the requisite training and experience for effective interpretation (MacKenzie, 2016). Interpretation presents opportunities and challenges; often, no exact translation exists between languages and cultural context must be accounted for (Bergen, 2018; Vara & Patel, 2012). However, working with interpreters allowed for participants of varying degrees of fluency in these languages to participate while resulting in audio data all research team members could understand (English). Participants were offered a Visa gift card to thank them for participation.

2.4   Interview guide

Focus groups were semi-structured. Following consent, the facilitator began each group by having participants reflect on their immigration/resettlement to Anchorage, their first experiences in the community, and changes they had experienced. Participants were then asked about their experiences in employment, accessing community services – including the public school system, police, judicial system, government, and healthcare system – as well as experiences interacting with people in Anchorage. The facilitator used additional probing questions to follow up on emergent information, clarify responses, and gain divergent and convergent perspectives on the topics at hand so themes were not limited to initial conceptions. A notetaker made observations of nonverbal behaviors and contextual information to enrich transcripts and inform our understanding of the verbalizations. The facilitator and notetaker also used member-checking and negative case analysis throughout the data collection process, checking for understanding, reviewing key themes, and probing for disparate responses and experiences.

2.5   Data analysis

We transcribed the English audio (whether spoken by participants or the interpreter), checked it for accuracy, de-identified the data, and added field notes that were taken during the groups. Each team member then independently labeled each data segment (i.e., complete idea, be it a phrase, sentence, or paragraph of text) in a given transcript to capture its meaning (i.e., 'open coding', Moghaddam, 2006). Then, as a team, we discussed, sorted, split, and grouped these open codes into 49 focused codes and developed them into a codebook. This codebook consisted of each code's name, definition, and guidelines on its use. Focused codes included concepts related to migration, acculturation, social networks, language, education, employment, community activities, crime and safety, housing, transportation, policing, health care, government, navigation, advocacy, and diversity. We used consensus coding procedures (Brodsky et al., 2016); in pairs, we independently coded each transcript using the codebook, compared coding, reviewed divergences together, and came to consensus on which code(s) best captured each data segment. As with focus group facilitation, different pairs coded each transcript to ensure a diversity of perspectives, and we met as a team periodically to discuss coding and ensure consistency of code application. We also kept individual memo logs to capture our reactions, record emerging findings, and note novel information. When new codes were

added through this process, previously coded transcripts were reviewed again to determine if any data segments should be captured by the new code. Once all transcripts were coded, we transferred the final coded transcripts into ATLAS.ti for organization and further analysis; our team examined associations between codes and fleshed them out through memo-writing, which we presented to one another for discussion.

One such memo involved the core concept of "sense of home," which closely mapped onto PSOC. For this paper, we then used reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2022; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) to explore this concept further. Specifically, we examined the development and maintenance of this sense of home, informed by the literature while remaining open to new concepts arising from the data. We compared codes that related to this concept and fleshed them out in our memos, constructing the themes from the data with quotes to illustrate findings. We shared this and all results with participants and community partners in written and oral formats for feedback.

3. Results

Immigrants and refugees' PSOC with their new local communities was developed and maintained through both individual and community characteristics along with their interactions. As described in the introduction, people can and do form PSOC to multiple relational and territorial communities simultaneously. Results demonstrate that PSOC between communities is likely not clearcut; although participants were explicitly asked about their local community of Anchorage, they frequently expanded the community they referenced in their remarks to the state of Alaska, describing the development of PSOC to this larger community. Although PSOC took time to develop for all new community members post-migration, social networks catalyzed its formation. The process was also quicker for younger immigrants, related to social embeddedness due to the community resources they had ready access to, such as schools. Having needs met through equitable access to a wide array of quality community resources was foundational to the development of PSOC; it was then through positive reflection on the community's social and ecological climate that appeared to maintain PSOC. Perceiving the community as diverse, valuing that diversity, and feeling valued for the diversity they brought to the community – while recognizing shared histories that transcended time and space – fostered membership and belonging. Opportunities to contribute and influence the community often came after PSOC developed and strengthened it further. We will discuss each of these findings in turn. Please see Table 1 for a summary of themes.

