ENVIRONMENTAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCES OF RESIDENTIAL COMMON SPACES ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

ENVIRONMENTAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCES OF RESIDENTIAL COMMON SPACES ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

PIYA BOSE

This project looked at ways in which college students use common areas in traditional residence halls. Previous research and theory shows that students’ success is based on both their academic and social integration into a university. For students living on campus, residence halls play an integral role in both.

In Spring 2007, I did a project in a research course which provided the foundation to frame this thesis. Using qualitative methods of site examination, interviews, long observations, and snap-shot observations, I collected information to understand how students use common areas.

After a process of coding and data analysis, the themes that emerged from all the forms of data collection were territorial behaviors, the development of social networks, use of resources, study habits, activities, and multitasking. These themes, in conjunction with previous theory and research, provide groundwork for furthering the design of common areas and implications for further research.
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Completing my thesis is not only the culmination of my degree, it also serves as the end of a chapter in my life – four years at Humboldt State University. As I reflect upon the last two years of working on my degree and four years of life in Arcata, I know I have by no means achieved this by myself.

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the fall semester of 2006, I sat down with a group of students who worked for me in a traditional residence hall at a state university in northern California. This group of students requested that we move the furniture around in the main common areas of this building. Moving the furniture would result in changing the functionality of the spaces as well. What would this mean for the spaces? What would this mean for the students using these spaces? Would more students like the set up? Would fewer students utilize the spaces?

Curious about these questions, I designed a class project in a graduate-level research methods course to better understand how students use the common spaces in a particular building. I examined the areas to be studied, developed a set of questions for a focus group, conducted two interviews, and completed several observations.

From this class project, I was able to gather information regarding some influences on students’ decisions and behaviors in common spaces. The specific themes that came from that project included territorial behaviors, social networks, and resource use in common areas. All of the information gathered from this project was utilized as a foundation for creating this full-scale thesis project to better understand how students use the space and resources in common areas in residence halls on university campuses.
Residence halls are a crucial part of the community development and holistic growth of students in higher education on campuses with residential communities. As the purpose and role of residential facilities continue to evolve to provide a more intentional educational and community driven role in students’ experiences, there is a need to ask questions about how the spaces that bring students together are designed and how they are being used.

Initial clarification of terms used in this thesis will help avoid potential confusion, primarily because of the ever-evolving definitions linked to residential spaces and related student experiences. Residence hall refers to any variety of housing accommodations available to college students on campus. A university can manage its own residence halls or outsource this management to private property management companies. Traditional residence halls are buildings with many rooms that usually have single and double occupancy rooms available to students. These buildings have common areas for bringing students together to socialize, study, learn, and participate in extra-curricular activities. Non-traditional residence halls are apartments, suites, and houses with a small group of people (generally 3 – 12) that live together to form a smaller community. Non-traditional residence halls generally tend to have smaller common spaces, designed more like living rooms, for the smaller communities.

Common areas and lounges refer to public spaces for residents of a particular residence hall. At the campus being used as the site for data collection, all students who live in these areas have access to these areas with resources available for their
use 24 hours a day. Students who do not live in the area may access these areas if
someone lets them into the spaces. Common areas and lounges can have many
different intended purposes, but there is no enforcement that the areas are used
specifically for these purposes.

Subsequent chapters will provide the foundations, methods, results, and
analysis of this research project. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature, looking at the
history of evolution of residence halls and their role and impact on student success in
higher education. Chapter 3 outlines the details of the qualitative methods used for
collecting data, while Chapter 4 summarizes the findings from the data collected
through the qualitative research methods. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the data
collected and the relevance in relation to current literature. Chapter 6 looks at the
limitations of this study and the implications for further research.

Providing a theoretical and historical foundation is essential before presenting
the research methods and findings to understand the context. The next chapter will
explore the history of residence halls and the role they play on college campuses.
Additionally, environmental behavior and the psychological impacts of various
spaces will be explored in how they impact individuals’ behaviors in spaces.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

College and university housing facilities have evolved from places for students to eat, sleep, and study into residence halls that provide complimentary educational and social development experiences to experiences in classrooms. The evolution of the purposes of colleges and universities has greatly influenced the functions of residence halls. Properly executed, intentional design and resource management in the residence halls can lead to college students having more holistic and successful experiences in college. The types of residence halls that students occupy can influence the way students develop social networks, study, and manage their college experience.

History of Residence Halls

During the colonial times, early colleges in the United States required faculty members be responsible for not only instruction, but supervision and discipline as there was a lack of funding to follow the academic models of their European counterparts (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). European faculty, without the responsibility of discipline and conduct, had the opportunity to develop a positive rapport with their students through study groups, meals, and other social venues (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). U.S. faculty of the time had very strong roles as parental figures, enforcing rules and regulations and shaping character development of the
young who were groomed to be the political and religious leaders of the communities (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). After the Civil War, many college-bound Americans (mostly privileged upper class) studied in Germany and learned to value the nature of research institutions and to devalue the interaction between academic life and residential life, thus creating the gap between academia and extracurricular activities that still exists in higher education (Schroeder & Mable, 1994).

When the Morrill Acts passed in 1862 (Morrill Act, 1862; Morrill Act, 1890), the federal government began to support institutions of higher education with land-grants. Land or money was given to each state in the union to create higher education institutions that would provide very specific training to students in the fields of agriculture, mechanic arts, and military tactics (Morrill Act, 1862; Morrill Act, 1890). With this law came pressure on faculty members to shift their focus towards research in their fields of expertise (Schroeder & Mable, 1994, Rudolph, 1968). The year 1890 brought about the second Morrill Act that would deny states land and funding if there was discrimination based on race for admissions; schools were allowed to circumvent this act by creating separate facilities for students of color (Morrill Act, 1890; Rudolph, 1968). Post WWII, the G. I. Bill provided education benefits to veterans, leading to increased enrollment in colleges and universities (Schroeder & Mable, 1994; The Servicemembers' Readjustment Act of 1944, 1944). With the Housing Act of 1950 came federal loans for building more housing on college campuses; however, the goal was to create as many bed spaces as possible, not to create and foster communities within the halls (Reorganization Plan No. 14 of
The shifts in faculty goals and the growth of housing on campuses caused the development of student affairs – professionals responsible for development of students’ social and personal identities (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). The political climates during the 1960s and 1970s gave rise to students wanting more independence in colleges and universities, which eventually led to professional residence life staff replacing traditional dorm mothers in the halls (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). Residential life departments eventually evolved into organizations that provide a holistic education for college students (Levine, 1994).

The evolution of the purpose of residence halls has brought on new opportunities for holistically educating students in the residence halls. Influence from institutions of higher education in Europe and Constitutional acts passed by the U.S. government led to the growth and necessity for residence halls on college campuses. The following section will discuss the potential for creating the most successful educational opportunities for students in the residence halls and the fundamental basis for the necessary cooperation between various members of a university.

*Residence Hall Role in Retention of Students*

As the number of students applying for colleges and universities increases, there is an increase in the number of students departing higher education as well (Tinto, 1993). Students decide to leave college for a variety of reasons, but there are two broad, but nonetheless critical aspects of students’ success (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). Students need to be engaged academically and socially for a successful experience (Astin, 1993). Students living on campus tend to be more engaged by
spending more time with faculty and peers outside of classrooms, being involved with extracurricular programs and events, having more appreciation for their campus and peers, and developing interpersonally (Astin, 1993; Pascarella et al., 1994; Berger, 1997). Residence halls have the potential to provide a space for community engagement on a micro level that can result in providing a larger campus community involvement (Berger, 1997). Additionally, students living on campus tend to be more engaged by spending more time being involved with extracurricular programs, events, and community service (Astin, 1993; Inkelas & Weisman, 2003; Pascarella et al., 1994). Students have opportunities to be involved with Greek life, leadership roles, social activism, and community service opportunities that are available on campuses. The next two sections will look at educational opportunities and social networks in the residence halls.

