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11-1-2018

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### MSU Digital Commons Citation

Lardier, David T.; Reid, Robert; and Garcia-Reid, Pauline, "Validation of the Brief Sense of Community Scale Among Youth of Color from An Underserved Urban Community" (2018). *Department of Family Science and Human Development Scholarship and Creative Works*. 198.  
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**ARTICLE**

# Validation of the Brief Sense of Community Scale among youth of color from an underserved urban community

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**Funding information**

This research received funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP), Grant No. SP-15104.

**Abstract**

Neighborhood sense of community (SOC) is a key construct in the community psychology literature. While the research on neighborhood SOC has progressed significantly, there is a need to further validate the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) among youth. A critical area of scholarship, therefore, is to examine the factor structure of the BSCS among a cohort of adolescents, particularly from the United States. This study tested the factor structure of the BSCS among a sample of urban youth of color ( $N = 383$ ) using SPSS AMOS, a structural equation modeling software. After testing the factor structure, we examined the relationships between each of the BSCS subscales and conceptually related variables (e.g., psychological empowerment, relational power, and school importance). Results from this study confirm the first- and second-order factor structure of the BSCS among youth. BSCS and its underlying subscales were both correlated with one another and correlated with the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment, relational power, and school importance. Our findings have critical implications for the field of community psychology and the development and use of the BSCS among adolescents.

Neighborhood sense of community (SOC) represents a key construct in the community psychology literature. Neighborhood SOC is theorized as both a construct and a value that “captures the complex and subtle social processes, which lead to cohesive and supportive communities” (Cantillon, Davidson, & Schweitzer 2003, p. 324). Over the past two decades, neighborhood SOC has been theorized and examined both quantitatively and qualitatively in a variety of social spheres such as urban neighborhoods (Garcia-Reid, Hamme Peterson, Reid, & Peterson, 2013; Lardier, 2018; Lardier, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2018; Lardier, MacDonnell, Barrios, Garcia-Reid, & Reid, 2017; Peterson, Speer, & Peterson, 2011), supportive housing with emancipated foster care young adults (Forenza & Lardier, 2017b), supportive housing with mentally ill adults (Forenza & Lardier, 2017a), organizational community spaces (Nowell & Boyd, 2014; Speer, Peterson, Armstead, & Allen, 2012), and faith-based institutions (Mammana-Lupo, Todd, & Houston, 2014) as well as among youth (Albanesi, Cicognani, & Zani, 2007; Kenyon & Carter, 2011; Zeldin, 2002). Hence, the scope and

breadth of research surrounding this construct illustrates the critical role it plays in both community-based research and practice.

Neighborhood SOC is based in concepts of collective efficacy and neighboring (i.e., sharing neighbors and mutual assistance; Perkins & Long, 2002) and has been broadly defined as perceived feelings of belongingness and a shared belief that community members will meet one another's needs through these relationships (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Scholars agree that neighborhood SOC not only has a positive influence on communities and individuals but also shapes how people participate within and among the collective toward broader social change (Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, & Wandersman, 1986; Elfassi, Braun-Lewensohn, Krumer-Nevo, & Sagy, 2016; Long & Perkins, 2003; Mannarini, Rochira, & Talò, 2014; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008; Sarason, 1974). McMillan and Chavis (1986) defined the following four dimensions to neighborhood SOC:

- Membership—feeling of belongingness or relatedness to the organization or community.
- Influence—the feeling of making a difference in the group and mattering as a member.
- Needs fulfillment—the perception that members will meet one another's needs, and resources will be shared through these relationships.
- Emotional connection—a shared emotional connection or experience, through history or common places.

*Membership* more broadly emphasizes a sense of belonging to a group based on shared history, sense of safety, and personal commitment to the community. *Influence* considers who individuals make decisions within and among the collective and how the influence of the larger group on one's decision making. *Needs fulfillment* is the perception that one's community will meet their needs, which suggests that social credentials and resources are transformed between individuals and groups to both meet needs and fulfill the needs of the broader collective (Elfassi et al., 2016; Nowell & Boyd, 2014). Last, *shared emotional connection* is based on those common experiences shared among individuals and the collective and how these experiences strengthen social ties among members (Mannarini et al., 2014). As McMillan and Chavis (1986) note, these constructs work together to create and maintain overall neighborhood SOC.

Several measures have been derived from McMillan and Chavis' (1986) model and adapted to assess SOC (e.g., Neighborhood Youth Inventory; Chipuer et al., 1999); however, the Sense of Community Index (SCI), developed by Chavis et al. (1986) to empirically test the SOC model, has had the greatest usage. The SCI has been used as a brief assessment to test the four dimensions of SOC (i.e., membership, needs fulfillment, influence, and emotional connection) and the total SOC construct. Despite such work, researchers have long questioned its validity and its multidimensional nature (Chipuer et al., 1999; Jason, Stevens, & Ram, 2015; Long & Perkins, 2003; Peterson et al., 2008; Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008).

