WILEY JOURNAL of COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

ARTICLE

What is the role of sense of community in multiracial societies? A contribution to the community–diversity dialectic: A genetic psychology approach

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The author declares there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Abstract

Interconnecting the construct of sense of community (SOC), elaborated by McMillan and Chavis, with the notion of social representations, elaborated by Moscovici, this article aims to contribute to advancing an understanding of the relationship between SOC and respect for diversity. Utilizing a genetic psychology approach and the intergroup contact theory, the article articulates 3 levels through which the social representation of community and SOC can be formed and transformed (i.e., microgenetic, ontogenetic, and sociogenetic) to enhance the investigation of the relationship between the 2 phenomena beyond the intraindividual and interindividual levels that tend to emphasize homophily, or preference for similarity. In particular, the article elaborates on the sociogenetic formation of SOC by examining the macro-level forces that participate in establishing what a community should be and who is entitled to be part of it. Examples from 2 previous studies are discussed.

1 | INTRODUCTION: IS THERE ROOM FOR SENSE OF COMMUNITY (SOC) IN MULTIRACIAL SOCIETIES?

Immigration (i.e., the international movement of people who relocate permanently in a foreign country in search of better opportunities or to flee difficult circumstances in their native countries) and migration (i.e., the international movement of people who come to a foreign country temporarily, for example to work, and eventually return to their native countries) are multifaceted and controversial issues that have progressively attracted increasing interest from scholars and practitioners, particularly in the last decade. Among the numerous topics generated by the presence of immigrants in modern societies (hereafter referred to as "immigr/ation/ant/s" for both categories, unless distinctions are purposively required), the cultural and ethnic variety of territorial communities is a challenging theme for researchers in the field of community psychology. Immigrant settlements provoke changes in the cultural, social, and psychological configuration of the local communities, which in turn become increasingly heterogeneous, a phenomenon that has compelled scientists to respond to the demands resulting from inter-ethnic contacts (Berry, 2005).

In this regard, it appears that the construct of SOC (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) is unlikely to develop within multiracial spaces (Townley, Kloss, Green, & Franco, 2011). Recently, scholars have addressed the paradox in which respect for diversity and SOC are both core values in community psychology; however, the perception of community heterogeneity corrodes positive engagement in varied community life (Mannarini, Talò, & Rochira, 2016; Neal, 2017). In line with the *community–diversity dialectic* debate (Neal & Neal, 2014; Stivala, Robins, Kahsima, & Kirley, 2016; Townley et al., 2011), this article aims to contribute to the comprehension of the (seeming) irreconcilability of SOC and respect for diversity, interconnecting the conceptual elaboration proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) and the Theory of Social Representations (TSR; Moscovici, 1988).

The article contends that the genetic articulation of the three levels through which social representations can be formed and transformed–*microgenetic*, *ontogenetic*, and *sociogenetic* (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990)–can offer a means of increasing our understanding of the relationship between these two phenomena. In particular, it suggests that the societal conditions that define life in a community (e.g., ideologies, media communication, institutional discourses) are key elements to enlarging our comprehension of the relationship between SOC and respect for diversity beyond the intraindividual and interindividual levels that tend to emphasize homophily and preference for similarity (Neal & Neal, 2014). Moreover, the article proposes that the distinction between mutable and immutable features introduced by Stivala et al. (2016) is applicable to the multidimensional construct of SOC as elaborated by McMillan and Chavis (1986), with shared emotional connection potentially fitting a certain degree of appreciation for diversity.

2 | THE (UNRESOLVED) TENSION BETWEEN SOC AND RESPECT FOR DIVERSITY

In his seminal work, Seymour Sarason emphasized that "the perception of the similarity to others" is highly important to the formation of SOC (1974, p. 157). In fact, there is a robust consensus among researchers that the awareness of community as a homogeneous entity is a basic drive toward the promotion of a positive SOC (Colombo, Mosso, & De Piccoli, 2001; Fisher & Sonn, 2007). Beyond Sarason's definition, the elaboration of SOC must be credited to McMillan and Chavis (1986), who defined it 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 being together" (p. 9) along with the following four key components.