**Education in Residence Halls**

Residence halls were first developed in the United States replicating the campuses of Oxford and Cambridge in England to create cohesive communities of faculty and students (Schroeder & Mable, 1994; Rudolph, 1968). Residence halls were places where students slept, ate, and interacted with faculty and staff who acted in loco parentis or in the place of a parent (Schroeder & Mable, 1994). Now within residence halls, intentional education is complimentary to the academic lessons taught in classrooms, resulting in an interconnected educational experience (Kuh, 1994).
Beyond providing basic management functions, such as maintaining suitable living facilities, ensuring safety, and enforcing policies, it is the responsibility of residence life departments to facilitate and cultivate the educational and developmental purposes of the residence halls based on the needs of the community (Stimpson, 1994). The educational and developmental purposes of residence halls on a particular campus should support the current missions of the institution and residence life department in addition to the long-term goals of the campus community (Stimpson, 1994; Strange & Banning, 2001). Successful educational programs in residence halls require cooperation between and among students and faculty for several purposes including the establishment of clear goals and determination of holistic needs; provision of active learning opportunities in a multitude of ways to effectively meet the needs of different populations; development of intellectually challenging curriculum; and academic accountability of faculty and students (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kuh 1994; Stimpson, 1994). Additionally, students living on campus graduate at higher rates than students who commute (Pascarella et al., 1994). Thus, residence halls provide a much greater breadth of educational connections for college students. The education can be tailored to meet the students’ needs and interests, depending on the purposes and initiatives of the residence life model.

*Faculty Involvement*

Intentional education in residence halls can be achieved in a number of ways, especially with the cooperation of administrators, faculty, staff, and students towards
achieving common goals. Students who spend more time with faculty tend to improve writing skills, have higher GPAs, graduate from college, graduate with honors, and pursue a graduate degree (Astin, 1993). Students who spend more time with faculty tend to participate in social activism, take on leadership roles, and tutor other students (Astin, 1993).

Time spent with peers has the most impact on college students’ experience (Astin, 1993). Increased time spent with peers positively impacts students’ analytical and problem solving skills, likelihood to pursue a graduate degree, and attainment of a higher GPA (Astin, 1993). The next section will look at the development and impact of social networks.

*Social Networks in the Residence Halls*

It is important to note that there are many ways that students interact with their peers and that the type of interaction impacts different outcomes (Astin, 1993). While most student-to-student interaction positively influences students, there are some influences that can be detrimental. Students’ social networks can greatly impact their success in college and for residential students, residence halls tend to be the center of their social development (Astin, 1993; Kaya, 2004; Tinto, 1993). The community environment of social networks developed with the residence halls as the ability to connect students, which is an important aspect of student commitment to success (Berger, 1997).

Social networks in the residence halls have the potential to interfere with other forms of community interaction, such as clubs, Greek life, and faculty
engagement, because students spend the majority of their time interacting and socializing within their social networks inside their residential spaces (Berger, 1997).

Social networks greatly influence the choices that students make, especially in regards to alcohol (Astin, 1993). Athletes and students involved with Greek life (fraternities and sororities) tend to drink more than students who live in residence halls (Astin, 1993). Disturbances to living communities due to alcohol consumption, such as damages, vomit, sleep, studying, or unwanted personal interactions are much more common in traditional residential communities (Brower et al., 2003).

*Design Factors that Impact Behaviors*

Environmental psychology has explored the impacts of color, light, textures, and furniture as is correlated with behavior. While individuals respond differently to various stimuli, there is consistency between people with similar levels of sensitivity (Kwallek, et al., 2007). Color, in particular, impacts learning, mood, and productivity (Küller et al., 2006; Kwallek et al., 2007). Individuals respond differently to different spectrums of color and light, making the response to various colors different for each person. Light impacts both the perception of size and mood, including perception of spaciousness increasing with lighting (Küller et al., 2006; Stamps & Krishnan, 2006). The level of light combined with textured walls has an even greater impact on the perception of size of space (Stamps & Krishnan, 2006). The shape and distinguishing features of furniture can evoke emotional responses from soft, cute ranging to hard, not cute and rational (Hsiao & Chen, 2006). Positive emotional
responses indicate softer features while negative emotional responses correlate to hard, rational features of furniture (Hsiao & Chen, 2006).

**Territorial Behaviors**

Students in the United States are more territorial over their personal spaces and belongings in their private rooms than students abroad (Kaya & Weber, 2003). Territorial behaviors are determined by personalization and marking of territories (Kaya & Weber, 2003). Students in the U.S. claim their room to be much more personal that students abroad (Kaya & Weber, 2003). Students want the ability to personalize their own spaces with features such as accessible internet connections, moveable furniture, shelving, flexible lighting, and the ability to paint walls (Clemons, et. al, 2005).

**Residence Hall Innovations**

New residence halls are being constructed around the world on a constant basis, each one more revolutionary in enhancing the experience of college students than the last. A school in Southwestern United States built a new residence hall, very different from traditional halls (Doxtater, 2005). All the rooms were grouped together and on the other side of the building an array of common areas – study lounges, meeting rooms, kitchens, TV lounges, activity rooms – were grouped together (Doxtater, 2005). This resulted in students spending more time in their rooms rather than going to the common areas because of the distance and inconvenience of their location (Doxtater, 2005). Finding a balance between meeting
students needs for academic and social engagement in the residence halls, while balancing spatial design factors is crucial.

Conclusion

Residence hall design has an impact on students’ social engagement in the residence halls (Wilcox & Holahan, 1976). More emphasis needs to be placed on the design and impacts of residence halls on social development and engagement (Wilcox & Holahan, 1976). Current literature shows what students need to succeed in college conceptually and environmental psychology has identified some key factors that impact behaviors. Literature specifically about how students use common areas in residence halls is much more limited. The limitations of the literature and the need to help students succeed led to the following question: How do college students at a midsize public institution use common areas in traditional residence halls and what impacts does the environment have on their behaviors?
CHAPTER 3
METHODS

Finding the methods to collect useful data to address the questions being asked in this research project was initially a struggle. Quantitative methods did not seem as appropriate as qualitative approaches because qualitative methods of collecting information helped to contextualize, understand and interpret how the students socially construct their experience in the residence halls (Glesne, 2006). In Spring 2007 I did a class project for a Qualitative Research Methods course and the methodology for this research project was been shaped by the information that was gathered and analyzed. Methodology was also restructured to accommodate this larger scale project.

I used four main methods of data collection for this research project and a focus group was used in the initial class project. The four methods each provided a different set of very rich information. I examined the common areas, interviewed five students, observed the common area for 2 one-hour time periods, and conducted fourteen snap shot observations. In the initial project completed during Spring 2007, I also included a focus group to aid in framing the questions for the interviews. The information from the focus group is included below.

Focus Group (Spring 2007)

After examining the areas in Spring 2007, I developed a set of questions for a focus group. The focus group consisted of 7 students who work as student leaders
and peer mentors within the residence hall. There was a high level of trust among them, so they respectfully challenged each other and gave me honest feedback. They had a very good understanding of the building and living area as they were not only residents, but student leaders in the area but they were not ideal respondents for the actual interviews because of this role. However, their focus group feedback allowed me to create better questions for individual interviews in later phases of this research. Specifically, my questions were further developed to include kitchens as a common area that students use and consider that the territoriality of the areas. Kitchens bring people together with food, the ultimate tool for community development. I was also surprised to learn that the leaders of the community did not use these spaces unless it was for a very specific purpose, such as a meeting or a program.