Several studies have assessed the psychometric properties of the SCI. For instance, Chipuer and Pretty (1999) examined the factor structure of the SCI and found minimal support for the four-factor dimensionality of the SCI and recommended use as a single-factor item. Similarly, Long and Perkins (2003) applied confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test both the one-factor and the hypothesized four-factor model of the SCI. Findings from this study led to these authors recommending the abandonment of the SCI and moving toward a Brief Sense of Community Index (BSCI)—that is, an eight-item scale that combined five original SCI items with three other items that were not formally part of the scale (Long & Perkins, 2003). However, as Obst and White (2004) noted, minimal theoretical justification was provided for the inclusion of additional items and the keeping of the five original items. And while Obst and White (2004) preserved the four-factor structure, they did so by shifting items to different subscales without sufficient theoretical or conceptual justification and simply relying on indices of model fit to “better fit” their model. Hence, this work did not provide empirical support for their reassigned items putting into question the validity and reliability of findings.

Following this work, Proescholdbell, Roosa, and Nemeroff (2006) argued that SOC, measured through the SCI, was a multidimensional construct, despite having been tested previously using only unidimensional instruments. Among a sample of gay and bisexual men and using both exploratory factor analysis and CFA, these authors found that a three-factor model for SOC fit their data, including one factor for influence, another for emotional connection, and a third that combined needs fulfillment and membership. While the sample for this study and the attributed findings are unique and

deserve more attention, these authors, similar to their predecessors (e.g., Long & Perkins, 2003; Obst & White, 2004), provided little in the way of theoretical justification for their findings.

More recent scholarship has continued to examine and validate the factor structure of the three-factor SOC solution presented by Long and Perkins (2003). For instance, Stevens, Jason, and Ferrari (2011) tested the factor structure of the SCI and found some preliminary evidence for the three-factor SOC model; however, concerns were present with regard to cross-loadings between factors, signifying measurement issues. Mannarini, Rochira, and Talò (2012) also tested the three-factor structure and, similar to previous studies, illustrated low reliability of the scale and its partial overlap with other constructs such as group identification.

In addition, Coffman and BeLue (2009) examined whether the SCI differed among racial groups (i.e., White non-Hispanic and Black adults). While the study goals were interesting, in an attempt to tease apart differences in racial groups' experiences of SOC, these authors found that the SCI was invariant across White non-Hispanic and Black participants and that SOC loaded onto only a single-factor solution. Hence, such limitations and varying outcomes have motivated scholars to improve upon the SCI, the measurement of SOC, and its context-dependent nature (Mannarini et al., 2014). Measures more recently developed and examined are as follows: Multidimensional Territorial Sense of Community Scale (Prezza, Giuseppina Pacilli, Barbaranelli, & Zampatti, 2009); Italian Sense of Community Scale (Tartaglia, 2006); and Psychological Sense of Community Scale (Jason et al., 2015); however, the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) can be identified as the most widely used (Peterson et al., 2008).

Peterson et al. (2008) focused on developing and validating the brief measure for SOC, which included new items that were designed to be consistent with McMillan and Chavis' (1986) original theoretical model. The BSCS is a shortened eight-item multidimensional scale that corresponds with the original theoretical conjectures of McMillan and Chavis (1986). Peterson et al. (2008) through CFA and among a sample of Midwestern adults tested the factor structure and multidimensionality of the neighborhood SOC construct. These authors found support for both the four-factor structure of the BSCS and, importantly, the second-order structure, therefore displaying evidence of the measure underlying a single SOC construct. The overall BSCS also was found to be correlated with community participation, psychological empowerment (PE; i.e., examined in this study through sociopolitical control, and the Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth [SPCS-Y]), mental health, and depression.

More recently, the BSCS factor structure has been tested cross-culturally among the German Military (Wombacher, Tagg, Bürgi, & MacBryde, 2010); among adults from Malaga, Spain (Hombrados-Mendieta, Gomez-Jacinto, Dominguez-Fuentes, & Garcia-Leiva, 2013); and in a musical community in Puerto Rico (Rivera-Segarra, Rivera-Medina, & Varas-Diaz, 2016). Also, studies have deductively tested SOC among college and university housing students (Townley, Kloos, Green, & Franco, 2011) and among an Iranian Community Council in Tehran (Barati, Samah, & Ahmad, 2012) to name a few. These investigations further confirmed the factor structure of the BSCS among the sampled groups of adults and, importantly, provided validity and reliability for its cross-cultural use. Although such scholarship has been critical in the development and validation of the BSCS, as well as the examination of SOC among diverse social groups and populations, greater understanding is needed on the performance of the BSCS factor structure among adolescents (Lardier, 2018; Lardier et al., 2018).

