Background

● Low social density vs. high density dorms: Low social density dorms provide a more affiliative environment, with less unwanted interaction, greater social initiative, spending more time in areas where interaction was more likely to occur, and greater tendency to form cohesive residential groups (Miller et al., 1981).

● Physical layouts that encourage the use of communal areas increase the likelihood of coincidental meetings and development of interpersonal bonds (Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2014).

● Dormitories with predominantly suites and their own common areas will have a lower sense of community and belonging, as compared to residential colleges with corridor type spaces (Devlin et al., 2008).

Predictions

1. We predicted that having no common area in the suite creates a greater sense of belonging and college pride.

2. We predicted that having communal bathrooms also creates a greater sense of belonging and pride.

3. We predicted that there is an interaction effect; the effect of type of bathroom on sense of belonging and college pride depends on whether rooms have a common area or not.

Method

Participants: 306 undergraduate students at Rice University, all at least 18 years of age or older.

Survey: Students took part in an online survey on Experimetrix, which was expected to take a couple minutes. Students were randomly assigned to read one of four student profiles that we created. The profiles were identical save for a sentence about their room and bathroom type. After reading the profile, participants were asked to rate the fictional student’s perceived sense of belonging and college pride on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Finally, the participants were asked a set of demographics questions.

Results

● Participants who read descriptions of students with common areas rated a significantly higher sense of belonging (M = 3.33) than those who read about students with no common area (M = 2.95), F(1, 302) = 20.364, p < 0.001, η² = 0.063.

● Participants who read descriptions of students with common areas rated significantly higher college pride for the student (M = 3.19) than those who read about students with no common area (M = 2.97), F(1, 302) = 7.638, p = 0.005, η² = 0.025.

● Participants who read descriptions of students with suite-style bathrooms rated a significantly lower sense of belonging (M = 3.04) than those who read about students with communal bathrooms (M = 3.24), F(1, 302) = 6.120, p = 0.014, η² = 0.020.

● Participants who read descriptions of students with suite-style bathrooms did not rate significantly different college pride (M = 3.04) than those who read about students with communal bathrooms (M = 3.11), F(1, 302) = 0.997, p = 0.319, η² = 0.003.

● There were no significant interactions effects for either sense of belonging, F(1, 302) = 0.520, p=0.520, η²= 0.001, or college pride, F(1, 302) = 0.664, p = 0.416, η²= 0.002.

Discussion/Conclusions

● We are not sure why students with a common area in their suite were perceived to have more college pride, because they likely interact with fewer people in their college.

● Our prediction that a communal bathroom would facilitate a greater sense of belonging in students was correct, likely because there is a perceived greater interaction between students in the residential college in the bathroom, and on their way there.

● Bathroom type probably played no role in sense of college pride because bathrooms are thought to foster mundane interpersonal interactions, unrelated to deeper concepts like pride.

● Students who had a common area in their room were probably thought to have a higher sense of belonging because they have a core unit of people in their suite to interact with.

● Our large sample size gave us more reliable results with better precision and more power.

● We should keep in mind, however, that our effect sizes were either small, or medium.

Future Work

● Future studies could analyze the effect of other room designs on sense of belonging and college pride, such as having windows in the room or the height of the room.

● Testing the effects of common areas (or extra rooms besides bedrooms and bathrooms) and the effects of bathroom styles at different universities can be a next step for future research.

● Researching the differences between residential colleges that have either commons culture, floor culture, or suite culture, and their effects on college pride and belonging.

References