Site selection/Examination

Before data collection began in Spring 2008, it was important for me to select a site that would provide me with the most useful information. The most convenient building and space to observe is where I work because I have direct access to the students and the building. There are many ethical considerations that I had to consider by doing “backyard research” (Glesne, 2006). The decision I made to use my own building was grounded in the ethic that I want to know about how to improve the building and community in which I work in order to better provide for the students that live here (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003; Glesne, 2006).

To examine the common areas, I created a diagramed layout of the area and took pictures of the areas. I know what resources are available to students in these
spaces and this allowed me to reflect on potential uses of these areas. Additionally, I took photographs of the area so that I could more carefully consider and analyze aspects such as colors, furniture, textures, and layouts.

One of the spaces observed is a study lounge with tables, couches, a dry erase board two small windows, dark walls, and a lot of lighting. There is a lobby area with a ping-pong table and surrounding couches. In the larger TV lounge there is a TV with couches, a fireplace, a piano, and pods of couches and table. There is also a kitchen with a full size refrigerator, stove, sink, and microwave.

All of these spaces are available from the two main entrances of the building and students traverse through the spaces everyday to leave or return to the building (see Figure 3.1).
Figure 3.1 The diagram of the layout of the common areas observed. The TV lounge and couch pods are on the left side, the study lounge is on the left side, and the pin pong area is at the bottom of the diagram. The diagram is not to scale.
Interview Participants

I generally know the students who live in my building and I thought this would help ensure good trustworthy interviews with students. However, as an authority figure in this community, who also serves as a judicial officer, I had to consider that students will alter their responses as to not get in trouble (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003). On the same token, I believed that students with whom I had a positive relationship would be very willing to provide me with information that helped me and was useful. I was concerned that I would not get a good perspective of use of the space if I worked only with students with whom I had a good relationship.

Another aspect of working with students in my building with whom I had developed relationships is that I know more about their history – I know whom they spend time with, I know more about them, which would make analyzing the data more meaningful. I do think it is an ethical concern to use prior knowledge (previously developed relationships) for the study. I feel as though I may better understand what they were conveying by knowing their personal stories through different venues. As such, I selected five students to interview for a purposeful sample in this case study approach (Glesne, 2006). The questions asked were framed from the focus group completed in Spring 2007 and the results of the Spring 2007
project (see Appendix A for the interview questions).

I maintained my role as a student affairs educator and did not ignore opportunities to help students reflect upon their experiences, which served to contribute to the level of trust between the interviewees and me. From the interviews, I observed these students (all first year students) reflecting on their past year, which is an important part of their growth and development. Each interviewee signed a confidentiality statement (see Appendix B for a copy of the statement of confidentiality). I recorded each interview with a device connected to an MP3 player and took observer’s notes through the interview to help in the process of framing subsequent questions and trying to keep a documentation of the interview processes (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003). In all the interviews, questions sometimes diverted from the proposed questions to further follow up with students to get clarification and advance my understanding of their experience (Glesne, 2006).

The first interviewee, Student A, is a non-traditional first year student living in a first year building. He is currently enrolled in a Leadership Studies course I teach which is required for students interested in leadership roles within the university’s Residence Life department. I asked him to be part of my interview process because I have observed him using the lounge areas a significant amount. I also know that he would be willing to share his thoughts with me honestly. Student A is an immigrant to the United States and Spanish is his first language. He lives on the second floor on a co-ed floor and his major is social work. Student A and I spent
just under 20 minutes talking during the interview, during which he was excited and engaged.

The second interviewee, Student B is a first generation college student and identifies as a person of color. She is currently a Business major, but is also considering Art. She does not live in the residence hall being observed, but spends a significant amount of time in the common areas of the building observed. She is in a leadership class that I teach. She was more reserved at the beginning of the interview, although she eagerly agreed to participate in the interview process. She lives in a living and learning community focused on outdoor activities and community service, of which she does not take much interest.

Student C also spends a significant amount of time in the lounge (Students A, B, & C are all friends). She is a very active person and spends lots of time working out. She is extremely committed to her schoolwork. From outside of the interview setting, I know that she struggles with her roommates (she’s in a triple), which I suspect may contribute to her spending a lot of time outside of her room. Student C did not make that direct connection often during the interview. Student C identifies as student of color and lives on an all women’s wing.

Student D does not spend any time in the common areas, rather she has built her community within her hallway and living community. Student D is a first year student and presents as a white female. She lives on an all women’s wing and spends most of her time in her and her friends’ rooms. Not only is her floor all women, it is also a special themed living area, which has some intentional programming for
empowering women and breaking down power structures across identities. Her hallway is near my office and I often chat with her when she is coming and leaving her hallway and I am in my office. These interactions, although casual, provided a level of trust that led her to agree to be interviewed. We also spent several minutes talking about topics related to her schoolwork after the interview stopped being recorded.

Student E is a first year student who presents as a white male and is majoring in Forestry. He does not spend much time in the common areas. His social network was established on the third floor, where he lives. He and I have a friend in common and I selected to interview him because I know that he makes different life style choices than the other students interviewed, particularly in relation to drug and alcohol use (other students involved do not regularly use drugs or alcohol). Student E and I have developed a trusting rapport because we have a friend in common and he has a great deal of respect for me and his community because of this rapport. He has worked with student leaders to put on educational programs, making him very engaged in the community. Student E also spent about 15 minutes after the interview recording ended reflecting on different aspects of his first year experience.

Upon completing the interviews, I worked with a transcription service in the local area to have the five interviews transcribed for this research project and agreed to a statement of confidentiality (see Appendix C for the statement of confidentiality). While having a third party transcribe these resulted in some
questions, I was able to go back and fill in those questions from my notes taken during the interview and listening to the interviews over again.

*Long Observation*

Along with the interviews, I conducted two one-hour long observations of the areas. This proved to be a difficult task for me as a member of the community. From my previous experience with the Spring 2007 class project, I learned that I could not complete this task solely as an observer, but rather in a participant observer role, as interactions with students were unavoidable (Glesne, 2006). In the previous project, students asked questions, invited me to join in activities, and had brief conversations. I had expected these interactions to occur during this round of observations.

For both observations, I sat on a plastic chair in a visible part of the lounge that would allow for maximum viewing space of both sides of the lounge. I could see the TV lounge, the study lounge, and the ping-pong area. I had a laptop computer with me to take notes as I was observing the spaces. My presence in the spaces received a few different forms of response from students. Some students came and interacted with me, some had a looks of confusions when they realized I was sitting in the lounge with a laptop, and others ignored the fact I was in this space.

From the prior observation in Spring 2007, I learned that the spaces were very fluid – things were always changing – people, furniture, and activities. This fluidity was also supported in the observations that were conducted for the scope of this research project. The people, activities, mood, and purpose were all continually changing in these spaces. As such, I subsequently decided to conduct snapshot
observations to better understand the ebb and flow of space use at various days and times.

**Snapshot Observations**

I developed snapshot observations as a way to collect information over different times of the day to more fully understand the fluidity of the spaces. This allowed me to have a broader understanding of how spaces are used during different times of day. I conducted snapshot observations over two weeks at different times of day. The intended schedule for the snapshot observations is located in Table 3.1 (see Table 3.1).

Snapshot observations consisted of my going into the common areas, observing the areas (what activities are occurring, how many people are around, what areas are being used), and writing research memos to include as part of the data to analyze. From the class project in Spring 2007, I learned that this is a useful way to collect data as the spaces were constantly changing. Additionally, I was able to observe the spaces over a larger span of times, allowing for a more holistic understanding of the use of these spaces.