3.1 Time

As would be expected, PSOC took time to develop. Many participants described PSOC with the new community developing the longer they had resided in it, regardless of whether or not they actively chose to migrate to Anchorage.

Table 1. Summary of themes

Theme	Description	Facilitation of PSOC
Time	Time in the community was needed for interactions that led to the development of PSOC. Younger people, such as those who migrated during childhood, more quickly developed PSOC compared to older people, related to opportunities for social embeddedness.	Development
Social Connections Within and Across Networks	Family members in the community helped newcomers feel like community members, created connections to other members and resources, and promoted community involvement that helped develop PSOC. Community members with similar backgrounds (e.g., shared country of origin, language, religion, immigration status) provided social support and connected newcomers to resources needed for PSOC. Community members with different backgrounds helped newcomers create connections to other members and resources, as well as learn how to navigate the community to develop their PSOC.	Development
Access to Community Resources	Access to linguistically accessible community services (e.g., education, employment, social services, transportation, libraries, recreation, health care, law enforcement) that were perceived to be of high quality were needed to meet material, social, and informational needs for PSOC. Some resources (e.g., education, employment) also helped expand networks, promoted social embeddedness, and created opportunities to influence the community in ways that promoted PSOC.	Development, Maintenance
Social and Ecological Climate	Positive assessment of the community's physical environment (e.g., weather, nature, temperature, light) and social environment (e.g., perceived treatment of others, sense of safety, shared values) for both oneself and one's family – as compared to other communities – sustained PSOC.	Maintenance
Diversity and Belonging	The community's diversity, one's personal value of diversity, and feeling that one was truly valued for the diversity they brought to the community promoted membership and belonging needed for PSOC. Recognizing shared histories with community members that transcended individual differences promoted belonging and deepened shared emotional connections related to PSOC.	Development, Maintenance
Opportunities to Contribute and Influence	Typically, it was then after some level of PSOC developed that people sought opportunities to shape the community further – including through employment, volunteering, mentoring, organizing, and other forms of civic participation – which further strengthened their overall PSOC. Community infrastructure and resources shaped the availability of these opportunities.	Maintenance, Further Strengthening

As Ole La[1] (F, Samoa) put it, "I found myself in a place that ended up as my home now and [it is] very hard to go back home. I call Alaska now home for me." While extended time in a new community alone did not appear to directly shape PSOC, it created opportunities for immigrants and refugees to develop relationships, form a shared emotional connection with the community, and see themselves as members of the community. BT (F, Thailand) shared, "Coming to Alaska, my first three months as a teenager I will have to say I was very depressed. No friends. You know, it was just all new – new school, new home, new place. I had to explore everything new. … But having to live here, you know, over 10 years now, it's a wonderful state. I don't think that I would be able to want to go back and live where I came from." Nawal (F, Sudan) similarly noted that while she did not feel an immediate connection with Anchorage, time spent in the community allowed her to gain opportunities and develop connections that promoted her PSOC:

> "It was a lot different than I expected. But after staying here for a couple of years, I'm still here and planning to stay here because I ended up liking Alaska and liking it here. People are nice. I have more opportunities. I got to go to school here. … But yeah, I will say that I didn't think that I would have stayed longer than I'm staying right now. I thought I was gonna like probably leave to go [to] the lower 48 or go to other places, but I ended up liking [it] here. So I stayed."

PSOC appeared to develop at different rates, with participants who had migrated during childhood describing developing a stronger PSOC in a shorter time period than those who migrated as adults. Many participants also noticed this trend in others, describing opportunities that young people had for forming PSOC through involvement in community resources, such as schools and activities that helped them develop their social networks and become embedded in the community. As Shawn (F, Pakistan) put it, "Schools are such a perfect spot because … everybody [is] more mixed. So I think schools are such a good place to get this diversity and belonging. … By the time you grow up, you pretty much have the same struggles that the mainstream community does. But for the grownups, it's much harder." In contrast, many participants who migrated as adults described fewer interactions outside of people who spoke their language, their workplaces, and formal supports due to limited time and opportunities. "My parents can't get what I'm getting like … the resources that I got connected to – friends and the way I can like, understand in the culture difference is harder for them to get adapted to different cultures, unlike the youth," explained Nawal.

