

AN EVALUATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF RESIDENCE HALL LIFE STYLE ON A CHANGE OF COLLEGE STUDENT'S ATTITUDES

Marilyn Nouri, Oneonta, New York

Ted Walbourn, School Psychologist, Baldwinsville, N.Y.

1. Introduction

Residence hall living on college campuses has changed considerably in the last decade. In order to keep residence halls filled, it has been necessary to adapt to rules and regulations of the modern college student. At the same time, colleges have been concerned with the effect of the relaxing of controls on student attitude and behavior.

Little research has been done on the influences of residence hall living on the student, particularly in the area of comparison of various styles of residence hall living. Much of the literature indicates the importance of the environment on the student. The interaction of the student with his physical, social and psychological environment does much to influence his perception of self and the world around him. (French, 1963; Baker, 1966; Mirande, 1968; Pace and Stern, 1958; Pervin, 1967)

This study will investigate the influence of style of residence hall living on change in student's attitudes in three specific areas: premarital sexual behavior, concept of self, and male-female interaction. These three topics were chosen because of much of the criticism, both negative and positive, of residence hall living revolves around these areas. Much of the controversy is over coeducational living. On the positive side it is claimed that it improves the quality of male-female interaction, that many brother-sister relationships develop, that it is a more natural environment and that the student is better prepared to face the "real world" when he graduates. On the negative side it is stated that coeducational living causes an increase in promiscuity, little studying is done and a general breakdown of moral values.

Previous research gives some insight into which of the above views might be more accurate. Changes of attitudes regarding premarital sexual behavior has been most exhaustively researched but not as it relates to coeducational living. Studies indicate that individual's attitudes liberalize regarding sex as they go through the courtship process until they marry and have children (Reiss, 1967; Mirande, 1968). There has been some liberalization of sex codes in the last few years.

Male-female interaction in adolescence has been studied mainly as it relates to dating. Lowrie (1951) found that students date for four reasons: (1) mate selection, (2) recreation, (3) anticipatory socialization, and (4) adult role

clarification. Coeducational living might bring similar results. The changing of one's self concept is also highly related to one's reference groups. Residence hall living is only a small part of the total college environment that one experiences when he goes away to school.

It is reasonable to assume that attitudes of students do change while they are in college. Individuals are constantly going through the socialization process in what is called continuing socialization. When a student comes to college, he is removed from his home environment and put into quite a different situation. He is given new knowledge by professors; he is constantly surrounded by peers whose ideas and behavior patterns may be very different from those he has experienced in the past. The college environment usually provides a new freedom away from parental supervision that the individual has not experienced before. Due to the trend away from close supervision by college officials, the student is much more free to set his own regulations regarding personal behavior. Whether or not living in one residential life style or another will add to the changes is difficult to hypothesize. Attitude change is a very complex process resulting from many factors and whether this single factor is significant enough in itself is not known. The following three general hypotheses were delineated:

1. There is a significant change in attitudes from freshman to the senior year in college.
2. There is a significant difference in attitudes among students who choose one life style over another.
3. The degree of change in attitudes in one semester will be significantly related to the life style in which one is living.

Attitudes here has been broken down into three specific areas - premarital sexual behavior, concept of self, and male-female interaction.

2. Method

The sampled population consists of the resident students at one of the two year colleges of the State University of New York. A stratified random sample of 300 students was selected from the college housing listing (a sampling fraction of 20%). The criteria for stratification consisted of class standing, sex, and residence hall life style. The three residence hall life styles that were compared in this study were:

1. one-sex dorms: all of the students in the bui-

living were of one sex. There were no female one-sex dorms.

2. coed by wing dorms: one wing of the building contained males, the other wing, females. Visitation between the sexes was not allowed after midnight.

3. coed by suite dorms: one suite of a residence hall was occupied by males and down the hall a neighboring suite was occupied by females. There were no restrictions on visitation. The response return to the questionnaire first administered in September 1971 was 75%. The follow-up study was administered at the end of the fall semester with response return of 50% of the original sample.

Operational measures of specific concepts have been developed. It is assumed that if a relationship can be established between operational measures, then this is evidence that a relationship exists between the concepts they are measuring. This can only be assumed if the operational measures do measure the concepts being studied. Evidence of a relationship, then, is support for the general and empirical hypotheses. Paired t-test and analysis of variance were used to test the relationships.

The questionnaire used in the study is a combination of Pervin's Instrument for Transactional Analysis of Personality and Environment and Riess's Scale of Premarital Sexual Permissiveness. Nine characteristics related to social behavior were chosen from Pervin's scale to give a composite self concept and were used to measure a degree of change in that concept. Riess's scale is composed mainly of questions with six alternative answers to measure strength of attitudes regarding premarital sexual permissiveness. The authors added questions used for background information about each subject and questions to determine attitudes regarding male-female interaction. Degree of certainty scaling was used to measure this area.

