

**Analyzing Room Interaction Time and Relationship Satisfaction Among College
Roommates**

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Quantitative Research Methods

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All over the United States students in colleges share rooms with other people and their lives are affected by this relationship. This topic pertains to college life and relationship satisfaction between roommates. This is a real world issue, and it is a very interesting area of study as college life can be very complex. A question that arises is: Whether those college roommates that spend less time with the other in the room, are more satisfied with the roommate relationship. Roommates must share a space with someone who may or may not be different from him or herself. Tension and conflict could arise due to certain behaviors that do not match up with the other individual. Conflict is when one comes into collision or disagreement with another, and tension is a mental or emotional strain. Spending more time together in the room might provide more opportunity for conflict and tension to occur, and therefore influence satisfaction.

Relationship satisfaction is an indicator commonly used to assess overall relationship quality (Sanford & Rowatt, 2004). Relationship satisfaction is the fulfillment of one's wishes, expectations or needs. Roommate relational satisfaction occurs when individuals enjoy living with their roommates and remain committed to residing with each other (Hanasono & Nadler, 2012). The degree of roommate relationship satisfaction leads to a decision by the person on whether or not to continue sharing a room with their roommate or deciding to part ways.

This topic is worthy of study because interpersonal communication is of utmost importance to study. Not only that, but research has shown that conflict or an overall unsatisfactory relationship with a roommate is a predictor of stress for college students (Dusselier et al, 2005; Hanasono & Nadler, 2012). Stress leads to other impediments, which may influence a person's college experience. Analyzing the amount of time a person spends in the room with a roommate and linking it to whether or not the person reports more relationship satisfaction will help us facilitate a discussion about the issues underlying this

situation. The study could help colleges all over the country deal with residential life issues better.

The present study examines whether college roommates that spend less time with one another in the room report more roommate relationship satisfaction than those who spend more time in the room together. This paper will look at the literature discussing roommate relationships and its correlation to other factors in a college setting. It will first discuss the relationship between stress and conflict with college roommates, and will then go deeply into different roommate types researchers have analyzed. Consequently, it will touch upon the topics of conflict and compatibility among roommates, and finally it will look at roommate responsiveness overall.

Literature Review

Stress

According to Emerson (2008), adjusting to college is often a stressful experience, and although their living situations were places of support, excitement, and comradeship, they were also sources of personal and emotional turmoil. The majority of college students had important relationships stressors of some form during their time at college (Hurst et al, 2013). It is not easy to transition to a college setting; there are many changes that individuals have to learn to deal with. Scholars have found that among students, transitioning into the college environment created high levels of anxiety, stress, emotional disturbance, and uncertainty (Dusselier et al, 2005; Hanasono & Nadler, 2012). Relationships in general can be a source of stress for individuals as well as a helpful aspect, and exposure to stress can impact a person's health negatively, resulting in physical, behavioral, or physical strains (Hurst et al, 2013). Stress is a mechanism of any internal or external demand made upon the body that is not solely physical, as it may additionally involve emotions (Dusselier et al, 2005). It was

reported that environment factors in the residence hall environment played a crucial role in the amount of self-reported stress among students (Dusselier et al, 2005).

When students experience excessive stress in general, they deal with physical or psychological impairment, indicating that stress has many negative effects on students (Dusselier et al, 2005; Hanasono & Nadler, 2012). These effects include poor academic performance, bad habits, addictions, poor health, disease, and absenteeism (Dusselier et al, 2005). A big negative effect is poor academic performance, as satisfactory residence hall experiences have been associated positively with student's academic performance (Dusselier et al, 2005, Fuller & Hall, 1996; Hanasono & Nadler, 2012).

Results from a study by Hurst (2013) show that relationships in general (family, romantic, peer, and faculty) are one of the most significant stressors for college students. More specifically, both a conflict and satisfactory relationship with a roommate or staff member were significant stress predictors among college students (Dusselier et al, 2005). A caveat that many do not consider is that having a satisfactory relationship with a roommate can also be a source of stress. This could be due to the effort of maintaining the relationship, or merely that students exaggerate on how well they actually get along with their living partner (Dusselier et al, 2005).

