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University Housing, Sense of Belonging, and Self-Esteem

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Abstract

Student housing factors were analyzed to assess their impact on self-esteem and sense of belonging, predicting that both would be higher in students living in university housing and with more roommates. Eighty-seven undergraduate Boston University students were sent a survey containing the State Self-Esteem Scale and the Imperial College of London Sense of Belonging Scale, as well as questions related to housing and demographics. A small positive correlation was found between the number of roommates and the number of semesters at BU. No racial or ethnic differences were found for self-esteem or sense of belonging. After regrouping all non-binary genders into a single group, no significant gender differences were found. Results suggest that mandatory on-campus residency may not promote student self-esteem and sense of belonging as previously thought.

Introduction

Our study assessed how on-campus and off-campus housing impacts a Boston University student's self-esteem and belonging. This is important to understand as it is a key factor in determining academic success and overall well-being.

Hypothesis 1 - Individuals living in BU housing will be associated with a higher sense of belonging and self-esteem than those not living in BU housing.

Hypothesis 2 - Individuals with a greater number of roommates will have a higher sense of belonging and self-esteem than those with fewer.

Method

Participants - Eighty-seven undergraduate Boston University students (13 males, 69 females, two non-binary, one other, one preferred not to answer, by self-identified race, 31.03% Asian, 8.04% Black, 47.52% White, 17.24% preferred to self-describe, 1.14% did not respond).

Materials - Participants were sent a link to a Qualtrics survey and consent form. The survey included the State Self-Esteem Scale (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991) (α = .94), the Sense of Belonging Scale (Imperial College of London, 2016) (α = .86), as well as other questions asked for information about subjects' living situations within and around the BU community.

Procedure - Participants were told via an email link that we were evaluating sense of belonging, self-esteem, and liking because we wanted to learn more about how living arrangements of BU students affects these factors. Participants were emailed with a link to the survey which consisted of 39 questions that lasted about 10-20 min and were given a two-week deadline to complete the survey.

Results

Hypothesis 1 -No significant difference was found in self-esteem between on and off campus residency, t (85) = -1.22, p = .227, d = -.26. No significant difference was found in sense of belonging between on and off campus residency, t (85) = -.22, p = .825, d = -.05 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Self-Esteem and Sense of Belonging by Residency Type

	Residency Type	
Variable	BU Housing	Non-BU Housing
Self-Esteem	61.35	65.68
	(15.50)	(17.57)
Sense of Belonging	20.35	20.58
	(5.07)	(4.54)

Note. Maximum score for the State Self-Esteem scale is 100. Maximum score for the Imperial College of London Sense of Belonging scale is 35.

Hypothesis 2 - No significant correlation was found between number of roommates and self-esteem, r (85) = -.05, n = 87, p = .658 . No significant correlation was found between number of roommates and sense of belonging, r (85) = .06, n = 87, p = .587. Additionally, there was a small significant positive correlation between the number of roommates and semesters at BU, r (85) = .24, n = 87, p = .025 (see Table 2).

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations of Self-Esteem Scores by Number of Roommates

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1.Self-Esteem	63.24	16.53		-.05	.18	.36*
2. Number of Roommates	3.16	1.75	-.05		.24*	.06
3. Semesters at BU	5.95	1.63	.18	.24*		.06
4. Sense of Belonging	20.49	4.82	.36*	.06	.06	

Note. Maximum score for the State Self-Esteem scale is 100. Maximum score for the Imperial College of London Sense of Belonging scale is 35.

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

When the responses from our housing style question were modified into two groups, living with a shared or personal bathroom, those in apartment-styles (personal bathroom and spaces) had higher levels of self-esteem than those in dormitories (shared spaces), t (81) = -2.03, p = .049, d = -.579 (see Table 3).

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations of Self-Esteem and Sense of Belonging by Housing Style

	Housing Style	
Variable	Dormitory	Suite/Apartment-Style
Self-Esteem	55.33	64.50
	(14.83)	(16.02)
Sense of Belonging	19.20	20.59
	(5.89)	(4.43)

Note. Maximum score for the State Self-Esteem scale is 100. Maximum score for the Imperial College of London Sense of Belonging scale is 35.

Discussion

- The results did not support the hypothesis that those living in university housing would have higher self-esteem or sense of belonging. A limitation of these findings was the convenience sampling of students from psychology classes at Boston University, which may reflect the self-esteem of only some students living in university and non-university housing. Further research should be conducted with a wider variety of students across different schools.
- Our analysis also did not support the second hypothesis that self-esteem and sense of belonging would be higher for those with more roommates. A limitation was that the number of roommates was skewed, with most individuals having few roommates. A stronger relationship may be found with participants with more roommates.
- The number of semesters a student has been at BU correlated with number of roommates - understandable, as a student on campus longer likely has more connections leading to more roommates than newer students. This prompts questions about whether there would be a relationship between number of semesters at BU and affiliation or connection to social networks. Further research could help universities understand what factors promote or harm a student's social experiences.
- An interesting finding was suite-housing students had higher self-esteem than those in standard dorms. This suggests housing autonomy may influence self-esteem and decision-making and provides support that keeping students in on-campus dormitories their first year, as is standard in many schools, may be ineffective for fostering new students' self-esteem and connection to the community.