

Are We All in This Together?

Measuring the Psychological Sense of Community at
Metropolitan State University

Conducted by the Psychology 610 Class, Fall of 2010

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Psychological Sense of Community

- Psychological Sense of Community (PSC): feelings of belonging, interaction with members in shared events, the belief that community members matter to one another. (Mcmillian and Chavis, 1986)

- PSC is a central concept for community psychology and has been found to be related to:
 - Crime prevention (Levine, 1986)
 - Participation in community organizations (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990)
 - Student burnout (McCarthy, Pretty & Catano, 1990)
 - Subjective well-being (Davidson & Cotter, 1986)

Previous Research

- Lonsbury and DeNeui (1996): examined PSC among college students
- They developed a measure of PSC for a collegiate setting
- Their scale was found reliable and valid for 27 colleges and university

PSC and Metropolitan State

- Metropolitan state university is unique in many ways:
 - Medium to Large student body
 - Public institution
 - Majority of students are “adults”
 - Many students are part-time
 - All students commute to campus
 - The campus is spread out over the Twin Cities

Applying Collegiate PSC

- Due to the ways in which Metropolitan State is a unique university, can the collegiate scale for PSC developed by Lonsbury and DeNeui (1996) be applied here?
 - Will the scale be reliable?
 - How do Metro State students compare to the sample used by Lonsbury and DeNeui (1996)?
 - Are there sub-groups within Metro State with a higher or lower sense of community?

The Survey

- Collegiate Sense of Community Scale (Lonsbury and DeNeui, 1996)
 - 14 item survey
 - 5 point Likert Scale (1 – strong disagreement / 5 – strong agreement)
 - Once item 3 was reverse scored, a high score indicated strong sense of community.

- Community Engagement
 - 4 item survey
 - 4 point Likert scale (1 – never engaged / 4 – engaged often)
 - A high score indicated a strong sense of Community Engagement

The Survey

Demographic Items

- Gender
- Year in School
- Part-time or Full-time
- Time at Work
- Have Children / Age of Children
- Age / Age Category
- Semesters at Metro State
- Marital Status
- Ethnicity
- Class Location (on campus or online)
- Major

Incentive

- Opportunity to win a gift card to the Metro State Book Store

Sample

- Our sample consisted of the results of an online survey completed by 901 metro state students
 - 69% women
 - median age: 30 (11% 22 or younger / 28% 40 or older)
 - 51% full-time students
 - 30% juniors / 45% seniors / 14% graduate students
 - 60% employed more than 30 hours a week
 - 75% identified as white / Caucasian

PSC and Our Sample

- ❑ The Collegiate Psychological Sense of Community showed internal consistency and reliability with an alpha coefficient of .93. This was similar to the alpha found by Loundsbury & DeNeui of .92.

- ❑ Our Sample
 - ❑ Mean: 48.29
 - ❑ Std. Deviation: 10.66

- ❑ Loundsbury & DeNeui
 - ❑ Mean: 49.71 (total sample)
 - ❑ Std. Deviation: 10.00

PSC and Significant Relationships

- ❑ A Higher Sense of Community was found to correlate significantly with:
 - ❑ Greater Community Engagement at Metro State
 - ❑ correlation: .21 / $p < 0.01$
 - ❑ Greater Age of Student
 - ❑ correlation: .12 / $p < 0.05$
 - ❑ Greater time spent at Metro State
 - ❑ correlation: .11 / $p < 0.05$

- ❑ Those who with a low sense of community wanted an improved sense of community feel on campus
 - ❑ correlation: -.34 / $p < 0.05$

PSC Was Not Related To

- Sense of Community was not found to have a significant relationship with:
 - Full-time or Part-time status
 - Marital Status
 - Gender
 - Numbers of hours worked at job

Conclusions

- Would the Loundsbury and DeNeui scale for collegiate PSC be appropriate to use on a non-traditional campus like Metro State?
 - Yes, using the same measures gave us a similar range of scores as recorded in the original study and the alpha for our sample was .93.
- Is our sample similar to Loundsbury and DeNeui?
 - Somewhat. Our scores are slightly lower than the previous study.
- Are there groups within Metro State with higher PSC?
 - Yes, older students and students with more semesters at Metro State had a higher PSC.

Additional Thoughts

Our Sample and Lounsbury

- The mean score for Lounsbury's total sample was 49.71 for a traditionally aged student population, while ours was 48.29. Comparing comparable 18-25 year-old Metro State students, they had an average score of 46.72. Why do our "younger" students seem to have a lower sense of community? What can we do to combat that?

Age and Sense of Community

- Students 36 and above had a PSC score of 49.8 while students 18-25 had an average score around 46.7. Do younger students who are new to the workforce feel more novelty towards a new job and have less positive feelings towards continuing school? Do older students, having been in the work force for a long time, get more enjoyment out of returning to school after a hiatus?

Metropolitan State is the "reverse" of more typical universities

- At most Colleges PSC starts high, rises, and then declines in senior year. At Metro State PSC seems to start low and increase as students are at the University. This is a cross-sectional study, so it is possible that attrition could account for this finding (only the high PSC students finish at Metro). Or it might reflect the fact that many student groups are professionally-oriented and students do not become more engaged in the community until their final terms.