THAT HALF OF THE ROOM IS YOURS: CONFLICT BEHAVIOR SYSTEMS IN A UNIVERSITY RESIDENCE HALL

by

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Abstract

College residence halls house thousands of students every year. This provides students an opportunity to live closely with new people and develop social skills sought by employers (Myers & Larson, 2005). Living with new people also provides the opportunity for anxiety and conflict (Ingalls, 2000). Many residents reject the idea of initiating or processing their own conflicts, often turning to destructive conflict management behaviors such as avoidance (De Cecco & Richards, 1974; Sillars, 1980). A clearer understanding of influences on student conflict behaviors will help colleges and universities assist students in having positive experiences living on campus. While attempts to understand student conflict management are varied, few consider behavior patterns as systems (Duran & Zakahi, 1988, Kiernan & Gray, 2013, Martin & Anderson, 1995). This qualitative study applies an organizational communication framework and structuration theory (Giddens, 1984; Poole & McPhee, 2005; Sewell, 1992) as a lens to address conflict behavior systems and structures within post-secondary residence halls. Theoretically, this research adds to existing scholarship by applying structuration theory to a non-business context, extending the theory beyond the employer/employee dynamic it is often constrained to. Additionally this study uses structuration theory in a practical manner (Sewell, 1992) in the hopes of informing and improving roommate pairing and conflict approaches. Twenty-three student residents participated in in-depth interviews to answer research questions designed to address communication practices that relate to *rules* and *resources* of conflict structures as well as how the *dimensions* of structuration, *power, meaning, and norms,* influence the use of rules and resources (Poole & McPhee, 2005). The study identifies resources of *authority*, *space*, *favor reciprocity*, *mutual respect*, *routines*, *external others*, and *time* and discusses the associated rules within college residence hall rooms. These rules and resources are informed by systems of

“coexistent” and “engaged” harmony. Additionally the study identifies how the dimensions of structuration shape systems within the residence hall room and between the roommates by influencing the way rules and resources are used. Largely, this study contributes to the field of structuration research while attempting to incorporate pieces of Sewell’s (1992) critique in the form of practical implications.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

> *Picture a resident assistant hard at work in his/her room, finally getting into the rhythm of studying after a long day of classes. After a knock on the door, the resident assistant answers to find an angry resident complaining about her roommate. "The room is too hot", "the lights are always on", "she is constantly disrespectful and mean to me." When the venting is finally done and the resident has had time to calm down, the resident assistant asks a simple, yet essential question: "What does your roommate think about all of this?" Without missing a beat, the resident responds, "I was hoping you could talk to her about this for me."*

Despite popular culture's romanticized vision of "going away to college", most young adults find entry into post-secondary education stressful (Bozick, 2007; Emerson, 2008; Myers & Larson, 2005). Aware of this, many colleges and universities train residence hall staff to assist students with the adjustments to living within a residence hall (Owens, 2011) and with mediating conflict in their communities (Dodge, 1990). Considerable research has been conducted on community living, residence hall life, design of campus spaces (Henry & Schein, 1998; McCluskey-Titus & Oliver, 2001; Pike, Schroeder, & Berry, 1997), and how students' conflict management skills affect their post-graduation success in business (Myers & Larson, 2005).

Roommates and on-campus living have a considerable impact on a student's post-secondary experience, satisfaction with living arrangements and retention within their college or university system (Waldo, 1989; Duran & Zakahi, 1988). While colleges are certainly interested in keeping current students, an overwhelming number of schools invest greater resources and attention on recruitment (Fike & Fike, 2011). As Fike and Fike (2011) contend, "Understanding why students choose to leave or choose to stay is essential to those wanting to make a difference

in students' lives" (p. 69). Schudde's (2011) research indicates a positive statistical relationship between living in on-campus housing and student persistence at school for a second year. Further, students must be integrated into the college atmosphere academically *and* socially to be successful (Padilla, 1999). Considering this research, it would make sense for colleges and universities to steer incoming and prospective students in the direction of living within residence halls and dormitories to increase retention.

However, living within a residence hall environment can result in increased anxiety and stress due to living away from home with new people; students are often unprepared to mitigate this anxiety and manage conflict on their own. For colleges to retain students, they must get students to not only live in college residence halls, but also have a positive experience. One way campuses across the country work to ensure that students have a positive experience is through placing student para-professional staff, also referred to as resident assistants (RA), in living communities. RAs work hard to be available and provide a support system for students by playing an integral role in assisting students with conflicts and stressors (Dodge, 1990; Wasley, 2007). More specifically, RAs are trained to mediate and navigate conflicts between residents that refuse to cooperate or speak with one another (Dodge, 1990). As a result, the administrative and student staff experiences a considerable increase in the demand of their jobs; residents see them as "problem solvers" and "solution factories" rather than the advisors they were intended to be (Blimling, 2010; Dodge, 1990; Kitzrow, 2009).

Unfortunately, due to the current responsibilities of RAs, students learn that it is often easier to take problems to RAs immediately, rather than working to develop conflict skills. For example, college students are twice as likely to discuss conflicts with individuals outside the conflict as with those inside the conflict (Myers & Larson, 2005). However, students indicate

that discussion with third parties is less helpful than when they discuss their conflict with the involved conflict partner (Myers & Larson, 2005). This study highlights a salient issue in the way college students approach conflict – a student can talk with their RA but not resolve the conflict any faster. This pattern makes both the RAs' and the students' experience within the residence hall community more stressful.

When a student does handle roommate conflict on his or her own, the strategies used can become an issue. For example, students often handle roommate conflict by practicing more avoidance-type strategies when they perceive their roommate as non-cooperative and possessing personality traits that cannot be changed (Sillars, 1980). In this regard the existence of conflict encourages residents to continue to practice avoidance and perpetuate the pattern of talking with third-parties concerning their conflicts. Avoidance behavioral patterns slow the conflict resolution process, while depriving students of the positive benefits of healthy conflict management (DiPaola, Roloff & Peters, 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Marek, Knapp & Wanzer (2004) explain that "while conflict may initially seem to have an adverse effect on a relationship, it actually can have constructive effects by improving the decision-making process in the relationship" (p. 213).

Although unconstructive conflict patterns occur in college roommate interactions, research suggests that initial interactions can reduce ineffective conflict behaviors (Sillars, 1980). Roommates who have a positive initial interaction tend to use more constructive problem solving and conflict management strategies (Marek et al., 2004). However, those who practice avoidance strategies and pass their issues on to RAs or other residents likely do not garner the constructive benefits of conflict.

Knowing that first impressions can predict the type of conflict management strategies students use (Marek, et al., 2004), an attempt to address problems between roommates has been made by several colleges and universities. For example, the University of Texas at Austin and Ball State University operate an "internet dating-type" system to allow students more control over the process of finding a roommate (Hoover, 2002). Providing students' decision making abilities for roommate selections will hopefully enhance positive first impressions and thus increase the use of constructive conflict management (Hoover, 2002; Lipka, 2008). However, a majority of college institutions do not have a selection process such as the one described and most students enter college having little to no control over roommate selection.

In opposition to matching programs, some housing officials argue that all the roommate selection process succeeds in doing is cutting down on the amount of time that students have to spend with those that have different interests, opinions, and lifestyles than their own (Hoover, 2002). Roommate selection procedures also rely heavily on honesty from the students and the idea that they are, in fact, the individuals filling out the questionnaires and surveys. In most cases, there is nothing to prohibit mothers and fathers from taking it upon themselves to complete this paperwork for their teenagers; feeling that they know their son or daughter well enough to predict how they would want to live (Lipka, 2008).

From a global perspective, the roommate matching process can address personality issues or "likes" and "dislikes". Asking a student if they drink, smoke, or if they are an early riser or a "night owl" are common questions institutions use to place and match their students (Ingalls, 2000; Lipka, 2008). However, this process may neglect accounting for roommates who "seem" to be perfect matches but still experience conflict and practice avoidant behaviors. While some research points to specific predictors of topics of roommate conflicts (Ogletree, et al., 2005;

Riforgiate, Mongeau & Alberts, 2013), college and university housing officials simply do not have comprehensive answers as to the cause of conflicts between roommates. Furthermore, if students cannot manage their conflicts in constructive ways, the conflicts may lead to stress and even potential exit from the college or university (Hardy, 1984).

The objective in matching students as roommates "is exposing students to new situations, new people, and new ways of thinking" (Ingalls, 2000, para. 52). This exposure to differences has high potential to lead to conflict (DiPaola et al., 2010; Emerson, 2008; Sillars, 1980). Therefore the possible consequences of negative conflict experiences inside of campus dormitories and residence halls, coupled with what college and university administrators know about retention, brings urgency to the proposed research from a financial perspective as well as from a student development point of view.

While on the surface, roommate conflict appears to be an individual issue, the provided discussion points to larger systems, including norms, expectations, and patterns of conflict behaviors, that impact individual behaviors. Exploring communication systems and how these systems shape various relationships and communities involving college roommates over time provides insight into improving college student experiences. Specifically, this study uses Giddens (1984) theory of structuration, Poole & McPhee's (2005) extension, and Sewell's (1992) critique of the theory as a communicative lens to better understand roommate conflict communication behaviors within a residence hall system. Structuration theory has already proved adept at identifying how norms and rules within workplace organizations are enacted, reinforced and challenged (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Hoffman & Cowan, 2010).

The current study extends organizational communication research beyond formal work organizations and into residence halls. This move represents a blend of workplace and living

arrangements to account for discursive communication practices and systems of behavior. Further, while interpersonal research on conflict communication has been studied extensively (De Cecco & Richards, 1974; DiPaola et al., 2010; Emerson, 2008; Goodboy & Bolkan, 2013; Sillars, 1980), researching conflict in a way that brings attention to communication systems enhances interpersonal scholarship and provides a broader understanding of individual conflict approaches.

Using qualitative interviews and ethnographic field methods, this study identifies student resident communication patterns to understand how these actors utilize *rules* and *resources* to create and/or perpetuate conflict systems, consistent with the idea of duality of structure (Giddens, 1984; Miranda & Bostrom, 1993; Selcer & Decker, 2012). This understanding offers practical and theoretical implications for those in the fields of student affairs and communication studies, working towards a better idea of how communication functions in collegiate residential spaces while extending organizational theory beyond the business world. The subsequent chapter details research informing this study pertaining to college roommates, interpersonal and organizational conflict communication, and structuration theory. Following the review of the literature, the methodology and findings are explained, after which the study concludes with a discussion of the results.

Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

This study draws on interpersonal and organizational research to better understand conflict systems using structuration theory. First, the literature review explores pertinent studies concerning college roommates and applicable communication research. This overview highlights oversights in university roommate matching systems, communication theories that have been applied to roommate studies and communicative factors that influence roommate satisfaction and the persistence of roommate relationships.

The review continues by conceptualizing conflict and discussing communication research pertaining to conflict strategies used by college student roommates. Consideration is also given to research examining how roommate attributions and relationship types predict conflict management strategies. This leads to discussion of how conflict management extends beyond interpersonal communication as the result of created and re-created systems. Finally, the review describes structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) as a theoretical lens for understanding roommate conflict communication patterns.

College and University Roommates

Roommate relationships have been explored across myriad disciplines including communication (Martin & Anderson, 1995), student development (Hardy, 1984), and social psychology (Kitzrow, 2009). Each of these research lines note the significant role a college roommate plays in the success and persistence of students in the college and university systems in America (Duran & Zakahi, 1988; Jones, 1980; Padilla, 1999; Schudde, 2011; Waldo, 1989). Many colleges recognize that it is less expensive to retain students than to recruit new ones (Fike & Fike, 2011). In an effort to retain students, some colleges pay closer attention to research findings regarding roommate compatibility in order to improve roommate relationships. As a

result, research in the area of roommates has become an important field of study (Jones, 1980; Markey & Kurtz, 2006; Martin & Anderson, 1995; Waldo, 1989).

One common strategy used by colleges and universities to improve retention and reduce student experience of stress and anxiety, is the development of roommate matching and selection systems; however, these strategies have their proponents and detractors (Ingalls, 2000; Lipka, 2008). On the one hand, the systems in place at universities have been touted as improving student living experiences and satisfaction with their roommates (Lipka, 2008). On the other hand, critics suggest that pairing similar roommates stifles social growth by making sure that like-minded individuals are placed together to avoid friction (Ingalls, 2000). Furthermore, roommate-matching systems rarely consider students' communication practices and preferences beyond the individual level (Ingalls, 2000; Lipka, 2008). The present study aims to extend understandings of roommate communication patterns beyond the individual level by looking at broader systems. However, first it is necessary to understand existing research that informs this study.

Many of the roommate pairing programs allow for initial roommate interaction prior to moving in together (Hoover, 2002; Ingalls, 2000; Lipka, 2008). Research supports this strategy, indicating that initial roommate perceptions may play a large part in the formation of positive relationships between roommates (Marek et al., 2004). For example, Marek et al. (2004) report that first impressions of roommate personalities predict subsequent interactions between roommates, including the level of constructive communication that roommates partake in and relationship persistence beyond the first year (Marek et al., 2004). Importantly, communication influences relationships, specifically relationships of college roommates.

Modeling this research, college matching systems identify student similarities in hopes that similar roommates will positively interact with each other initially, establishing a satisfying relationship over time (Ingalls, 2000; Lipka, 2008). Colleges also provide students opportunities to interact with each other and allow students to make roommate decisions based on interactions on private and school sponsored online systems (Hoover, 2002; Ingalls, 2000; Lipka, 2008). While pairing mechanisms are designed to capitalize on the way communication influences the roommate relationships, they do not take into account the systems at work within the residence hall communities. Further, initial roommate interaction is only a piece of the communication influencing the relationship.

Experiences beyond roommates' initial interactions also play an important role in the quality and durability of the relationship. Martin and Anderson (1995) consider specific communication factors that influence the development of relationships between roommates. Measuring interpersonal communication competence, verbal aggressiveness, and willingness to communicate through scales, Martin and Anderson (1995) found that students who are similar on the three dimensions listed above report being more satisfied with their roommates. In other words, if roommate A is (a) willing to communicate (b) communicatively competent (c) less verbally aggressive and roommate B shares these traits, the two of them would be more similar and thus more satisfied individually. Considering research from other studies (Duran & Zakahi, 1988; Markey & Kurtz, 2006; Waldo, 1989), these results contribute more evidence to the idea that individual communication behaviors have a strong influence on roommate satisfaction.

Communicative practices are especially salient when expectations are concerned. Expectations impact the manner in which individuals communicate, in turn influencing roommate perceptions of satisfaction (Duran & Zakahi, 1988; Hecht, 1978). This can be

demonstrated in the following manner: If roommate A expects to have a positive conversation with roommate B, and a positive conversation results, then roommate A is more likely to report liking roommate B (Duran & Zakahi, 1988). Additionally, a violation of expectations also plays a part in the satisfaction that roommates have for each other (Duran & Zakahi, 1988; Hecht, 1978; Markey & Kurtz, 2006). If one expects to have a positive experience but does not, they report being unsatisfied with the experience (Hecht, 1978). However, when an individual expects an emotionally charged or intense interaction, he or she is more likely to use avoidance-type conflict strategies (DiPaola et al., 2010). Roommate behaviors influence one another even when not explicitly tied to conflict situations. Also, if expectations impact the way residents approach dissonance in their rooms, it is likely that unspoken rules govern actions in the living space.

