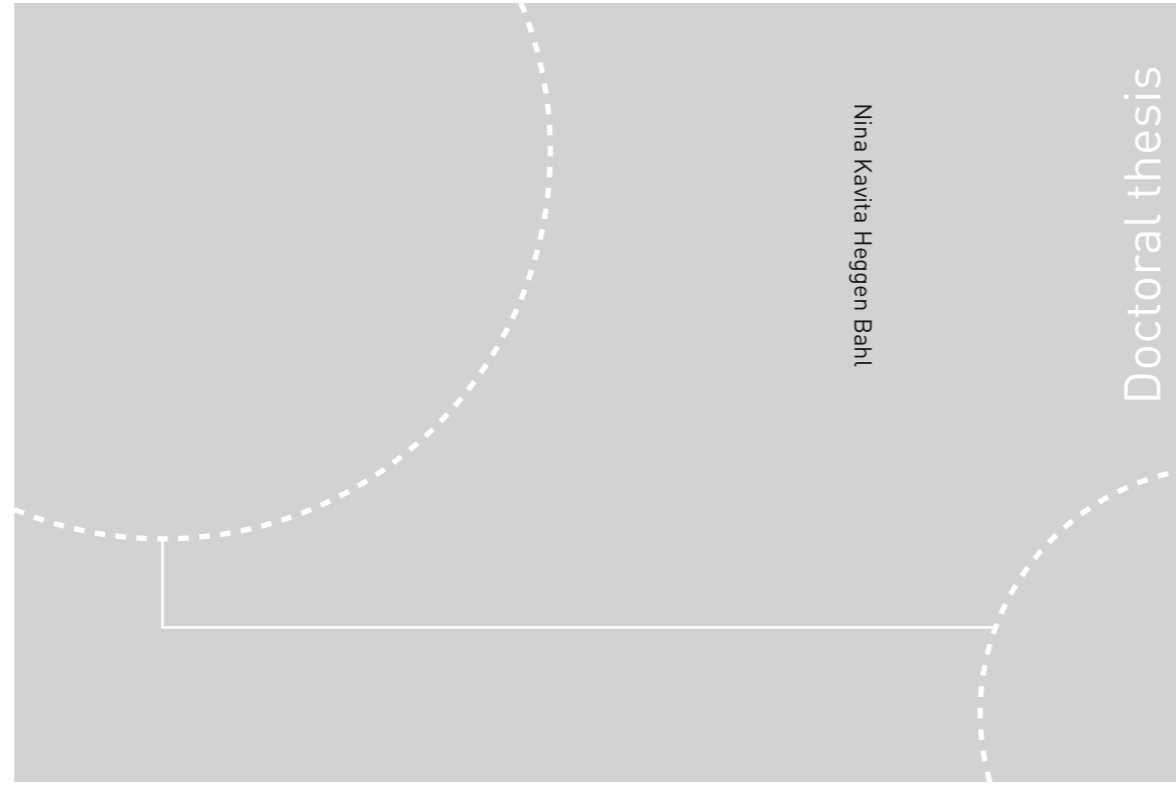


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Nina Kavita Heggen Bahl

Doctoral thesis

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Nina Kavita Heggen Bahl

## Psychological Sense of Community:

An Exploration of Norwegian and Indian Urban Older Adults' Conceptualisations within Cultural Meaning Systems

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Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Thesis for the Degree of  
Philosophiae Doctor  
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Thesis for the Degree of Philosophiae Doctor

Trondheim, April 2018

Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
Faculty of Social and Educational Sciences  
Department of Psychology



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## Summary

Psychological sense of community (PSOC) undergirds our efforts to feel that we belong, our interdependence with others and connection to our multiple communities across our life-span. In community psychology, one of the overarching aims is to promote, and prevent the decline of, PSOC. Despite the substantial amount of cross-disciplinary research on PSOC across cultural contexts and the life-span, several gaps in knowledge limit the possibility to promote PSOC among the growing populations of older adults across the world today. There is a need to understand: 1) later-life conceptualisations of PSOC in additional cultural contexts, 2) cultural aspects of older adults' meanings of PSOC, and 3) life-stage related aspects of later-life conceptualisations of PSOC. This thesis explored these issues – cultural and life-span related aspects of later-life meanings of PSOC – with respect to Norwegian and Indian older adults.

The thesis consists of three papers which all address these issues in different ways. Paper I describes meanings of PSOC for Norwegian urban older adults. The paper demonstrates individual responsibility and initiative in one's own PSOC as the most important aspects of their conceptualisation of PSOC. Moreover, the paper illustrates how these aspects operate as premises for later-life PSOC and reflect traditional as well as contemporary Norwegian meaning systems.

Paper II explores Indian urban older adults' meanings of PSOC. The paper illustrates helping and caring for others (referring to the larger community of Mumbai and India as a nation) as core aspects of their conceptualisation of PSOC. In addition, 'community heterogeneity' is a shared and positive part of their meaning of community. These aspects reflect key elements of Indian cultures, both within the city as well as the larger national context.

Finally, paper III describes PSOC among older adults as an intersection between gerontology, community psychology, as well as cultural psychology. Two main questions are raised: ‘do people in different life-stages within one cultural context share similar meanings of PSOC?’ and secondly, ‘are similar cultural meaning systems reflected in people’s conceptualisations of PSOC at different life-stages?’ The paper explains cultural as well as life-stage related aspects of urban Norwegian and Indian adults’ meanings of PSOC.

Papers I-III illustrate that later-life conceptualisations of PSOC in urban Norway and India include shared and established aspects – both overlapping with the dimensions included in McMillan and Chavis’ theory and definition – although the main aspects of their meanings are culture-specific. In addition, the papers demonstrate how older adults, through their discourses of PSOC, interact with cultural meaning systems within their culture. Finally, the papers show that life-stage related aspects of PSOC are embedded within the meaning systems of each particular cultural context.

The findings have implications for later-life conceptualisations of PSOC, for future research on meanings of PSOC, as well as later-life PSOC as a multidisciplinary field, and practical implications for urban older adults in Norway and India.

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This thesis is dedicated to my beloved grandfather, Yogi R. Bahl, who passed away March 2016.

### **List of Papers Included in the Thesis**

The thesis is based on three articles designated by Roman numerals.

- I. Bahl, N. K. H., Nafstad, H. E., Blakar, R. M., & Geirdal, A. Ø. (2017). Responsibility for Psychological Sense of Community and Well-Being in Old Age: A Qualitative Study of Urban Older Adults in Norway. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 5, 321-338. doi: [10.4236/jss.2017.57020](https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2017.57020).

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- II. Bahl, N. K. H., & Hagen, I. (2017). Psychological Sense of Community Responsibility and Diversity in Old Age: A Qualitative Study of Urban Older Adults in India. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 5, 387-401. doi: [10.4236/jss.2017.57024](https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2017.57024).

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- III. Bahl, N. K. H., Nafstad, H. E., Blakar, R. M., & Langvik, E. (2017). Meanings of Psychological Sense of Community Among Urban Older and Young Adults in Norway and India. Submitted for publication.

### **List of Abbreviations**

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BSCS	Brief Sense of Community Scale
MPSOC	Multiple Psychological Sense of Community
PSOC	Psychological Sense of Community
PSOC-R	Psychological Sense of Community Responsibility
SCI	Sense of Community Index
SCI-2	Sense of Community Index-2
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TISS	Tata Institute of Social Sciences

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### **List of Abbreviations**

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BSCS	Brief Sense of Community Scale
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## **I. Introduction**

Seymour Sarason (1974), one of the founders of community psychology, proposed psychological sense of community (PSOC) as a core-value for community psychological research and interventions. He described the essential characteristic of sense of community as ‘the perception of similarity to others, an acknowledged interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure’ (p. 157). The lack of PSOC was considered a destructive force in life, and dealing with its consequences and its prevention should be the overarching concern of community psychology (Sarason, 1986).

Today, the ageing population is a contemporary issue affecting many societies across the world. The portion of the global population aged 60 years or older is estimated to increase from 10.0% in 2000 to 21.8% in 2050. A further increase to 32.2% is estimated to take place in 2100 (Lutz, Sanderson, & Scherbov, 2008). In 2009, Cheng and Heller expressed concern about community psychology rarely attending to the issues of ageing. Consequently, special attention has recently been given to this issue by adopting a critical and cross-disciplinary approach to the positive potentials as well as challenges which demographic ageing provide to individuals and their communities (see Provencher, Keating, Warburton, & Roos, 2014). However, in order to effectively capitalise on the positive potentials of ageing, a more complete understanding of the importance of community to older adults is necessary. In-depth analysis of how older adults define and construct PSOC has been, and still is, one of the most important topics to meet this necessity.

Population ageing is progressing in vastly different cultures across the world (Jacobzone, Cambois, Chaplain, & Robine, 1999) and there is a consensus that PSOC is a context-sensitive and culturally bound concept (Hill, 1996; Mak, Cheung, & Law, 2009; Sonn, Bishop, & Drew, 1999). Thus, when studying PSOC one cannot assume that people draw on the same meaning systems (Sonn et al., 1999). However, limited attention has been devoted to the cultural aspects of later-life PSOC. To build a more complete and context-sensitive understanding of later-life PSOC across the world, there is a need to understand PSOC and ageing as embedded in meaning systems. In old age, older adults go through several psychosocial transitions that are common across the world (e.g., retirement, decline in health and loss of spouse and loved-ones). However, how these transitions are culturally expected to be managed and how they affect later-life PSOC can be tied to cultural context (Bhawuk, 2008; Katz, 1996). Moreover, with the emergence of an increasingly growing global meaning system, culturally embedded understandings of PSOC, and even later-life itself, may be challenged and even altered today (Baars, Dannefer, Phillipson, & Walker, 2006; Torres, 2006).

This thesis approaches later-life PSOC from a meaning system perspective, where older adults' conceptualisations are understood as embedded within the interaction of meaning systems in a cultural context. The way we use language to describe concepts reflects meaning systems within society and analyses of language usage may therefore serve as descriptive indicators of societal and psychological phenomena and processes, including PSOC (Billig, 1997, 2006; Blakar, 1979; Carlquist et al., 2017; Formanowicz, Roessel, Maass, & Suitner, 2016; Holtgraves, 2014; Nafstad, Carlquist, & Blakar, 2012; Nafstad, Blakar, Carlquist, Phelps, & Rand-Hendriksen, 2007; Pennebaker, Mehl, & Niederhoffer, 2003; Sonn et al., 1999). Moreover, the way we speak about something, our discourse, influences meaning systems within society (Fairclough, 2010; Gee, 2014b). As

such, analysing the way older adults describe their meanings of PSOC provides central insight into positive potentials of demographic ageing, and how older individuals engage with cultural understandings and meaning systems within their cultural context.

Exploring Norwegian and Indian urban older adults' conceptualisations of PSOC and the interaction between their discourse and meaning systems, by several different qualitative analyses of interview material, this thesis attempts to add knowledge about: a) how older adults define and construct PSOC and b) the interaction between later-life discourses of PSOC and cultural meaning systems in two additional cultural contexts.

Before the field and studies are further introduced, I will provide a short introduction to two central topics within PSOC research, 'PSOC and culture' and 'PSOC and age', and position the present research with respect to these.

### **PSOC and Culture: Lines of Research and Positioning of the Thesis**

Since Seymour Sarason introduced PSOC as a core value in community psychology in 1974, there has been particular focus on understanding the role of cultural meaning systems in people's meanings of PSOC (e.g., Bishop, Colquhoun, & Johnson, 2006). Many cultural contexts have been examined to provide knowledge about this concept across the world and to validate the measure of the dominant operationalisation: Sense of Community Index (SCI) (Brodsky, 2009; Pretty, Chipuer, & Bramston, 2003; Pretty, Conroy, Dugay, Fowler, & Williams, 1996; Regis, 1988; Robinson & Wilkinson, 1995; Roussi, Rapti, & Kiosseoglou, 2006; Sagy, Stern, & Krakover, 1996; Sonn & Fisher, 1998).

Several scholars have applied the SCI to understand meanings of PSOC in new cultural contexts (e.g. Wu & Chow, 2013 in Hong Kong). Others have developed new versions of the measure for the specific context and group studied (e.g., Chiessi,



Cicognani, & Sonn, 2010 for Italian adolescents). Finally, a number of studies, primarily from Australian community psychologists (e.g., Sonn et al, 1999), approach PSOC as a culture-bound concept with emic<sup>1</sup> meanings. This line of research is critical of assuming that ‘academic meanings’ of PSOC necessarily will be valid for cultural contexts which have not been studied before and apply qualitative approaches to grasp people’s meanings (Barbieri, Zani, & Sonn, 2014; Bishop et al., 2006; Dudgeon, Mallard, Oxenham, & Fielder, 2002; Mannarini & Fedi, 2009; Mannarini & Rochira, 2014).

The present research was stimulated by the need to understand the role of culture in meanings of PSOC in additional cultural contexts and is positioned within the latter line of research. My bi-cultural background as Norwegian-Indian represented a unique opportunity to use this background as an analytic resource to understand PSOC in two cultural contexts where the concept, to my knowledge, has not been studied before. Moreover, as a relationship between PSOC and individualistic and collectivistic meaning systems has been demonstrated (Love, 2007; Moscardino, Scrimin, Capello, & Altoè, 2010; Nafstad, Blakar, Botchway, & Rand-Hendriksen, 2009; Sarason, 1974), choosing individualistic Norway and collectivistic India as cultural contexts, represented a chance to study meanings of PSOC with respect of the two meanings systems.

### **PSOC and Age: Lines of Research and Positioning of the Thesis**

In research on PSOC and age, there has been a focus on how PSOC is experienced and defined by specific age-groups (Albanesi, Cicognani, & Zani, 2007; Amio, 2006; Chiessi et al., 2010; Cicognani, Klimstra, & Goossens, 2014; Cicognani, Martinengo, Albanesi, De Piccoli, & Rollero, 2014; Evans, 2007; Ferrari, 2000; Kenyon & Carter,

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<sup>1</sup> According to Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen (2002) emic research considers local frames of reference and culture-specific aspects within one culture in interpreting the social and psychological realities of a group.

2011; Li, Hodgetts, & Sonn, 2014; Pretty, Andrewes, & Collett, 1994; Strother, 2006; Zaff & Devlin, 1998). The SCI measure has been demonstrated as central to meanings of PSOC across the life-span (Amio, 2006; Evans, 2007; Fisher, Sonn, & Bishop, 2002; Zaff & Devlin, 1998). However, in research some scholars adjust the SCI measure to include communities important for the age group studied (e.g. the neighbourhood as well as the school for adolescents) as this may differ from one age group to another (Pretty et al., 1996). Others have used qualitative measurements along with the SCI (Zaff & Devlin, 1998). Finally, there are some scholars assessing PSOC solely by qualitative approaches to understand the concept with respect to the specific age group and cultural context studied (e.g., Li et al., 2014).

The present research was inspired by the paradoxical lack of studies on community and PSOC among older adults in a world with an ageing population. It positions itself within the latter line of research in aiming to explore older adults' meanings of PSOC within two different cultural contexts. Using my cultural background as an analytical resource, I aspired to understand the meanings of PSOC in older adults in Norway and India with respect to the cultural meaning systems within their contexts.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

First, in the second chapter I present theory and research on PSOC and community from community psychology. This section describes theoretical and empirical developments within the field, as well as some gaps. Then, later-life PSOC as a cross-disciplinary field is briefly introduced. In chapter three, I present the research; the understanding of PSOC, its positioning and aims. A short introduction to Norwegian and Indian meanings of community is also included to provide the reader with some context. In chapter four, the methodology, data collection and analyses are outlined. Ethical

considerations and reflections about reflexivity and validity of the research are also provided. Chapter five provides a summary of the main findings in each of the three papers. Thereafter, in chapter six, a general discussion of the findings is presented including conceptual implications, implications for future research and practical implications. Finally, limitations of the research are presented in chapter seven, as well as an overall conclusion in chapter eight.

## **II. Meanings of PSOC – Theoretical and Empirical State of the Art**

### **The Dominant Meaning of PSOC - A Core Value in Community Psychology**

The theoretical contributions of Sarason (1974) were empirically supported as early as the late 1970s (see Doolittle & McDonald, 1978). The largest and most widely accepted effort in converting Sarason's theoretical proposal into some form of theory and definition, however, has been McMillan and Chavis (1986). They defined PSOC as: 'a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together' (1986, p. 9). In order to measure and understand the effects of PSOC, they proposed a four-dimensional conceptualisation of the meaning of PSOC as a state consisting of: a) a feeling of belonging, acceptance and identification with the community (membership); b) an experience of having some impact on the community and a sense of acceptable influence from the community (influence); c) a sense that one's individual needs will be integrated and fulfilled through the community's resources and at the same time one's own contributions to the community (integration and fulfilment of needs); and d) a shared experience between members that the community shares and will continue to share a common history (shared emotional connection).

The importance of maintaining PSOC as a core value in community psychology has been demonstrated by several studies illustrating an association with various positive individual and community outcomes: life satisfaction (Prezza & Costantini, 1998), mental health and well-being (Davidson & Cotter, 1991; McCarthy, Pretty, & Catano, 1990), volunteerism (Okun & Michel, 2006; Omoto & Malsch, 2005), prosocial behaviour (Wenner, 2015), community involvement (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990), community and

political participation (Davidson & Cotter, 1989; Talò, Mannarini, & Rochira, 2014) and satisfaction with public services (Sagy et al., 1996).

There is, however, a dark side to the concept too. Although these usually relate to the lack of PSOC, PSOC in itself entails boundaries and exclusion. Some studies have illustrated examples of communities being unsupportive or even exclusionary of older adult people (e.g., Walsh, O'Shea, Scharf, & Shucksmith, 2014 ). Moreover, oppressive groups can potentially meet the criteria for a strong healthy community. To use a present-day example, communities of terrorists such as ISIS most likely experience a PSOC within their community. Finally, 'imposed communities' (communities that people do not chose themselves, but involuntarily belong to) have been discussed as a related issue (e.g., communities based on caste) (Bess, Fisher, Sonn, & Bishop, 2002; Dalton, Elias, & Wandersman, 2007).

### **Meanings of Community**

The definition of the concept 'community' continues to be a difficult issue in social sciences as well as within community psychology (Hillery, 1955; Mannarini & Fedi, 2009). Sarason applied the definition of PSOC to *geographical communities* (territorial or physical bounded places) as well as *relational communities* (communities founded on common interest or goals). Basing their conceptualisation upon Gusfield's (1975) definition of community, McMillan and Chavis (1986) also distinguished between these two forms of community. Both forms of communities are central for all age groups, including older adults (Provencher et al., 2014). Ife (1995), however, claims that community should be defined in a subjective way: 'Because of its subjective nature, it is not particularly helpful to think of community as "existing" or to "operationalise" community in such a way that we can measure it. It is more appropriate to allow people to

develop their own understanding of what community means for them, in their own context...’ (p. 93). Similarly, Provencher et al. (2014) argue that in order to fully understand the importance of community to older adults (that is, what makes older people feel connected to others), more attention should be given to older people’s understanding of the construct. These constructivist perspectives are integrated in this thesis and its explorative aims.

### **Theoretical Developments**

The most important theoretical developments for this thesis are the conceptualisation of: ‘Multiple Senses of Community’ (M-PSOC) (Brodsky, 1996; Brodsky, Loomis, & Marx, 2002; Brodsky & Marx, 2001; Mannarini, Rochira, & Talo, 2014), ‘Psychological Sense of Community Responsibility’ (PSOC-R) (Boyd & Nowell, 2014; Nowell & Boyd, 2010; Nowell & Boyd, 2014) and the issue raised by Mannarini and Fedi (2009) – that meanings of PSOC can potentially be something more than what is included in the unidimensional model of PSOC.