3.2   *Social connections within and across networks*

Indeed, social connections within and across networks played a critical role in supporting immigrants and refugees to develop PSOC in their new communities. Family promoted PSOC in three primary ways, through (a) feeling like a community member due to established family ties in Anchorage, (b) establishing and strengthening connections to community members and

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[1] All participants are described with a pseudonym they chose following by their gender and the country they were born in.

community resources through family, and (c) seeking involvement in the community because of family. Women in particular discussed participating more in neighborhoods and schools because of children. CyCy (F, Thailand) expressed, "When I was little you know when we first moved here, my goal was to move back when I hit 18 but then you know, things have turned [since] I've met my now husband." Likewise, Princess (F, Hong Kong) shared, "Alaska is definitely home now that I've established a family. … I just think that it's a great place to raise a family."

PSOC also developed from friendships and other social connections outside one's own immediate family. These connections provided important social support and served as bridging networks to connect participants with other needed resources. Sometimes people from newcomers' previous home regions and/or who spoke the same language who had migrated to the community before the newcomers provided this critical support. Jamila (F, South Sudan) shared how other refugees from her previous country helped her to navigate the new community: "So when I came to Alaska, the challenge was the language. Because at the beginning, we don't know the language. So it was hard to understand. … There are some people who are from the Sudanese community, they help us too." Cultural organizations frequently supported the development of social connections and fostered PSOC. "I got connected right away with the Filipino community of Anchorage, which was really a great experience for me. … I felt really welcomed as a new immigrant to be part of an organization of other Filipinos," shared Bisaya (F, Philippines). Religious institutions also provided opportunities for the development of these connections. "When [my parents] try to adapt to this new place and find a job, that's very difficult, again, due to their English, but what helped them to accommodate to this new environment is our religious community. Because due to people who attend [the] same church as we do, we were able to support each other," shared Phima (F, Russia). T (F, South Korea) expanded, "[The Korean Catholic Church] was more like a community not for not aiming for the religious activity, it was more like an activity, more gearing towards the activity or the daily life of things and events."

Finally, others found this critical support through longstanding community members from other regions of the world along with U.S.-born people. Fufu (F, Ethiopia) commented, "Anchorage is my second home. The people in Anchorage [are] part of my family. They are very supporting and very kind. They encourage you to learn and to grow. To guide you, navigate you. I really appreciate them and what they do for me and for my community. … It's a better place to live in Anchorage." These connections were seen as critical for network-building, community navigation, and getting needs met. Rice (M, South Korea) explained, "You know, I mean, so that was my experience, that education and the networking or right, meeting the right people really helped me get to where I am now."

3.3   *Access to community resources*

Access to quality community services was critical for having needs fulfilled by the community and supported the development of PSOC. Named resources mapped onto many of the pillars of welcoming the municipality put forth in their strategic plan. They included primary, secondary, and post-secondary education; employment resources and opportunities in one's desired field and/or area of training; social services, including safety net programs, case management, and

immigration and resettlement services, as well as municipal services, such as public transportation, libraries, parks and recreation, public health services, and law enforcement. For example, AKGal (F, Canada) shared how libraries served as hubs for information-sharing and community-building:

> "The more we have community sponsored events that bring people of different backgrounds together, I think that's good. … Once a month at the library you would talk about somebody from a specific part of our community; [they] would come in and have food and dance or talk about what they're doing and invite the community and it gave people a chance to sort of see what our community is all about."

Language access was particularly critical; Mariam (F, Egypt) spoke about how having accessible services led to them feeling that they belonged and were supported by the community: "I am very happy with the medical system. As soon as I say, 'I don't speak English,' they provide somebody who speaks my language and make me feel comfortable." Quality education and employment opportunities were also critical for PSOC, seen as ways of not only meeting one's needs, but also expanding networks, becoming more embedded in the community, and having an opportunity to shape the community. As Rice (M, South Korea) put it, "If get an education, it's going to open more doors for opportunities."

