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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Katherine Higgins entitled “Relationship of Broad versus Narrow Personality Traits to Psychological Sense of Community in College Students.” I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Psychology.

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Relationship of Broad versus Narrow Personality Traits to Psychological Sense of Community in College Students

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
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Katherine Higgins
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my advisor and doctoral committee members: John W. Lounsbury, Ph.D. (chair), Jacob J. Levy, Ph.D., Richard A. Saudargas, Ph.D., and Tricia McClam, Ph.D. Having their support, encouragement, and input throughout this process has been my great fortune. I would also like to thank Resource Associates, Inc. and Lucy Gibson, Ph.D. for graciously contributing the data on which this dissertation is based.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to further examine the relationship between personality traits and Psychological Sense of Community (PSC). It attempts to confirm previous research findings that indicate a significant relationship between the Big Five traits and PSC. In addition, it seeks to determine whether selected narrow personality traits are significantly related to PSC and whether those traits add incremental validity to the Big Five personality traits in predicting PSC. This study is a secondary analysis of data collected by Resource Associates, Inc between 2003-2005. Participants (N=1468) were students at a large, southeastern university. Results confirmed a positive relationship between PSC and four of the Big Five traits. Correlational analysis further indicated that all four selected narrow personality traits are positively related to PSC. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis revealed that the narrow traits of Career-Decidedness, Optimism, Work Drive, and Sense of Identity, while significant, accounted for a modest proportion of the variance in the prediction of PSC. Implications, limitations, and directions for future research are discussed.
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Psychological Sense of Community (PSC)

Seymour Sarason first introduced the concept of a psychological sense of community (PSC) as “the overarching criterion by which one judges any community,” (Sarason, 1974, p. 158). Sarason conceded that the concept of PSC “does not sound precise,” “reflects a value judgment, and does not sound compatible with “hard” science,” (Sarason, 1974, p. 156). He goes on to say, “And yet there is no psychologist who has any doubt whatsoever about when he is experiencing the presence or absence of the psychological sense of community,” (Sarason, 1974, p. 157). Although Sarason (1974) finds it difficult to operationalize PSC, he does list some characteristics of PSC as perceived similarities with others, an active interdependence with others, and a feeling that one is part of a larger, more stable whole.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) further defined the concept of PSC. They propose that PSC consists of four dimensions: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Obst and White (2007) describe them as follows:

Membership refers to the feeling of belonging and identification, of being a part of a community.

Influence is a bi-directional concept; for example for a group to be attractive, an individual must feel he or she has some control and influence over it, and for a group to be cohesive, the group itself must also have influence on its individual members.

Integration and fulfillment of needs assumes that for a community to maintain a positive sense of togetherness, the individual-group association must be rewarding for the individual members, with common needs, goals, and values being important elements of this dimension.
Shared emotional connection is based on a sense of shared history and identification with the community, and refers to the bonds developed over time through positive interaction with other community members (Obst & White, 2007, p. 78).

The Sense of Community Index (SCI) (Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, & Wandersman, 1986) is based on the four dimensional PSC model of McMillan and Chavis (1986). The SCI was evaluated in terms of appropriate usage, factor structure, and reliability (Chipuer & Pretty, 1999; Long & Perkins, 2003; Obst & White, 2004). While there is general support for the four dimensions of McMillan and Chavis (1986), researchers debated the measure’s reliability and overall validity as a measure of PSC. Long and Perkins (2003) found increased reliability and validity for their eight item Brief Sense of Community Index (BSCI). Obst and White (2004) argue in favor of preserving the original four factor structure of the SCI, as laid out by McMillan and Chavis (1986), with some minor modifications to the scale in order to improve model fit.

The SCI continues to be the most commonly used measure of PSC. As assessed by the SCI, McMillan and Chavis’ four dimensional model has received empirical support (Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Sagy, Stern, & Krakover, 1996; Obst, Smith, & Zinkiewicz, 2002; Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, & Wandersman, 1986; Pretty, 1990; Chavis & Pretty, 1999) and has been used in a variety of contexts including towns and cities (Obst, Smith, & White, 2002; Davidson & Cotter, 1991), neighborhoods (Pretty, Conroy, Dugay, & Fowler, 1996; Pretty, Andrewes, & Collett, 1994; Obst & White, 2005; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Brodsky, O’Campo, & Aronson, 1999), housing developments (Sagy et al., 1996; Zaff & Devlin, 1998), schools (Pretty et al., 1996; Pretty et al., 1994; Obst & White, 2005; Loomis, Dockett, & Brodsky, 2004; Royal & Rossi, 1996; DeNeui, 2003; Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996; Pretty, 1990; Lounsbury, Loveland, & Gibson, 2003), workplaces (Pretty & MCCarthy, 1991; Royal & Rossi, 1996), interest groups (Obst & White, 2005), and foreign countries (Sagy et al., 1996; Fisher & Sonn, 1999; Prezza,
Amici, Roberti, & Tedeschi, 2001; Prezza & Constantini; 1998) and with adolescents (Pretty et al., 1996; Pretty et al., 1994; Royal & Rossi, 1996), adults (Obst, Smith et al., 2002; Pretty & McCarthy, 1991; Royal & Rossi, 1996), and the elderly (Zaff & Devlin, 1998).

PSC has taken on increasing importance in the community psychology literature. This trend is partially due to the rapid societal changes witnessed by recent generations. People are increasingly mobile and less likely to live amongst extended family in the communities where they were born. Many spend more time with co-workers than with neighbors. Children and adolescents come home from school and reconnect with friends via on-line networks rather than outdoor playtime. A university classroom is just as likely to exist in cyberspace as in a building on a campus. Politicians, educators, sociologists, and psychologists alike have expressed concern regarding the apparent deterioration of traditional community structures. Their concern underscores the important implications of a psychological sense of community. Indeed, having a sense of community is thought to serve a protective function for members (Chavis & Newbrough, 1985). Research has suggested that those with a high psychological sense of community are more likely to be invested and involved in community-level interventions (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Brodsky et al., 1999; Fisher & Sonn, 1999; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990), to report greater Subjective Well-Being and Life Satisfaction (Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Prezza & Costantini, 1998; Prezza et al., 2001), to pursue and endorse strong Social Ties within the community (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Fisher & Sonn, 1999), and are less likely to experience Loneliness and alienation (Prezza et al., 2001; Fisher & Sonn, 1999).

Though traditional, spatially defined communities or neighborhoods have weakened in recent decades, organizational, relation-based communities have grown exponentially in the same time period (Royal & Rossi, 1996). This type of community may exist at a geographical
location, such as a workplace, or members may communicate solely via the internet, postal system, or telephone, as might be the case with a community of cancer survivors. High schools and universities are particularly salient examples of organizational or institution-based communities as they are often the primary communities of adolescents. Given the acknowledged benefits of PSC in other contexts and with adult samples, it’s important to assess for PSC in educational settings, with adolescent samples.

