

2000

## The Factors That Influence Psychological Sense of Community for Students Living on Campus at Edith Cowan University

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*Edith Cowan University*

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# Edith Cowan University

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Running head: PSYCHOLOGICAL SENSE OF COMMUNITY

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The Factors That Influence Psychological Sense of Community For students Living  
on Campus at Edith Cowan University.

Colleen Dalton

A Report Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of  
Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) Honours Faculty of Community Studies, Education  
and Social Sciences, Edith Cowan University.

October, 2000

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The Factors That Influence Psychological Sense of Community For students Living  
on Campus at Edith Cowan University.

**Abstract**

A psychological sense of community (PSOC) has been found to facilitate adjustment and well-being. However, little research has been conducted in Australian universities. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena, a qualitative approach was adopted. This research explored PSOC from the participants' perspective using McMillan and Chavis's (1986) theoretical framework as a guide and investigated the following research questions. (1) What is the residential students' perception of PSOC, at Edith Cowan University (ECU)? (2) What factors, within the student village, facilitate and inhibit PSOC? (3) What factors within the university setting and beyond, in the wider community, facilitate and inhibit PSOC? Fifteen ECU students, living in the student village, on the Joondalup campus, participated in this study. Postgraduate and undergraduate students, from a variety of academic disciplines, took part. There were six females and nine males. The participants ranged in age from 18 – 43 years. The nationality of participants varied, including Australian, British, Kenyan, New Zealander, Singaporean, Sri Lankan, Thai, and Zimbabwean. The findings support the interactionist perspective, and emphasise the importance of a positive PSOC to the adjustment process. The research also highlights the role that the university plays in facilitating a positive PSOC. The university can facilitate a positive PSOC, through providing orientation, educational continuity and recognition, security, acceptance, educational flexibility and resources, clubs, outings, social events, and personal support.

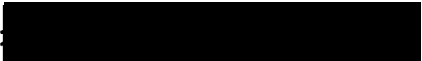
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Submitted: October, 2000

### Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgment, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature: 

Date: 30/10/2008

### Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the generous support and assistance from a number of people without whose help this thesis would not have been completed.

I wish to thank my supervisor Dr. Christopher Sonn, for sharing his expertise, supervision and support.

Thanks to Julie Reddin for her kindness and assistance.

I would like to thank Geoff Janvanovich, for all his assistance and support.

I wish to thank all the residential students who participated in this study.

A special thankyou to my husband Ian for all his love, support, assistance and patience.

With humble devotion and love, I offer this completed thesis to Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba. Thanks for giving me your grace, love and inspiration.

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## Introduction

The demand for a university education has increased with time, along with its associated costs (Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1998). The funding system for Australian universities has also changed, with the introduction of fee-paying courses. Australian universities are now more than ever, seeking to generate greater revenue. One method that the universities have adopted to achieve this goal is by openly competing with one another, through advertisements and marketing campaigns to attract local, national, and international students. University educators realise that they must provide more than just an education if they are to compete, attract, and retain students. Ender, Kane, Mable, and Strohm (1980), argue that:

Creating community in residence halls has increasingly become a major objective for residence educators. Colleges and universities are expected to offer students numerous experiences, to expose them to ideas, to put them in touch with peers and role models, to acquaint them with the many opportunities life affords, and to encourage them to experience themselves in tasks and relationships. Community living in residence halls provides stimulation in these directions. ...Thus, creating community in residence halls becomes a significant contribution to individual students and staff, residence education programs, and potentially to society. (p. 1)

In order to create community, one must understand what facilitates and inhibits a sense of community for the individual in context. Although much research has been conducted on sense of community in relation to different referent groups, little research has been undertaken on university residential communities in an Australian context.

## Community

One of the problems for researchers wanting to understand more about communities is that there is no one, clear operational definition (Bishop, 1984). Research by Bardo and Hughey (1984) found that within the social sciences, the term 'community' has a number of meanings. Puddifoot (1996) and Wiesenfeld (1996) also suggest that there is no one fixed definition for community. Wiesenfeld (1996) argues that the lack of a consistent definition is due to the number of diverse theories and different methods that researchers have adopted, to study this construct. Furthermore, Dunham (1986) suggests that the meaning of community has changed over time.

First, for centuries the idea of community was tied to place. Second, there are three central factors-the industrial revolution, the increase of scientific knowledge, and the increase in the speed of communication from the telegraph to the satellite-that have destroyed the notion of community as tied to place.

Third, there is the urbanization of the world that has taken place during the past two centuries (Dunham, 1986, p. 399).

Wiesenfeld (1996) indicates that community is not static, rather it evolves and changes over time. Wiesenfeld (1996) also argues that the nature of community is diverse, dynamic and complex and any definition of this construct should reflect these properties. Furthermore, Duffy and Wong (2000) acknowledge the diverse and changing nature of community. "Community has traditionally meant a locality or place such as a neighbourhood. It has also come to mean a relational interaction or social ties that draw people together" (Duffy & Wong, 2000, p. 17).

Bishop (1984) describes community as "... a large informal structure that is defined by its networks and collective sense of belonging" (p. 5). Similarly, Chavis

and Newbrough (1986) define community as “...any set of social relations that are bound together by a sense of community” (p. 335). So what is this collective sense of belonging or sense of community that these theorists are referring to and how does one experience it?

### Psychological Sense of Community

Burroughs and Eby (1998) suggest that psychological sense of community is the term used to describe how an individual experiences their community. Seymour Sarason was the first to formally introduce the concept of a psychological sense of community (PSOC) in 1974. Sarason (1974) defines PSOC as:

... the sense that one was part of a readily available, mutually supportive network of relationships upon which one could depend and as a result of which one did not experience sustained feelings of loneliness that impel one to actions or to adopting a style of living masking anxiety and setting the stage for later and more destructive anguish (p. 1).

Sarason (1974) goes on to suggest that it is not a matter of how many loved ones and close friends that an individual has, but how available they are. If family or friends are not part of your everyday life then this will do little to improve your daily PSOC. In fact, this occasional contact can exacerbate the lack of a PSOC and the feelings associated with it, namely, loneliness, alienation and isolation. PSOC can provide individuals with meaning and direction in their lives. Sarason (1974) indicates that people earnestly strive to part of a social network, to belong to a community.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that the “...need to belong is a fundamental human motivation” (p. 497). Baumeister and Leary (1995) found that people readily form social relationships and they have a tendency to spend a lot of time, effort and

energy cultivating supportive relationships with other people. Baumeister and Leary (1995) also suggest that once social bonds are formed, individuals display a reluctance to break these bonds. Research suggests that primary social bonds can not be broken without some distress.

Many of the strongest emotions people experience, both positive and negative, are linked to belongingness. Evidence suggests a general conclusion that being accepted, included, or welcomed leads to a variety of positive emotions (e.g., happiness, elation, contentment, and calm), whereas being rejected, excluded, or ignored leads to potent negative feelings (e.g., anxiety, depression, grief, jealousy, and loneliness) (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 508).

Like Sarason (1974), Baumeister and Leary (1995) indicate that it is not enough to possess social bonds alone. Interactions must be frequent, positive and with the same people. Furthermore, individuals who do not have a sense of belonging are prone to broad range behaviour problems, are more likely to commit suicide and are more likely to suffer from mental and or physical illness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Problems associated with not belonging can be remedied by assisting the individual to develop a PSOC.

Chavis and Newbrough (1986), Hill (1996), and Chavis and Pretty (1999), stress the importance of promoting a PSOC for the health of the individual and of the community. Hill (1996) and Chavis and Pretty (1999) suggest that community psychologists need to develop an understanding of the factors that facilitate PSOC, so that they can promote these factors and foster a PSOC. Hill (1996) argues that if community psychologists work on promoting healthy communities the communities themselves will form healthy individuals. Furthermore, Chavis and Pretty (1999)

argue that PSOC is a universal experience and by promoting PSOC one can address the problems of society at large.

McNeely (1999) recommends a community building approach to address problems of poverty, unemployment, low education, drugs and crime. The community building approach

...works by building community in individual neighbourhoods: neighbours learning to rely on each other, working together on concrete tasks that take advantage of new self-awareness of their collective and individual assets and, in the process, creating human, family and social capital that provides a new base for a promising future (McNeely, 1999, p. 742).

Dunne (1986) examined one intentionally created community, called the I'Arche community. Dunne (1986) suggests that in order to create a sense of community in mainstream society similar conditions to those adopted by I'Arche are necessary. The I'Arche community is described as a service community, where people with an intellectual disability and people without an intellectual disability make a home together. Dunne (1986) suggests that from the I'Arche perspective, PSOC "...is an awareness of the interdependence of *all* humanity, activated by reaching out into a *particular* network of relationships and accepting the risks, pain, and weaknesses encountered there in self and others". (p. 53).

Berkowitz (1996) also highlights the importance of creating and sustaining communities. He argues that factors that sustain an individual also sustain a community. Berkowitz (1996) cites previous research to suggest that both individuals and communities are sustained longer when they utilise their capacities or resources, maintain strong social networks and meet their needs. The author suggests that a community can be sustained by promoting a sense of community

amongst members. Lorion and Newbrough (1996) suggest that PSOC is the key factor in developing further understanding of communities.

Chavis and Newbrough (1986) indicate that individuals have the opportunity to derive a PSOC from a variety of settings. Klein and D'Aunno (1986) suggest that PSOC can be obtained from being a member of a family, church, gang, professional body or workplace. Sonn and Fisher (1998) suggest that people can derive a PSOC from church groups, sporting associations and the extended family. Glynn (1986) argues that whilst the neighbourhood is perhaps no longer the focal point for which sense of community revolves around, it is still a significant source by which individual's can obtain a PSOC. Furthermore, Royal and Rossi (1996) argue that social environments, like workplaces and schools give the individual an opportunity to enhance their PSOC.

Bishop (1984) and Fisher and Sonn (in press) both suggest that an individual can derive a PSOC from more than one community simultaneously. Fisher and Sonn (in press) indicate that whilst individuals "... may belong to multiple psychological communities, each has a primary community which reinforce norms, values, identities and provides structures and social support systems that are crucial to the well-being of its members" (p. 1). Furthermore, Sonn, Bishop and Drew (1999) indicate that primary communities provide members with meaningful roles, social identities and relationships. One type of relationship that individuals can derive from being a member of a community is friendships.

Hartup and Stevens (1997) argue that the majority of people build their lives around both friends and family. "A friendship consists mainly of being attracted to someone who is attracted in return, with parity governing the social exchanges between the individuals involved" (Hartup and Stevens, 1997, p. 355). The authors

distinguish between two levels of friendship, namely, deep structure (reciprocity) and surface structure (social exchange). The authors also suggest that in general, friendship is associated with psychological well being, across the human lifespan. However, Hartup and Stevens (1997) argue that the quality of friendship and the identity of the friends mediate this outcome. Furthermore, Hartup and Stevens (1997) examined previous research and suggest that having good friends acts as a buffer against the effects of everyday stress.

Stress is experienced when an individual's emotional homeostasis is disturbed (Lev-Wiesel, 1998). This generally occurs when the environmental demands exceed the individuals' perceived ability to cope. Lev-Wiesel (1998) studied residents living in the Golan Heights region of Israel. Members of this community live under the constant threat of relocation and therefore must cope with exceptional environmental demands. The findings suggest that potency had the most significant effect on stress. Surprisingly, education and PSOC did not have the significant impact on stress that was hypothesised. Previous research suggests that PSOC may be an effective coping mechanism for dealing with temporary demands such as, daily hassles. However, when environmental demands are excessive and occur for prolonged periods PSOC may not be as effective (Lev-Weisel, 1998).

Lev-Wiesel (1998) results are consistent the interactionist view of human behaviour. The interactionist perspective argues that behaviour is the result of the interaction of the person and the environment (McKnight & Sutton, 1994). Gibbs, Puzzanchera, Hanrahan and Giever (1998) also support the interactionist perspective. Gibbs et al., (1998) conducted research in a university setting, investigating the interaction between the individuals personal needs (demands) and the environments' ability to meet these needs (supply). Gibbs et al., (1998) conducted a path analysis

and found that environmental concerns, such as safety, had a direct influence on emotional well-being, and an indirect impact on emotional well-being mediated via their sense of control. The results suggest that if individual's perceive that the environment is meeting their personal needs then, they are likely to experience feelings of emotional well-being. Furthermore, if individuals have this perception then they are likely to feel a sense of control and this in turn will create a feeling of emotional well-being. Gibbs et al., (1998) argue that the implications of this study are that interventions aimed at creating more satisfying person-environment transactions are likely to diminish stress.

A study undertaken by Pretty (1990) also found support for the interactionist perspective. Pretty (1990) investigated the relationship between PSOC and social climate factors in the context of a university residential setting. Analysis using a stepwise multiple regression revealed that the social climate factors that could partially predict PSOC were, (1) the amount of involvement, (2) academic achievement and (3) support. Furthermore, Petty (1990) states that the participating university students "...not only related their sense of community to perceptions of their interactions with each other, but also to what they felt was expected of them as a group" (p. 64). Pretty (1990) argues that to promote PSOC in a university setting, we must move beyond just focusing on support and social interaction and become aware of how the press of the university setting impacts on the students' perception of PSOC.

