Does It Matter Where College Students Live? Differences in Satisfaction and Outcomes as a Function of Students’ Living Arrangement and Gender

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY WAS TO COMPARE THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS residing in on-campus housing with those of students residing in fraternity/sorority housing, specifically to explore the differences in academic success, alcohol use, and perceptions of the living environment as a function of students’ living arrangement and gender. The researcher sampled 772 respondents from the aggregate results of five institutions that administered the ACUHO-I/EBI Resident Assessment and the AFA/EBI Fraternity/Sorority Assessment during the 2009–10 academic year. Differences by living arrangement and gender were tested using a rank-based factorial analysis of variance. The results revealed several significant differences. Implications for practice include encouraging students to review their academic behaviors, promoting active engagement within residence halls, establishing improved safety measures in fraternity and sorority houses, promoting academic engagement in fraternities, and reducing the prevalence of alcohol use in fraternities and sororities.

A student’s residential setting is an important environmental factor (Strange & Banning, 2001), and research demonstrates that living on campus is associated with such benefits as improved academic performance (López Turley & Wodtke, 2010; Nicpon et al., 2006; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1999), higher rates of persistence (Jamelske, 2009; Nicpon et al., 2006), and better social and academic adjustment (López Turley & Wodtke, 2010; Nicpon et al., 2006; Terenzini et al., 1999). Another living arrangement common on many campuses is fraternity/sorority housing (De Los Reyes & Rich, 2003). Research on this topic has primarily focused on student alcohol use and shows that students residing in fraternity or sorority houses tend to consume greater quantities of alcohol per week compared to those living in other residential settings (Larimer, Anderson, Baer, & Marlatt, 2000; Page & O’Hegarty, 2006; Wechsler, Lee, Kuo et al., 2002). Given that frequent alcohol use is associated with negative academic and psychological outcomes (Dusselier, Dunn, Wang, Shelley, & Whalen, 2005; Wielkiewicz, Prom, & Loos, 2005),
it is possible that fraternity/sorority living arrangements do not provide the same academic benefits as on-campus living arrangements do. The purpose of this study was to compare the experiences of students residing in fraternity/sorority housing to those of students in on-campus housing in order to determine if differences in academic success, alcohol use, and perceptions of the living environment exist as a function of students’ living arrangement and gender.

EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS LIVING IN RESIDENCE HALLS

Research on college and university student housing has focused on a variety of areas, including academic success (Inman & Pascalella, 1998; Jamelske, 2009; López Turley & Wodtke, 2010; McCluskey-Titus & Oliver, 2001; Wang, Arboleda, Shelley, & Whalen, 2003), satisfaction (Cleave, 1996; Li, Sheeley, & Whalen, 2005), alcohol use (Cross, Zimmermann, & O’Grady, 2009; Fromme, Kruse, & Corbin, 2008; Larimer et al., 2000), and social integration (Kaya, 2004). Because of the wide-ranging topics that have already been studied, this review is limited to research on the influence of living conditions on student adjustment, alcohol use, and academic success.

Living Conditions

Research on the impact of the living conditions in residence halls has focused on outcomes such as stress, adjustment, perceptions of safety, and attrition. In a study of what contributed to the stress of 416 residence hall students at a large public research university in the Midwest, the researchers found that the most common contributing factors were students’ inability to study in the residence halls, roommate conflicts, sleep difficulties, and alcohol use (Dusselier et al., 2005).

In a study of the influence of the residential environment on the academic, social, and personal-emotional adjustment of 245 first-year students at a large public institution in the Southeast (using the Residence Hall Climate Scale and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire), Kaya (2004) found that group cohesion was positively related to academic and personal-emotional adjustment, perception of safety, and institutional commitment. Student perception of safety was positively associated with social adjustment and institutional commitment and negatively related to disruption by noise. Respondents who expressed concerns about the noise level on their floor tended to perceive their floor to be less safe than did their peers who had fewer concerns about the level of noise.

Studies on residence hall attrition found that poor living conditions, such as small rooms, poor study conditions, and lack of privacy, influence students to move off campus. In comparison, social interactions, leadership opportunities, and convenience factors, such as proximity to academic resources and buildings, influence students to reapply for on-campus housing (Cleave, 1996; Li et al., 2005).