McPartland (1994) proposes widespread advantages for both students and staff where high levels of PSC are present in the school. Such advantages might include reduced absenteeism and increased performance ratings. McCarthy, Pretty, and Catano (1990) found that high levels of PSC protected college students from burnout. Pretty (1990) studied the relationship between PSC and the social climate characteristics of Involvement, Order and Organization, Support, Independence, Student Influence, Traditional Social Orientation, Competition, Innovation, Academic Achievement, and Intellectuality in a sample of undergraduates living in a residence hall. They found that a majority of the variance in PSC could be accounted for by a combination of Support, Involvement, and Academic Achievement characteristics (Pretty, 1990). Using a sample of 167 high school students, Pretty et al. (1994) found that PSC at school accounted for a higher proportion of the variance in a measure of Loneliness than did neighborhood PSC. Pretty et al. (1996) sought to replicate and expand the findings of Pretty et al. (1994) with a broader age range of adolescents. They studied 234 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18. In contrast to the previous study, they found that neighborhood PSC, as opposed to school PSC, better predicted Loneliness scores. PSC scores in general were lower for older adolescents. In addition, PSC correlated significantly with the variables Happiness, Worry, and Coping in the measure of Subjective Well-Being.
Obst and White (2007) hypothesized that PSC levels would vary according to degree of choice in community membership. Using a sample of university students, researchers assessed PSC in a low-choice condition (neighborhood), medium-choice condition (university), and high-choice condition (special interest group). Indeed, they found that students reported higher levels of PSC with increasing choice (Obst & White, 2007). PSC levels can also vary in response to the environment, as demonstrated by Loomis et al. (2004). Researchers studied 1,042 undergraduate and graduate students at a historically African-American, non-residential university during two different environmental conditions. At the time of the first sampling (high threat condition), university students were protesting a proposal by the mayor to move the school from an affluent neighborhood to a more isolated, economically disadvantaged area of town. The second sampling (low threat condition) took place twenty months later, after the threat to the university had passed. Consistent with the hypotheses of Loomis et al. (2004), students reported significantly higher levels of PSC during the high threat condition.

Royal and Rossi (1996) studied the relationship of PSC to Tenure, Status, and Involvement with learning communities in a sample of school staff members and to Grade level, Extracurricular participation, and Membership in a learning community in a sample of high school students. They found that length of Time in setting is positively correlated with PSC in the student sample, but not the staff sample. While learning community Membership was positively associated with PSC in the student sample, participation in Extracurricular activities was not related to PSC (Royal & Rossi, 1996). Lounsbury & DeNeui (1996) researched the relationship of PSC to Size of university and to On versus Off-Campus Residence in 774 undergraduate students from 23 different universities. They found that higher PSC scores were
associated with smaller enrollments (less than 10,000) and with on-campus residence (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996).

In the aforementioned study, Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) also looked at the relationship between PSC and the personality trait of Extroversion in the students. They found not only that Extroversion was positively related to PSC, but also that Extroversion accounted for a unique percentage of the variance in PSC (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996). This study marked a significant departure from earlier research on PSC in that, by including a personality variable, it looked at PSC from a “personological framework” (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996, p. 382). That is, perhaps PSC is as much a function of individual characteristics as it is a function of the environment. As Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) point out, “PSC is a perceptual measure,” and “perceptually-based measures reflect individual difference variables which in turn, account for large, and sometimes the only significant, portions of variance in corresponding “environmental” or “situational” attributes,” (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996, p. 383).

**Big Five Factor Model**

McCrae and Costa (1994) lend support to the power of individual differences in stating the following:

researchers who have measured the objective quality of life by such indicators as wealth, education, and health find precious little association with subjective well-being, and longitudinal researchers have found surprising stability in individual differences in happiness, even among people whose life circumstances have changed markedly. The explanation is simple: People adapt to their circumstances rapidly, getting used to the bad
and taking for granted the good. In the long run, happiness is largely a matter of enduring personality traits. (p. 174)

Indeed, personality traits, measured by a variety of instruments (Digman, 1990), in a variety of different ways (Digman & Takemoto-Chock, 1981), and on diverse populations (McCrae & Costa, 1994; Paunonen & Ashton, 1998), tend to remain remarkably stable through out adulthood with test-retest correlations ranging between .60 to .80 even over a 30 year time period (McCrae & Costa, 1994). McCrae and Costa (1994) add that some shifting does occur between the ages of 20 and 30, with individuals becoming “somewhat less emotional and thrill seeking and somewhat more cooperative and self-disciplined” (p. 173).

When studying individual differences in personality traits, the five factor model, or “Big Five,” is the most commonly used and empirically supported model. The conception of today’s well-known five factor model dates back to the middle of the 20th century. As reported in Digman (1990), Cattell was the first to use a factor analytic approach to identify a minimum of 16 higher order personality traits. Later, both Fiske and Tupes and Christal would attempt to replicate Cattell’s results, but would find only five higher order factors in their analyses. Tupes and Christal termed these factors Surgency, Agreeableness, Dependability, Emotional Stability, and Culture (McCrae & Costa, 1985; Digman, 1990), terms not so different than the ones used today: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness to Experience. Replication of the five factor structure has been repeatedly achieved (Digman & Takemoto-Chock, 1981; Digman, 1997). All five factors (Extroversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness, and Neuroticism) have demonstrated convergent and discriminant cross-observer and cross-instrument validity (McCrae & Costa, 1987; Digman, 1990, 1997; Paunonen, 2003), as well as construct validity, and have been successfully employed with a wide
range of research populations (Digman, 1990, 1997), including high school and college students (Lounsbury, Saudargas, & Gibson, 2004).

A brief description of each factor follows:

*Agreeableness* (v. Hostility) – trusting, helpful, nurturing, cooperative, interacts amicably.

*Conscientiousness* – orderly, reliable, hardworking, self-disciplined.


*Emotional Stability* (v. Neuroticism) – ability to successfully adjust and adapt under stressful circumstances, emotional resiliency.

*Openness (to experience)* – daring, imaginative, having broad interests and values (McCrae & Costa, 1985, 1987; Digman, 1990).