Roommate relationships in particular have both positive and negative effects on students and their college experience. Those close relationships of high quality enhance mental and physical well-being, whereas those poor quality close relationships hinder health and well-being as well as create stress (Canavello & Crocker, 2010). Interestingly, roommate dissatisfaction has been linked to lower levels of emotional adjustment, higher levels of alcohol abuse, and stress (Hanasono & Nadler, 2012). More importantly, a person who suffers from high levels of anxiety or depression is likely to be dissatisfied with their current roommate relationship (Bahns et al, 2013).

Conflict and Compatibility

Individual's who share a bedroom regularly, mentioned feeling tension over noise, cleanliness, and use of space (Emerson, 2008). Other discontents include use of one's possessions, problems from sleeping and waking hours, and embarrassment over sexual activities taking place in the room (Emerson, 2008). Because roommates share a living space, the opportunities of interaction are greatly increased when compared to other friendships and personal acquaintances. This is due to the small living space in the residence halls, which increases both proximity and interaction (Hanasono & Nadler, 2012). Because of this proximity, some people wish privacy and independence from their roommates, thus, some roommates make it a point to avoid one another by leaving temporarily or participating in different activities.

Many roommates feel a need to get along with one another by handling conflict and troubles informally (Emerson, 2008). Interpersonal conflict includes any overt and verbalized arguments or differences of opinion over any issue between the roommates involved, while covert differences (such as hostile impulses) do not in themselves constitute conflict (Wheaton, 1974). Responses to conflict arise when a roommate directly makes a complaint in an attempt to get the other person to change the behavior (Emerson, 2008). Many issues are internal (such as personality, emotional troubles), others may be external (involving outside factors). Internal issues among roommates are said to have more immediacy for the relationship, and consequently more marked effects on cohesiveness than those issues that are external ones (Wheaton, 1974). Cohesiveness, or "getting along," varies greatly over the course of the roommate relationship, but Wheaton suggests that those roommates who do spend more time alongside the other have more probability and opportunity for conflict.

Emerson (2008) explains that when there was an issue among roommates, many communicated with one another signaling the behavior that bothered them. Those that openly

expressed discontent but only saw the problem continue, began to see the problem as irreversible and reported feeling frustrated. Along the same vein, this lack of cohesiveness is important to reflect on. Difference of opinion between roommates is related negatively to cohesiveness, thus supporting the idea that perceived similarity of opinion among roommates is related to cohesiveness (Wheaton, 1974). When problems continued among roommates it was observed that many began to confront the other individual in a hostile manner, and began eliciting distancing responses such as inducing the other to move out or thinking about moving out themselves, in an attempt to solve the troubles (Emerson, 2008). Going back to the idea of conflict and its relation to proximity and amount of time spent together, communal conflict is significant in research. Results suggest that people who spend more time together have more conflicts (Wheaton, 1974). Something important to note, is that it makes no difference whether roommates are chosen or assigned, conflict is still there (Wheaton, 1974).

When the conflicts among roommates escalated further, many responded with systematic exclusion or avoidance, in order to minimize relational contact (Emerson, 2008). Increased resentment and persistent tension led students to deliberately inconvenience the other, in accordance with feelings of revenge, creating hostility and a situation where acts by both individuals can escalate (Emerson, 2008). Ability to solve conflict is essential and it plays a very important role in the relationship process. Theoretically speaking, the ability to resolve issues and deal with conflict is necessary for a relationship to adapt to stressful situations in the future. Hence, when there is poor conflict resolution it leads to a decline in the stability and quality of the relationship (Sanford & Rowatt, 2004).