3. Results

Tables one to five show the results of the statistical analysis. The results indicate little change in attitudes. Change from the freshman to senior year in college occurred in only two areas. The freshmen women had significantly less permissive attitudes regarding premarital sexual behavior than did senior women. However, by the time of the follow-up study, the significant difference had disappeared. The other difference was found between freshmen and senior men. Male freshmen consider themselves to be significantly less comfortable with the opposite sex than do senior males. This difference also disappeared by the time of the follow-up study.

When attitudes were compared by life style among freshmen women, senior women, freshman men and senior men, only one significant difference was found. (See Table II) Freshmen women living in the coed by wing dorm were found to be significantly less comfortable with the opposite sex than were freshmen women living in the coed by suite dorm.

The comparison of change in attitudes after having lived in the residence halls indicated different results. (See Table III) Somewhat unexpected results came out of the change of atti-

Table I

CHANGES IN ATTITUDES FROM FRESHMAN TO SENIOR YEAR IN COLLEGE. (t-test)

| | Before | After |
|--------------------------------------|---------|--------|
| Regarding self | | |
| All students | 0.3405 | |
| Regarding premarital sexual behavior | | |
| All students | 1.7847 | 0.5824 |
| Females | 2.5518* | 1.0925 |
| Males | 0.1913 | 0.2867 |
| Regarding male-female interaction | | |
| All students | 1.3205 | |
| Females | 0.6824 | |
| Males | 1.9739* | 0.7980 |

*Significant beyond the 5% level of confidence.

Table II

DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDES AMONG STUDENTS LIVING IN VARIOUS LIFE STYLES. (mean values and analysis of variance)

| | Mean | F Value |
|---|---------|---------|
| Regarding self ¹ | | |
| All students | | 1.3075 |
| Coed by suite | 32.3333 | |
| Coed by wing | 29.6938 | |
| All males | 32.1290 | |
| Freshman females | | 0.0002 |
| Coed by suite | 28.6875 | |
| Coed by wing | 28.7368 | |
| Freshman males | | 0.9872 |
| Coed by suite | 36.0000 | |
| Coed by wing | 31.2000 | |
| All males | 33.6000 | |
| Senior females | | 0.0567 |
| Coed by suite | 31.7777 | |
| Coed by wing | 30.9090 | |
| Senior males | | 0.5220 |
| Coed by suite | 32.7333 | |
| Coed by wing | 28.5555 | |
| All males | 30.7500 | |
| Regarding premarital sexual behavior ² | | |
| All students | | 2.1121 |
| Coed by suite | 8.2923 | |
| Coed by wing | 7.3469 | |
| All male | 8.4687 | |
| Freshman females | | .0605 |
| Coed by suite | 6.2352 | |
| Coed by wing | 6.0000 | |
| Freshman males | | 1.6722 |
| Coed by suite | 9.6250 | |
| Coed by wing | 9.1000 | |
| All males | 8.1250 | |
| Senior females | | .3243 |
| Coed by suite | 8.1764 | |
| Coed by wing | 7.5454 | |
| Senior males | | .7849 |
| Coed by suite | 9.3333 | |
| Coed by wing | 8.0000 | |
| All males | 8.8125 | (con'd) |

Table II, continued.

| | Mean | F Value |
|--|---------|---------|
| Regarding male-female interaction ² | | |
| All students | | 1.6657 |
| Coed by suite | 17.0000 | |
| Coed by wing | 18.1836 | |
| All males | 20.1875 | |
| Freshman females | | 6.2243* |
| Coed by suite | 12.7058 | |
| Coed by wing | 18.6842 | |
| Freshman males | | 0.0136 |
| Coed by suite | 21.7647 | |
| Coed by wing | 22.2000 | |
| All males | 21.7500 | |
| Senior females | | 0.0078 |
| Coed by suite | 14.3333 | |
| Coed by wing | 14.6363 | |
| Senior males | | 0.3381 |
| Coed by suite | 19.6666 | |
| Coed by wing | 17.0000 | |
| All males | 18.6250 | |

¹The higher the mean value the more sociable they consider themselves to be.

²The higher the mean value the more permissive the attitudes.

³The higher the mean value the less comfortable they are with the opposite sex.

*Significant beyond the 5% level of confidence.

tudes regarding self. Senior women living in the coed by wing dorm became significantly less positive in their concepts of themselves, as did freshman and senior men living in the all male dorm. It is possible that the measure of self concept is inaccurate. The measure of self concept was developed from the discrepancy scores and it may not be valid to use it to measure change in self concept.