To date, the factor structure of the BSCS has been tested largely among adults. There is an increasing need, therefore, to test the BSCS among adolescents (Lardier, 2018; Lardier et al., 2018; Talo, Mannarini, & Rochira, 2014). The presence of such limited scholarship is problematic because it assumes that SOC is a uniform construct across groups and social contexts (Mammana-Lupo et al., 2014). Moreover, the ways in which SOC is theorized to promote social participation and empowerment is a critically important area to understand, particularly today in the United States, where youth are engaging in social activism and change at higher rates than in past decades (Forenza, Rogers, & Lardier, 2017). Youth who have opportunities to engage in roles traditionally reserved and maintained by and for adults within the community, or in organizations, are likely to develop a greater SOC or organizational belongingness, as well as a perceived sense of agency and empowerment (Zeldin, Krauss, Kim, Collura, & Abdullah, 2016). For instance, Whitlock (2007) found that youth who had opportunities to exercise influence, engage in social change, and perceive that they had power in decision making had a greater sense of community connectedness.

Similarly, in a sample of Malaysian youth, Zeldin et al. (2016) found that while youth voice and supportive adult relationships were not directly related to community connectedness, program engagement and program safety mediated the path to community connection, policy control, and school attachment. Elsewhere, investigations have also connected SOC with buffering the negative effects of community violence, disorganization, and substance use (e.g., Garcia-Reid et al., 2013; Lardier et al., 2017), predicting school importance (Garcia-Reid et al., 2013) and furthering the empirical connection between community participation, neighborhood SOC, ethnic identity, and PE (e.g., Lardier, 2018; Lardier et al., 2018). Yet, while there is both theoretical and empirical evidence supporting the role neighborhood SOC has in adolescent development and promoting well-being, there is still a need to validate the BSCS among adolescents in the United States. As Forenza and Lardier (2017a) note, the ways in which SOC manifests “will vary from culture to culture, and context to context” (p. 34); hence, it is critical to understand and validate the factor structure of the BSCS among youth.

## 1 | PRESENT STUDY

The research on neighborhood SOC has progressed significantly since McMillan and Chavis' (1986) original theoretical conjectures. As stated by Lardier (2018), the BSCS has not been validated among youth and, more specifically, urban youth of color. Both Peterson et al. (2008) and Long and Perkins (2003) argued that a brief, validated measure of SOC is needed to provide to diverse and varying community contexts. And as Chiessi et al. (2010) highlight, the BSCS must be further validated among adolescents in different geographic communities. Hence, a critical area for scholarship is to test the factor structure of the BSCS among a cohort of adolescents, particularly from the United States.

In the current study, we tested the BSCS, which was originally validated and supported by Peterson et al. (2008), among a sample of underresourced urban youth of color. The first-order and second-order factor structure of the BSCS were evaluated using CFA. Following this, we further examined the entire BSCS and each of the five SOC subscales with theoretically related variables (e.g., PE, relational power, and school importance). We expected to find, based upon previous investigations, that SOC would be positively related to PE (Kenyon & Carter, 2011; Lardier, 2018; Peterson & Reid, 2003; Peterson et al., 2008; Speer et al., 2012), relational power (Christens, Collura, & Tahir, 2013), and school importance (Garcia-Reid et al., 2013). The influence of neighborhood SOC in community psychology research and the practical importance it has had in prevention–intervention programming and other empowering youth-based organizations support the need for further research to address the methodological and theoretical concerns of the BSCS among youth in the United States.

## 2 | METHOD

### 2.1 | Sample and Design

Data were collected in 2013 from a northeastern U.S. urban school district. These data were gathered as part of a Minority AIDS Initiative grant program that examined youth empowerment in relation to prevention–intervention methods against substance abuse and contracting and transmitting HIV/AIDS. These data helped inform environmental strategies and prevention–intervention protocols within the target community.

A convenience sample ( $N = 383$ ) of students were recruited through their high school physical education and health classes in grades 9 through 12, from the largest high school in the focal city. In compliance with the university's institutional review board and state laws requiring active parental consent, those students who returned parental consent and student assent forms were eligible to complete the questionnaire over a 1-hour time period (36.5% response rate). While this may be a lower overall response rate for school-based surveying, this response rate must be considered in relation to laws from the focal state, which require active parental consent. Studies indicate that active parental consent may in fact influence consent procedures and reduce the overall response rate of students (Nulty, 2008).