Roommate Types

Conflict can be due to personality types, health issues, or similarities and differences. Researchers have many opinions concerning different roommate types and different predictors of roommate satisfaction. Many of the same traits and processes that determine

relationship longevity and satisfaction in friendships also determine whether or not a roommate relationship will fail or succeed (Bahns et al, 2013). In essence, individuals who share a same roommate type report higher levels of relational satisfaction than those who do not (Hanasano & Nadler, 2012). Although personality type is said not to contribute significantly in predicting roommate conflict, results suggest that the best way to reduce conflict is to match students based on their construction of an ideal roommate (Fuller & Hall, 1996; Hanasano & Nadler, 2012). This means that “as the resemblance of a person’s actual roommate [becomes] more aligned with his or her notion of an ideal roommate, levels of relational satisfaction increase” (Hanasano & Nadler, 2012; 632). However, according to Fuller and Hall (1996), women value similarity in their roommate’s habits and preferences more than men, and that when their roommate is more similar to them they report less conflict and feeling more comfortable. Overall, going back to the ideal roommate construction, conflict is more likely to occur when there is little parallel between the description of an ideal roommate and the real, actual perception of the current roommate (Fuller & Hall, 1996).

Some models assume relationship outcomes depend on the person’s own characteristics. Studies have shown that a person’s relationship satisfaction is more strongly related to his or her own self-rated personality, and many call these actor-oriented models of relationship outcomes (Bahns et al, 2013). This relates back to the notion of the ideal roommate, which also has to do with one’s personal opinion or ideals. Hanasano and Nadler (2012) say that there are three specific roommate types: Conventionals, Functionals, and Separates. They noted: “Conventionals preferred high levels of dependence and affection in their roommate relationships, Functionals desired dependence and instrumentality, and Separates prioritized independence from their roommates” (Hanasano & Nadler, 2012; 632). Other researchers simply believe in the similarity hypothesis, where two people who are similar to each other will be more compatible and will have greater relationship satisfaction

(Fuller & Hall, 1996). Realistically it varies, as some people value similarity in a relationship and others complementarity (Bahns et al, 2013).

So these roommate types all vary, but even with these, what actually makes roommates want to stay together? In most cases, decisions of whether to continue in a relationship or not may be made fairly early in the relationship. According to Berg (1984), reports on satisfaction were correlated with the desire for roommates to continue living together, and those students who did not plan to continue living together reported less relationship satisfaction. First of all, when it comes to conflict, the skills and resources of each person affects how they deal with conflict in a constructive way, so it is important to note the different coping mechanisms (Bahns et al, 2013). Those roommates with similar competitive achievement, and those who used social and communication skills accordingly, were more likely to want to stay together (Bahns et al, 2013). The decision of continuing the roommate relationship in future reflects whether the rewards the individuals provide to each other will increase or decrease over time (Berg, 1984). Hence, data demonstrates that the traits of both partners as well as the characteristics of the relationship must be taken into account in order to predict relationship outcomes (Bahns et al, 2013).

Responsiveness and Relationship Quality

For many college students, the roommate relationship constitutes a very important interpersonal relationship, and through their compassionate and self-image goals they end up creating their own unique relationship experiences (Canavello & Crocker, 2010; Sanford & Rowatt, 2004). However, there is a belief that negative emotions can also help the quality of a relationship, as it serves as an adaptive function in human survival and that both fear and anxiety are likely to have a positive effect in a relationship (Sanford & Rowatt, 2004). In general, positive emotion and human responsiveness has shown to be the more helpful in relationship satisfaction. Those with self-image goals experience fear and confusion; they are

insensitive to the roommate's needs, which results in decreased responsiveness. Those students with compassionate goals who interact with their roommates report feeling connected and caring when interacting, and they have constructive beliefs about the problems within the relationship (Canavello & Crocker, 2010). Individuals with compassionate goals also have a heightened sensitivity to the other's needs, which results in increased responsiveness on both sides (Canavello & Crocker, 2010). Responsiveness is important because, "Relationship quality depends on beliefs about a relationship partner's responsiveness— that is, on the perception that a partner understands, values, and supports important aspects of the self. People who perceive their relationship partners as responsive feel close, satisfied, and committed to those relationships" (Canavello & Crocker, 2010; p78). In conclusion, responsiveness from one individual incites responsiveness in the other individual, which increases relationship satisfaction and commitment to that relationship. Thus, those roommates who have high responsiveness will be more likely to want to continue being roommates.