Whilst not discounting the interactionist perspective, some theorists have placed more emphasis on the physical environment and it's impact on behaviour. McKnight and Sutton (1994) reviewed previous research and suggest that "... the effects of noise, weather, climate, architectural and interior design, isolation, crowding, urban



stressors, disasters, environmental degradation and pollution, all emphasise the importance of the physical environment on human behaviour” (p. 608).

Plas and Lewis (1996) suggest that in community psychology, not much research has been conducted on the relationship between physical environmental variables and PSOC. Plas and Lewis (1996) utilised a qualitative approach and investigated the impact of the physical environment on PSOC. Results indicate that there was a relationship between PSOC and environmental variables such as town design and architecture. The authors found that “...it is possible to plan town environments so as to induce factors associated with the sense-of-community construct” (p. 140).

Pretty, Andrews, and Collett (1994) reviewed previous literature and suggest that social environmental factors have an impact on individual PSOC. The authors argue that alienation and the loneliness that ensues is not the result of inadequate social skills or personality types but of the communities’ failure to accommodate the individual. Furthermore, Allen and Maimone (1989) adopt a social-ecological perspective and argue that social climate and physical-environmental factors account for more of the variance in behaviour than personality and individual differences.

In contrast, Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) argue that salient personality attributes may have more of an impact on PSOC than environmental variables. Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) conducted a study on undergraduate university students to test this and other hypotheses. In the first phase of this study, an internally consistent scale to measure PSOC in college and university populations was developed. Contrary to previous research, the scale revealed that member homogeneity was not related to PSOC. For example, Klein and D’Aunno (1986) suggest that member homogeneity is likely to enhance PSOC because it fosters a

common group identity and enhances a feeling of belonging. Due to the contradictory findings, Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) indicate that more research needs to be conducted in this area. However, at least for students it appears that diversity is not a barrier to PSOC.

In the second phase of the study several hypotheses were tested. Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) found that the personality trait extraversion was positively related to PSOC. Students living on campus also scored higher on the PSOC scale compared to students not living on campus. Fraternity and sorority memberships were also positively related to PSOC. The authors recommend further research to determine if PSOC is related to participation in other activities on campus. An inverse relationship between PSOC and the size of the college or university was also found. Compared to larger universities, students attending smaller colleges scored higher on the PSOC scale.

Similarly, research undertaken by Royal and Rossi (1996) supported the notion that size is inversely related to PSOC. Royal and Rossi (1996) conducted a study on high school students and employed adults. For participating students, membership in the smaller "...reform-oriented learning communities (as opposed to participation in the larger, traditionally-organized section of the school) was positively associated with sense of community" (p. 408). Royal and Rossi (1996) also found a positive relationship between PSOC and the student's grade level. However, contrary to what was expected, participation in extracurricular activities was not associated with PSOC. Amongst participating employed adults, no significant relationship between PSOC and status was found. Furthermore, Royal and Rossi (1996) found that PSOC was not related to the length of time that individuals had been employed with a particular organisation.

Burroughs and Eby (1998) developed a scale to measure PSOC in the workplace. They administered the scale to 256 employees across a number of organisations. Factor analysis suggests that PSOC in the workplace is a multidimensional construct. Burroughs and Eby (1998) utilised a path analysis to explore the variables related to PSOC in the workplace. The findings indicated that workplace PSOC was positively related to both relational and transactional contracts. The relational contract refers to the mutually supportive relationships that bond employees together. The transactional contract is the bond that develops between the organisation and the employee. This bond is enhanced when the workplace provides a supportive environment and offers services and benefits to employees. Burroughs and Eby (1998) also found that PSOC at work was related to organisational citizen behaviour (loyalty, altruism, courtesy and civic virtue). This positive relationship operated both directly and indirectly, through the mediating effect of job satisfaction. Furthermore, Burroughs and Eby (1998) found that participants with a high need for affiliation also displayed a strong PSOC in the workplace.

Previous research conducted by Davidson, Cotter and Stovall (1991) also found a positive relationship between PSOC and the need for affiliation. Davidson et al., (1991) conducted a study to examine the relationship between PSOC and two social variables, namely, the need for affiliation and the number of siblings that an individual was raised with. The authors reasoned that both these social variables would promote the social contact necessary to develop PSOC. The researchers conducted telephone interviews with adult residents living in the Alabama region. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicated that age, need for affiliation and number of siblings were all significant predictors of PSOC. Older participants

with more than one sibling, who also scored high on the need for affiliation scale tended to score high on the sense of community measure.

Davidson and Cotter (1986) developed a scale to measure PSOC within the city. The researchers randomly selected adult residents from the Alabama and South Carolina areas. Results suggest that the newly constructed scale was internally reliable, unidimensional and could be generalised across different cities. Davidson and Cotter (1986) also found that PSOC differed in relation to a number of demographic variables, namely, race, age and income. Caucasians scored higher on the sense of community scale than non-Caucasians, older residents scored higher than younger residents and participants with higher incomes scored higher on the sense of community scale than those with lower incomes. As hypothesised, participants who scored high on the sense of community scale also scored high on the degree of social identification, reported more civic contributions and were more likely to own their own home. However, contrary to expectations, the length of time that participants had lived in the area was not significantly related to sense of community scores. The authors suggest that time in itself may not be a factor in determining an individual's PSOC but the way in which one spends their time within the community.

In conjunction with Davidson and Cotter's (1986) results, later research has also found that length of residency was not associated with PSOC. Brodsky, O'Campo and Aronson (1999) randomly selected adults residing in the low-income neighbourhoods of Baltimore City. The researchers found that for these participants the length of residency was not positively associated with PSOC. Brodsky et al., (1999) suggest that low income families might not feel as though they have a choice about where they live and therefore may not develop a positive PSOC, irrespective

of the length of residence. Furthermore, in keeping with the Davidson and Cotter (1986) findings, Brodsky et al., (1999) found that older adults had a higher PSOC than younger adults and that participants who owned and occupied their home reported a higher level of PSOC.

A number of variables pertaining to community involvement, were also found to be positively associated with PSOC (Brodsky et al., 1999). Participants who reported being involved in neighbourhood organisations, attended a mosque, church or synagogue, lived in areas with higher rates of community-level involvement or areas with higher voter registration levels all reported higher levels of PSOC. Brodsky et al., (1999) also found that crowding and unemployment were inversely related to PSOC scores. Furthermore, results suggest that there was an inverse relationship between children living at home and PSOC. This is similar to the results of an earlier study undertaken by Brodsky (1996).

Brodsky (1996) utilised a qualitative approach to investigate PSOC for resilient single mothers, living in risky neighbourhoods. Brodsky (1996) found that rather than developing a positive PSOC, participants withdrew from their local neighbourhood. This was done in an attempt to protect their children from the perceived negative effects of the community. Brodsky (1996) argues that if a community is viewed as problematic rather than resourceful, negative PSOC can be adaptive, leading to positive outcomes. This finding suggests that PSOC is situation specific. In one context it may be beneficial to promote a PSOC whilst in another it may be detrimental.

Davidson and Cotter (1997) also examined neighbourhood PSOC. Davison and Cotter (1997) randomly selected 1,007 adults residing in the Arkansas and North Carolina areas to participate in a telephone interview. The researchers hypothesised

that there would be a relationship between PSOC and newspaper readership. The results suggest that in comparison to participants with low scores on the sense of community scale, participants with high scores tended to frequently read several sections of their local newspaper. High scoring participants also displayed a higher interest in local, state and national news topics compared to lower scoring participants.

Pretty et al., (1994) investigated neighbourhood and school PSOC for adolescents. The researchers found that neighbourhood PSOC was positively related to length of residency. However, school PSOC was not significantly correlated with the number of years that participants attended school. Neighbourhood PSOC was also correlated with the number of support people, the satisfaction that adolescents felt with these support people and the non-directive guidance that they received. School PSOC was associated with tangible assistance and the number of supports. Multiple regression analysis revealed that school PSOC was the most significant predictor of loneliness. This result suggests that participants with a low sense of community in the school environment are more likely to experience loneliness compared to those with a high sense of community.

At a later date Pretty, Conroy, Dugay, Fowler and Williams (1996) conducted similar research and the results of this study were consistent with the earlier research of Pretty et al., (1994). However, in the later study on adolescent PSOC, Pretty et al., (1996) also measured the relationship between PSOC and subjective well-being. The findings showed that adolescents with high PSOC scores exhibited more happiness, less worry and greater coping efficacy compared to adolescents with low PSOC scores. This significant relationship between PSOC and subjective well-being supports an earlier study undertaken in 1991 by Davidson and Cotter.

Davidson and Cotter (1991) conducted telephone interviews with adult residents living in South Carolina and Alabama areas, to investigate the relationship between PSOC and subjective well-being. Subjective well-being was made up of three components, namely, happiness, worrying and coping. Davidson and Cotter (1991) found that participants who scored high on the sense of community scale also tended to score high on the subjective sense of well-being measure. Furthermore, results suggested that PSOC was primarily associated with the happiness items and to a lesser extent coping and worrying items.

Similarly, Jason (1996) indicates that PSOC is associated with subjective well-being. However, "... if this sense of living in, belonging to, and having some commitment to, a particular community is threatened, the prospect of leading rewarding lives is to a greater or lesser extent diminished" (Puddifoot, 1996, p. 327). Furthermore, Jason (1997) suggests that in today's climate, the bonds we share with others are increasingly fragile. These ties with others are often disrupted as friends and family move away or change jobs (Jason, 1997). Individuals move away for a variety of reasons. For example they may be migrating to a new country, they could be refugees, they may move interstate or overseas for employment or to study at university.

### Culture and Adjustment

Lev-Wiesel (1998) highlights the importance of a consistent environment. Relocation creates a disturbance in the stability of the individuals' life and often brings with it drastic changes (Lev-Wiesel, 1998). An individual relocating to a new country is generally confronted with a number of changes. The language, culture and environment of the host country may all be foreign and perhaps the individual has had to leave family and friends (Churchman & Mitrani, 1997). Much research has

been conducted concerning the effect of relocation and the results are contradictory. Some research has found negative effects, other studies have found no significant effects, whilst others have found positive effects. Churchman and Mitrani (1997) argue that the inconsistency in research findings is likely to be due to the context of the situation. The authors concede that relocation like everything else has advantages and disadvantages. Personal, familial, social, cultural, economic and environmental factors are all likely to have an impact on adjustment. Furnham and Bochner (1986) argue that developing a PSOC can facilitate the adjustment process.

Cornille and Brotherton (1993) suggest that relocating to a foreign country can create substantial stress. The authors also suggest that tension may occur when the individual is attempting to integrate the competing cultural values, namely the values of their home country and those of the host culture.

Cultural transition is a process that begins at the time when individuals or families arrive in a new country and ends when they feel comfortable enough in the new country/culture (e.g., with a new language and values) to relinquish some of their indigenous cultural values and become acculturated to the host culture (Baptiste, 1993, p. 342).

Baptiste (1993) argues that to assist in the adjustment process, health professionals need to become aware of the culture and values of their clients and tailor interventions to suit the particular needs of their clients.

According to Furnham and Bochner (1986) and Bochner (1986) foreign students, migrants, refugees, business people, tourists and international guest workers could all be exposed to unfamiliar cultural environments. Some or all of these people may experience culture shock. Furnham and Bochner (1986) define culture shock as the "...psychological consequences of exposure to novel, unfamiliar



cultural environments” (p. 3). Furnham and Bochner (1986) suggest that developing a PSOC can facilitate culture learning. Furthermore, Furnham and Bochner (1986) argue that culture learning is the key to sojourner adjustment and consequently the relief of culture shock. This theory is supported by the study conducted by Rosenthal and Cichello (1986), who found that for Italian-Australian high school students, there was a positive relationship between culture learning and psychosocial adjustment.

People who are exposed to unfamiliar environments may also experience homesickness. Homesickness can be characterised as intrusive thoughts of home and the past (Burt, 1993). Burt (1993) explored the relationship between concentration, academic ability and homesickness. Australian and overseas first year psychology students participated in this study from an Australian university. Burt (1993) found that homesickness influenced attentional ability but not academic performance. The author suggests that a possible explanation for these findings is that homesickness is an episodic problem rather than a persistent one. Furthermore, homesickness appears to be a transitory state, which disappears once the individual, is committed to their new environment.

Hsiao-Ying (1995) studied sojourner adjustment in Japan and found “...that the average sojourner to Japan suffers most from culture shock as late as his or her third year” (p. 533). The author paints a bleak picture suggesting that there appears to be no meaningful recovery from culture shock. Specifically, Hsiao-Ying (1995) indicates that this condition is due to psychological rather than socio-cultural factors. For example being aware of the language or culture of the host country does not guarantee that the sojourner will develop a positive attitude towards the host country.