**TABLE 1** Correlation matrix and descriptive statistics for main study variables ( $N = 383$ )

|                         | 1          | 2           | 3           | 4           | 5           | 6          | 7          | 8            |
|-------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| 1. Overall BSCS         | –          | .70**       | .83**       | .75**       | .76**       | .41**      | .15**      | .15**        |
| 2. Needs fulfillment    |            | –           | .47**       | .37**       | .28**       | .27**      | .15**      | .10*         |
| 3. Group membership     |            |             | –           | .46**       | .56**       | .32**      | .19**      | .15**        |
| 4. Influence            |            |             |             | –           | .43**       | .33**      | .12*       | .11*         |
| 5. Emotional connection |            |             |             |             | –           | .33**      | .01        | .09          |
| 6. PE (SPCS)            |            |             |             |             |             | –          | .23**      | .10*         |
| 7. Relational power     |            |             |             |             |             |            | –          | .08          |
| 8. School importance    |            |             |             |             |             |            |            | –            |
| Mean (SD)               | 3.08 (.80) | 3.11 (1.04) | 3.13 (1.08) | 2.99 (1.04) | 3.07 (1.08) | 3.30 (.62) | 3.38 (.79) | 26.55 (4.13) |
| Cronbach's $\alpha$     | .85        | .70         | .80         | .71         | .70         | .89        | .76        | .75          |

Note. BSCS = Brief Sense of Community Scale; PE = psychological empowerment; SPCS = Sociopolitical Control Scale.  
\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

Students ranged from grades 9 through 12, with 29.2% in 9th grade, 45.7% in 10th grade, 6% in 11th grade, and 19.1% in 12th grade. The majority of students identified as Hispanic/Latina(o) (75%), with the next largest demographic group identifying as Black/African American (24.3%). A nearly equal proportion of students identified as male (46.9%) and female (53.1%), with 50.6% ( $n = 193$ ) between 13 and 15 years of age and 49.4% ( $n = 190$ ) between 16 and 18 years of age. The majority of youth received free or reduced lunch (75%), an indicator for low socioeconomic status.

## 2.2 | Measurement

As part of a Minority AIDS Initiative grant, the study administered the National Minority SA (Substance Abuse)/HIV Prevention Initiative Cohort 7 Youth Questionnaire. This outcomes-based measure was designed by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention to help prevention initiatives learn about how to keep youth safe from drugs, alcohol, and becoming infected with HIV. Federal grantees were required to administer this survey to program participants. In addition to this survey, questions were added that assessed students' perceived psychological empowerment, measured through the SPCS-Y (Christens, Krauss, & Zeldin, 2016; Lardier, Reid, & Garcia-Reid, 2018; Peterson, Gilmore Powell, Hamme Peterson, & Reid, 2017; Peterson, Peterson, Agre, Christens, & Morton, 2011), neighborhood SOC (McMillan, 1996; Peterson et al., 2008), relational power (i.e., a component of cognitive empowerment; Peterson, Hamme Peterson, & Speer, 2002), and community participation (Speer & Peterson, 2000). See Table 1 for descriptive statistics and alpha level reliabilities.

### 2.2.1 | Neighborhood SOC

Neighborhood SOC was measured using eight items (sample item: "I feel like a member of this neighborhood") from the BSCS, which was based on the theoretical conjectures of McMillan and Chavis (1986) and the empirical work of Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008. The BSCS was designed to assess four dimensions of SOC: needs fulfillment (NF), group membership (MB), influence (IN), and emotional connection (EC). Youth participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

Through CFA, Peterson et al. (2008) illustrated and confirmed the BSCS (overall scale: Cronbach's  $\alpha = .92$ , mean [ $M$ ] = 3.81, standard deviation [ $SD$ ] = .79) as a four-factor structure that examined NF (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ,  $M = 3.65$ ,  $SD = .98$ ), MB (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$ ,  $M = 4.18$ ,  $SD = .92$ ), IN (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .77$ ,  $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = .87$ ), and EC (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ,  $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = .89$ ). For the current study, Cronbach's alpha for the overall BSCS was .85 ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = .80$ ). Alphas for each of the subscales were as follows: .70 for NF ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ); .80 for MB ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ); .71 IN ( $M = 2.99$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ); and .70 for EC ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ). The BSCS items used in this study are shown in the Appendix.