Following the results of Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) in which at least one personality trait (Extraversion) accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in PSC, researchers wondered if other personality traits might also explain variance in PSC. DeNeui (2003) conducted a longitudinal study to investigate changes in PSC over time and the relationship of personality traits and campus involvement to these changes. 120 college freshmen were surveyed first in the fall semester (Time 1) and again at the end of spring semester (Time 2). DeNeui (1996) found that PSC did not necessarily increase over the course of the year as predicted. However, Participation, or campus involvement, was positively correlated with both PSC Change and Time 2 PSC. In addition, Extroversion was positively correlated with Time 1 PSC as well as Time 2 PSC. Using the Big Five factor model, Lounsbury, Loveland, and Gibson (2003) further investigated the link between PSC and personality traits in a sample of 646 high school students and 355 undergraduates. They found a significant relationship between PSC and
Extroversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism in both samples and a
significant relationship between PSC and Openness and PSC and number of Absences in the
high school sample (Lounsbury, Loveland et al., 2003). As predicted, Extroversion,
Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness (in the high school sample) were positively
correlated with PSC while Neuroticism and Absences (in the high school sample) were
negatively correlated with PSC. Perhaps most significantly, the researchers report that the Big
Five personality traits accounted for an unprecedented portion of the variance in PSC: 25% in the
high school sample and 21% in the college sample. Lounsbury, Loveland et al. (2003) results
suggest “considerable construct overlap between PSC and personality variables,” (p. 538) which
leads the researchers to question “whether there are any community-level effects for PSC above
and beyond personality” (p. 531) and to suggest that PSC levels can be altered by “adding or
subtracting occupants of that setting” (p. 538) rather than altering the environment.

Narrow Traits

Lounsbury, Loveland et al.’s (2003) results merit follow-up studies to further investigate
the relationship between PSC and broad personality traits. In addition, there is some evidence to
suggest that the inclusion of select narrow personality traits can add incremental validity to
studies of personality (Paunonen, 1998; Ashton, 1998; Lounsbury, Sundstrom, Loveland, &
Gibson, 2003; Lounsbury, Welsh, Gibson, & Sundstrom, 2005; Landers & Lounsbury, 2006;
Timmerman, 2006; Paunonen, Haddock, Forsterling, & Keinonen, 2003; Schneider, Hough, and
Dunnette (1996) put forth some general guidelines in defining broad versus narrow traits. They
commented that broad traits are “more inclusive, general, and abstract, while narrow traits are
concrete and have clear behavioral connotations” (p. 640). Acknowledging the ambiguity in this
distinction, they go on to conclude that “traits greater than or equal to the Big Five in breadth are broad, and traits less broad than the Big Five are narrow” (p. 640). Paunonen, Rothstein, and Jackson (1999) take a more empirical approach. According to the researchers, broad and narrow traits represent different points along the same continuum. One can empirically test the homogeneity of a trait using factor analysis. Thus, a trait that is more multidimensional, or heterogeneous, would be considered a broad trait. Paunonen (1998) clearly illustrates broad versus narrow traits in his hierarchical model. The model shows that specific responses or behaviors reside at the lowest level of the hierarchy. Several specific responses combine to form what Paunonen terms “habitual response[s]” (p. 539). Following, several habitual response tendencies combine to form lower level, or narrow, personality traits. And lastly, several narrow traits combine to form the broad personality traits, residing at the top of the hierarchy.

According to the literature (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996; Schneider et al., 1996; Paunonen, 1998; Ashton, 1998; Paunonen et al., 1999), researchers have debated the utility of including narrow traits in the study of variables related to personality traits. This issue has come to be known as the “bandwidth-fidelity dilemma” (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996). Although many of the aforementioned researchers were interested in the relationship of broad and narrow personality traits to job performance and personnel selection, a similar concern could be raised in relation to the study of personality and PSC: Are broad traits better predictors of overall PSC? Would a predictive model of PSC based on broad traits be more generalizable than one including narrow traits? In relation to job performance, at least, Schneider et al. (1996), Paunonen (1998), Ashton (1998), and Paunonen et al. (1999) argue no. Schneider et al. (1996) claim that “restricting oneself only to the common variance included in the Big Five would not serve to maximize criterion-related validities because the substantial specificity possessed by the facet-
level scales most relevant to criteria of interest would remain unexploited” (p. 645). Similarly, Paunonen et al. (1999) advocate for the assessment of multiple homogenous, or narrow, traits and list the advantages as:

(a) individual trait measures can be purposely selected because they are known or thought to cover facets of the criterion domain (even orthogonal facets) not covered by other variables in the predictor set; (b) the trait measures can be combined using modern regression techniques in such a way as to provide maximal accuracy in predicting the criterion; (c) scores on each predictor measure are individually interpretable in terms of a psychological construct and, hence, can be used to establish a general theoretical network of trait-work behavior associations. (p. 403)

Data based evidence for including narrow traits in the study of normal personality traits comes from several studies within the last ten years (Paunonen, 1998; Ashton, 1998; Lounsbury, Sundstrom et al., 2003; Lounsbury et al., 2005; Landers & Lounsbury, 2006; Timmerman, 2006; Paunonen et al., 2003). Timmerman (2006) studied the role of broad versus narrow personality traits in the prediction of Voluntary job Turnover within a large telephone company located in the southeastern United States. Customer service representatives were solicited for participation. Analyses revealed a positive relationship between Voluntary Turnover and the broad traits of Extraversion and Openness to Experience and the narrow traits of Imagination, Artistic Interests, and Intellect. Together, the three narrow traits accounted for significant incremental validity in the prediction of Voluntary Job Turnover (Timmerman, 2006).

Also interested in the use of personality traits to predict job performance, Ashton (1998) used an undergraduate sample at a Canadian university to study the relationship of broad and narrow traits to “self-reported Workplace Delinquency” (p. 289). Ashton (1998) defines
Delinquency as “unnecessary absenteeism, lateness, alcohol use or influence, safety violations, ‘goldbricking’ (i.e. avoiding work during paid time), theft, giving of ‘freebies’ (i.e. free goods or services) to friends or relatives, and vandalism or sabotage” (p. 292). Of the five broad traits and sixteen narrow traits included in the study, the narrow traits of responsibility and risk taking were most significantly correlated with the measure of Delinquency. Less strongly correlated, but still significant, were the broad traits of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (Ashton, 1998). Ashton (1998) describes the superior predictive ability of the narrow traits as not statistically significant. However, he asserts that the results do argue against the inclusion of only broad traits (as suggested by Ones and Viswesvaran, 1996) in the study of personality in relation to other variables.