Churchman and Mitrani (1997) examined the relationship between the physical

environment and culture shock, for 60 students who had relocated from the former Soviet Union to study at Israeli universities. Churchman and Mitrani (1997) suggest that positive place attachment is an indicator of coping effectively with culture shock or the relative absence of it. The authors define place attachment as "... a positive emotional bond that develops between individuals or groups and their environment" (p. 65). Churchman and Mitrani (1997) hypothesised that individuals who perceived fewer differences in the new environment would report feeling more attached towards their new environment than those who perceived greater differences.

Churchman and Mitrani (1997) examined the environment at several levels, namely the city, neighbourhood, building and apartment. The physical attributes of the city level that were examined included, population size, city size, spatial structure of the city, climate, cultural services, number and kind of parks, public transport available, and style and quality of roads. The neighbourhood level attributes examined were, character of the neighbourhood, amount of traffic, amount of people in the streets, style of streets, neighbourhood services, level of violence, architectural design of the residential buildings and the materials of which they were constructed, distance from participants home to friends and relatives, place of employment, commercial, cultural, and educational facilities. The building level attributes examined were the relations between the tenants and the services within the building. The apartment level attributes examined were, size of the rooms and the apartment, types of rooms, and household density. Churchman and Mitrani (1997) in their analysis of the findings did not try to "... relate each specific attribute to attachment, because we assume that people relate to their environment as a whole and not each individual aspect" (p. 70). The findings revealed that preference was associated with place attachment. If an individual prefers the new environment, irrespective of its

differences to the old environment, then place attachment to the new environment is likely to occur (Churchman & Mitrani, 1997).

Harris, Werner, Brown and Ingebritsen (1995) investigated the relationship between privacy regulation, place attachment, and quality of life. Harris et al., (1995) surveyed residential Asian and American students living in family accommodation. Harris et al., (1995) found that privacy regulation is universal, however the means utilised to regulate privacy vary from culture to culture. Results showed that an environment which facilitates effective privacy regulation, enhances place attachment for both Asian and American students. Harris et al., (1995) also found that place attachment was associated to quality of life.

Barker, Child, Gallois, Jones, and Callan (1991) conducted two studies to examine the adjustment of university students in Australia. The first study examined social adjustment for international Asian students and Australian urban and rural students. Participants were asked to rate the degree of difficulty in handling everyday social situations and nominate the coping style they utilised. The findings revealed that Asian students had more problems making friends, experienced greater difficulty with interpersonal relationships, and interacting with individuals of a different social status, than the Australian urban students. However, Australian rural students experienced similar difficulties to the Asian students, albeit to a lesser extent. Furthermore, Asian students adopted an information-seeking coping style more frequently than the Australian students. The second study examined academic adjustment for international Asian students and Australian urban and rural students. Participants were asked to comment upon four vignettes pertaining to academic situations. The results indicated that in comparison to Australian students, Asian

students had greater difficulties with tutorials. Asian students reported that this was because of language problems and difficulty adjusting to Australian cultural norms.

Barthelemy and Fine (1995) investigated the relationship between adjustment of college students and residence hall climate in an American university. Barthelemy and Fine (1995) developed a scale to measure the residence hall climate. The scale consisted of four factors, namely, personal support, conflict, order, and group cohesiveness. The Residence Hall Climate Inventory (RHCI) and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) was administered to 121 undergraduate students living on campus. The SACQ has four dimensions, namely, academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment. Barthelemy and Fine (1995) found that for males and females the personal support score was positively correlated with the full scale college adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment scores. As expected, there was a negative relationship between conflict and social adjustment for both sexes. However, for females the conflict score was also negatively correlated with the full scale adjustment, academic adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and institutional attachment scores. For males, the order score was positively associated with the academic adjustment score. For both males and females the group cohesiveness score was positively correlated with the full scale adjustment, social adjustment and institutional attachment scores. For females, the personal-emotional and academic adjustment scores were also positively related to the group cohesiveness score. These findings suggest that environmental factors play a substantial role in student's adjustment to college.

Research conducted by Schwitzer, McGovern and Robbins (1991) investigated the relationship between university orientation and adjustment. 113 freshman

participated in the study. Schwitzer et al., (1991) found that orientation seminars are beneficial to new students in that they increased the participant's knowledge of the university and provided support. The results also suggest that orientation seminars promote both academic and social adjustment among students. This in turn was associated with a better grade point average, full time enrolment and the retention of students.

Furnham and Bochner (1986) suggest that developing a positive PSOC can relieve symptoms of culture shock and enhance adjustment. Bobo, Gilchrist, Cvetkovich, Trimble and Schinke (1988) and Gething (1997) suggest that the context should be considered when researching communities, and designing and implementing services. Gething (1997) argues that each community is unique, with members having different values and expectations. Communities may also differ on economic, social, cultural, and geographic characteristics. Therefore by researching PSOC in context, a greater understanding can be developed in order to assist in the promotion of a positive PSOC for the respective community (Fyson, 1999).

#### Psychological Sense of Community Framework

McMillan and Chavis (1986) introduced a theoretical framework for PSOC that they suggest can be used to explore both relational and territorial communities. McMillan (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) operationally defines 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" (p. 9). According to McMillan and Chavis, (1986) this definition contains four elements, namely, (1) membership, (2) influence, (3) integration and fulfilment of needs, and (4) shared emotional connection. These

elements work together to create an experience of community and provide a theoretical framework for the study of PSOC.

McMillan (1996) reviewed the McMillan and Chavis (1986) PSOC framework and decided to rearrange and renamed the four elements as follows, Spirit, Trust, Trade and Art. McMillan (1996) now conceptualises PSOC “...as a *spirit* of belonging together, a feeling that there is an authority structure that can be *trusted*, an awareness that *trade*, and mutual benefit come from being together, and a spirit that comes from shared experiences that are preserved as *art*” (p. 315). Fyson (1999) argues that these reworked components are more abstract than McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) original elements. This new reworked definition of PSOC is arguably more difficult for researchers to explore and hence much research still follows the original PSOC framework of McMillan and Chavis (1986).

A number of researchers have utilised the theoretical framework of PSOC put forward by McMillan and Chavis (1986). For example Pretty (1990) utilised this PSOC framework to examine the relationship between PSOC and social climate characteristics. In a later study Pretty et al., (1994) also used the framework to investigate the association between adolescent PSOC and loneliness. Brodsky (1996) used the PSOC framework in a qualitative study to explore the negative pole of PSOC for resilient mothers living in risky neighbourhoods. Sonn and Fisher (1996) also adopted a qualitative approach and utilised the PSOC framework to examine PSOC in a politically constructed group. Furthermore, Plas and Lewis (1996) utilised a qualitative approach to investigate the relationship between environmental factors and PSOC.

### Rationale and Research Questions

Universities have long been conceptualised and studied as communities (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996). Fyson (1999) highlights the importance of understanding the complex issue of community within the school environment, noting it as a key component in personal development. Burt (1993) and Fyson (1999) argue that building a positive PSOC in an education setting will encourage the productive learning of students.

Research indicates that the retention of students is a major priority for academic institutions (Ender et al., 1980; Schwitzer et al., 1991). Research has found that the residence hall environment can make a difference to student retention and academic performance (Allen & Maimone, 1989). Each year many students relocate from overseas countries, and urban and rural areas of Australia, to live on campus whilst undertaking their studies (Barker et al., 1991). Often they leave what is familiar in exchange for the unknown (Cornille & Brotherton, 1993) and this transition and settlement is likely to be quite stressful (Baptiste, 1993). International students and to a lesser degree Australian students, may experience a number of adjustment problems which could have an impact on their ability to successfully complete their studies (Barker et al., 1991). Jason (1997) argues that developing a PSOC is likely to alleviate some of these transition and adjustment problems.

Hill (1996) suggests that PSOC is situation specific and due to the diversity underlying PSOC, a qualitative approach to study this construct would be beneficial. Chavis, Hogge, McMillan and Wandersman (1986) indicate that the “...difficulty in the scientific exploration of sense of community is in the value-laden and phenomenological nature of the experience’ (p. 24). Sarason (1974) also highlights the difficulties in measuring PSOC with traditional empirical approaches.

The concept “psychological sense of community” is not a familiar one in psychology, however old it may be in man’s history. It does not sound precise, it obviously reflects a value judgement, and does not sound compatible with “hard” science. It is a phrase which is associated in the minds of many psychologists with a kind of maudlin togetherness, a tear-soaked emotional drappiness that misguided do-gooders seek to experience. *And yet there is no psychologist who has any doubt whatsoever about when he is experiencing the presence or absence of the psychological sense of community.* He luxuriates in its presence and despairs in its absence (Sarason, 1974, pp. 156-157)

Taub (1998) suggests that, creating a community for residential students, who come from diverse backgrounds, is exceptionally challenging. In order to understand and promote a PSOC for residential students, more research is required (Fyson, 1999; Pretty et al., 1994). Chavis, Hogge and McMillan (1986) suggest that the meaning of community may vary from individual to individual and is determined by situational and cultural aspects. The use of qualitative methods allows the researcher to examine the meaning of PSOC in context (Sonn et al., 1999). Furthermore, Trickett (1996) states that a qualitative approach to research can “...capture the complexity and richness of the sociocultural embeddedness of diverse individuals and groups as they cope with varying aspects of their environment” (p. 219).

Very few studies have examined PSOC in the context of an Australian university residential setting. In order to develop an understanding of this construct within the context of an Australian university a qualitative approach was adopted. In view of the literature, this exploratory study aims to investigate PSOC from the participants perspective, using McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) theoretical framework as a guide. The research questions are as follows, (1) What is the residential



students' perception of PSOC, at Edith Cowan University (ECU)? (2) What factors, within the student village, facilitate and inhibit PSOC? (3) What factors within the university setting and beyond, in the wider community, facilitate and inhibit PSOC?

## Method

### Qualitative Approach

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena, from the perspective of the participants, a qualitative approach was adopted (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Maykut and Morehouse (1994) suggest that there are eight important characteristics to consider when conducting qualitative research. They are as follows, the focus is descriptive and exploratory, the sample purposive, the design is emergent, the data is collected within the natural setting, there is an emphasis placed on the human as an instrument, data is gathered using qualitative methods, data analysis occurs early in the process, is ongoing and inductive, and the research findings are reported using a case study approach. These eight characteristics put forward by Mayket and Morehouse (1994) were adopted throughout the research process.

### Participants

Fifteen ECU students, living in the student village, on the Joondalup campus, participated in this study. Postgraduate and undergraduate students, from a variety of academic disciplines, took part. There were six females and nine males. The participants ranged in age from 18 – 43 years. The nationality of participants varied, including Australian, British, Kenyan, New Zealander, Singaporean, Sri Lankan, Thai, and Zimbabwean. At the time of interviewing, the participants had been living in the student village between six months and five years. To protect the identity of participants, pseudonyms were used and any identifying characteristics are not reported.

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling approach. Burgess-Limerick and Burgess-Limerick (1998) suggests that when selecting participants,

using a purposive sampling approach, "... the researcher purposively draws on his or her own cultural experiences and understanding of the issue to choose individuals who are considered likely to develop the researcher's understanding" (p. 64).

Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest that qualitative researchers are more likely to adopt a purposive sampling approach, as opposed to the method of random sampling, commonly adopted by quantitative researchers. Furthermore, qualitative sample sizes have a tendency to be smaller than their quantitative counterparts (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), one of the characteristics of purposive sampling is that it is an emergent sampling design. Hence, it is not possible to decide how many participants would be involved prior to the commencement of the study. Data was collected until the saturation point was reached. Glaser and Strauss (1967) define saturation as, the point where no new information is forth coming in the data being collected. Therefore new data is redundant in relation to the previously gathered data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that saturation generally occurs with no more than twenty participants. Furthermore, a modest sample of twelve participants can be enough to reach the point of saturation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Materials

Participants were provided with an introductory letter (Appendix A) to read, and a consent form (Appendix B) to sign. The researcher asked the participants a series of questions to ascertain demographic information (Appendix C). An interview schedule (Appendix D) was also utilised as a guide during the semi-structured interview. As suggested by Smith (1996) the interview schedule was developed prior to the interview.

The interview schedule was designed to answer the research questions and explore McMillan and Chavis's (1986) theoretical framework in an Australian university setting. The PSOC theoretical framework put forward by McMillan and Chavis (1986) was also utilised as a guideline when developing the interview schedule. The interview schedule, the questions within the schedule and the prompts, were formulated in accordance with procedures suggested by Smith (1996).

Two colleagues, familiar with this area of research, were given a copy of the first draft of the interview guide to read. Their task was to determine the face validity (Bordens & Abbott, 1996), specificity and clarity (Smith, 1996) of the questions. After receiving feedback some questions were added, some were deleted, whilst others were slightly modified (Smith, 1996). To further examine the face validity (Bordens & Abbott, 1996), specificity and clarity (Smith, 1996) of the modified interview schedule, a pilot study was conducted prior to the launch of the official study. Two university students were interviewed in the pilot study and as a result, slight modifications were made to the questions in the interview schedule.