### 2.2.2 | Sociopolitical control

The intrapersonal component of PE was examined through sociopolitical control using the SPCS-Y (Christens et al., 2016; Lardier et al., 2018; Peterson, Peterson, Agre, Christens, & Morton 2011; Peterson et al., 2017; Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991). Through CFA, Peterson, Peterson, Agre, Christens, & Morton (2011) illustrated and confirmed the 17-item version of the SPCS-Y (overall scale: Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ) as a two-factor measure that examined leadership competence (sample items: "I am a leader in groups" and "I can usually organize people to get things done"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$ ) and policy control (sample items: "I have attended a public meeting to push for a policy change" and "I have participated in a protest march or rally"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ ).

More recently, Lardier et al. (2018) assessed and validated an abbreviated eight-item version of the SPCS-Y based on previous research conducted on this scale (e.g., Christens et al., 2016; Peterson et al., 2017). Lardier et al. (2018) confirmed the abbreviated eight-item version of the SPCS-Y (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ ;  $M = 3.26$ ;  $SD = .66$ ) also as a two-factor measure that examined leadership competence (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .70$ ) and policy control (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .69$ ). For the current study, the original eight-item measure of leadership competence (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .82$ ;  $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = .71$ ) and the nine-item measure for policy control (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81$ ;  $M = 3.20$ ,  $SD = .69$ ) were used and combined (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ;  $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = .62$ ). Participants responded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

### 2.2.3 | Relational power

Relational power was measured using a subscale of the interactional empowerment or Cognitive Empowerment Scale, developed by Speer and Peterson (2000). Relational power is based on the strength of interpersonal relationships to determine power among the collective, or collective social power (Speer & Peterson, 2000; Uchelen, 2000). Furthermore, this construct concerns the critical nature of social power, and that empowerment is manifested through collective or relational empowerment experiences and networks (Christens, 2012). The Power through Relationships Scale (i.e., relational power) comprises four-items (sample item: "Power lies in the relationships between people") that are measured on a 5-point Likert type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). An average of these four items were calculated to create one relational power measure (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .76$ ;  $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = .79$ ).

### 2.2.4 | School importance

School importance was assessed using a seven-item measure that asked students to first self-report their grades, providing choices that ranged from 1 (*mostly Fs*) to 5 (*mostly As*). Participants then rated six additional questions that assessed perceived school importance (sample item: "How important do you think things you are learning in school are going to be for your later life?"), using a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*very important*). Responses were summed (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .75$ ) to reflect higher composite scores of school importance ( $M = 26.55$ ;  $SD = 4.13$ ).

## 2.3 | Analytic Approach

Before main analyses, missing data were examined. Little's missing completely at random (MCAR) test was used to assess the level and type of missingness (Little & Rubin, 2014). Little's MCAR test revealed that the Chi-square result was significant ( $\chi^2 = [df = 23] 43.23$ ,  $p = .006$ ), and that these data most likely were not MCAR. Further inspection of these data revealed that the largest amounts of missing data were related to school importance (< 10%). Although, numerous missing data techniques are available (McGinniss & Harel, 2016), missing data for this study were handled using maximum likelihood through IBM SPSS AMOS (v. 25), a structural equation modeling software.

Following maximum likelihood estimations of imputation, CFAs were conducted using IBM SPSS Amos (v. 25) to assess the validity of the BSCS as a second-order, four-factor structure: NF, MB, IN, and EC. Reflective models (scale) were fit, which specifies that the relationships emanate from a SOC construct and is directed toward observed

measures, which suggests that variation in the BSCS leads to variation in the four-factor structure, which in turn leads to variations in BSCS measures (Peterson et al., 2017). Three models were examined through CFA:

- Model 1 examined the one-factor BSCS model.
- Model 2 examined the four-factor model of the BSCS.
- Model 3 examined the second-order four-factor BSCS.

Several fit indices were used to examine model fit for the CFA models (West, Taylor, & Wei, 2012). These model fit indices are as follows: chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test, discrepancy of fit ratio (discrepancy/df), goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), comparative fit index (CFI), Tucker Lewis index (TLI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), Akaike information criterion (AIC), and Bayesian information criterion (BIC). Nonsignificant  $\chi^2$  values indicate acceptable model fit; however,  $\chi^2$  must be considered in tandem with other fit indices because  $\chi^2$  may be too stringent and an often unrealistic standard of goodness of fit (West et al., 2012). Discrepancy of fit (discrepancy/df) indices less than 2.00 are desirable (West et al., 2012). Higher values that are greater than .95 on the GFI, AGFI, CFI, and TLI and smaller RMSEA values that are less than .09 are desirable (i.e., RMSEA that are  $\leq .05$  = good fit; .05-.08 = acceptable fit; .08-.10 = marginal fit;  $> .10$  = poor fit; Browne & Cudeck, 1992; West et al., 2012).