In observing these spaces, I used a similar technique each day. I walked through the lobby, into the study lounge, through the vending machine room, into the TV lounge and then outside to see the activity stirring there (see Figure 1). I immediately wrote research memos from each observation time to remember and reflect upon all that had been observed (see Appendix D). Similar to the long
observations, I could not do the snap-shot observations without recognizing that I have a role within the community.

I had intended to do the snap-shot observations over a consistent two week period. After the observations had begun I was notified that I needed to travel which interrupted the snap-shot observations on days 12 and 13 of week two. Rather than have another person record the observations, I selected to reschedule the two observations for days that I was in town for consistency in observations.

The academic calendar at this time of year is also noteworthy in relation to these observations. The observations started the Sunday at the end of Spring break and lasted two and a half weeks from then. In the middle, there was one three-day weekend, which changed the atmosphere in the common lounges for the long weekend, especially in relation to cleanliness.
TABLE 3.1
INTENDED SNAP-SHOT OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>3 p.m.</td>
<td>11 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>2 p.m.</td>
<td>4 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>2 p.m.</td>
<td>7 p.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>3 p.m.</td>
<td>11 a.m.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>11 a.m.</td>
<td>1 a.m. (Friday a.m.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>2 p.m.</td>
<td>12 a.m. (Sat. a.m.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>8 p.m.</td>
<td>10 p.m.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analytic Memos

Throughout the process of collecting data, especially because it was spread out over a two-week period, I occasionally wrote analytic memos (Bogden & Bilken, 2003). These memos helped to provide me the ideas and thoughts that were in my mind sporadically throughout the data collection process. They sometimes resulted in connections between different forms of data collection and served as a good way to help recall my thoughts when taking breaks between analyzing data.

Coding and Data Analysis

Once all the data were collected, I created a binder with all the interviews, long and snapshot observations, analytical memos written through the process, interview transcripts, diagrams and pictures. I used a coding system for finding themes that continually emerged from this process. From my previous project in Spring 2007 there were some themes that I anticipated, such as territorial behaviors, social networks, and the use of resources.

I carefully read all the information several times, often with a different purpose. The first two times I sorted through the data, I was trying to familiarize myself with all the information and start extracting themes. The third and fourth times that I went through this process, I was intentionally verifying existing themes and seeking saturation (Glesne, 2006).

As I went through this process, I grouped themes that were consistent within each form of data collection. I found that while there was an overlap in the overarching themes of territoriality, social networks, and use of resources between
each form of information gathering, each form of data collection provided different insights into the overarching themes (see Table 3.2 for codes and samples).

I revisited all the data collected and reviewed all the information over several days, giving myself time between coding sessions to refresh, refocus, and reflect before proceeding (Glense, 2006). This process allowed me to become aware of new interpretations of the information presented, the results of which are presented in the next chapter.
**TABLE 3.2**

**CODING OF INFORMATION GATHERED**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Illustrative words/phrases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Territoriality</td>
<td>Repeated use of a space: ‘This is where we always hang out,’ personalizing space;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networks</td>
<td>Group of students that are friends, determined by activities and time spent together. Students identify who their friends are, not the researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Items available for all students to use in an area: microwave, TV, stove, couches, wireless internet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>The actions and behaviors of students in the lounge: eating, socializing, talking on the phone, studying, watching TV,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studying</td>
<td>The presence of materials and tools: academic books, laptops, discussions around common first-year student courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multitasking</td>
<td>Two or more activities at a time: watching TV and using a computer; traveling between locations and socializing (in person or on the phone); watching TV and socializing; doing homework and socializing; eating and watching TV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

From the multiple forms of observation, I gathered information regarding how students use the particular common spaces in the residence hall building being examined. After completing the initial study in Spring 2007, my initial hypothesis was that the areas are used for two primary reasons - resources that are available in these spaces and social networks that territorialize these spaces. Much of the information that was gathered in this research project supports this hypothesis and provides a further understanding on how both resource use and territorial patterns are established.

Site Examination

From the examination of the common lounge spaces, I was able to better understand how students could use the spaces. There was a TV with a cable, and a DVD/VCR player that allows for students to watch TV, movies, and hook up video game systems. The couch pods in the TV lounge are set up in a square with a table in the middle to allow a space for an individual or group to study, play a game, or socialize. The ping-pong area allows for 2 people to play ping-pong and a group of people to observe from the surrounding couches. This area is adjacent to the main entrance of the building, those students who are transitioning to and from the building must pass through this area, creating a steady flow of people. The study lounge has tables, chairs, couches, a dry erase board, and a bookshelf. This area is
designed to provide an atmosphere for studying. Since I have worked at this university for several years, I know that two years ago a specialist from the university Learning Center came to the study lounge and helped to design it into an academic space. I also know that previously the piano was in the TV lounge. There was an argument in the early part of the Spring 2008 semester that resulted in moving the piano from the TV lounge to the study lounge. The residents’ response to this move was very positive, because the piano is disruptive to the TV watchers, so the piano remained in the study lounge. The piano cannot be played after 10pm on weeknights and 12midnight on weekends, which is consistent with the patterns of how students use the study space.

Examination of the common areas led me to understand that the facilities managers are the ones who make the decisions about what resources (furniture, games, TVs, etc.) to add to the common areas. It is up to the residential life staff to make the area purposeful. Without considering the flexibility of the resources available in these spaces, at first glance, each section of the common areas has a specific purpose. This could present the opportunity for different social networks of students to participate in different activities in adjoining areas. Examination of the area also allows me to understand that the areas are spatially configured very close to one another, which means that activities, in particular the noise created from activities, impacts those in surrounding areas.

The flexibility of being able to move the furniture and most of the resources allow for reconfiguring the areas and purposes, which was the initial motivation for
the research project. This adaptability can allow for the student leaders in the building to host educational and social programs that meet several different types of needs. The flexibility of the space can allow for students to move furniture around so that they are able to include as many people as they desire for activities.

From the analysis of the common area spaces it is clear there are many options for students and flexibility. Students could move all the furniture easily, except the TV and ping-pong table. Each area of the lounges had specific purpose(s) for its use, but it could be used for other activities or needs. I was able to learn more about these activities and needs from the observations and interviews.

*Interviews*

The five interviews provided me one on one time to further understand the experiences of several individuals who live in the residence halls. Students A, B, and C, whom all spend time in the common areas, are part of the same social network that has claimed many of the couch pods and the ping-pong area as their territory. Students D and E both do not spend a substantial amount of time in the common areas, with the exception of the kitchen.

Entering into this research project with the prior experience from the Spring 2007 project, it was not surprising that students A, B, and C are part of a social network that has territorialized the common areas. The three students arrived at school approximately one week before the residence halls opened for all residents because they were part of a campus program that brought them to school early for a bridge program. These three students and their social network dominate the common
areas with the amount of time they spend in the couch pods and the ping-pong area. From both their perspective and an observer’s perspective, they spend almost all waking hours in this space, outside of class and eating. They do all their activities, including studying, watching movies, playing ping-pong, and other forms of socializing in these spaces. In particular, these three students all purposefully took classes together and frequently studied for all of them together.

The interviews helped me understand the individual experiences that students have in these spaces. The experiences are unique to each student, even those that share similar habits. The students that predominantly use the common areas have territorialized the space. The three students who were interviewed, all were able to recognize that they and their shared social network used the space the majority of the time.

Social networks, separate from territoriality, also play a large role in where students choose to spend their time. Of the five students interviewed, all the five could identify the spaces where their social network spent time and the activities in those spaces. Students who do not use the common areas spend much of their time in their room or friends’ rooms, in different places on campus, and sometimes off campus. The activities they take part in fluctuate dependent on the various resources that are available in all of these locations. The activities that students choose to participate in also influence areas that students spend time, as certain activities are not permitted on campus.
Student A, who exuded a higher level of reflection regarding his use of the common areas, was able to clearly identify the territorial impact his social network had on the couch pods in the TV lounge and the ping-pong areas.