Overall, research on the impact of residence hall living conditions on college students found that poor living conditions might increase stress, negatively affect perceptions of safety, and influence students to move off campus. A limitation of the existing research is that most of the studies were mono-institutional in nature (e.g., Cleave, 1996; Dusselier
et al., 2005; Kaya, 2004; Li et al., 2005). Multinstitutional research would improve the generalizability of the findings.

**Academic Success**

Studies on the academic success of college students in the residential context have focused on the personal and environmental predictors of GPA (McCluskey-Titus & Oliver, 2001; Wang et al., 2003) and the critical thinking and academic performance of students being influenced by their living arrangement (Inman & Pascarella, 1998; Kuder, 1972; López Turley & Wodtke, 2010). In a study of the difference in the end-of-first-year critical thinking of on-campus and commuter students, Inman and Pascarella (1998) found no difference in critical thinking as influenced by residence, gender, age, and academic motivation. In regard to academic performance, López Turley and Wodtke (2010) found that students who lived on campus tended to earn greater first-year GPAs than did their peers who lived off campus. A study of the relationship between the environmental characteristics of a residence hall community and academic performance (McCluskey-Titus & Oliver, 2001) found that sense of belonging was positively related to floor GPA; however, the perceived study habits and interpersonal connectedness of floor residents were not related to floor GPA. In terms of gender differences, the researchers found that the semester GPAs of residents who lived on all-women’s floors were higher than those of residents who lived on all-men’s floors. Considering that previous research has found differences in the academic performance of college students that are related to residence (López Turley & Wodtke, 2010) and gender (McCluskey-Titus & Oliver, 2001), additional research is needed to know if there is an interaction effect between these variables.

**Alcohol Use**

The pre-college drinking behaviors of students influence their drinking behaviors in college (Cross et al., 2009; Fromme et al., 2008; Larimer et al., 2000). Students who regularly consumed alcohol in high school tended to consume alcohol in college as well. Moreover, researchers found that pre-college alcohol use was related to choice of college residence (Fromme et al., 2008; Larimer et al., 2000). Students who regularly consumed alcohol in high school tended to select living environments in college that enabled or facilitated the consumption of alcohol. In terms of how alcohol use is related to the physical environment, students who lived in coed residence...
halls (Willoughby & Carroll, 2009) or suite-style rooms (Cross et al., 2009) were more likely to consume alcohol than were their peers who lived in single-gender halls or standard rooms, respectively. In terms of the relationship between gender and alcohol use, research in the residential context has found that men tended to consume alcohol more frequently (Cross et al., 2009; Larimer et al., 2000) and were more likely to binge drink (Cross et al., 2009; Sharmer, 2005) than were women; however, women were more likely to consume alcohol before socializing, i.e., pre-party drinking (Paschall & Saltz, 2007). Drinking behaviors are influenced by both environmental and personal factors; additional research is needed to understand how the intersection of these factors influences students’ drinking behaviors. Other limitations of the research on alcohol use in residential settings is that most of the studies were mono-institutional in nature (Cross et al., 2009; Fromme et al., 2008; Larimer et al., 2000; Sharmer, 2005) or they focused on subpopulations, such as first-year students (Fromme et al., 2008). Multi-institutional research would shed additional light on the alcohol use of college students and improve the generalizability of the findings.

EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS RESIDING IN FRATERNITY/SORORITY HOUSING

Research on fraternity/sorority housing has primarily focused on health behaviors (Page & O’Hegarty, 2006; Scott-Sheldon, Carey, & Carey, 2008) and alcohol and drug use (McCabe, Knight, Teter, & Wechsler, 2005; Strote, Lee, & Wechsler, 2002; Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, & Lee, 2000; Wechsler, Lee, Nelson, & Kuo, 2002).

In terms of the relationship between gender and alcohol use, research in the residential context has found that men tended to consume alcohol more frequently and were more likely to binge drink than were women; however, women were more likely to consume alcohol before socializing, i.e., pre-party drinking.

Alcohol Use

In general, students residing in fraternity or sorority houses engage in more risky behaviors than do those residing in other settings, which could be attributed to cultural norms within these organizations that promote the consumption of alcohol (Borsari, Hustad, & Capone, 2009). Fraternity chapter houses can be living environments that enable alcohol use, especially for underage college students. Only one study has been found showing that on-campus residents consumed more alcohol per week than did fraternity/sorority residents (Theall et al., 2009), though no explanation was offered for this finding.