The Present Study

In sum, roommate satisfaction is related to academic performance, as well as personality development. Those students who have satisfying roommate relationships find their overall college experience more satisfying (Fuller & Hall, 1996). Conflict was extensively discussed in this review as well as how roommates respond to conflict or tension. It was noted that living in proximity with another individual increases interaction and can lead to further conflict. The review explained that tension and conflict can arise due to behaviors that do not match with the other person and that an unsatisfactory relationship with a roommate is a situation that produces stress among students. Research also suggests that people who spend more time together have more conflicts (Wheaton, 1974).

The relationship between time spent in the room and relationship satisfaction among roommates is a topic of great interest that should be investigated further. What makes this topic so pertinent is the correlation between relationship satisfaction and stress in college. It is important to study this topic, as understanding it further could reduce stress and boost relationship satisfaction among roommates. Instead of focusing specifically on the variable of conflict, the present study will be focusing on measuring roommate relationship satisfaction in relation to time spent in the room together. In order to analyze differences, it will also ask about time spent together outside the room, so there can be a point of comparison in this study. Hence, the following prediction will be examined: Those college roommates that spend less time with one another in the room report more roommate relationship satisfaction than those who spend more time in the room together.

Methods

Participants and Procedures

The present study utilized a convenient sample of undergraduate students from Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. This is appropriate for the study because the focus is specific to college roommates, so the sample must be taken from an institution such as the one mentioned. The study aimed to understand relationship satisfaction between college roommates in regard to the amount of time spent together in the room. Relationship satisfaction is an indicator commonly used to assess overall relationship quality (Sanford & Rowatt, 2004). In the roommate context, relationship satisfaction involves the fulfillment of one's wishes, expectations or needs. Relational satisfaction occurs when individuals enjoy living with their roommates and remain committed to residing with each other (Hanasono & Nadler, 2012). The sample was composed of 153 undergraduate college students (men=38 women=115), with an average age of 19.98 years (SD= 1.103). Participants described

themselves as female (73.7%) or male (24%). The sample consisted of 15.4% freshmen, 40.4% sophomores, 28.2% juniors, and 12.2% seniors.

Participants were asked via a Facebook event and Facebook status to take an online survey (See Appendix A). The research announcement described the study goals and offered a consent form for the participants to read. Afterwards, participants were provided with the following instructions: "Please take a moment to think about your current roommate and the relationship you two share." Participants were instructed to complete the remainder of the questionnaire in response to their relationship with their college roommate. The survey was anonymous, so the researcher did not ask for personal information. For classification purposes, the researcher asked for biological sex, current class rank based on credits earned, and current age. All procedures received approval from the university's institutional review board.

Measures

Time Spent In Room. A single question was used to assess the frequency in which participants spend time in the room alongside the roommate on a daily basis. The question made it possible to attain a ratio-level measurement, which is the most specific form of measurement one can use when it comes to gathering data. This open-ended question allowed the data to be better and more precise. The question that was used was: "In a typical day, how many waking hours do you spend in the room alongside your roommate?" The participants then filled in the blank with the number of hours they thought were spent together in the room. The typical day was selected because it is easier for students to calculate hours on a daily basis rather than base it off a whole week. The time frame was small enough for participants to recall their interactions and calculate the hours on a typical day, and it was a large enough time period to assess variance.

Relational satisfaction. The present study conceptualizes *relational satisfaction* as an indicator of global contentment or overall satisfaction with the roommate relationship in a college setting. Relational satisfaction was measured using Canary and Spitzberg's (1989) Relational Satisfaction scale, which is a three-item assessment demonstrated to possess high reliability and construct validity. The scale uses open language, so it is directly applicable to the roommate relationship without any amendments. Items include: "I am satisfied in this relationship;" "This relationship is rewarding;" and "I would not want to do anything that would hurt this relationship." These items were assessed using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree). Two additional items were added to this scale. One was "I am satisfied living with my current roommate" and "I plan to continue this living arrangement in the future." The Chronbachs alpha was .922, indicating that the scale possessed strong internal reliability.