Using an adolescent sample of both middle school (N=457) and high school (N=375) students, Lounsbury, Welsh, Gibson, and Sundstrom (2005) examined the relationship of broad and narrow personality traits to cognitive ability. All Big Five factors and two narrow traits: Optimism and Work Drive were considered. The researchers found that all Big Five factors and both narrow traits are significantly related to cognitive ability in adolescence. Interestingly, the two narrow traits, together, accounted for 8.4% of the variance in cognitive ability in the middle school sample and 10% of the variance in the high school sample while the Big Five factors, together, accounted for only an additional 1.6% of the variance in the middle school sample and 1.5% of the variance in the high school sample (Lounsbury et al., 2005).

Paunonen (1998), interested in investigating the validity of using personality traits to predict various behavioral phenomena as well as comparing broad factors versus narrow traits in this respect, conducted two independent studies. In both studies, participants were same sex roommate pairs, between the ages of 18 and 21, who had been living together in university
dormitory housing for approximately seven months at the time of the study. Both studies utilized both self report and peer rating scales to assess the relationship between broad and narrow personality traits and the following variables: number of Dates per month, number of different people dated per month, Smoking behavior, number of Cigarettes smoked per ay, choice of liberal arts v. non liberal arts Program of Study, interest in Fraternity or Sorority membership, mean number of Traffic Violations per year, self-rated Religiosity, roommate rating of physical Attractiveness, roommate rating of Intelligence, roommate rating of Popularity, and roommate rating of Honesty (Paunonen, 1998). The second study, however, included an entirely different set of narrow personality traits and used a new, although similar, participant pool. In both studies, researchers reported that broad and narrow traits demonstrated predictive validity with all variables examined when combined and with nearly all variables when analyzed separately. In both studies, the narrow traits accounted for substantially more incremental validity than did the broad traits, thus advocating for the inclusion of specific narrow traits when attempting to construct predictive models.

The predictive validity of broad versus narrow traits was studied in yet another undergraduate sample. Landers and Lounsbury (2006) studied the relationship of broad and narrow personality traits to Internet Usage. The researchers included the Big Five traits of Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness, Extraversion, and Emotional Stability as well as three narrow traits. Employing the criteria suggested by Paunonen, Rothstein, and Jackson (1999), Landers and Lounsbury (2006) selected narrow traits thought to be conceptually related to the construct under investigation (Internet Usage) and that are not absorbed by the Big Five factors. The researchers thus selected the narrow traits of optimism, tough-mindedness, and work drive. Data analyses revealed that all three narrow traits and three broad traits (Agreeableness,
Conscientiousness, and Extraversion) were significantly related to Internet Usage. Moreover, the narrow trait of Work Drive accounted for significant incremental validity (4%) above and beyond the Big Five factors.

Lounsbury, Sundstrom et al. (2003) investigated the predictive validity of broad versus narrow personality traits in the Academic Performance of adolescents. 220 seventh-graders and 290 tenth-graders were included in the study. The Big Five personality traits did, indeed, predict participants’ Academic Performance and accounted for 15% of variance in GPA in the seventh-grade population and 10% of the variance in the tenth-grade population. Further analyses revealed that the inclusion of narrow traits accounted for an additional 8% of the variance in GPA among seventh-graders and an additional 12% among tenth-graders (Lounsbury, Sundstrom et al. 2003). Using a sample of 233 college freshmen, the relationship of broad versus narrow personality traits to Intention to Withdraw from college was investigated by Lounsbury, Saudargas, and Gibson (2004). As hypothesized, the Big Five factors were significantly related to the variable of interest, Intention to Withdraw from college. Again, the inclusion of narrow traits added incremental validity as the two narrow traits of Sense of Identity and Work Drive accounted for an additional 6% of the variance, above and beyond the Big Five, in Intention to Withdraw.

Finally, Paunonen et al. (2003) provide especially compelling evidence for the inclusion of narrow traits in their cross-cultural study of personality in relation to a myriad of variables. Paunonen et al. (2003) advocate for the inclusion of narrow traits not just because they add predictive validity but also because their specificity contributes to “an improved understanding of the nomological network underlying traits and behaviours” (p. 415). The researchers selected ten narrow personality traits believed to be unrelated to the Big Five factors and studied their
relationship to nineteen different complex variables including, for example, Musical Ability, GPA, Participation in Sports, Driving Behavior, substance use, and self-reported Attractiveness, Popularity, and Intelligence. Beyond comparing the predictive abilities of broad versus narrow traits, the researchers were interested in replicating their findings across cultures. Participants were undergraduate psychology students in Canada, England, Germany, and Finland. Overall, the researchers found that the narrow traits were able to significantly predict many of the complex variables under investigation. This effect was diminished or lost entirely when the narrow traits were combined into broader factors. In regards to cross cultural replication, the researchers tentatively note similarities across cultures, especially between the two English-speaking samples from Canada and England. However, Paunonen et al. (2003) caution against making any premature or conclusive interpretations regarding the cross-cultural findings.

Lounsbury et al. (2004) provide the following descriptions, which were relied upon in the current study, of relevant narrow personality traits:

*Career Decidedness* – degree of focus towards a specific occupation.

*Optimism* – tendency to have a sunny, hopeful outlook, even when confronted with challenges or problems.

*Sense of Identity* – having an awareness of one’s self and one’s beliefs, values, and purpose.

*Work Drive* – being goal-oriented and willing to work hard in order to meet goals.
CHAPTER II
THE CURRENT STUDY

Previous research has established the importance of PSC in different contexts, including schools, and it has begun to uncover the significance of personality traits in accounting for PSC. The current study aims to further cement the relationship between PSC and personality traits, using a student sample. In addition, it seeks to investigate whether narrow traits account for a unique portion of the variance in PSC as they have for the other constructs reviewed.

Rationale and Hypotheses

The purpose of the present study is: (1) to investigate the relationship between personality traits and psychological sense of community; (2) to confirm that selected Big Five traits are related to psychological sense of community; and (3) to determine whether narrow personality traits add incremental validity to the Big Five personality traits in predicting psychological sense of community. The following hypotheses are based on a review of the literature.

Hypothesis 1: Extraversion will be positively correlated with PSC. Substantial support, both direct (DeNeui, 2003; Lounsbury, Loveland et al., 2003; Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996) and indirect (Brodsky et al., 1999; Obst & White, 2005; Pretty et al., 1994), exists for a positive association between PSC and the trait of Extroversion.
Hypothesis 2: Agreeableness (2a), Conscientiousness (2b), and Openness (2c) will be positively correlated with PSC. Results from a study by Lounsbury, Loveland et al. (2003) showed PSC to be positively related to not just Extraversion, but also to Agreeableness and Conscientiousness in both high school and college samples and to Openness in the high school sample.