Membership includes the feeling of identification, the acceptance of a common set of symbols, the sense of belongingness to an organized system, and the sense of security. *Shared emotional connection* refers to the common ground formed by habitual encounters, common experiences, and significant events that nourish the history and the collective memory of the community and contributes to the creation of a steady foundation for identification and integration of the newness experienced by the community members. *Integration and fulfillment of needs*–later defined by McMillan as "an economy of social trade" (1996)–indicates that the community offers its members opportunities to meet their psychological (i.e., affective) and material needs to increase individual commitment and a sense of interdependence. Finally, *mutual influence* echoes the sense of cohesion that encourages people to conform to the rules of the community, accepting its *influence* and simultaneously being aware of the *influence* that they have on other members and the community itself.

Elucidating the *community–diversity dialectic*, Townley et al.(2011) highlighted that the conceptualization of the construct expanded by McMillan and Chavis rests on the prevalence of uniformity, above all for the component of *membership*. Shared values, norms, and symbols serve as basis for the establishment of the boundaries that make a community a secure place. Indeed, community provides individuals with the social and psychological conditions for identification by enabling them to find similar others, establish social networks, and differentiate those who belong from those who do not. In this regard, Neal and Neal (2014) explained that individuals are inclined to create relations with those perceived as similar and to establish with them a solid social network. Such a behavioral tendency, together with proximity and homophily, appears to be a necessary–but not sufficient–condition for the advancement of a strong SOC and, at the same time, antagonistic to the promotion of respect for diversity. Accordingly, the authors deduced that these two

phenomena are antithetical in "all reasonable likely worlds" and that a contextually appropriate balance between them is a feasible solution to this antithesis.

Furthermore, they added that in a few cases SOC and respect for diversity can occur together, although such an option is very unlikely. The conclusions raised by Neal and Neal are remarkable and supported by a sophisticated analysis along with agent-based simulation models. At the same time, their study is not focused on the construct of SOC as elaborated by McMillan and Chavis, but on the personal network density that, along with a social network approach, has been seen as the significant origin of several components of SOC. Specifically, in a recent study (2017) introducing a *Special Issue* of the *American Journal of Community Psychology* on the *community–diversity dialectic*, Zachary Neal clarified that the article published in 2014 was intended to investigate the contextual conditions that would increase SOC.

Moreover, other authors (Brodsky, 2017; Hill, 2017) noted that social network density does not equate with SOC and that the vast literature on SOC and human diversity notes that the experience of community can be varied and multifaceted (Hill, 2017). Seen from this viewpoint, a broader approach could enlarge the comprehension of the relationship between SOC and respect for diversity beyond the perspective adopted by Neal and Neal, which, as the authors themselves recognized, overlooked the complexity that exists in reality.

The work of Stivala et al. (2016) makes an important contribution to the idea that there may be circumstances in which respect for diversity and SOC can be positively associated. In particular, the authors argued that the perception of similarity can be based on immutable features, such as race, and mutable ones, such as tastes and opinions, that can change over time and according to social influences. Attitudes, opinions, tastes, and habits are "cultural attributes" that individuals can accommodate in the context of social exchanges in search of a common basis, eventually cultivating a certain degree of respect for diversity. Stivala et al. found that when the degree of community diversity is minimal (especially a single immutable feature), mutable attributes are potential conditions for the creation of a culturally based similarity among diverse groups.

Similarly, previous research (Mannarini et al., 2016) has shown that in case of a low level of perceived community heterogeneity, SOC is likely to be negatively associated with adverse attitudes toward immigrants. "Cultural similarity" can contribute significantly to an understanding of the *community–diversity dialectic* by suggesting that distinct subgroups can coexist within the same social spaces when they engage in a process of creation of shared representations of significant mutable features. A theoretical route to expand this issue is the TSR (Moscovici, 1984) and, in particular, the genetic approach developed by Duveen and Lloyd (1990).