The discussion thus far has focused on research that measures individual level variables in a roommate relationship. However, it is important to consider information on roommate interaction as well. Markey and Kurtz's (2006) research explores roommate dyadic interactions by using and adapting the idea of complementarity among college roommates, where for every personality or set of behaviors, there are corresponding behaviors that provide a complement or best fit. According to Markey and Kurtz (2006), these complementary traits work together to create a personality equilibrium within the living environment. When personalities are not complementary, this balance is disrupted, and roommates work to adjust their personalities in order to reach equilibrium again. The authors clarify this further by stating, "one's behavioral style conveys information regarding how others (e.g. roommates) should respond" (Markey & Kurtz, 2006, p. 907). Different roommate patterns are identified through examining roommate dyads, or pairs of roommates, where one roommate reports their perceptions of the other roommate's behavioral style. In some cases, the dyads contain a dominating member and a

subordinate member, constituting equilibrium or balance. Equilibrium does not necessarily need to be a positive arrangement for both parties; balance can be achieved if the subordinate member adopts behaviors to accommodate and compliment their roommate's dominating style (Markey & Kurtz, 2006).

Markey and Kurtz (2006) posit that individuals will not only act differently around a hostile roommate than they would around a comforting roommate, but that the behavior of one roommate constrains the behavior of the other. This idea moves the research focus beyond individuals in roommate relationships to concentrate on dyadic communication patterns; both roommates must work together to co-create the living space. One person's behavioral choices convey information in regards to how the other roommate should respond and it is "likely they will alter their behavioral styles when interacting with each other to encourage a reasonable state of harmony" (Markey & Kurtz, 2006, p. 907).

Additionally, communication behavior patterns often occur without conscious thought. Markey and Kurtz (2006) report that individuals' "perceptions of their own personalities remained the same" despite adjustments made to accommodate their roommate, suggesting the communication alteration happens almost without the person's knowledge (p. 914). Of particular importance to this study, communication in roommate relationships extends beyond the individual level and approaches roommate relationships from the perspective that the two roommates in the space cannot be treated separately.

The reciprocity of liking rule also has bearing on roommate perceptions and behavioral patterns. Duran and Zakahi (1988) contend that when one party communicates "liking" or positive impressions of the other party, those sentiments will then be returned in kind. A competent communicator will be seen as more likable and therefore perceived as a more

attractive roommate choice (Duran & Zakahi, 1988). This principle also recognizes how roommates mutually influence perceptions in a dyad and is illustrated by the authors as, "Person A likes person B. Person B recognizes this liking and therefore likes person A. Person A recognizes the liking received from person B and responds by liking A even more" (Duran & Zakahi, 1988, p. 144). In this example, roommate A's behavior or attitude toward roommate B works to influence and inform the reaction from the other party, highlighting the interactive influence of roommates on each other.

Based on this review, communication factors are important contributors to roommate satisfaction (Duran & Zakahi, 1988) and are a predictor of student success and retention at the institution (Hardy, 1984; Jones, 1980; Waldo, 1989). While initial communication influences subsequent interactions (Marek at al., 2004), a portion of responsibility in feeling satisfied with a roommate still relies on the roommate behaving and communicating in ways that encourage a positive balance (Markey & Kurtz, 2006). Further, dyadic research reveals that without a mutual understanding of how communication should operate within the room, one individual's behavior can constrain the other's illustrating the interdependence of the relationship (Markey & Kurtz, 2006). The interwoven relationship between roommates' communication and their satisfaction, as well as the effect of one roommate's communication on the behaviors of the other, suggests that rather than two separate entities operating within a context, roommates mutually create a system of behavior (Markey & Kurtz, 2006). One such behavioral system includes conflict.

Conflict among University Students

Living with a roommate in college is stressful and often causes anxiety in students' lives (Blimling, 2010; Marek et al., 2004). Roommate conflict is an important source of this stress, compounded by students who do not inherently possessing the skills and strategies to mediate

and manage conflicts effectively (Johnson & Johnson, 1996; Myers & Larson, 2005). In order to address conflict as a concern roommates face, researchers explore the issue of conflict from several different perspectives including conflict and race (Kaya & Weber, 2003; Bresnahan, Xiaowen, Shearman & Donohue 2009), the development of conflict management strategies (Kiernan & Gray, 2013), conflict and humor (Wisler, 2010), and the impact of roommate relationships on how conflict is perceived in the room. (DiPaola et al., 2010; Emerson, 2008; Sillars, 1980).

Conceptualization of Conflict

Conceptualizations and definitions of conflict vary across relationships and contexts. In organizational contexts, Rahim (2002) defines organizational conflict as "an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement, or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e., individual, group, organization, etc.)" (p. 207). Characterizing conflict as interactive implies that individuals, groups or organizations take part in communicative exchanges and lends support to the idea that parties are interdependent (Putnam, 1987). Interdependence suggests that one person can block or prevent another individual from reaching their goals and therefore the parties involved need cooperation from each other in order to achieve their individual objectives (Putnam, 1987). Standard double occupancy within residence halls and dormitories, often with community baths, remains the standard (Kaya & Weber, 2003). Regardless of style or design, the university or college residence hall room generally places two or more individuals into a situation where they are forced to interact and rely on each other to some extent (Waldo, 1989; Owens, 2011). Roommates, when sharing space, can easily block each other's goals and therefore the roommate dyad forms an interdependent relationship. When expectations are unclear or when goals contradict each other, such as one roommate wanting for the light to be on

and the other person wanting it off, conflict arises in the form of disagreement or dissonance (Rahim, 2002).

In order to surmount this dissonance, individuals or organizations in conflict typically negotiate a solution or reframe the events to a point where dissonance is no longer felt and perceptually the parties are no longer incompatible (Levine & Shearman, 2005). Often this negotiation is impacted by a norm of reciprocity due to the interdependent nature of the relationship. During conflict, reciprocity can affect approach due to the actions of one agent informing those of the other which can thwart attempts to promote a harmonious environment between the individuals as the behaviors will not be complementary (Emerson, 2008; Markey & Kurtz, 2006). This often takes the appearance of mirroring behavior during interactions such as if one agent refuses to perform an expected task the other will also not perform the task, or if one agent raises their voice the other will also raise their voice (Markey & Kurtz, 2006). Therefore issues of reciprocity can add to perceived incompatibilities and actually aid agents in blocking the motives of others. In order for either person to reach their goals they must agree to not get in the way and this courtesy needs to be extended back to them (Levine & Shearman, 2005; Olekalns & Smith, 2003). Therefore, interdependent relationships require a certain level of perceptual understanding in order to avoid conflict, resolve conflict or not end in stalemate.

Individuals' perceptions play a large role in the way conflict is approached (Putnam, 1987) and the communication strategy utilized (Sillars, 1980). Difference in expectations and perceptions of other's behaviors create dissonance. If one individual perceives something as incompatible, conflict can exist regardless of the perceptions of the other person (DiPaola et al., 2010). In this way expectations and perceptions of the other person influence the success of the interdependent relationship. Martin and Anderson (1995) explain that those who perceive others

as being more similar in communication styles report having more positive experiences and successful relationships. Whether or not one person's perceptions of communication match the other's perceptions in the communicative exchange also have bearing and influence the satisfaction in the communicative relationship (Segrin, Hanzal, & Domschke, 2009). Often there is an incompatibility between what is the perceived *intention* of the communication and the perceived or actual *impact* of the message (Segrin et al., 2009). This difference in intent and impact is a regular cause of conflict in relationships (Segrin et al., 2009). Applying Rahim's (2002) definition to roommates helps to examine the interdependence of the roommate relationship while accounting for reciprocity and perceptual incompatibilities within rooms.

The idea that individuals in a living environment are responsible for a certain level of the others' satisfaction provides a level of interdependence between roommates, making conflict possible (Putnam, 1987). This interdependence means that a student's roommate has a large impact on their success in several aspects of college life (Marek et al., 2004; Owens, 2011). Furthermore, the action or behaviors of students within a living community have an influence on that community as a whole (Owens, 2011). Roommate satisfaction is related to roommate communication patterns (Duran & Zakahi, 1988) and adherence to room policies or norms (Markey & Kurtz, 2006).

Finally, the roommate relationship is more permanent compared to many other types of relationships, since living arrangements are ongoing and difficult to walk away from (Emerson, 2008). For example, conflict with a roommate with differs from conflict between friends due to the interdependence and the unique conditions of the relationship. Roommates are in a long-term relationship with a fixed exit point. This relationship arrangement often creates a desire to minimize confrontation in order the preserve a good "working" relationship, but also may mean

roommates need to convince others to change behaviors (Emerson, 2008). These efforts give rise to a wide array of conflict strategies that students utilize and are discussed in the following section.

Conflict Strategies

When roommates engage in conflict, there are many communication behaviors and strategies they may enact. There have been multiple iterations of the conflict styles and conflict resolution strategies typologies (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Follett, 1942; Putnam, 1987, 1988; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). An understanding of these concepts helps to shape the direction of the current research. Follett (1942) suggested three ways of dealing with conflict: domination (one side winning), compromise (each side giving something up to reach an agreement), and integration (when the solution incorporates both sides completely). Two additional strategies were added: avoidance (refusing to engage in the conflict) and suppression (solving the conflict by force) (Follett, 1942). These styles were later classified and reclassified into conceptual models by Blake and Mouton (1964) who suggested the model of forcing, withdrawing, smoothing, compromising, and problem solving based on dimensions of *concern for production* and *concern for people*. This work guided research and design of comprehensive conflict communication models such as the research of Thomas and Kilmann (1974, 1978) and Rahim and Bonoma (1979) who parsed conflict styles into two dimensions, *concern for self* and *concern for others*. These dimensions refer to the amount of concern an individual has for the other party and himself when approaching conflict. Putnam (1987) then amended the model slightly and proposed the five styles as: confronting (addressing the issues head on), forcing (using a position of power to solve conflict), smoothing (ignoring differences and disagreements for solutions), compromising (splitting the difference) and avoiding (evading the issues entirely). Roommate

research is grounded in these concepts to explain and interpret interactions within residence halls and between roommates (DiPaola et al., 2010; Marek et al., 2004; Sillars, 1980).

Putnam's (1987) typologies each are represented in the two dimensions argued by Thomas and Kilmann (1974, 1978) and Rahim and Bonoma (1979). *Avoidance* is low on both concern for self and others by not engaging in the conflict. *Forcing* represents high concern for self and low concern for others due to the assertive but uncooperative nature of the communication. *Confronting* includes assertive and cooperative communication and therefore is high on the scales of both concern for self and others. *Compromising* is in the middle of the model with moderate concern for self and others. *Smoothing* includes high concern for others and low concern for self with the goal achieving or maintaining harmony (Putnam, 1987; Rahim & Bonoma, 1979). The following section explains how these various typologies have been used in researching conflict and university students, as well as the role of attributions in roommate conflict.

Conflict and University Students

Ninety percent of college students report that their conflicts are unresolved or resolved through the use of avoidance or domination styles (De Cecco & Richards, 1974). Avoidance and domination styles are two of the most destructive conflict management styles (Putnam, 1987) and can predict difficulties for students as they approach late adolescence and early adulthood (Johnson & Johnson, 1996). These destructive styles reflect poorly on communication competence which can lead to tensions between roommates (DiPaola et al., 2010; Marek et al., 2004; Markey & Kurtz, 2006; Sillars, 1980). Often, conflict is avoided in an effort to maintain a good working relationship (Emerson, 2008) or in an attempt to preserve equilibrium within a roommate living arrangement (Markey & Kurtz, 2006). The present study identifies the styles

roommates use to address conflict and other sources influencing avoidant behaviors by examining the structures at work in the residence halls.

In addition to conflict styles, attributions of conflict are also important. College students attribute conflict to different aspects of their social interactions with their roommates (Sillars, 1980). Sillars' (1980) research indicates that attributions from one roommate to another are a significant indicator of which conflict strategies will be used in the interaction. Three propositions tie attributions to conflict style – intent to cooperate, locus of responsibility, and stability of conflict (Sillars, 1980). Students who attribute cooperativeness to their roommate use more integrative or constructive strategies. Likewise, attributing more responsibility for the conflict to one's self results in more constructive strategies. Finally, if the cause of conflict is attributed to something stable, such as fixed personality traits, a student is more likely to resolve conflict through the use of indirect strategies such as avoidance (Sillars, 1980).

Interestingly, interactions consistent with expectations of communication result in similar emotionally positive or negative evaluations of the communication (Duran & Zakahi, 1988; Hecht, 1978). If an individual expects to have a pleasant conversation with another, and such an interaction occurs, the individual comes away satisfied with the communication. Additionally, DiPaola et al.'s (2010) research considers whether or not expecting a conflict to be intense impacts students' reports of emotional problems after the conflict has "ended". Findings indicate that individuals expecting an emotionally upsetting or intense conflict will experience it as such, with expectations influencing perceptions and the relationship after the conflict with consideration to how satisfied an individual is with their roommate (DiPaola at al., 2010).

Roommate communication similarities also have a bearing on roommate satisfaction. Martin & Anderson's (1995) research measures roommates' willingness to communicate,

interpersonal communication competence, and verbal aggressiveness. When roommates are statistically similar in these variables compared to each other, they report higher levels of roommate satisfaction.

Response patterns are also important to consider. Using qualitative interviews, Emerson (2008) identifies three dyadic response patterns for roommate troubles. The categories are not mutually exclusive, but differentiate response patterns as: “managerial responses”, “dyadic complaints”, and “extreme responses” (Emerson, 2008, p. 491-492). A managerial response is unilateral and originates with the troubled party as a response to the discomfort or from an annoyance (Emerson, 2008). Complaints are bilateral responses where the troubled student proposes action or steps for the other in order to solve the concern (Emerson, 2008). Finally, an extreme response is used to create distance and/or punish the other party involved.

Through an evaluation of these response patterns, Emerson (2008) illustrates how responses from one member of a dyad influence the other member. For example, extreme responses influence both parties by generating hostility towards one party and reciprocation by the other party (Emerson, 2008). These results are consistent with studies on roommate relationships that indicate the communicative actions or behaviors of one party influence or inform the actions of the second party (Sillars, 1980; DiPaola, 2010; Markey & Kurtz, 2006). Emerson (2008) explains that roommate relationships are different from typical friendships, which has bearing on the style of conflict communication employed.

