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Effects of Differential Housing on Attitudes and Values

Studies of the effects of college experience on student attitudes and values suggest that the student subculture itself plays a significant role in shaping attitude and value patterns. (Jacob, 1956; Freedman, 1956; Lehmann and Dressel, 1962). Wallace (1966) clearly identified the influence exerted upon new students by members of the established student body.

The existence of an identifiable student subculture with established patterns of attitudes and values has important implications for the transmission of these patterns to new members of the student body. Sociological research supports the theory that groups in contact with one another have a significant effect on each other (Kelley and Thibaut, 1954; Bales, Hare and Borgatta, 1957; Newcomb, 1956; Bushnell, 1962). Further, the dominant, high-status group will have the greater effect in modifying, socializing, or in some definite way serving as a model for the subordinate, lower-status group (Festinger and Kelley, 1951; Child, 1954). Thus, one would expect that freshmen would be influenced by upperclassmen and would tend to adopt the existing upperclass patterns of attitudes and values.

American colleges and universities have traditionally housed freshmen in one of two fashions. The freshmen live either in separate or in mixed-class residence units. For all practical purposes, the degree of interaction with upperclassmen is somewhat negligible in the former, and considerably more intensive in the latter. Can it be assumed that freshmen living with upperclassmen will be affected differently than freshmen who are not in direct contact with the upperclass environment? Will freshmen who are in direct contact with upperclassmen become more like them in their attitudes and values than freshmen who are not in such contact? Finally, if it may be assumed that the characteristics of the upperclass subculture are acceptable and consistent with the purposes of the university, and that freshmen are more likely

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to adopt the characteristics of the dominant group if they are in contact with that group, then what are the differential effects of housing freshmen in a freshmanlike environment versus an upperclasslike environment?

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of varying contact with upperclassmen on the attitudes and values of male college freshmen.

Method

The study took place at a large, midwestern state university during the 1964-65 academic year. A sample of male college freshmen, first-time enrolled, and living in university-operated residence units was delineated. The experimental group consisted of those freshmen residing in a number of selected, representative upperclass residence units. Eleven residence units which had a greater proportion of upperclassmen than the total university residence ratio of upperclassmen to freshmen were selected as Upperclass units (N=573). The experimental group was thus exposed to an upperclass environment. Two control groups were designated. One group consisted of freshmen living in predominantly or solely freshman residence units; the other group consisted of freshmen who lived in residence units which were neither predominantly freshman nor upperclass. The first group reflected the total university residence ratio of freshmen to upperclassmen. Six residence units which had a greater number of freshmen than the total university residence ratio were selected as Freshmen units (N=330). Two residence units which most closely approximated the total-university residence ratio were selected as University-ratio units (N=90). Thus an initial sample of 993 (487 upperclassmen and 506 freshmen) were asked to participate in the study.

Two testing instruments were used to measure student attitudes and values. The *Inventory of Beliefs* was used

to distinguish those students who tend toward accepting stereotypes and who are dependent and rigid in their attitudes and beliefs, from those who are more mature in their viewpoints and more flexible in their beliefs and attitudes. (American Council on Education, *Inventory of Beliefs*, Instructor's Manual, 1953, p. 4.)

Based on 30 studies, reliability coefficients ranged from .68 to .95 with a median of .86. The *Differential Values Inventory* (Prince, 1957) was used to determine the students' value orientation along a traditional-emergent continuum. Traditional values included Puritan morality, Work-Success ethic, Individualism, and Future-time orientation. Emergent values included Sociability, Relativistic moral attitude, Conformity, Hedonism, and Present-Time orientation. Lehmann and Dressel (1962) found the test-retest reliability of the DVI to be .70.

Both instruments were administered to a pre-test sample of 720 students (334 upperclassmen and 386 freshmen), at the beginning of the academic year. At the end of the academic year, the inventories were re-administered to a sample of 467 (220 upperclassmen and 247 freshmen). Of the 253 nonparticipants (post-testing), 190 had moved from their residence unit and were, therefore, ineligible to participate in the total study. The remaining 63 did not participate in the post-testing for a variety of reasons.

Changes in scores on the *IB* and *DVI* (pre-test to post-test) were examined and compared for the three freshman groups in an effort to determine whether significant differences were evident. Analysis of variance technique was used to analyze the data.

Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were developed and tested to determine the effects of contact with upperclassmen on freshman attitudes and values, over a period of one academic year. A five per cent (.05) level of significance was considered to be suitable for testing the hypotheses: (1) Freshman attitudes and beliefs will show differential change at the end of the study period, depending upon the degree of contact with upperclassmen, and (2) Freshman values will show differential change at the end of the study period, depending upon the degree of contact with upperclassmen.

Results and Discussion

1. Pre-test data supported the assumptions that: (a) the freshman groups were initially similar in their attitude and value patterns ($F=1.25$, $.70$, respectively); and (b) freshmen and upperclassmen differed in their pre-test attitudes ($F=15.65$).

2. Pre-test data did not support the assumption that the freshmen, as a group, were different from the upperclassmen, as a group, on pre-test values ($F=1.30$). Therefore, the assumption that the freshman groups would be exposed to differing upperclass value orientations was untenable and post-test comparisons were invalid.

3. A comparison of freshman attitudes at the end of the study period showed no significant difference in degree of change among the freshman groups ($F=1.82$).

Several concluding observations may be noted:

1. All freshmen, regardless of degree of contact with upperclassmen, became more mature and less stereotypic in attitudes and beliefs after completing their first college year (see Table 1). As a group, they became more like upperclassmen. These findings are consistent with those of Lehmann and Dressel (1962).

2. The initial value patterns of the upperclassmen were not similar ($F=3.047$), i.e., the values of the upperclassmen in the upperclass residence units differed from the values of the upperclassmen in the university-ratio residence units (see Table 2). This finding supports the proposal that the student culture is not monolithic but rather encompasses several distinguishable subcultural groups with varying value orientations (Clark and Trow). Similar results were found by Gottlieb and Hodgkins (1963).

3. All freshmen, regardless of degree of contact with upperclassmen, became more emergent, i.e., less traditional, in their value structure, as the academic year progressed (see Table 2).

Table 1. Mean Attitudes of Freshmen and Upperclassmen, as measured by *Inventory of Beliefs*

Residence Unit	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test Upperclassmen
Freshman	65.33	70.23	69.74
Upperclassman	62.86	66.44	70.49
University-Ratio	60.57	65.17	66.58
	<u>64.19</u>	<u>68.65</u>	<u>69.98</u>

NOTE: High score = more mature, less stereotypic.

**Table 2. Mean Values of Freshmen and Upperclassmen,
as Measured by *Differential Values Inventory***

Residence Unit	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Pre-Test Upperclassmen
Freshman	33.85	30.71	38.35
Upperclassman	35.09	33.15	34.76
University-Ratio	33.70	32.71	33.33
	34.18	31.61	34.98

NOTE: High score = more traditional; Low score = more emergent.

Although the data give further support to the thesis that the collegiate experience tends to encourage mature and flexible attitudes and beliefs, as well as the formulation of emergent values, the role of the established student subculture remains somewhat unclear. No doubt, the student subculture is a major factor in the total collegiate experience of the freshman. There is strong evidence to support the contention that the peer culture plays a significant role in influencing new members. But the specific effect of this influence continues to be elusive.

Although the results of the study should be cautiously weighed when considering housing policies, the findings do suggest that those policies which are directed toward increasing or decreasing the proportion of freshmen and upperclassmen in residence units in order to affect the information of attitudes or values needs to be carefully reviewed. The findings imply that the formulation of freshman attitudes and values is not significantly affected by the presence or absence of upperclassmen in freshman residences.

It is possible that when a group of freshmen are in close contact with a group of upperclassmen, as in the sample residence units, the freshmen tend to isolate or insulate themselves from the upperclass "press." In this way, they may continue to interact in a freshmanlike environment with negligible influence from upperclassmen.

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