Both the BIC and AIC were used to assess the better fitting model between the three models tested. The model with the smallest BIC and AIC tends to be the most favorable or best fitting model (West et al., 2012). Both the BIC and the AIC were used because AIC tends to be sensitive to smaller samples sizes and the BIC often performs well with smaller sample sizes (West et al., 2012). Beyond these, the consistent Akaike information criterion (CAIC) was also used to further check the performance of AIC because CAIC tends to perform better with a smaller sample (West et al., 2012).

Initially, gender, age, Hispanic/Latina(o) ethnic identity, and African American/Black racial identity were included in analyses, due to McMillan and Chavis' (1986) original conjectures regarding the context specific nature of neighborhood SOC, as well as several studies testing SOC among various groups of adults and some finding significant differences between groups (e.g., Albanesi et al., 2007; BeLue, Taylor-Richardson, Lin, McClellan, & Hargreaves, 2006; Chiessi, Cicognani, & Sonn, 2010; Coffman & BeLue, 2009; Rovai, 2002; Speer et al., 2012). Results, however, indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between SOC and gender,  $\chi^2(32) = 30.43, p = .55$ ; age,  $F(6, 53.18) = 1.22, p = .29$ ; Hispanic/Latina(o) ethnic identity,  $\chi^2(32) = 44.51, p = .15$ ; and African American/Black racial identity,  $\chi^2(96) = 109.02, p = .17$ . Therefore, the addition of these variables as covariates and statistical controls were not included in subsequent analyses.

### 3 | RESULTS

Table 2 displays the model fit statistics for the overall BSCS as a one-factor, four-factor, and second-order model. Figure 1 presents the second-order factor structure. Table 1 displays the correlation matrix for all variables.

The first CFA (one-factor BSCS) included all eight items loading onto one single latent construct. As Table 2 displays, the one-factor BSCS model provided overall poor model fit. The  $\chi^2$  for this model was statistically significant; the discrepancy-to-*df* ratio was greater than 2.0; and while values for the GFI, AGFI, CFI, and TLI were within ranges deemed acceptable, the RMSEA was greater than the acceptable fit in the .05-.08 range. Contrary to the one-factor BSCS model, the four-factor BSCS model provided a much better fit to the data. The  $\chi^2$  for this model was not statistically significant; the discrepancy-to-*df* ratio was below the 2.0 threshold; the values for the GFI, AGFI, CFI, and TLI were all above .95 and the RMSEA was below .05, indicating a good fit for the four-factor model.

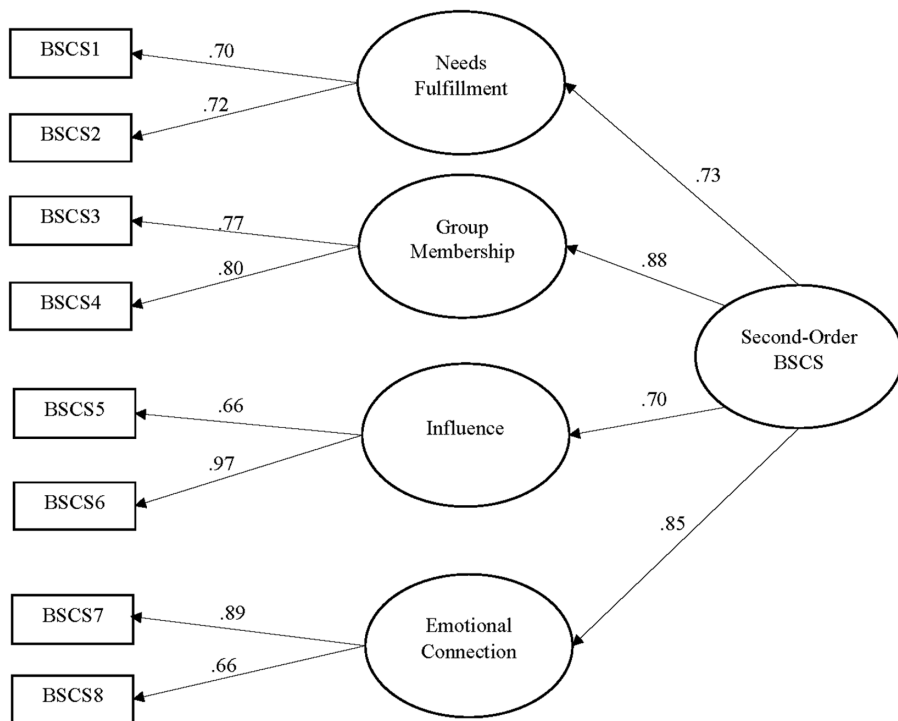
The BIC and AIC, presented in Table 2, are used to compare fit across models. As shown in Table 2, the BIC in Model 1 was larger than Model 2. The BIC difference between models was 14.33. The AIC shows a similar pattern, with the four-factor model having a smaller AIC than that of the single-factor BSCS model (Model 1). Also, because the