As a resident’s relationship with a roommate matures and develops, it becomes easier for individuals to predict the reaction of their roommate in response to stimulus (Duran & Zakahi, 1988). Avoidance behaviors stem from the anticipation that conflict will have a negative effect on the roommate relationship (DiPaola, et al., 2004). Considering typical behavioral patterns in

existing research, this study is designed to extend understanding beyond the roommate dyad to also examine how the residence hall community is part of a system that informs roommate conflict behaviors. In this view, residence hall community norms constrain and inform the communication behaviors of roommates for handling conflict. The idea that norms constrain and inform agency within roommate relationships echoes with ideas of Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration, which is detailed in the next section.

Structuration Theory

Structuration theory explains that social systems are produced and reproduced through structures, or sets of *rules* and *resources*, that agents use to engage in practices within an institution or organization (Giddens, 1984). One can view an organization and all of the separate departments as comprising a system. A *system* is made up of human practices or patterns of activity that are meaningful to individuals within the specific organization (Poole & McPhee, 2005). For example, if the organization sold groceries, aspects of the system might be the practice of balancing the budget or inventorying the back stock. These individual practices can be seen as organizing activities in relation to one another, which form a larger system (Poole & McPhee, 2005).

The structure within the example grocery store system presented above is the collection of rules or resources that individual agents use to carry out system practices (Giddens, 1984). In this case, *rules* are any belief or routine that guides the actions of the individuals within the system (Poole & McPhee, 2005). For example, one rule may be taking inventory of the stock every Tuesday on a routine basis. A *resource* is anything physical or non-physical an individual is able to harness in order to act out a rule and perform in the system (Poole & McPhee, 2005). In the example organization, the money or an inventory sheet could serve as a resource just as the

budget or the manager's degree in business could (Poole & McPhee, 2005). The theory of structuration states that through the utilization of rules and resources (the structure) an agent produces and reproduces systems (Giddens, 1984; Poole & McPhee, 2005).

Producing and reproducing systems is done through an agent within the system using structural rules and resources in order to constitute the very system that they are operating within. This represents the idea of the "duality of structure", one of the main tenets of structuration (Giddens, 1984; Poole & McPhee, 2005). Plainly stated, by using structural rules and resources individuals affirm them and embed them within a system. In the sense of the grocery example, the simple act of customers in a grocery asking a clerk where an item is located keeps the need for clerks alive. Likewise, if the customers were to discover a new way to find items, the entire system would not cease existing but would transform (Poole & McPhee, 2005).

This production and reproduction is practiced through agency and the modalities of action, which include meaning, power and norms (Poole & McPhee, 2005). In any system, *dimensions* of *power* (who has the ability to interpret and use rules and resources) *meaning*, (how the rule or resource is interpreted by the agent) and *norms* (whether the use of any rule or resource is legitimate) are at work on the actors in every interaction (Poole & McPhee, 2005). While these dimensions can be individually distinguished they are interwoven and interconnected. Power can be utilized to change meaning and make the use of rules and resources legitimate just as meaning and norms can influence who has power and how it can be practiced (Giddens, 1984; Poole & McPhee, 2005). In addition to the dimensions is the concept of agency.

Agency is not necessarily the intentions that actors possess but the capability to act; agency deals specifically with events where an individual is the actor (Giddens, 1984). In a sense, the concept of agency is directly entwined to "doing", whether one is aware or not. This

idea of *awareness* is communicated through the three levels of consciousness an agent: discursive, practical, and unconscious (Poole & McPhee, 2005). *Discursive consciousness* is when an agent is aware of rules and resources being used (Poole & McPhee, 2005). *Practical consciousness* is skills and knowledge that an agent knows but can't articulate, such as tension in a roommate relationship (Poole & McPhee, 2005). Finally, the *unconscious* deals with experiences agents do not have the ability to describe due to lack of awareness (Poole & McPhee, 2005).

If an agent acts, regardless of intention, they practice agency (Giddens, 1984). So if a store clerk bags groceries, they practice agency to the same extent that an employee who ignores a customer in line accidentally practices agency. The idea of agency, as suggested by Giddens (1984), ties very closely with whether or not the actor has power in the situation. When an actor does not have power, they do not have the capacity to make a difference in the system and therefore do not possess agency. A higher level of consciousness can at times lead to more agency in a system.

As a theoretical lens, structuration has been applied to business organizations in management studies as an interpretive tool (Jack & Kholeif, 2007), to study small group communication (Poole, Seibold & McPhee, 1985), to examine group support systems (Gopal, Bostrom & Chin, 1993), to identify identity construction and reinforcement (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Ran & Golden, 2011), as an explanation of organizational design (Selcer & Decker, 2012), to understand organizational culture (Witmer, 1997), as a lens for work/life accommodation issues (Hoffman & Cowan, 2010), and to better understand policy use (Kirby & Krone, 2002). Considering the scope of theoretical application, structuration has proven a useful theory to

examine the way that actors practice agency and use structures to become part of and reproduce systems (Poole & McPhee, 2005).

One example is provided by Selcer and Decker (2012). After a study within an ‘ambidextrous’ organization, research concluded that corporations are often interconnected communities of change. This change affects members and the organization in a manner that places the members within the organization in a position to produce change through perceptions, talk, and action through resources and rules (Selcer & Decker, 2012). The authors use structuration to explain why designing a “top-down” *and* “bottom-up” strategic plan did not work in refocusing a company’s efforts. In this case, the managers gave employees freedoms expecting them to conform to the prescribed values and vision. What was not considered is that employees have the ability to enact change and thus have agency (Poole & McPhee, 2005). This employee agency influences, interacts with and changes the system just as the executives do.

This research carries similarities to common residence hall practices (Ingalls, 2000; Lipka, 2008; Selcer & Decker, 2012). Residence life professionals generally use a “top-down” method for matching roommates but also expect students to work within that system to provide feedback and influence the direction of the system congruent with the vision of the institution (Lipka, 2008; Ingalls, 2000). Giddens (1984) illustrates that this expectation is not possible due to the fact that systems rely on the production and reproduction of structures. If the systems being re-produced are slightly different, the structure will change.

Kirby & Krone (2002) also note the important role of agents within a system, discovering that even though written policy in the organization communicated one set of behavioral practices, employees regulated each other’s behaviors to reinforce and bring about a different practice. Applying this finding to residence life, research has pointed to how students practice

conflict avoidance (DiPaola et al., 2010) and under-utilize conflict strategies (Sillars, 1980; De Cecco & Richards, 1974). Why some conflict strategies are more prevalent than others could be addressed through identification of resources or rules that affect student choices with the organizational system of a residence hall.

Structuration provides a useful framework to examine organizations with embedded structures (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Selcer & Decker, 2012). Once rules and resources are identified and the manner in which agents use structures to produce and reproduce a system is named, the system can be understood from a deeper level. Nicotera and Mahon (2012) contend, “Knowing structure enables doing structure” (p. 92-93).

Further, identifying agents and structures is applicable to conflict communication. “Participants in conflict can control the factors that lead to negative results of conflict by clarifying and narrowing conflict issues, by taking conflict through formal channels, and by shaping arguments and rhetorical strategies to accent the costs of a stalemate” (Putnam, 1987, p. 43). In other words, conflict participants have agency and can impact outcomes and behavioral patterns.

Structuration is a fruitful theory in elucidating how rules and resources in workplace organizations are enacted, reinforced and challenged (Hoffman & Cowan, 2010; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Selcer & Decker, 2012). Hoffman & Cowan (2010) make a call for future research to “use structuration theory to uncover rules and resources in other common organizational issues” (p. 220). The current research answers this call by exploring conflict in a non-traditional organization – residence halls.

One criticism of structuration theory is that the complexity of the theory makes it difficult to validate and apply practically in organizational contexts. Sewell (1992) advocates for the

preservation of structuration theory's central components, but makes a case for the use of the theory in a more practical manner. Further, Sewell (1992) also critiques the need for structuration to focus on re-centering the theory on the agency of the actors. The practical application of structuration can help explain the importance of individual actors within large collectives, such as residence halls. Therefore, this study uses structuration theory as a framework in an effort to provide a well-rounded and current application of the theory that illuminates how residents in residence halls utilize rules and resources established through previous actions, consistent with duality of structure (Giddens, 1984; Miranda & Bostrom, 1993; Selcer & Decker, 2012; Sewell, 1992). Additionally, the effect that the resulting communication patterns have on conflict management and healthy relationship management skills will be explored. Specifically, this study proposes two research questions:

> RQ1: How do the three dimensions of structuration (power, meaning, and norms) influence the resident's approach to conflict within a residence hall?
>
> RQ2: What resources and rules do and resident's use to create and perpetuate conflict behavior systems?

Chapter 3 - Methods

Conflict communication is inherently complex, involving a range of perceptions regarding what is happening, what has happened, and the available responses to these happenings (Putnam, 1987; Rahim, 2002). Conflict also presents a unique challenge to researchers due to the fact that conflict communication and the effect of conflict experiences often go beyond the scope of the parties involved and can affect the larger community (Putnam, 1987; Rahim, 2002; Rahim, Garrett & Buntzman, 1992). This study used a qualitative approach to capture the communication processes and larger structural influences to identify the inner-workings of the systems at play. Specifically, this research study was designed to develop a nuanced understanding of the contexts (who, what, where, etc.) and participants' experiences, providing a chance for meaning from these contexts to arise (Tracy, 2012). Put simply, the study design offered subtle understanding of roommate conflict practices in an effort to find the meaning in these practices.

Data collection involved both ethnographic observations and qualitative interviews. The ethnographic approach included observation of interactions and provided an opportunity to see and experience what people actually did through communication patterns (Tracy, 2012). Because qualitative research is an inductive process, allowing meanings to emerge, field research methods provided the most ecologically valid representation of the interactions (Tracy, 2012). This methodology allowed the researcher to uncover the aspects of communication systems in the residence hall that influence student interactions and conflict strategy choices.

Further, these observations paired with interviews provided an opportunity to make note of interactions and behaviors and then speak with participants to clarify what happened between participants, noting how the systems at work formed patterns over time. Following is a

discussion of the study design, participant information, interview protocol, and data analysis procedures.

Study Design

The study began by conducting approximately 30 hours of ethnographic field observations as a participant-observer resulting in 20 pages of hand-written field notes (Charmaz, 2006; Tracy, 2012). Previous studies dealing with conflict often employ quantitative methods to address not only conflict communication strategies (Sillars, 1980), but also communicative factors that influence conflict communication (DiPaola et al., 2010). While these studies have been illuminating, they provide only a snapshot of how communication practices influence conflict interactions. Qualitative methodology involving observations and interviews allowed the researcher to focus on actual interactions rather than participant-reported exchanges and look at larger conflict patterns in the residence hall community. During this process the researcher also examined 16 pages of documents distributed to the residents of the residence hall. These documents set ground rules and explained policies regarding resident and staff interactions. These observations and documents allowed the researcher to provide a more accurate picture of structural elements and communication patterns in the residence hall.

Next, the researcher conducted 23 semi-structured interviews to gain information on the residents' perspectives of conflict. Of the 23 interviews, 10 of the participants comprised dyads and 13 participants were individuals. This choice provided multiple perspectives. The individuals that were interviewed provided insight to *rules* and *resources* at work in multiple rooms being utilized by the agent. Dyads allowed the researcher to examine complete systems at work in rooms by getting feedback from both agents. Interviews allowed the researcher to develop an understanding of communication practices and ask for clarification through follow-up questions

and open dialogue. These discussions with residents also allowed for understanding of how conflict and relationships operated within the residence hall by permitting the researcher to ask questions about unspoken rules to residents. This provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on structures they utilize to practice agency within their roommate relationships. The interview questions and protocol will be further discussed after describing the participant demographic information.

Participant Demographics

Initial participants were identified by the researcher based on their experiences of roommate conflict noted in observational data, followed by the use of a convenience snowball sampling methodology. Snowball sampling involves identifying individuals that meet the criteria for inclusion and then asking those participants to recommend others (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). This method allowed participants to point the researcher in the direction of new participants rather than the researcher dictating the direction of data collection. The choice to use snowball sampling provided a natural flow of data and access to individuals who would be comfortable discussing their conflicts openly, rather than a force-selected group of participants who may not be interested in the study itself or have anything to offer the researcher.

In order to participate, students had to be currently living in the residence hall and have experienced conflict with a roommate within the last semester. All participants were living in a large Midwestern university co-ed residence hall that housed between 590 and 619 students at any time with the maximum capacity of the residence hall being 619 students. The residence hall housed students between the ages of 18 to 27 years old, who were full-time college students (freshmen to seniors) in various academic majors. The building also housed 14 student staff

para-professionals (student RAs). Three of the participants (13%) were members of this staff who lived with roommates in the residence hall.

More specifically, the participants included 13 females (57%) and 10 males (43%). Interview participants ranged from 18 to 23 years old. Nine freshman students (40%), 10 sophomore students (43%), and 4 juniors (17%) participated in the study.

The racial make-up of the building was comprised of primarily Caucasian students from the Midwest with a small population of international students, as well as students representing most of the traditional minority groups. International and minority students comprised approximately 15% of the total building population. Participants self-reported their race, which included Caucasian (n = 20; 88%), Asian (n = 1; 4%), African American (n = 1; 4%), and Multiracial (n = 1; 4%) individuals.

All 23 participants self-reported living in a standard double room with one roommate for between 1 to 6 or more semesters. Nine participants lived with their current roommate for 1 semester (39%), eight lived with their roommate for 2 semesters (35%), four lived with their roommates for 4 semesters (17%), and two lived with their roommates for 6 semesters or longer (9%). Additionally, participants self-reported various lengths of time living in the residence hall; ten had lived in the hall for 1 semester (43%), two participants for 2 semesters (9%), eight participants for 4 semesters (35%), and three participants for 6 or more semesters (13%).

This sample was ideal for the research study for several reasons. For one, the mix of freshman and upper-classman students allowed the researcher an opportunity to look for the perpetuation of behavior systems by interviewing students in their first year and students who have spent multiple years living within the residence hall environment. This also provided an opportunity for the researcher to see how upperclassmen introduced new freshman to the system.

Additionally, the scope of ages provided an interesting perspective on *authority* and how it operated within the residence hall.

The building was composed primarily of standard double rooms with community bathrooms located in wings that are separated by gender. As double occupancy in residence hall rooms is still the most common living arrangement for students (Kaya & Weber, 2003), it makes sense to sample students living in similar conditions. The sample also allowed for multiple students to be interviewed who are having similar living experiences in regard to privacy, personal space, physical room layout, and number of roommates which enhanced the validity of the results.

Interview Protocol

To address the first research question regarding the influence of the three *dimensions* of structuration (*power*, *meaning*, and *norms*) on resident's approaches to conflict, the researcher relied heavily on observations initially and then followed up with interview questions to clarify. Many of the residents were not aware of how power, meaning and norms were operating around them and on them. Once general patterns were observed, the interview questions allowed participants to provide more detail and context for these concepts.