### Procedure

Participants living in the student village were approached and asked if they would like to participate in the study. The interested students were given the introductory letter (Appendix A) to read and a consent form (Appendix B) to sign. An appointment time for the face-to-face in depth interview was made, and any questions that participants had were answered. The researcher was also given a tour of the student village and field notes pertaining to the physical environment, were taken.

The researcher collected signed consent forms prior to the commencement of each interview and any further queries were answered at this time. Participants were

also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without reason, and that they were under no obligation to answer all the questions. Confidentiality and anonymity issues were also explained prior to the commencement of the interviews (Australian Psychological Society, 1997).

The demographic questions (Appendix C) were asked and the researcher noted the responses on paper. The audio tape recorder was then switched on and the interview began. The interviews lasted between 25 and 45 minutes in duration and the researcher took field notes (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) before, after and during the interview process.

All the interviews were conducted in the lounge-room of unit number 41, located in the student village, ECU Joondalup campus. Smith (1996) suggests that in order to make participants more comfortable, interviews should be conducted in a place that is familiar to them. Smith (1996) also indicates that only those that are involved in the interview are present and that the place is kept free from distractions. Unit number 41, is familiar to the participants, the researcher attempted to keep the room free from distractions and only those involved in the interview were generally present. At the end of the interview, participants were thanked for their participation and if they had any questions these were also answered.

The researcher also kept a journal, detailing thoughts and feelings in relation to the methodology and the research process in general. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggests that "...the reflexive journal, a kind of diary in which the investigator on a daily basis, or as needed, records a variety of information about *self* (hence the term "reflexive") and *method*" (p. 327). Pidgeon and Henwood (1997) indicate that the journal or diary is one way that qualitative researcher can build a paper trail, adding to the credibility of findings.

## Analysis

In accordance with Maykut and Morehouse (1994), prior to beginning the analysis, the researcher retained an open view and suspended judgement, so that meaning was not imposed too soon. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) indicate that qualitative researchers face a paradoxical dilemma. On one hand they are required “...to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others - to indwell - and at the same time to be aware of how one’s own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand” (p. 123).

According to Taylor and Bogden (1984), Creswell (1994), Smith (1996) and Berg (2000) there are many different ways to analyse qualitative data. To analyse the data collected in this research, the content was examined thematically, utilising the systematic approach put forward by Smith (1996). To ensure authenticity audio tape recordings of the interview were transcribed verbatim. To protect the identity of participants pseudonyms were used in the transcripts and no information that can identify the participant was included in this report. An idiographic approach was adopted, as suggested by Smith (1996). This approach involves examining one transcript in detail before moving onto the next.

The first transcript was read several times and significant information was underlined with black pen. Notes were taken throughout the reading process. An overall summary was written at the base of the transcript, whilst other comments pertaining to the transcript were placed in the right hand margin. The left hand margin was used to record emerging theme titles. The emerging theme titles were also documented on a separate sheet of paper (Smith, 1996).

After completing the first transcript, the separate sheet of paper containing the list of the theme titles, that were emerging, was examined. The purpose of this was to

look for connections between the themes. It was found that some of the themes could be clustered together to form categories under a primary or master theme. After refining the primary themes and categories, a coherent list (primary theme list) was made of the primary themes and their categories (Smith, 1996).

The second transcript was then examined in the same way as the first transcript but with one extra step. The second transcript was compared to the first transcript. Existing theme titles were utilised as required and new theme titles were created where necessary, and placed in the left hand margin. The new theme titles were also examined to see if they could be clustered together as categories under a primary theme or become a master theme in their own right. After refining the themes and categories this information was recorded on the primary theme list (Smith, 1996).

The third transcript was then examined in the same way as the second transcript. This process was continued with each individual transcript (Smith, 1996) until the point of saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Saturation occurred after 15 interview transcripts had been examined. Hence no more participants were selected to be interviewed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

All the transcripts were marked with identifying codes, for example Q1James represents question 1 (location), interview 1 (James was the pseudonym used for interview 1). If more than one theme or category was present in the same question, an identifying code was placed at the start of each one. Copies were then made and the original transcripts were left intact so that the information could be traced back if required (Smith, 1996).

The copy of the first transcript was then cut into segments, with each retaining its identifying code. The themes and categories were used to determine where the text should be cut. Files were produced for each of the primary themes and the cut

segments were placed in their respective files. The entire process was repeated for each one of the copied transcripts (Smith, 1996).

The next step was to further refine the themes and categories. This was completed by examining each primary theme file independently, and using the raw data to define the theme more clearly. Comparisons were also made across themes, to determine if higher order themes would emerge. A final list containing the refined themes and their respective categories was made (Smith, 1996). The majority of the themes and categories reflected the elements of the PSOC framework (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

A colleague, familiar with this area of research, was given the transcripts and all the information relating to the themes and categories. Their task was to independently assess the information and authenticate the themes and categories that had emerged. After completing this task, the colleague met with the researcher to discuss this assessment. Differences in interpretation were addressed and agreement on themes and categories was reached. This was achieved by referring to the relevant literature and further clarification. This verification process was conducted in order to address the problem of researcher bias and ensure that the themes and categories are reflected in the text (Huberman & Miles, 1994).

#### Provisions for trustworthiness

Several procedures have been built into the research design to enhance trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is a term used to describe the credibility or believability of qualitative research findings (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are a number of things that researchers can do to enhance the credibility of their research. A variety of procedures were adopted throughout the research process to facilitate trustworthiness.



The data in this study was collected using multiple methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, namely: residential leaders, members of the tenants association, members of the international students association and residential students. Field notes pertaining the physical characteristics of the setting were taken before the interviews. Field notes were also taken before, during and after the interview process and a journal was also kept (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Other procedures that were adopted to enhance the credibility of this study were as follows. An audit trail was built in the form of: journal entries, field notes, and interview transcripts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A systematic approach was adopted when preparing the interview schedule (Smith, 1996) and the questions in the schedule were examined independently for face validity (Bordens & Abbott, 1996) specificity and clarity (Smith, 1996). A systematic approach was also adopted during data analysis (Smith, 1996). The themes and categories that emerged from data analysis were independently verified (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Finally, rich detail has been included in all aspects of the research report, in an attempt to make the process transparent and in turn increase trustworthiness (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

## Findings

The aim of this research is to explore PSOC, from the participant's perspective, using McMillan and Chavis's (1986) theoretical framework as a guide. This study used interview data to explore the following questions: (1) What is the residential students' perception of PSOC, at Edith Cowan University (ECU)? (2) What factors, within the student village, facilitate and inhibit PSOC? (3) What factors within the university setting and beyond, in the wider community, facilitate and inhibit PSOC?

The majority of themes that emerged during data analysis, were consistent with the PSOC framework put forward by McMillan and Chavis (1986). These themes reflected the four elements namely: (1) membership, (2) influence, (3) integration and fulfilment of needs, and (4) shared emotional connection. Data analysis also revealed two additional primary themes, namely environment, and culture and adjustment that influenced the students' perceptions of PSOC. A number of categories were clustered together under these primary themes. Under the theme of environment the following categories were clustered: (1) noise, (2) privacy and crowding, (3) architectural and interior design, (4) pollution and environmental degradation, (5) weather and climate, and (6) environmental press. Under the theme of culture and adjustment the following categories were clustered: (1) cultural diversity, (2) culture shock, (3) homesickness, (4) adaptation, and (5) floating population.

### Membership

Membership is the first element of the PSOC theoretical framework. McMillan and Chavis (1986) define membership as "...the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness"(p. 9). McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggest that

... membership has five attributes: boundaries, emotional safety, a sense of belonging and identification, personal investment, and a common symbol system. These attributes work together and contribute to a sense of who is part of a community, and who is not (p. 11).

Furthermore, they suggest that these attributes are interrelated, reinforcing one another.

### Boundaries

The term 'boundaries' suggests that some people belong to a particular group whilst others do not. Previous research indicates that boundaries can be explicit or so subtle that they can only be recognised by members of the group (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). The data revealed that for these participants there were two levels at which the boundaries operated, namely: the subgroup level and the student village level.

Participants noted that there were various subgroups within the student village. The boundaries that define who belongs and who doesn't belong are based for some on common interests, for others on educational level, and yet for others culture was the defining factor. Lee gives an example of subgroups defined by their common interests:

There's a lot of sub-cultures around. .... So I would say rather than a whole, there are cliques and kind of stuff like that. So I guess you know, [hang out] because of the same interests .... there's a party group I know, then there's another sort of rowdier bunch, there's a soccer, there's ah, there's I guess a faculty group as well, certain people from the same faculty kind of hang out together as well.

Lee has mentioned that there are faculty subgroups. There also appears to be a division between postgraduate and undergraduate students. Ann gives an example of just such a boundary:

..... with students from the undergraduate units cause they live in close quarters with each other, whereas us over here sort of, we sort of, pretty much can, we keep to ourselves in, in some ways you know. We don't want to get involved ah to that extent with village life so much. .... there's quite a few psychology students doing post grad studies here, so we take up most of the units. So we know each other in class and over here um, but in terms of the other students ah, a few interactions, I suppose.

For some participants, cultural background was important in defining their subgroup. Lee gives an example of his cultural subgroup:

To be honest, I'm a bit introverted in that sense because I don't really mingle around with everyone. I guess, I mean I have selected friends and so fourth. .... I find fellow Singaporeans around and you tend to clique with your own people, I guess.

Although subgroups may provide shelter to their associates, if the boundaries of the subgroups are too rigid, members can be stifled. As James noted: "..... groups that seem to have enclosed themselves into just doing certain things. They haven't stepped out of their shell and, or out of the comfort zone to be able to um experience new, new things".

Besides the subgroup boundaries, there appeared to be a notion of 'them' and 'us' when participants were referring to people who did not reside in the village. Sharon gives an example of this insider – outsider boundary:

Most of the time that we do go out it's usually people from housing. It's very rare that people go out with friends from outside, or even if you do go out with friends from outside of housing, they'll come here first and go out with the ECU group.

This quote by Rhonda also implies that there is a division between those who live on campus and other ECU student, who don't reside in student housing:

When you go out um, like even in campus. You meet people from the student village as well. So you go up and say "hi, hi" and you feel like you belong to this certain group. Like you know, the people in campus won't know like other people like me, but when I see someone from housing I say "hi" and you just feel like your in this group. Like you know, you belong to each other.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggest that those who are not part of the in-group may be excluded and this can have a negative impact on the outsider. Tina gives an example of being rejected by a particular in-group: "As I told you about the [tutorial] discussion groups and you know, people just wouldn't want to talk to us, we are like aliens to them". However, McMillan and Chavis (1986) state that despite the negative ways in which boundaries can be used, they are necessary for the group. Boundaries provide group members with the emotional safety.

### Emotional Safety

"Boundaries established by membership criteria provide the structure and security that protect group intimacy" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 10). When group members feel emotionally safe with one another they are more likely to confide. This in turn facilitates closeness or intimacy. The data collected from the interviews suggests that participants did feel comfortable enough with other student village members to confide. The following quote by Chris illustrates this:

Everyone is just so close. I mean you can't not feel a part..... I mean if someone has a problem and you just have to, its easy to tell the person your problem because everyone gets so close..... I mean because we go through the same stuff you know whatever, when they have difficulties and stuff they also confide in me, and basically it's just the same living. It's like you know, they've got to get their rooms clean, they've got to cook, they've got to study, they've got so many things in common that ah, it's easy you know to confide.

Anne also gives an example of the intimacy that has developed between herself and other residential students: "Yeah, well I formed some very, very close friends and I've met all of those people through living here, in the student village. I even met my fiance here".

The term 'family' was used frequently by participants, when describing the student village and it's members. This term would suggest that participants felt connected to one another. Sammie gives an example of how this connection developed for her over time: "I've had to settle in and accept everybody, and they've all become my family and, everybody sees each other as brothers and sisters and, family looks out for each other, so that's good".

On a number of occasions participants used the term 'support' or 'supportive'. It would be reasonable to suggest that, supportive group members facilitate emotional safety. The following statement made by James illustrates this: "Here [student village] it's excellent, everyone's really supportive of each other, um it's like a little family".

Many participants remarked on how safe they felt talking to staff. Staff members employed by ECU were described as friendly and approachable. Louise comments on this: "A more protected atmosphere here, because there's always people like

James and the office ladies. If somebody gets themselves into a bit of trouble or whatever, there's always someone they can go to talk to or ask advice from".

McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggests that emotional safety can "...be considered as part of the broader notion of security" (p.10). Many of the participants mentioned the importance of physical security. During the interview, Sammie commented on the importance of safety to her father. Sammie's father encouraged her to live on campus because he felt it was safe. "I was an international student coming to a country where I knew nobody, my Dad decided this was safer and I'd make friends quicker so I wouldn't be lonely. Joe also commented on how safety was a factor influencing his decision to live on campus: "It's my first time and it's very new to me, then I think [living on] campus is more familiar, more safe".

Many participants commented on how safe they felt both, in the student village and on campus itself. Sammie explains: "You can walk up to the labs and it was safe and, it's safe in housing cause, they've got security constantly". Furthermore, Ted comments on the security provided by ECU: "There's always someone to look upon us. There's a sense of security here. I mean there's security ah personnel who keep walking so we feel safer and, there's much more security for the female residents".