Hypothesis 3: Emotional Stability will be positively correlated with PSC. Lounsbury, Loveland et al. (2003) found that Emotional Stability, the inverse of Neuroticism, was positively correlated with PSC. Further support for this hypothesis can be inferred from studies (Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Pretty et al., 1994; Royal & Rossi, 1996) that found PSC to be positively associated with Subjective Well-Being and other indicators of psychological health.

Hypothesis 4: Career-Decidedness (4a), Optimism (4b), Work Drive (4c), and Sense of identity (4d) will be positively correlated with PSC. The relationship between narrow personality traits and PSC has not been previously studied. Thus, hypotheses pertaining to narrow traits are extrapolated from related studies. Lounsbury, Saudargas, and Gibson (2004) found that Aggression, Career-Decidedness, Optimism, Work Drive, and Sense of Identity were significantly related to Intention to Withdraw from college. Because we can envision a relationship between Intention to Withdraw and PSC (those with higher levels of PSC would likely be less inclined to withdraw from college), we can hypothesize that a significant relationship may be found between those same narrow traits and PSC.
4a) Several studies lend indirect support for a positive relationship between PSC and Career-Decidedness. Smaller communities have been linked to higher levels of PSC as evidenced by Royal and Rossi’s (1996) finding that university students in learning communities had higher levels of PSC than those not in learning communities, Lounsbury and DeNeui’s (1996) results showing higher levels of PSC in students at small to medium-sized universities versus those in larger universities, and Prezza and Constantini’s (1998) finding that PSC was higher for residents of a small town than for those in two larger communities. Students who have chosen a career, and thus a field of study, have joined a smaller community (i.e. psychology) within the larger school, and so can be expected to experience higher levels of PSC.

4b) My prediction that PSC will be positively correlated with Optimism is supported by Lounsbury and DeNeui’s (1996) emphasis on the perceptual nature of PSC. One can hypothesize that students with high levels of Optimism would expect to have their needs met by the community, to be able to exert enough influence, to cope effectively, and to feel a sense of belonging. Indeed, even if experiences didn’t match with the optimistic expectations of these individuals, their optimistic personalities would allow them to maintain hope that conditions might soon change for the better.

4c) Relying on workplace and school samples, Royal and Rossi (1996) found a positive association between degree of PSC and performance-related outcomes in both the work place and school samples. The performance-related outcomes studied by Royal and Rossi (1996) are directly related to the variable Work Drive. In addition, Pretty (1990) reported that PSC can be partially predicted by students’ perceptions of academic
demands. That is, students who felt able to meet the academic demands of the environment reported higher levels of PSC.

4d) One can hypothesize that a greater Sense of Identity will be associated with greater PSC if we reason that knowledge of oneself and one’s beliefs and values facilitate conscious identification with a community. Conscious identification was identified as an additional dimension of PSC by Obst et al. (2002) and Chavis and Pretty (1999).

*Hypothesis 5:* The narrow traits of Career-Decidedness, Optimism, Work Drive, and Sense of Identity will account for a unique portion of the variance in PSC beyond that accounted for by the Big Five traits. Lounsbury, Sundstrom et al. (2003) demonstrated that inclusion of narrow personality traits can add significant incremental validity to the Big Five traits in predicting the Academic Performance of adolescents. Lounsbury et al. (2004) found that including measures of narrow personality traits added significant incremental validity to the prediction of students’ Intention to Withdraw from college. Based on these results, they advocate for the use of such “multidimensional composites” (p. 525) in order to achieve maximum predictive validity.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants (N = 1468) were students at a large, southeastern state university who volunteered their participation while enrolled in either an Introduction to Psychology course (N = 240) or a First Year Studies course (N = 1,228). Participants completed the instruments during
the 2003-2004 or 2004-2005 academic years. Of the 1,468 participants, 68.5% were female while 31.5% were male. 83.1% of participants identified as Caucasian, 11.4% as African American, 1.6% as Hispanic, 1.5% as Asian, .2% as Aleut/Pacific Islander, .2% as Arabic, .3% as Indian, .5% as Native North American, and 1.2% as Other. In terms of age, 94.2% of participants listed their age as between 18 and 25. See Table 1 for specifics related to age.

Measures

The demographic characteristics of Age, Race, and Gender were assessed using categorical items.

The Adolescent Personal Style Inventory (APSI), designed by Resource Associates, was used to measure personality traits. The APSI is a 118 item measure of normal personality traits that has been contextualized for use with early, middle, and late adolescents (Lounsbury, Saudargas, & Gibson, 2004). Participants rate responses on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. In addition to the Big Five Factors of Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability (inverse of Neuroticism), the APSI also measures Aggression, Career-Decidedness, Optimism, Self-Directed Learning, Sense of Identity, Tough-Mindedness, and Work Drive. The APSI achieves convergent validity with other substantiated personality inventories such as the NEO-PI-R, 16PF, and Myers-Briggs Temperament Inventory. As reported in Lounsbury et al. (2004), information pertaining to scale development, criterion-related validity, construct validity, reliability, and norming can be found in Lounsbury, Tatum, et al. (2003), Lounsbury, Gibson, and Hamrick (2004), Lounsbury, Loveland et al. (2003), Lounsbury, Steel, Loveland, and Gibson (2004), Lounsbury, Gibson, et al. (2003), and Lounsbury, Sundstrom et al. (2003).
Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Participant Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 18</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>1233</td>
<td>83.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-25</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-39</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1468</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Collegiate Psychological Sense of Community Scale (see Appendix A), developed by Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) to measure PSC within a university population, was used to measure PSC in the sample. The Collegiate Psychological Sense of Community Scale is based on previous definitions of PSC (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Its items reflect the themes of sense of belonging, commitment, attachment, fulfillment of needs, and overall PSC. The scale contains 9 items, utilizes a 5-point Likert scale, and has a coefficient alpha of .90 (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996).

Procedure

Researchers first obtained permission to conduct the study from the university’s institutional review board. Participants were then solicited via introductory psychology courses or first year studies courses. Participants enrolled in introductory psychology courses were awarded extra credit in return for their participation. After completing the on-line inventory, all participants received an on-line feedback report summarizing their results and offering inferences for a variety of areas including choice of major, social life, study habits, and stress management (Lounsbury et al., 2004).

The current researcher obtained all data from an archive kept by Resource Associates, Inc. and was granted permission by Resource Associates, Inc. for the data to be used in the current study. Approval to proceed with the study was granted by the university’s Institutional Review Board.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Results largely supported the hypotheses. Four of the Big Five traits and all four narrow traits considered were positively related to PSC. In the hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the inclusion of narrow traits was significant, but they accounted for only a modest proportion of the variance in the prediction of PSC.

Hypothesis 1:

As can be seen in Table 2, Extraversion was positively related to Psychological Sense of Community, $r = .281$, $p < .01$.