MPSOC proposes: a) a broad conceptualisation of PSOC as positive, negative and neutral, b) PSOC as an outcome of people’s multiple communities, and c) that diversity is an inherent part of the concept (Brodsky, 2017). For example, one individual can have a positive PSOC at work, and at the same time, have a negative PSOC in his or her neighbourhood. Moreover, if that same individual is an older adult, he or she can still feel a strong PSOC with younger members within one of the communities, even though these members are different ages. Diversity can exist as long as there is inclusion (Brodsky, 2017).

The second development (PSOC-R) goes deeper into the theoretical framework of PSOC and offers a corollary to the dominant meaning of PSOC. To further explain,

Nowell and Boyd (2010) question the needs theory which the conception and measurement of PSOC have relied on: understanding PSOC as a resource for meeting physiological or psychological needs of the individual. They state that this perspective of PSOC is insufficient as it fails to account for the situations in which people act to benefit their communities, not out of the expectation of their own individual benefit, but rather, in the pursuit of higher order ideals, personal values and a sense of responsibility. To capture such expressions of community, they (based on the work of March & Olsen, 1989) proposed an additional perspective of PSOC as 'sense of community responsibility'. This perspective rests on the premise that individuals develop personal values, norms, ideals, and beliefs about what is appropriate within a given social context through exposure to various institutions (e.g., families, neighbourhoods and senior centres) within a social context. As such, the perspective considers PSOC as a value-based phenomenon and focuses on the interaction between an individual's perception of the community context and his/her personal belief system.

Finally, Mannarini and Fedi (2009) raised the issue that the academic construction of the concept do not always represent the experience and understanding that people have of community and PSOC. Although numerous examinations of meanings of PSOC support the theoretical model proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) and it remains the primary theoretical fundament for most PSOC studies after 30 years, there are qualitative investigations suggesting that there exist a gap between academic and lay meanings of PSOC (e.g., Pretty et al., 1996). Using interviews to explore lay representations of community and PSOC, they demonstrated that variations in PSOC were related to different representations of PSOC. Conclusively, Mannarini and Fedi (2009) underlined the value of qualitatively investigating people's PSOC as 'culturally situated'.

## **Empirical Developments**

There has been a predominately quantitative and factor analytic approach to study PSOC. The SCI, and newer PSOC measures such as the BSCS (Brief Sense of Community Scale) (Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008) and the Sense of Community Scale-2 (SCI-2) (Chavis, Lee, & Acosta, 2008) have been validated in several different cultures and are commonly used. While the SCI is a 12-item scale with a true-false response set, the BSCS Brief is an 8-item scale with a 5-point Likert-type response and the SCI-2 is a 24-item index scale with a 4-point Likert scale.

However, a growing number of researchers within the field of community psychology study meanings of PSOC using qualitative approaches (Barbieri et al., 2014; Brodsky, 2009; Li et al., 2014; Mannarini & Fedi, 2009; Toohey, McCormack, Doyle-Baker, Adams, & Rock, 2013). These studies have aimed to understand the role of culture in meanings of PSOC and represent the empirical developments inspiring this thesis and its assumptions. In particular, the qualitative procedure of Mannarini and Fedi (2009) inspired the development of the open-ended semi-structured interview guides used in this research. Furthermore, the analytical approach of Brodsky (2009) to first analyse people's meanings in an inductive way and then apply McMillan and Chavis' (1986) conceptualisation to understand the findings from the initial analysis, inspired the analyses in this thesis.

## **Theoretical and Empirical Gaps and Assumptions in Mainstream PSOC Research**

Several community psychologists have been critical of using the quantitative measures of PSOC, especially when it comes to assessing meanings in new cultural contexts and groups (Hill, 1996; Sonn et al., 1999). The SCI has been subjected to criticism as the reliability of the four sub-scales has been shown to be inconsistent and



generally low. The response set has also been a concern because it limits variability. Finally, concern has been expressed about the adequacy of the SCI as a cross-cultural measure and that it fails to take into account the role of the family and social structure (Chavis et al., 2008; Sonn et al., 1999).

Moreover, the theoretical and empirical developments in PSOC research have largely rested on two basic assumptions of logical positivism: reductionisms and generalisability (Fisher et al., 2002). The work of McMillan and Chavis (1986) has been recognised as an example of this matter, assuming that truth or knowledge about PSOC is ascertained by reducing the meaning to its dimensions and elements, and the conceptualisation of PSOC as generalisable to the groups and cultural contexts studied (Fisher et al., 2002; Sonn et al., 1999). Using the SCI as a measurement of PSOC has restricted the opportunity to build knowledge on specific groups' meanings and to identify the role of meaning systems in particular cultural contexts, important for a group- and context-sensitive understanding of the construct. Consequently, the majority of PSOC studies have been conducted on adult age groups, and in Western societies. In a globalised world with an ageing population, this is of great concern, not only in community psychology, but for all change-makers and professionals wanting to promote later-life PSOC across the world.

### **Later-life PSOC as a Cross-Disciplinary Issue**

Although PSOC is a core value in community psychology and the few published studies on the PSOC in old age mainly come from scholars within this sub-discipline, later-life PSOC is a cross-disciplinary field where additional and very different disciplines and fields such as social gerontology and sociology (see Provencher et al., 2014), housing studies (Jolanki & Vilkkö, 2015), architecture (Cantarero, Potter, & Leach, 2007) and

health education (Minkler, 1985) have enhanced our understanding of the topic. The research on this issue can be structured with respect to different forms of communities, as follows:

**Geographical.** Aiming to understand the importance of community for older adults, ‘ageing in place’ has been a concept used in community psychology, social gerontology and sociology (Li et al., 2014; Provencher et al., 2014; Roos, Kolobe, & Keating, 2014). Some have addressed geographical PSOC and community connection with respect to specific geographical communities such as neighbourhood (Phillipson, Bernard, Phillips, & Ogg, 1999), Integrated Service Areas (Singelenberg, Stolarz, & McCall, 2014) and co-housing (Jolanki & Vilkkö, 2015). The latter has been understood as an option for older adult city-residents promoting PSOC and preventing the decline of PSOC despite retirement, loss of friends and reduced mobility. Others have debated the importance of intergenerational relations (Brown & Henkin, 2014; Roos et al., 2014) for older adults’ geographical PSOC and the importance of applying MPSOC as a concept to understand later-life meanings of PSOC with respect to multiple geographical communities (Li et al., 2014). Finally, ‘care for place’ has been introduced as a central concept to understand ‘ageing in place’: the varied and active ways older people are involved and contribute to their communities, including, volunteering, activism, advocacy and nurturing (Wiles & Jayasinha, 2013).

**Relational.** Communities of interest differ from geographical communities, as they are not bound to a physical setting but rather by a set of interests. The cross-disciplinary literature on the importance of these forms of communities for older adults has focused particularly on volunteering (Okun & Michel, 2006; Pozzi, Marta, Marzana, Gozzoli, & Ruggieri, 2014), intergenerational bonds (Brown & Henkin, 2014; Roos et al., 2014; Slevin, 2005), as well as the use of media to connect to virtual communities and distant

community connections (for migrants and those with family who have migrated) in later life (Li et al., 2014; Means & Evans, 2012; Provencher et al., 2014).

**Sense of Belonging.** Irrespective of the bonds based on geographical location or shared interests, it is ultimately a sense of belonging which connects people to their communities. Sarason as well as Willmott (1989) suggest that community is about people who share a sense of identity or belonging. One of the main questions within the research on later-life sense of belonging has been ‘how can older adults maintain a sense of belonging to their communities?’ (Provencher et al., 2014, p. 7). Li et al. (2014) illustrates that PSOC is not predicted by active participation but rather by personal social constructions fostered by a history of residence and assistance to other community members. Older adults create and maintain a sense of belonging to their communities through everyday practices.

### **III. The Present Research and Choice of Cultural Contexts**

#### **Understanding PSOC as Meaning – Positioning and Aims**

Several scholars within the field are approaching PSOC as an emic meaning to increase the understanding of context- and culture-specific aspects of the concept. In these studies, words and discourses have been central in providing the opportunity to explore and analyse such aspects, including the ones that transcend academic meanings of PSOC (Barbieri et al., 2014; Fisher et al., 2002; Mannarini & Fedi, 2009; Mannarini & Rochira, 2014; Sonn et al., 1999). These studies often adopt hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches to understand people's meanings. In addition, assuming that PSOC is a process (as juxtaposed to the understanding of PSOC as a state in McMillan and Chavis' operationalisation), this line of research has been concerned with the meaning systems and societal changes affecting people's conceptualisations of PSOC.

This thesis shares an understanding of PSOC with the qualitative and culture-oriented direction of PSOC research: The words and expressions people use to describe their meaning of PSOC are understood within interacting meaning systems at the individual and cultural level. To illustrate an example, take the word 'old'. The meaning of the word, our idea, understanding and definition of 'old', are connected to the meaning of other words such as 'young' or 'age', in an individual's meaning system. Furthermore, the meaning systems of an individual are closely interrelated to meaning systems at a cultural level. The way an individual from India describes and defines 'old', for instance, is influenced by cultural syndromes<sup>2</sup> within the Indian context. Moreover, every individual

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<sup>2</sup> '...a pattern of shared attitudes, beliefs, categorization, self-definitions, norms, role definitions, and values that is organized around a theme identified among those who speak a particular language, during a specific historic period and in a definable geographic period' (Triandis, 1996, p.408).

interact with cultural meaning systems through language usage (Fairclough, 2010; Gee, 2014b; Kim & Park, 2007). That is, the way people use language to speak about and describe concepts, their discourse, constructs the cultural meaning systems within their context. Our conceptualisations are shaped by and fitted to our cultural context, but at the same time, how we speak create that very same context. Taking this position, one of the core assumptions in this thesis is that analyses of people's descriptions and language use serve as descriptive indicators of societal and psychological phenomena, including PSOC (Billig, 1997, 2006; Blakar, 1979; Carlquist et al., 2017; Formanowicz et al., 2016; Holtgraves, 2014; H. Nafstad et al., 2012; Nafstad et al., 2007; Pennebaker et al., 2003).

Aiming to contribute knowledge about later-life meanings of PSOC in additional cultural contexts and beyond academic constructions, this thesis explores and describes: (Aim 1) urban older adults' meanings of PSOC in Norway (Papers I and III) and India (Papers II and III); and (Aim 2) the interaction between Norwegian and Indian urban older adults' meanings of PSOC and meaning systems within their context (Papers I, II and III).

### **Choice of Cultural Contexts**

The cultural context of Norway and India were chosen for several reasons. First, my bi-cultural background as Norwegian-Indian and networks in the two contexts made it convenient to collect data and provided an opportunity to use this background as an analytical resource. Secondly, as a relationship between PSOC and individualistic and collectivistic meaning systems has been demonstrated (Love, 2007; Moscardino et al., 2010; Nafstad et al., 2009; Sarason, 1974), choosing the two contexts provided an opportunity to explore the role of meaning systems with respect to the meanings of older

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adults in individualistic Norway and collectivistic India. Finally, to my knowledge, there are no prior published studies of PSOC within these cultural contexts, offering the opportunity to contribute new knowledge to the field.

Urban contexts were chosen because people are increasingly becoming city residents and because individuals residing in urban areas often report lower levels of PSOC, compared to individuals living in rural and suburban areas (Obst, Smith, & Zinkiewicz, 2002). There is thus a great need for knowledge about city residents PSOC for PSOC interventions within urban contexts. Also, having available data from the largest urban area in India (Mumbai), it was natural to choose Oslo, as it is the largest urban context in Norway.

### **Meanings of Community in Norway and India**

The meaning of PSOC is necessarily connected to the meaning of community. As such it is central to address what is meant by the concept ‘community’ within the two cultural contexts studied.

**Norway.** The Norwegian word for community ‘samfunn’ means both society and community and the first syllable denotes ‘being together’, ‘the same’, ‘cooperate’ ‘cohere, ‘union’, ‘gather into one’ (sammen, samme, samarbeide, henge sammen, samband, samle). This largely reflects the traditional Norwegian understanding of community as social bonds free of calculations, competitiveness, based on trust, a shared solicitousness toward weaker and less advantaged, but also characterised by harmony, a fear of standing out, inclusiveness and communalism (Eckstein, 1966). However, the Norwegian word ‘fellesskap’, defined as ‘to have something in common’ (det å ha noe felles) (Bokmålsordboka I Nynorskordboka, 2017), also translated as ‘community’, is more

closely connected to the concept 'sense of community' and was used in the interviews conducted in Norway (see Appendix 1).

**India.** The modern Hindi word for society, *samaj*, refers to a community of people bound together by some principle of social cohesion. It refers to common properties but also a coherence that is obtained between members of a shared culture (Dwyer, 2015). However, it may also refer to communities defined by caste, religion, region, historical era, or some other element of identity. According to Dirks (2001) caste is the core symbol of the Indian community, defining the features of Indian social organisation. Interviews in India were conducted in English and the expression 'sense of community' was used instead of PSOC, as the latter has academic and clinical connotations (especially in India where psychology is predominately clinical), which could have increased the experienced formality of the interview and thus influenced the informant's answers to fit with this context (see Appendix 2).

#### **IV. Methodology, Material and Analyses**

In qualitative studies, the aim is to understand a small number of informants' own frames of reference or view of the world, rather than trying to test a preconceived hypothesis on a large sample (Smith, 2003). There were several reasons to engage in this form of research in the present research. First, there were few studies on PSOC in older adults, and the two contexts upon which to build a solid foundation. Secondly, aiming to understand older adults' meanings of PSOC and cultural meaning systems reflected in these, it was important to conduct studies, which provided the possibility to explore older adults' meanings in-depth, and the meaning systems in a context-sensitive way.

The research questions were:

- 1) How do urban older adults in Norway and India define and describe PSOC?
- 2) Which cultural meaning systems are reflected in Norwegian and Indian older adults' meanings of PSOC?<sup>3</sup>
- 3) How do the older adults' meanings of PSOC interact with cultural meaning systems within their context?
- 4) Are there any life-stage related aspects of the older adults' meanings of PSOC?

The present research assumptions are placed between a realist and social constructivist epistemology. It assumes: a) that peoples descriptions can be reported as the reality of the informants (their meaning systems), b) that there are multiple realities (or conceptualisations), c) that meanings are constructed between individual meaning systems and cultural meaning systems, and, finally, d) that the interaction between these two

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<sup>3</sup> In papers I and II, older adults' meaning of PSOC is explored in terms of local meaning systems, while in paper III the perspective is broadened to include global meaning systems.



systems happens through discourse (Billig, 1997; Blakar, 1979; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fairclough, 2010; Formanowicz et al., 2016; Gee, 2014b; Pennebaker et al., 2003; Rommetveit, 1992).

## **Material**

The empirical findings in the thesis are based on individual semi-structured interviews which I conducted with informants from Mumbai in India and Oslo in Norway. The empirical findings in paper I are based on interviews with an older adult sample from Oslo gathered in March 2014. In paper II, the empirical findings are based on interview material from interviews with a sample of older adults from Mumbai gathered in March 2010. Finally, paper III was a follow-up and extension of the two previous papers including two additional sets of interview material from young adult people in Oslo and Mumbai, which were also gathered during the two data collections in 2014 and 2010. The interview materials from the young adult samples were included to add two new perspectives: a culturally comparative one and another on life-span development.

**Selection of Informants.** In total, 44 informants participated in the present research. The main sample included 24 older adults from Oslo (12 informants; six women and six men) and Mumbai (12 informants; six women and six men) (see Table 1 p. 26 and Table 2 p. 27 in this thesis for demographical variables of the informants). However, as paper III aimed to explore specific life-stage related aspects as well as cultural aspects of later-life conceptualisations of PSOC, a sample of ten young adults from both of the two contexts (20 in total) were included to understand these aspects even further. The idea was that including young adult samples would inform the understanding of what was shared and taken for granted within the cultural contexts (the cultural aspects of PSOC), but also

what was typical for older adults' meanings of PSOC: the life-stage related aspects of PSOC.

While 'old age' is defined as the age of 67 years and above in most research, policy makers and consensus in Norway, it is defined as 60 years of age in India (also in cultural scripts). Alongside residency in the city (Oslo and Mumbai) and language skills (Norwegian in Norway and English in India), these definitions of old age (67 and above in Norway and 60 and above in India) were used as inclusion criterion for informants in the present research. Finally, as all informants had to be healthy enough to participate in the study, senior centres, organisations and day care centres were chosen as main settings to recruit older adult informants.

***Older Adults in Norway.*** In purposive sampling, the researcher selects participants, settings or other sampling units as a criterion for the sampling (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In the recruitment of older adults from Norway, senior centres were chosen as the setting to recruit informants. Heads of senior centres across Oslo were contacted by phone to invite their centre to participate in the study. The ones who were interested in participating were given further information about the study by email. The information included details about the study and its aim, criteria for the desired sample (above 67 years, speaking Norwegian, living in Oslo and of both genders) and how to proceed with participation. The heads were advised to give information about the study and a document for written consent to older adults at their centre. They were also given post-paid envelopes for the participants to send back to me. I then contacted the older adults who sent me the consent to set a time and place for the interview. Three senior centres in different parts of West and East Oslo agreed to participate in the study and nine informants were recruited via this approach. All nine informants chose to meet in their senior centre to do the interview.

As often happens, unforeseen opportunities to include informants in the research arise (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). During the data collection, I came in contact with another older adult individual at one of the senior centres, and thus this informant was included by convenience sampling. Finally, to increase the heterogeneity of the sample I wanted to include informants representing the many older adults in Oslo with a Pakistani background. I did not come in contact with older adults with this background through the senior centres. Therefore, it was necessary to use convenience sampling, contacting an acquaintance that had family members and a large network of people with a Pakistani background and who resided in Oslo, in order to recruit two informants with this background, both residing in Oslo East. These final three informants chose to do the interview in their home. None of the older adults invited to the study withdrew after accepting to participate.

***Older Adults in India.*** In Mumbai, scientific staff (one professor and two field workers) at the Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS) recruited the older adult informants, originally to a former master project (Bahl, 2011). I chose to use this available data as it was timesaving and inexpensive, compared to collecting new data. The staff used membership lists from the organisation ‘Lions Club’ to contact and invite senior members by phone. Five informants were recruited from this organisation. In addition, two day care centres were asked for permission to interview older adults. Both day care centres granted permission. The staff at the centres then asked older adults if they wanted to do an interview for the study. Four informants were recruited by this approach. Finally, three older adults who did not identify themselves as active in communities were included by one of the field workers. Overall, the data collection strategy was a combination of purposive and convenience sampling.

When I met with the informants, they were all given further information about the study and its aim and asked for written consent. Most of the informants chose to meet in their home (eight of 12), while one informant chose to meet at TISS, one at work, one at a restaurant, and one at the day care centre. The sample resided in the city areas of Chembur and Sion (suburban and urban, respectively).

*Young Adults from Norway and India.* A sample of 20 young adult informants (ten from each context) was recruited to provide insight into cultural and life-stage related aspects of later-life meanings of PSOC. The idea was that the inclusion of these sub-samples could provide the opportunity to explore age-specific aspects of Norwegian and Indian urban older adults' meanings of PSOC as well as cultural aspects shared with other age groups within the same context. In Norway the campus 'Blindern' at the University of Oslo was chosen as a setting to recruit young informants living in Oslo. I encountered five young informants from Oslo by asking random individuals passing by to participate in the study. This strategy was purposive with respect to the selection of the setting to recruit informants. However, as it was necessary to include additional informants, convenience sampling was used as well, by asking acquaintances if they knew someone who could be interested in participating in an interview. Five informants were recruited by this approach.

In Mumbai, TISS was chosen as a setting to recruit young adult informants. As I stayed in a hostel at TISS it was easy to encounter potential informants at the campus. Random young adult individuals were asked if they wanted to participate in an interview and given information about the study both verbally and written.

All informants gave their written consent before the interview and chose to do the interview on the campus.