Academic Success

Limited research has explored the academic success of fraternity and sorority members as a function of their living arrangement. In research comparing the study habits and academic performance of college men living in
fraternity houses and those living in residence halls at a large public research institution in the Northwest, Kuder (1972) found no difference in their study habits or GPAs. However, research outside of the housing context has found mixed results on the relationship between fraternity/sorority membership and academic performance. While some studies have found a negative relationship (DeBard, Lake, & Binder, 2006; Grubb, 2006), others have found a positive one (DeBard & Sacks, 2010). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) concluded that fraternity/sorority membership neither contributes to nor hinders students’ academic performance when background characteristics and academic ability are taken into consideration.

Living Conditions

While researchers have explored the perceptions of safety that students in residence halls have (Kaya, 2004), little is known about those perceptions in fraternity or sorority house residents. In a study of a large public research institution in the Midwest, Menning (2009) revealed that those who attended parties at fraternity houses felt less safe than they did at parties elsewhere; however, the study did not illuminate the day-to-day perceptions that fraternity and sorority house residents have about safety. As Strange and Banning (2001) emphasize, an environment must be safe and inclusive in order for it to serve as an effective learning space. For this reason, more research on the living environment of college and university students is needed to understand if fraternities and sororities provide environments that foster outcomes comparable to those in on-campus living arrangements.

Most of the research on the residential experiences of college students explored differences by living arrangement or gender, separately. Limited research has explored if differences exist as a function of both a student’s living arrangement and gender. Furthermore, much of the research on students’ residential experiences was mono-institutional in nature (e.g., Cleave, 1996; Cross et al., 2009; Dusselier et al., 2005; Fromme et al., 2008; Kaya, 2004; Kuder, 1972; Larimer et al., 2000; Li et al., 2005; McCluskey-Titus & Oliver, 2001; Page & O’Hegarty, 2006; Sharmer, 2005) or focused on specific campus populations, such as first-year students or minority students (e.g., Fromme et al., 2008; Inman & Pascarella, 1998; Kaya, 2004). Therefore, the present study sought to contribute to the literature by conducting a multi-institutional study and exploring the interaction of gender and living arrangement.

RESEARCH METHODS

The data for this study are from five institutions that administered the ACUHO-I/EBI Resident Assessment (Long, 2010a) and the AFA/EBI Fraternity/Sorority Assessment (Long, 2010b) during the 2009–10 academic year. Educational Benchmarking, Inc. developed the Resident Assessment and the Fraternity/Sorority Assessment in partnership with the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International and the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors, respectively. Both assessments measured background characteristics, perceptions of the living environment, alcohol use, and satisfaction with the college experience, making these assessments appropriate tools for answering the research questions.
Measures

The study focused on three outcome areas: living environment, academic success, and alcohol use. The researcher measured respondents’ perception of their living environment using four variables: living conditions, safety, programming, and peer interaction. Living conditions was a three-item scale ($\alpha = .809$) that measured respondents’ satisfaction with their degree of privacy and their ability to study in their room and sleep without interruption. The response options for these measures and other scale items ranged from Not at all (1) to Extremely (7). Safety was a three-item ($\alpha = .888$) measure of the extent to which respondents felt safe in their living environment. The third variable, programming, consisted of two items ($\alpha = .949$) that measured respondents’ satisfaction with the quality and variety of programs and activities provided to them. Peer interaction was a three-item ($\alpha = .907$) measure of the degree to which the living environment of the respondents influenced their ability to meet people, live cooperatively, and resolve conflict. All of the scales had good ($\alpha > .8$) or excellent ($\alpha > .9$) Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients (George & Mallery, 2003).

Academic success was measured using two variables: Study and GPA. Study was measured using a question that asked respondents to report the number of hours they studied per week. The response categories ranged from None (1) to More than 25 (6). GPA was the self-reported cumulative grade point average of the respondents at the time when the survey was completed. The variable consisted of the following response categories: Below 2.50 (1), 2.50 to 2.74 (2), 2.75 to 2.99 (3), 3.00 to 3.24 (4), 3.25 to 3.49 (5), 3.50 to 3.74 (6), 3.75 to 4.00 (7).

The researcher measured the alcohol use of the respondents using two variables: Alcohol Use Frequency and Binge Drinking. The first variable was the respondents’ self-reported frequency of alcohol consumption. The response categories were I do not consume alcohol, Once per week or less, Two to three times per week, Almost every day, and Every day. The second variable represented the prevalence of excessive alcohol use among respondents, which was measured using a question that asked them to report how many alcoholic drinks they usually consumed per sitting. The response items were collapsed into three categories: Does not consume alcohol (0), Consumed between 1 and 4 drinks per sitting (1), and Consumed 5 or more drinks per sitting (2).

Participants

After creating the variables of interest, accounting for missing values using list-wise deletion, and removing first-year students, merging the data from the two assessments resulted in a sample of 2,885 participants, including 239 fraternity house residents, 193 sorority house residents, and 2,453 participants who lived in an on-campus residence hall. The researcher used the full subsample of sorority members and randomly sampled 193 participants from the other three groups (fraternity members and on-campus residents, both men and women) to produce equally sized groups of men and women from both assessments. About 54% of the respondents were sophomores, 32% were juniors, and 14% were seniors. First-year students were not included in the study because they were required to live in on-campus housing. The ethnic distribution of the sample was 5% Black/African-American, 7% Asian/Middle Eastern/Pacific Islander, 5% Spanish/
RESULTS

The descriptive data revealed that participants were most satisfied with the degree of safety they felt in their living arrangement ($M = 6.10, SD = 1.09$). Peer interaction received the second highest rating ($M = 5.75, SD = 1.34$), and programming ($M = 5.40, SD = 1.37$) and living conditions ($M = 5.15, SD = 1.42$) received the lowest ratings of the living environment measures. In regard to the academic success measures, 31% of the respondents reported having a cumulative GPA less than 3.00, 38% reported a cumulative GPA between 3.00 and 3.49, and 31% reported a GPA of 3.50 or greater. In terms of the number of hours studied per week, 44% of the respondents studied 10 hours or less per week, 42% studied between 11 and 20 hours per week, and 14% studied 21 or more hours per week. In terms of alcohol use, 22% of the respondents indicated they did not consume alcohol. About 45% of the respondents reported they consumed alcohol once per week.
or less, and 31% indicated they consumed alcoholic beverages two to three times per week. The remaining 2% reported they consumed alcohol almost every day or every day. Of the respondents who indicated they consumed alcohol, 41% tended to binge drink (consume five or more alcoholic beverages per sitting).

The 2 x 2 factorial ANOVA revealed additional insights into the experiences of the respondents (see Table 1). Students residing in on-campus housing reported greater satisfaction with their living conditions, $F(1, 750) = 24.13$, $p < .001$, and felt safer and more secure, $F(1, 763) = 6.84$, $p = .009$, than did students who resided in fraternity/sorority housing. In comparison, students living in a fraternity or sorority house reported greater satisfaction with the programming that was provided to them, $F(1, 755) = 4.53$, $p = .034$, and reported a higher degree of peer interaction, $F(1, 751) = 87.20$, $p < .001$, than did students living in on-campus housing. Fraternity/sorority residents also consumed alcohol more frequently, $F(1, 749) = 126.44$, $p < .001$, and were more likely to binge drink, $F(1, 717) = 59.26$, $p < .001$. There was no statistically significant difference in the number of hours that respondents studied per week in terms of living arrangement.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
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<th>Statistical results</th>
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<td>.585</td>
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<tr>
<td>Binge drinking</td>
<td>.606</td>
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Note: Relative effects represent the degree to which respondents in one group score high or low on a dependent variable relative to the scores of all of the respondents. Higher values correspond to higher ratings. Statistical significance was set at the .05 level. Significant differences are in bold.
The comparison of the experiences of women and men revealed significant differences for living conditions, $F(1, 750) = 18.99, p < .001$, binge drinking, $F(1, 717) = 7.45, p = .006$, and hours spent studying, $F(1, 761) = 8.42, p = .004$. Men were more satisfied with their living conditions and were more likely to binge drink than were women, while women tended to spend more hours studying per week than did men.

There was an interaction effect between living arrangement and gender for the measure of cumulative GPA, $F(1, 759) = 4.72, p = .030$. Figure 1 illustrates that the significant main effects of GPA can be attributed to the living arrangement x gender interaction, as seen by the non-parallel lines. Specifically, fraternity residents reported significantly lower GPAs than did both groups of women ($d_{\text{sorority}} = -.285, p < .001$; $d_{\text{on-campus women}} = -.312, p < .001$) and men in residence halls ($d_{\text{on-campus men}} = -.218, p < .001$). There were no other statistically significant interactions.

**DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study indicate that college and university students residing in on-campus housing have different experiences than do students who reside in fraternity or sorority housing. Previous research on the residential life of students in on-campus housing and fraternity/sorority housing has primarily focused on differences in alcohol-related behaviors (Page & O’Hegarty, 2006; Wechsler et al., 2000; Wechsler, Lee, Nelson et al., 2002). The current study contributes to the current literature by highlighting differences that exist in terms of living conditions, programming, safety, and peer interaction. Specifically, students residing in on-campus housing reported greater satisfaction with their living conditions and the perception of safety than did students residing in fraternity/sorority chapter houses. Students residing in fraternity/sorority housing, on the other hand, were more satisfied with the programming that was provided to them and experienced a greater degree of peer interaction. Because fraternity and sorority members are generally responsible for organizing the programs that are offered in their organizations, they may be more satisfied with the programming because they are engaged in the planning process as fellow members of the
organization. According to Ogletree, Turner, Vieira, and Brunotte (2005), including residents in the planning of social and educational activities positively influences resident satisfaction. In terms of safety, research on fraternity parties revealed that students did not feel as safe at fraternity houses as they did in other living arrangements (Menning, 2009). Additional research is needed to understand why students who live in fraternity/sorority housing feel less safe.

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This study revealed that students residing in fraternity/sorority housing tended to consume alcoholic beverages more frequently than did students who lived on campus. This supports previous research that linked living in fraternity/sorority housing with increased alcohol use (Borsari et al., 2009; Wechsler, Lee, Kuo et al., 2002; Wechsler, Lee, Nelson et al., 2002). Previous studies have found that precollege drinking behaviors influence alcohol use in college (Cross et al., 2009; Fromme et al., 2008; Larimer et al., 2000) and that students who regularly consume alcohol select living environments that enable them to drink (Fromme et al., 2008; Larimer et al., 2000). The difference in drinking behaviors found in the current study may be due to student attributes in addition to environmental characteristics. The research findings also support previous research showing that men tended to consume greater quantities of alcohol than did women (Cross et al., 2009; Larimer et al., 2000; Theall et al., 2009).

The current study found no difference in terms of residence in the number of hours studied per week. There was, however, a difference in terms of gender, with women studying more frequently than men. Previous research on differences in the experiences of students in terms of living arrangement has not explored the study habits of students. The current study contributes to the existent literature by showing that students residing in residence halls or fraternity/sorority housing report comparable hours of studying per week. It should be noted, however, that the number of hours respondents dedicated to studying per week was low. In their guide to college success, Rooney and Reardon (2009) suggested that college students should spend two to three hours preparing for class for every hour they spend in class. That is equivalent to a minimum of 24 hours of studying per week for a student enrolled for 12 credit hours, yet only 14% of the respondents dedicated 21 or more hours to their studies per week.

The interaction effect between living arrangement and gender on the academic performance of the respondents is significant. Findings indicate that the impact of the living
arrangement varies as a function of the gender of the respondent; specifically, on-campus housing appears to be a better residential environment for supporting the academic success of college men. The non-significant difference between women and men who lived in on-campus housing supports this claim that living environments affect their academic performance differently. The finding expands our understanding of the relationship between a student’s academic performance, living arrangement, and gender. Previous research has explored the difference in academic performance of college students by living arrangement (Kuder, 1972; Nicpon et al., 2006; Terenzini et al., 1999) and gender (DeBard & Sacks, 2010; McCluskey-Titus & Oliver, 2001; Wielkiewicz et al., 2005) separately, but no studies explored the possibility of an interaction between the two characteristics.

IMPLICATIONS

Overall, the study revealed differences in the experiences of college students in terms of living arrangement and gender. An interaction effect for the cumulative GPA of the respondents in terms of gender and living arrangement was also present. These findings have several implications for practice and research.

Implications for Practice

There are several important implications of these findings that professionals can use to improve the student experience in both on- and off-campus housing.

Promote active engagement within on-campus housing. The results revealed that students who resided on campus were less satisfied with the programming they received

Findings indicate that the impact of the living arrangement varies as a function of the gender of the respondent; specifically, on-campus housing appears to be a better residential environment for supporting the academic success of college men.

and reported less peer interaction than did their peers who resided in fraternity/sorority housing. Since involving residents in the planning of programs and events might increase satisfaction (Ogletree et al., 2005), housing officers and resident assistants should create more intentional opportunities for engagement and interaction. For example, a resident assistant could collaborate with a resident interested in social justice in planning a cultural awareness program. This approach might have the secondary effect of teaching residents transferable skills pertaining to event management, interpersonal relations, and time management.

Encourage students to review their academic behaviors. Nearly half of the respondents dedicated 10 hours or less per week to studying, which is below the recommended standard of studying two to three hours per hour spent in class (Rooney & Reardon, 2009). Administrators should encourage residents to review their academic behaviors by having residents reflect on how they spend their time, their note-taking style, in what conditions they
study, if they routinely connect with faculty members, and if they work on assignments ahead of time. A holistic discussion of positive academic behaviors might assist residents in identifying ways to improve their academic success. Academic advisors can be a great resource for achieving this recommendation. Administrators might also consider educating resident assistants and fraternity/sorority scholarship chairpersons about effective study strategies and referral techniques. These peer educators could serve as valuable resources for students wanting academic advice.

**Establish improved safety measures in fraternity/sorority housing.** Students residing in fraternal housing felt less safe in their living environment than did students who lived on campus. Student affairs administrators should work with fraternity/sorority advisors and student leaders to ensure that fraternity and sorority houses are safe and secure. Administrators could accomplish this by encouraging chapter housing corporations to arrange periodic safety inspections. In addition, administrators could encourage fraternity/sorority house managers and housing corporation representatives to ensure that their facilities meet health and building codes and are free of fire hazards. Collaborative initiatives between housing professionals and fraternity/sorority advisors might be beneficial in ensuring the safety of fraternity/sorority residents. For instance, fraternity/sorority house managers might attend resident assistant training sessions to learn about creating safe environments, an arrangement that has been successful at Troy University (J. C. Hager, personal communication, December 2, 2011). Additionally, many websites feature free educational resources for teaching college students about fire safety. In his review of the website igotzknow.com, Hager (2011) suggested that administrators and student leaders ask students to complete the online modules as an educational sanction for violating risk management policies.

**Promote academic engagement in fraternities.** The results of the present study revealed an interaction effect between residence and gender for the measure of academic performance. Fraternity houses do not appear to be effective environments for promoting the academic success of college men. Student affairs administrators should work with fraternity advisors and student leaders to ensure that fraternities support the academic mission of...
the host institution. Possible strategies include encouraging student leaders to establish and enforce quiet hours and to create a culture of academic excellence within fraternities. Jelke and Kuh (2003) found that high-achieving fraternities have a culture of academic excellence. Moreover, student leaders could collaborate with campus resources, such as the academic support office or tutoring center, to establish educational sessions on effective study strategies as part of the membership education curriculum.

The literature on student engagement shows a link between student and faculty interaction and student academic success (Terenzini et al., 1999). Fraternity student leaders and advisors should consider engaging faculty members in the fraternal experience. For example, a sociology professor could educate the residents on social justice or a business professor could teach them about event management or personal financing. This initiative would promote student-faculty interaction, while teaching fraternity members important life skills. This initiative could be fruitful in sororities and residence halls, as well.

Reduce the prevalence of alcohol use in fraternity/sorority houses. Residents of fraternity or sorority housing reported consuming alcohol more frequently than did participants who resided on campus. Student affairs administrators should work with organization advisors and student leaders to reduce the prevalence of alcohol use in fraternity houses, which have been described as environments that enable alcohol abuse (Borsari et al., 2009) and whose traditions, such as big brother/big sister events and date parties, might encourage high-risk drinking (Kuh & Arnold, 1993). Administrators might consider prohibiting or limiting alcohol consumption in chapter houses and reducing the use of alcohol as a social bond during fraternity/sorority activities. Administrators could accomplish the latter by encouraging students to continue traditions in an alcohol-free capacity. For example, big brother/big sister events and initiations could be celebrated by hosting a social gathering such as a dinner, a gift exchange, a bonfire, a parent event, or a bowling tournament—events that encourage social interaction without making the consumption of alcohol a primary focus.