In attitudes regarding premarital sexual behavior the only change that took place was among freshman females in the coed by wing dorm. That group changed to become significantly more liberal in their attitudes regarding premarital sexual behavior than before the experience. However, when they were compared to the freshman females living coed by suite after the experiment, no differences were found.

In attitudes regarding male-female interaction, again the only group that changed significantly were the freshman females in the coed by wing dorm. They changed in the direction of being more comfortable with the opposite sex. However, even with the change in attitudes, they were still significantly less comfortable with the opposite sex than were freshman girls living in the coed by suite dorm.

It appears that life style has little relationship to attitudes and attitude change. There are very few differences between the groupings when they move into the life style and it causes very few changes. The only significant explainable difference is the freshman females in regard to male-female interaction. If girls are less comfortable with men they tend to choose to live in coed by wing dormitories. Coed by wing living helps to make them more comfortable with men but

Table III

DIFFERENCES IN DEGREE OF CHANGE IN ATTITUDES AMONG VARIOUS LIFE STYLES. (Paired t-test)

Degree of change among life styles--Self

| | |
|------------------|--------|
| Coed by suite | |
| Freshman females | 0.0666 |
| Senior females | 0.8834 |
| Freshman males | 0.9472 |
| Senior males | 1.8944 |

| | |
|------------------|---------|
| Coed by wing | |
| Freshman females | 1.7145 |
| Senior females | 3.0596* |
| Freshman males | 1.4384 |
| Senior males | 1.4743 |

| | |
|----------------|---------|
| All male | |
| Freshman males | 1.8047* |
| Senior males | 2.4861* |

Degree of change among life styles--Premarital sexual attitudes

| | |
|------------------|--------|
| Coed by suite | |
| Freshman females | 1.6898 |
| Senior females | 1.0895 |
| Freshman males | 1.1423 |
| Senior males | 1.3193 |

| | |
|------------------|---------|
| Coed by wing | |
| Freshman females | 2.2641* |
| Senior females | 0.0000 |
| Freshman males | 0.0000 |
| Senior males | 0.0000 |

| | |
|----------------|--------|
| All male | |
| Freshman males | 0.0804 |
| Senior males | 0.7992 |

Degree of change among life styles--Male-female interaction

| | |
|------------------|--------|
| Coed by suite | |
| Freshman females | 0.0652 |
| Senior females | 0.0719 |
| Freshman males | 0.0272 |
| Senior males | 0.6629 |

| | |
|------------------|---------|
| Coed by wing | |
| Freshman females | 2.0909* |
| Senior females | 1.7634 |
| Freshman males | 0.8310 |
| Senior males | 0.5143 |

| | |
|----------------|--------|
| All male | |
| Freshman males | 1.2043 |
| Senior males | 0.1833 |

*Significant beyond the 5% level of confidence.

not to the level of the freshman girls living coed by suite.

It was stated in the theoretical orientation that coming to college may put the students into a new environment which will cause attitude change.

Whether or not this in fact happens depends upon the groups of students and the attitude being analyzed. The male sub-culture has apparently already given males a liberal outlook on premarital sexual behavior so that the college experience causes no further significant liberalization of values. On the other hand, the college experience does change the attitudes of the female regarding premarital sexual behavior. She becomes significantly more liberal in her views within one semester.

The college experience also helps both sexes to feel more comfortable with the opposite sex. Freshman men differed significantly from senior men in this respect but the difference had disappeared by the follow-up study. Life style appeared to have no effect on this change. Only freshman girls living coed by wing felt significantly less comfortable with men before the study; this situation improved by the follow-up study, but not to the level of the coed by suite freshman girls.

No meaningful analysis of the college experience's effect on self can be made since the results follow no particular pattern.

4. Summary

Change in attitude did take place. The college experience did cause men to become more comfortable with the opposite sex and women to develop more liberal sexual attitudes. Freshman men already had such liberal sexual attitudes that there was little room for change. The place of residence played little or no significant role in these changes. Freshman girls who chose to live coed by wing dorm were significantly less comfortable with the opposite sex than freshman girls who chose to live coed by suite and although they changed to being more comfortable, they were still significantly less comfortable than the suite girls at the end of the study. Feeling comfortable with the opposite sex appears to be a selective factor in choice of life style. It is possible that if they had been forced to live by another life style they would have been much less satisfied.

This research and another part of this project not covered in this paper lend support to the idea that various kinds of life styles should be provided in college residence halls so that the

student can choose to live in the style most appropriate for his needs and interests. None of the life styles investigated contributed to changes in student attitudes.

Footnotes

1. Baker, S.R. "The Relationship Between Student Residence and perception of Environmental Press," The Journal of College Student Personnel, pp. 222-224, July, 1966.

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