*Benefits and Limitations of the Sampling Strategy for the Older Adult Samples.*

The mix of sampling strategies applied in Oslo benefitted the research as I encountered older adults in very different situations: some still working, some retired, some living in an old age home, some residing with husband or wife, some with children too, and some living by themselves. It also provided diversity as I could include older adult informants with a Pakistani background in the sample. In addition, approaching senior centres provided me with a sample concerned with the topic: half of the Norwegian informants were active as volunteers at a senior centre in the city area where they resided. However, it is important to acknowledge the senior centre head's assumptions of who would be interesting or good informants for the research project. They may have asked older adults who were the most active and eager in promoting PSOC in the centres, or who were most concerned with other people's PSOC to participate in the study. The two Pakistani informants in the Norwegian older adult sample were reached through convenience. Thus, my contact's assumptions of who would be 'good Pakistani informants' for the research may also have influenced the informants reached though I emphasised that any informant fitting the inclusion criteria would be desirable. Finally, one of the Pakistani informants did not fit the inclusion criteria for age (she was 62 years), however due to time limitations for data collection and the fact that the informant is considered 'old' in her home country, this was regarded as acceptable.

The strategy used in India also provided me with older adults in different situations (living at home with spouse/family, in an old age home, alone or participating in a day care centre) and with different outlooks on community and PSOC (active and not active in communities). It also included older adults who were difficult to reach using other strategies (older adults who were not active in communities). In this data collection, however, I had less control over the recruitment of informants. In hindsight this restricted

me from some of the characteristics of the sample which would be desirable, for instance heterogeneity reflecting the population in the city (only Hindu and rather resourceful informants were included). Another limitation was that I lost central information such as how many informants chose not to participate in the study.

Informants recruited at the day care centres likewise were influenced by the staff choosing whom to ask to participate in the study and they may have had assumptions about who would be regarded as 'suitable informants'. Moreover, most of the sample lived in a suburban area of Mumbai (Chembur). There can be differences between meanings of PSOC in suburban and urban areas in Mumbai.

***Benefits and Limitations of the Sampling Strategy for the Young Adult Samples.***

The purposive strategy used in recruiting the urban young adult sample aided the study as the campuses provided the opportunity to approach a large number of potential informants. Recruiting the sample in this setting, compared to other public settings (e.g., shopping malls) was more likely to lead me to young adults valuing the importance of research, and thus informants wanting to participate. The sampling strategy, however, had the potential of leading me to informants with a certain particular socio-political values and ideals (important when studying the role of meaning systems) and who were more talkative or extroverted than the general population (several of the individuals declined to participate in the study when asked); combined with another strategy, convenience sampling, was beneficial for sample diversity.

Table 1. Older adults' Demographic Characteristics

	<b>Informant<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Highest level of education</b>	<b>Residential area of Oslo</b>	<b>Years of residency</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Family members in the home</b>
<b>Older adults (Norway)</b>	F851	Widow	MA	West	80	3	0
	F852	Widow	High School	West	25	3	0
	F853	Divorced	Primary School	West	5	2	0
	F854	Widow	High School	West	25	4	0
	F71	Divorced	NDGC <sup>5</sup>	East	16	2	0
	F62	Married	MA	East	21	2	1
	M78	Divorced	BA	West	30	1	0
	M80	Married	MA	West	9	2	1
	M85	Widower	NDGC	East	5	0	0
	M75	Widower	High School	East	47	2	0
	M75	Widower	NDGC	East	3	4	0
	M69	Married	MA	East	28	4	5
		<b>Informant</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Highest education</b>	<b>Residential area</b>	<b>Years of residency</b>	<b>Children</b>
<b>Older adults (India)</b>	F77	Widow	MA	Suburban	3	2	3
	F74	Widow	BA	Suburban	15	1	4
	F61	Married	BA	Suburban	10	3	1
	F82	Married	PhD	Suburban	50 <	2	1
	F67	Married	BA	Suburban	4	2	1
	F80	Widow	Basic school	Urban	6	2	0
	M81	Widower	BA	Urban	4	2	0
	M67	Married	BA	Suburban	37	1	1
	M65	Married	BA	Suburban	39	1	2
	M60	Married	MA	Suburban	20	2	4
	M70	Widower	High school	Urban	1	0	0
	M69	Widower	MA	Suburban	32	2	0

<sup>4</sup> Informants are represented with codes indicating gender (F, female and M, male) and the informant's age. In the Norwegian sample, there were several female informants who were 85 years old and these were given an additional number (1-4) to identify them.

<sup>5</sup> Non-degree granting college.

Table 2. Young Adults' Demographic Characteristics

<b>Informants</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Relationship status</b>	<b>Highest level of education</b>	<b>Years of residency</b>	<b>Children</b>	<b>Informants living with family members</b>
Young adults Norway	21-28 years	6 single, 1 engaged, 1 cohabitant and 2 in a relationship	Upper secondary school to lower university level	6 months to 11 years (majority < 3 years)	0	3 of 10
Young adults India	18-25 years	10 of 10 single	College to lower university level	1-21 years (majority < 2 years)	0	5 of 10

### **Analyses**

The data from the 44 interviews were substantial and required an approach that enabled exploring and comparing large amounts of data systematically while also analysing meanings in relation to context. Several different qualitative analytical approaches were used to explore the research questions: thematic analysis (papers I and II), discourse analysis (papers I and II) and content analysis (paper III). All approaches are concerned with the analysis of language use and, to some degree, aim to understand meaning as part of meaning systems.

To prepare the data for analyses, a simple transcription system was used (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). Most of the interviews were transcribed by me, using the programme 'Express scribe'. Two assistants were hired to transcribe a few interviews from the Norwegian older adults and all the interviews from the Norwegian young adult sample. In total, the transcribed material consisted of 270 pages. In all stages of the analytical process, I used memos and log writing.



The analysis of the first two studies aimed for a particular in-depth and context-sensitive understanding of the meanings of PSOC for older adults. The same stages in the analyses (and aims for these steps) were applied for these studies (see Table 3).

Table 3. Stages, Analysis and Aim for the Analyses in Papers I and II

Stage	Analysis	Aim
1	First four steps of thematic analysis of meanings of PSOC.	Find the most frequent and central themes in the meanings of PSOC for the sample.
2	Analysis using ‘the making strange tool’ of what is taken for granted in the meaning of PSOC.	To get an in-depth understanding of what was taken for granted in the samples’ meanings of PSOC.
3	Merging themes and taken-for-granted elements of the meaning of PSOC to ‘final themes’ of the concept.	To review the initial themes and to include the most salient and frequently mentioned themes as well as taken-for-granted elements in the final themes.
4	Analysis using ‘the framing problem tool’ of the way the context is reflected in the core themes of PSOC.	To get a context-sensitive understanding of the main aspects of the samples’ meanings of PSOC.
5	Analysing final themes in light of McMillan and Chavis’ conceptualisation of PSOC.	To understand how the final themes related to the most dominant conceptualisations of PSOC.

**Discourse Analysis.** Despite the fact that discourse analysis was not the first analysis used in the current research, it should be introduced first because of its function as a framework for the research.

Discourse is language in use. In this regard, language means more than words; it includes forms of action, sign systems and values in use (Gee, 2014b). Discourse analysis as a discipline consists of several approaches to analyse discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Common to all is a view of language as social practice in context (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In papers I and II, I describe why the approach of Gee (2014) was chosen in these studies; mainly because it is a convenient approach with concrete tools for studying meanings of PSOC in an in-depth and context-sensitive way. In this section, I will

describe how I came across this approach and provide some additional details on how particular discourse analytical heuristics were used in the analyses.

I was lucky to learn about Gee's approach during a masterclass in qualitative research in Maastricht in 2014. The start of the analysis can be said to be the discussions of my data with the group of researchers I met in this class. One of the most important messages I took back with me was that 'Gee's tools are best used sparingly'. That is, one must choose the tools that seem most appropriate and helpful to understand the data. As my teacher explained, the word 'tool' does not mean that the tools are used as a hammer or wrench to fit the data. The tools sensitise the researcher to informative features of the data and there are no standard ways of using them (T. Dornan, personal communication August 22, 2014).

Two tools were regarded as helpful and appropriate for the data: 'the making strange tool' and 'the framing problem tool'. The first one was used to look for linguistic features: words expressing what the informant took for granted. It was applied to the whole data set and in a systematic way (see paper I p. 325-326 and paper II p. 391). The second tool was used to analyse the main themes presented in papers I and II. In applying this tool, I asked if and in what way the specific cultural meaning systems in each cultural context were reflected in the themes. Using this tool to go back and forth between the data and theory about different meaning systems in each cultural context, as well as discussing with colleagues how meaning systems were reflected in the meanings of the samples, helped me in making sense of this relationship and to reach interpretations.

**Thematic Analysis.** Thematic analysis is one of the most widely used analyses within psychology to analyse interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Smith, 2003). Traditionally thematic analysis is accomplished in six analytical steps: 1) Familiarising with the data, 2) Generating and forming initial codes, 3) Searching for themes, 4)

Reviewing themes, 5) Defining and naming themes, and 6) Producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke, Braun, & Hayfield, 2015). In the first and second papers, I decided to use thematic analysis to organise the data with respect to reoccurring and central themes. This was largely done with the first four steps of thematic analysis.

The first step of the analysis was to read through the data set to become familiar with the material. Next the material was coded by hand to generate initial and inductive codes. I then went back to the data set and searched for codes that I could have missed in the first read-through. As the third step of the analysis, organising codes in themes, I looked for repeated and coherent patterns of meaning across codes which were distinct from other themes. To review the themes, in the fourth stage, I noted the most central characteristics and sub-themes of each theme. Furthermore, I went through the data set to see if and how each theme interacted with other themes, and if demographic variables played a role in each theme. Finally, I extended the review of the themes by highlighting the data set in different colours (e.g. one theme in yellow, another in green) for each theme to check to what degree the themes covered the whole data set and if the non-coloured parts provided further insight into the understanding of the PSOC conceptualisation. Thereafter the themes identified through these four steps and the findings from ‘the making strange tool’ (words used to express taken-for-granted elements of PSOC) were merged, as part of the fifth step (defining and naming themes). Moreover, the most important themes (‘individual responsibility’ and the sub-theme ‘adaptation to transitions’ in paper I and ‘helping and caring for others’ and ‘community heterogeneity’ in paper II) were analysed by ‘the framing problem tool’ in a context-sensitive way. Finally, in producing the report (the sixth step) the final themes were, similarly to Brodsky’s study (2009), understood with respect to McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) conceptualisation.

Thematic analysis is often divided in terms of four dimensions (use of the dataset in the analysis, inductive/theoretical coding, the focus in findings themes, and epistemology) with two categories of each of the four dimensions (rich description of the data set/detailed account of one particular aspect, inductive/theoretical thematic analysis, semantic/latent themes and realist/constructivist epistemology) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These, as well as the positioning of the present research in terms of these dimensions and categories, can be illustrated as follows:

Table 4. Thematic Analysis in the Present Research

<b>Use of the data set in the analysis</b>		
<b>Rich description of the data set</b> Themes identified and coded that reflect the content of the entire data set. Often used in investigating under-researched areas.	<b>Detailed account of one particular aspect</b> Detailed and nuanced account of one theme within the data.	<b>Present research</b> Identified themes that reflect the entire data set but with a detailed focus on the most salient themes in the data.
<b>Inductive versus theoretical thematic analysis</b>		
<b>Inductive thematic analysis</b> Coding the data without trying to fit it into a frame, dimensions or preconceptions.	<b>Theoretical thematic analysis</b> Analysis driven by the researcher's theoretical interest or in terms of specific concepts/dimensions.	<b>Present research</b> An inductive and theoretical analysis where the initial steps of the thematic analysis were driven by the data, and then secondly, analysing themes with respect to specific meaning systems and dimensions.
<b>Semantic or latent themes</b>		
<b>Semantic themes</b> Not looking for anything beyond what an informant has said. Form and meaning in focus.	<b>Latent themes</b> Identifying underlying ideas assumptions and conceptualisations, also ideologies. Focus on what gave rise to that form and meaning.	<b>Present research</b> Focus on the semantic themes in the first analysis, followed by a more latent analysis of the themes by discourse analysis.
<b>Epistemology</b>		
<b>Realist</b> Reporting experiences and meanings and the reality of informants.	<b>Constructivist</b> Examining the way events, realities, meanings and experiences are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society.	<b>Present research</b> Reporting meanings of the informants while exploring meanings as embedded in meaning systems within one cultural context.

**Content Analysis.** ‘Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from text (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use’ (Krippendorff, 2012, p. 24). It is a widely used qualitative research technique with three distinct approaches: conventional, directed and summative. A conventional approach derives coding categories directly from the text data. In a directed approach, the initial coding is guided by a theory or relevant research findings. Finally, a summative content analysis involves counting and comparing keywords or content, followed by an interpretation of the underlying context (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Usually this form of content analysis includes a quantitative analysis where the researcher explores usage of words, followed by a qualitative analysis with a focus on understanding the usage of words in context.

In the third paper of this thesis, the aim was to understand meanings of PSOC in a cross-cultural and developmental perspective. I and my co-authors questioned: a) ‘do different age groups within the same cultural context have similar or different meanings of PSOC?’ and b) ‘does the way different age groups speak about PSOC reflect the same meaning systems within one context?’ A summative content analysis was chosen as it provided the opportunity to identify words and expressions used by two different age groups: older adults (N=24) and young adults (N=20) from two cultural contexts (Norway and India) and to compare the four sub-samples’ descriptions of PSOC.

The interview material (part 2) from the four sub-samples was analysed. First, I read through the material to identify words which each of the four samples used to describe PSOC. I looked for words typically used for each sample but also words that reoccurred across the material. Then, the identified words were used as search-words in NVivo to perform text search queries (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). To extend the text search queries, I extended these to include words from operationalisations of PSOC

(Mannarini et al., 2014; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Each text search query provided information on how many times each word or expression was used by each individual informant and was plotted in IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) (Verma, 2012). Next, chi-square tests were used to explore the relationship between the use of a word/expression and cultural context and age. The aim was to find words and expressions which were interesting to analyse qualitatively; any significant relationships between the usages of PSOC related words and 1) cultural context, 2) specific age groups or 3) specific age groups from each of the contexts, was of interest. I worked closely together with a statistician to secure the quality of this part of the analysis. Next, in the qualitative part of the analysis, the detected words and expressions were compared with respect to typical usages for the two age groups and cultures. Finally, the findings from this analysis were interpreted with respect to the larger context; the local and global meaning systems co-existing as part of the Norwegian and Indian cultural meaning systems. Although not going as deep as the two other papers in analysing the role of cultural meaning systems, this approach enabled the possibility to explore the role local and global meanings systems in each of the two cultural contexts, as well as age, thus adding central insight to the aims of the thesis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The research was approved by the Norwegian ethics comity (NSD) before collecting the data in India and Norway. The procedural ethics of the studies, that is the ethical actions dictated as universally necessary by governing institutions or bodies (Tracy, 2010), were approved. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that all studies raise ethical considerations and the first one to consider is the consent of the informants (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). All informants interviewed were informed about the purpose of the study

and gave their written consent before the interviews were conducted. Moreover, in order to ensure a level of cautiousness in the interview situation, the informants were given the option to choose the setting of the interview that they were most comfortable with. Several additional measures to secure the ethicality of the research were made: The informants were made aware of the nature of the interview, that they were free to end the interview at any time, that everything would be made anonymous, that notes could be taken if they felt uncomfortable about recording the interview, and finally, that nothing was considered as 'right' or 'wrong'.

The topics of the interview 'Community' and 'PSOC' are not usually understood as sensitive topics. The negative aspects, or the dark side of community and PSOC, such as exclusion and isolation are, however, topics that people may find difficult to speak about. One of the questions in the interview guide ('Do you have any experience of someone being excluded or leaving a community which you were a member of?') touched upon the boundaries of the informant's community, and can be said to pertain to these aspects of communities. Throughout the interview, every effort was made to be a sympathetic and attentive listener, dedicated to the situation. In cases where the informant was struggling to express him/herself, I let them know that we could stop and come back to the question if desired.

Additional ethical considerations involve the way the informants are presented and how the data is interpreted. In the discourse analytical perspective, the informants and their culture are understood as involved in the process of constructing discourse. The informants and the cultures were thus not perceived or presented in a passive way, which could have offended the samples. Finally, the experiences and understandings of the informants were respected and understood from their own frames of reference.

## **Reflexivity**

Marshall and Rossman (2016) argue that the researcher is a gendered, aged, culturally and socially-placed human being who will affect the way the data is focused upon and analysed. Self-reflexivity, or sincerity (Tracy, 2010), is an important part of the criteria for quality in qualitative research. Being a bi-cultural researcher has an impact upon one's values, what stands out as central in the analysis and the interpretation of findings in any study. It is important to acknowledge that an upbringing coloured by both Norwegian and Indian culture, rituals, and tradition, have influenced my interests, values and ways of thinking as a researcher. Kim and Park (2007) argue that 'outsiders' with an external point of view can call to attention what is taken for granted or assumed to be natural, but is actually cultural. As such, a bi-cultural background may have made me especially attentive to the importance of cultural contexts in meanings of psychological phenomena. My background in cultural and community psychology, emphasising the important role of cultural context to understand psychological phenomena, is also likely to have increased the attentiveness to the Western bias within the discipline.

There are several benefits and limitations with this background. To add to the reflections in the papers, it had the benefit of giving me access to information. It provided me with networks in both contexts, and a possibility of being perceived as an 'insider' (sharing the same culture as the informants). This made it easier for me to stay in the contexts and to complete the data collection. It may, however, also restricted access to information in cases where I was perceived as an 'outsider' (not being regarded as 'entirely' Norwegian or Indian). The 'outsider' perspective may have been promoted by other factors such as age and gender too, especially in the Indian culture where patriarchal and traditional values emphasise men and older adult as in power over female and young. In the Indian context, my Indian surname may also have pointed to an upper-caste



background influencing access to information and promoting a social desirability in some of the informants' answers. Some informants from India did see me as Norwegian. However, their impression of me as such only seemed to increase their eagerness to express what was special about India, which was desirable for the research. However, a more distinctive Indian meaning than the one shared within the context may have been expressed by some of the informants because of this. Also, those informants who saw me as very young seemed excited to express what was special about the issues of old age, also valuable for the research. Again, a more distinctive picture of later-life PSOC may have been drawn by some of the informants because of this.

Finally, my academic background cannot be set aside from the research. Given that the informants knew that the interview was part of data collection for a PhD project (and that I was pursuing a PhD), it is likely that the informants answered questions in a somewhat 'correct' manner. This is particularly likely with my background in psychology as people often associate psychology with its clinical practice where people's expressions are analysed to understand their mental state. Being told that there could be no wrong or right answers, most informants did however seem comfortable with expressing different aspects of their meanings.

### **Validity in Qualitative Research**

According to Yardley (2015), validity in qualitative research can be demonstrated through several criteria; 'sensitivity to the context', 'commitment and rigour', 'coherence and transparency', and finally, 'impact and importance'.

An important aspect of 'sensitivity to the context' concerns the degree to which the research draws on existing relevant theory of the meanings and concepts studied. To the degree possible and appropriate, I included and made sense of the findings with

respect to literature about PSOC in old age and different cultures. A second aspect refers to 'context', as the socio-cultural context of the informants, which was important for the ecological validity of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The thesis has included theory on the meaning systems surrounding the samples to understand their meanings as embedded in each of the respective cultures. Including macro-level data (on public discourses), and not only micro-level data, could have increased the sensitivity to the context. Doing so would, however, entail additional data collection and analysis which would have required more time. This was not possible in the time limits for this project which already included comprehensive interview data material from 44 interviews. I will, however, provide some suggestions on this in chapter six for future research.