Yeah, we have movie nights every day. Yeah, we’re always watching movies. We have a lot of movies. We basically like to watch movies. We play Monopoly. We have like deep conversations, about our problems, stuff like that, so we have those types of conversations…Helping out friends…Ping pong…We match up in ping pong already…And we listen to music down here, having our own little kick back, that’d be on Fridays. So, that’s where I spend my time (Student A, personal communication, March 28, 2008).

He was able to identify that he frequently closed the curtains because darker areas provide an atmosphere of seclusion and privacy for him when he is with his intimate group of friends.

I like how there’s like the light, the first couches right here, the windows are really open . . . and so like there’s light right there, but all the windows are like shut down, so it’s not pitch black but it’s like more secluded…So, there’s not hardly any light. I’m not saying I don’t like light, but I like that kind of light. I mean kind of like privacy and stuff like that ‘cause mostly the people who spend time down here is me and my friends (Student A, personal communication, March 28, 2008).
Student A was confident in his academic abilities in accomplishing studying as a group. “[A]nother thing that helps [Student A] a lot” are “[his] friends” because “they don’t judge [him],” and Student A is successful with their support (Student A, personal communication, March 28, 2008). From the group of students interviewed for this project, Student A had the personality of being the most extroverted and spending the least amount of time by himself.

Student B, who was very nervous, had not given much thought to her or her social network’s use of the common areas before the interview. She was not as conscious about who was not using the common areas, rather, of more importance to her was who was using the common areas on a regular basis, her social network. When asked about what would result in Student B spending less time in the common areas, she responded,

[mean people. I don’t know. It’s like if the lounge started becoming like everybody else’s hang out, maybe I wouldn’t like it so much, but then again I don’t know ‘cause like we started watching America’s Best Dance Crew over there like every Thursday, and like more and more people started showing up, but it turned into like community time. I don’t know, I like that a lot, so maybe if there were more people there it wouldn’t be a problem (Student B, personal communication, March 31, 2008).]

She spends the majority of her time in a building different from which she lives because she was part of the summer program that got her socially connected with students in the building being observed. She also feels that she does not fit in very
well with the community in the building she lives, which makes this building a more comfortable space for her.

Because my friends are here… That’s like the biggest reason. I try to meet people too in my building, and I don’t know if it’s because they’re older, or… I think a lot of them are older, but like in my building they’re kind of… they kind of seem… I feel like an outsider there basically. And here I feel like I fit in more, so… (Student B, personal communication, March 31, 2008).

Student B was conscious of the fact that as a group, she did not study well with her friends because she was easily distracted and taken off topic.

[A]ctually lately since I’ve been going to my room, which is really weird, but [laughs]… I study in there, and it’s kind of better sometimes ‘cause since we’re altogether we get distracted, which is probably why it takes so long to study. ‘Cause when I studied in my room it took way less time, and I remembered more stuff when I studied there… But I don’t like, I really don’t like studying by myself. Well, in high school that didn’t work out, because when I would study by myself like at home or something, I’d get distracted… (Student B, personal communication, March 31, 2008).

Of the students interviewed, Student B most valued alone time, which was mostly spent in her room.

Student C shared the most about physical activity and the importance of working out for her balance. She spends her introverted time working out generally,
but wishes for spaces for her physical activity. “If there was like an area where we
could like jump rope, that would be neat…’Cause there’s no…in the gym you can’t
jump rope so…[Student C goes] outsides…but it’s just kind of awkward because
people are just staring at you” (Student C, personal communication, March 31,
2008). While Student C recognizes that it would be good for residents that are being
disruptive on their hallways to spend more time in the common areas, she recognizes
that her social networks’ presence has an impact on other students’ use of the areas.

Well, my friends and I we use it like too much. That’s our hanging out area.
Uh, I think we use it to our advantage sometimes…Well, sometimes like
we…I like, like sometimes other people use it, it’s just…wish like if people
are going to be loud and stuff that they should use the lounge instead of a
room…Because sometimes like I might be on the 3rd floor and it’s like really
loud where, I don’t know. Maybe ‘cause where I live is really quiet and just
like a bunch of noise is sometimes like wow. ‘Cause I might play my music
outside, but I really don’t really like to play my music in the lounge because I
don’t want to be disrespectful (Student C, personal communication, March
31, 2008).

Student C does study with her group of friends, but, similarly to Student B, admits
that they spend more time socializing as a group rather than studying. I know that
she has some conflicts with her roommates, but she did not explicitly relate any of
her experiences of spending time in the lounge to the conflicts that result in her not
spending time in her room. Student C also participates in the same social activities as Students A and B, not surprising because they are part of the same social network.

If I want to be in the lounge, that’s where I like play my music, um, watch TV, talk, just stuff that wouldn’t bother my roommates…Well, sometimes we just like, I just watch them play ping pong ‘cause I’m not that good at it. We watch TV, movies, sometimes just like do our homework but not really…In the lounge (Student C, personal communication, March 31, 2008).

Students D and E, who do not use the common areas, are part of two separate social networks. Students D and E both mentioned that they did not have friends that spent time in the common areas, which did impact their lack of use of the space. Both also noted that occasional use of the kitchen was necessary because of limitations of resources in their individual rooms.

Student D spends all of her time doing her activities, studying and socializing, in her room or in the rooms of her friends, on the same hall.

Um, well, I spend a lot of time in our hallway either in my room doing something productive school-wise, or not. Uh, I’m pretty good friends with the girl who lives across the hall from me, and a lot of girls in hall, so we kind of just congregate and like talk for hours. Um, as far as the lounge, I use it to meet people usually to talk about things. The other day for my acting class, my friend and I rehearsed our skit and, yeah…Um, [Student D and her friends] watch movies, mostly talk though, yeah…usually in one of our rooms. Sometimes the bathroom, the laundry room, the hallway, um, the
[dining hall]. We all go down at the same time, usually (Student D, personal communication March 31, 2008).

Student D did not arrive at school early for the bridge program, and therefore created her social networks with the students who moved in at a similar time as her and are in her vicinity. Student D likes studying with other people because it motivates her more in the process.

Student E divides his time between his social network on campus in his living community and with his social network off campus. Student E spends time off campus so he can partake in behaviors and activities that are not permitted in the residence halls for legal and safety reasons. Student E has a lot of respect for the guidelines of his community and the process. Student E has a group of four identified friends and a girlfriend with whom he spends the majority of his time.

But, we usually kick it together, and like, like we like do like basically everything together. Like we kick it in each other’s rooms. We go out and play Frisbee golf, you know, we party, we study, we do everything together basically. And like, I don’t know, like bigger circles of friends have formed out of that group (Student E, personal communication, April 1, 2008).

He identifies himself so much so with his social network that they even have name that identifies them as a group of friends. Student E also mentioned that he spends a significant amount of his time at work. Student E was able to identify that while his social network did not use the common areas consistently, there was a social network
that did use the space steadily and he connected it with the activities that students participate in.

By some people. I don’t know. Um, I think some certain people, uh, don’t mind like chilling down here like, but like I think a lot of people also like to have the freedom, now that they’ve moved out of their house to do what they want, and so they don’t spend a lot of time off campus, you know, and like I’m not saying that they’re drinking or smoking pot, but I’m saying they like, like a lot of people like that’s how they like relax, you know? And so, a lot of people like to have that freedom. Or just like the freedom to do whatever they want, you know, and like, like they use it like an establishment. So, like some people don’t mind like spending time here ‘cause they’re not interested in that kind of stuff, they’re like, you know…. I think like, like, I think the ping pong table is like a totally great idea…Cause a lot of people play ping pong and like and especially [this county], like it’s always raining up here, so it’s like a chill thing to do inside, and like the TV just like, people are always watching TV and stuff and like on those couches right there, like I don’t like personally like kick it down there. But, people kick it down there. Like I always see people down there and like or they’re studying over there. Some of my friends go to study down there sometimes and like, my one buddy plays the piano a lot, so if like the practice rooms are full he’s like down here playing the piano. (Student E, personal communication, April 1, 2008).
Student E was able to further make connections with the role that living on campus has played in developing his social network as well as the impact it will have on the future of his college career living off campus in the coming year.