3 | A GENETIC PSYCHOLOGY APPROACH TO THE *COMMUNITY–DIVERSITY DIALECTIC*: MICRO-, ONTO- AND SOCIOGENESIS

The creation of common views of important mutable features as a condition for the formation of "cultural similarity" (Stivala et al., 2016) appears highly consistent with the TSR, originally introduced by Serge Moscovici in 1961 and later elaborated by several scholars (Abric, 1994; Doise, 2001; Markovà, 2000). Social representations (hereafter referred to as SRs) designate both the process of formation of social knowledge and its products. The former concept refers to the process by which people create relatively enduring views of important objects and significant events that constitute their reality. As for the latter, SRs indicate the structures of knowledge that enable individuals to "classify persons and objects, to compare and explain behaviors and to objectify them as parts of [their] social setting" (Moscovici, 1988, p. 214). SRs are formed in the context of daily social encounters when people strive to find unambiguous ways of communicating and interacting (Moscovici, 2011). Operatively, SRs allow individuals to transform an object that is perceived as unusual into something that sounds familiar through associations with images, concepts, and languages (that together form a social representation) that are already known through the process of familiarization (Markovà, 2000).

Along with the TSR, a social representation of a community can be defined as a set of common references and social practices that, taken together, indicate what is or is not perceived as a community as well as who is or is not perceived as a community member by a given group. By means of such a common set of references (e.g., values, norms, collective memories, behavioral patterns, images), group members can communicate unambiguously and interact daily without

explicitly elucidating what, according to them, constitutes a community. Moreover, this social representation orients their attitudes, shapes their social behavior, and reinforces their social identification with the group or the community itself.

Unlike social cognition approaches, the TSR emphasizes the cultural and constructive nature of social knowledge that is shaped by societal forces (e.g., historical occurrences, political events, media discourses) and changes when unexpected or abnormal happenings disrupt the ordinary flow of daily life, stimulating individuals to search for new and meaningful social representations to make sense of the unknown. Along with the *community–diversity dialectic*, immigration emerges as a disturbing phenomenon that commands the members of various local communities to accommodate the newness brought about by the presence of immigrants. Accordingly, individuals strive to integrate immigrants in a preexisting frame of knowledge, eventually accepting them either as community members or as outsiders. They can also initiate an original process of social representation, producing an alternative and innovative image of the target immigrant or of the community itself.

Moreover, alternative and even conflicting representations of immigrants, as both community members and outsiders, can coexist and individuals can alternatively draw on them to make sense of a target immigrant group. Precisely, given that everyday life is complex and "fraught with a multitude of different social settings and demands, the simultaneous existence of sometimes contradictory representational systems comes as no surprise" (Wagner, Duveen, Verma, & Themel, 2000, p. 312).

The constructive nature of SRs is at the core of a leading work entitled *Social Representations and the Development of Knowledge* (1990) by Gerard Duveen and Barbara Lloyd, who claim that SRs are the outcomes of a particular kind of developmental (i.e., genetic) process of knowledge production.

> *A genetic perspective is implied in the conception of social representations, in the sense that the structure of any particular social representation is a construction and thus the outcome of some developmental process … Even if social representations as structures do not meet the strict formal criteria proposed by Piaget (1971), they nonetheless constitute organized wholes with the specific function of making communication and understanding possible. (Duveen & Lloyd, 1990, p. 5)*

