THE INFLUENCES OF ROOMMATE ASSIGNMENTS UPON STUDENTS' MATURITY

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One hundred ten entering freshmen were randomly assigned to one of three experimental groups representing three types of roommate assignments in the residential halls. The three types of assignments included the pairing of two high-maturity students, a high- and a low-maturity student, or two low-maturity students. A pretest measure of maturity from Heath's Perceived Self Questionnaire (PSQ) was used to determine high or low maturity. About 90% of the sample was retested with the PSQ after one semester to study mean differences in maturity among the three experimental groups and between the initial status of high or low maturity after controlling for pretest maturity scores. Results showed that the maturity of one's roommate does have an impact on that student's degree of Symbolism, that is, on the student's awareness and insight of his or her values and experiences and an increased ability to express those values and experiences symbolically.

Researchers have been concerned for a number of years about the impact of colleges and universities on students (Newcomb, 1961; Yamamoto, 1968; Feldman and Newcomb, 1969; Lenning, 1977; Lenning et al., 1977). These impact studies have contributed greatly to our understanding of student change and growth during the undergraduate period; on the other hand, other educators (e.g., Moos et al., 1976; Delworth and Hanson, 1980) have recently expressed the need to learn about specific influences in the environment that produce such changes in college students. The role of the residence hall has been thought to be an integral part of the educational experience for years (Williamson and Wise, 1958; Moos, 1979); but much about the sociological and psychological dynamics within the residence hall needs to be studied as a subenvironment that influences students' attitudes and development. This investigation was designed to determine the effects that room-
mates have upon each other's maturity. More specifically, this study was made to determine whether the congruence or incongruence between roommates' maturity levels affected students' maturity.

Educators have proposed over several years that the college peer group can change group and individual attitudes (Thibaut and Kelley, 1959; Newcomb, 1961) and that friendship patterns among college students are influenced by proximity of students with similar interest and attitudes (Bonney, 1946; Maisonneuve et al., 1952). These earlier contentions have been restated in more recent years (Moos, 1979) with respect to the residence hall environment:

Compared to commuters, students who live in residential halls encounter more diverse experiences and people, in more cultural and extracurricular activities, develop greater personal and social competence, and are more satisfied with college life. (p. 22)

In addition to recognizing the impact of the general residential hall environment, the influence of a student's roommate also may be conceived as a separate and powerful environment (Brown, 1968). For example, Pace (1970) has illustrated the importance of roommate compatibility by showing that dissatisfied pairs had lower academic achievement. A number of other studies have explored a variety of factors for matching students in attempts to enhance roommate compatibility. Some of these schemes for matching students have included smoking and drinking (Broxton, 1962); fathers' educational level and predicted grade point average (Gehring, 1970); weekday bedtime (Jones et al., 1980); year in school, age, and hometown size (Nudd, 1965); and birth rate (Scheidt and Smith, 1976).

Three main problems were evident with these studies. First, most of the studies about roommate satisfaction were not based on any particular student outcome theory, which makes generalizability of results limited. Second, most of the studies in this area ignore students' attitudes and social development as important variables. Third, most of the studies were not designed for experimental purposes but were merely descriptive in nature.

In consideration of these issues, this study was designed as an experiment and used the student development theory of Douglas Heath (1968, 1977). Heath conceptualized a comprehensive model of maturity by synthesizing the ideas from 25 educational theorists since Socrates. Heath posited that there are five growth dimensions of maturity in each of four systems of the self. The four self systems include intellect, values, self-concepts, and interpersonal relationships. Maturation involves development along five growth dimensions called stability, integration, allocentrism, autonomy, and symbolization. Stability involves a firmer sense of direction, greater equanimity, and stronger resilience in recovering from disorganizing experiences. Integra-