Interviews began with broad questions to capture emergent data regarding participant perceptions and expectations. Questions such as “If you had a magic wand and could get any roommate you wanted, what would they be like?” and “Have you ever shared space with someone before?” allowed for wider perspectives on conflict communication and relationship expectations with roommates. The researcher was careful to probe answers to these questions to gain additional information on power, meaning, and norms within the system, often with participants pausing to understand their own answers and why they felt the ways they did. This

type of perspective is paramount when dealing with a lens of structuration due to the fact that all of the components are so interwoven and often unstated.

In order to address the second research question regarding the *resources* and *rules* residents used to create and perpetuate conflict behavior systems, initial broad questions followed by more specific questions were used. Interview questions were more useful in addressing this particular research question because it addressed personal perceptions that the residents and staff may possess. Questions that addressed this component included "If you felt like you needed help with a roommate problem where would you go or what would you do?" This allowed for themes to emerge concerning conflict communication without isolating specific instances by relying on the experiences of the participants to inform the data. The complete interview protocol for this study appears in appendix A.

Analysis

Upon completion of the observations and interviews, the researcher transcribed the interviews, which provided 214 typed single spaced pages. Analysis involved grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher approached the data through open-coding to identify themes (Charmaz, 2006) from observations and interview transcripts that were relevant to conflict communication or behaviors. This process was iterative in order to provide accurate themes from the data and also allowed the researcher to become immersed with the data in question (Charmaz, 2006; Tracy, 2012). It was the researcher's intent to deal with each research questions individually in regards to coding and memo-writing. However, shortly after analysis began it was clear that because structuration is a mutual informing process the research questions were interconnected throughout.

Following initial coding and sorting of the data, themes were compiled and processed using memo-writing. This allowed the researcher to analyze coded data and work back and forth between the data and emerging categories (Tracy, 2012). The researcher used the emerging theme of "harmony" to organize the data into "engaged" and "coexistent" styles which provided the fullest picture of the participant experiences. During the memo-writing process the researcher diagrammed, sorted, doodled, and connected the memos to the data in order to craft a well-rounded and informative data set (Clarke, 2005). Repetitive codes were grouped together under a common identifier. The quotations relevant to that identifier were processed several more times and the resulting themes were used in addressing the proposed research questions. This process was done over approximately 80 hours of coding, memo-writing, analysis, recoding, and theme generation.

Chapter 4 - Results

Discussed previously, research in the area of conflict and college roommates focuses on individual characteristics and how the roommate relationship influences conflict strategies (DiPaola et al., 2010; Martin & Anderson, 1995; Sillars, 1980). The research questions focused on the influence of *power*, *meaning*, and *norms* on the resident's approach to conflict, as well as how residents' used *resources* and *rules* to create and perpetuate conflict behavior systems in the residence halls. Structuration theory involves a mutually informing process between elements (Giddens, 1984; Poole & McPhee, 2005; Poole et al., 1985), making distinctions between the research questions difficult to clearly and cleanly separate. For example, discussion of resources and rules existing in a system must also include coverage of the *dimensions* of structuration that allow those resources and rules to function in different ways. Therefore, in order to engage with both research questions simultaneously, the analysis begins with a discussion of the way conflict was framed by residents within the residence hall.

Conflict Framing

In the residence hall system explored in this study, the two questions that prefaced any conversation or mediation between two roommates experiencing conflict were: "Do you feel safe in your space?" and "Do you feel comfortable in your space?" In the cases where safety was concerned, the strategies to remedy the problem were more extreme. These usually resulted in the almost immediate removal of one or both roommates and reassignment into different spaces. In the cases where comfort was the concern, options varied as adjustments could be made by one or both parties to make the living situation more comfortable.

The results of the data for this study focused on issues of comfort and discomfort rather than safety. In the participant interviews, the general idea expressed was that their living

situation was or was not optimal or preferred, but never approached the point of making any of the participants feel unsafe. In almost every situation the participants voiced complaints about their roommates or past roommates that were framed from the point of view of "just wishing things were better." Keith, a male sophomore, illustrated this wish by explaining:

> He [the roommate] just—he never seemed to really want to talk at all and I, I enjoy talking to my roommates because I feel like I can—you know I feel like they're the people that I live with, the close—you know that I'm closest to here.

Keith's ideas for how to improve the roommate experience simply dealt with improving the relationship in marginal ways. Jessica, a female sophomore, echoed the idea of small changes that would improve the atmosphere in the room, wishing for

> …someone who doesn't mind my mess for a couple days while I'm trying to get my life together [laughs] um, someone who's pretty clean themselves, you know, isn't like clean to a fault, but um, you know, they respect a clean room and that kind of thing or, I don't know, someone who has a sense of humor.

This pattern in the interviews yielded a clear concern for harmony from residents; Keith wanted a balanced relationship and Jessica wanted someone who could easily co-exist with her cleanliness habits. This result is somewhat consistent with research from Markey and Kurtz's (2006) study on roommate complementarity. However, using a lens of structuration, the data surfaced *resources* and *rules* at play in each system in order to achieve harmony, or a balanced living arrangement, and the manner in which *power*, *meaning* and *norms* impacted those resources and rules to influence the pathway to harmony.

Harmony

According to 19 of the 23 participants interviewed, harmony was an explicitly stated concern. Harmony did not necessarily need to be what someone would consider “true harmony”, where both sides are equally balanced. Instead, data supported a bifurcated approach consisting of “engaged harmony” and “coexistent harmony” rather than a single view of “balance”. Brad, a male junior and RA with a roommate in the hall, framed harmony as the ultimate goal:

> You’re going to be living with them for 10 months or nine months so it would just be really awkward if you all went to your desks and just didn’t talk to each other…for some people that’s okay as long as they keep their side of the room clean or whatever.

This goal was echoed again by Steve, a male sophomore RA who lived with an international student. Steve approached harmony from the perspective of reaching it despite whether or not both parties were at their optimal level of satisfaction, “For me I am the type of person that you know if it is not really harming me as an individual …I am going to let it slide.” Alexa, a female freshman added to this theme by claiming that the only thing necessary to really avoid conflict was for her roommate to “understand that you’re not the only person living here and I have to understand I’m not the only person living here.” She clarified this idea even further stating, “She can be clean and I can be a disaster and it’s not a big deal.” Through these two comments from Alexa it is clear that while things weren’t perfect, harmony could still be a very real and attainable goal as long as there was mutual respect.

An important distinction to make between these statements is that Alexa and Brad were advocating for harmony through engaging their roommates. Brad wanted to talk to his roommate and engage to create harmony and Alexa wanted to make it clear to her roommate that she understands the room is a shared space. Steve was attesting to the idea that sometimes harmony

was best reached through avoiding confrontation and simply coexisting with another person. If something didn't harm him or affect his ability to function in the space he did not see a reason to engage with his roommate and disrupt the feeling of harmony that existed in the room. In essence, harmony was the overall goal regardless of whether it was actual or perceived. The identification of harmony as the goal in any roommate system and the differences between coexistent and engaged room systems is important in answering the research questions posed by this study. The following section broadly identifies the two systems, engagement and coexistent, and then describes three specific features delineating the two systems.

Engagement

According to participants, harmony could be reached through practices of engaging with a roommate in order to address problems and dysfunction. This practice was explicit in 12 of the 23 interviewed and especially clear in the relationship between Kyle, a male junior, and Justin, his 19-year-old sophomore roommate. These roommates crafted what they referred to as "the Bro Code", which was a document that plainly stated what could and could not be shared and what responsibilities each roommate was in charge of. By doing this, the pair reached a state of harmony in their room through engaging by talking explicitly about expectations and forming a written agreement. Kyle attested to the "Bro Code's" ability to preemptively solve for conflict, "Well if we have already addressed those issues even if we don't think we're going to have them then we know kinda what's gonna [*sic*] happen."

In a different conversation with Rose, a female freshman, the strategy of engaged harmony was more clearly articulated. When asked "how disagreements were handled" between Rose and her roommate she answered, "I mean we didn't really wait until the problem happened

because we knew it was there so we just talked about what we were going to do." Rose reached an agreement, or harmony, with her roommate through direct conversation and communication.

Coexistence

While many roommates were willing to engage in direct and explicit communication to solve conflict, almost half of the participants preferred to avoid conflict communication or act passive aggressively. In fact, 11 of the 23 participants indicated they achieved harmony through avoidant behaviors. This action typically dealt with creating a *perception* of harmony in the space. An example of such an interaction occurred with Beth, a female sophomore with a randomly paired roommate. Beth softened her approach when making requests to her roommate to preserve the apparent harmony and not engage in conflict**,** "I know that I try to shove it off as like 'Oh it's okay. I know you're going to clean it.' but really inside I think 'Really I just want you to clean it right now.'" In this example, by saying one thing and thinking another to appear polite, Rose avoided confrontation for the sake of maintaining harmony and simply coexisting with her roommate, Brandi. Beth also admitted to this practice, "I try not to show it I think just because I don't want to be the bad roommate." Keith, a male sophomore with a randomly matched roommate, gave another example of this strategy when talking about his roommate's sleeping schedule, "I was almost angered about it again but I decided not to pester him about it so much. I'm just like 'maybe he was just having a bad night.'" In this situation, Keith was frustrated with his roommates sleeping schedule conflicting with his time to complete schoolwork but chose avoid the confrontation for harmony's sake. He even created an excuse for his roommate's behavior to justify avoiding the conflict.

Through these examples, the participants spoke to the idea of reaching harmony through coexisting practices because they did not have to address the fact that dysfunction existed in their

rooms. These roommates were also concerned about being seen as a “bad roommate” if they did engage in conflict. As long as conflict was not plainly stated or addressed, the roommates perceived they were living in harmony.

Differences in Engaged and Coexistent Harmonious Systems

Engaged and coexistent roommates differed in several ways. Interviews with participants yielded three broad scope differences between the two systems. The following sections explore the most vital and relevant points illustrating how the systems differ.

Discuss Problems vs. Internalize Problems

The first difference between engaged and coexistent harmony systems was that engaged roommates discussed problems, concerns and expectations while coexistent roommates avoided interactions when problems or concerns arose. One of the strongest examples of an engaged dyad was between Kyle and Justin, the sophomore/junior pair who drafted what they referred to as a “Bro Code”, which listed proper behaviors for each of them while living together. The code covered guests, cleaning, sharing personal property, schedules, and food. Kyle and Justin also developed consequences for breaking the agreement. While this type of written agreement was not a usual occurrence among study participants, it served to set ground rules for these roommates. Justin explained, “I don’t like to be up there in the dark, not knowing that if something does happen that they’re being held accountable for it.” The pair was engaged with each other through direct communication in order to proactively address problems.

The practice of engaging a roommate to set ground rules was common among 11 of the 23 individuals interviewed. Steve, a male sophomore who was living with an international student, described the common communication practices of engaged roommates. While the pair experienced some complications derived from their cultural differences, the domestic roommate

made it a point to set ground rules right away so that the two of them could get off on the right foot, “I kind of set some expectations like ‘hey we’re going to interact with people when we come in—when we come in and like be roommates.’” Steve went so far as to directly address cleanliness expectations in the relationship in a way that would not create conflict but mitigate it from the onset. Steve explained, “I don’t feel like it is my place to be like ‘you should clean up your room right now or I am going to be angry.’ I’ll just be like ‘hey you want to clean it up that would be great.’” Steve went on to describe in detail the process of setting ground rules for items such as cleanliness and the types of media that could be consumed in the room. This example showcases communication patterns of how engaged roommates clearly worked to discuss problems with each other, unlike coexisting roommates.

Coexisting roommates worked to actively or passively ignore problems in the hopes that they would resolve issues without confrontation. Blake, a male freshman, demonstrated this when asked about any specific conflicts he experienced with his roommate. Blake explained:

> I introduced—“here’s my dad” he took one headphone off kind of smiled over and said “hello”. I was like “you get up and shake his hand!” I was getting ready to go off but I was like oh, no, so it blew over, it’s fine.

Blake identified a very simple conflict that he could have approached. However, he chose to wait to see if the problem would resolve itself, or at least appear to. Follow-up questions indicated that Blake just didn’t want to have a confrontation and would rather just pretend things were alright. In another coexistent system, Rebecca, a female junior with a sophomore roommate spoke about her approach to conflict, “I try very hard not…when I can like if I can just deal with it I try not to confront it head-on.” In this case, much like the last, Rebecca recognized the fact that she consciously attempted to avoid conflict and did not directly discuss issues. While these

two differences seem very plain, myriad factors that can be identified by applying structuration theory influenced these communication choices.

In addition to the differences in the way the engaged and coexistent pairs discussed problems, they also worked to solve problems in different ways. Engaged roommates attempted to solve concerns between themselves rather than turn to outside individuals for solutions. Coexisting pairs looked to third parties for solutions to problems and did so in an effort to remain appearing “laid back” in their roommate’s eyes, even when they were not.

Solutions vs. Laid Back

Engaged roommates were solution oriented in their communication; they worked directly with each other to find resolutions for the various disagreements in the room. Michael and Brad, both male juniors and roommates, made it clear that their first step in a conflict was to talk with each other in order to solve the problem. When asked, “Who would you go to first?” in separate interviews, both roommates answered in a similar fashion. Michael responded saying, “Probably him just like ‘this isn’t working we should figure something out.’” Brad responded to the prompt stating, “I usually just let it [conflict] play out for a little bit but if it gets to a point where I feel uncomfortable then I approach it directly.” Although Brad’s initial response was somewhat avoidant, the difference here was the directness of the approach once the issue was identified as a problem. Engaged roommates approached their living partners on their own.

This pattern of solving problems without the assistance of an outside person was also seen in Kyle and Justin’s “Bro Code”. This code was an expanded two page version of a roommate agreement that covered topics of “personal property”, “guests”, “cleanliness”, “schedules”, “food”, and “vices”. The “Bro Code” was written in pseudo-contract language and carried the tone of a legal document. Under each of these categories there were more specific

rules and policies set to manage behavior in the room. For example, under “Vices” there was a clause to dictate smoking behavior, “Smoking: will be done outside and all articles of clothing that smell of smoke will be place [sic] in one’s laundry basket and washed ASAP.” A similar clause covered the act of consuming alcohol. Other clauses covered behaviors such as cleaning which were divided into “daily”, “weekly” and “monthly” tasks; for example, “Trash: we shall each be assigned a bin and empty it [sic] when it is full”. Each instruction under cleanliness was worded with a similar sentence structure and written in a direct format in very plain language.

At the end of the document there was a section titled “Consequences for Violating Agreement”. This section included a single clause stating that punishment should be incurred in response to a breach of the code. A simple addition, yet it kept the *authority* of conflict in the hands of the roommate dyad. The code did not indicate that the pair should seek outside assistance. Rather the code worked to help the pair solve their own problems without the help of others outside of the room. This pattern was noticed in all 12 of the engaged participants and helped to establish how authority worked inside of those systems.