Secondly, 'commitment and rigour' are demonstrated by showing that you have carried out an analysis that has satisfactory breadth and/or depth to provide added insight to the researched topic. Due to the state of the art in PSOC research, it was important to conduct an in-depth analysis to understand the meanings of a particular age group (older adults) within two particular cultural contexts (Norway and India). With respect to the sample, informants with different demographic backgrounds and in different situations were included, making sure a range of different meanings of later-life PSOC were included. This was essential to ensure a level of multivocality<sup>6</sup>, to ensure credibility of the research. Including a larger sample and a broader range of different meanings, for example by including older adult informants from additional city contexts, could have increased the validity. However, doing so would have provided a larger data set and would likely have been at the cost of an in-depth analysis. Using several analytical approaches provided the possibility to go deep into the material, as well as to explore the meanings in a broad way,

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<sup>6</sup> Multivocal research includes multiple and varied voices in the qualitative report and analysis (Tracy, 2010).

by making sense of them from different perspectives. Achieving rigour demands considerable personal commitment, including methodological skills and theoretical depth, as well as to engage extensively and thoughtfully with participants or data (Yardley, 2015). Some criteria for rigour also emphasise the time used in the field (Tracy, 2010). By learning Gee's approach, going deep into the PSOC theory and research (within and outside community psychology), engaging personally with informants in the two contexts, and finally, using my bi-cultural background as well as several in-depth analytical approaches to the data, I hope to have demonstrated my personal commitment in achieving rigour in this research. Spending more time in the contexts, conducting the interviews in India using the informant's native language and using an indigenous psychological approach<sup>7</sup> more thoroughly could have increased the rigour of the research. However, this would be even more costly and time-demanding. It would also have restricted me from doing the interviews myself, thus, losing central information from the interviews. Furthermore, the core assumption in indigenous psychology, that cultural phenomena should be understood from their own frame of reference (Kim & Berry, 1993), and the use of central cultural texts were integrated within the research.

'Coherence and transparency' are evaluated in terms of the research's clarity and power: expressing to the reader exactly what was done and why, including arguments made for the fit between theoretical approach, research question, methods employed and the interpretations of the data (Yardley, 2015). To get insight into older adults' meanings of PSOC, and ensure a meaningful coherence between methods and the stated goals of the research it was important to utilise a method and instrument letting older adults open-ly express their meanings. Furthermore, to answer the research questions, the

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<sup>7</sup> The scientific study of human behaviour or mind that is native that is not transported from other regions and that is designed for its people (Kim & Berry, 1993, p. 2). This psychological sub-discipline often uses philosophical and religious texts for explanations of cultural phenomena.

analysis had to provide a way to understand people's meanings in an in-depth, context-sensitive as well as systematic way. Combining, thematic analysis, discourse analysis and content analysis were appropriate to meet this need. The thematic analysis made sure that the data were coded, organised in themes (and sub-themes), and that themes were understood with respect to the larger text; discourse analytical tools provided the opportunity to systematically explore taken-for-granted elements in the sample's meanings and to make sure a context-sensitive exploration was included. Moreover, summative content analysis was a natural choice to systematically analyse differences and similarities in the meanings of PSOC with respect to culture and age. When it comes to interpretations, it is important to acknowledge that these are inevitably prescribed and shaped by the researcher as well as the analytical approaches used. Several measures were taken to make sure it was easy to provide a clear picture of the analysis and interpretations – for example, by concretising the use of 'the making strange tool' and, as done in chapter four, presenting the informant's background. Moreover, by presenting my assumptions and analytical steps, illustrating interpretations of themes based on theory about the informants' meaning systems and examples from the data, it is my hope that interpretations in this research have been clearly expressed to the reader in papers I-III.

Finally, it is important for 'impact and importance', as the final criteria included in Yardley's (2015) evaluation of validity in qualitative research, to demonstrate the way the findings make a difference. The implications (conceptual, for further research and practical) will be discussed in chapter six.

**Validity of the Discourse Analytical Approach.** Given the important role of the discourse analytical framework in this research it is important to pay extra attention to the validity of this approach. The validity of research using Gee's approach is evaluated in

terms of four elements: Convergence, Agreement, Coverage and Linguistic Detail (Gee, 2014).

The first element has to do with the trustworthiness of the analysis. The more the questions used in the discourse analytical tools are answered by the analysis, the more convergent the analysis is. I used two tools, where the first one, 'the making strange tool', has the following question: 'What would someone find strange here if that person did not share the knowledge and assumptions and make the inferences that render the communication so natural and taken-for-granted by insiders?' (p. 199). As will be described in papers I and II, the tool was used for sensitivity to linguistic features. Using this tool provided information about what the informants took for granted when describing their meaning of community and PSOC. It also provided knowledge on which words the informants used when addressing what was taken-for-granted. One may question if it is truly possible for the researcher to become 'strange', or what is more commonly referred to as 'bracketing' (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2009). However, to the degree this is possible, using search-words was an efficient, organised and sufficient way of finding answers to the question that the tool provided. The second tool, 'the frame problem tool', asks: 'After you have completed your discourse analysis, after you have taken into consideration all the aspects of the context that you see as relevant to the meaning of the data, see if you can find out anything additional about the context in which the data occurred and see if this changes your analysis' (p. 200). I believe to have included the most central meaning systems within the cultural contexts with respect to the findings. Including an unlimited range of aspects in the analysis would have made the analysis messy, overwhelming and inappropriate for the article format; it was therefore important to limit the analysis to a manageable number of aspects. Thus, the heuristics question provided an answer by the analysis, although in a purposively restricted way.

The second element to evaluate validity is ‘agreement’: Whether researchers (who accept the basic theoretical assumptions and tools of discourse analysis) tend to support the conclusions in the research. Before conducting the analyses, the ideas for how to perform it were discussed with other discourse analysts. Furthermore, after the analyses, the findings and conclusions were discussed and supported by other researchers, supervisors and a research group. A final agreement judgement was made by editors and reviewers.

The third aspect of evaluation, coverage, is about how tightly tied to the analysis the related sorts of data are. In the analysis, the first tool was tightly connected to the data identified using search words. The way the tool was used led me to choose segments of the data to analyse for the related question. The second tool was connected to the data with the help of thematic analysis. Discourse analytical approaches usually do not have specific guidelines for coding. By going back and forth between the most salient themes in the data and cultural meaning systems, I believe that the thematic approach kept the analysis of the second tool grounded to the data.

‘Linguistic details’ are the final element of evaluation for discourse analysis. It concerns the details of linguistic structure in the analysis. Not all discourse analytical research in social science places an equal emphasis on linguistic detail and the theoretical aspect of the analysis. In the current research, the first tool (the making strange tool) employed provided sensitivity to the linguistic features of the data. Thus, parts of the analysis did emphasise linguistic details in the analysis, although not all parts of it.

## V. Findings

### Findings from Paper I

The aim for the first paper was to: a) explore and describe how older adults in urban Norway (Oslo) explain and define PSOC and b) understand which cultural meaning systems are reflected in their meanings. The main identified aspects that comprised the Norwegian urban older adults' understandings of PSOC included 'Individual responsibility for PSOC in old age' and 'Adaptation to transitions'. Both of these aspects emphasised individual responsibility in achieving and maintaining one's own PSOC and well-being in old age; also when going through life-span related psychosocial transitions (e.g., widowhood, change in health and loss of community members). Because several of these old age related transitions represent a loss of social bonds, the older adults' responsibility-taking was understood as a central premise for their later-life PSOC. This premise reflected core Norwegian cultural meaning systems (e.g., Individualism and traditional Protestantism) as well as low expectations of family support in old age. Moreover, by discoursing and prescribing so intensely the responsibility for one's own PSOC, the older adults reproduced these meaning systems as part of the Norwegian culture. Finally, although the findings illustrated that McMillan and Chavis' dominant conceptualisation of PSOC (consisting of four dimensions: membership; influence; integration and fulfilment of needs; and shared emotional connection) were closely related to components of the Norwegian urban older adults' PSOC concepts, the main aspects transcended these dimensions. The kind of responsibility the older adults were concerned about was different from the social responsibility that so far has been included in PSOC conceptualisations.

## Findings from Paper II

In the second paper, the aims were to: a) Explore and describe how older adults in urban India explain and define PSOC and b) understand which cultural meaning systems are reflected in their meanings of the concept. The findings illustrated two main aspects in older adults' conceptualisations of PSOC. First 'helping and caring for others' – to take social responsibility for the larger community's well-being – was an important part of the meanings of PSOC. This aspect reflected several meaning systems in Indian cultures<sup>8</sup> (e.g., collectivism and *seva*<sup>9</sup>), but at the same time, contradicted meaning systems as part of their religious affiliation prescribing how to live life in the last stages of life (*Vanaprastha* and *Sanyasa*<sup>10</sup>). The cultural transition from old age within the family to outside the family seemed to make this form of social responsibility especially important for the urban older adults. Secondly, 'community heterogeneity' was an inherent part of the meanings of community reflecting the co-existence of many diverse meaning systems in the cosmopolitan context of Mumbai. The findings illustrated that although the Indian older adults' meaning systems of PSOC overlapped with dimensions included in McMillan and Chavis' conceptualisation of PSOC, the main aspects of their meaning systems more closely related to other concepts within the field; Psychological Sense of Community Responsibility (PSOC-R) and diversity.

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<sup>8</sup> India is a complex cultural context which consists of several states with different cultures and meaning systems (Delle Fave et al., 2016). Indian cultures will therefore be referred to in plural.

<sup>9</sup> 'Service to others' (Jacobsen, 2014), commonly understood as a selfless act of worship for a Guru or a social cause (Pandya, 2014; Srinivas, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Human life is divided into four stages (*ashramas*) in the Hinduistic scripture 'Bhagvad Gita': The latter two stages (*Vanaprastha* and *Sanyasa*) are for everyone to withdraw from day-to-day material activities and social bonds to eventually lead a spiritual life (see Bhawuk, 2008; Gokhale, 2003)



### **Findings from Paper III**

For the third paper, the aim was to understand cultural as well as life-stage related aspects of PSOC conceptualisations. Young adults' and older adults' meanings of PSOC in one individualistic (Norway) and one collectivistic (India) culture were explored and compared through systematic analyses of language use. The findings revealed the subsamples' meanings largely reflected traditional differences between collectivistic and individualistic meaning systems. In addition, life-stage related aspects of the four subsamples' meanings of PSOC were identified. For the Norwegian samples' meanings, life-stage related aspects largely reflected local meaning systems. In India, however, age-specific aspects reflected the very different local and global meaning systems within the urban context of Mumbai. The findings also suggest that in some respects globalisation is making the two cultures more alike; the Norwegian samples' descriptions of the family as a community could be seen as a collectivistic aspect; and the Indian samples' portrayals of the nuclear family structure as the norm and the different meaning systems of young and old in the same community, point to the mediation of individualism. Taken together the findings demonstrated that the interaction of different meaning systems played a central role in the words and expressions the young adult and older adult Norwegian and Indian samples used to describe PSOC. However, older adults reorientation to these meaning systems as well as challenging psychosocial transitions demanded greater individual efforts to maintain PSOC in later-life.

## VI. General Discussion

This section begins with a broad discussion of: a) Norwegian and Indian older adults' meanings of community and PSOC and b) later-life meanings of PSOC in urban Norway and India as embedded in culture, in light of former research and theories. Then, the discussion focuses on two reoccurring topics in the thesis: responsibility and transitions. The topics are discussed in light of PSOC and culture and PSOC and age. Responsibility was a dominant topic in the first two papers and reflects two of the main aspects of the older adults' meanings; 'Individual responsibility for PSOC in old age' and 'helping and caring for others'. The importance of responsibility is established as well as corollary conceptualisations of PSOC renders a discussion of these findings important (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Nowell & Boyd, 2010). A discussion about responsibility, cultural meaning systems and age will be provided. Secondly, the findings of this thesis provide additional understandings of psychosocial transitions, which have been debated within research on PSOC and age groups (Chiessi et al., 2010; Fyson, 2008; Li et al., 2014; Pereira & Pooley, 2007). Transitions during specific stages of life as well as at different levels of society (micro, meso and macro)<sup>11</sup> will be discussed. Finally, implications for the conceptualisation of PSOC, future PSOC research, and PSOC interventions are proposed in light of current findings as well as prior theories and research.

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<sup>11</sup> Three interdependent levels of analysis are discussed in community psychology: personal (micro), relational (meso) and collective (macro). These parts comprise the eco-system and changes in any one part of the system will have domino effects that impact other parts of the system (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005).

### **Norwegian and Indian Urban Older Adults' Meanings of Community and PSOC**

The urban older adult samples from Norway and India referred to both geographical and relational communities when describing their meanings of community and PSOC (see papers I and II), consistent with dominant conceptualisations of PSOC and the suggestion that these types of communities are central for older adults (Gusfield, 1975; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Provencher et al., 2014). Friends, family, neighbourhood, senior centres, organisations and unions were communities referred to by the Norwegian older adults. The Indian older adults typically mentioned the family, the neighbourhood, the city and India as a nation. Similar to Li et al. (2014), these findings indicate that later-life PSOC is an outcome of older individuals' multiple communities. They also suggest that the family is a central part of the older adults' concept of community, in line with arguments to include the family in operationalisations of PSOC (Sonn et al., 1999).

The four dimensions included in McMillan and Chavis (1986) conceptualisation were reflected in both samples' meanings of PSOC (see table 5 p. 48). The first dimension 'Membership' was closely related to the theme 'acquaintance' and 'acceptance' identified in the Norwegian informants' discourse, as well as the theme 'sense of belonging and attachment' located in the Indian informants' descriptions. 'Acquaintance' was similar with respect to the boundaries that delineate membership – defining who was in and who was out (based on residency and prior interaction) of the older adults' geographical community (city area) –, while 'acceptance' was about the sense of being accepted by other community members, necessary for any community membership. 'Sense of belonging and attachment', as part of the Indian older adults' meaning, also reflected key elements of the dimension 'membership', describing a sense of belonging and attachment to the community. Most of the Indian older adults referred to prior or current geographical communities when addressing

this aspect, suggesting that both types of communities are central to older adults' PSOC in Mumbai.

The second dimension, 'Influence' was similar to the theme 'reciprocity' identified in both samples' definitions and 'adaptation and acceptance' as a theme identified in the Indian older adults' conceptualisation. Reciprocity is a key element in the bidirectional dimension 'Influence'. In every community, people have to be attracted to the group, to feel they can influence the community, and at the same time, communities depend on influencing its members to obtain cohesiveness. In both samples, the informants emphasised to 'give and take' and 'contribute and receive' as important aspects. Giving or contributing was often described as being able to do something for the benefit of the community (e.g., accepting individual differences or investing in a community goal), while taking or receiving as obtaining something from the community (e.g., care and compassion) which both attracted them to the community. Most likely these aspects allowed community influence to happen, although this was not something the older adults voiced.

The dimension 'integration and fulfilment of needs' mirrored 'respect' as part of both samples' meanings, as well as 'tolerance', 'trust, honesty and loyalty' and 'care and compassion' detected in the Norwegian samples' descriptions of PSOC, and 'community expectations' and 'safety and welfare' identified in the interview data from the Indian sample. All these themes reflected individual or social needs and expectations, which reinforced the older adults' community memberships.

Finally, 'shared emotional connection' was largely a part of the aspect 'shared elements' found in the Norwegian and Indian older adults' characterisations of PSOC. However, these themes were broader than the dimension, including interests, values, goals and activities, in addition to a shared history.

Table 5. Themes Overlapping with McMillan and Chavis' (1986) PSOC Dimensions

	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Membership</b>	<b>Influence</b>	<b>Integration and Fulfilment of Needs</b>	<b>Shared Emotional Connection</b>
<b>Norwegian Urban Older Adults' Meanings of PSOC</b>	Acquaintance	x			
	Shared elements				x
	Respect and tolerance			x	
	Acceptance	x			
	Care and Compassion			x	
	Reciprocity			x	
	Trust, honesty and loyalty				x
<b>Indian Urban Older Adults' Meanings of PSOC</b>	Adaptation and acceptance		x		
	Reciprocity		x		
	Safety and welfare			x	
	Shared elements				x
	Sense of belonging and attachment	x			
	Community expectations				x
	Respect				x

As discussed in papers I and II, however, the four dimensions included in McMillan and Chavis' conceptualisation did not capture the most salient themes identified in the two samples' meanings of PSOC; the Norwegian samples' description of individual responsibility for PSOC (and well-being) in old age; and the Indian older adults' portrayals of helping and caring for people in the enormous city context of Mumbai and the importance of diversity. These findings support the issue raised by Mannarini and Fedi (2009) – that people's meanings of PSOC can potentially be something more than what is included in the unidimensional model of PSOC. Moreover, they suggest that cultural meaning systems play a central role in later-life meanings of PSOC.

#### **Norwegian and Indian Later-life Meanings of PSOC as Embedded in Culture**

The findings in papers I-III demonstrate what one may consider as typical characteristics of the Norwegian and Indian cultural meaning systems: Norway as individualistic and India as collectivistic. The discourse analysis reported in papers I and II, however, revealed a more detailed picture; the way the Norwegian urban older adult sample spoke about PSOC reflected the long pervasive Protestant work ethic and increasingly vertical individualistic<sup>12</sup> meaning system within their context. Moreover, the way the Indian urban older adult sample described PSOC reflected collectivistic social patterns and self-understanding, as well as traditional ideals of how to live a good life as a Hindu (*seva*). These findings support the growing agreement that cultural meaning systems play a central role in meanings of PSOC (Brodsky, 2009; Fisher et al., 2002; Hill, 1996; Mak et al., 2009; Mannarini & Fedi, 2009; Sonn et al., 1999; Talò et al., 2014).

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<sup>12</sup> Horizontal individualistic cultures are described as valuing equality and individual uniqueness (people want to do their own thing but are not particularly interested in status) while vertical individualistic cultures emphasise hierarchy, competition, as well as individualism (people want to obtain status as well as to be unique) (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

In paper III, some of the findings suggested that Norwegian and Indian cultures, in some respects, are becoming more similar; when describing PSOC, the Norwegian samples talked about the family as a community, reflecting a characteristic that has only been reported in collectivistic cultures before (e.g., Brodsky, 2009). Furthermore, the Indian samples described the nuclear family as becoming the norm and that intergenerational communities were struggling to balance the needs of young and older members, reflecting what has been considered as outcomes of increased individualism in urban India (Bhat & Dhruvarajan, 2001; Shah, 2009).

These findings are largely consistent with the way the relationship between PSOC and individualism and collectivism has been described within the field; collectivistic values and orientations support PSOC while individualistic values and orientations are destructive to PSOC (Love, 2007; Moscardino et al., 2010; Nafstad et al., 2009; Sarason, 1974). However, as illustrated in paper I, individualistic meaning systems and low expectations from the family and community encouraged and promoted the older adults' individual effort and initiative to secure their own PSOC. Hansen and Slagsvold (2015) reported similar findings; one of the reasons why older adults in Norway score lower on loneliness, compared to older adults in other European countries, is because they have low expectations of strong family and community ties. As such, individualistic values may in some cases promote individual action to invest in one's own PSOC.

Nevertheless, for an individual to find a PSOC with others there must be meaning systems supporting the value of community within society. Vertical individualistic values systems – promoting individual hierarchy, and competition with others as well as an understanding of the self as different from other selves (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) – can then be detrimental for the value of community and thus also PSOC. Although prior theories and research, as well as the findings of this thesis, suggest that a global neo-

liberal meaning system is promoting this form of extreme individualism in very different cultures (Fairclough, 2006; H. E. Nafstad et al., 2012), they also suggest that opposing meanings systems and counter-discourses, supporting community connections, grow simultaneously within these cultural contexts.

Finally, as earlier studies have suggested, the findings of this thesis suggest that people strive to adjust to changes and challenges to their PSOC in ways that maintain their PSOC (Brodsky, 1996; Mannarini et al., 2014), also in old age (Li et al., 2014) and with respect to changing cultural meaning systems. The older adults largely adapted to the changing meaning systems in ways that sustained their PSOC.

### **Responsibility as Part of PSOC: The Role of Culture and Age**

The findings from papers I and II suggested that responsibility is a central part of older adults' meanings of PSOC. While the older adult sample from Norway was largely concerned with their own individual responsibility in maintaining PSOC and well-being in old age, several of the older adults in India emphasised the importance of taking social responsibility in the neighbourhood, city and national community. The different meaning systems in each of the cultures seemed to mediate responsibility as part of the older adults' discourse of PSOC; that in contexts with strong individualistic meaning systems, individual responsibility can be part of older adults' meanings of PSOC (see Jolanki and Vilkkö (2015) for similar findings from Finland); and that social responsibility can be an important part of collectivistic meanings in later-life PSOC (see Slevin, 2005 and Roos, et al., 2014 for parallel findings from Africa). Although responsibility is considered a central part of the dominant conceptualisation of McMillan and Chavis (McMillan, 2011), it might then be beneficial to have a more specific and value-based conceptualisation of community responsibility, as proposed by Nowell and Boyd (2010), to understand the role



and nuances of PSOC-R (individual and social) as part of PSOC in old age. Finally, the findings indicate that PSOC-R can be practiced at multiple levels; the older adults in Norway invested their efforts and duties at the individual level and the Indian informants at the city and even national level. Then, meanings of later-life PSOC and PSOC-R may not only be culturally bound (Mak et al., 2009) but also transcend what is usually referred to as ‘community’ within the field, typically not going beyond the neighbourhood or part of the city.

One may question if cultural meaning systems within one context promote responsibility as part of different age groups’ meanings. One of the findings from paper III was that to help and care were important parts of PSOC for young adults and older adults. Although cultural meaning systems play a central role in promoting responsibility as part of the meanings for older adults, there may be additional aspects of old age (e.g., experience or insight – individual efforts must be taken to help yourself and/or others (see Roos, et al., 2014 for parallel arguments), loss of social bonds, or retirement – having time to attend social needs and/or invest in the community), which also promote responsibility as part of later-life conceptualisations of PSOC.

### **Transitions at the Micro, Meso and Macro levels: The Role of Cultural Context and Age**

The findings from paper I suggested that psychosocial transitions at the micro level (e.g., the loss of a spouse and decline in health) were central to the meanings of the Norwegian older adult sample. Papers II and III demonstrated that the older adult Indian sample was generally concerned with transitions happening at the meso level (e.g., the change from extended family structure to nuclear family structure) when describing PSOC. In this respect, one may say that transitions at different levels seem to be important parts of later-life meanings of PSOC. However, the older adults’ descriptions of transitions

also reflected and reproduced cultural meaning systems within their contexts. The Norwegian older adults expected themselves to invest and make an effort in maintaining their PSOC through psychosocial transitions, reproducing the Norwegian individualistic cultural understanding of older adults as largely self-reliant. Older adults in India invested and participated in the larger community, defying traditional religious understandings of old age (to withdraw from social bonds) and producing new practices of old age outside the family. As such, how older adults deal with transitions at the micro and meso levels may not only influence their own PSOC, but also the macro level – the meaning systems and embedded understandings of old age within one context.

The question is then if transitions are particularly important parts of older adults' meanings of PSOC. The findings in paper III suggested that meso level transitions also played an important role in young adults' meanings in the two cultural contexts. For the young adult informants (Norwegian and Indian), the campus and student communities were especially important for their PSOC after the transition of moving out away from one's family. As for macro level transitions, the findings suggested that the presence of very different meaning systems (individualism and collectivism) within the Indian cultural context made age-specific aspects of PSOC more salient, compared to the Norwegian cultural context where similar meaning systems (horizontal and vertical individualism (see p. 49 for an explanation) exist. The two Norwegian samples' conceptualisations were more similar compared to the two Indian samples' conceptualisations. Thus, it may not be that transitions are particularly important to older adults' meanings; transitions happen across the life span, and as the findings in paper III suggest, older and young adults (in both contexts) need communities beyond the family to secure their PSOC through psychosocial transitions in the various life-stages. However, as Phillipson (1993) and papers I-III discuss, later-life entails several life-changing transitions which are only

understood as normal in this stage of life (e.g., the loss of spouse) and require larger effort from the individual (compared to other age groups) in order for their overall PSOC to be maintained. Moreover, as illustrated in paper III, increasingly dominant individualistic vertical values, conflicting with the horizontal or collectivistic values which Norwegian and Indian older adults have grown up with, are to a larger degree a central part of young adults' discourses in these contexts. This is consistent with what former studies have suggested (Shah, 2009; Türken, Nafstad, Blakar, & Roen, 2016). In this regard, transitions at the micro, meso and macro levels are particularly important to understand later-life meanings of PSOC.

### **Conceptual Implications**

Today, we know little about the conceptualisation of PSOC of older adults across the world. Although the findings of this thesis cannot be transferred to the larger urban older adult populations in Norway and India, they provide some valuable insight to the field. First, the findings from papers I and II show that there are central parts of the meanings of PSOC of older adult samples from very different cultures which are closely related to the four dimensions of McMillan and Chavis' (1986) conceptualisation (membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection). However, at the same time, the main aspects of the older adults' conceptualization of PSOC went beyond these dimensions and reflected the cultural context of the samples in several ways. Papers I and II illustrate the influential role that cultural meaning systems play in the meaning systems of the ageing individual and these are closely tied to how the informants adjusted to changes demanded in old age. In addition paper III demonstrated local as well as global meaning systems within a cultural

context as reflected in later-life meanings of PSOC. In line with these findings, the first conceptual implication is that:

- 1) The conceptualisation of later-life PSOC should secure sensitivity to cultural meaning systems within the cultural context studied.

As discussed in Paper I responsibility has primarily been studied as a social aspect within community psychological research on PSOC. This is largely the case outside community psychology as well; the focus has been on responsibility for others (including global responsibility, volunteering, activism, advocacy and nurturing within the community) as an important part of the community concept and PSOC in later life (Pozzi et al., 2014; Roos et al., 2014; Wiles & Jayasinha, 2013). The findings from papers I and II suggests that PSOC-R in old age can be both individual and social, depending on the meaning systems within the cultural context. The second conceptual implication proposed is that:

- 2) Later-life conceptualisations of PSOC-R should secure sensitivity to meaning systems within the context studied.

Moreover, the findings from papers I and II suggest that later-life PSOC and responsibility, as part of PSOC in old age, can be understood as an outcome of communities at multiple levels. The informants' (prior and current) referent communities ranged from the micro to the macro level; friends as well as the nation of India were mentioned. One of the most important theoretical developments within the field has been the M-PSOC conceptualisation (Brodsky, 1996; Brodsky et al., 2002; Brodsky & Marx, 2001; Mannarini et al., 2014). The findings of this thesis support the argument of Li et al. (2014) that in order to understand how older adults create and make an effort in

maintaining later-life PSOC we have to address their multiple communities. As such, it is reasonable to suggest an additional conceptual implication:

- 3) Older adults' conceptualisations of PSOC and PSOC-R should be understood based on M-PSOC, in light of people's multiple communities.

When it comes to the findings on PSOC and transitions, there are additional conceptual implications that should be suggested. First, there are particular psychosocial transitions taking place in old age. Thus, in line with earlier studies suggesting that psychosocial transitions are important to understand young adult people's PSOC (Chiessi et al., 2010; Cicognani, Klimstra, et al., 2014; Fyson, 2008; Phillipson, 1993), I want to broaden this perspective with the following suggestion:

- 4) Conceptualisations of PSOC need to be understood with respect to the typical psychosocial transitions of the age group studied.

Secondly, paper III discussed that although psychosocial transitions pertaining to one stage of life may be shared across cultures, they can at the same time be culturally embedded (retirement is shared, but the expectations of how to spend life in retirement may depend on the cultural context). This underlines the importance of macro-social and cultural factors in understanding specific age groups PSOC (see Cicognani, Klimstra, et al., 2014). In line with this, the following is suggested:

- 5) Psychosocial transitions affecting conceptualisations of PSOC in one life-stage need to be understood with respect to the meaning systems within the cultural context of the age group studied.

Finally, the findings of paper III suggest that meanings of PSOC can be mediated by both local and global meaning systems within one context. Also, as discussed, how the older adults talked about and dealt with transitions at the micro (i.e., the loss of spouse)

and meso level (from the practice of old age within the family to the practice of old age outside the family) influenced the meaning systems and embedded understandings of old age within the context. To understand the process of later-life PSOC as meanings constructed through discourse:

- 6) Later-life conceptualisations of PSOC should be understood as mediated by the interaction between older individuals' discourse and (local and global) meaning systems within the cultural context studied.

### **Implications for Future Research**

- 1) Introducing additional approaches and suggestions to study PSOC meanings

Conceptualisations of PSOC have largely been studied by hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches (Fisher et al., 2002). Thematic approaches have also been used in recent studies (e.g., Brodsky, 2009). In papers I and II, combining thematic analysis with discourse analysis offered an additional way of studying meanings of PSOC as embedded within meaning systems. Applying this combined approach in future research may benefit the field further with respect to building knowledge on PSOC as a context-dependent and culturally bound concept.

Furthermore, specific discourse analytical and content analytical approaches, not commonly used in the field so far, were utilised in this thesis and add to the qualitative tradition within the field. The original and systematic way the discourse analytical 'making strange tool' was applied to the material can be further used to understand taken-for-granted elements of people's meanings of PSOC. Moreover, the summative content analysis and design used in paper III may be used in future research to learn more about cultural and age-specific aspects of PSOC. As the design in paper III, a two-by-two design may be applied to study PSOC among different age groups within the same cultural

context, but also to compare meanings of PSOC among different age groups across different contexts. More numbers of age groups (children, young, adults and older adults), or several different groups of older adults can also be included, as well as cultural contexts, depending on the scope of the research.

To better understand the interaction between individual meaning systems and cultural meaning systems, it is important that future research include data that provide the possibility to explore PSOC beyond the individual level. For example, media language data (e.g., electronic newspapers) can be included to study meanings of community and PSOC at the macro level. An archive methodology developed by Nafstad and Blakar (2002) has been used to longitudinally study public discourses (see Carlquist, Nafstad & Blakar, 2007). By using this data and methodology, one may explore contemporary discourses within society in retrospect: a) at a specific given time (e.g. a specific decade), or b) longitudinally (from a given time to the present). The premise is of course that there are media language data from the period of time that one wants to study. One may conduct analyses of macro level data with analyses of micro level data (e.g., from interviews) to explore if the public discourse of community and PSOC from the time the older adult population grew up (e.g., the 1940`s) and/or today, are reflected at the individual level; as part of older adults` contemporary discourses. In this way, one may explore if and how different meaning systems are mediated in meanings of PSOC of older adults from different cohorts (globally, rather different meaning systems existed in the 1940`s and 1960`s). Combining these analytical approaches, one may also explore changes over the life-span from individual level data of language (e.g., interviews or open-ended surveys of one age group across time) to investigate in retrospect if the same patterns of change are observed at the macro level in public discourse data (e.g., newspapers). In this way, one may test earlier findings of word use changes across the life span (see Pennebaker &

Stone, 2003) in different cultural contexts.

## 2) Future multidisciplinary research

A deeper analysis of community and PSOC in later life is needed. Based on the culturally specific findings from this thesis as well as the cross-disciplinary literature on later-life community and PSOC, I suggest that researchers from different disciplines (e.g., different psychological sub-disciplines, sociologists, anthropologists and gerontologists) come together to plan and conduct needed future multidisciplinary studies, so that a more complete understanding of later-life PSOC and the role of culture can be fostered. These are some of the topics which future research may look into:

### -Responsibility as part of later-life meanings of community and PSOC

The findings in papers I-III are in line with several studies, suggesting that responsibility is a central part of older adults' meaning of community and PSOC (Pozzi et al., 2014; Slevin, 2005; Wiles & Jayasinha, 2013). Future studies should investigate the relationship between seemingly similar concepts (PSOC-R, 'care for place' and global responsibility). Moreover, they should be approached in a context-sensitive way to understand the role that cultural meaning systems (e.g., individualism and collectivism) play in individual as well as social responsibility.

### -Validity in PSOC measures

This thesis transfers the dominant PSOC conceptualisations to the Norwegian and Indian context: the four dimensions (membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection) were central to the older adults' meanings. There is, however, a need to sufficiently address the validity of the SCI with older adult populations (Zaff & Devlin, 1998). These studies should address the matter with respect to different groups and populations of older adults across the world.



## **Practical Implications**

Population ageing is a global issue and this thesis suggests that promoting older adults' well-being across the world demands an acknowledgement of cultural diversity in later-life meanings of PSOC. In this section, I will first highlight some practical implications of the findings with respect to the urban Norwegian and Indian context. Secondly, some practical implications are provided for change makers and professionals working with the health and care for older adults in Norway and India based on the review of the introduced cross-disciplinary literature.

**Norway:** In Norway older adults are, and will be, an increasingly self-reliant and resourceful group (Slagsvold & Solem, 2005). In Paper I, practical implications were suggested for self-reliant individuals as well as older adults who for some reason are not able to participate in the community. However, like the Norwegian sample included in this research, there are many older adults who need some support in everyday life (e.g., the ones living with chronic illnesses) but still can be active and resourceful members in their communities. This group of older adults will most probably increase as well with a growing population, and it is important that the senior centres offering assisted care (Omsorg+<sup>13</sup>) harmonise with the number of older adults needing these. In this way older adults, regardless of their needs, may still experience being part of a community and society at large in a way that secures their PSOC and well-being.

Secondly, as in many city contexts across the world, the older population in Oslo is becoming increasingly diverse (Tønnessen, Leknes, & Syse, 2016). Offers and services securing the different cultural and social needs of the future older adult population will thus be needed. The findings in paper I imply that Norwegian and Pakistani older adults in

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<sup>13</sup> Assisted living for older adults who do not need to stay in a nursing home, with available assistance day and night. Often the older adults have their own apartment and a senior centre in the same building.

Oslo have rather similar conceptualisations of PSOC despite different cultural backgrounds. Also, although not reported in paper III, this point was supported by additional analysis in our mixed-method study, which showed that the two Pakistani informants did not differ from the other older Norwegians with respect to word use and excluding the two from the analysis did not alter the overall results. Moreover, as discussed, individualistic and collectivistic cultures are becoming more alike. As such it should be possible to find shared aspects to promote PSOC among an increasingly diverse population of older adults. However, to plan and develop such common community offers sufficiently, additional research including groups of older adults from different cultural backgrounds represented in the population is needed.

**India:** In India, social support from communities beyond the family will become important for the growing future older adult populations' well-being, especially in urban areas where the nuclear family is growing stronger. Promoting PSOC in the face of a changing family structure and understandings of old age will be one of the main challenges. To meet the need for communities outside the family, it is essential that policy for ageing promote community offers for older adults (e.g., senior centres). The findings in paper II imply that helping and caring for the larger city community promoted PSOC for several of the informants. Although more research on a larger and more diverse sample, including additional religious affiliations and residents from additional city contexts, is needed in order to know if this is a central part of other urban older adults' meanings of PSOC, these findings indicate that including older adults in volunteering organisations may be a central step to promote their PSOC outside the family. In this way, older adults with a drive for social responsibility within the larger community can improve their own PSOC and their community at the same time. Furthermore, irrespective of this drive, the findings in paper II suggest that it is essential that community offers to older

adults in Mumbai promote a shared identity of being a ‘Mumbaikar’ (a person from Mumbai) in order to foster PSOC and diversity as inherent parts of their community concepts.

Based on the cross-disciplinary field of later-life PSOC, there are some additional practical implications for the urban older adults in Norway and India which should be mentioned:

-Intergenerational relationships

One of the reoccurring topics in studies on community and PSOC in old age is the loss of intergenerational relationships. In many collectivistic cultures, such relationships have recently been dismissed (largely because of the transition from the extended to the nuclear family structure), at the expense of older adults’ role to protect and give advice to young people, and get help in return (Roos et al., 2014). In these cultures, it is important to offer communities fostering intergenerational connections. In Mumbai, there are already some existing programmes (e.g. ‘Each one teach one’ and ‘Adopt a granny’). These need to be expanded within Mumbai and to additional urban contexts with the growing older population in India.

Although intergenerational relationships are often discussed in terms of collectivistic cultures, these relations are of course important in individualistic cultures as well (Brown & Henkin, 2014; Dykstra, 2010; Herlofson, Hagestad, Slagsvold, & Sorensen, 2011). As demonstrated in paper I, the family and the neighbourhood (both including people of different ages) were mentioned as two of the most important communities by the Norwegian older adults. In Oslo, there are intergenerational cafés (‘Kanskje kommer kongen?’) promoting such relationships for city residents. Findings from previous studies (Brown & Henkin, 2014, Jolanki & Vilkkko, 2015) and the present research suggest that intergenerational programmes and meeting places will benefit from

promoting common interests and aims for all age groups, as well as individualism and collectivism, in order to build and promote PSOC.

-Co-housing and Integrated Service Areas as a way to maintain PSOC in old age

Both co-housing and Service Areas have been suggested as ways of securing older adults' PSOC (Jolanki & Vilkkö, 2015; Singelenberg et al., 2014). In the Norwegian context, both options fit well with older adults' preference (and policy promotion) of independent living for as long as possible, while at the same time, maintaining a sense of belonging with peers. In the Indian urban context, people have been sceptical of old age homes as an alternative to the family, even though many still want the nuclear family structure to go on. Co-housing with friends and peers or Integrated Service Areas built to support older adult persons in their communities and promote intergenerational relationships, may be a more accepted form of living, as it harmonises with earlier practices of co-housing with family members of different generations.

## **VII. Limitations**

In all research, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. I will add some additional reflections about the limitations of the research to the ones mentioned in papers I-III.

First, only 22 informants were included in the study from each context. The findings from each context are thus based on interview data from very few informants, restricting transferability to the larger urban older adult populations. The goal, however, was never to generalise but to explore and get an impression of how urban older adults in Norway and India describe PSOC.

Another limitation, concerning the data collection in India has to do with the fact that the interviews were conducted in English. A central assumption in the research was that language reflects the social and cultural context of the informants. As such, doing the interviews in English precluded the context-sensitive understanding of the Indian informants' meaning of PSOC, despite the fact that English is a central part of several Indian languages. Future PSOC research analysing language use should make sure to include a researcher who speaks the language of the sample (in Mumbai: Hindi or Marathi), to get a context-sensitive understanding of the concept and to secure the rigour of the research.

Concerning sample-bias, it should be noted that both samples of older adults were rather resourceful. Although the Norwegian sample largely reflected the heterogeneity of the urban older adult population in Oslo, some groups were not represented, for instance older adult people who do not participate in any community and older adult refugees. And the sample from India did not reflect the heterogeneity of Mumbai: the many different

religions, the ones living in the slum, and the older adults who actually leave their material and social bonds according to Hindu scripts.

The data from India were collected for a former master project (Bahl, 2011), although never published in a journal. This thesis was a continuation and extension of this former work. With new research questions, analyses and several new data sets, I have made sure that this thesis has resulted in an independent and substantially different product (consisting of three scientific papers as well as this thesis). The data were also analysed in significantly different ways; while the earlier project used the PSOC dimensions to code the data, the present research had an inductive approach to the data. This thesis was also more sensitive to the older adults' meanings, compared to the former work, which was more 'theory heavy'. Furthermore, as this thesis had a significantly larger amount of data (44 interviews compared to 22 interviews) and required different analyses enabling a comparative perspective, compared to the master thesis focusing on one cultural context (Mumbai).

Time is important when discussing contemporary meanings and discourses. The data collection in India was done seven years ago and the data collection in Norway was done three years ago. As societies and meanings constantly change, and this study is cross-sectional by including data from a specific point in time, the findings in this thesis cannot be regarded as 'contemporary'.

Finally, the suggested in-depth and context-sensitive approach to meanings of PSOC has some disadvantages; studying large samples becomes a complex task due to the required level of specificity. Data collection is likely to be time demanding and costly. Furthermore, the included method (interview, and possibly also archive methodology) and analysis (thematic combined with discourse analysis or content analysis) also demands a

great deal of time, which requires a great deal of funding. However, if these disadvantages and challenges can be endured, the benefits are great; using the approach is likely to provide context- and age-sensitive findings, important to increase contextualisation and population validity of later-life PSOC research. In addition, community interventions aiming to promote later-life PSOC (or prevent the decline of later-life PSOC) that are based on research measuring what it aims to promote, are likely to be efficient, by offering the opportunity to achieve the aims wherever needed.

## VIII. Concluding Remarks

In this thesis, later-life meanings of PSOC have been explored among older adults in urban Norway and India. On the one hand, the findings suggest that there are some aspects of later-life PSOC shared across cultural contexts. Several of the identified aspects in the samples' meanings reflect central aspects of PSOC included in McMillan and Chavis' four-dimensional conceptualisation (1986). On the other hand, the most salient aspects identified in the older adults' meanings transcend this academic construct of PSOC and reflect meaning systems within each cultural context. As such, the findings of this thesis confirm prior research illustrating PSOC as a context sensitive and culture-bound concept. Then, to answer the first research question (How do urban older adults in urban Norway and India define and describe PSOC?) in a short and general way, older adults in Norway and India define PSOC in a way that reflects established PSOC dimensions, and at the same time, specific meaning systems within their cultural context.

The second research question dealt with these specific meaning systems and asked: 'Which cultural meaning systems are reflected in older adults' meanings of PSOC?' Analysing the main aspects of Norwegian and Indian older adults' meanings revealed that several cultural meaning systems within each cultural context reflected the way the older adults defined and spoke about PSOC. In Norway, traditional meaning systems of horizontal individualism, Protestantism and early industrial capitalism as well as contemporary vertical individualism were apparent. In India, collectivistic values, the concept of 'seva', a selfless act of worship for a social cause, as well as the cosmopolitan and heterogenic meaning system in Mumbai were evident.

However, as assumed in a meaning system perspective, the relationship between individual and cultural meaning systems is not one-way. The thesis thus asked a third



research question; ‘How do older adults’ meanings of PSOC interact with cultural meaning systems within their context?’ Several meaning systems were practiced and reproduced through the older adults’ discourses of PSOC and their actions within their communities. For example, by defining PSOC as an individual responsibility, the Norwegian older adults practice and reproduce individualistic meaning systems within their context, and in India, by defining PSOC as help and care to others, the older adults reproduce meaning systems of interdependency and selflessness. However, by defining PSOC in this way, the Indian older adults also negotiated traditional understandings of older adults’ social life – nurturing social bonds within their communities rather than withdrawing from these.

Finally, as addressed in the fourth research question (Are there any life-stage related aspects of the older adults’ meanings of PSOC?), this thesis explored life-stage related aspects of the older adults’ meanings of PSOC. The findings suggest that there are age-specific aspects of later-life meanings of PSOC and that these need to be understood within the interaction of meaning-systems in the specific cultural context. The findings of paper III illustrate that, compared to the young adult stage of life, older adults’ reorientation to life-stage related transitions – retiring and withdrawing from communities and loss of social relationships, as well as changes in meaning systems, from the ones they grew up with to the emerging and sometimes conflicting contemporary ones – demand greater efforts and activity from the individual to adapt and maintain PSOC.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Interview Guide Used in Norway

#### Interview guide

(Norwegian questions in brackets).

#### Part 1:

##### Background information<sup>14</sup>:

Age (Alder):

Gender (Kjønn):

Marital status/Relationship status (Sivilstatus):

Highest level of education (Høyeste nivå av utdanning):

Residential area of Oslo (Hvilken del av Oslo er du bosatt i):

Years of residence in this area (Antall år bosatt i bydelen):

Number of children (Antall barn):

Number of family members living at home (Antall familiemedlemmer som bor i hjemmet):

Member of any group where you have some influence (e.g., social or political group)?

(Deltaker i hvilken som helst gruppe der du har innflytelse (f.eks. sosial eller politisk gruppe?)):

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<sup>14</sup> These demographic variables were chosen because they have been illustrated as important to PSOC.

## **Part 2:**

### **1. Community (Felleskap)**

1.1 Can you tell me a little bit about what 'community' means to you?

(Kan du fortelle meg litt om hva " felleskap" er for deg?)

- Is there a particular community that you are referring to when you think of this?

(Er det et spesifikt felleskap du refererer til når du tenker på dette?)

- What elements would you say make up a community?

(Hvilke elementer vil du si utgjør et felleskap?)

1.2 Do you have any experience of someone being excluded or leaving a community which you were a member of?

(Har du noen erfaring med at noen har blitt ekskludert eller forlatt et felleskap du har vært medlem i?)

- What factors can contribute to this?

(Hvilke faktorer kan bidra til dette?)

1.3 Would you say that the community you feel that you most belong to is most commonly based on geographical location or acquaintance (relations)?

(Vil du si at felleskapet du føler mest tilhørighet i er samlet mest på grunnlag av geografisk plassering eller bekjentskap (relasjoner)?)

-Can you elaborate?

(Kan du utdype?)

1.4 What characteristics do you think a good community should have?

(Hvilke karakteristikk synes du et godt felleskap burde ha?)

## **2. Sense of Community (Felleskapsfølelse)**

2.1 Can you tell me a little bit about what 'sense of community' means to you?

(Kan du fortelle meg litt om hva « fellesskapsfølelse» er for deg?)

2.2 Do you experience a sense of community in the area in which you live?

(Opplever du en fellesskapsfølelse til området der du bor?)

- Why/Why not?

(Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke?)

2.3.1 What kinds of emotions are important for you when you think about/do you relate to sense of community?

(Hvilken type følelser er viktige for deg når du tenker på/ relaterer du til fellesskapsfølelse?)

2.3.2 What kind of behaviour is important for you when you think about/do you relate to sense of community?

(Hvilken type atferd er viktig for deg når du tenker på/ relaterer du til fellesskapsfølelse?)

2.3.3 What kind of values are important for you when you think about/do you relate to sense of community?

(Hvilke verdier er viktige for deg når du tenker på/ relaterer du til fellesskapsfølelse?)

### **3. Well-being, community and sense of community<sup>15</sup>**

#### **(Å ha det bra, fellesskap og fellesskapsfølelse)**

3.1 Can you tell me a little bit about what well-being means to you?

(Kan du fortelle meg litt om hva det å ha det bra» vil si for deg?)

3.2 Would you say that a sense of community is important for your well-being?

(Vil du si at en fellesskapsfølelse er viktig for at du skal «ha det bra»?)

3.3 Is community participation important for you to experience well-being?

(Er deltakelse i fellesskap viktig for at du skal oppleve at du «har det bra»?)

#### **4. Alderens betydning for fellesskap og fellesskapsfølelse**

4.1 Can you tell me a little bit about the meaning of community participation at your stage of life?

(Kan du fortelle meg litt om betydningen av deltakelse i fellesskap for deg i din fase av livet?)

4.2 What would you say is the most important community for you today?

(Hva vil du si er det viktigste fellesskapet for deg i dag?)

4.3 Would you say that a sense of community or a feeling of belonging is important in your stage of life?

(Vil du si at en fellesskapsfølelse eller følelse av tilhørighet er viktig for deg i din fase av livet?)

4.4 In what way do you think that your experience of a sense of community could have been improved?

(På hvilken måte mener du at din opplevelse av en fellesskapsfølelse i din alder kunne blitt forbedret?)

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<sup>15</sup> In the Norwegian interview guide, questions about happiness (lykke), quality of life (livskvalitet), usage of skills and competence (bruk av evner og kompetanse), resources (ressurser), and empowerment (medvirkning) were included. Each concept included the same three questions as presented for well-being (å ha det bra). The presented versions of the interview guides include the questions used to gather the data analysed in this study.

4.5 Has your experience of sense of community changed through life?

(Har opplevelsen av fellesskapsfølelse endret seg gjennom livet?)

9.6 Do you think the experience of community is different for young people today (than when you were young/than before?)

(Tror du at opplevelsen av fellesskap er annerledes for unge i dag (enn da du var ung/enn tidligere?)

**Reflections and comments (Refleksjoner og kommentarer).**

We are about to end the interview. Is there anything that you would like to say or you want to add before we finish?

(Vi skal nå avslutte intervjuet. Er det noe du føler du gjerne skulle fått sagt eller gjerne vil kommentere før vi avslutter?)

If you have any questions or comments in hindsight you may contact me by email

: [Nina.Bahl@svt.ntnu.no](mailto:Nina.Bahl@svt.ntnu.no) or phone: 73 55 13 62

(Om du har noen spørsmål eller generelle kommentarer i ettertid må du gjerne kontakte meg på epost: [Nina.Bahl@svt.ntnu.no](mailto:Nina.Bahl@svt.ntnu.no) eller telefon: 73 55 13 62)

Nina Kavita Heggen Bahl

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## Appendix 2. Interview Guide Used in India

### **Interview guide**

#### **Part 1:**

##### **Background information:**

Age:

Gender:

Marital status/Relationship status:

Highest level of education:

Residential area of Mumbai:

Years of residence in this area:

Number of children:

Number of family members living at home:

Member of any group where you have some influence (e.g., social or political group):

## **Part 2:**

### **Community and Sense of Community**

What comes to mind when you think of the word 'community'?

Is there any particular community you are referring to when you think of this?

What elements would you say make up the community (the people and objects involved)?

Do you feel a sense of belonging or attachment to this area? Why/ Why not?

Do you have any experience of past members of the community being excluded or leaving the community? (What factors could contribute to this?)

What meaning do you relate to the concept 'sense of community'?

What kind of emotions do you relate to the concept?

What types of behaviour do you relate to the concept?

What types of values do you relate to the concept?

Would you define the area where you live as a community? Why/ why not?

In which way would you say a sense of community is important to you as an elderly person?

What kind of characteristics do you think a good community should have?

**Reflections and comments.**

If you have any questions or general comments after the interview, feel free to contact me:

ninakavi@stud.ntnu.no

Thank you for your time!

Nina Kavita Heggen Bahl

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# Responsibility for Psychological Sense of Community and Well-Being in Old Age: A Qualitative Study of Urban Older Adults in Norway

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## Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to explore older adults' understanding and conceptualizations of the concept "psychological sense of community" (PSOC) as experiences of belonging and being part of seem to be important in old age. Twelve older informants from Oslo (the capital of Norway) were interviewed. A thematic and discourse analytical approach was used to identify and depict the most central themes in the older adults' meaning of PSOC in-depth and in relation to context. The findings show that there are important parts of Norwegian older adults' meanings of PSOC that goes beyond dimensions included in the predominant conceptualization of PSOC. "Individual responsibility for PSOC in old age", identified as the most salient theme, reflects core Norwegian cultural values and provides new insight to premises of PSOC and well-being in old age. Furthermore, the findings in this Scandinavian sample extend the understanding of older adults' efforts to maintain their PSOC and well-being through life-changing transitions.

## Keywords

Well-Being, Psychological Sense of Community, Old Age, Culture, Social Responsibility, Norway

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## 1. Introduction

The aging of Western populations emphasizes the need for more research on the well-being of older people. How older adults are socially connected is a highly relevant research issue for future studies of older adults' well-being, as relations,

to be part of, to belong, and to feel committed to seem to be important aspects of individual well-being [1]-[6]. Using the concept “psychological sense of community” (PSOC), community psychology has approached peoples’ experiences of belonging and to be part of [7] [8] [9] [10] [11]. Most used today is McMillan and Chavis’ conceptualization of PSOC as consisting of four dimensions: a) membership, or a feeling of belonging and identification with the community; b) influence, or the sense of acceptable community influence and, at the same time, feeling some control and influence over the community; c) integration and fulfillment of needs, or the reinforcement that members receive by having their needs met through their community’s resources and their contribution to it; and d) shared emotional connection, or the sense that members in the community have shared, and will continue to share, a history of negative and positive events, places and experiences together. These dimensions have also been shown to be central in older adults’ conceptualizations and understanding of PSOC [12]. This paper presents an analysis of urban older adults meaning of PSOC useful to community psychology as well as current PSOC research [13] [14]. Our findings carry implications for development and applications of services and interventions from public elder care.

Taking as our position that PSOC is a context-sensitive concept embedded in culture [9] [15]-[20] experienced differently among various age groups [12] [21] [22] [23] and that cultural context affects our meanings and experiences of aging and thereby our well-being [24], we are interested in how urban older adults in Norway, one of the Scandinavian welfare states, explain and define PSOC.

## 2. The Norwegian Context and Older Adults

Norway as a culture has traditionally been characterized by communal values, social equality, equal distribution of wealth [25], a strong “work ethic” [26] [27] and the “Law of Jante”<sup>1</sup>, all elements that encourage individuals to show humbleness, or not putting oneself above the community and others [29]. Triandis and Gelfand [30] categorised the Norwegian culture as a culture of “horizontal individualism” characterised by a shared understanding of one’s self more or less as every other self, or as “egalitarian individualism” as Gullestad (1991) described it. Triandis and Gelfand [30] as well as Gullestad [26] thus describe the Norwegian culture as individualistic but not a culture that favors hierarchy or competitiveness, as vertical individualistic cultures often do [31]. However, Norwegian values have recently changed towards a stronger vertical individualism [32].

Most older people in Norway are living at home by themselves or with a partner. The last two generations of older adults have, given that they are in good health, been rather self-reliant [33]. In Norway, retirement pension is provided universally to all individuals independent of earlier employment, and the state is perceived as the main economic provider for older adults [34]. However, al-

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<sup>1</sup>The Law of Jante is composed of 10 “commandments”, e.g. “Thou shalt not fancy thyself better than us” [28] Sandemose, A. (1933) *En flykting krysser sitt spor: fortelling om en morders barndom*. Gyldendal, Oslo. It is a frequently recurring theme in the public discourse when public figures express an attitude of uniqueness or putting oneself above the community in some way.

though most older adults are not economically dependent upon their family, there is a great deal of solidarity between the generations within the typical Norwegian family; almost 50% of adults visit their older parents weekly, and older adults often live in the same area or close to their grown children. Norwegian older adults under 80 years old are often active, not only when it comes to social participation with friends and neighbors, but also within their local community [33]. This high level of social activity concurs with the findings of a new study demonstrating that Norway has the lowest prevalence of loneliness among older adults, compared to West, East and South European countries [35].

The typical big-city context of Norway differs from the more rural Norway where social cohesion values tend to be higher [36]. Using a qualitative approach, we interviewed older people in Oslo about how they understand and define PSOC.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Informants

Twelve older adults (six women and six men) participated. Nine of them were asked by the head of different senior centers if they would like to participate. The rest of the informants (three) were recruited by the researcher (the first author) either through these centers or acquaintances.

As there are marked health differences between older adults east and west of Oslo—people to the west of Oslo have better health [37]—an equal number of informants (six) from the east and west of Oslo were decided to be included.

Older populations in Western societies are increasingly diverse. People from Pakistan represent the immigrant group, which is the largest and has the longest history of residency (many came in the 1970s) in Oslo [38] [39] and two older adults (one male, one female) born in Pakistan were also included in the sample. One had resided in Oslo in 21 years, the other 28 years. These informants did not stand out as different from other informants with respect to the findings.

The following demographic variables characterized the sample (Table 1).

Thus the sample reflects central demographic variations of the old age population in Oslo.

#### 3.2. Instruments

In earlier studies, interviews were used for getting in-depth information about PSOC as this method gives the informants the opportunity to express in their own words what PSOC is for them [17] [18] [23] [40] [41]. However, to ensure that the informants had the chance to express themselves and at the same time have some overall structure to the interview, a semi-structured interview was chosen [42]. The interview guide consisted of two sections; part one included questions about demographic variables (age, gender, marital status, highest level of education, residential area of Oslo, years of residence in area of Oslo, number of children and number of family members residing in their home), and if they

**Table 1.** Demographical characteristics of the sample.

Informant <sup>2</sup>	Marital status	Highest level of education	Residential area of Oslo	Years of residency in area of Oslo	Number of children	Number of family members in the home
F851	Widow	MA	West	80	3	0
F852	Widow	High school	West	25	3	0
F853	Divorced	Primary school	West	5	2	0
F854	Widow	High school	West	25	4	0
F71	Divorced	Non-degree granting college	East	16	2	0
F62	Married	MA	East	21	2	1
M78	Divorced	BA	West	30	1	0
M80	Married	MA	West	9	2	1
M85	Widower	Non-degree granting college	East	5	0	0
M75	Widower	High school	East	47	2	0
M75	Widower	Non-degree granting college	East	3	4	0
M69	Married	MA	East	28	4	5

had influence in any social or political group). Part two dealt with open-ended questions concerning meaning of community and PSOC (e.g. “What comes to your mind when you think of the word “community”?”, “Is there any particular community you are referring to when you think of this?”, “What meaning do you relate to the concept “sense of community”?” and “In which way would you say a sense of community is important to you as an elderly person?”). Follow up questions about PSOC and well-being were asked (e.g. “What would you say that to experience a “well-being” means to you?” “Would you say that a sense of community is important for your well-being?”).

The interviews were recorded by a digital voice recorder, and varied from 27 minutes to 1 hour and 26 minutes. National ethical guidelines of research were applied for and accepted by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

### 3.3. Analyses

**Thematic analysis.** Thematic or theme focused approaches are a methodology often used for analyzing data from interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a systematic and rigorous thematic approach to identify and analyze frequent and central themes in the meaning systems of informants [43] [44] [45], and was used as the first initial analysis of the data set. The thematic analysis was based on verbatim transcriptions of the second open section of the semi-structured interview. Moreover, it was decided to combine the thematic analysis with discourse analysis to meet our aim of exploring the meaning of PSOC in-depth and

<sup>2</sup>Informants are represented with codes indicating gender (F, female and M, male) and the informant’s age. As four of female informants were 85 years old, they have been given an additional number (1 - 4) to separate them from each other.

in a context-sensitive way.

The first four steps of the thematic analysis were used to capture the most frequently mentioned and common themes [44] [45]. The researcher first read through the data set to become familiar with the material, then coded the data set by hand to generate initial codes, and thereafter, went back to the data set and searched for codes that could have been missed in the first read-through. Codes were then organized in themes; repeated and coherent pattern of meaning that is distinctive from other themes. To review the themes, the most central characteristics and sub-elements of each theme were noted. Furthermore, the researcher went through the data set to see if and how each theme interacted with other themes, and if demographic variables played a role in each theme. Finally, the review of the themes was extended by highlighting the data set by different colors for each theme to check to what degree the themes covered the whole data set and if the non-colored parts explained the samples' understanding of PSOC further. In this process, seven themes were identified in the material. They were: "Responsibility and initiative", "Acquaintance", "Decease of community members", "Community member health", "Shared elements", "Respect and tolerance for diversity" and "Care and support".

**Discourse analysis.** Within discourse analytical approaches it is a priori assumed that the meaning of concepts changes with time. Moreover, change happens through discourse, which can be understood as the interaction between spoken language (how individuals and groups speak about something) and cultural values as part of a meaning system prescribing and describing the common sense of society [46] [47] [48] [49]. There is a variety of concrete techniques or tools of discourse analysis [47] [50]. The approach of Gee [51] for analyzing meaning systems in a data set is relevant for us as he argues that what is taken for granted or common sense is most central for understanding meaning. Gee's "The making strange tool" focuses on the elements taken for granted in the data set; the researcher inquires continually into what the informants implicitly take as natural and true.

When applying "The making strange tool" in the further analysis it became evident that some words used by the older people were recurring in the data set. The following six words were typically used when referring to taken-for-granted notions: "should" (bør), "ought to" (burde), "must" (må), "is indeed" (er jo), "absolutely" (absolutt), "one"/"you" (man), and "of course" (selvfølgelig). It was decided to use these words as search words in a systematic analysis of the whole data set. Searches were also undertaken for "should not" (skal ikke), "is not" (er ikke), "normal" (normal) and "ordinary" (vanlig) but they did not add any more detailed information. From these searches, interview extracts about taken-for-granted elements about PSOC were copied. In the data set, eight reoccurring taken-for-granted aspects of PSOC were identified: "reciprocity", "feedback, response and acceptance", "good manners and amiability", "trust, honesty and loyalty", "good atmosphere", "flexibility", "safety", and "participation". Reviewing the data through "The making strange tool" confirmed some of the themes



identified through the thematic analysis, gave a more in-depth understanding of these themes and provided the possibility of revealing additional themes/overlapping themes. The findings from this analysis were evaluated and then merged with the findings from the thematic analysis, making sure that both the most central and common themes as well as the taken-for-granted dimensions of PSOC in the data set were included in the final themes to be presented in the study.

Context is a central concept in discourse analysis [47] [48] [50]. As the present study aimed to understand the meaning of PSOC for older adults in a context-sensitive way, Gee's "Framing problem tool" was also used. According to Gee (2014), this tool can be used to analyse meaning in context by repeatedly asking and analyzing how contextual aspects affect the meaning of peoples' utterances. Any aspect of context can affect the meaning of an utterance and the researcher pushes one's knowledge of the context as far as possible to see if aspects of the context are relevant. This tool was applied in the analysis of the most central theme in the informants' meaning (presented below) by asking how any of the utterances from the informants reflected the described elements of the Norwegian context. This way of thinking provided a more context-sensitive understanding of the chosen findings by connecting the meaning of the informants with the larger cultural meaning systems within their context.

#### **4. Findings**

The above analyses produced several themes important to the Norwegian older adult samples' meanings and understandings of PSOC. The themes were about making an effort; how they thought other community members felt about them and their membership; what they shared with the others; and PSOC as both geographical and relational. The typical referent communities the informants mentioned were friends, family, neighbourhood, and finally, senior centres, organisations and unions they were members of.

Taken together, the themes could be divided into two categories: premises for PSOC and components of PSOC. Components were themes reflecting typical conceptualisations or descriptions of PSOC (PSOC is ...), while premises were themes reflecting central aspects for the older adults in order to experience PSOC (in order to have a PSOC...).

##### **4.1. Components of the Older Adults' Meaning of PSOC**

Firstly, "acquaintance" was something particularly important for the older adults' geographical PSOC:

F71: "Yes! [I feel a sense of community] here. I meet a lot of old acquaintances if I go down to Sagene [city area of residence] ... or the centre here".

Activities associated with acquaintances was often "face-to-face"—visiting others, drinking coffee together at local cafés, going to cultural events and just saying "hi" to each other when meeting.

“Shared elements” was a more general component of PSOC; it could be a shared community goal, shared interests, activities and history with other members. However, most mentioned was “shared understandings” between community members:

M85: “Sense of community is that we have a shared understanding”.

Moreover, the older adults described that it was central that other members showed them respect:

F62: “I show up [in the community], so everyone shows me respect ... Respect ... I mean, there [in the community] they think that “she is part of us”.

Furthermore, “care and compassion” was mentioned in describing PSOC. As a theme it was about the older adult’s definition of a good community and the experience of care and compassion shared between community members:

M80: “Yes, it [a characteristic of a good community] is indeed ... warmth, consideration and caring”.

F854: “The fact that we wish each other well [is something I connect to PSOC]”.

Like showing care and compassion, most actions and interactions in the communities of the older adults were expected to be of a reciprocal character:

F62: “And I think that if you do something yourself ... you have to contribute ... so that you can receive also. If you don’t do something, how can you expect that others will help you?”

A final theme was about “trust, honesty and safety” between community members:

M80: “It [Sense of community] is ... that people are ... not dependent on me, but can count on me”.

These components demonstrate that the dimensions as part of McMillan and Chavis’ conceptualization of PSOC (membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and a shared emotional connection) are central to the meanings of PSOC among older adults in the Norwegian context. However, there were other themes important in our Norwegian city sample.

#### **4.2. Premises of the Older Adults’ Meaning of PSOC**

Three other themes, in fact reflecting premises important and central for the older Norwegian adults, were identified. The first two mentioned premises were exposed as part of the most salient theme in the data: “Individual responsibility for PSOC in old age” and the sub-theme “Adaptation to transitions”. All informants in their discourse of PSOC highlighted responsibility for maintaining PSOC. The third theme was “acceptance” as an important premise for individual PSOC. As M80 formulated this third theme:

“So ... a condition for having ... a sense of community is that ... you are ac-

cepted”.

As the following analyses will demonstrate, the first two premises were underscored as especially important premises for PSOC in old age

### 4.3. Individual Responsibility for PSOC in Old Age

What stood out as most central when our older Norwegian informants described their understanding of PSOC was their own responsibility for PSOC. Taking responsibility for their own PSOC was about taking initiative and participating in community activities. This theme operated as something “taken for granted” and words like “shall” (skal) and “must” (må) were typically used.

F851: “That is what I am saying; you cannot just sit at home; you have to take initiative yourself”.

This individual responsibility was referred to as especially important in old age, as being part of a community could no longer be taken for given as in a younger age.

F853: “Yes, that [community participation] is eh ... really ... very important. Not to just sit at home ... and get stuck ... Very important for health and mind ... young people are at work, right? And meet ... have a community at work ... and in their everyday life ... While ... Eh ... old people ... are, if they don’t take initiative themselves, then they are just sitting at home ...”

The informants also expressed that this initiative effort concerned and was about the choice to be part of the community or not.

M80: “In every community, or in a society, you have people who won’t make an effort ... and they ... they keep themselves outside, by themselves ... And those who don’t participate in the community, they are naturally outside (the community)”.

Individual responsibility of PSOC was also demonstrated by the informants’ understanding that being lonely was seen as being in their own control.

F854: “That is ... you, you create your own old age ... I don’t have to feel lonely, I can just take ... if I feel lonely I can make a phone call or I can go across the street to a friend.”

“Individual responsibility” (eget ansvar), “initiative” (initiativ), “effort” (innsats) and “to accomplish” (yte) were words typically used by the informants when describing their meaning of PSOC.

The sub-theme “Adaptation to transitions” was about psychosocial transitions in old age such as the loss of a spouse, friends or community members because of death or illness and the decline in their own health:

F853: “No... [I don’t have any experience with community members being excluded or leaving the community]. Yes, there are some who are dead ...

but that's another way of leaving. And ... some have become demented ... . So that's another way of losing as well".

F854: "... I take health into account immediately. Because I won't sit here and say that ... because some are so sick, and have such ailments and pain that ... [The same effort is not required]".

Going through such transitions, the community of older adults reduced the demands and expectations of the individual member's responsibility and initiative of community participation, even though at the same time they all on their own part emphasised their own responsibility.

Decline in health was the most frequently mentioned transition. For example, dementia and severe pain were mentioned as reducing the expectations the community and the older adult adults had towards others. Going through hip surgery, cancer or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, the older adults still required efforts and initiative in community participation from themselves, however:

F853: "You are solely responsible for ... eh ... both your own health and your own life".

Moreover, to prevent decline in health, community participation and involvement were seen as something depending on one's own individual effort; one has to try to go on:

M78: "Yes, to participate is important in old age and to be involved in order to ... eh ... be included and continue in the community. There is one thing I'm afraid of, and that is to get dementia. And I have found out that I ... have to be involved [to stay healthy]".

As shown, the expectations the older individuals held to themselves were strong; and they were not about how you were feeling, what changes in life have affected you, but how you deal with the changes, how you adapt to them.

To never give up, to be part of community and good health were mentioned as the fundamental premises for the older adult's well-being:

F851: "Yes, I believe so [That sense of community is important for well-being]. That you want to, I think ... if you only sit at home and do nothing ... do not get out and ... contribute ... meet people and things like that ... then you cannot experience well-being".

F854: "Its [well-being] very much ... what should I say ... yes, the more I have to attend to the more well-being I have".

F71: "I can say that ... I have well-being if I get up in the morning and I'm not ... that I am ambulatory".

M80: "It [well-being] is about health as well. That you have a good health".

The relationship between PSOC and well-being was described as going both ways. Well-being could promote community participation:

F62: “Mhm [Sense of community is important for well-being]. Because I have noticed that if I feel good, I participate more [in the community]”.

Finally, in our analysis we found an interaction between “residential area of Oslo” and our theme; older adults to the west of Oslo often reported to invest their efforts in more communities compared to informants residing in the east. We assume that this observation reflects the health discrepancy between older adults in east and west of Oslo [37]. Being ill restricts mobility and thereby the number of communities one can participate in. Moreover, age and gender played a role as more women than men described experiences of loss, and the majority of informants describing experiences of loss were 85 years and above. This makes sense as women live longer than men, and with age they are more likely to experience others’ death and own illness. However, importantly, informants, independent of demographic background, stressed the importance of individual responsibility and health as premises for PSOC and well-being.

To sum up, other people, organizations or institutions were not mentioned as responsible or accountable for the informants’ PSOC; they rendered themselves totally responsible. Moreover, even though many older people in Norway live near their family and have frequent contact with family members [33], support from the family was not taken for granted when experiencing demanding transitions in old age. In one way or the other, the informants strongly focused on their own efforts to cope and secure their well-being. They required themselves to manage and to adapt to the changing situations of life.

There are several strong cultural meaning systems in the Norwegian society that can help to understand the older adult Norwegian informants’ way of conceiving PSOC and well-being primarily as an outcome of personal efforts and individual “responsibility taking”. First, the horizontal individualism having pervaded in the Norwegian context for a long time indicates a meaning system of Norwegians as individualist persons. People prefer to decide for themselves what to do and how to do it [30]. Another key aspect in the Norwegian value system is, as also discussed, the strong “work ethic” of Protestantism and early industrial capitalism [26] [27]. These meaning systems demand making great efforts and working hard in order to “deserve” a good life. These values of hard work were also predominant in the Norwegian society when our informants grew up (1930-50) [27] [52]. Our informants’ expectations and practices to be self-reliant is in fact a practice that has grown increasingly stronger since 1990 in Norwegian society [33], implying that many of today’s older adults had self-reliant parents, uncles and aunts who acted as role models for how older people “should” think and behave. Finally, the recent move away from traditional communal values to more individualistic values and policies in the Norwegian society may also have made individual responsibility, initiative and involvement an important part of the older adult discourse to manage to adapt to the larger context of more neo-liberal and private practices (Nafstad *et al.*, 2007). As a consequence, older Norwegians may have changed from being the “deserving

citizen” to the “adapting citizen”; a shift that carries far reaching implications for the individual’s responsibility for their own PSOC and well-being.

## 5. Limitations

Discourse analyses are based on assumptions of dialectical relation between the context and discourse practice [51]. Knowledge obtained from discourse analysis has, therefore, been questioned in terms of a form of falsification that may result from these assumptions, reading meaning into text rather than out of text (Haig, 2004). This is an important limitation that context-sensitive studies interpreting findings in terms of cultural frames of reference are subjected to. However, the possibility of this form of falsification has to be accepted in order to meet with the aim and value of a context-sensitive understanding. Importantly, in this study thematic analysis was undertaken first. The discourse analysis was thus based on findings sensitive to the informants’ meaning of PSOC.

Qualitative analysis of cultural context also calls for the researchers themselves to be scrutinised. The bi-cultural perspective (Norwegian-Indian) of the researcher in the current study is argued to be of importance in this regard. Advantages of this perspective are the researcher’s “outside” perspective, which make it easier to point out biases and taken-for-granted notions assumed to be natural, which actually are cultural, but also the “inside” perspective, and which provide a thorough understanding of the Norwegian culture and for the researcher to be perceived as Norwegian by the informants. This perspective, however, is likely to have introduced some biases as well; cultural notions (such as the role of individualism in the main theme), may have been understood as cultural, because it stood out as very different from an Indian culture, while actually being related to the individual aspects of the informants, such as personality or their situation. This limitation is especially central considering the researcher’s community and cultural psychological background. The perspective is also likely to have made the researcher blind to taken-for-granted elements, which the researcher shared with the informants.

Older people living in a big city were interviewed. The results may differ from more rural Norway. Given the age range of the sample (62 - 85 years), the results may not apply to people who are older than the sample (over 85 years). Finally, the assumptions of who would be regarded as suitable informants by senior center leaders as well as acquaintances may have affected the representativeness of the sample. As in any qualitative study, it is possible that informants who were social and talk-active were more likely to be chosen or wanting to participate, despite a clear instruction from the researcher that any informant would be of interest.

## 6. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

As shown, the older Norwegian city informants’ meaning system of PSOC reflected several dimensions in the conceptualisation of McMillan and Chavis [10]. “Acquaintance” and “acceptance” are a central part of “membership”; “recipro-

ity” in “influence”; “respect and tolerance”, “trust, honesty and loyalty” and “care and compassion” in “integration and fulfilment of needs” and “shared elements” in “shared emotional connection”.

However, as presented, their own responsibility for PSOC in old age was a very important part of the Norwegian informants’ meaning system of PSOC. Given psychosocial transitions such as retirement, children getting their own family, and friends and community members dying, PSOC for older adults is no longer automatically maintained by going to a work place, being part of a family or meeting up with long-lasting friends. Old age, then, in many ways, demands people to make efforts and take responsibility themselves in maintaining their own PSOC and well-being. Responsibility has also been discussed by some scholars in the field of PSOC research [10] [53] [54] [55]. The kind of responsibility the informants in our study were concerned about, however, was different from the social responsibility that has so far been focused upon in PSOC research. Our informants strongly focused on their individual responsibility to secure their PSOC in old age and thereby their well-being.

As presented, this type of responsibility is largely reflected in core Norwegian cultural values: the Protestant “work ethic” [26] [27], horizontal individualism and the more recent vertical individualism [25] [30]. The above findings could thus be considered as expected. However, the Norwegian culture can, as presented, be characterised both as a horizontal individualistic culture and at the same time a welfare state [25] [26] [31] [32]. One could, therefore, expect that in such a culture not only individual efforts, but also more communality and communal systems of care would be central parts of people’s discourse of PSOC. However, the findings show that expectations towards community members to take responsibility for their own PSOC, even though depending on good health, were strong. The expectations that the older adults held toward themselves even in situations of poor health (and in preventing poor health) are to make an effort and be personally involved, mirroring the mentioned individualism of the Norwegian culture. Our findings support other findings of Norwegian older adults’ main coping strategy: to accept and adapt [56].

It is likely that by taking responsibility for their own PSOC and well-being by being personally involved and participating in the community, they also shape old age related transitions. For by taking responsibility and making efforts to take part, demanding and difficult transitions in old age become less likely to be undertaken alone. People, as far as they can try as long as possible to be part of community, and as presented, loneliness among Norwegian seniors is not high compared to other countries [35]. However, one may question whether this individual way of handling hardship is actually beneficial for the older individual in cases where individual efforts necessarily come up too short, for example, blaming oneself for being alone after a change in health that reduces physical mobility.

Finally, how people speak about a situation is a vital part of the process behind what makes up society’s common sense of how to live [46] [47] [48] [49]. By

discouraging and prescribing so strongly the responsibility for one's own PSOC and well-being in old age with the transitions entailed, older individuals strongly reproduce the cultural values and expectations of themselves as being responsible for own PSOC and well-being even in old age and having poor health.

To conclude, the overall meaning of PSOC of the Norwegian sample largely reflects the conceptualisation of McMillan and Chavis [10]. Our study also demonstrates how older adults are very active in trying to maintain their PSOC and well-being through life-changing transitions. Finally, our findings further illustrate the importance and value of exploring meanings of PSOC in social contexts where it has not been studied before, as culture, as shown in our study, is clearly reflected in the central premises for PSOC and well-being. Other studies have also shown that PSOC in old age is affected by context [12] [57] [58] [59] [60]. Li, Hodgetts and Sonn [59] study showed results similar to our study; their Chinese older adult New Zealand migrant sample, as our Norwegian city sample, was both active in adapting to transitions and strived to create PSOC within their context. Their argument, however, was that personal social constructions predicated PSOC. As a final point, we will argue that it is important that the interaction between personal and cultural social constructions within one context be explored to build stronger understanding of later-life PSOC.

## 7. Practical Implications and Application

To promote PSOC and well-being among older adults across the world is an important issue in a population-aging world. In Norway the practice of living in the home with the spouse if he or she is alive, or alone as long as possible, is the preferred way of living [33] [61]. Four of five older Norwegian adults in fact live at home and do not receive any support from the local authorities [62]. The majority of older adults in Norway are thus as self-reliant as before within their home and geographic community, which may be a typical situation in many Western countries. The findings of the present Norwegian study suggest that urban older adults have a strong motivation and will to take individual responsibility to participate in their local communities. For society, it is, therefore, important to assist older adults in their initiative and efforts to be responsible and participate in their local communities, including phases of declining health.

Norwegian public eldercare is already offering important assistance through local authorities for integrating older adults with poor health. The city of Oslo, for example, provides economic funding for senior centres (combined with volunteer organisations and foundations) and offers adequate transportation to those who are not able to use their own or public transportation. Given the anticipated increase in the number of older adults in the population, this type of funding and assistance for those with declining health most probably needs to be expanded in the future. Furthermore, it is our hope that Norwegian public eldercare and the city of Oslo may find the empirical findings of this study useful in their efforts to promote, and prevent the decrease of, PSOC among older adult citizens.



The older adults mentioned the death of spouse, friends or community members as a challenge to PSOC. Family and friends are important to manage the situation of the loss of a spouse in old age [63]. But as shown, senior centres—communities of peers—are important communities to help older adults who have lost loved ones to feel connected. To secure PSOC and thereby well-being for those older adults who, for whatever reason, are not able to participate in community, and go to senior centres or as some of our informants, do not have children, it may be of great significance that there are offers of someone to come to their home, not only for delivering health services or doing practical jobs, but for spending time with them, talking and listening to them. The new intervention from the Norwegian Directorate of Health to provide “prevention home visits” aiming to give older adults guidance and advice for how to preserve health and the ability to live independently can represent a valuable contribution in this endeavour as this intervention emphasises older adults’ efforts and mastery in everyday life and the community. We advise that the application of this intervention allow older adults to choose “preventing conversations” as an initiative (e.g. by volunteers from senior citizens communities or organisations) so that continuous connection to the community can be sustained. In this way, the older adults may still experience being a part of and belonging to the community and society at large in a way that secures their sense of individual responsibility and thereby their self-respect and well-being.

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# Psychological Sense of Community Responsibility and Diversity in Old Age: A Qualitative Study of Urban Older Adults in India

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## Abstract

The aim of the present study is to explore older adult people's meaning of psychological sense of community (PSOC), a key element in individual and community well-being. Using thematic and discourse analytical approaches we have in an in-depth and context-sensitive way analyzed interview material from twelve urban older informants residing in the heterogenic mega-city of Mumbai. Several themes included in the samples meaning of PSOC confirm established dimensions of the concept. However, key aspects of their meaning system more closely relate to the concepts PSOC-R and diversity and demonstrate these inherent concepts as highly culturally bound and context-sensitive at a city and national level.