Um, I think the dorms are an excellent networking, like, I think like that’s like the whole point of the dorms, like from like my perspective like, like the only, like the true like benefit of the dorms for me, like I’ve gotten sick a thousand times, like, you know, it’s loud all the time, especially like right, like Redwood’s pretty crazy. You know that…Yeah, like that’s the whole point. Like everyone’s like super active. Everyone always has their doors open, blaring music and stuff, they’re like . . . the networking. Like I know so many people it’s ridiculous. Like I seriously can’t walk without like saying hi to like five people, right? Anywhere. Like I’m always saying hi to people like ‘cause I know so many people like from just living here…Especially it’s going to be super beneficial like next year [not living on campus]. Just ‘cause like I know so many people. Like all different kinds of people too, you know?(Student E, personal communication, April 1, 2008).

Each student interviewed had slightly different experiences with the use of the kitchen, which provided a different perspective from the other forms of data collection.

…my friend likes to bake cookies a lot so…we’ll be like cooking cookies.

Uh, last semester we did chile rellenos…We did those and then during
Thanksgiving break we cooked a lot in kitchen. We did chicken and soup and stuff like that. (Student A, personal communication, March 28, 2008).

We did [cook] one day out of the year. That week . . . yeah, they were just like “We’re going to have like a party, and we’re going to make a bunch of food . . .” and actually it was just Juana, one of the people that comes. She’s like, “I’m going to cook for you guys.” So then we helped her out, but that was it. (Student B, personal communication, March 31, 2008).

Yeah, I just used it. Um, I use the kitchen when the J was not an option. Like, I was here over spring break and like, I don’t know, we used the kitchen like a good amount of times. And then we also went over to our friends’ houses and used their kitchens, but like, we for sure made at least four meals, like four big meals in the kitchen. (Student E, personal communication, April 1, 2008).

Of all the students interviewed, Student D uses the kitchen the most consistently and for a variety of purposes.

Um, I make, well, we like to make pancakes and just different, just different food and wash dishes after we cook, so we just like put all of our food and dishes and everything in a bag and then walk to the kitchen and cook and then clean up all our dishes and everything, the counters and whatnot and
then come back and eat usually in our rooms (Student D, personal communication, March 31, 2008).


**Long Observations**

The two long observations confirmed the fluidity and territorial behaviors of the common areas. The areas are constantly changing, especially the lobby area and kitchen. The lobby area has a constant flow of people (both during the day and at night) with people coming and going from class, with food, and with friends.

Students are constantly flowing in and out of the building – with book bags, gym bags (for the athletes), purses, skateboards, and food (wrapped in the distinguishing wrappers from the dining halls). I even saw one person walking in with charcoal (presumably for the grill located in the quad).

Additionally, students are many times with friends talking very animatedly. While not all, many students who are alone are talking on the phone. From brief snippets of conversations that I can overhear, student seem to be talking to friends and making plans for going out, eating, or studying (Analytic Memo, March 27, 2008).

The flow of people increases when classes are changing – with students returning from class and others going to class. From the observations, I learned that students using the kitchen go in to use the microwave or stove for instant foods.

In the span of one hour, I’ve seen 6 students go into the kitchen, individually, to use, what I presume, is the microwave. They all carry their individually wrapped items that are microwaveable. 3 – 8 minutes later, they return from
the kitchen with prepared food. Two of the students sat down at the TV and watched TV with the residents already there. There was no interaction between the students that were watching TV first and the two individuals (who separately) joined the group. The other 4 students returned to theirs or others rooms in the building (Analytic Memo, April 1, 2008).

The long observations support the notions of constant fluctuation in these spaces – but not by those who territorialize the space. The students are moving in, out, and around the spaces, are generally students who do not spend the majority of their time in these spaces. The students that are in the common areas (more than just passing through) are generally using a resource, such as the microwave, vending machines, or TV. It is presumed that students that are using these resources do not have them available in their rooms, making these resources an important part of the level of comfort students have in the residence halls.

**Snap-shot Observations**

From the 14 snap shot observations, the main themes included territorial behaviors, flexibility of spaces, the time of day, the impact of weather, and time off from school. Not surprisingly, there is more activity at night than during the day in the common areas because more students are in the halls, with fewer other commitments (meetings, classes, meals, etc) at night. In particular, the TV lounge and ping-pong areas are used by more people between the hours of 6:30p.m. and 12-midnight. The study spaces are used significantly more after 11p.m., especially on weeknights.
Over time, the students occupying the couch pods in the TV lounge were the same social network of students. Many times, Students A, B, and C, all of whom were interviewed, were part of the students in the area.

I walked through the TV lounge and Student A and Student C were in a couch pod with other friends. There were 6 people and two laptop computers. They had books out, some snack food and seemed to be studying. Upon listening to their conversations, they were socializing and ignoring their school work (Analytic Memo, March 25, 2008).

In the couch pods today, I saw Student B and Student C with 2 other friends huddled around a laptop and laughing. It seemed as though they were either watching a movie on a laptop or perhaps watching funny videos online. I could very vaguely hear noise coming out of the speakers, but their laughter was much louder than what was on the computer (Analytic Memo, April 2, 2008).

The couches facing the TV were observed to be the area with most variation in the groups of students that used the space. Sometimes there would be individuals independently watching TV as a group – that is, there was no interaction between the individuals watching TV. Also observed, was small clusters of students watching TV as a group. Many times students had laptops with them, surfing the internet or working on homework, eating food, or talking on the phone.
The study lounge was very frequently empty and seemed like it was never used during the daytime. It was observed that the spaces did not even look like they were ever used during the daytime. Once the evening arrived more students used the space, mostly for socializing or playing cards, and games. Late at night, there were even more students using the space for studying individually, not in groups. The students generally had their laptops at separate tables with their headphones in the ears, and they don’t face each other. It was an atmosphere where students agreed to share the space, but take part in their individual activities.

The ping-pong area was frequently used in the evening time, between dinner and midnight. Students would gather around the ping pong table. I observed large groups of students playing ping pong on two occasions – both times provided similar information. Two students played ping-pong, while socializing with the students sitting on the surrounding couches. The students in the surrounding couches would switch in and out with the two playing ping-pong so that everyone had a turn. There was not much discussion about whose turn it was to play, rather it was a natural flow of people switching between playing and sitting on the couches.

The kitchen and the available resources provide a different set of resources for students with different needs. From the observations it was clear that various students use the space for microwaving snacks and meals in the middle of the day and at night. Four of the students interviewed indicated that the only use of the kitchen was when main campus dining facilities were not available, generally over university breaks. The kitchen, during these times becomes a necessity for students.
It was gathered from the snap-shot observations that the kitchens are consistently dirty – with trash, dishes, and food messes visible. This untidiness can sit for days, usually until the custodial staff cleans up the space.

At the end of all of my observations, I would check the outdoor quad for the residence hall to see if there were a lot of people present or not and check the weather. Regardless of weather or time of day, the gazebo area of the quad generally had people present. This is the only area nearby where students are allowed to smoke cigarettes or hookah. If the weather was sunny and warm, there would be more people present outdoors, however if it was sunny and cooler, generally the smokers were the only students outdoors.