The data also exposed that the desire to solve problems internally was not always shared between the parties. Jessica, a female sophomore, talked about the one-sidedness of her roommate relationship and how her efforts to engage to solve problems did not work. Jessica was met with resistance from her roommate, which caused some tension between them. She described, “I thought there would be an easy conversation of just sitting down and discussing like how we wanted our room to be and stuff like that she was very much like ‘oh we don’t need to talk about this.’” Jessica continued to work on engaging her roommate, even to the point of asking, point blank, whether they should continue to live together due to the amount of tension in the room. Jessica repeatedly described the way in which an engaged roommate solves problems,

rather than complain outwardly, she turned inward and worked within the roommate relationship to solve, or attempt to solve, the issues.

In contrast to engaged roommates, roommates who were just coexisting desired to seem "laid back" and so they did not talk to their roommates about the conflict and instead avoided the problem indefinitely or sought out third parties to help. The fascinating portion of this is that these roommates were often only *pretending* to be laid back in an effort to not disrupt what they felt was a harmonious living situation. This behavior was observed explicitly in 9 of the 12 interviews. Mary spoke to this point directly when referencing being woken up by her roommate "She can't be perfectly quiet like going to sleep or leaving the room. That's physically impossible so I understand that. So if I wake up it's not a problem". Mary addressed the fact that her roommate had habits that bothered her but avoided confronting her due to a desire to be understanding and "laid back". Cathy also talked about being "laid back" and the way it helped her and her roommate maintain harmony, "I think maybe on her part, she leaves the room a little messier and I keep it cleaner but it is not that big of a deal." Cathy went on to recognize that she tried hard to accommodate her roommate's behaviors through her laid back approach which created a sense of harmony in her room. She didn't want to disrupt that harmony through confrontation. Cathy explained, "I can confront people and I will but if I don't have to then I would rather not."

Importantly, coexistent roommates often did not realize they were not as laid back as they seemed. For example, Beth, a female sophomore explained, "I don't want to be the difficult person you know? Everybody's different so like not being that person's like 'you didn't do it like this so sorry.'" Beth was very concerned with seeming welcoming and laid back and this behavior actually introduced a fair amount of stress and tension into the relationship. The first

two differences 1) discussing issues directly or ignoring them and 2) looking for solutions or trying to appear laid back can be understood even more clearly through the third difference, viewing conflict as fixable or treating conflict as ignorable.

Conflict is Fixable vs. Conflict is Ignorable

When asked how they perceived conflict, nine of the 12 engaged system participants answered that conflict was something that was fixable or surmountable. Conflict was usually perceived as a disagreement but not something that the participant was afraid of. Importantly, engaged participants recognized that conflict was something initially negative but could be fixed and even have positive results. Brad, a male junior, stated the idea very plainly at two different points in his interview discussing conflict and his opinion of it: "I mean it's, maybe like it's good to have some sort of conflict you know." "I always think conflict can be fixed." These attitudes created a harmonious system based on the idea that conflict was a part of the system and could be dealt with accordingly.

Coexisting roommates responded to the same question with a very different orientation, often stating that conflict was some form of scary or negative interaction that was or could be detrimental to relationships. Mary, a female sophomore, explained that she didn't like conflict and tried to avoid it at all costs, "It intimidates me a little bit…It's a little bit upsetting that there is something going on." Her roommate, Melissa, shared this negative view of conflict and characterized the conflict as "just people yelling at each other." This dyad constituted a coexistent relationship and is exemplary of the way most of the coexisting participants felt about conflict. These relationships characterized conflict as an unwelcomed intrusion to the roommate relationship, but through avoidant behavior could be downplayed to create harmony.

Within each system, the participants attended to the *dimensions* of structuration (*power*, *meaning*, and *norms*) in different ways. These structuration dimensions included who had the power, how the power was manifested within the system, the meanings behind the *resources*, and the way the norms of the systems worked to establish harmony. These differences worked to shape how the resources were appropriated and how the *rules* enacted supported the resource. While the argument could be made that one of the systems is better in quality or function compared to the other, analysis suggests that both systems arose from the same set of resources enacted by the roommates in different ways to develop rules. As previously mentioned, the mutual informing nature of structuration tied RQ1 and RQ2 closely together. Therefore, the next section begins by discussing the resources of engaged and coexistent systems, which focuses on RQ2. Through the discussion of the results, RQ1 will be answered in a semi-simultaneous fashion as the dimensions influenced which rules were developed to support harmony in the systems.

Authority

Throughout the data analysis it was clear that *authority* was a concern of many of the participants interviewed. In this case, authority related to who had the ability to solve issues between the roommates. While authority existed in both engaged and coexistent systems the primary difference came from where the authority operated.

Authority in Engaged Harmony Systems

In engaged systems, *authority* operated within the room and between the roommates. This was evident through practices such as Kyle and Justin's "Bro Code". The very practice of drafting such a document was an attempt by the roommates to self-govern their actions; this established authority with both roommates and the *rule* that conflict was handled within the room

first. Harmony was gained by engaging with one another and solving the problems through active communication.

Rose and Brandi, a dyad of female freshmen, illustrated another way that authority operated within an engaged system. The two suffered a disagreement shortly after moving in with each other and addressed the problem head on rather than involving a third party. Rose spoke about the process stating, “It was a lot of back-and-forth…you know it was still friendly but it was just way harder to compromise.” This disagreement was grounded in basic wants of both roommates, but rather than practicing avoidant behaviors, the roommates engaged each other, preserved *power* as equal by keeping the authority to solve the conflict between the two of them. Brandi summed up this tendency neatly, “Yeah we usually, if we have a problem we sit down and we talk about it right then and there and we finish it.” This statement signifies engaged behavior, and the idea that the matter was “finished” with their interaction indicates that authority to solve was kept within the relationship.

Authority within an engaged system also changed the perceived role of student staff members. Rachel, a female freshman, described what made her RA so adept at handling conflict:

> So it’s not like you are going to an authority figure being like “I want this person in trouble so I am going to tell you all of my problems” it’s more like “I am going to do what is comfortable for you so that you can feel better about the situation.”

According to Rachel’s observation, student residence assistants in the building were adept at handling conflict because they kept the authority to solve the conflict within the roommate system and did not try to take control. The engaged participants, in addition to Rachel, all voiced an appreciation for their RAs because they did not try to seize authority. Pursuits for harmony within an engaged system primarily revolved around agency of the roommates.

Authority in Coexistent Harmony Systems

Within a coexistent system, the *authority* was understood differently. Authority to reach resolutions was granted to individuals outside the system. These third parties took many different forms, such as mothers, friends, and RAs. Felicia, a female freshman, explained "I guess if it [conflict] happened, like if it happened while she was here I would probably talk to my mom about it like 'I didn't know what to do.'" This statement by itself was a telling view of how Felicia dealt with conflict. Authority resided not in her ability to solve the conflict, but instead in a traditional authority figure – a parent. In the interview with Felicia, this was the fourth mention of her mother in regards to how she handled conflict with her ex-roommate. Her mother provided answers for her conflict issues that rendered engaging her roommate for harmony an unnecessary inconvenience. Felicia discovered a way to coexist with her roommate without having to discuss conflicts.

Agents within coexistent systems, such as Keith, repeatedly mentioned looking to third parties right from the start. When asked whom he talked to about conflict first, he responded, "my two neighbors, uh, Jacob and Fred. They're two of my best friends that I have here and I talk about almost everything with them. They offer me a lot of suggestions." In this way, Keith represented the coexisting agent's tendency to transfer the responsibility of authority to those outside of the roommate system.

In one such case, Kyle, an engaged system RA, described how coexisting roommates treat authority, "…they [residents] come to you when they can't fix it [conflict] themselves so they expect you [RAs] to fix it." For coexisting roommates, the authority to solve the problems between roommates was outside of their relationship and the room system.

Dimensions of Authority

Throughout the examples both systems of engaged and coexistent harmony appropriated the *resource* of *authority* to craft *rules* which affirmed and reinforced the system. Differences in the resource of authority are derived from the way that the *dimensions* work on the systems. In an engaged system, *power* was shared between roommates. Rose and Brandi, referenced above, spoke very plainly of "compromise", which is indicative of a relationship where authority was shared and both roommates had similar power. Also, as previously indicated, the power remained in the system, which assists, in equal distribution of the power.

However, in a coexistent system the power was not equal. Sometimes the power differential was derived from age differences. This was found overtly in four of the interviews. Rebecca, a female junior, expressed, "Yeah and for me since I was a sophomore and she was a freshman I think that was easier for me to say 'okay here's what I did last year why don't we just keep it this way."' Rebecca's age influenced the way she perceived who had the power to utilize rules and resources in the room. Mary, a female sophomore, also spoke about age difference influencing power, "I was like a little freshman and she was a sophomore. It kind of intimidated me a little bit." Mary's interpretation of age being the equivalent of power influenced her ability to even speak to her roommate about issues.

In addition to power being unequal, it can also shift outside the system. In these cases, one or both roommates place the authority to settle conflicts in the hands of those outside of the room dyad. In one instance, Rebecca, a female junior, spoke about looking to those outside her room for help in working out conflict, "I feel like in a residence hall, you are pushed more by those around you to solve your problems." In this example, Rebecca avoided her roommate and instead engaged with the individuals outside of her room such as floor partners. In this case, the

others outside the room system exercised the power to help resolve the issue. In this way Rebecca was able to coexist with her roommate while not having to address conflict herself. Linda, another female freshman, also talked about giving the power over to those outside her direct room-level system, "For me it's [having others around outside the room] positive because I had a way to voice it [conflict] without like making a confrontation with my roommate because I guess on one side I just didn't want to have a confrontation." In both of these cases, the power to mediate and manage the conflict was removed from the roommates and given to those living outside the room to manage emotions and deal with conflict. This practice served to promote avoidant behavior through others outside the room validating that the problem was real but that it could be addressed outside the room.

The *meaning* of authority was also different as it pertains to coexistent and engaged systems to reach harmony. As Brad expressed earlier, in an engaged system, having authority meant that conflict could be fixed. This was a very different perspective than in a coexistent system where authority was seen as a source for a solution to mediate conflict or remove tension. Felicia, a female freshman, reflected on her experience consulting with an RA and shared:

> I think by that point it was just too late we were just like "we need a solution not like a simple, like you can do this to fix it." I think we need something that was like "this is going to completely fix the issue and not just like walk around it."

In this statement a difference was drawn between the idea of mediation and a solution. According to Felicia, who was coexisting with her roommate, *mediation* was not a *solution* to the problem. Her idea of a solution didn't deal with addressing the problem or finding ways to work through it, she wanted a direct "fix" for the problem. Her interpretation of authority was "someone who could make the issue go away without having to deal with the issue itself." By

finding a person to exercise authority, the two women were able to continue to coexist without threatening the perceived harmony in the room.

From the analysis above and the previous two dimensions explored, the research suggests that engaged systems operated under the *norm* of authority being something that was not to be used to gain an upper hand. Rather, authority was something that all members of a system possessed and should be recognized and respected by all members of the system. This norm directly influenced the manner in which authority was perceived, or the meaning behind it, and also influenced the fact that power operated within the system as both roommates practiced authority in an equal manner. Within a coexistent system, authority operated under the norm that older, wiser, individuals were in a position of power, practiced power, and that authority *meant* that issues go away with the introduction of an authoritative member into the system.

Space

Of the 23 participants interviewed, 17 mentioned privacy or space as an issue, point of concern or interest in the relationships with their roommates. This was not necessarily a surprise, as all the roommates interviewed were sharing an approximately 12.5’ by 12.5’ standard double room and space was tight. *Space* presented itself through analysis as a *resource* and functioned in different capacities depending on *rules* created by roommates in engaged or coexistent systems. In an engaged room the space was treated as “shared” and in a coexistent room the space was treated as “segmented”. While the difference was nuanced between shared and segmented, the change influenced the manner in which the roommates approached the space.

Space in Engaged Harmony Systems

In engaged systems it was quite clear that the room was an environment of working together to use the shared *space* for both parties’ interests. This was expressed by Michael, a

male junior's, explanation of why his current roommate experience was better than in previous years, "Now I understand that the fact of 'okay it's not just my room it's our room.'" Michael elaborated on this point sharing, "understanding that it's not just his space but it's your space", as a specific quality making someone a good roommate. In order for a pair of roommates to be engaged, the space needed to be seen as shared with mutual respect for each other.

Brandi, a female freshman, made a distinction between the difference of shared and segmented space when juxtaposing her experience with her former roommate to that of her current:

> With my other roommate it was more like "here is your side, here is my side this is my stuff, this is your stuff" I mean granted we respected each other's stuff but it wasn't um, it wasn't like sharing and we were on very different schedules so when I did come in I did have my own room because she wasn't there when I wasn't there and vice versa. But then when I moved in with Rose it was more like living *with* each other… it's more shared space.

Brandi drew very clear distinctions between shared and segmented space. Shared space was space that was "ours" while segmented space was space that both roommates occupied but did not see as overlapping. This was recognized later in the interviews independently by both Rose and Brandi when they discussed a conflict originating in different approaches to keeping the windows open in the room. They both acknowledged that in order for harmony to be reached the windows needed to be treated in a way that addressed both of their concerns with a solution where they shared the space together.

Space in Coexistent Harmony Systems

In the first scenario, Brandi equated segmented *space* with avoiding interaction. This was a "laid back" approach to interaction with simple ground rules, "here is your side, here is my side", resulting in harmony through the perception that everything was fine by respecting the separation between space and belongings. Other coexistent room systems displayed similar characteristics of segmented space. Linda, a female sophomore, identified the space in her room as segmented early on in her interview. When asked if she felt the space was just as much hers as her roommates she responded, "I mean yes and no. As far as like…arranging my stuff I mean I had plenty of room to work with but she took up two walls and I felt like I had one wall." This statement expressed a direct concern with an equal distribution of space. One roommate actually, or perceptually, claiming more than their fair share of space was seen as unfair and unequal. Linda, feeling that the space was not equally distributed to each roommate, practiced avoidance when she explained, "It was just, she moved her stuff in and I worked with what was left." In this case, Linda "worked with what was left" rather than protest that the space was not divided a way she might have liked.

Thus, respecting each other and finding ways to equitably handle space concerns was a *rule* that engaged systems utilized to reinforce how the *resource* of shared space should be appropriated. Coexistent systems utilized the resource of space to create rules to maintain an environment of space segmentation, where space ideally would be divided equally between the roommates with each controlling their own part of the space. Following, these differences are examined from the perspectives of *power, meaning,* and *norms*.

Dimensions of Space

The *dimension* of *meaning* played the largest role in shaping the manner in which the systems operated pertaining to the *resource* and *rules* of *space*. As illustrated above, the space meant something different to the roommates when it was seen as shared rather than segmented. Shared space was more comfortable space and was often space where relationship work could be done. In four of the interviews where space was viewed as shared the participants mentioned specifically that they enjoyed spending time developing their relationships with their roommates and that smaller magnitude problems were rarely a concern. In these cases, space was not something that was treated as a commodity but was a fact of the living situation that both parties needed to develop respect for. *Power* in the case of space was distributed between the roommates in engaged systems and did not serve a dominating function when exercised in shared space.