**TABLE 2** Model fit statistics for overall Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) confirmatory factor analysis

| Measures of fit | Models            |                   |                   |
|-----------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
|                 | One-factor BSCS   | Four-factor BSCS  | Second-order BSCS |
| $\chi^2$        | 40.93             | 15.95             | 10.22             |
| df              | 14                | 11                | 11                |
| p-value         | .000              | .14               | .51               |
| Discrepancy/df  | 5.94              | 1.43              | .93               |
| GFI             | .97               | .99               | .99               |
| AGFI            | .92               | .97               | .97               |
| CFI             | .95               | .99               | .99               |
| TLI             | .94               | .98               | .98               |
| RMSEA           | .10               | .03               | .04               |
|                 | 90% CI [.05, .19] | 90% CI [.01, .05] | 90% CI [.01, .05] |
| AIC model       | 89.02             | 65.94             | 60.216            |
| AIC saturated   | 72.00             | 72.00             | 72.00             |
| CAIC            | 192.65            | 189.32            | 182.58            |
| BIC             | 178.65            | 164.32            | 152.58            |

Note. df = degree of freedom; GFI = goodness of fit index; AGFI = adjusted goodness of fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; CI = confidence interval; AIC = Akaike information criterion; CAIC = consistent Akaike information criterion; BIC = Bayesian information criterion.

**FIGURE 1** Second-order confirmatory factor analysis of the Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) among adolescents of color

AIC is sensitive to smaller sample sizes, the CAIC was also examined, which further indicated that the four-factor BSCS (Model 2) was a better performing model (West et al., 2012).

Fit indices for the second-order BSCS (Model 3) are also presented in Table 2. Standardized regression weights for the second-order model are also presented in Figure 1. As can be seen in Table 2, the  $\chi^2$  for this model was not statistically significant; the discrepancy-to-*df* ratio value was less than 2.0; values for the GFI, AGFI, CFI, and TLI were all above .95, indicating good model fit, and the RMSEA was less than .05, which further indicates good model fit. In addition, the BIC, AIC, and CAIC were all smaller in Model 3 than in previous models. All standardized factor loadings for this second-order model were moderate to strong and significant at  $p < .001$  level (Field, 2013). First-order regression weights ranged from .66 to .97, whereas second-order regression weights ranged from .70 to .88. These results provide support for the hypothesized structure of the BSCS second-order model, in which scales were theorized to load onto four SOC dimensions as well as one underlying SOC construct.

Table 1 displays the correlations between the overall BSCS, the four individual dimensions of the BSCS, and the set of theoretically related variables of the intrapersonal component of PE, relational power, and school importance. Results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between the observed frequencies for each of BSCS subscales and demographic groups. There was also no significant relationship with demographic variables. The overall BSCS was significantly correlated with all four dimensions (e.g., NF, MB, IN, and EC) of SOC. The overall BSCS was also positively related to the intrapersonal component of PE ( $r = .41, p < .01$ ), relational power ( $r = .15, p < .01$ ), and school importance ( $r = .15, p < .01$ ).

In addition, all four dimensions of SOC were significantly related to one another, and in general each of these dimensions were related to each of the conceptually related variables. Psychological empowerment was significantly related to all four dimensions of SOC: NF ( $r = .27, p < .01$ ), MB ( $r = .32, p < .01$ ), IN ( $r = .33, p < .01$ ), and EC ( $r = .33, p < .01$ ). Relational power was also related to NF ( $r = .15, p < .01$ ), MB ( $r = .19, p < .01$ ), and IN ( $r = .12, p < .01$ ); however, relational power was not associated with EC. Last, school importance was associated with NF ( $r = .10, p < .01$ ), MB ( $r = .15, p < .01$ ), and IN ( $r = .11, p < .01$ ). EC and school importance had no significant relationship.