### Sense of Belonging and Identification

McMillan and Chavis (1986) defines sense of belonging and identification as "...the feeling, belief and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group, and a willingness to sacrifice for the group"(p. 10).

According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), a sense of belonging and identification is defined in part by, a feeling of being accepted by the group.

Interview transcripts revealed that participants did feel accepted by other members of the student village. James gives an example of this:

I think others acceptance of you really. I think that's what made me most feel part of the student village. Being invited to their unit for dinner, some parties, for sports. So its things like that, that make you feel good, so a lot of confirmation of relationships I suppose, yeah.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) also suggest that a sense of belonging and identification is characterised by the belief that one fits or has a place within the group. Participants revealed that they did feel part of the student village and cited a number of reasons for this. Iksan gives one example: “ Yeah the sense, there is a sense of belonging here if you've lived here long enough”. Lee gives another example “I mean student housing binds us together, I guess and I guess, the rules and regulations that we have to follow”

Lee's comment suggests that students are bound together because of commonality, namely: living in student housing and having to follow the same rules. The transcripts revealed that some participants identified with the student village and ECU in general, because they felt that, as students they shared a common identity and faced similar problems. The following quote by Iksan illustrates this:

During exams you feel that everyone is stressed out, it's not only you. So it all distributes around. So it's like you've got that sense of pushing together though it's not explicit but you've got it in you yeah. Yeah sort of everyone struggling at that time. So that's one of the main things I think, everyone sort of going through similar problems.



Participants frequently mentioned that their sense of belonging and identification was enhanced by the camaraderie that they shared with other residential students. Sammie's statement illustrates this quite well:

Everyone in our courtyard will shout from balcony to balcony, we'll even go phone each other cause it's free and it's easy. We all get on very well in that little area, it's pretty good. We've got everything from German to Egyptian, to Chinese, Indians, Malay to African, and Australians and Americans, Canadians, everything. It's very good actually, because we're all close friends. We'll all gather up and go out for a drink, and go to the local bar.

Furthermore, Sammie indicates that she can identify with the student village and that she belongs there. However, Sammie does not feel the same sense of belonging and identification with ECU in general. The following quote demonstrates this:

I keep forgetting I'm part of the university because, it's, even though it's on the same campus, actually it's just a walk away. .... But when you live so close, you go for an hour class and walk back and so, you don't really feel part of the university. Cause I'm only there quickly, for a class and then I come back. So, I don't really feel part of the university, just the housing cause, this is where I've lived for the past year .....

However, other participants felt a sense of belonging and identification with both the student village and ECU in general. Some participants openly expressed their feelings of pride in the university. As Scott suggests: "I'm very pleased with being at ECU. I think there's a good ambience, I think there's a sort of a collective sort of pride here and I'm happy I'm up at ECU". Rhonda also states:

Yeah you feel like you belong to ECU by just telling people. Yeah I'm from ECU. Because it happens that most of the people say, oh ECU's not one of the

good ones. So, so you kind of like tell each other, tell the other people from the other uni's that, no you know, ECU is really good you know, they do this and that.

Like Scott and Rhonda, other participants felt that they had a sense of belonging and identification to both the student village and ECU in general. However, the reasons that participants gave were varied. For example, some participants felt a sense of belonging and identification to ECU because they lived on campus. Sharon states: "..... you kind of feel like your part of the uni because you live there you know. You kind of feel like your part of the furniture, stuff like that yeah".

Others felt that they belonged because they were asked to contribute knowledge and or skills, on behalf of the university. James gives an example of this:

Myself and some other students get invited to contribute some of our knowledge and skills, to things like the careers expo. So that makes me feel part of ECU.

Taking part in sports for ECU too as well. So getting involved in groups at ECU are things that make me feel involved.

### Personal Investment

McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggest that by investing time, money or energy into a particular group, the member feels that he or she has a right to belong.

Interview transcripts revealed that participants did make a personal investment and as a result felt that they had a right to belong. To varying degrees participants invested time, money, and energy into clubs, friendships, social events, the student village, and the university. Sharon gives an example of investing time and energy into the Tenants Association:

I was ah the international student's rep for the Tenants Association. It was just a matter of organising, like things for housing, um stuff like that and we had our

end of semester party I had to help organise that. Just making sure whatever complaints they have can get to the housing office.

Brett also talks about getting involved:

Even though I don't have that much time as a Master's student, I've always felt like, I like to get involved and have a bit of a say in what we do rather than just sit here and um expect the university coordinators to try and organise um. I know if no one else does anything they will because they want to sort of create a sense of community themselves.

Participants frequently commented on the personal investment people made by being friendly and helpful. Ann gives an example:

I'd describe it [sense of community] as a good one, because people are very friendly and willing to help out and even if they don't know you very well at all. If they've seen you around their willing to sort of you ah, help you out. Give each other lifts to the city and back because a lot of the students don't have cars and stuff. So we do you know, the car pool thing.

Sharon also suggests that people are friendly and helpful. However, she argues that not everyone makes an effort:

You'll have some who'll you know, who are always willing to help out, whatever you need and then you do have your others that just couldn't be bothered. They've got there whole entertainment unit type set up in their rooms and they hardly ever leave their rooms and you hardly ever see them. Yeah, I think it's half and half. You've got those who are fair dinkum community minded and there are others who just couldn't be bothered.

Data revealed that participants had made a personal investment into the friendships that they had formed. Rhonda states: "I mean I'm really happy here after

2 semesters and long term friendships yeah. I've got friends who have actually left and we're still in contact yeah".

The personal investment of time plays a part in creating a sense of belonging. Brett's remark illustrates this:

One reason I feel like apart of ECU is you know, the amount of time you seem to spend here. Um, being associated with uni, I've been associated with the uni probably years, that's a long, it took almost 4 years to complete my undergrad.

Ann's comment also supports the importance of time invested:

Definitely I'd recommend it [living on campus]. It's a very good experience. I mean I've, I've done a total of gee it's coming on five years in, at the end of the year living in different student housing and it's been a completely positive experience. I mean some people have had some difficulties, but I've been lucky, I've always had good flatmates and good neighbours so.

### Common Symbol System

Common symbol systems can be used to unite members and maintain boundaries. Previous research suggests that a common symbol system has the important role of uniting heterogeneous groups. Common symbol systems can include modes of dress, emblems, icons, and various social conventions (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Social conventions can assist in the development of social bonds through the acknowledgment of group members. Lewis and Slade (1994) define social convention as "... behaviour arising when a group adopts a form of activity either by explicit agreement or by implicit and possibly unconscious accord" (p.12). Furthermore, conventions can take the form of linguistic and or non-linguistic behaviour such as a wave to greet someone.

One of the common symbol systems described by participants related to the social conventions that occur between members when they see each other in the student village. Iksan noted:

There's that common recognition that goes around still. We recognise people who are around and you know there's always that sort of nod, of greeting (laughs), that we give each other. Just the people I know yeah, just the people, the friends. That's the village for you, the people you know.

Sammie gives an example of her personal experience:

Everybody knows you, you walk past and everybody says, "Hey Sammie", even the new people you've never met. How are you doing Sammie? And I'm like, do I know that person? (Laughs). It's great, it's like a big family, everybody knows you.

When members saw each other outside the student village, they acknowledged one another with a greeting (common symbol system: social convention). Ann stated:

If you see people from student housing and you recognise them in the city or at a club or down at campus, everybody always you know gives a little wave and stuff. And if they see you down at the shopping mall and you don't have a car or something they'll give you rides. So in that sense you know you belong and people know that you belong too.

Some participants mentioned the physical symbols that showed others that they belonged to ECU. Tina mentions her car sticker: "... you know, your part of, part of ECU is the car sticker that we have on our windscreen that says ECU". Whilst Louise commented on her mode of dress: "[Wearing ECU T-shirt] My T-shirt (laughs)".

## Influence

Influence is the second element of the PSOC theoretical framework. McMillan and Chavis (1986) define influence as "...a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members"(p. 9). McMillan and Chavis (1986) cite previous research on group cohesiveness to illustrate the nature of this bi-directional concept. On one hand, an individual is generally attracted to a group when he or she can exert some influence over this group. On the other hand, to promote group cohesiveness, the group needs to influence its members. In other words, the individual influences the group and the group influences the individual simultaneously (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

The data revealed that there was a bi-directional influence that occurred between the members and their various groups. One example of this bi-directional influence exists at the unit level, between the six people that reside in the shared accommodation. Iksan stated:

I guess it's sort of the people you live with, their the one's that make the biggest difference. You might have a sense of belonging in the village and you might like the sort of place it is but, everyone's experience is going to be different depending on the sort of people they've had [to live with]. ..... I mean they do try to mix it up, but you don't really know what the people are like. It never say's very dirty at the bottom of the application form. So in that sense it's always random. So you might get people who are just impossible to live with. I've had unit mates who have been what they normally call, unit mates from hell.

Some participants commented on the cultural mix in units, and the bi-directional effect it can have on unit mates. James remarked: "There's compromises happening

all the time. The 1st ones having to live with five other people, and there all from different cultures. It was a real challenge to come to some kind of agreement about how we should live”.

Through living with others, participants frequently commented upon their development of tolerance. Iksan noted:

Learning to live with people, I guess tolerance. Cause at home everything was like clockwork, people have been living together for quite a while. Here you probably change, you change your unit mates every semester. You learn, you learn to change with the change. So it's good I think yeah. It's prepared me well for my life later with work as well, as I'll find it easier to adjust to people now, especially after living in the village, because you meet people with all sorts of habits. All sorts of standards so to speak, like opinions and yeah, so it's been quite good for me.

Participants commented on the various ways that they and others handle conflict. Sharon gives an example of this:

I mean you do fight, as you would you know, when you live so close to each other. Like yeah it's usually and you know, you'll have your little you know, your little pow wow and it will end there and your friends again, so it's pretty cool.

As well as the informal ways of influencing one another to resolve conflict, participants also mentioned the formal structures that are in place. Chris said:

We have meetings, each unit has a student, a rep who goes to these meetings. So if you have any problems or whatever, you just have to tell the rep and they have a meeting once every two weeks or something. All the reps from each and every

unit, to discuss the issues and so on, and the management relays their opinions to the reps, and the reps tell the tenants, and it goes the other way too.

Another influence that participants commented on came from the social environment within the student village. Sammie noted that:

It's good in certain ways and in other ways it's hard to concentrate on university studies and stuff. Cause there's just too much going around, and your thinking, I'll do that later, I'll go out and talk to them people or I'll do that later, I'll go to the pub with this lot. Cause it's such a close community in here, within housing.

Brett also commented:

There's always people going out ... ah I guess people who don't live here, just sort of associate it with more of a party, maybe more than it is. Um, it's not necessarily, but it is if you want it to be. Yeah, I mean you can work as hard as you like, or there's always an opportunity to totally party. I've seen quite a few students fail all their units because, people just haven't like, you really have to um ... what would you say, ha (laughs) exercise a bit of self control.

Furthermore, Scott stated: "The institution creates ah situation and community that's congenial to learning. Basically any real obstacles or challenges, are pretty much taken away, all you have to do is to study".

Data revealed that the Tenants Association is concerned with promoting a sense of community within the student village and therefore organises a number of social events in an attempt to influence the members. Ann stated:

It's good, I mean there are a lot of things organised for students but because of my commitments to uni and stuff I haven't been able to do a lot. Though I did go on this trip to Rottneest, which was good, a good trip.

Chris also noted that the:



[Tenants Association] ..... organise end of semester parties and so on and so on, and they make an effort to let everyone know that there is a party on, right so you can't really feel like your not part of the student village.

The International Student Council also tries to provide a positive influence by supporting international students. Joe gives an example of how a member of this organisation assisted him when he arrived in Australia. "One of the international office ah came to meet me at the airport and after that she provide me ah shopping the whole day, she's so nice". Some participants also spoke of the advocacy role that the International Student Council plays. Ted said:

Yep, I'm a member of the International Student Council at ECU. We cater to the needs of the international students that come here. We are speaking mouths for them. So if they've got any problems, they can come and see us. Then, we will sort of like bring the problem to the student office, or if they have problems with their marks, or they have financial difficulties, we can write a petition.

Joe commented on how the wider community has influenced his perception of Perth.

In Perth I like, I'm very impressed, with the people. They look so nice, they have, hospitality. Different, I have been too many countries. I've been Europe before and so many countries, but I prefer here. Here's very nice, the people here.