The authors illustrate the entire theory as a *genetic social psychology* (p. 5) and elaborate on the three interconnected levels that they believe contribute to the formation and change of SRs: *microgenesis*, *ontogenesis*, and *sociogenesis*. Likewise, from the ecological perspective in community psychology (Powell, 2015), the aforementioned three levels allow for the appreciation of the experience of community throughout diverse systems, namely, the everyday interactions (i.e., microgenesis), subjective perception (i.e., ontogenesis), and societal drives that mold both of them (i.e., sociogenesis). In this regard, the *community–diversity dialectic* mainly privileges the analysis of the microgenetic and ontogenetic foundation of the relationship between SOC and respect for diversity: the conditions (e.g., homophily and proximity) that promote significant social contacts among individuals (i.e., microgenesis) that in turn strengthen the subjective perception of a community as a secure place (i.e., ontogenesis).

However, the concept of "cultural similarity" (Stivala et al., 2016) suggests that there might exist a relational and communicative space into which members from diverse groups can negotiate a shared representation of significant mutable features and, under certain circumstances, accept a certain degree of respect for diversity. Furthermore, sociogenesis might illuminate the societal influences that contribute to establishing what is a (secure) community and who is entitled to be part of it beyond the intraindividual and interindividual perspectives on SOC. Consequently, further descriptions of micro-, onto-, and sociogenesis are needed.

3.1 | Microgenesis

Microgenesis refers to the communicative exchanges that might occur among individuals in the context of daily life (e.g., in bar, clubs, organizations) and through which SRs are formed. It includes all the social activities that might occur when people meet, talk, debate, and eventually resolve differences. Homophily leads people to interact with those perceived as similar (Neal & Neal, 2014). Therefore, they need not elaborate on issues under discussion, such as the community,

because preexisting social categories and representations provide them with a set of common references allowing for unambiguous communication. Nonetheless, because reality is complex and unusual happenings might exceed the ordinary flow of daily life, individuals can overtly challenge established SRs in search of new and meaningful categories and images to familiarize themselves with the novelty of the situation. In line with Stivala et al. (2016), microgenesis designates the process of mutual influence whereby persons from diverse ethnic groups might accommodate mutable features in search for common perceptions of what constitutes a community and hence potentially embraces a certain appreciation of diversity.

3.2 | Ontogenesis

Social representations serve as a basis for establishing social relations, communicating unambiguously and strengthening the sense of belongingness toward groups and communities (Moscovici, 1984). Ontogenesis involves the inner process by which SRs contribute to forming an individual's self-perception with respect to the surrounding social and physical environment. In their seminal work on the social representations of gender (1990), Duveen and Lloyd were concerned with the fact that children are compelled to face a consolidated system of meanings characterizing their social environment in an effort to form a social identity.

Similarly, ontogenesis concerns existing social representations of relevant social objects (for instance, the local community, which includes important social categories, such as sex, gender, and ethnicity) that are significant to individual self-perception. From this perspective, whenever these categories are discussed and possibly challenged at the microgenetic level, individuals may experience either a corroboration or a threat to their social identification and possibly to their SOC (e.g., the subjective perception of the community; Neal & Neal, 2014). In this regard, the distinction between immutable and mutable features suggests that if the social representations of community are discussed and eventually questioned in the context of daily social encounters (i.e., microgenesis) but unvarying self-categories are preserved at the ontogenetic level (e.g., race), there may be room to increase the respect for diversity.

3.3 | Sociogenesis

Ultimately, sociogenesis pertains to the economic phenomena, ideologies, social institutions and norms, historical and political facts, and mass-media communications that, taken together, design the sociocultural framework for the formation and evolution of SRs. Time is a notable constitutive element of sociogenesis that captures the historical dimension of social representations. In fact, whichever topic sounds relevant in a social environment and in a given time frame is eligible to initiate a process of knowledge production through which modifiable SRs emerge. Sociogenesis enlightens the societal *milieu*, where ideologies, rhetorics, stereotypes, consolidated habits, and customs are transmitted from time to time through social conventions, institutionalized narratives, and cultural artifacts. For example, in their investigation of the social representations of gender, Duveen and Lloyd (1990) shed light on the institutionalized contexts, social spaces (e.g., homes for girls and playgrounds for boys), and cultural materials (e.g., dolls for girls and guns for boys) through which the SRs of gender were produced and maintained as a basis for the formation of social identity.