References to resources supporting PSOC often incorporated not only *material* resources but also *social support* and *information sharing* to support community navigation. For example, the refugee resettlement center was named as helping many refugees meet their tangible and intangible needs. "Anchorage people is so beautiful. So kind. … We can go to [the local refugee resettlement agency] and we got a lot of support with them. You know, we got ourselves a volunteer and … little by little we change our life and … we got more support," shared Fufu (F, Ethiopia). Thus, quality community resources not only fulfilled needs, but also were key to promoting a sense of membership and setting the stage for influence.

3.4 Social and ecological climate

These social networks and formal resources came together with environmental factors to form a climate that maintained PSOC. The physical environment (e.g., weather, nature, light, temperature) and the perceived character/morals of people in the community (e.g., perceived treatment of others, sense of safety, values) made for a livable community that met core needs and participants felt deeply connected to. "I love the nature here and beautiful summer. I don't miss the busy road where I used to live," Den (F, Thailand) shared. Climate was rarely referenced in the development of PSOC; rather, participants' narratives described coming to appreciate the climate as they became further embedded in the community and it was this climate that maintained PSOC. For example, participants frequently compared the ecological and social climate of Anchorage to the climate of other places they had lived to describe how they recognized that Anchorage felt like home. Da Lion (M, Samoa) explained, "I started traveling the world. And I saw that there were other places in the world, it was worse than Alaska. And it's the

reason why I came back to Alaska." Likewise, Moon (F, South Korea) shared, "I like the weather … compared to the lower 48 [continental U.S.]. I feel like I'm gonna stay here. … I don't see myself going back to live in the lower 48 because the police and over there [it] is too warm."

Feeling that the community's climate fulfilled not only one's own needs but also their family's needs was frequently referenced as a reason for why the community had come to feel like home. Moon continued, "Whenever [my kids] see the beautiful scenery … they take a picture. So I asked them, are you guys still emotional with the scenery? And they said yes. So my expectation is the kids to have calm emotions and senses. And I think they all have that [here]." Indeed, perceiving the community as fulfilling their families' needs frequently came up as key to maintaining PSOC. "Alaska also feels like a place that is healthy to raise a family, which makes it feel like home," was a comment from BT (F, Thailand) that was echoed by participants across focus groups.

3.5   *Diversity and belonging*

A critical part of this climate was diversity. Seeing oneself as a member of a diverse, vibrant community in which members respected and valued each other for their diversity was core to PSOC. This included (1) recognizing that the community was diverse, (2) personally valuing the community's diversity, and (3) feeling that they were valued for contributing to the community's diversity and belonged. Participants frequently remarked on how they were surprised by the diversity they encountered and how it helped them to feel like they were a community member. When asked about first experiences in Anchorage and if they differed from what she imagined, Shawn (F, Pakistan) shared:

> "What I did not expect was the diversity. And I was very surprised by the diversity that is here. And I think that's such a great asset. And that's something that I have really enjoyed or have really enjoyed being a part of this city because of how diverse it is. … Coming here, I saw the diversity and I saw differences of not just ethnicities, but faiths also. And being back in the South I used to be the only Muslim kid in school. And here I see there's so many different ethnicities and different religions and all that. So that was very refreshing."

Both valuing a diverse community and feeling valued for the diversity they brought into the community supported PSOC. Kat (F, Philippines) illustrated how this value was key for immigrants and refugees of all ages, including for those who migrated during childhood: "All throughout high school, people were a lot more like, aware of like diversity and that people are different, but we'll still be saying, like, we're all human." Being a member of a diverse community was critical to decisions to remain in the community, as Olive (F, Germany) expressed, "What was surprising was the diversity. That was *so* welcoming. The welcoming community, and the good schools. And yeah, the minute I stepped foot out of the plane – well, a little bit later from that – I realized that it's good to stay. And I haven't left since."

Within this diverse community, immigrants and refugees also described a shared emotional connection developing from their recognition of their shared histories that transcended geographical and time boundaries with residents who had lived in the community longer than

them. For example, a few participants described coming to understand the ways in which Alaska Native people had been oppressed by colonialism and connected that to their own group's experiences of oppression. Moreover, they connected in recognizing how both groups were resisting colonialism and embracing their cultures. Phima's (F, Russia) description of her development of PSOC illustrates this, connecting with Alaska Native cultures through studies and relationships with Alaska Native people.