All of these data provide different perspectives of how students use the common areas in residence halls. From the intended uses to the individual experiences that students have in these spaces, it is important to make meaning of this information. The following chapter will provide an analysis of the behaviors in these spaces.
CHAPTER 5
ANALYSIS

Introduction

All of the information gathered in this project provides a foundation for how students use common areas in university settings. The data collected can be interpreted to convey patterns of behaviors that are frequent in common areas and what resources and spaces can support student success. Each form of data collection presents different aspects of the territorial behaviors, development of social networks, use of resources, study habits, activities that students partake in, and unconscious multitasking. While each form of data collection supports these themes, all the forms of data collection combined provide a more holistic understanding of students use the common areas.

Territoriality

The interviews very clearly indicated that the students who used the common areas had a very territorial impact on the spaces. They were all able to recognize that their social network overwhelming used the common areas more than others. Students A, B, and C, all part of the social network that used the common areas were all also part of the social network that arrived at school early for the bridge program. Since they were the first to arrive, they had access to the space before the majority of their peers arrived and they were likely able to “claim” the space before other students had the opportunity to access the space.
The snap-shot observations also reinforced the ideas of territoriality in the common areas, with a similar group of students using the couch pod areas and the ping-pong table area. Even when students of the social network were not present, there were signs that students were present in the space—such as leaving belongings or trash in the spaces used.

The social networks of students that use common area spaces dominantly did the majority of their activities in these spaces—studying, socializing, watching TV/movies, and eating. The activities they do alone are generally activities that most students do by themselves, such as showering and sleeping. Of the three students interviewed that use the common areas, one does not get along well with her two roommates, and another does not feel comfortable in her residence hall community. Having these common areas may give them a space to go where they are more comfortable and they can personalize.

The students who do not use the common areas are able to identify the spaces outside of the common areas that they do territorialize— their rooms and their friends’ rooms. Given that students want the ability to personalize and territorialize spaces in college to provide a sense of familiarity and comfort, it is not surprising that students territorialize spaces around the residence halls (Clemons, et. al, 2005; Kaya& Weber, 2003).

Social Networks

Social networks play a major role in student success and from all the forms of data collection, social networks were a consistent theme (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993).
All five students that were interviewed talked about their social networks and activities that they participated in with their social network. From the snap-shot and long observations, it was very clear that many student activities and daily habits are with groups of people. Students walking to and from the building are generally with other people or talking on the phone to other people. This indicates a social culture where students are able to constantly be with their peers, which corresponds to the nature of traditional residence halls.

Students eat, study, socialize, and watch TV/movies together. Students who recognized they could be more academically successfully if they studied alone, continued these behaviors because of the social aspects. Students even indicated that when selecting courses, especially university requirements, they tried to select similar courses and sections so they could spend even more time together.

Social networks play a critical role in college students’ experience and providing spaces for students to create and to foster these relationships is a responsibility in holistically developing students (Stimpson, 1994). While students have different needs for spaces to socialize, providing a variety options and multiple spaces could help maximize the number of social networks using common areas.

**Use of Resources**

One of the main reasons that students use the common areas, for long periods of time or even if only for brief moments, is for the resources that are available in these spaces. The physical limitations of traditional residence hall rooms do not allow for students to have all the technologies that a common house would have,
including a kitchen, TV, cable, and a ping-pong table. Students do not have wireless internet in their room (although there is wired internet available).

A common theme regarding resource use of the kitchen was time of day or academic year. Many times students use the resources of the kitchen when other dining options on campus are not available. This includes university breaks and in the evenings in particular. The residence halls at this university provide a small convenience store with many microwaveable and instant foods. Students frequently eat food from these locations on the weekends and evenings, as the trash and wrappers from those foods is more prevalent during these times. During break when the dining hall is closed, the students interviewed said they used the kitchen more frequently for meals.

The TV (which is equipped with cable) is a very accessible resource for students and reaches out to a more extensive group of students. During observations, the space closest to the TV had the greatest variety of students using this space. This is likely due to the fact that students are attracted to what program or movie is being viewed, rather than the social network of people in the area. It is also likely that a group of students could be watching TV together, but not interacting with one another.

The furniture, including couches and tables, are resources for the students that help to provide functionality for the spaces. The furniture, which is designed to be flexible, is moved around regularly in the TV area. More people can be included in a circle, or furniture can also be repositioned for programs and community
meetings. The furniture in the study lounge is moved the least frequently leading me to believe that students feel that it serves a useful purpose at night without the need for change.

Wireless internet is another resource that is commonly used in the common areas. Students with laptops can use the wireless internet in the common areas (which is not available in their individual rooms) and surf the internet. The students whom I observed and interviewed frequently used this resource while participating in other activities. The multi-tasking phenomenon will be addressed further in an upcoming section.

The ping-pong table, located in the lobby of the building, is the first area that students see when entering and the last area they see when exiting. During the evening, social networks generally territorialize this space, taking turns playing and socializing. During the daytime, this area is more commonly used for congregating or waiting to meet people. When ping-pong was not being played, students would use the table for food, books, and other belongings. In the evenings when students are playing ping-pong, this area has a very high level of energy and excitement. The placement of the table is ideal in that the excitement and energy are an ideal atmosphere for students to leave and enter the building.

Additionally, while no investigation was completed regarding the financial status of students, I suspect that financial limitations of students and their families might prevent a student from having additional amenities within their room. Cable, TVs, microwaves, and mini-refrigerators can all be costly amenities for either
purchase or rental. Since this university does serve many low-income students, socioeconomic status could greatly influence a students’ use of the resources in the common area.

Having an understanding of what resources are needed and used most frequently can help to plan useful spaces for students. It is important to consider frequency of use, the financial resources of students, and flexibility of some of the resources. The availability of resources also impacted the variance of people using the common areas, and it was not just those students who territorialized the spaces.

**Studying**

Since academic achievement is a key component of student success in higher education, understanding study habits of students within common areas is important (Astin, 1993; Tinto, 1993). There were two main facets of studying in common areas that came to light from the observations and interviews. The common areas provide a space for groups to work together and a space for individuals, particularly while watching TV or late at night.

For the social networks that territorialize spaces of the common area, they study in the lounge regularly. For some, even knowing that they are not as successful in study groups, because they are easily distracted, studying with friends is important. The students also appreciated having the wireless internet available while doing homework in the lounge. From my observations, even when students looked like they were studying, it was clear that they were socializing more than being academically productive.
The study lounge, while not used during the daytime, is frequently used late at night, after 11 p.m. Individual students have their books, laptops, and their own headphones in this space. This is likely due to roommates who are sleeping or other students with the roommate. The study lounge provides a space for individuals to be productive while not disrupting others around them. Additionally, students frequently have their laptops while watching TV. It was sometimes observed that students were surfing the internet or they were working on documents likely to have been homework.

The students who do not frequently use the common areas identified their rooms, their friends’ rooms, and the library as locations to do homework and study. Bedrooms served as locations for homework when working in groups and the library was linked to individual studying.

The common areas can impact students’ academic achievement when working in groups and individually. Providing the space and atmosphere for studying is important. It is also important to recognize that when students have roommates, particularly those with different schedules, it is necessary for students to have other locations in which to be productive.

Activities and Multitasking

Students have the ability to participate in a number of activities, both on and off campus. The students interviewed were able to quickly identify which activities they enjoy partaking in the most. From observations, it was clear that there were always students participating in activities.
In the lounge areas, the most common activities were watching TV/movies, ping-pong, eating, and general socializing. More common, especially with the given fluidity of the space, students were multitasking. Students were observed watching TV using their laptops for homework or surfing the internet. At other times students were eating, talking on the phone and socializing with the immediate people around them. From the interviews it was obvious that students made no clear connection that they were often multitasking. This disconnect lends one to believe that multitasking is normal behavior for these students, and not anything out of the ordinary.