4 | MICRO-, ONTO-, AND SOCIOGENESIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIVERSITY AND SOC

Research on SOC has privileged an individual perspective (Long & Perkins, 2007) and, with very few exceptions (Brodsky, 1996, 2009; Brodsky & Marx, 2001; Mankowski & Rappaport, 1995; Mannarini & Fedi, 2009; Rapley & Pretty, 1999), has employed methods of data collection and analysis that do not fully allow for an understanding of the socially constructed nature of the community. Moreover, the majority of scholars have focused on the ontogenetic level of SOC, attributing great relevance to the subjective perception of the community. Except for a few authors (Neal & Neal, 2014; Stivala et al., 2016), previous studies have narrowly considered the entire community's social network and the extent

to which SOC might be a function of social interactions (i.e., microgenesis) and have mostly neglected to address the societal pressures (i.e., sociogenesis) that might influence the formation of SOC.

In contrast, the genetic approach suggests understanding SOC along with all three stages (i.e., micro-, onto-, and sociogenesis) that, taken together, increase our comprehension of the relationship between SOC and respect for diversity, in keeping with the distinction between immutable and mutable features (Stivala et al., 2016). In this regard, the genetic perspective explains how the four components of SOC, as elaborated by McMillan and Chavis (1986), include both immutable and mutable features. At the same time, whereas the immutable features appear typical of the membership component (Townley et al., 2011), the mutable features pertain to the other SOC components, such as shared emotional connection.

These arguments are addressed in the following two sections, and the results from two previous studies (Fedi et al., in press; Rochira, Fasanelli, & Liguori, 2015) are presented to show the extent to which social interactions and the societal frame surrounding life in the community may or may not contribute to creating a "culturally based similarity" (Stivala et al., 2016). In fact, as suggested by Stivala and colleagues, "even if homophily is a significant force for relationship formation," mutable features, such as ethnic diversity, can be represented as cultural values in the context of daily interactions and establish a culturally based similarity that ultimately can provide the conditions "to build a SOC in diverse neighborhoods" (p. 26).

4.1 | SOC and respect for diversity in social interactions

The results from a qualitative investigation help to illustrate that the exploration of the features evoked in verbal encounters (i.e., microgenesis) by individuals for the creation of a social representation of community allows one to determine if conditions exist for the appreciation of a certain degree of diversity in a community. Moreover, these results help us to examine interethnic social contacts to search for potential differences in the subjective perception of community and SOC components (i.e., ontogenesis).

The research, which was part of a larger international study (Fedi et al., in press), involved 30 Italian autochthons recruited via snowball sampling and word-of-mouth and selected according to their contacts with the immigrants settled in their territorial community (e.g., coworkers, friends, classmates, neighbors). The participants were interviewed to explore their representation of the community and the four SOC components. The transcribed interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Thematic categories were generated by means of open and axial coding and an iterative coding framework was developed through successive approximations to capture the shared and unique content, cultural context, themes, and processes related to the community experiences of the native-born Italians. Coding was conducted using a research team approach, in which general definitions and consensus were built among the entire group of researchers; coding was then completed in pairs who reached consensus on each transcript.

With regard to the *community–diversity dialectic*, the findings indicated that the perception of similarity acted as a main symbolic resource for the formation of the SR of community by the Italian autochthons in line with previous investigations (Neal & Neal, 2014). The interviewees elaborated on self-categories as the significant means by which they made sense of the four dimensions of SOC, particularly with reference to the membership component (Townley et al., 2011). However, in community did not emerge in their discourses as an unchanged entity across the various SOC components. In fact, the SOC voiced by the participants appeared as a kaleidoscope, with each facet evoking a distinct view of the community itself.

More importantly, the results revealed that there were vestiges of appreciation of respect for diversity in the way that individuals with a high level of interethnic contact represented the component of shared emotional connection. It was found that for the high-contact subgroup of participants, there was space for consideration of diversity in the traditions, customs, histories, and tastes (e.g., mutable features) that characterize the dimension of shared emotional connection; a certain degree of cultural junction seemed to occur. Furthermore, once the construct of SOC was unpacked, collective narratives, shared icons, and food traditions were used as symbolic building blocks to which interviewees resorted to produce a welcoming representation of their community, eventually accepting immigrants' customs, foods and cultural habits.

It could be cautiously argued that the component of shared emotional connection included a set of mutable features that high-contact participants employed in the construction of their social representation of community. With this in mind, mutable features contribute to the construction of a common view of the community that, referencing only a single SOC component out of four, would embrace distinctive subgroups, ultimately giving substance to the "culturally based perception of similarity" (Stivala et al., 2016).

In contrast, the interviewees who reported scarce levels of interethnic confrontation turned to reified images of ethnic social categories to locate themselves and immigrants within their social representation of the community. In their view, homophily was a relational dictate, and stereotypes about immigrants were taken as immutable features that did not contribute to ways to incorporate appreciation for diversity in their perceptions of the community. Ultimately, the research outcomes revealed that the lack of inter-ethnic social encounters prevented the low-contact interviewees from taking mutable features into the social representation of the SOC components.

These findings showed that a focus on the microgenesis of the social representations of the community and SOC allows one to determine the social conditions according to which the components of SOC might be compatible with mutable features, such as cultural traditions and customs. At the same time, the outcomes corroborated the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), indicating that social interactions are likely to reduce interethnic clashes and eventually provide circumstances conducive to the emergence of a "culturally based similarity." In this regard, an extensive body of research (Pettigrew, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) has maintained that equal group status and authority support are two optimal conditions for intergroup contacts, thus calling attention to sociogenesis.

4.2 | The societal framework of SOC formation

Although the ecological perspective represents an epistemological keystone in community psychology (Powell, 2015), the societal level (e.g., cultures, legal and economic institutions, political ideologies, and governances, media communication) appears scarcely relevant in the empirical investigation of SOC, with very few exceptions (Jason, Stevens, & Ram, 2015; Stevens, Jason, & Ferrari, 2011). A focus on the sociogenesis of social representations of community allows the sociocultural framework to increase the understanding of the relationship between SOC and respect for diversity, potentially disclosing either traditional or innovative images of what a community should be and who is seen as entitled to be part of it. From this perspective, the sociogenetic level exposes the social hierarchy legitimized by institutionalized bodies, policies, and practices (Moloney, 2010) that might have contributed to creating a public view of diversity, particularly race. Hence, it is perceived by individuals as a threat to their SOC.

The analysis of the *community–diversity dialectic* through the lens of the sociogenesis of social representations of the community requires an exploration of the conditions (e.g., historical and political frames, local governances, media discourses) that contribute to the formation of SOC beyond the intraindividual and interindividual levels and at the same time are likely to facilitate the negotiation of a common perception of mutable features among members of diverse groups. In fact, "developing models that explicitly recognize the contextual nature of diversity [and SOC] could provide important insights" (Hill, 2017, p. 278) into understanding in which settings the two phenomena can occur together.

One recent investigation (Rochira et al., 2015) has explored the public perception of the phenomenon of seasonal migration among residents of a small, local community in southern Italy where, since the 1980s, hundreds of migrant laborers arrive every summer to harvest watermelons and tomatoes and settle in the surrounding countryside. The research findings showed that the social representations of the migrant farmers rested predominantly on their work and life conditions in the host territory. More specifically, the unhygienic living conditions, together with the harsh, illegal work conditions sustaining the local black economy, were central to the shared social representations of migrants, whereas the personal stories of the temporary farmers were almost peripheral, as well as their "mutable features" such as opinions, customs, tastes, and attitudes. Public perception greatly depended on the failure of local policies to appropriately receive and accommodate the migrants, thus preventing them from becoming targets of unlawful organizations. Hence, unwelcoming and negative social categories were adopted by the residents in familiarizing themselves with the migrants, thus precluding any possibility of forming culturally based similarities.

In conclusion, the research outcomes suggested that the lack of an effective local governance and resettlement program and, more generally, the type of public support and legal treatment provided by the local immigration policies generated the (adverse) societal conditions that contributed to making the immigrants undesirable targets to the receiving population. A focus on sociogenesis reveals that SOC does not develop in an empty political, economic, legal, and cultural space; rather, these influences characterize a societal environment that might or might not promote respect for diversity among community members.

Recently, Brodsky (2017) contended that the tension between SOC and respect for diversity is not inherent in the two concepts but is intrinsic to the social context in which they occur in real life. Accordingly, sociogenesis might increase our understanding of the contextual conditions likely to expedite harmonious intergroup encounters and cooperative interactions. In fact, these occur in specific historical and cultural contexts based on established systems of meanings legitimized by media, institutions, and public debates. Similarly, the negotiation of the common perception of what constitutes a community occurs in the psychological inner world of social actors (i.e., ontogenesis), in the context of their social networks (i.e., microgenesis), and in the societal framework (i.e., sociogenesis). Sociogenesis engenders several SRs of various objects that can be significant to the relationship between SOC and respect for diversity, such as multiculturalism, racial diversity, and ethnic categories.

5 | SOC in a multiracial society: A broader approach to the *community–diversity dialectic*

Although recent, the debate on the (seemingly) irreducible tension between the promotion of SOC and respect for diversity in the multiracial community has captured the interest of several scholars in the field of community psychology. In fact, full comprehension of the relationship between the two phenomena is crucial because it would enable researchers and practitioners to find ways to balance or reduce this tension (Neal, 2017). In this regard, genetic social psychology, as proposed by Duveen and Lloyd (1990), provides original theoretical tools with which to deepen our understanding of the dissonance between SOC and respect for diversity (Townley et al., 2011).

In line with the conclusions of Neal and Neal (2014) and the distinction between mutable and immutable features elaborated by Stivala et al. (2016), this article suggests that the multidimensionality of SOC (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) shows a certain degree of appreciation for diversity. In particular, it argues that the findings of Neal and Neal and Stivala and colleagues considered network closure to be an indicator of strong SOC, but the subjective experience of community is more complex. The construct of SOC captures this complexity that intertwines both immutable and mutable features and the exploration of the social representations of community and SOC components can reveal what dimensions can be compatible with a certain appreciation of diversity. A focus on the three levels of formation and transformation of the social representations of community and SOC (i.e., micro-, onto-, and sociogenesis) reveals the subjective, relational, and societal conditions according to which respect for diversity might enter into the sociosymbolic process underlying the development of the dimensions of SOC.

The results from previous studies (Fedi et al., in press) reveal that homophily and proximity are necessary to the component of membership (Townley et al., 2011), but shared emotional connection is likely to evince some respect for diversity, especially in the case of frequent inter-ethnic encounters among individuals from diverse groups. With respect to the latter point, earlier findings indicated that habitual social exchanges among autochthons and immigrants in local communities (Fedi et al., in press) might facilitate the process of negotiating common perceptions of significant mutable traits (e.g., food traditions, festivals and celebrations) and in turn form a "culturally based similarity" (Stivala et al., 2016) that is compatible with an appreciation for diversity. In particular, positive inter-ethnic exchanges might occur when the perception of community heterogeneity (Mannarini et al., 2016) on the part of autochthons is low as well as when there is a small variety of immutable features (Stivala et al., 2016).