Results

Hypothesis one predicted that the less amount of hours spent in the room would be positively related to relationship satisfaction. A bivariate correlation analysis was conducted and results revealed a significant positive relationship between amount of hours spent in the room ($M=3.77$, $SD=2.361$) and relational satisfaction ($M=4.9161$, $SD=1.86852$); $r= .351$, $p=.000$. Hours spent in the room accounted for 12.3% of the variance in relationship satisfaction scores. Hence, hypothesis one was supported.

Discussion

Based on the literature review, it was hypothesized that there are many factors that influence relational satisfaction among college roommates. Previous research brought to light the idea that relationships in general are one of the main stressors for students and a main

component of their college experience. Relationship satisfaction is linked to commitment in the relationship and a wish to continue the relationship in the future.

The goal of the present study was to examine how amount of hours spent in a room affects a student's relational satisfaction with his or her roommate. The hypothesis that was put forth was that those college roommates that spend less time with one another in the room report more roommate relationship satisfaction than those who spend more time in the room together. Significant correlation was found between amount of hours spent in the room and relational satisfaction. Thus, the hypothesis was supported.

The researches found that participants who have satisfactory roommate relationships report an overall positive college experience (Fuller & Hall, 1996). Other research such as Emerson's (2008), mentioned that individuals who share a bedroom regularly, mentioned feeling tension over noise, cleanliness, and use of space. Conflicts may arise from many situations but they tend to escalate if the contact with the other person persists or increases.

It could be speculated that relational satisfaction is stronger for those who spend less amount of hours in the room because there are less opportunities for conflict with the roommate. Complaints about noise, use of space, etc, are all lessened if the other person spends less time in the room. It can be surmised that although personality types may be similar between the individuals and they may be good friends, less interaction creates a situation with less possible conflict or situations that would hinder the relationship.

Limitations

The present study did face limitations, which might have influenced the results of the study. The limitations might have prevented the discovery of other significant findings in regards to the amount of hours spent in the room and roommate relational satisfaction.

Although the study utilized 153 participants, this was still a small sample size and with a greater amount of participation, different results or more significant results could have been

yielded. The time frame in which the survey was given was a very short window of time, which again limited the amount of participants able to complete it. It is also possible that those participating in the survey did not accurately recall the amount of waking hours spent in the room on a typical day, which would alter the possible research results.

The survey was also completed by students at Trinity University which is a small, liberal arts college environment. Results could have been altered, deepened, or enriched by sample diversity with more individuals from different college environments or even different age groups. It would be interesting to continue research in this area, as the college experience is a very diverse and important one. The relationships that form between people who live with one another are worthy of study. More specifically, further research should be conducted that explores the reasons and consequences of conflict among college roommates, and if amount of hours spent in the room influences the opportunity for conflict or not. It would be interesting to see the results and continue to explore the different components that make up a successful roommate relationship.

Appendix A

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. Please take a moment to think about your current roommate. The remainder of this survey will ask you to answer questions about your relationship with this roommate.

1) In a typical day, how many waking hours a day do you spend in the room with your roommate? (ratio measurement)

2) Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about your current roommate (1= strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Please circle the number that corresponds to your answer for each question.

	Strongly Strongly Disagree Agree					
I am satisfied in this relationship	1 7	2	3	4	5	6
This relationship is rewarding	1 7	2	3	4	5	6
I would not want to do anything that would hurt this relationship	1 7	2	3	4	5	6
I am satisfied living with my current roommate	1 7	2	3	4	5	6
I plan to continue this living arrangement in the future	1 7	2	3	4	5	6

3) Thank you for your time. These last few questions are for classification purposes only.

1) What is your biological sex?

Male

Female

2) What is your current class rank based on credits earned?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

3) What is your current age as of your last birthday?

_____ years old

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