> "What helped me … to connect more to this place outside of my people who spoke the same language [or] from the same culture is that I started to learn more about Alaskan heritage, about Native culture. … I feel extremely connected to Alaska, and I have no plans to moving out from here. And just knowing the story and feeling part of this story makes a whole huge difference. So I still love and respect and connect to my culture, my background, my origin, but I also share this place and I feel like I belong here as well."

In order for respect for diversity to foster PSOC, it had to go deeper than mere appreciation of difference of salient characteristics to true welcoming of the diverse values, perspectives, and expertise that fostered belonging and could lead to community change. For example, some participants described being tokenized by diversity and inclusion movements in their workplaces and in community workgroups where lip service was given to respecting diversity but it was not followed through with true opportunities for change. Olive (F, Germany), who has roots in the Middle East, explained:

> "You'll get hired because you have a diverse background, you have a multicultural background, and in the organization that hires you, that's all White, and they look around, and they all of a sudden, need to put some more color in there so the community can perceive them as being inclusive and welcoming. … Sometimes there is that hinting like, 'Yeah, look, we're diverse, we're inclusive. We provide equal opportunity to everyone in our community.'"

In other words, personally valuing diversity and perceiving being valued by other community members for the diversity they brought to the community promoted PSOC – so long as the value came with a willingness for the community to grow and change in response to its diverse membership.

3.6   Opportunities to contribute and influence

This culminated in the opportunity to both contribute to the community and to help shape the community. While such opportunities were generally spoken to as occurring after some of these other community aspects were in place, they not only maintained PSOC but also developed it further. Many participants shared that as their community membership strengthened, they felt called to make it a more welcoming, equitable, and liberating place for all community members. Ways in which participants described contributing to and influencing the community included

through their employment, volunteering, being a mentor/role model for others (particularly young people and newcomers), reaching out to community members (particularly to older people and newcomers) to provide information and help them navigate the community, organizing, and other forms of civic participation. "I'm turning back into my community now, my status in a hub of my community," commented Fufu (F, Ethiopia). Similarly, Rice (M, South Korea) shared:

> "Information is power. … Education provided me how to handle difficult people, or people with different views or values, because I learned how to, like, surround myself with different people. And also be able to speak for myself, like, I'm not gonna just sit there and just take it. … We're going to talk about it. … Now I advocate for people, Native students, American Indian students [at the university]. As a caseworker [in a shelter], working with homeless kids, we also had refugees and foreigners that come in. And I think it was important to let them know that there are resources available out there that you can access. … I'm an advocate … I'm available. And so that's how I got to it."

Frequently, participants made calls to action within the focus groups for others to join with them to collectively shape the community. Da Lion (M, Samoa) shared:

> "If we're gonna call Alaska home, we want to be able to live in a community that is fair. … We want to be able to put our kids in an education system that is fair, rather than being treated, because of the skin color. … And people just need to value people for being people, rather than the color of their skin or what language they speak or where they're from, it does not matter where you're from anymore. This is America. When I serve this country, it is because I want everybody to be able to live free."

Although the vast majority of participants spoke of ways they envisioned influencing the community, many also referenced barriers to doing so, largely related to limited time for this influence that resulted from many participants needing to work long hours while raising their children alongside challenges navigating cumbersome community structures. In conversation with other Hmong refugees, CyCy (F, Thailand) suggested:

> "Seeing how Anchorage can help support the community, like everybody was saying, we do need some sort of sponsorship [for] … the Hmong New Year, sports tournaments, … clubs and organizations. … At least put it out there as a paid leadership position because it was all volunteer work if you have the time to go for it. But now … we're all working families nowadays. And it's just so hard to volunteer to find time to just, you know, give time."

A number of participants also advocated for community entities, such as the local government, to directly support newcomers' ability to contribute through their infrastructure and community resources.