## 4 | DISCUSSION

The present study examined the eight-item BSCS (i.e., the measure of neighborhood SOC; Peterson et al., 2008) in a sample of youth of color from an underresourced urban community. Results from this study confirm the first-order and second-order structure of the BSCS among youth. Our analyses illustrated that the four-factor, second-order structure provided the best overall model fit (Model 3). This finding indicates that the second-order, four-factor model of the BSCS represents one underlying SOC construct. Also, both the overall BSCS and its underlying subscales were correlated with one another and, as expected, correlated with the intrapersonal component of PE, relational power, and school importance. While speculative, these relationships point toward the association neighborhood SOC has with PE, relational empowerment, and school importance. For example, the development of a positive SOC can help to promote school importance, youth empowerment, and participation in positive relational processes, which further cements emotional connections with individuals in the community (Zeldin et al., 2016). However, we should be cautious in interpreting results due to the low to moderate associations between theoretically related variables and dimensions of SOC. Nonetheless, outcomes from this investigation provide support for the validity of this scale among this sample of urban youth from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Our findings have critical implications for the field of community psychology and the development and use of the BSCS among adolescents. First, this study has provided preliminary empirical evidence on the factor structure of the BSCS among a sample of racial and ethnic minority youth. This is a critical implication because it gives insight into the ways that the BSCS and SOC function among diverse populations, particularly youth in vulnerable social positions. A second implication concerns the notion that successfully reproducing the conceptual structure put forward by McMillan and Chavis (1986) supports as Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008 and others (e.g., Chiessi et al., 2010; Mammana-Lupo et al., 2014; Wombacher et al., 2010) have raised that flaws in SOC were not necessarily due to

theoretical shortcomings, but attributable to measurement error. Hence, issues with SOC may be less about theory and more about how SOC is measured. A third implication is that SOC is indeed a multidimensional construct and that this study provides evidence of its multidimensionality among a sample of urban minority adolescents. Taken together, findings from this study illustrate SOC as a multidimensional construct among this sample of youth.

## 4.1 | Limitations

While this study put forward important evidence on the factor structure of the SOC among a sample of adolescents, there are several limitations that findings from this study need to be interpreted through. First, this measure of SOC may not capture all the nuances of a specific group of young people, particularly those that identify as racial-ethnic minorities. Second, this study engaged in analyzing the factor structure among a specific group of youth from a single underresourced community in the Northeastern United States. Future studies need to consider multiple groups of adolescents and further validate the factor structure of this scale.

Third, a greater understanding of the relational processes within SOC needs to be more deeply considered, particularly in the development and adaptation of the BSCS. Future research should consider ways in which social network analysis can be used to tease out the relational processes of SOC. Fourth, while inter-item reliability was appropriate, a Likert-type response format could be improved: instead of using *strongly agree* or *strongly disagree* responses, ask respondents to consider more affective (intensity) responses. Such work may allow this scale to be used cross-nationally and be used in other social contexts (Wombacher et al., 2010).

Fourth, a thorough investigation of SOC is needed that considers the multilayered nature of SOC within diverse nested groups and subgroups. In tandem with this limitation, while our preliminary analyses included the examination of potential covariates (e.g., gender, age, Hispanic/Latina(o) ethnic identity, and African American/black racial identity) with SOC, and found no significant differences, future research should continue to examine variations between groups, given the context specific nature of SOC (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Last, both relational empowerment and the intrapersonal component of PE are in need of further validation among youth (notable exceptions include Lardier et al., 2018 in the measurement of intrapersonal PE among youth) because studies are more broadly examined these constructs factor structure among adults.

## 4.2 | Conclusion

Despite these shortcomings, this study has particular resonance because it is one of the only investigations to engage and validate the factor structure of the BSCS among a sample of adolescents and to support second-order, four-factor SOC structure. As such, this study has broadened the application base of SOC and contributed to the methodological debate that has occurred and is occurring among community psychologists. Continued investigation into the BSCS and SOC will work toward developing a stronger way of understanding and measuring SOC among diverse groups of people.

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**How to cite this article:** Lardier DT, Reid RJ, & Garcia-Reid P. Validation of the Brief Sense of Community Scale among youth of color from an underserved urban community. *J Community Psychol*. 2018;46:1062–1074. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22091>

## APPENDIX

### Brief Sense of Community Scale (BSCS) Among Adolescents Items

| Concept | Item   | Item wording  |
|---------|--------|---|
| NF      | BSCS 1 | I can get what I need in this neighborhood.                       |
| NF      | BSCS 2 | This neighborhood helps me fulfill my needs.                      |
| MB      | BSCS 3 | I feel like a member of this neighborhood.                        |
| MB      | BSCS 4 | I belong in this neighborhood.                                    |
| IN      | BSCS 5 | I have a say about what goes on in my neighborhood.               |
| IN      | BSCS 6 | People in this neighborhood are good at influencing each another. |
| EC      | BSCS 7 | I feel connected to this neighborhood.                            |
| EC      | BSCS 8 | I have a good bond with others in this neighborhood.              |

Note. Based on McMillan and Chavis (1986): NF = needs fulfillment; MB = group membership; IN = influence; EC = emotional connection.