### Integration and Fulfilment of Needs

Integration and fulfilment of needs is the third element of the PSOC theoretical framework. McMillan and Chavis (1986) define integration and fulfilment of needs in terms of reinforcement. McMillan and Chavis (1986) argue "...that for any group to maintain a positive sense of togetherness, the individual-group association must be rewarding for it's members."(p. 12). Due to the complex nature of individuals and

groups, it is difficult to identify all the reinforcers. Previous research indicates that some of the effective reinforcers include, the success of the group, the status derived from membership and the competencies of individual members.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggest that integration and fulfilment of needs “...is the feeling that members’ needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group” (p. 9). McMillan and Chavis (1986) state that needs are determined by values. If values are shared by the individual and the group, then the group as a collective, is likely to provide the individual with an opportunity to fulfil their needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

The data suggests that various needs are being met as a result of being a member of the student village. Sammie gives an example:

Everybody is very helpful and friendly, the people who work here and the people who already live here. Everybody is willing to show you round, take you shopping, things like that. Now I do the same, when new people come, you help them, and show them around, and introduce.

Ann gives another example:

When things matter people will help you out. A friend of mine, her dad died and she had to go home, catch an early flight. A lot of people rallied around and helped her out, helped her organise tickets and that sort of thing, gave her a ride to the airport, made sure all her stuff was ok while she was gone and so that sort of community here it’s brilliant.

Participants mentioned the social needs that were fulfilled by choosing to live on campus. James stated:

People on campus, they were really friendly ..... came here knowing no-one and so um, humans being a social animal you got to find someone, even one person

that you relate too. I had no problems um meeting and making friends with people.

James also commented on how much he had gained by living in the student village:

Absolutely, it's just one of the many great experiences I've had being in Australia. Being in the student village, I've learnt a lot about people, and a lot about the university by being here. I wouldn't have learnt as much about the university if I'd been living off campus.

Sammie states how being a member of the student village meets her needs:

The people and how it's easy to get university. It's less stressful getting to and from university as an international student. Especially when I first came here. It's a lot easier than having to worry about what bus to get, what train to get to find your classes. You can just have to walk up the path.

The majority of participants commented on just how convenient it was living on campus and also on the proximity to resources Chris stated:

It makes everything so easy, because getting to lectures, you don't have to rush. You don't have to wake up two hours before to catch the train or whatever, and um, you can also get to the Internet for example at any time. It's not too far if you want to see teachers or lecturers, you can do that any time, because your living on campus anyway.

Data revealed that some participants financial needs were met by living on campus. Sharon comments:

It's a nice place to live. It's great for me and it means I pay my rent and that's all I'm paying. I'm not paying extras and that leaves me with a lot of money that I can use for other stuff. I don't really have to pay that much for travel to go to the

library or whatever. It's easy to get through to the different departments. I just use the switchboard if I need to get through to a different campus or whatever. It's pretty convenient.

However, not everyone felt that their financial need's were met in this way. As Tina noted:

Student housing is actually quite expensive, the prices just keep increasing. It's like it used to be 76 and now it's 79, and I don't know, maybe their going to increase again yeah. It's a threat actually, when they increase and you start thinking about leaving the student housing. Yeah, I mean even though it's the maintenance, everything is free and water bill is free but you don't even use that much of the electricity and water for a person.

Participants gave various reasons for choosing to attend ECU. Scott gives one example of how coming to university met his needs:

To further my education. I did a lot of labouring jobs and I needed something that would give me security, financial security in the future and I wanted something that would help me to work through the social echelons. To help me with a career rather than confining myself you know purely to labouring because obviously it's a trap in itself. Yeah so I ah, I decided business obviously because business is based on monetary system so that was the way to go cause I was going to chase the buck, I wanted to you know have a few dollars.

Ted also remarked:

I come from Singapore and it's just 5 hours flight from Singapore to Perth. If there's anything important happening back at home it's easier to fly out. And ECU, because I looked at the programs and then it's much easier to comprehend. I thought here would be really good.

Ted comments on the undergraduate programs offered by ECU. Other participants were also motivated to come to ECU because of these programs. James stated: “ECU held the best program for me for my course. It was um a lot more flexible and they had better curriculum”.

Some participants commented on the post graduate courses offered by ECU, suggesting that there is an expectation that ECU is able to meet the needs of this group of students. Lee sated:

Since coming here I’ve come to realise that ECU, has got a reputation for postgraduate studies. So in that sense I would recommend someone coming here to do there post graduate studies, because I guess it’s innovative. I guess you have more play in your research topic.

Participants frequently commented on how the university was providing for their needs. Scott gives an example of this:

Overall I think as an institution for learning, it creates all the different facilities and the elements that are needed. There’s security, there’s safety, there’s a roof over your head, there’s complete access to the Mega Lab, the Library, and to the tutors and lecturers and they are normally very helpful. I’m very pleased with the fact that I’m studying at ECU.

Scott also comments on the lecturers and how they meet his needs:

Obviously there are good lecturers and bad lecturers, and the good lecturers are really helpful and go out of their way to do the right thing and to help you. 100% motivated to help you learn and are motivated to create a situation in the community that is congenial to teaching. I think that they do it well and I’m really pleased.

Like Scott, other participants commented on the lecturers and also on other ways in which ECU meets their needs. Brett gives an example:

I'm quite proud of the uni, there's something that sets this uni apart from every other uni. In a way it's a bit like student housing, it's always been a bit more intimate than any other uni. Just being able to sort of knock on the doors of my lecturers any time of the day and just sort of go in and have a chat.

### Shared Emotional Connection

Shared emotional connection is the fourth element of the PSOC theoretical framework. McMillan and Chavis (1986), define shared emotional connection as "...the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences"(p. 9). Furthermore, McMillan and Chavis (1986), indicate that this element:

... is based, in part, on a shared history. It is not necessary that group members have participated in the history in order to share it, but they must identify with it. The interactions of members in shared events and the specific attributes of the events may facilitate or inhibit the strength of the community (p. 13).

McMillan and Chavis (1986) examined previous research and suggest that there are a number of factors, which are likely to have an impact on the shared emotional connection between group members. These factors are, contact (with more contact, opportunities for closeness are enhanced), quality of contact (positive interaction facilitates closeness), closure (ambiguity / unresolved issues inhibit closeness), significance of shared events (eg the bonding between people who have undergone a crisis together), honouring members as opposed to humiliating them, experiencing a spiritual connection, and investment (eg time, money, energy). Personal investment

is also mentioned as one of the five attributes of membership (see earlier in this report).

Data revealed that participants had a shared emotional connection with one another. Some participants commented on the shared emotional connection that they felt with other residential students. James remarks: “The people weren’t difficult to meet because they were all in the same boat. We were all in the same environment, it wasn’t a problem at all meeting people and making friends”.

Data revealed that whilst living on campus participants, developed friendships, spent time together, shared history and similar experiences. All of which facilitates a shared emotional connection between members. Brett commented: “Some of my closest friends I’ve met here and some of the times that I’ve had with those people, have definitely been some of the best years of my life”.

Sammie also talks about the friendships she has formed in student housing:

All my friends are from ECU. It’s hard leaving them, cause I’m actually going home to Malaysia. We’re all going out tomorrow night to say goodbye, and that’s going to be sad. Housing’s great, I love it. I’ve got a lot of memories I’ll go home with. A lot of friends I’ve made world wide from living here at student housing, that I can go visit all over the world. Stories to tell when I’m older.

Furthermore, Sharon talks about her experiences:

I actually only realised it over the summer, that all my friends are in housing when I didn’t go home last summer and everyone had gone and I suddenly thought ok, I don’t know anyone in Australia or (laughs) all my friends have gone. So yeah, it’s so much easier to make friends with people your around all the time and stuff like that yeah.

Chris discusses how spending time together facilitates the shared emotional connection within the village: “Yes it’s definitely a community everyone gets ah, really attached to one another because um, we see each other so often”.

Ted talks about the significants of a shared event: “I’m also into sports yeah, the soccer team. So we won the championship last year, last semester so that’s another club I’m in”.

Participants also talked about the advantages of communal living, suggesting that the shared emotional connection that they feel with others in the student village relieved loneliness. Rhonda gives an example:

The communal living thing. If your bored, you can just go out to one of the units and just talk, and there’s people to talk too, which is really nice and if you feel lonely or anything like that you just go out and meet some of their friends and yeah that’s one thing I like about it.

### Environment

Previous research indicates that environmental factors can significantly effect a person’s behaviour. McKnight and Sutton (1994) state that “... the effects of noise, weather, climate, architectural and interior design, isolation, crowding, urban stressors, disasters, environmental degradation and pollution, all emphasise the importance of the physical environment on human behaviour” (p. 608). Analysis of transcripts suggests that the physical environment does have an impact on the thoughts, feelings, and behaviour of participants.

### Noise

Participants frequently mentioned the level of noise. Some felt that it was quiet, whilst others felt that it was noisy in the village. Sharon stated:



I mean it can get a bit noisy sometimes. I mean like, if you want to study or people coming back late and your in bed like 2 am in the morning and something like that you know, it's not the kind of thing that just makes living here you know unbearable.

Joe also indicated that: "It's a good atmosphere, the village is very calm, good for study".

Furthermore, David compares the ECU student village to the residential quarters he used to occupy in Canberra:

One of the things that struck me is how quiet this place is. I lived in residential quarters years ago and that place was pretty loud (laughs). A lot more social than this place is because you know, like you had a communal dining room and that kind of thing. So yeah, it could be pretty difficult to get your work done, but this is quite different. So I can't think of anything that I really don't like about it.

Tina offered a possible explanation as to why some participants felt that the student village was quiet and others felt that it was noisy: "I guess it depends on which side of housing your staying, because this whole stretch is quiet and the end where the housing office is quiet, the rest is kind of noisy".

Some participants mentioned that the main campus of ECU was quiet. David gives an example:

One of the things that surprised me a bit was the place was completely dead compared to other universities I'd been too, just a ghost town in comparison to most of them. I remember in O week there didn't seem to be very much happening, and I dropped into UWA to go to the library there and the place was like the city. There was sort of student stalls and people go around and a band

was playing. I get the impression that here people you know come and they do their business and they go.

### Privacy and Crowding

Analysis of the data revealed that both, privacy and crowding were frequently mentioned by participants. Sammie's quote illustrates this:

After a year now everybody living so tightly packed and knowing your business and living six people to such a small unit it can be stressful and it's hard to concentrate on studies when there's so much going on about, around you.

Iksan also comments:

Privacy, you put it down to almost zero. ... the over crowdedness of it sometimes gets to you yeah. Sometimes you need your peace and quiet as well. The solution is having to go out. One of my favourite spots is Fremantle. I go out and relax sometimes, have a meal outside. You have to unwind sometimes cause here, life's quite noisy (laughs).

Furthermore, Brett suggests: "Really the only place that you've got privacy is in your own bedroom but I mean, even then the walls are thin".

### Architectural and Interior Design

Participants talked about the architectural and interior design of buildings on campus. For example Iksan compares ECU to his home country:

If your coming from the third world your probably more impressed with Australia or any of the developed countries for that matter. Especially with the infrastructure because we don't have this, Kenya has about 10% of this, and so that's always going to be something we appreciate.

Participants also commented on how the size of the university facilitated the sense of community on campus. Chris remarked:

Yeah, it's easier to make more friends, especially good friends. Where as in a big university you find it will take maybe 3 months to find a really good friend. Here it just took a month and I knew exactly who my good friends and close friends were.

### Pollution and Environmental Degradation

Pollution and environmental degradation are also factors, which can adversely effect people. Participants commented on how beautiful the ECU campus is with its clean air and natural bushland. Ted compares ECU to his home country: "Yep, look at the environment, I mean it's so good. You can't find this sort of thing in Singapore, like it's all high rise buildings and smoke. Down here it's clean air, its good, and kangaroos". David comments on the aesthetics of the Joondalup campus: "The Joondalup campus is quite an attractive campus. It's sort of in the edge of the bush. I guess that's one of the things that attracted me".

### Weather and Climate

Joe talked about the environment in terms of weather and climate: "I love the weather here, the climate is like my country, it's sunny but it's not warm. Yeah and like it better here, much more than Europe. [Europe is] very cold and very windy, no sun anywhere (laughs)".

### Environmental Press

One of the things that the participants disliked was the unit inspections' initiated by management. This appeared to have a negative influence on participants, creating pressure. Ted gives an example of this: "In regards to staying in the student village, I think inspections every five weeks is still too much. During exam time, or the one week prior to exams, to be planning another inspection is torturous kind of a thing".

### Culture and Adjustment

“Culture reflects a person’s racial background, religious values, and concern for the arts, music, and scholarly interests. Culture is the unwritten social and psychological dictionary that each of us has learned and through which we interpret ourselves and others” (Lefton, 1994, p. 28). Adjustment refers to adapting to the new environment. The adjustment time period can vary from individual to individual and depends on a variety of factors (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

### Cultural Diversity

Cultural diversity can be described as differences in cultural background (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). Participants commented on the cultural diversity within the student village, ECU and the wider community. Ann states:

One thing I’ve noticed about Australia is that everybody has a very diverse background. Not everyone’s just sort of born and bred in Perth, they’ve come from all over the place, whether it’s East or up North or from different countries. In a certain sense almost everybody is a bit dispersed in this place. Which sort of adds to a sense of community, I think sort of a new way of living and I think it’s a good way.

David also comments: “I was impressed by just how diverse the population is here. It’s probably one of the most interesting things about living here”.

Participants talked about what they had gained by mixing with such a diverse population. Iksan noted: “ The diversity of people that you meet is one of the best experiences here regardless of whether their easy to be with or not it teaches you something”.

### Culture Shock

Pedersen (1995), defines "... culture shock as an internalized construct or perspective developed in reaction or response to the new or unfamiliar situation" (p. xii). Some participants' described feelings that could be construed as culture shock. Tina commented: "You can't really find your identity. Not unless your with your same people, that you know, that your from Singapore". Iksan also noted:

When people come they are quite impressed and then start feeling out of place suddenly. I had a friend of mine come with me, I think it helped a bit, but I mean your still there, your still sort of in a very new place.

### Homesickness

Homesickness has been defined as a pre-occupation with thoughts of home (Burt, 1993). Some participants described feelings of homesickness. Iksan commented:

I think the homesickness when you come. I'm starting from way in the beginning. Yeah that gets to you, especially if you've never lived [away]. This was something new to me, and of course there was food and cooking. It's not really a challenge if you've got the free time, but when it's just one of the things you have to learn in a new country, it does become a bit of a hassle.

Burt (1993) suggests that homesickness may be viewed as transitory in that it will pass with time, as individuals become more committed to the new environment. Ted described feeling homesick in the beginning, but as time passed these feelings dissipated:

Only in my first year, I felt homesick because I'd never been away from home this far. So I thought of home because I'm being Asian and then whites I mean nothing against them, but its just that I feel as if I'm distant from them. It's

because I don't know their culture. I mean I've seen movies on TV and I reckon it's a nice culture, but I think when you are there in that point of time and living amongst them it's different from what you see on TV. So what I had an image of them from watching movies, and TV, and BBC, was a bit different when staying with them. So I felt a bit distant at the beginning, but they were friendly so we sort of got like closer and closer. So in the beginning I felt distant. Yeah but now I feel better.

### Adaptation

Data revealed that participants adapted to their new environment, namely the university and the student village. Joe gives an example: "Learning to adapt to a new environment. The new classroom and everything is new (laughs). The food, how to live in here. It takes time to get used to everything".

Language was also a problem for some participants who's first language was not English. Chris revealed how he adjusted to the new language:

The language, I'm just speaking English all the time. It's not like I don't like English, it's just that if I had a choice I would not speak English. I'm having breakfast and someone comes in and it's like, "good morning", and it's English all the time and I'm going crazy, it's like Ahhhh. But yeah, it worked out fine. Yeah now English is second nature.

Some participants also spoke of how they had to adjust to Perth and the wider community. Iksan noted: "One of the other challenges was learning Perth as a place and a culture. I persevered, just wait for time, to heal things. It's a freer society than where we come from, so it's easier to adjust yeah".

Furnham and Bochner (1986) suggest that it is important for a person to adjust as quickly as possible in order to relieve stress and become effective in the new

environment. Participants commented on how the university assisted in their adjustment. Iksan stated:

For me I was late when I came here. One of them gave me a personal tour of the uni, cause I'd missed orientation. She just showed me, especially the canteen and the other areas. They just helped me open my account. I missed a week of classes so that was really tough on me cause I had to start going to classes and everything as well. They [University staff] made me settle as fast as they could, they got my enrolment in. They made it easy because they let me go to my classes as soon as possible, by the afternoon I had my student card ready.

### Floating Population

Participants also talked about having to adjust to the frequent changes in unit mates. Whilst some viewed this positively, as an opportunity to meet new people, others felt uncomfortable and wanted stability. Lee comments on his preference for stability in unit mates:

What don't I like, um I guess adapting to new people because I am experiencing new people coming into the unit. So I guess maybe I don't like the change. After every semester you get new people coming in. You have to make new friends, go through the whole cycle, meeting new people. It's in a familiar surrounding, you feel more at ease and you have to adapt again to that change.

Ted also commented on the floating population within the village:

There are exchange students, they just stay for 6 months and then the next semester they are gone. Every semester, it's sort of like you have to go through the basics again of meeting them. Because I've stayed here for a long time the social skills sets in.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore PSOC from the participants perspective, using McMillan and Chavis's (1986) theoretical framework as a guide. The research questions were (1) What is the residential students' perception of PSOC, at Edith Cowan University (ECU)? (2) What factors, within the student village, facilitate and inhibit PSOC? (3) What factors within the university setting and beyond, in the wider community, facilitate and inhibit PSOC?

Analysis revealed that participants derived a PSOC from more than one source simultaneously, namely various subgroups within the student village, the student village itself, ECU in general and, or various clubs or groups within ECU and externally in the wider community. For example one participant mentioned his involvement in a subgroup within the student village, the student village itself and a local squash club. Another participants belonged to a particular Internet group in addition to a subgroup within the student village, the student village itself and ECU in general. Other theorists (e.g., Bishop, 1984; Fisher & Sonn, in press) have suggested that individuals can derive a PSOC from more than one community at the same time.

The findings also showed that participants came from diverse ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds and had different expectations, experiences, interests, values, beliefs, thoughts and feelings. These variables interacted with one another and the numerous environment factors to facilitate and, or inhibit the students' perception of PSOC. This is consistent with the interactionists view of human behaviour as noted by McKnight and Sutton (1994). A myriad of studies have found support for the interactionist view (e.g., Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Lev-Weisel, 1998; Lounbury & DeNeui, 1996). Some theorists' place more emphasis on environmental



characteristics but none of these theorists negate the belief that individuals play a role in shaping their own behaviour (Plas & Lewis, 1996; Pretty et al, 1994; Royal & Rossi, 1996).

There were a number of factors within the student village, the university setting and the wider community, which interacted with the individual to facilitate or inhibit their PSOC toward a particular referent group. Participants perception of membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection all worked together to facilitate PSOC, whilst the perceived absence of one or more of these four elements inhibited PSOC for the participants.

In keeping with the membership element, participants described feelings of identifying and belonging to particular referent groups. They mentioned the common symbol system that they shared with others and the boundaries that defined who belonged to the particular referent group and who did not. These boundaries provided members with the emotional safety needed so that intimacy could develop and close friendships could be formed. Participants also talked about the personal investment that they had made, giving them a right to belong (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Participants noted a number of factors that facilitated their sense of identification and belonging and in turn their PSOC. Baumeister and Leary (1995) indicate that belonging is a fundamental human need and some of the strongest emotions people feel are linked to the need to belong. Some participants felt that they belonged because others accepted them. Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest that being accepted and welcomed can lead to a number of positive emotions including feelings of happiness. Other participants suggested that time was a factor, the time they had spent together and the length of residence. Pretty et al., (1994) also

found a positive relationship between length of residency and PSOC. In contrast, Davidson and Cotter (1986) did not find a significant association between length of residence and PSOC. Perhaps further research in this area may clarify this contradictory finding.

Some participants had a sense of belonging and identification toward the subgroups and the student village but not to ECU in general. For these participants the lack of time spent on campus inhibited this feeling of belonging to ECU. Other participants felt that they belonged to subgroups, the student village and ECU in general. Participants gave a variety of reasons as to why they felt that they belonged to ECU in general. For some, being asked to contribute their knowledge, skills and, or abilities on behalf of ECU facilitated their sense of belonging. For others being a member of a group or club associated with ECU enhanced their feeling of belonging. Some participants felt that they belonged to ECU because they lived on campus. This finding is partly supported by Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996), who found that living on campus, and being a member of a fraternity or sorority was positively related to PSOC.

Common symbol systems can be used to unite members and give them a sense of belonging (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Social convention was the common symbol system that participants frequently mentioned. When participants saw each other within and outside the students village, they would greet each other, wave or nod. The common recognition that they felt toward one another, and the social conventions adopted to acknowledge this, facilitated their sense of belonging to the village. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), common symbols systems can also be used to maintain boundaries.

Analysis suggests that for these participants, boundaries operated at the subgroup, student village and university level. The boundaries used to define the various subgroups within the student village were, cultural background, department or faculty, postgraduate versus undergraduate and, or common interests. What facilitated subgroup membership for these participants and in turn their PSOC, was homogeneity. This is consistent with previous research, which suggests that member homogeneity can facilitate PSOC, by promoting a sense of belonging and a common group identity (Klien & D'Aunno, 1986).

In contrast, other participants appreciated the diversity of the population within the student village, and ECU in general. These participants commented on the positive aspects of diversity and the friendships that they had formed from all over the world. The findings suggest that for some participants, diversity facilitated rather than inhibited their PSOC. Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) also found that member homogeneity was not related to PSOC for the university students that they sampled.

Whilst boundaries can facilitate PSOC for members, these same boundaries can inhibit PSOC for non-members (McMillan & Chavis 1986). One participant commented on being excluded from a group of class members, and the alienation that she experienced. Previous research suggests that being rejected or excluded is associated with feelings of grief, anxiety, depression and a number of other negative emotions (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Brodsky (1996) found that individuals tend to withdraw from groups that they perceive as negative.

Despite the negative way in which boundaries can be used, McMillan and Chavis (1986) indicate that boundaries can facilitate the emotional safety necessary for group intimacy. Results showed that the residential students felt safe enough to confide in one another. The participants commented on the support that they

received and offered to other members of the student village. Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that individuals have a tendency to spend a lot of time and energy cultivating supportive relationships. Participants also talked about the closeness that they felt toward other residential students, and the many friendships they had formed. Hartup and Stevens (1997) indicate that most people build their lives around friends and family. Previous research also suggests that having good friends can act as a buffer against everyday stress (Hartup & Stevens, 1997). All these variables mentioned by the participants facilitated PSOC within the subgroups, the student village and ECU in general.

In order to facilitate a PSOC toward a particular referent group individuals must invest something of themselves (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). To varying degrees participants invested time, money, and, or energy into the various subgroups within the student village, the student village itself, ECU in general and the various clubs and groups that they belonged to. Brodsky et al., (1999) also found a positive relationship between community involvement and PSOC.

Data also revealed that participants had made a personal investment into the friendships that they had formed with other group members. Participants spent a lot of time and energy cultivating, and maintaining mutually supportive social relationships. Participants mentioned how the frequent contact that they had with one another facilitated friendship, and in turn their PSOC. Sarason (1974) highlights the importance of frequent contact with friends in order to facilitate PSOC.

Participants commented on the personal investment that others had made and how this facilitated their PSOC within particular subgroups, the student village and ECU in general. Participants mentioned how friendly everyone was, and the way residential students rallied around to help each other out in times of need.

Participants also talked about the tangible assistance that they and others had received and how this added to the PSOC. Previous research (e.g., Petty et al., 1994; Petty et al., 1996) also found a positive relationship between tangible assistance and school PSOC.

Whilst most of the participants talked about how friendly and helpful people were, some suggested that not everyone in the student village was like this. Participants reported that some residential students were not community minded, keeping to themselves and not investing time or energy into the student village. Rather than facilitating PSOC, this lack of involvement acts as an inhibitor (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Another factor, which was reflected in the findings, and facilitates PSOC, was influence. McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggest that influence is a bi-directional construct, with members perceiving that they matter and make a difference to the group, and the group itself mattering to its members. The data showed that this bi-directional influence operated at a number of levels namely, the unit, the subgroup, the student village and the university level.

At the unit level, participants mentioned how they adjusted to living with five other people, from various cultural backgrounds. They talked about tolerance, compromises and conflict resolution, all of which facilitated their PSOC. Some participants had difficulty resolving conflicts with the people they shared with and this inhibited their PSOC. Barthelemy and Fine (1995) also found that conflict was negatively associated with social adjustment for both males and females. Furthermore, Barthelemy and Fine (1995) found that for females, conflict was negatively related to full scale college adjustment, academic adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment and institutional attachment.

Participants also talked about the formal structures in place to encourage group cohesion. For example, each unit nominates one of their members to be a unit representative. The household has regular meetings where members are given the opportunity to have their say and bring up any relevant issues. Some of these issues are dealt with collectively in the household whilst others are relayed to management via the unit representatives. This formal structure facilitates PSOC by honouring members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986) and promoting group cohesion. Previous research (e.g., Barthelmy & Fine, 1995) also highlights the importance of group cohesion in relation to full scale college adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, academic adjustment and institutional attachment.

At the subgroup, student village and university levels, students also mentioned this bi-directional influence. Some participants talked about the social environment created by subgroup members and how they allowed this to distract them from their studies. Others suggested that the student village was congenial to study because it was a controlled environment, which eliminated outside distractions.

Data also revealed that the Tenants Association is concerned with positively influencing the PSOC for students living on campus. In an attempt to promote a PSOC for residential students, the Tenants Association organises a variety of social events including, cultural nights, dinners, parties, sports events, day trips and weekends away. Participants commented on how the Tenants Association makes an effort to let everyone know about these events and how this makes them feel as though they belong to the student village. Participants also talked about how committed the Tenants Association are to creating a PSOC for students living in the village.

The International Student Council (ISC) also facilitates PSOC for international students within the village and at ECU. International students talked about how a friendly member of ISC met with them at the airport when they arrived, took them shopping, gave them a tour of the university and offered other tangible assistance as required. The ISC also offers ongoing support by advocating on behalf of students. All these factors facilitate adjustment and PSOC, for the international student. Pretty et al., (1994) also found that tangible assistance and support were positively related to PSOC in an educational setting.

Participants also commented on the wider community and its positive influence. One participant was quite impressed with how friendly and hospitable people in Perth were. The attitude of community members had a positive influence, making him feel welcome and this in turn facilitated his PSOC. Baumeister and Leary (1995) also suggest that being welcomed is likely to have a positive effect on the individuals' emotions. Furthermore, the participant indicated a preference for Perth over other places that he had been to. Churchman and Mitrani, (1997) also found a positive relationship between a preference for a place and an attachment to that place.

The third element of the framework, which facilitates PSOC, is integration and fulfilment of needs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Participants commented on how their needs were being met through their membership to subgroups, the student village and, or ECU in general. Klien and D'Aunno, (1986) also found that if an institution is meeting the individuals needs, through the provision of services, then a bond between the individual and the institution is likely to develop.

Through membership to the various groups, participants' social needs were met and they received tangible assistance, and emotional support. Participants also

mentioned that living on campus was convenient because of its close proximity to tutorials and lectures, facilities and resources. Some participants said that living on campus was less stressful because they did not have to worry about finding their way around in a strange country or dealing with public transport. A few participants mentioned that their financial needs were being met by living on campus, they liked the idea of one flat fee to cover everything. In contrast, another participant felt that student housing was too expensive and therefore the price in this instance, was an inhibitor.

Students also mentioned the safety needs that were being met by living on campus and attending ECU. Participants said that the security services provided by ECU were excellent and they felt safe on campus. Some participants talked about how their educational needs were being met through attending ECU. The geographic location was also mentioned, as Perth is not too far from some participants' home country. Lev-Wiesel (1998) found that if individuals perceive that the environment is meeting their needs then they are more likely to experience feeling of well being. Previous research (e.g., Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Pretty et al., 1996) also suggests that there is a positive relationship between subjective well being and PSOC.

Shared emotional connection, the fourth element described by McMillan and Chavis (1986) for facilitating PSOC, was also reflected in the results. Participants perceived a shared emotional connection with the various subgroups, the student village and, or ECU in general. Participants commented on the frequent, positive contact they had with others, the shared events and the importance of these events, the personal investment that they had made, the ways problems were resolved, and the bond they felt toward others, the subgroup, the student village and ECU in general. According to McMillan and Chavis (1986) all these variables contribute to



the shared emotional connection that members feel toward one another and the various groups that they belong to.

During analysis, two additional primary themes (environment; culture and adjustment) and a number of categories emerged. These themes and the various categories had an impact on the development of PSOC for participants. Under the theme of environment the following categories were clustered, noise, privacy and crowding, architectural and interior design, pollution and environmental degradation, weather and climate, and environmental press. Under the theme of culture and adjustment a number of categories were also clustered, namely; cultural diversity, culture shock, homesickness, adaptation, and floating population.

Participants frequently commented on the noise levels in the student village. Some participants felt that it was noisy, whilst others indicated that it was quiet. One participant said that one side of housing was noisy and the other was quiet. This is one possible explanation for the contradictory findings. Another possible explanation is that some participants may have previously lived in very quiet environments and others may have resided in areas or homes that were very noisy. Therefore, these past experience are likely to influence the participants' perception of their present environment. Irrespective of whether they perceived it to be noisy or quiet, if the person was comfortable with the noise level, this facilitated their PSOC, but if not this inhibited their PSOC.

Personal preferences also played a role in relation to privacy and crowding. Some participants complained about the housing environment, suggesting that there was no privacy and that the units were crowded. They viewed this situation as stressful and this inhibited their PSOC. One participant said that he coped with this stressful situation by taking time out, and occasionally going to Fremantle for a

meal. Brodsky et al., (1999) also found that crowding was negatively related to PSOC. However, other participants commented upon the advantages of communal living, indicating that they were never lonely. Living in such close quarters facilitated their PSOC. Previous researchers also suggest that developing a PSOC relieves feelings of loneliness (Sarason, 1974; Pretty et al., 1994).

Participants talked about the architectural design of the buildings within the student village, indicating that having balconies that faced one another facilitated their PSOC. This is consistent with Plas and Lewis (1996) who found a relationship between PSOC and environmental variables such as town design and architecture. The authors suggest that PSOC can be facilitated through community engineering and town planning.

ECU is perceived by participants to be a small university. Participants commented on how intimate the student village and the university was, and how this facilitated their PSOC. These findings support the research undertaken by Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) who found an inverse relationship between PSOC and the size of a university.

One participant commented on how impressed he was with the infrastructure of ECU and the wider community, in comparison to his home country of Kenya. Other participants discussed the aesthetics of the Joondalup campus. They talked about how beautiful the campus is, with its natural bushland, clean air, and wild life. Another participant mentioned that he liked the weather and climate in Perth, and that it was similar to his home country. Being pleased with their environment facilitated PSOC for all these participants.

One of the things that the participants disliked was the frequent unit inspections. This created stress for the participants and inhibited their PSOC. This is consistent

with Pretty (1990) who found that university students' PSOC was not only related to their interactions with one another, but also to what the university expected of them. Pretty (1990) suggests that further research needs to be conducted in order to understand more about the environmental press within the university setting and its effect on PSOC.

Cornille and Brotherton (1993) indicate that relocating to a new country can be quite stressful. In response to exposure to an unfamiliar environment, the individual may experience culture shock (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Pederson, 1995). Many of the participants from overseas countries described feelings that were consistent with the culture shock literature. For example, one participant said she could not find her identity without being around her own people. Another described feeling quite good in the beginning but later feeling out of place and quite stressed in response to his new surroundings. Furnham and Bochner (1986) and Bochner (1986), indicate that the effects of culture shock are relieved once the individual has adjusted to their new environment and developed a PSOC.

The majority of participants said that they had settled in, adjusting to their new environment with time. There were many factors, which facilitated the adjustment process and enhanced the PSOC for these participants. The friendliness of the staff and students, the tangible assistance that participants received, the intimacy of the student village and ECU, being accepted by others, and making friends all contributed to the process. Participants also said that learning new living skills (e.g., cooking), learning about the Australian culture, the culture of ECU and the student village, and becoming more familiar with the English language and their physical surroundings all facilitated adjustment and PSOC. Furnham and Bochner (1986) support this finding as they suggest that cultural learning is a key to sojourner

adjustment. Furthermore, Rosenthal and Cichello, (1986) found a positive relationship between cultural learning and psychosocial adjustment.

One participant commented on the way that university staff assisted in the adjustment process. This participant had arrived one week into the semester and had missed orientation. Schwitzer et al., (1991) found that orientation seminars were beneficial, providing new university students with support, increasing their knowledge of the university, and assisting them in the adjustment process. To make up for missing orientation, a university staff member took this participant on a personal tour of the university. They also assisted him to open a bank account, and expediently organised his enrolment and student card. The students' residential accommodation was also ready upon arrival as promised. All this assistance facilitated the adjustment process and the participants PSOC.

The adjustment process in a new environment can also include having to overcome feelings of homesickness. Some participants described episodic feelings of homesickness, which passed as they adjusted to their new environment and developed a PSOC. This is consistent with Burt (1993) who found that homesickness is episodic and transitory, passing with time once the individual is committed to their new environment.

The student village has a floating population, with students moving in and out each semester. Participants commented on how sad it was for them to say goodbye as friends moved away. They also talked about having to adjust to the frequent changes in unit mates, and to the new people in the student village. Whilst some viewed this positively, as an opportunity to meet new people, others felt uncomfortable and wanted stability. Depending on the participants' preference, this either facilitated or inhibited their PSOC.

The research findings from this study showed that participants' perception of PSOC, consisted of the four elements, membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs, and shared emotional connection, and is consistent with the theoretical PSOC framework of McMillan and Chavis (1986). However, no conclusions can be drawn about the strength of residential students' PSOC within subgroups, the village and, or ECU in general. Further research, adopting a quantitative approach may be of some benefit in determining the magnitude.

Participants came from diverse ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds and had different expectations, experiences, interests, values, beliefs, thoughts and feelings. The participants development of PSOC, was mediated through their personal history, interaction with one another, the student village, ECU, the wider community, environmental factors, and culture and adjustment factors. This supports the interactionist theory and previous research findings (e.g., Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Lev-Weisel, 1998; Lounbury & DeNeui, 1996) that environmental characteristics play a role in shaping individual behaviour. Furthermore, depending on how the participants perceived their environment as either positive or negative, facilitated or inhibited their PSOC.

The findings emphasise the importance of PSOC to the participants' adjustment and how this can assist in their psychological and physical health. The research also highlights the role that the university plays in facilitating this process, and how they can create a positive PSOC, which is likely to attract and retain students through providing orientation, continuity, recognition, security, acceptance, educational flexibility and resources, clubs, outings, social events, and personal support.

This study was designed in consideration of the time constraints and available resources. Whilst the results from this small qualitative study can not be generalised

to the broader university residential community, these findings do offer a thorough description of the participants perception of PSOC, and provide future directions for theory and research.

A longitudinal study could be undertaken in the future to explore the relationship between PSOC, adjustment, student retention, and academic performance. Future research could also focus upon the university demands and other social and physical environmental variables and the impact they have on the students PSOC. By understanding more about PSOC within the university setting we can create a more satisfying person-environment interactions, nurture the physical and psychological health of students, and play a part in fostering a positive PSOC for society.

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## Appendix A: Introductory Letter

Colleen Dalton  
23 Gynea Court  
ARMADALE WA 6112

Dear Perspective Participant,

My name is Colleen Dalton and I am currently undertaking an Honours Degree in Psychology at Edith Cowan University (ECU). I would like to invite you to participate in a research project that I am conducting as part of the course requirements. Edith Cowan University School of Psychology Ethics Committee has approved the study for the conduct of ethical research.

I am interested in residential students' perceptions of community at ECU. In particular, I would like to explore the factors that facilitate and those that inhibit the development of community within the university environment. Whilst some research has been conducted overseas in this area, not has been done within the Australian context.

If you wish to be part of this study, it will involve you participating in an interview with the researcher. This will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. We will provide all the materials needed for the study.

All information provided by you, will be strictly confidential and pseudonyms will be used in the write up of the report, to protect your identity. You can refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. When the study is completed, a report will be available to you at the school.

If you have any queries whatsoever regarding the project, please feel free to contact me on 9498 0751 or my principal supervisor, Dr. Christopher Sonn of the Psychology Department, Edith Cowan University, Joondalup campus on (08) 9400 5105. If you wish to participate in this study, please complete and return the consent form to my self as soon as practicable.

Yours Sincerely,

Colleen Dalton

## Appendix B: Consent Form

## EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY ETHICS CONSENT FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_,

hereby consent to participate in the following research study, which has been approved by the Committee for the Conduct of Ethical Research at Edith Cowan University.

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Christopher Sonn.

Name of Student Researcher: Colleen Dalton.

Title of Research Study: The Factors That Influence Psychological Sense of Community For students Living on Campus at Edith Cowan University.

I acknowledge that:

1. The research program in which I have been asked to participate has been explained fully to me and any matters on which I have sought information have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I consent to having the interview audio taped.
3. Data obtained from me will given a pseudonym and stored separately from this consent form.
4. I understand that the results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in scientific and academic journals.
5. I can refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason, in which case my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information obtained from it will not be used.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix C: Demographic Form

Time: \_\_\_\_\_,

Location: \_\_\_\_\_,

Name: \_\_\_\_\_,

Gender: M / F

Age: \_\_\_\_\_,

Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_,

English 1st Language: Y / N ,

Relocated from: \_\_\_\_\_,

Length of Residence: \_\_\_\_\_,

How long do you intend to live in the student village: \_\_\_\_\_,

Course: \_\_\_\_\_,

Year level: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Interview Schedule

1. Why did you decide to come to ECU?
2. What made you choose to live on campus?
3. What were some of your impressions upon arriving at ECU?
4. How have these impressions changed?
5. What does being a residential student at ECU mean to you?
6. What do you like most about living on campus?
7. What don't you like about living on campus?
8. Tell me about some of the positive experiences you've had here?
9. Tell me about some of the challenges you've faced? *How have you overcome these?*
10. What makes you feel like you are part of the student village?
11. What makes you feel like you are part of ECU?
12. Could you describe anything, which makes you feel that you don't belong here at ECU?
13. How freely do you feel you can express your values and opinions here at ECU?
14. Can you tell me about a time when you had to make a compromise whilst living at ECU?
15. Can you tell me about your interactions with neighbours here at the student village?
16. Are you a member of any clubs / groups/ organisations? *If so, can you tell me a bit about these? What types of things do you do there?*
17. How would you describe the social atmosphere in the student village? *What about on campus in general?*
18. Can you tell me a little about the friendships you have formed at ECU? Can you confide in these friends?
19. How would you describe the sense of community here? (*student village/campus*)
20. Would you recommend ECU and living on campus to others?
21. Is there anything you would like to add or recommend?