In coexistent systems the existence of segmented space created rules in regards to who could perform what actions in what space. Interestingly, this conceptualization of space as "mine" and "theirs" also provided an impetus for conflict when the other roommate did not respect the division of the space. Space also shaped expectations for the rest of the relationship. In one specific case, Beth, a female sophomore, expressed how she saw segmented space informing the rest of the room atmosphere, "I'm big on sides 'cause like sides help to establish like what is yours and what is mine." Segmented space meant boundaries in this situation and helped establish *norms* of separation within the room. From this meaning, power in the space could dominate actions of those within it regarding boundaries in the room and who had the agency to cross or change them.

Norms as they dealt with space were derived from the meaning and the power of the space. According to six of the 11 coexisting participants, the idea of segmented space established

boundary norms that influenced the way roommates interacted. Blake, a male freshman, voiced how these six participants operated from a perspective of, “you don’t mess with my stuff/I don’t mess with your stuff and go from there.” This norm of respect through segmentation bled over into the relationship of these individuals and played into their behavior of coexisting, which in turn allowed conflict to remain unstated and allowed for a sense of harmony. This behavior came out in Beth, a female freshman’s interview when she was asked about her roommate’s cleaning habits: “It’s [the room] pretty messy and it’s a bit stressful but that’s just how they keep their side”. Beth’s way of respecting her roommate came from avoiding conflict about how the space was being used. The very idea of “your things” and “my things” was grounded in coexistence and separation.

Engaged room systems created and were built on very different norms. In nine of the 12 engaged systems, the participants mentioned the idea of space belonging equally to both parties and that space broke down boundaries. Alexa, a female freshman, even identified this norm as a large difference between residence hall living and other living. She described, “here you have to realize that’s their home too so that’s, that’s the only big difference I think.” The norm of shared space created a situation in which boundaries didn’t exists physically between the room occupants and therefore influenced the meaning of the space and the way in which power was practiced using the space.

The clearest way power differed between coexistent and engaged pairs was in an engaged system, the space was co-owned and therefore power differences between the roommates were minimized. Eleven of the 23 participants mentioned an improved roommate relationship as a result of the fact that space was shared with their roommate. In this way power created an equal environment where norms of being okay with not having physical boundaries improved the

meaning of space. Space was not something the roommates looked to as a way to define power in the relationship.

Counter to this system, in a coexistent relationship between roommates, space carried a meaning of power and was perceived as granting one person more power over the room than the other to some level or degree. This idea was reinforced through talking with Keith, a male sophomore, "We've disagreed about whether or not I can even be in the room past 10:30 to do anything because he [Keith's roommate] goes to sleep." Keith's space was seen as segmented and unequal. Keith ended up on the short end of the segmentation process which, from his perspective, gave his roommate more power over the space. This meaning informed boundary norms at work in the room as the roommates struggled to maintain some semblance of power in the room that was or equal to or greater than their roommates'. As covered earlier, six of the 11 coexistent roommates mentioned feeling an unequal balance in their room based on the division of space or the influence of space in the relationship.

Favor Reciprocity

While *authority* and *space* were *resources* with specific system *rules* that emerged relatively early on in the analysis, a more subtle feature of roommate systems included expectations of *favor reciprocity* to achieve and maintain harmony. Of the 23 participants interviewed, 14 made some mention to the idea that favor reciprocity was a factor in evaluating the quality of their roommate relationship. The basis of the resource rested on the idea that the rules pertaining to favor reciprocity in an engaged harmonious system functioned on "meeting" the favors of another and creating a perceived fairness. In systems where roommates where simply coexisting, favor reciprocity functioned from perceived injustice where roommates tried to "beat" guilt.

Favor Reciprocity in Engaged Harmony Systems

Within engaged systems, roommates recognized that *favors* were being done for them, either through conversations or mutually agreed upon practices, and those favors were reciprocated to keep the system balanced or to "meet" their roommates' actions. The motivation to enforce and reaffirm the *rule* to reciprocate favors in this type of system came from a mutual understanding that each roommate would contribute to the system to keep it equal. Richard, a male sophomore, reflected on developing this system, "I think we take turns buying soda and we agreed on that and like empting the trash and the recycling." After some follow-up, it was clear these initial ground rules grew into a favor system. He recognized a favor system operating and that his perception of fairness in the room kept him doing favors and keeping track, even though he didn't realize it until talking about it in the interview.

Favor reciprocation supported an environment where conflict could be solved and problems could be discussed equitably. Richard kept reciprocating favors for his roommate because he wanted to "meet" his roommate's actions and keep things fair. The motivation for him to adhere to the rule came from mutual understanding that things should be equal. He explained, "He will always remind me like 'hey there is soda in the fridge for you too' and then I just bought some soda yesterday and he had some so yeah it is really kind of a favor system." In this case the roommates understood that favors were a way to keep things fair in the space and maintain harmony. Other times this reciprocity was more explicitly stated, such as the case with the "Bro Code".

Kyle and Justin, who drafted the "Bro Code" as a guide for their roommate interactions, spoke a great deal about reciprocity. Kyle described how he would complete favors such as picking up groceries and food for Justin when he was out because "It is just fair that way because

he would do the same for me." Kyle even went as far to identify an equal and balanced favor system with the trademarks of an engaged system such as being direct and fixing conflicts, "at some point everybody's got to do something…so I better fix the problem now and tell him." Justin also recognized the benefits of this approach when he discussed the system in the room and the "Bro Code", "We can go back to that [the Bro Code] if something doesn't happen or if he has to go buy three cases of water in a row he can refer back to what we agreed on in writing." Justin mentioned multiple times the benefits of having a balanced system in the room and the fact that it removed a lot of guesswork from the relationship. He also acknowledged that it helped the roommates see the level of engagement that was necessary to "meet" the actions of the other and keep the system fair. Justin and Kyle's behaviors and expectations led to the creation of the "Bro Code", and the code kept the dyad working to preserve the system using the rule of reciprocity. This practice aligns with the idea of duality of structure (Giddens, 1984). The idea that fairness should exist in the room was established through behaviors and the use of the *resource* and rules *of favor reciprocity*. By utilizing the resource, Kyle and Justin affirmed the rules within the system of fairness they created and perpetuated the expectations, and the system.

Favor Reciprocity in Coexistent Harmony Systems

Within coexistent harmony systems, the *favor reciprocity* functioned from the perception that the room was out of balance and that the *favors* being completed by one agent were done to bring the room back into harmony. However, by doing a favor, the behavior encouraged the other agent (roommate) to react in kind. Therefore reciprocity was characterized by a practice in which roommates felt an imbalance of *power* that motivated them to "beat" the debt felt because their roommate was doing more. The key difference in the way the *resource* was utilized was the motivation that crafted the *rules*. In the case of coexistent systems, a feeling of indebtedness

derived from unclear expectations motivated the roommates to do favors for each other. Also, roommates described the guilt of not fulfilling their responsibilities through reciprocity. Further, the fact that the roommates avoided discussing these expectations and simply reciprocated to maintain the harmony perpetuated how rules shaped the use of this resource. Unlike the engaged harmony system of reciprocity, the tasks completed in a coexistent system were power driven as opposed to cooperative in nature.

Six of the 11 participants made specific mentions to favors of this nature that stemmed from feeling out of balance. In one case, Mary, a female sophomore, would clean her room up as a reaction to the fact that her roommate cleaned. The two never spoke or communicated expectations that the room should be kept clean on both sides. Mary stated that "she [the roommate] never said anything" in response to the mess in the room. Mary would just hear her roommate clean, complaining about her own mess. Subsequently Mary would clean to try and make up for the fact that her side was messy; she felt the pressure to clean.

In another case, Kayla, a female sophomore, actually left her room when her roommate, Rebecca's romantic partner came over, lending Rebecca use of the *space* of the room. This was not an agreed upon act or a policy that was put into place in the room. It was a favor to Rebecca and Kayla was able to articulate that, "I didn't get a signal, I just I felt like they should have their time." After an interview with Rebecca, it was discovered that this behavior was reciprocated, but not out of mutual understanding. Rather Rebecca modified her interactions in front of Kayla to make up for the fact that Kayla gave up her portion of the space to Rebecca. Rebecca shared, "I remember making a conscious effort that whenever Kayla was there I would text, or be on Skype and typing, so that I wasn't having my lovey-dovey conversations where she could hear it." Both roommates stated some displeasure at accommodating the other either directly or in the

tone they used. Rebecca mentioned brushing off her displeasure for the sake of Kayla's comfort, "I'm not going to tell her to not talk to her boyfriend. I just don't know how to confront it. I'll just watch TV or something but sometimes I don't want to listen to that." Due to the avoidant nature of the harmony in the system the favors were reciprocated to "beat" guilt by attempting to be the one that was sacrificing more comfort for the sake of the other person.

Cathy, a female freshman, described the way her favor system functioned with her roommate in specific reference to cleaning the dishes, "You can kind of pick up and say 'okay she's cleaning them. Obviously she wants them cleaned. I should clean them.'" In this example, the roommates never actually spoke with each other. The reciprocal act of washing the dishes was completed out of Cathy feeling required to do so to make up for the fact that the other agent (her roommate) already did the dishes. In other words, there was a perceived imbalance in the system and that imbalance was the catalyst for action. This catalyst created more imbalances for the other agent due to the fact that expectations were never discussed. Instead the roommates were motivated to utilize *favor reciprocity* to keep track of and "beat" the debt owed to their roommate in hopes that it would allow them to avoid a conversation about expectations that may lead to conflict. Just like the previously discussed resources and rules, issues of power and *meaning* inform these choices and influence how the *reciprocity of favors* is employed in a system.

Dimensions of Favor Reciprocity

Power in an engaged system, based on discussion of the previous two *dimensions*, has already been established as creating an equal system. This was especially true in regards to the *resource* and *rules of authority* where engaged roommates each possessed authority to solve conflict collaboratively. Additionally, power in reference to the resource and *rules of space* also

created an environment where space was not used to give one agent in the system an advantage over another. Power in reference to the resource and *rules of favor reciprocity* influenced the perception of fairness and justice within the system through using *favors* to contribute equitably and respect the other, as in an engaged system, or place one in a position of power, such as in a coexistent system.

In the examples above, which are representative of the engaged population in the sample, statements such as, “I think we take turns buying soda and we agreed on that and like emptying the trash and the recycling” indicated that power was shared among the roommates and that one member of the dyad did not utilize favors to influence perceived or actual power in the relationship. Rather, the agents were “meeting” each other with reciprocity. This was also characterized by a collaborative construction of the power within the system such as with Michael, who spoke to the collective approach he and his roommate took to creating the space, “we are willing to change like things in the room that if one wants this way we definitely talk about it and then we decide ‘okay let’s do this.’” This example was representational of the engaged harmony found in similar dyads that resulted from this shared mutual power that permeated activities in the room.

Favor reciprocity in coexistent systems was highlighted by a “beat” approach. The coexistent harmony occurred between tensions of feeling in debt to or creating feelings of debt from their roommate. Rebecca gave an example of this “beat” idea when discussing cleaning tasks, “When we left for Thanksgiving break she left before me and didn’t unplug anything or take out the trash and I thought, ‘are you kidding?’ because I had to do it all.” Rebecca went on to explain she did not confront her roommate Kayla about this due to the fact that things seemed to be going well and she did not want to upset the balance in the room. Kayla responded to these

actions by doing favors for Rebecca because she "was always doing things for her". With this cycle in place, Rebecca invoked guilt rather than confront Kayla about the imbalance and Kayla responded by reciprocating favors out of guilt, or feeling that she *had* to, rather than just being motivated to reciprocate because that was the established *norm* set to make sure no one agent had power over another.

In a coexistent behavior system where power was out of balance the perceived guilt or pressure to act in a reciprocal manner set the cycle in motion. This idea was exemplified in the previous example with Mary, who recognized that her roommate was setting the policy for when the room needed to be cleaned, "She would complain if you know she had a couple sweatshirts like 'oh my gosh my side is so messy!' and like three sweatshirts on the floor and my stuff is like exploding out of my dresser." Mary then indicated that her roommate's complaints were enough to motivate her to clean, "I was like okay maybe I should [clean]." In this case there was no direct communication by Mary's roommate asking her to clean. Mary thought herself as being in debt to her roommate, making her feel as though she "should" or had the responsibility to clean, therefore giving her roommate the power to set expectations without even talking about them. Mary reciprocated favors of cleaning to maintain harmony based on a desire to avoid conflict, which reinforced the influence of power within the coexistent system.

The influence of *meaning* on favor reciprocity changed the way the favors were perceived and also supported a "meet" or "beat" difference. The actions of an engaged system were predicated on the idea that reciprocity was an opportunity to "meet" the actions of the other agent and craft a relationship where harmony was derived from mutual reciprocation and respect. The "meet" goal of reciprocity came from shared meaning of what the favors in a system were supposed to do. The fact that the engaged systems often explicitly talked about expectations such

as with Kyle and Justin, Richard and his roommate and Michael and Brad allowed these dyads to agree on the meaning behind the favors they were performing. In other words, being a roommate meant reciprocating favors, looking out for each other, and working together to maintain the space and relationship.

Rose, a female freshman, expressed the idea of agreed meaning quite clearly. Rose spoke to the fact that she and Brandi, her roommate, understood how reciprocity supported the idea of "meet", "we had never written anything down but we have talked about it like whenever one person does the dishes we just do each other's dishes and like if you take out the trash just take out both trashes." Not only did this statement support the idea that through engagement, meanings became shared, but it also illustrated the positive nature of sharing meaning and the fact that both agents understood that their actions support fairness and not competition.

On the other hand, meanings of favors in coexistent systems such as Kayla and Rebecca, Cathy and her roommate, and Mary and Melissa were not shared because the roommates never discussed setting expectations with each other. These pairs functioned from a "trial and error" framework where harmony was reached by complying with perceived expectations to avoid conflict, rather than from a perspective of mutual understanding. The favors were viewed as competitive. The dyads worked to "beat" guilt brought on by either feeling one agent was doing more work than the other or by feeling that one agent was easier to deal with in the dyad.

Another example was that of Beth, a female sophomore. Beth worked very hard to keep her room clean and set a good example. Her roommate reciprocated, but only because Beth would constantly mention that her side was cleaner and passively noting that her roommate's side was disheveled. Beth reported saying things like, "Oh hey I've noticed that the stack of clothes is getting rather…a lot. So maybe you should, maybe you should do some laundry." All

of her comments were passive in nature and designed to get her roommate to reciprocate without directly stating "Do your laundry." The conversations hinting at cleaning made her roommate realize that she was being the "dirty one" in the room. Beth felt this approach to dealing with conflicting ideas of cleanliness was necessary because they never discussed expectations for cleanliness. Beth however, did not approach these conversations thinking that she was being sneaky; instead she viewed her communication as being non-confrontational, "I try not to show it I think just because I don't want to be the bad roommate and cause conflict." Through analysis, Beth's actions aligned with the idea that her and her roommate did not share a meaning of reciprocity and Beth, who was "beating" her own guilt to not feel like the dirty roommate, unintentionally got her roommate to keep the room clean by evoking the same type of guilt.

While favor reciprocity was an important pattern and resource influencing rule formation for the participants interviewed, it was not the only type of reciprocity that could exist within a system. Not all of the participants identified favors as a means of interaction with their roommates and not all of the participants articulated a favor system at work in their rooms. However, respect was a very powerful force at work between the roommates and constitutes another related resource identified by the study that influenced conflict systems.

Mutual Respect

Having *mutual respect* for *space* and belongings emerged naturally in the interviews by 21 of the 23 participants as a factor in creating systems of conflict behavior. Participants explicitly referenced *respect* as a factor that shaped how they interacted with their roommates. Further, although not explicitly stated, the final two participants implied that respect was an important part of building a good roommate relationship and managing roommate conflict.

The *resource* of mutual respect functioned differently depending on whether the harmony in the system was a result of engaged or coexistent behavior. Within an engaged harmonious system, mutual respect took the form of *all* agents accepting a less than desirable living situation and understanding that *others* have agreed to the same living conditions and deserve respect. Within a coexisting system, mutual respect was based on the premise that the first agent has accepted a less desirable living environment and must respect the second agent in an effort to preserve harmony.

Mutual Respect in Engaged Harmony Systems

The *rules* pertaining to the *resource* of *mutual respect* within an engaged system differed from that of coexistent systems because the roommates all accepted that the living situation was not ideal. When one roommate respected the *space* of the other, this generated empathy and mutual respect between the roommates. Rachel, a female freshman, exemplified this mindset, "It's kind of that mutual, we know we're going to wake each other up so we don't get upset about it." Rachel embodied the idea expressed by 10 of the 12 engaged participants. Through being engaged to achieve harmony, the roommates worked through their loss of space with their roommate and empathized to show *respect*.

Alexa, a female freshman, also spoke directly to respect when asked what she thought was necessary to live harmoniously. She asserted, "It's mostly like respecting each other's space and like interests and stuff like that." Alexa continued to explain that her roommate openly discussed this idea of respect and that each understood that the other person is giving up something to make the situation work. She voiced ideas that not everyone will live the same way and that roommates do not have to be alike but they should respect that everyone in the system

compromises for the good of it. In a way, engaged roommates posited a very pro-social model of respect that included taking the perspective of the other (Olekalns & Smith, 2003).

This pro-social model of respect was based on the idea that respect given resulted in respect received. Rachel, Alexa and Kyle saw respect as something earned rather than deserved. Because of this fact, the focus of the resource of mutual respect involved how the participants could show respect to their roommates to prove that they deserved it for themselves. The analysis suggested that one of the best ways for these individuals to communicate respect was through acknowledging that everyone was giving something up. Kyle articulated:

> You just got to have to be like 'okay this is gonna be our stuff for the year' you have to be relaxed and not really worry about it if he uses something of yours or if you use something of theirs. And it is hard, no personal space at first but you get used to that really quick.

This observation from Kyle spoke to how the participants who engaged to reach harmony approached the idea of respect. It was a very pro-social, empathy-based practice of communicating understanding to those with whom space was shared. This practice was juxtaposed with the approach of those who found harmony through simply trying to coexist.

Mutual Respect in Coexistent Harmony Systems

Ten of the 11 coexistent participants suggested that they entered into the relationship with an idea that *mutual respect* was just common sense and so no communication about expectations was necessary. Rebecca, a junior with a sophomore roommate named Kayla, epitomized this idea of common sense when asked how she shared her expectations with Kayla, "I think a lot of it was just common sense and like I don't think either one of us really have expectations that are not normal between two roommates living together." The assumption made here was that

"normal" meant that everyone understood the *rules* pertaining to the *resource* of mutual respect already.

This statement had even more meaning when considering that the expectations were never communicated and *space* was such a point of annoyance for Rebecca. She mentioned multiple times that she really respected space, but she did so from the framework that space was important to her and she expected mutual respect for her space in return. At one point she commented, "I get that you have to sit on my bed to turn on the air conditioner but why are my pillows messed up? Like, I don't touch your stuff can you not touch my stuff?" Rebecca's interview was quite representative of the general theme of mutual respect within coexistent spaces. Other participants used preservation of their space as the motivation to respect others.

Keith believed the living quality of the room could be preserved and conflict could be circumvented if he respected his roommate's less than optimal situation. This fact served to explain why he continued to accommodate his roommate throughout the year while perceiving to get no respect in return. Keith complained about not feeling mutually respected several times in the interview, framing the simplest of his actions as respectful and non-invasive as possible.

> I mean, I put my headphones in when I play my music, but I put my music in, turn my desk lamp on which isn't horribly bright, and I'll start doing my homework and I feel like I can't do that because he's always sleeping.

The tendency to frame his actions as respectful illustrated that Keith recognized his own loss of space, the importance of mutual respect, and his attempt to gain respect by respecting other's space. However because he did not communicate expectations to his roommate, his mind frame in dealing with conflict was from a pro-self perspective (Olekalns & Smith, 2003). His space was taken and he could not get his roommate to recognize and respect that fact; he unsuccessfully

relied on implied “common sense” rules for the resource of mutual respect involving expectations for reciprocity to hopefully encourage his roommate to do the same, rather than voicing his concerns which might create conflict and disrupt harmony.

Much like the previously explored rules, the *dimensions* of structuration (*power, meaning,* and *norms*) influenced the manner in which participants approached each other. Mutual respect in a coexistent system was conditional, individual and operated on norms informed by power. However, respect in an engaged harmony system was unconditional, collective and operated on norms that informed where and how power was to be used in the relationship within the room and between the agents in the system.

Dimensions of Respect

Respect carried very different *meanings* in systems of engaged and coexistent harmony. When harmony was the result of engaged roommates, respect was not a one-way gesture but something that was shared and was the result of perspective taking and mutual understanding. Richard talked about how he and his roommate approached each other and framed it from a collective perspective, “I think we both knew that the room needs to be cleaned.” Rose also spoke about her approach with Brandi as collective, “we had never written anything down but we have talked about it like whenever one person does the dishes we just do each other’s dishes and like if you take out the trash just take out both trashes.” Both of these examples represented the 10 engaged participants’ meaning of respect as a collective or cooperative effort to create harmony.

Due to the collective meaning behind respect in these systems, the practice of offering respect to another individual was less strategic in nature. The residents did not offer respect to their roommates in order to gain an upper hand; they did so in the interest of building a positive

living environment. Put simply, they offered respect that was not conditional or contingent on the other person. Brad offered his comments on respect in a few places during his interview. In one instance he spoke to the reciprocal nature of their respect, “He is very respectful of if I need to go to sleep or vice versa, very respectful of one another.” In another instance, Brad provided explanation to how their appreciation of each other builds into respect, “[He] really puts a lot of thought behind every one of the decisions that he makes and so I feel like in that respect I respect him a lot.” Brad and Michael respected each other with no expectation of having that respect returned to them and no plan to “keep score” in regards to each other’s behaviors. In essence they divorced the act of “giving respect” from “getting respect”, which made it an unconditional and positive process operating from mutual understanding.

While the meaning of respect in engaged harmony was unconditional and collective, respect within a coexistent system of harmony was conditional and individual. All of the coexisting participants indicated to some degree that respect was necessary to continue the existing harmony in their rooms. However, this respect was often framed in conditional terms and as an individual responsibility rather than collective. In two cases, residents called out this conditional relationship. Blake, a male sophomore, spoke to this conditional relationship in regard to multiple interactions with his roommate. He commented on the topic once in regard to personal belongings, “Our basic thing was you don’t mess with my stuff, I don’t mess with your stuff and go from there.” In this example the responsibility of respect was completely devoid of collective language. In Blake’s mind respect was something “I” do, and something that “you” do, but not something that “we” do. Blake’s comments exemplified the pattern of a harmony in other coexistent roommate pairs that was built on conditional respect within a space. The tone was

tense and hostile and used respect as a sort of “threat” to achieve a harmonious system. In this “threat”, the lack of respect would result in conflict and disharmony.

Mutual respect also extended to important guests who visited the space. Blake complained about his roommate’s lack of respect when he contended, “Someone introduces them to you, you stand up and give them respect.” This comment was made after Blake detailed an instance of introducing himself to his roommate’s parents but not receiving the same respect in return when introducing his own parents. This example again spoke to the idea that in Blake’s mind, harmony was built on respect and the respect that was offered to the roommate was conditional on receiving it back again.

Blake’s experience was another example of respect being an individual’s responsibility; “you” give respect to the people “I” care about and I will do the same. Cathy, a female freshman, spoke to this dynamic candidly, “I feel like I’m kind of laid-back and I try to respect other people so I think that kind of draws the respect back to you so that you don’t have to face those conflicts.” While Cathy’s idea of respect seemed positive in nature, her conceptualization of conflict was derived from conditional respect. She wished that her roommate would reciprocate respect because she didn’t want to have conflicts. In order to grant this wish, Cathy offered her roommate respect as a way to get her roommate to reciprocate. Simultaneously, Cathy didn’t talk to her roommate about her expectations of respect; instead assuming her roommate would reciprocate respect in response to her actions.

While differences in meaning shaped the way that respect was shared or not shared between roommates, *dimensions* of *power* informed why these meanings existed and tied very closely to *norms.* Norms within engaged harmonious systems created a structure where power was not the concern in the interaction. Power did not dominate within the engaged harmonious

systems in regards to respect due to the fact that the understood norms supported respect as a shared commitment by both parties and not just the responsibility of an individual. Kyle and Justin's "Bro Code" was a clear example. The "Bro Code" was predicated on the idea that, in order for the room to function correctly and for harmony to be reached, each agent in the dyad must respect the document and the regulations it set within the space. The document was worded in a way that supported this goal from the beginning, "Following lists apply to any and all residents of ------- Hall, Room -----, also known as Kyle and Justin for the time including and during August 14, 2013 and May 20, 2014." In order for the agreement between Kyle and Justin to work and for the norms it set within the room to function, power had to be shared equally in regards to respect. Likewise, the norms within the room (such as both of them taking responsibility for tasks) were presented as collective ventures that helped to support the sharing of power.

Brandi and Rose also detailed how norms within the room supported the idea that power was not dominating in terms of roommate respect. Brandi and Rose talked out their problems because they understood that they both came from very different backgrounds and had different but good reasons for wanting different "set-ups" within the room. Within this system, a norm of treating differences as positive rather than negative supported a shared responsibility for respect, "we had really good reasons for why we wanted what we wanted. And we both respect each other so that was really hard to try and like go against those reasons because we both really respected each other's [opinion]." This statement by Brandi represented their relationship. Both of them stated that they wanted to live with individuals who were different from themselves because of the learning that could occur and it helped make their space more interesting.

Alexa, a female freshman within an engaged system, also supported the idea of mutual respect for differences when asked about qualities that make good roommates, "respect and tolerance and like just like the knowledge that not everybody's going to live like you do." Alexa, Brandi and Rose reinforced the theme that respect came from norms of appreciating differences and space. These norms were motivated by the desire to make sure all agents in the space were respected and that the space felt safe rather than simply wanting respect in return. By agreeing to this approach, each member of the dyad gave up trying to dominate the other by allowing the norms to influence the power in the space.

Systems of coexistent harmony worked under norms *informed* by power. Every participant in practicing coexistence talked about respect and framed it from the perspective that individual's used respect to inform behavior. The roommates did not discuss these behaviors, and the norms that guided them were informed by feelings of powerlessness or power imbalance. Respect carried a meaning of power. A person who conveyed respect to their roommate was displaying power in the relationship that they thought deserved respect in return. This interpretation gave rise to the norms. Blake communicated this idea when he mentioned meeting his roommate's parents. In his mind, respect meant standing up and going through formal introductions including hand shaking and a brief conversation. Introduction communication was necessary, and through demonstrating respect towards his roommate's parents he created a norm for his roommate to follow that family should be respected within the confines of the room. While this was a nuanced difference, in a coexistent system the power attributed to respect created the norm. Both roommates acknowledged that respect had entailments of power and communicated status in the room.

If an agent communicated respect to their roommate they did so from the standpoint that it provided them an upper hand in the relationship as "the more desirable" or "better" roommate. Beth summed this idea up quite clearly, when asked about the respect she offered to her roommate, "Like I was saying, I don't want to be the bad roommate." This comment hints at the power imparted by other's perception of the roommate. Beth was concerned with her reputation in her room and on her floor and made choices in regard to respect that provided her with validation from her roommate and others on her residence hall floor that she was the "good roommate" and by comparison, her roommate was the "bad" one. In this case, even if her roommate did not reciprocate Beth's actions, Beth still gained a sense of power from the validation other floor members' perceptions provided her. She felt in the right.

Within engaged systems the norm of equal and collective mutual respect undercut any power the resource and related *rules* created due to the fact that roommates discussed their expectations and divorced the use of the resource from the power it might entail. Michael and Brad illustrated this in their discussion earlier and demonstrated the way that mutual respect created an environment where neither roommate was better than the other. In this case the roommates had clear expectations within the room and therefore others on the floor had no input on who was right or wrong. Brad and Michael understood that a room of mutual respect created an environment where neither of them regarded themselves or the other agent as "better" or "worse". In this way, the mutual understanding kept power in the room and combated the power entailments that could be perceived from others on the floor.

This difference in the way norms functioned was repeated throughout the interviews. Felicia, a female freshman, described how her own respect for the *space* informed the creation of a norm that she applied to her roommate involving male guests. In her experience, her roommate

invited male guests over to their room with no warning and without asking. In Felicia's mind, this practice communicated disrespect due to the fact that she was not asked for permission, which caused her to perceive herself as not possessing any power over the space. Therefore, Felicia and her roommate indirectly, and through the use of a third-party, crafted a norm of asking about male guests in order to curb the feelings of powerlessness in the space. This norm was born out of a perception of power imbalance and the purpose of the norm was to address the dysfunction in the system. In this case, the roommates found a way to use a third party and not directly engage with each other to solve the conflict while continuing to coexist. Simply put, "common sense" uncommunicated norms within coexistent harmony systems created perceptions of power differences within the space and served to control roommate behaviors. When conflict over these norms did occur, agents within the dyad did not engage and address the conflict, but relied outsiders to balance power issues.

Routines

Routines were identified early in the analysis as a *resource* that agents used to act out *rules*. Routines connected closely with an agent's ability to utilize *space* within a system. While routines created shared space within engaged harmony systems, they were used to define segmented space in coexistent systems.

Routines in Engaged Harmony Systems

In engaged systems, *routines* functioned to categorize the *space* as shared due to the fact that routines were shared actions and not individual actions creating harmony through sharing common tasks and routines. Kyle and Justin communicated the idea of sharing common tasks repeatedly in their interviews. Kyle summed it up well, comparing his experience with Justin to

his experience with a roommate in previous years. Kyle gave the following example of dealing with the trash:

> I know my roommate my freshman year we tried alternating and it would just kind of be like we would each put it off because he didn't want to do it and Justin and I we just decided if it is full empty it on your way out.