4. Discussion

This study points to factors across individual, micro-, and macro-levels that shape immigrants and refugees' PSOC. PSOC developed over time for everyone, but formed more quickly for younger people, in part catalyzed by stronger social networks that resulted from access to certain community resources, such as schools. Community resources – many of which mapped onto Anchorage's strategic plan for welcoming – played a key role in not only fulfilling material needs but also fostering the development of social networks and helping newcomers to feel as though they belonged. These aspects came together with physical features to form the community's social and ecological climate, which seemed to maintain PSOC as participants compared Anchorage to other places. In particular, community diversity fostered belonging and further developed PSOC, especially when valuing diversity entailed openness to community change and was accompanied with opportunities to contribute and influence the community. While some of these aspects have been previously implicated in the development and maintenance of PSOC, seeing them in practice in a secluded city with a diversifying population provides further insight into ways communities may seek to foster PSOC among immigrant and refugee community members.

Anchorage, like many communities around the globe, has such a diverse membership that it may be difficult for it to form a collective sense of 'us'. This diversity was reflected in our sample, with immigrants and refugees representing a wide range of countries, ages, migration pathways, and time in Anchorage. There has been a great deal written about what has been termed the community-diversity dialectic (Neal & Neal, 2013; Townley et al., 2011), discussing the degree to which contexts that simultaneously promote respect for diversity and PSOC can be created. Some community psychologists, such as Brodsky (2017) and Townley (2017), have posited that this dialectic can be reconciled by turning to superordinate shared values and emphasizing interdependent fates and goals. Others, such as Hill (2017), have argued that because diversity is inherently socially constructed, it is the way in which the community conceives of diversity that shapes membership and the development of PSOC. Still others, including the first author of this paper (Buckingham et al., 2018), have argued that respecting and revering diversity can itself be what membership forms around. These results support all of these contentions; shared values and goals of individual and community betterment supported membership of these diverse members, all held a superordinate identity of being a member of the community, and all spoke to feeling part of the community because of its diversity. Therefore, ensuring that the value of diversity is not solely given lip service, but rather its structures are responsive to members' diverse cultures is a critical aspect of fostering PSOC.

There are many other ways in which communities may be able to foster these factors that contribute to PSOC. While some factors that promoted PSOC were seemingly at the individual or interpersonal level – e.g., time in the community, family – communities can employ strategies to

be spaces in which people want to remain, put down roots, and grow families, through community infrastructure that provides for a safe, enriching, and opportunity-filled life. This may include access to affordable and safe housing, quality education and apprenticeships, integrated education and training models, transfer of international education and training, opportunities for job entry and advancement, linguistically and culturally responsive health care, and indoor and outdoor enrichment spaces. Inclusive language access through appropriate signage, multilingual services, interpretation, and translation across the community appears especially important not only for needs fulfillment but also promoting belonging. Moreover, having ways to learn to navigate the community from formal structures was imperative for many immigrants; while resources exist to support their transition, many newcomers reported not knowing what was available to them, particularly if they migrated without already having connections in the area. The local refugee resettlement agency provided critical case management that connected newcomers to resources, but services from these agencies are limited to those designated by the Office of Refugee Resettlement – refugees, asylees, Cuban and Haitian entrants, special immigrant visa holders, survivors of torture, victims of trafficking, and humanitarian parolees (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2023). Likewise, the school district was seen as a resource to support newcomer families in identifying relevant resources, but of course, those services were not available to families without children. A community navigation center available to *all* newcomers may allow people to navigate the community and locate the resources they need more easily. Libraries could be an ideal setting for this as they are often a resource hub (Philbin et al., 2019); half of the sample that completed surveys associated with this project indicated accessing public libraries. Ongoing partnerships with immigrants and multilingual outreach through community leaders and social media may help get this information out to the newest community members (Gillespie et al., 2016; Welcoming America, 2016).

Often community navigation came from informal bonding and bridging networks that provided important social, cultural, and navigational capital; that is, connections with community members who had lived in the area longer than the newcomer, including from one's own country of origin, other immigrants, and other U.S.-born community members. In addition to helping immigrants to fulfill their needs, these connections were critical for fostering belonging, membership, and developing a shared emotional connection. For example, developing relationships between immigrants and Indigenous communities appeared to support their PSOC through their shared experiences and their joint actions toward resisting colonialism and cultural oppression. Therefore, structures that foster belonging and strengthen connections across community members may also be especially useful. For example, participants often reported needing resources to lead these efforts; thus, fiscal and technical support may help to bolster informal networks that already exist within communities. Moreover, increased support for multicultural events would not only provide opportunities for cultural maintenance and bonding, but also bringing together people of different cultures, allowing for networking opportunities and the development of positive cross-cultural relationships. Optimal contact between members of diverse groups occurs when people have similar statuses, engage in cooperative activities for a common goal, and are supported by community policies (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). For younger immigrants, schools may therefore provide a prime location for such relationships to develop;

for older immigrants, community centers, senior centers, libraries, and mutual support settings may be useful.