The students who do not spend time in the common areas identified what activities they participated in outside of these areas. Some of the activities could not be accommodated in any type of indoor space, such as frisbee golf. The students who did use the common areas frequently did many activities that were available in the areas, such as ping-pong. It is not clear if the activities draw people to the common area or if the resources in the common area define the activities that students participate in, but there is a need to have activities available.

Summary

The main themes that were relevant and meaningful in understanding how students use common areas all provide insight into the questions asked in this research project. Territoriality, social networks, resource use, study habits, activities, and multitasking all impact how individuals and groups of individuals use common areas. Common areas are very useful and intentionally provide an adequate amount of space and resources. As such, they are an important consideration in the design of
residence halls. This analysis also provides a foundation for further implications of research and some innovations for creating new spaces, the topic of the next chapter.
Common areas in residence halls in college housing are an important part of providing spaces for community development. The territorial nature of humans within these spaces drastically limits the number of people that use these spaces. Having a variety of spaces is important in allowing different social networks of people to use the different spaces. While there are more people present in these spaces at night (after 6:30 p.m.), the spaces are consistently, but lightly used during the day. In the ping-pong area and the couch pod areas, territorial behaviors are consistently present. Students who tend to use the couch pods and the ping-pong table spend the majority of their time outside of class and activities in these areas. Even when they are not there, they tend to leave belongings there, as a way of marking their use of the space or territoriality.

The ping-pong area is also fluid, with people walking past the area regularly when entering or exiting the building. The students sometimes have brief conversations while passing through this area with the students that are present, but mostly keep to themselves or the peers with which they are walking. The kitchen is also an area of fluidity because students do not spend extended periods of time in this area. Instead, students use the resources that the kitchen provides and leave.

The TV area is the least territorial and fluid, which is consistent with the nature of watching TV, movies, and playing video games. Generally different groups
of students used this space. The length of time seemed to be dependent on the length of TV show, movie, or video game.

Using the information found from this research project to develop newly designed common areas could provide equitable access to common spaces for students within traditional residence halls. Traditional halls provide students the opportunity to meet and interact with a large number of students initially, and as students develop their social networks, find their own spaces. As a result of this research project, I think that it would be interesting to create a common area that is divided into smaller areas for students to territorialize, while also including spaces for resources that are commonly used. I would envision a large space for programming and meetings and smaller areas surrounding the large space.

The large space should have chairs or couches and would be a good space for a television with cable and a DVD/VCR. The large space could also incorporate a space for tables to use for programming. Places to hang posters and flyers would be ideal. A board with upcoming events and activities would help to inform residents about opportunities for community engagement.

The smaller areas could have windows, so that students could see who was in the areas and what activities were taking place. A table would be useful in this space for group work or board games. The spaces could also have a TV with a DVD/VCR hook for groups of students to watch their own movies. Additionally, instead of doors, the areas could have doorways to walk through, to make the spaces inviting.
I would also recommend a door for a specific area for studying. This area should also include additional resources, perhaps computers, printers, dry erase boards, study tips and tools, to create an academic atmosphere. There should be spaces for both individual and group study in this area.

A kitchen is essential, although creating a community of cleaning up after ones’ self is critically important. Other students are not likely to use the space if there is a mess that was previously left. Important aspects of a kitchen include having the space for a number of students to use the space simultaneously. Lots of counter space and multiple burners would be useful for larger groups of people. Since the space is not used heavily consistently, finding a balance is essential.

While this research project has explored how students use space, there are limitations to this project that provide opportunities for additional research. Several will be explored in the next few paragraphs.

The common area spaces were only observed over a two-week period, post spring break with a long weekend in the middle. It would be useful to do observations with focus groups and interviews with a handful of students throughout a complete academic year. This would help in understanding what interactions the students have with the common areas in developing territorial behaviors and social networks.

The areas that were observed were all part of a single residence hall at a university with multiple styles of residence halls. There are two directions for further research from this limitation: 1. compare the common areas of this residential unit to
other residential units on the same campus and 2. compare the common areas of the residential units on one university campus with similar residential units on another university campus.

This study examined a traditional residence hall, and did not look at the common areas of suite and apartment style residence halls on college campuses. It would be worthwhile to look at the territorial behaviors and the social networks that develop with a smaller group of students with a more limited scope of common areas.

This project looked at the common areas from a perspective of what was there at the time of data collection. Changing the layouts of the areas and the resources (and therefore the intended use) of the space could help determine the most effective uses of the common areas.

The research presented in this project is a start at looking how common areas in residence halls could be designed and what resources could be provided to further support the success of students living on campus. Suggestions for further research provide a larger base of information in making decisions in designing new residence halls. For the benefit of future generations of university students it is my hope that ideas contained herein serve that purpose.
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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Introductory questions:
   a. What is your name?
   b. What class year are you?
   c. Where do you live?

2. What are some of the ways you spend time in the halls?
   a. If you guesstimate what percentage of the time you spent doing those activities, what would those percentages be?
   b. What do you do when you’re hanging out with friends?
      i. Where do you spend time with them?
      ii. How much time do you spend with them?
      iii. What are some things you do with them?
      iv. Do you ever use the kitchen?
   c. Tell me about what you do when you study.
      i. How much time do you spend studying?
      ii. Where do you study?
      iii. Does it vary between courses?
      iv. Do you study with other people? If so, how many?
      v. What are the methods you use to study?
   d. How do you spend your personal time?
      i. What are some activities you do alone?
ii.

iii. Where do you do these activities?

e. Besides the residence halls, where do you do these types of activities?

3. What are your favorite common spaces (e.g. lounge, etc.) in Redwood?

   a. What factors would entire you to spend more time in the lounges
   b. What factors would influence you to spend less time in the lounges?
   c. In your opinion, are the lounges used a lot?
   d. How does that make you feel?

4. What changes would you make in the lounges?

5. Can you share what you observe in the lounges?

   a. What do you see?

      i. How is the lighting in the lounges? How does it make you feel?
   b. What do you hear?
   c. What do you smell?
   d. What are your thoughts about the furniture in the lounges?
APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Statement of confidentiality

This interview is part of a Thesis project for Piya Bose. The information will be used in the spring 2008 semester. The interview has no foreseen risks to participants. The interview is slated to last 30-45 minutes. The information gathered from this interview will be used to further as data for thesis research. Participants will remain confidential, no real names will be used, only pseudonyms. Participants may back out at any point of the interview if they deem necessary.

For further inquiry, Piya Bose can be contacted at piya@humboldt.edu or 707.826.5588.

Dr. Cathleen Rafferty is the faculty advisor for this thesis research. If there are further questions, she may be contacted at cdr11@humboldt.edu.

I, _______________________, agree to participate in an interview and have it recorded by Piya Bose.

Sign ___________________________ Date _____________________
APPENDIX C

TRANSCRIPTION STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Statement of Confidentiality

These interviews are part of a Thesis project for Piya Bose. This information will be used in the Spring 2008 semester. The below transcriber agrees to keep all information from the interviews confidential. The transcriber will not give any one copies of the recordings or the transcribed interviews.

For any questions, contact Piya Bose at piya@humboldt.edu or 707.826.5588.

Dr. Cathleen Rafferty is the faculty advisor for this thesis project. If there are further questions, she may be contacted at cdr11@humboldt.edu.

I, ____________________________, agree to transcribe the interview and keep them confidential for Piya Bose’s thesis project.

Sign ____________________________ Date ______________________
APPENDIX D

OBSERVER’S MEMOS (SNAP-SHOT OBSERVATIONS)

Date:

Time:

Weather:

General Observations:

TV Lounge:

Study Lounge:

Kitchen:

Lobby area/ping-pong:

Outside: