Exploring College Roommate Conflicts

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/stander_posters

Recommended Citation

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Stander Symposium at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Stander Symposium Posters by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.
Research Question: How do students perceive the experience of a roommate conflict?

Subquestions:
• What conflict resolution strategies do roommates in conflict use?
• How do roommates in conflict describe how the conflict has shaped their ability to handle future conflicts?

Methodology

Data Collection:
• Qualitative study with 30-60 minute semi-structured interviews.
• Six students self-selected to take part in the study.

Data Analysis:
• Open and a priori coding were used to see if Thomas and Kilmann’s (1974) Conflict Management Modes (see graph in column 3) and Hocker and Wilmot’s (2018) definition of conflict emerged.
• Conflict is “an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources and interference from others in achieving their goals” (Hocker & Wilmot, 2018, p. 13).

Overview

Themes

Living Habits: A majority of underlying issues for participants appear to stem from different living habit preferences, which align with Hocker and Wilmot’s (2018) definition of conflict.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incompatible Goals</th>
<th>Scarce Resources</th>
<th>Interference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When to sleep</td>
<td>Peaceful rest</td>
<td>Being loud while sleeping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nose level in room</td>
<td>Quiet time</td>
<td>Audible distractions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of socializing</td>
<td>Balanced social time</td>
<td>Ability/mobility and frequency of having others over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleanliness level</td>
<td>Contentment with cleanliness level</td>
<td>Room is dirtier or cleaner than preferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to lock the door</td>
<td>Safety vs. not being locked out</td>
<td>Locking the door more or less than desired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication efforts</td>
<td>Knowing roommate’s plans</td>
<td>Lack explanations from roommate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of drugs/alcohol in room</td>
<td>Freedom of expression vs. not getting in trouble</td>
<td>Having the opposite alcohol/drug use preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent in room</td>
<td>Having room to self</td>
<td>Roommate spending too much time in room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Roommate Housing Form:
Participants feel either their roommate misrepresented themselves on their housing form or the forms are not taken into consideration when making random roommate assignments.

Shared Space/Interdependence:
Participants do not feel their space is being adequately shared. They believe their roommate(s) is not mindful about their wants and needs.

Safe Haven: A phrase commonly used by participants in reference to their room is “safe haven.” To them that means they want their room be a place to escape life’s issues and have peace and quiet.

Depth of Relationship: At first, they were hoping their roommate could fulfill their social needs in college.
• The depth of the relationship changes the ability to discuss conflict—when there isn’t a close bond between roommates, it is perceived that the relationship is too fragile to address it.

Confiding in Others: Participants confide in other people besides their roommate about the problems they are experiencing in their living situation such as friends, parents and their R.A.

Thomas and Kilmann’s (1974) Conflict Management Modes: Three participants can be characterized as having an assertive style (Y axis on the graph) and the other three appear to have a cooperative style (X axis on the graph).

Growth in Conflict Management:
Participants learn from these conflicts and realize they have room for growth in the way they handle conflict; however, none of them want to considerably change their style. They feel more confident handling future conflict.

Future Roommate(s) Selection:
Experiencing roommate conflict early on in their collegiate career equips them to strategically pick their future roommate(s) based upon living habits through a more serious vetting process.

Recommendations

• Stress the importance of being honest about living habits on roommate housing form and having the student, not their parent, fill it out.
• Help roommates early on to form a relationship with each other through roommate programs that strive to establish personal connections.
• Create programming for students to understand Thomas and Kilmann’s (1974) Conflict Management Modes and focus on helping people strive for the collaboration mode, which creates win-win situations. Train housing staff and R.A.s on this, too.
• Conduct a future study that focuses on better understanding roommate conflict from the R.A.’s perspective.

Limitations

• Conflict does not bring out the best in people, so participants may have painted a better picture of themselves than reality to protect their image.
• All participants were white, females which may have resulted in a limited representation of roommate conflict experiences. Different themes may have emerged if a better variety of demographic characteristics were represented.

Participant Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cara</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtney</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References