## Keywords

Psychological Sense of Community, Older Adults, Meaning, Diversity, Mumbai, India

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## 1. Introduction

With today's aging world population a global concern is how to promote the well-being of older adult populations. To feel devoted to and included in one's communities are important aspects of individual as well as community well-being [1]-[6]. One of the ways that community psychology is pursuing individual and community well-being is through its core value "psychological sense of community" (PSOC) [7]-[12]. Several studies from non-Western contexts have demonstrated the four dimensions in McMillan and Chavis' (1986) operationalization as central to peoples meanings (e.g. Brodsky [13]): a) membership, or the experience of belonging and identification with those who are accepted as part of the community; b) mutual influence, or the acknowledge-

ment of community influence and, simultaneously an awareness of having influence on one's community; c) integration and fulfilment of needs, or the expectation and reinforcement of having ones needs met through the community and; d) shared emotional connection, or the experience of having a shared community experience and history with other members. There are, however, few studies of later-life PSOC [14], especially in non-Western societies, where the majority of the older population will reside in the future. Fast changing structures and meaning systems are taking place in the urban context of India, which have the second largest older adult population in the world [15]. Insight into what PSOC is for older adult individuals' residing in urban India is a central part of preparing for their future individual and community well-being.

This study aims to explore urban Indian older adults' meaning of PSOC. It provides three novel contributions to the field: First, to our knowledge, it is the first study of PSOC in India. Secondly, as few have done before, we study PSOC among older adults. Finally, of vital importance to the established understanding of PSOC as a context sensitive and culturally-bound concept [6] [11] [13] [16] [17] [18] [19] [20] and that cultural context affects our meanings and experiences of aging [21], we study later-life PSOC within the interaction of individual and cultural meaning systems.

## 2. The Indian Context and Older Adults

India's cultures have traditionally been characterized by vertical collectivistic values; A shared conviction of the self as interdependent with some in-group (e.g. the family), a social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals [22] [23] as well as the appreciation for hierarchy, as important parts of the culture [23] [24] [25]. Today, collectivistic meaning systems co-exist with individualistic ones, mainly in urban areas [26]. Additional core values include spirituality [27], meeting social obligations [28], and family-oriented values [29] [30]. Furthermore, Hindu understandings of the different stages across the lifespan<sup>1</sup> [31] [32] [33] and the caste system [34] [35] prescribe what old age should be. Traditionally older people in India have been taken care of by the extended family and possessed the role of an authority and a source of wisdom within the family. Today, however, the nuclear family structure is becoming the norm, particularly in urban areas [36]. Social networks and communities outside the family may thus become more important for the urban older adult in order to maintain their PSOC.

We are studying the concepts of older adult people living in Mumbai, the largest urban population in India. The megacity holds a population of over 21 million people [37] and the largest slum in Asia [38]. Due to rapid migration (the majority of the older populations in urban areas in India are migrants from other states in India [15] [30]) the city's culture is characterized by a fusion of

<sup>1</sup>In the Hindu scripture called "Bhagvad Gita" Human life is divided into four stages (*ashramas*): The first two stages of life (*Bramacharya* and *Grishhashtha*) are devoted to learning trade and performing duties, the latter two stages (*Vanaprastha* and *Sanyasa*) are for everyone to withdraw from day-to-day material activities and social bonds to eventually lead a spiritual life (see Gokhale, 2003, Bhawuk, 2008).

Indian cultures.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Informants

Twelve older adult informants participated in the study. This is a very small sample in respect of the older adult population in Mumbai. However, given the importance of cultural context for understanding conceptualizations of PSOC [20] [39], a in-depth and context-sensitive analysis was prioritized over sample size.

To recruit older adult informants, scientific staff at the Tata Institute of Social Science (TISS) invited older adults by phone. The following admission criteria were used; above 60 years of age, speak English and living in Mumbai. A combination of purposive and convenience sampling was used in the study. Ensuring a sample that could inform us about PSOC in old age from different perspectives, we included members of the Lions Club in Mumbai (three men, two women) and older adults who were not active in social or political groups (three women). Finally, older adults living in institutions (three men; two of them active as volunteers, one woman) were included. Two day-care centres were chosen as an institutional setting suitable for recruiting older adults sufficiently healthy to participate in the study. All the informants were acquaintances of one of the involved staff members from TISS. Furthermore, the following demographic variables characterized the sample (Table 1). All informants reported to be Hindu.

#### 3.2. Interviews

Qualitative interviews have been a useful method for getting information about

**Table 1.** Demographical characteristics of the sample.

Informant <sup>1</sup>	Marital status	Highest level of education	Residential area of Mumbai	Years of residency	Number of children	Number of family members in the home
F77	Widow	MA	Suburban	3	2	3
F74	Widow	BA	Suburban	15	1	4
F61	Married	BA	Suburban	10	3	1
F82	Married	PhD	Suburban	52	2	1
F67	Married	BA	Suburban	4	2	1
F80	Widow	Basic school	Urban	6	2	0
M81	Widower	BA	Urban	4	2	0
M67	Married	BA	Suburban	37	1	1
M65	Married	BA	Suburban	39	1	2
M60	Married	MA	Suburban	20	2	4
M70	Widower	High school	Urban	1	0	0
M69	Widower	MA	Suburban	32	2	0

<sup>1</sup>Informants are represented with codes indicating gender (F, female and M, male) and the informant's age.



PSOC in non-Western cultural contexts [13]. Aiming for data that provided a detailed understanding of the samples meaning of PSOC we chose semi-structured interviews, making sure that the informants had a chance to express their understanding and at the same time have some overall structure to the conversation [40]. The interview guide consisted of two sections; part one contained questions about demographical variables (age, gender, marital status, highest level of education, residential area of Mumbai, years of residence, number of children, and number of family members residing in their home). Part two included open-ended questions about the meaning of community and PSOC (e.g. “What comes to your mind when you think of the word ‘community’?”, “What meaning do you relate to the concept ‘sense of community’?” and “In which way would you say a sense of community is important to you as an elderly person?”).

The interviews were performed in English. Two research assistants were present during the interviews to make sure language did not become a challenge. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and ranged from 13 minutes to 1 hour and 36 minutes. The study was approved by national ethical guidelines (Norwegian Centre for Research Data) and TISS.

### 3.3. Analyses

**Thematic Analysis.** In psychology thematic approaches are a common way of analyzing data from interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) provide an accessible, systematic and rigorous approach to identify and analyze frequent and central themes as part of peoples meanings [41] [42] [43]. This was essential for the aim of the study, and the approach was used as the initial analysis of the data set, consisting of verbatim transcriptions of the second section of the interviews. As will be further discussed, we decided to combine the thematic analysis with discourse analysis in order to explore the samples meanings of PSOC in depth and in a context-sensitive way.

The first four steps of the thematic analysis were performed to capture the most frequently mentioned and common themes. First, the researcher (corresponding author) read through the transcripts to become familiar with the material and generate initial codes. To make sure codes were not missed out in the first read through, the researcher went back to the data set to search for additional codes. To develop themes the most central characteristics were noted for each candidate theme and sub-theme. Then, the researcher reviewed themes by going through the data-set to see if and how each theme interacted with other themes and demographical variables. Finally, the review was extended by highlighting themes in the data set with different colors, checking if the parts that were not colored provided further insight to the samples meanings of PSOC. In this process ten themes were identified. They were: “Helping and caring for others”, “Adaptation and acceptance”, “Reciprocity”, “Safety and welfare structures”, “Shared elements”, “Sense of belonging and attachment”, “Community satisfaction”, “Respect”, “Residential investment and action” and “Heterogeneity”.

**Discourse Analysis.** An a priori assumption in discourse analysis is that meanings of concepts change with time. This process happens through discourse, the interaction between spoken language (the way individuals and groups speak about something), and culture as part of meaning systems prescribing and describing the common sense of society [44] [45] [46] [47]. Discourse analysis provides several approaches and tools [45] [48]. Gee [49] offers an approach to analyze meaning systems in a data set and is considered appropriate for our study. He argues that what is taken for granted or common sense is most essential for understanding meaning. As one of the tools within his approach 'The making strange tool' focuses on the taken for granted elements in the data set. The researcher enquires into what the informants implicitly take as natural and true. Applying the tool it became obvious that some words used by the participants reoccurred in the data set. These words were used to search by in the data set, as a way of concretizing the use of the tool. Eight words were typically used when talking about taken for granted notions: "Should/Shouldn't", "Must", "Have to", "Absolutely", "Normal/Normally", "Isn't/That is not", "Right" and finally "Of course". Searches were made for these words and sections from the data set including the words were extracted and put into a separate document to analyze these with the discourse analysis tool. Four recurring taken for granted aspects of PSOC were identified: "Community development", "Owing the community", "Community membership", and "Social influence". Using the tool to review the themes gave an in-depth understanding of what was taken for granted, and provided the possibility of revealing additional themes. The findings from this analysis were evaluated and then merged with the findings from the thematic analysis, making sure that the most central and common themes as well as the taken for granted dimensions of PSOC in the data set were included in the final themes.

Context is a key concept in discourse analysis [45] [46] [48]. To understand the role of context in the samples meaning of PSOC we chose to use Gee's "Framing problem tool". This tool can be used to analyze meaning in context by continually asking and analyzing how contextual aspects affect the meaning of peoples' utterances. Any aspect of context can affect the meaning of an utterance and the researcher uses his/her knowledge of the context to see if aspects of the context are relevant [49]. This tool was applied in the analysis of the core themes in the informants' meaning of PSOC and community (presented below) by asking how any of the related utterances from the sample reflected the Indian context. This way of thinking gave a more context-sensitive understanding by connecting the samples meaning with the larger meaning-systems in their cultural context.

#### 4. Findings

The analytical approaches formed several themes important to the urban Indian older adult samples meaning of PSOC. The themes were about helping and sharing with others, giving back to the community, community development, respecting and adapting to other members differences and own safety. The typi-

cal referent communities mentioned were the family, the neighborhood, the city and India as a nation.

The themes reflected the dimension included in McMillan and Chavis' operationalization; *Membership* was a central part of the theme "sense of belonging and attachment";

M70: "I think that I am part of the community... I belong to a small group, as well as the larger group... very small group here in Sion [area in Mumbai], as well as the nation, our nation of nearly one billion people".

Furthermore, the themes "Adaptation and acceptance" and "Reciprocity" largely resembled Mutual influence;

F67: Yes [A value I relate to sense of community is]...first one is accepting each other the way they are, without trying to change everybody, you know...and have the respect for whatever their beliefs are, even if I don't agree...

M60: "It [sense of community] is all give and take, it should be that, and it is there. It is there, at least in a place like Mumbai, so many people do that".

Integration and fulfillment of needs was identified in the themes "Respect", "Community expectations" and "Safety and welfare structures";

F61: "For me, the sense of belonging, when you feel that in a community, the values which you will have...should be...respect for elders..."

M70: "You feel bound, attached to...satisfactory. I know my country is fine".

M69: "I want to be in good relation with them [the residential community], and there is also a welfare association to care for the needs...to care for the welfare of the community".

Finally, a shared emotional connection was a central part of the theme "Shared elements" identified in the samples conceptualization:

F67: "... we [from Mumbai] are none of us in a place of origin. We do have a certain culture...but we are very adaptable to the other cultures of my neighbors... Here people have... that sense of acceptance, and that is something very special about this Mumbai..."

There were, however, two additional themes "Helping and caring of others" and "Community heterogeneity" that did not easily fit within the dimensions. As the most salient and as core aspects of the samples meaning of PSOC and community, they will be given special attention.

#### **4.1. Helping and Caring for Others**

It is almost expected that people speak about help and care when asked about their meaning of PSOC. In our material it was the most evident theme and it operated as a "taken for granted" part of the informants meaning. Words and expressions like "benefit", "work" and "doing something" were typically used.

For several informants it was part of the very meaning of PSOC:

M65: "Sense of community is the caring of others."

M81: "...sense of community there first of all needs to be an objective. And the objective should be common for all. And most of the objectives should be positive, that is in a helping type".

However, while Western conceptualizations of PSOC typically describe help and care between somewhat equal individuals within a community (e.g. at work) the informants described it as something they provided for less fortunate individuals:

F82: "... our senior citizens used to go there and all the patients used to come, those patients were illiterate, they don't know where to go, so we used to help them...volunteering."

F61: "... we go to the slums... and help with education of the uneducated people..."

Further on it was explained that helping and caring was a way to "give back" to the community:

F82: "... from the community we came up to this level, so we must give it back to the community. That is what I feel is sense of community means."

In this type of community service, some demographical variables seemed to matter. First of all educational background; older adults who identified themselves as "highly educated" (four of the informants) expected themselves and other educated people to make an effort in the community:

M65: "All the educated should have come together and they should try to impart whatever they know... The behavior should be good. Social behavior like helping each other, so because helping others is not an obligation, it is a duty."

Secondly, (widowed) older adults who lived alone seemed to find an especially important purpose and well-being in giving help to the larger community:

M81: "I need them [the family] ... but I don't want... this is better. I am not God himself, but he has given me some power to do something, impact something. So, let me impact."

F61: "If you are in a community you feel 'I am more safe than being outside the community', then you will feel alone.... A sense of safety, a sense of belonging, and sense of wellbeing, mentally and physically. That I am in a good company, and I can also contribute..."

There are several elements within the context, which can help us to understand this theme in a context-sensitive way. First, concept "seva"; "service to others" [50], often understood as a selfless act of worship for a Guru or a social cause [51] [52]. Just as the community efforts the informants described, seva is frequently practiced by volunteering in NGOs [53]. Secondly, according to

Hinduism and the caste system there are duties which Hindu individuals, as our informants were, are expected to perform are prescribed by caste [31]. The older adult informant who identified as 'highly educated' most likely belong to the highest caste of "Brahmin". In urban areas of India, such as Mumbai, religious practice (including social duties) has been demonstrated as of greater importance for "Brahmins" compared to lower castes [54]. Finally, Hindu philosophy prescribes older adult individuals to withdraw from the material world and the social bonds, such as the family and community life [31] [32] [33]. Then, the finding of community investment as an important and salient part of the "educated" older adults meaning (particularly for those who living alone), seem to be consistent with prior findings that the main motivation for doing seva in old age is a sense of belonging [51], but actually contradicts central age related traditional expectations within their context.

#### 4.2. Community Heterogeneity

Established definitions of PSOC are founded upon a membership-similarity understanding of community. In order for PSOC to grow community members need to be alike. The sample from Mumbai, however, shared an understanding of community as consisting of members who were dissimilar. Typically, words like "different", "cosmopolitan" and "mix" were used. Differences in regional religious affiliation, age, interest, professional background and group-identities were described as important in a community:

M67: "I believe that those who stay together, maybe of different regions, maybe of different religions.... But... they should continue to stay together peacefully... that is what I feel a community means."

F61: "A community... is people... not only of the same age, different age groups. Different groups of people having different professions, different interests, but they are staying in the same area."

M65: "Community means that it is a group of people belonging to different race, different caste...but all are living happy. There is no distinction as such."

To adapt to and accept community members' differences was something the informants identified with as "Mumbaikars":

F67: "... we [from Mumbai] are none of us in a place of origin. We do have a certain culture, a basic culture at home, but we are very adaptable to the other cultures of my neighbours... Here people have... that sense of acceptance, and that is something very special about this Mumbai..."

To understand the informant meaning of community in a context-sensitive way we have to look Mumbai as a context. Mumbai can be described as a "Mini-India" where multiple diverse Indian cultures co-exist. The city is also the most exposed context to Western meaning-systems within the nation [38]. As such the citizens, especially those who have resided there for a long time (as many older adults are likely to) are used to a great heterogeneity of meaning systems.

In addition it is likely that this form of heterogeneity attracts residents preferring it, and that those who do not favour it have to adapt to it in order to be accepted, strengthening diversity as part of the culture further.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Psychological Sense of Responsibility

As presented, personally investing in the well-being of the larger city community was a very important part of the Indian older adults meaning system of PSOC. This form of social responsibility has been acknowledged as a central part of PSOC, particularly, in the element “personal investment” included in the “Membership” dimension [55] [56] [57] [58] [59]. In Nowell and Boyd’s recent corollary conceptualization of PSOC [58] the concept is understood as “sense of community responsibility” “... the feeling of personal responsibility for the individual and collective well-being of a community of people, not directly rooted in expectations of personal gain” [59]. The way our sample described PSOC—as helping and caring for others in a way benefiting the larger community—largely resemble PSOC-R by definition. Moreover it mirrors values of collectivism, selflessness and community investment embedded in the Indian cultural context [50] [51] [60]. Then, the informant’s meaning exemplify that PSOC-R can be a context-sensitive concept, reflecting key aspects of culture. Furthermore, as our findings suggest, with changes in the family structure (constructing old age outside the family as the norm) and the traditional culture (increasing individualism), this form of responsibility may be especially important for urban older adults PSOC today, despite traditional prescriptions of old age as a withdrawn from social bonds.

### 5.2. PSOC and Diversity

One of the primary values of community psychology has been to build positive communities and at the same time recognize the centrality of diversity. In the field today there is an ongoing discussion about this community-diversity dialectic; One side using agent-based simulation models to explore the dialectic argue that the contextual conditions that foster respect for diversity run in opposition to the ones that foster PSOC [61] [62] [63]. On the other side Brodsky [64] and Hill [65] state that there is no inherent dialectical relationship or conflict inherent to the concepts. Our informants’ discourse of community was founded upon diversity as a positive and required aspect, enabling inclusion, acceptance and co-existence of the many meaning systems within the urban context. As such the older adults concept provides an example from the “real world” illustrating community and diversity as interrelated and highly contextual concepts [64], which should be understood from within peoples multiple identities, communities and meaning systems.

## 6. Limitations and Reflections on the Study

Knowledge obtained from the use of discourse analysis is often questioned in

terms of the falsification that may result from assuming a dialectic relation between the context and discourse practice [49]; reading meaning into text rather than out of text [66]. Interpreting findings in terms of frames of reference or theory is rather common in research, and in qualitative research too. Furthermore, as the thematic analysis was undertaken first, the discourse analysis was based on thorough findings sensitive to the informants' conceptualization of PSOC. The benefit of combining thematic and discourse analysis was that it created an opportunity to expand the in-depth and context-sensitive exploration of meaning. In addition it offered the chance to keep a holistic perspective on the text despite the deconstruction of it, which the thematic analysis requires. However, the informants were not interviewed in their own language and although Indian languages contain several English words and the sample knew English well, doing the interviews in English most likely prevented an ample context-sensitive understanding of the informants' discourses.

Qualitative analysis of culture and social contexts calls for the researchers themselves to be scrutinized. The bi-cultural perspective (Norwegian-Indian) of the researcher in the current study is believed to have affected the interpretations. The "outside" perspective enabled a possibility to point out biases and taken for granted notions assumed to be natural, which actually were cultural. The "inside" perspective had the benefit of understanding the Indian culture and to be perceived as of Indian origin by the informants. However, it is also likely that this perspective have introduced some biases as well; Cultural aspects of the samples meaning may have been understood as cultural, because they stood out as very different from a Norwegian culture. The perspective is also likely to have made the researcher blind to some of the taken for granted elements that the researcher shared with the informants.

Another limitation concerns the fact that the informants were not asked about their caste. Although most Indian people will know people's caste from the moment an individual says his/her surname, this was not something the researcher was able to do. Asking about caste was avoided because the informant could perceive it as intrusive. Future research should include questions about caste in a sensitive way (e.g. "Would you say that caste has any influence on your sense of community?"), as it is vital to understand social and cultural phenomena in the Indian context.

## 7. Conclusion

As illustrated, the Indian older adult city samples' meaning of PSOC and community reflected the dimensions included in McMillan and Chavis' (1986) conceptualization. However, two core themes were detected which illustrate PSOC-R and diversity as culture-bound and context-specific concepts inherent in their meanings. As previous studies [11] [67], this study illustrates that later-life PSOC is largely influenced by the context and that many older adults are highly adjustable to large-scale changes potentially devastating to their PSOC. And once again, premises to older adults PSOC seem to be interrelated to culture [11]

in this case both at a national as well as city level. Communities outside the family and acceptance of heterogeneity seem to be ever so important for urban older adults PSOC and well-being in urban India today. It is important that the interrelation between older adults meaning systems of PSOC and culture is further investigated in additional contexts to generate a stronger and context-sensitive understanding of PSOC in old age across the fast-changing population ageing world.

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Paper 3

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