Results also indicate that having the ability to contribute to and shape the community was critical to immigrants' overall PSOC. And yet, multiple barriers limit and sometimes discourage full involvement of community members – e.g., signs of exclusion, lack of power. As we have found in other studies, neither the presence nor the absence of actions aimed at community change *necessarily* signifies a positive or negative context of reception nor a lack of or presence of PSOC. Immigrants and refugees may be more likely to work towards community change in more positive contexts and withdraw from or more quietly withstand contexts that are more negative or risky for them based on the interaction of their traits and the community's characteristics (Buckingham & Brodsky, 2020).

4.1   *Limitations and future directions*

The results and their implications must be considered within the context of the study's design and its limitations. First, the population from which this sample is drawn is incredibly diverse and given the limited sample size for the study, we can make only limited inferences into theme divergence by participant characteristics; therefore, the major themes presented are ones that were common across participants' narratives. The majority of the sample were women and focus groups were only available in seven languages. Working in multiple languages presented the possibility of meaning being lost during interpretation; however, working with local professional interpreters who understood the cultural context facilitated understanding. Still, while care was taken to stay as close as possible to the meaning of participants' words, some level of nuance is always lost in interpretation. Moreover, given the goals of the study, it is quite possible that participants who had a stronger PSOC chose to participate; therefore, the transferability of study findings across immigrant and refugee populations should be considered with caution. Nevertheless, these findings are representative of participants' experiences, providing important insights into drivers of PSOC across a diverse group of immigrants and refugees.

Focus groups have the potential to discourage divergent responses and participants' responses may have been influenced by the research team. Thus, multiple approaches were taken to minimize these possibilities: We partnered with trusted community leaders to carry out the research; each participant was welcomed to private message information they did not feel comfortable sharing aloud or could not incorporate into the discussion directly to the facilitator; and a research team consisting of immigrants, refugees, and nationals collected the data and analyzed the findings, with different constellations of interviewers, notetakers, transcribers, and coders for all groups to allow for divergent perspectives as well as member-checking with participants and community partners.

Future research should include other communities to understand if these drivers of PSOC are consistent across communities. Moreover, there were many experiences of 'unbelonging' and hindrances of PSOC described by study participants that we did not explore in this paper; future research would do well to examine what hinders the develop of PSOC among immigrant and refugee populations. While our study centered on PSOC with a municipality, there are many relational and territorial communities within such a broad community; future research would

benefit from exploring such micro-belongings. Additionally, future research with diverse populations would be useful to explore whether these themes diverge based on participants' individual characteristics. Longitudinal studies of immigrants and refugees would provide insight into growth of PSOC over time and help to pinpoint interventions to support the development of PSOC. The results of this study have informed actions in our local community; such actions should be examined to identify their effect on both individual and community outcomes.

4.2   Summary

This study provides important insights into the development of PSOC among diverse immigrant and refugee community members living in an isolated city in the U.S. The findings echo much of what we know about PSOC around the globe overall – that PSOC develops over time, that it is formed through bridging and bonding networks that foster membership and belonging as well as provide connection to resources, and that it is further fostered and maintained through opportunities to contribute and influence the community. Importantly, this study identifies numerous practical initiatives, both informal and formal, at the micro, meso, and macro levels that can welcome diverse new community members and foster their PSOC. Moreover, results show ways in which people construct membership and belonging in the face of divergent characteristics – through recognizing the community's diversity, respecting and valuing diversity, and identifying shared histories that promote a shared emotional connection. In these ways, this research points to numerous malleable and addressable factors that can be employed to support the development and maintenance of PSOC post-migration.

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