Hypothesis 2:

2a) As can be seen in Table 2, Agreeableness was positively related to Psychological Sense of Community, $r = .168$, $p < .01$.

2b) As can be seen in Table 2, Conscientiousness was positively related to Psychological Sense of Community, $r = .126$, $p < .01$.

2c) As can be seen in Table 2, Openness, however, was not significantly correlated with Psychological Sense of Community, $r = .017$, $p > .05$. 

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Hypothesis 3:

As can be seen in Table 2, Emotional Stability, the inverse of Neuroticism, was positively related to Psychological Sense of Community, $r = .226$, $p < .01$.

Hypothesis 4:

4a) As can be seen in Table 2, Career Decidedness was positively correlated with Psychological Sense of Community, $r = .064$, $p < .05$.

4b) As can be seen in Table 2, Optimism was positively correlated with Psychological Sense of Community, $r = .299$, $p < .01$.

4c) As can be seen in Table 2, Work Drive was positively correlated with Psychological Sense of Community, $r = .123$, $p < .01$.

4d) As can be seen in Table 2, Sense of Identity was positively correlated with Psychological Sense of Community, $r = .239$, $p < .01$.

Hypothesis 5:

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed to determine whether the narrow traits accounted for a unique portion of the variance in PSC above that already explained by the Big Five traits. The Big Five traits were entered on the first step while the narrow traits were entered on the second step. As can be seen in Table 3, the Big Five traits accounted for 12.9% ($p < .01$) of the variance in PSC while the narrow traits accounted for a unique 1.7% ($p < .01$). Together, the Big Five traits and narrow traits accounted for 14.7% of the variance in PSC, producing a multiple correlation of $R = .383$ ($p < .01$).
Table 2

Correlations: PSC and Big Five and Narrow Traits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>1468</td>
<td>.017</td>
<td>.503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>1468</td>
<td>.126(**)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>1468</td>
<td>.281(**)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>1468</td>
<td>.168(**)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Stability</td>
<td>1468</td>
<td>.226(**)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Decidedness</td>
<td>1468</td>
<td>.064(*)</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Identity</td>
<td>1468</td>
<td>.239(**)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimism</td>
<td>1468</td>
<td>.299(**)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Drive</td>
<td>1468</td>
<td>.123(**)</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
Table 3

Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Big Five and Narrow Personality Traits Predicting PSC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Multiple R</th>
<th>$R^2$</th>
<th>$R^2$ Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Big Five</td>
<td>.360(a)</td>
<td>.129</td>
<td>.129(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Big Five + Narrow</td>
<td>.383(b)</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>.017(**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Predictors: (Constant), Openness, Extroversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Emotional Stability
b Predictors: (Constant), Openness, Extroversion, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, Career Decidedness, Work Drive, Identity, Optimism

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
The present results lend support to hypotheses 1, 2a-b, 3, 4a-d, and 5. Hypothesis 2c was not supported by the data. Further description and interpretation of results follow.

Hypothesis 1 was supported by the analyses. Extraversion was positively related to PSC. Indeed, of the variables examined, Extraversion showed the second strongest relationship to PSC. The strong correlation between Extraversion and PSC replicates earlier findings by Lounsbury, Loveland et al. (2003). They reason that “more extraverted individuals would be expected to have more frequent interactions and more extensive relationships that would contribute more to what McMillan and Chavis termed ‘shared connections’” (p. 536). Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) describe the above reasoning as an “active personological” (p. 391) explanation. They offer, in addition, a “passive personological perspective” (p. 391) in which “more extraverted individuals might see an environment (i.e. community) as higher on PSC than more introverted individuals because of their own perceptual filters and predispositions” (p. 383). DeNeui’s (2003) longitudinal study lends direct support to the passive personological perspective. At the very start of Freshman year (Time 1), those students categorized as “highly extroverted” (p. 231) scored significantly higher than other groups on a measure of PSC. Thus, it seems that highly extraverted individuals tend to view a not yet known community as having greater levels of PSC than do other individuals. Although the highly extraverted students participated in activities at the same rate as only “moderately extraverted” (p.231) individuals and their PSC scores actually dropped during the course of the year, the highly extraverted group still endorsed the highest levels of PSC at the end of the year (Time 2).
Even without direct support, the strong relationship between PSC and Extraversion would not have been surprising given the relationship of PSC to variables conceptually related to Extraversion. Such variables include level of community involvement (Brodsky et al., 1999), number of social supports (Pretty et al., 1994), and ingroup ties (Obst & White, 2005). Willingness to engage with community members is a prerequisite to achieving membership, integration and fulfillment of needs, influence, and shared emotional connections within a community. Thus, it makes sense that those most eager to engage (extraverts) would endorse the highest levels of PSC.

The present results supported hypothesis 2a. As was the case in the study by Lounsbury, Loveland et al. (2003), Agreeableness was positively related to PSC. Earlier, someone scoring high on the variable Agreeableness was described as trusting, helpful, cooperative, and inclined to interact amicably. This description matches Ashton’s (1998) finding that Agreeableness was negatively related to Delinquent Workplace Behaviors. That Agreeableness would be related to PSC also makes intuitive sense. Part of Pretty’s (1990) description of Membership is “a feeling of belonging and emotional safety” (p. 61). An individual scoring high in Agreeableness would more likely be able to provide such characteristics. In describing Influence, McMillan and Chavis (1986) note the importance of a degree of conformity to group cohesion. Those community members described as Agreeable are most likely to cooperate with group norms and to facilitate a feeling of cohesiveness amongst the group. In fact, McMillan (1996) later changed the name of this characteristic from Influence to Trust, a component of Agreeableness.

Also in keeping with the findings of Lounsbury, Loveland et al. (2003), Conscientiousness was positively correlated with PSC (2b). Conscientiousness is characterized by reliability, attention to detail, and a strong work ethic. One who possesses such attributes
would likely contribute to the feelings of trust, security, and mutual benefit necessary for the emergence of a strong PSC. In addition, Conscientiousness accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in Intention to Withdraw from college (Lounsbury et al., 2004). Those with higher levels of Conscientiousness were less likely to withdraw from school. It has been suggested that PSC protects students from burnout (McCarthy et al., 1990), reduces absenteeism (Lounsbury, Loveland et al., 2003), and contributes to increased academic performance (McPartland, 1994). Because we can reason that those students intending to withdraw from school were low on not only Conscientiousness, but also on PSC, a positive relationship between Conscientiousness and PSC is further conceptually supported.