Fraternity houses do not appear to be effective environments for promoting the academic success of college men. Student affairs administrators should work with fraternity advisors and student leaders to ensure that fraternities support the academic mission of the host institution. Possible strategies include encouraging student leaders to establish and enforce quiet hours and to create a culture of academic excellence within fraternities.
Limitations and Implications for Research

As with all research, the results of this study should be interpreted in light of the methodological limitations. First, the vast majority of the respondents identified as White/Caucasian, so the results may not accurately reflect the experiences of racial/ethnic minorities. Second, the study design did not consider respondent and institutional characteristics. The magnitude of the differences may be amplified or diminished after controlling for institutional or respondent background characteristics. Lastly, the study used self-reported data, which can be problematic, because respondents might not be able to recall the solicited information accurately (Porter, 2011). Despite these limitations, the study contributes to the literature on the residential experience of college and university students by illuminating how students in residence halls and those in fraternity/sorority housing perceive their living environments.

While the present study expands the literature on the experiences of college students residing in on-campus or fraternal housing, some questions remain unanswered. The design of the present study did not enable the researcher to determine why residents of fraternity or sorority houses felt less safe in their living environment than did residents who lived on campus. Future research should explore which factors contribute to or hamper students’ perceptions of feeling safe in a living environment so that student affairs administrators could more easily foster safe living environments for students.

The focus of this study was the academic success, alcohol use, and perceptions of the living environment of on-campus and fraternity/sorority chapter house residents. Future research should explore if educational outcomes, such as gains in critical thinking, multicultural competence, personal development skills, and leadership ability, vary by living arrangement. Residence halls with living-learning communities may be more effective in developing these abilities than are fraternities and sororities (Blackburn & Janosik, 2009).

Researchers might also explore the impact of residential curricula in fraternity/sorority housing. Miami University in Oxford, Ohio,
recently developed a fraternity residential curriculum to promote the academic success of sophomore students who reside in fraternity houses (Stetter, 2011). Yet researchers must still ask how effective these curricula are. How do fraternity/sorority houses with a residential curriculum compare to living-learning communities in residence halls? The answer to this question can assist student affairs administrators in shaping fraternity/sorority chapter houses as learning environments.

CONCLUSION

Does it matter where college students live? More specifically, do college students living in residence halls or fraternity/sorority housing have comparable levels of academic success, satisfaction with the living environment, and responsible use of alcohol? The results of this study revealed that on-campus residents were more satisfied with their living conditions and their perceptions of safety than were fraternity/sorority chapter house residents. Men living in residence halls also reported greater grade point averages than did men living in fraternity houses. Conversely, fraternity and sorority chapter house residents reported greater satisfaction with programming efforts, enhanced interpersonal skills, and higher levels of alcohol use. The findings revealed that the living arrangement of college students does matter when it comes to safe, secure, and engaging learning environments. Furthermore, the variation in the performance of residence halls and fraternity/sorority houses in providing effective learning environments highlights an opportunity for student affairs administrators in residence life and fraternity/sorority life to work together to improve the residential experience and learning of students.

REFERENCES


Discussion Questions

1. The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of the living environments of on-campus residents and residents of fraternity and sorority houses. What are your impressions of these students' living experiences on your campus?

2. In this study, residents of fraternity/sorority groups reported a higher level of satisfaction with programming, and the author suggests that this is due to those students' involvement in the planning process. Discuss strategies for engaging students in the creation of programs in the residence halls and within student organizations. Identify potential hurdles that inhibit efforts to engage students in program development.

3. The findings of this study indicate that college and university students residing in on-campus housing have different experiences than do students who reside in the chapter house of a fraternity or sorority. What do you believe to be the factors that create these differences?

4. Speculate on the differences between fraternity and sorority housing that is housed in on-campus facilities and those programs that are truly off campus.

5. This study used existing data to respond to research questions regarding living arrangements. Review the surveys referenced in the study (ACUHO-I/EBI, AFA/EBI), and identify two additional analyses that could be conducted using the same survey data.

6. In light of recent campus shootings and violence elsewhere, student safety is a very important topic for most students, parents, and stakeholders. The findings of this study suggest that students residing in on-campus housing report greater satisfaction with their living conditions and their perception of safety as compared to students residing in fraternity/sorority chapter houses. What suggestions do you have to improve the perceived sense of safety in chapter houses?