Comprehension of the *community–diversity dialectic* would benefit not only the investigation of the intraindividual (e.g., ontogenesis) and interindividual (i.e., microgenesis) levels of SOC formation but also the broader sociocultural milieu (e.g., sociogenesis) that helps in forming a SOC. In this regard, it is worth noting that although SOC reflects social identity, it overtakes identification and captures the multilayered experience of community life that

encompasses mutual influence, integration, needs fulfillment, and shared emotional connection. In fact, SOC figures as a multifaceted process, and its components can be approached as dimensions through which social actors can express different attitudes toward community diversity.

Following Stivala et al. (2016), this article argues that the construction of a "culturally based similarity" can complement the behavioral tendency toward homogeneity. At the same time, the TSR explains how common perceptions of mutable features can be negotiated within communicative exchanges among individuals from diverse ethnic groups. Indeed, along with the genetic approach, social representations are contextualized forms of knowledge that can embrace conflicting meanings to the extent to which they allow individuals to make sense of particular phenomena and specific events (Wagner et al., 2010) within the context of peculiar social exchanges (i.e. microgenesis) and societal conditions (i.e. sociogenesis). Accordingly, the sociopsychological experience of community (i.e. ontogenesis) can simultaneously rest on homogeneity, which feeds the sense of belonging to a secure entity, and heterogeneity, for example, when participation in shared social practices allows for common membership among individuals who differ in other ways. Moreover, sometimes membership boundaries can be porous when the representation of community is based on the values of diversity, openness, and acceptance.

Additionally, this article clarifies how the sociogenetic level of transformation of the social representations of community may reveal what societal conditions either promote or impede the respect for diversity and the sociocultural dynamics underlying the real and symbolic threats (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) that might corrode SOC in a multiracial context. Furthermore, sociogenesis contributes to revealing the power dynamics that characterize the enlarged social context (Brodsky, 2017) and are significant to the social influence occurring at the microgenetic level.

The need for sufficient recognition in a population to establish positive inter-ethnic encounters (Stivala et al., 2016) suggests that community psychologists should strive to contribute to the creation of the sociogenesis of SOC to promote respect for diversity, such as by informing the process of policy making. In fact, the opportunity for implementing context-dependent solutions (Neal & Neal, 2014) could be beneficial for small local communities but highly expensive in the context of large territorial communities where an efficient allocation of economic resources might require more systematic actions.

In addition, given the multidimensionality of the construct of SOC and the distinction between mutable and immutable features, ways of dealing with the dialectic between SOC and respect for diversity might examine the dimensions of SOC separately. In this respect, beyond shared emotional connection, it would be interesting to examine whether other SOC components might reflect mutable features. Hence, future studies could explore whether SOC components would incorporate a certain degree of appreciation for diversity through a process of social influence at the microgenetic level and with societal conditions that promote respect for diversity at the societal level.

Moreover, interventions could be designed to encourage social exchanges among people from diverse ethnic groups with respect to specific sets of features characterizing distinct SOC components, such as shared emotional connection but not membership. Hence, given that the tension between the two phenomena cannot be easily eliminated (Neal, 2017), a balance could be found between certain components of SOC and the value of respect for diversity in multiracial communities as well as between a multiple SOC and diversity (Brodsky, 2017; Townley, 2017). In this regard, the exploration of the social representations of SOC and its multiple components could provide valuable insights into what dimensions are more compatible with diversity and how to promote respect for diversity across various community settings.

Finally, the mutual interchange between the individual and the social, underlying the microgenetic, ontogenetic, and sociogenetic processes to some extent eliminates the twofold definition of SOC, in terms of both subjective experience (i.e., psychological SOC) and group-level experience (i.e., SOC; Townley et al., 2011). In fact, the individual, group, and collectivity are intertwined in the genetic approach. Hence, SOC is simultaneously both individual and social to the extent to which it reflects the simultaneous act of placing oneself within the community and being positioned within it by the community and community members.

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