Hypothesis 2c, that Openness would be significantly and positively related to PSC, was not supported by the analyses. The supposition of a positive relationship was based on Lounsbury, Loveland et al.’s (2003) hypothesis that “individuals with higher levels of openness would be expected to be more open to influence by community members, and thus, to more readily introject community norms and values” (p. 537). However, it is noteworthy that while Lounsbury, Loveland et al. (2003) found a significant positive relationship between Openness and PSC in their high school sample, the authors failed to replicate the significant relationship in their college sample. Because the current study utilized a college population only, the results are perhaps not entirely surprising. It may be the case that in a university setting, with a larger student body, bigger campus, and increased demands on time, having broader interests and values tends to decrease one’s ability to choose and to commit deeply to any one community.

Regarding the third hypothesis, Emotional Stability was positively correlated with PSC. This finding replicates that of Lounsbury, Loveland et al. (2003) in which Emotional Stability was significantly related to PSC in both a high school and a college sample. Further suggestion
of a meaningful relationship comes from research on the relationship of PSC to Subjective Well Being. According to Pretty et al. (1996), subjective well being “consists of positive affects (happiness and enjoyment of life), negative affects (worry), and perceived efficacy (success in coping)” (p.369). Pretty et al. (1996), Davidson and Cotter (1991), and Royal and Rossi (1996) all suggest a significant, positive relationship between PSC and Subjective Well Being. Because the resiliency, effective coping, and tendency to worry less factors that partially comprise Subjective Well Being also define Emotional Stability, the positive relationship between PSC and Emotional Stability was expected and is consistent with previous studies on Subjective Well Being.

Career Decidedness, one of the four narrow personality traits examined, was positively correlated with PSC, thus confirming hypothesis 4a. Career Decidedness can be described as the strength of one’s orientation towards a chosen career path. An individual with a high level of Career Decidedness has consolidated their academic efforts in a particular direction. In a university setting, individuals with higher levels of Career Decidedness could be expected to manifest higher degrees of commitment to a chosen major field of study. Previously, we supposed a positive relationship between Career Decidedness and PSC based on literature that suggests higher levels of PSC are linked with smaller communities (Royal & Rossi, 1996; Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996; Prezza & Constantini, 1998). Academic departments often create those smaller communities within the larger university community. Conversely, an individual low in Career Decidedness may switch majors one or more times and experience a change in advisor, classmates, and area of campus as a result. Experiencing these shifts, along with the accompanying psychological stress, could reasonably predict lower levels of PSC. The
correlation between PSC and Career Decidedness was not as strong as that of the other significant correlations; however, it was significant.

The strongest relationship proved to be between PSC and the trait of Optimism (hypothesis 4b). Optimism is partially characterized by a positive outlook. In examining the items on the Collegiate Psychological Sense of Community Scale (i.e. “There is a lot of positive college spirit among the students here”), an element of positive outlook is immediately evident. The strong correlation also lends support to Lounsbury and DeNeui’s (1996) passive personological perspective, which highlights the perceptual nature of PSC. Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) explain that “personological attributes are important insofar as they mediate the meaning of communities for individuals and thus affect PSC” (p. 392).

Hypothesis 4c, that the trait Work Drive would be positively correlated with PSC, was also supported by the analyses. The variable Work Drive captures an individual’s desire and willingness to work hard in order to meet goals. Using their own sense of community assessment for high school students, which was in keeping with the constructs set out by McMillan and Chavis (1986), Royal and Rossi (1996) found that PSC was positively related to “feeling bad when unprepared for classes” and negatively related to skipping class, reports of disruptiveness in class, and “thoughts of dropping out of school” (p. 410). I can envision a similar relationship between those very outcomes and Work Drive. Indeed, Work Drive accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in intention to withdraw from school in college students (Lounsbury et al., 2004) and GPA in middle school students (Lounsbury, Sundstrom et al., 2003).

How might the perceptual nature of PSC relate to the trait of Work Drive? Pretty (1990) asserts that, beyond perceptions of interpersonal relationships and support, PSC is also related to “the demands for performance commonly perceived in the environment” (p. 64). While Work
Drive has been associated with greater cognitive ability in adolescents (Lounsbury et al., 2005), it may also tap into the construct of Influence described by McMillan and Chavis (1986). Presumably, those who are willing to work hard towards goals believe in their ability to influence the outcome. A positive relationship between Work Drive and PSC was, therefore, expected.

In regards to Sense of Identity (4d), results support our hypothesis that it would correlate positively with PSC. We defined Sense of Identity as having knowledge and awareness of one’s values, beliefs, and purpose in life. As stated previously, both Chavis and Pretty (1999) and Obst et al. (2002) emphasized the importance of identity in feeling an attachment and a sense of belonging in a community. In addition, Huffstetler (2005) found that Sense of Identity was positively related to various measures of satisfaction including Overall Life Satisfaction, School Satisfaction, Personal Satisfaction, Satisfaction with Roommate, Extrinsic Satisfaction, and Outcome Satisfaction. An individual with a strong sense of identity is able to identify people, communities, and pursuits that are likely to match with their own values, provide fulfillment and satisfaction, and instill a sense of belonging.

The fifth and final hypothesis, that the narrow traits of Career Decidedness, Optimism, Work Drive, and Sense of Identity would explain a unique proportion of the variance in PSC above and beyond that already explained by the Big Five traits, received modest support. The narrow traits, together, added less than 2% incremental validity above and beyond that accounted for by the Big Five traits in the prediction of PSC. This was less than expected based on the findings of Ashton (1998), Lounsbury et al. (2003), Paunonen et al. (2003), Lounsbury et al. (2004), Lounsbury et al. (2005), and Landers and Lounsbury (2006) in which the narrow traits
accounted for substantially more of the variance. However, the addition of selected narrow traits in the current study still proved to be significant and so can be considered a modest success.

Summary

The current study further affirms the robustness of the Big Five model in a university population. Results support a positive relationship between PSC and four of the Big Five traits. Openness did not correlate significantly with PSC as hypothesized. In addition, all four narrow traits considered were positively related to PSC. The larger literature on PSC is conceptually consistent with findings from the current study and aided in the interpretation of significant relationships. The inclusion of narrow traits did add significant incremental validity, above and beyond the Big Five, to the prediction of PSC.

Limitations

This study was not without limitations. As is the case with all correlational studies, causation cannot be assumed. While a clear relationship between PSC and personality traits exists, a full understanding of this relationship was not achieved in this study. Is it the case that personality traits influence our perception of sense of community in the environment as is suggested by the results of DeNeui’s (2003) longitudinal study? Or do personality traits influence our behaviors and relationships so as to create a widely differing PSC within each of us? Or perhaps personality traits predispose us to seek out certain types of communities already infused with more or less sense of community. Likely, as suggested by Lounsbury, Loveland et al. (2003), the answer lies within a complex set of interactions. From this study, we can’t yet begin to disentangle the interactions or to construct a model.
Another important limitation involves the participant population. Our sample was notably homogenous in terms of age, with 83.9% between the ages of 18 and 19, ethnicity, with 83.1% identifying as Caucasian, and gender, with 68.5% identifying as female. In addition, all participants were students at the same large, public, southeastern university. Therefore, it is likely that many participants shared other commonalities not captured by our measures such as cultural background, religious affiliations, and socioeconomic status. In order to increase generalizability, results would necessarily be replicated at other universities, large and small, public and private, in other geographic locations, and with more diverse populations.

Directions for Future Research

We are just beginning to examine the relationship of personality traits to the construct of PSC. Previously, PSC was primarily conceptualized as a characteristic of the environment or the community, something external to the individual that might be manipulated via community programs or activities. In further investigating PSC as a personological variable, the current research extends that of Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996), DeNeui (2003), and Lounsbury, Loveland et al. (2003). In examining the correlation between PSC and the Big Five personality traits in a college population, the current study replicated the significant findings of Lounsbury, Loveland et al. (2003). However, while their study found that the Big Five traits accounted for 21% of the variance in PSC, our study produced a lower figure of 12.9%. Future research is needed to shed light on the discrepancy. In addition, because this is the first study to examine the relationship of selected narrow traits to PSC, replication of results is necessary.

Future longitudinal studies such as Deneui’s (2003) might contribute to a better understanding of the causative factors related to PSC in university students. To begin to sort
through the interactions of person and environment that create differing levels of PSC, one would need to assess PSC, as well as personality traits, at multiple points throughout students’ college careers while also gathering information regarding their degree of campus involvement, with which communities on campus do they identify, and perhaps an assessment of PSC and personality of other members within those smaller communities. The “interactionist model” suggested by Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) has three components:

(1) psychological sense of community is a function of the interaction or feedback between the person and the community in which he or she is a member; (2) personological attributes are important insofar as they mediate the meaning of communities for individuals and thus affect PSC; and (3) community attributes are important insofar as they impact PSC through psychological attributions and meanings.

(p. 392)

In attempting to replicate the current findings and in further investigating causative relationships, it will be imperative that future research be directed at more diverse populations. It’s plausible, for example, that gender and/ or ethnicity may moderate the relationship between personality traits and PSC. Populations that have suffered widespread discrimination and oppression may struggle more to achieve feelings of membership, belonging, influence, integration, and shared emotional connection irrespective of their personality traits. This may be especially true when communities are heterogeneous, including members of both majority and minority groups. Thus far, opinions and evidence regarding whether heterogeneity leads to more or less cohesion, and perhaps PSC, within a group are mixed. McMillan (1996) reports that, in contrast with earlier hypotheses by McMillan and Chavis (1986), he now realizes that “the search for similarities can be an essential dynamic of community development. People seek a
social setting where they can be themselves and be safe from shame” (p. 320). However, both Royal and Rossi (1996) and Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) cite evidence which suggests that individuals value diversity within a group and that greater homogeneity within a community doesn’t necessarily relate to greater PSC. Further research is needed.

**Conclusion and Implications**

In the current study, results suggest a significant relationship between PSC and many personality traits including Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Emotional Stability, Career Decidedness, Optimism, Sense of Identity, and Work Drive. Together, these personality traits accounted for almost 15% of the variance in PSC. The inclusion of narrow traits in the current study improved the predictive validity of personality traits in relationship to PSC.

The findings of the current study have many implications for both research and practice. Lounsbury, Loveland, and Gibson (2003) argue for the inclusion of personality traits in all PSC related research saying “there is considerable construct overlap between PSC and personality variables” (p.538) and challenge future researchers to demonstrate that community level variables explain unique variance above and beyond that already accounted for by the Big Five personality traits. Based on the findings of the current study, which lend additional support to the role of individual level variables in PSC, it will be important to include narrow traits when accounting for the role of personality in PSC.

PSC has been associated with a wide range of positive outcomes including improved academic performance, reduced absenteeism (McPartland, 1994), protection from burnout (McCarthy et al., 1990), decreased loneliness (Pretty et al., 1994; Pretty et al., 1996; Fisher & Sonn, 1999; Prezza et al., 2001), strong social ties (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Fisher &
Sonn, 1999), increased community involvement (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Brodsky et al., 1999; Fisher & Sonn, 1999), greater subjective well being, happiness, and life satisfaction (Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Prezza & Costantini, 1998; Prezza et al., 2001), increased ability to cope with stress, and less worry (Pretty et al., 1996). The aforementioned outcomes are of great relevancy to any community, group, organization, or business. However, they are of particular importance to school administrators who, every year, attempt to improve recruitment, retention, campus involvement, academic performance, student mental health, alumni contributions, and all of the intangibles that go into creating a feeling of PSC on college campuses. Based on the current research, it can be concluded that wherever PSC is valued, it becomes essential to look at personality. Thus, rather than focusing exclusively on community level interventions, universities interested in increasing levels of PSC on campus may want to consider the personality traits of applicants during the selection process. If a model of person environment interaction can be established, school administrators can better select students whose personality characteristics will be a good fit with their university environment. Alternatively, the model might be used to identify incoming students at higher risk for negative outcomes. University counseling centers see hundreds of students per year, many of whom endorse loneliness, alienation, and isolation as presenting problems. The current research expands our knowledge and adds to the literature on this topic.


### Collegiate Psychological Sense of Community Scale

1. There is a strong feeling of togetherness among most students in this college. | 1 2 3 4 5
2. I would recommend this college to anybody who asked about it. | 1 2 3 4 5
3. There is a friendly atmosphere in this college. | 1 2 3 4 5
4. I wish I could go to another college instead of this one. | 1 2 3 4 5
5. I really enjoy going to college here. | 1 2 3 4 5
6. Students here really care about what happens to this college. | 1 2 3 4 5
7. I feel very attached to this college. | 1 2 3 4 5
8. There is a lot of positive college spirit among the students here. | 1 2 3 4 5
9. There is a real sense of community in this college. | 1 2 3 4 5
Katherine Higgins was born on February 18, 1978. She lived in many southeastern states and one foreign country before attending college at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC. There, in 2000, she earned a B.A. in Psychology. Several years later, Katherine completed a Master’s degree in Experimental Psychology from the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, VA. Currently, Katherine is pursuing a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Broadly, her research interests include the interaction of personality and environment. In 2008, Katherine completed her pre-doctoral internship at the University of California, Berkeley. She will commence a post-doctoral fellowship at Boston College in Boston, MA in the fall of 2008.