By modeling the *routine* as something shared or collective, the responsibilities and space became shared for both of Kyle and Justin, which motivated them to keep the use of the space even. Kyle saw routines as a direct result of open communication. Justin also viewed the process in a similar fashion and tied routines to the idea of shared space, "I said teamwork earlier. Work together to keep the room clean." In this statement Justin connected the routine of cleaning to something that he and Kyle needed to do as a team because their space was shared.

Michael echoed Justin and Kyle's perspective. He and his roommate Brad used routines to co-create a shared space, "We both had an understanding of how we wanted the room set up, where we wanted our stuff, we both give and take schedules for when we want to hang out in the room." This collective approach also articulated the way this *resource* of routines shaped and was shaped by the *power* at work in the system. Through Michael's interview it was clear that he and Brad began very early to utilize routines as a resource that enforced the *rule* of sharing routines. If their routines were shared, they also had to share other resources such as space to allow both of them to operate in the room, *authority* to co-craft the routine and *mutual respect* so they each felt respected; these efforts created sharing routines and managed the power between roommates.

Routines in Coexistent Harmony Systems

Within coexistent harmonious systems *routines* developed into two *rules*: (1) agents were not to be in the *space* at the same time in order to avoid conflict and preserve harmony and (2) routines established who was in control of different areas of the room space. First, interviews revealed that coexisting roommates memorized routines, supporting the idea of segmented rather than shared space. This was done though roommates' attempts to not be in the room space at the same time, which in their minds created a harmonious balance.

Felicia spoke about this experience of learning routines to avoid, using her time in a sorority as an antithesis to how she used the residence hall space she lived in, explaining:

> If you have a problem with the sorority sister you're literally around them every week if not more than that so you can't really avoid an issue but here I felt like I could just not be in the room or talk to other people about it.

Felicia used her knowledge of her roommate's schedule and routines to make sure that she was not in the room at the same times as her roommate. This provided Felicia with an opportunity to avoid any conflicts in an effort to create a sense of harmony. The routines provided the rule that whenever possible roommates should not be in the space at the same time.

Blake also mentioned using his own *routine* to impact the space and craft the appearance of harmony, "I was kind of like whatever. I'm going to be out of the room most of the time anyway." Blake justified being apathetic towards his roommate and their treatment of the space because he knew that he could avoid his roommate, and therefore conflict, by using his routine to escape interactions. As a rule, Blake used routines to escape confrontation by understanding that what tasks could and could not be done in the room should revolve around who was in the room at the time.

In Keith's experience, his roommate's routine actually constricted his space within the room. Keith mentioned several times that he and his roommate spent a fair amount of time in the room together. However, Keith's roommate's routine communicated that the space could not be shared, "when I tried to sit down and do homework I was sitting there and he rolled over and looked at me and he said 'can't you do that somewhere else?'" Keith's roommate used his sleeping routine to take ownership of the space at certain times. This let Keith know that the two of them had a segmented space and it was not space that could be shared between the two of them. In essence, a *norm* was created where the two of them could not perform different tasks in common space at the same time.

While occupancy routines were used to establish whether the space was shared or segmented, roommates also used routines inside of the room to communicate space sharing or segmentation. Coexisting participants talked about the manner in which they interacted in their space and in seven of the 12 coexistent interviews, routines created a rule that there was space in the room that was "yours and only yours". For example, within Rebecca and Kayla's coexistent system, a routine of organization served the purpose of dividing the space. Beth voiced, "I needed to be organized to keep my stuff where it needed to be." Rebecca continued to explain that her belongings had a specific place defined by the fact that Kayla's items did not belong there. Rebecca created a rule of segmented space that relied on organization in her and Kayla's room through utilizing a routine of what items belonged in what space.

Dimensions of Routines

Power in respect to *routines* played an important role in indicating when *rules* could be enacted. Routines inside of an engaged system were moments where power was shared between roommates to accomplish common tasks. Routines like taking out the trash in the case of Kyle

and Justin, allowed each roommate to enact rules of doing *favors* for each other to establish shared power in the room. The routine was co-created by the roommates and helped them to navigate the power dynamic within the room.

In coexistent systems, routines communicated who could do what in the room. This is evident in cases such as Keith, who struggled to find a way around his roommate's sleeping and studying routines. The power that informed the routines within the room belonged to Keith's roommate. These routines in turn did not allow Keith any input in constructing the routine. This resulted in a routine which favored the behavior of one member of the dyad while leaving the other member, in this case Keith, to do his best to adjust to the established routine and forced him to use rules like segmented *space* to inform his actions and behaviors in the room.

These power differences created and were reaffirmed by *norms* in each of the systems. Within engaged systems routines were collective. Michael and Brad, Richard and his roommate, Kyle and Justin, and Brandi and Rose all worked under the knowledge that routines were shared between roommates. In the case of Brandi and Rose, they created a routine in the morning that supported both of their habits and styles, "She [Rose] likes the windows closed and I like them open. She has afternoon classes and I have morning classes so we do the windows halfway to let her sleep and to wake me up." This comment by Rose communicates this idea that a morning routine within their room operated under the norm that routines were collective and needed input from both roommates. This norm informed collectively generating the rule regarding the windows in their room and communicated that both Brandi and Rose had the power to enact the rule that the windows should stay half open.

Within rooms where roommates were coexisting the routines were individual. Routines were *resources* that agents utilized to support individual rules in the room. Felicia used routines

to support her rule that we do not share space and because of that we should not be in the space together. This *routine* was not created collectively with input from both parties and therefore placed power to create rules regarding it in the hands of one roommate or the other. Within Keith's room, the norm that routines were individual allowed his roommate the opportunity to craft a routine bedtime without any input from Keith on the matter. As a result, Keith did not retain any power to enact a bedtime of his own in the space.

Routines carried different *meanings* in engaged and coexistent harmony systems. These meanings were drawn from and informed norms and power. Routines inside of engaged system carried a meaning of understanding. Roommates who subscribed to routines typically did so as a way to communicate that they understood the way that the room, on a whole was supposed to function. Brandi spoke about how Rose would blow dry her hair in the hallway to let her sleep and Caleb began putting his cologne on out in the hallway. These routines did not necessarily work to benefit Caleb or Rose. However, they meant they Caleb and Rose understood how to get the room to function at its absolute best.

In coexistent harmony systems routines meant that individuals were in control. Felicia began using her roommate's scheduled to avoid her to exercise control over when she had to see her. Keith's roommate used his bedtime to exercise control over when the lights could be on and Keith could do homework in the room. Rebecca used routine placement of her things and treatment of her space to exercise control over her part of the room. While these routines allowed the room to function in the interest of the agent performing them, they did not communicate understanding for both roommates and instead meant that one particular agent was in control at that moment. By accommodating this control, roommates could coexist without conflict in the room.

External Others

In all 23 interviews, the participants brought up the idea of how individuals outside of the roommate dyad influenced their ability to engage or avoid their roommates to reach harmony. According to participants, the *resource* of *external others* included those outside the direct roommate dyad such as neighbors, other residents on the floor, other building resident and non-residents. Most often when a participant mentioned external others they were speaking about neighbors and other floor residents. The basic function of external others in an engaged system served to encourage engagement with a roommate to solve conflicts. External others allowed engaged roommates to craft a *rule* that people outside of the micro system should be respected but not used to solve individual roommate issues. Within coexistent systems those outside of the room dyad were consulted as a means to validate avoidance and enforce the rule that the dyad did not have *authority*. Coexisting roommates understood that as a rule, the actors outside of the micro system had answers to their issues and that the two roommates did not.

External Others in Engaged Harmony Systems

Engaged harmony systems used others outside the dyad as a way to keep *authority* within the system and to solve problems and issues. In one instance, Richard spoke to the way *external others* influenced his desire to maintain harmony by contrasting conflict between those you live with from conflict with those you do not live with. Richard stated that he had more freedom to act unencumbered with those he did not live with due to the lack pressure from the others around you. In his words, "You need to be more careful with those you're living around because you will have to see them. I can do whatever with other people because I'm never going to see them again." By contrasting how he needed to behave with his roommate compared to others, Richard recognized his responsibilities to his roommate as a reason to solve roommate issues. Rachel also

who spoke about keeping concerns private and the inevitability of having to confront her roommate, “I live with this person and no matter who you are talking to it is going to get around to that person and you have to live with them so you may as well go to them first.” In this case, the interconnectedness of the others living around her, and the concern that complaints would “get around” to her roommate, provided pressure to directly address conflict with her roommate. The actors outside her room were helpful in enforcing the importance of direct communication with her roommate, but were not a source of conflict resolution. Justin expressed the idea that using external others as a source of resolution slowed down the process of conflict mediation, enforcing a *rule* to engage his roommate.

> If I wanted to talk to [Kyle’s girlfriend] about it, she’s going to try to take Kyle’s side. Or if I tried to talk to somebody that’s really good friends with me, but not with him, that they’re going to try to take my side.

In this statement Justin embodied an idea shared by the other engaged participants; external others were the reason they were engaging because it was more efficient to talk with the involved party. The biases that existed in the minds of the others hindered conflict resolution. In Justin’s opinion, talking to his friends and neighbors around him was helpful for support but did not provide solutions. Therefore, he saw talking with others as slowing the process of conflict while adding tension to the other micro-systems operating around them. As a rule the external others did not provide solutions to engaged roommates’ problems and gave them the impression that authority should operate within the system without involving others.

External Others in Coexistent Harmony Systems

On the other hand, coexistent systems used *external others* as a *resource* to validate their viewpoint and resulting behaviors. Coexisting roommates understood that the resource of

external others provided answers to their issues while their roommate could not. When coexisting roommates approached others for help, they avoided direct conflict and often received validation for their concerns, this reinforced the idea that individuals outside the system could and should solve the issues. Melissa, a female sophomore, reflected on being someone outside of a coexisting system providing solutions when a pair of roommates refused to solve their problems, "one of them would always slam the door and walk out and we would always go and get our RA and she would be like 'okay let me go take care of this again.'" In this case the roommates were passive aggressive and individuals outside the system validated these choices by helping the roommates place the conflict in the hands of the RA and reinforcing the *rule* that external others could provide answers that the roommates could not.

In another example, Keith, a male sophomore, worked very hard to find validation and conflict solutions through his neighbors and friends. He confided, "Some days it's me talking or just going 'I don't know what to do. What should I do?' You know?" Through these conversations Keith found members outside his room system that validated his choice to vent and then encouraged interaction through a third party *authority* like a RA. The perceived pressure to solve issues between roommates, evident within engaged systems, did not exist within coexistent systems. Instead, harmony was maintained by avoiding direct conflict by finding someone outside the roommate dyad to absorb the conflict through venting or solve the issue. The understood rule was that external others validated individuals' perspectives and were more qualified to provide solutions, enabling individuals to avoid conflicts with their roommates.

Dimensions of External Others

Dimensions influenced the *resource* and *rules* of *external others* by reinforcing *power* between roommates in the engaged systems and reinforcing power outside of the roommates in a

coexisting system. Through this process external others took on different *meanings* for engaged and coexisting roommates. For engaged roommates, *external others* were acceptable as a resource to help the roommates jointly manage conflict but should not be utilized to solve conflict. Also, external others created pressure to resolve conflicts within the room. *Authority* within the engaged system allowed the roommates to retain power to solve issues through *norms* of respectful actions and thus reaffirmed the meaning that external others carried for them; maintaining harmony in their room and with those outside of the room system.

On the other hand, for coexisting roommates, external others served as a resource to vent conflict or intervene and provided solutions so that roommates could avoid engaging in direct conflict. External others carried a meaning of a support system and a place to run for answers and solutions because the roommates did not feel they had the authority to address the conflict. Keith went to his neighbors to find answers when he was at a loss for what to do with his roommate. Melissa, as someone outside of a room dyad, helped the roommates down the hall solve conflicts by summoning the RA as an authority figure on the floor. This meaning transferred the power out of the control of the two roommates and into the hands of those outside the room who enforced external rules to bring the system back in line without the roommates needing to discuss the problem with each other.

Time

The *resource* and related *rules* of *time* concerned how often and how long the roommates were going to be exposed to each other and how soon roommates needed to solve a conflict in order for harmony to be reached or reinstated. For the engaged harmonious systems, time was a "commitment" that should be honored. For the participants who were in coexisting systems, time was treated as a "countdown" where harmony was achieved through a "state and wait" approach;

this allowed roommates to avoid conflict through a perception that they have casually mentioned or hinted at the issue and are simply providing their roommate's time to change or fix the issue.

Time in Engaged Harmony Systems

The *resource* of *time* created *rules* regarding engaged roommates' commitment to each other over a period of time, as well as that roommates should address conflicts in a timely manner. Time changed the way engaged systems approached *respect*. These roommates committed to a predetermined length of time living together and behaved in ways that promoted *mutual respect* to make time together as roommates more enjoyable and harmonious. Brad talked about time and how it influenced his approach to his roommate explaining, "Yeah like you're going to be living with them for 10 months or nine months so it would just be really awkward if you all went to your desks and just didn't talk to each other." In this circumstance, Brad recognized the commitment he made to his roommate, which shaped the way he approached conflict.

In recognizing the time commitment of living together, time helped the participants realize the importance of making what might be perceived as an uncomfortable situation as positive as possible through minimizing the amount of time between perceiving a conflict and talking about it. Twelve of the engaged participants explained that they addressed issues quickly to create and maintain an arrangement that was respectful for all the parties involved. Brad's explained that he and Michael had ten months together and needed to create an environment where they were *both* comfortable. Michael explained, "He is very respectful of it I need to go to sleep or vice versa very respectful of one another."

Kyle also viewed time as a commitment and specifically tied it to the way he approached *space* and personal belongings, "Okay this is gonna be our stuff for the year." Kyle approached

the system as a shared (i.e. “our”) year-long commitment rather than something that he could get out of. This changed the way he thought about *space* and *authority* and influenced him in drafting the “Bro Code”. When asked why he chose to draft up the contract, he framed his response in terms of time and the fact that he wanted to get the rules set at the beginning because a year was a long time. While commitment motivated 12 of the 23 participants into engaging with each other, the idea that time was a countdown motivated others to avoid each other and potential conflict, using a “state and wait” strategy to reach harmony.

Time in Coexistent Harmony Systems

Coexistent harmony was all about making the participant feel as if the issue was solved enough to make it through a countdown of the *time* the roommates had together. Blake exemplified the countdown idea, “It’s just more convenient kind of to push it off because there’s only three months left.” Blake was simply following a *rule* of waiting for the termination of the relationship and created harmony through avoidance or passive aggressiveness until that point.

Often a countdown mindset was accompanied by a rule the researcher referred to as the “state and wait” approach. In one case, Beth, a female sophomore, talked about her process of using “state and wait”. She referenced multiple times that she appreciated cleanliness in her room environment but had trouble communicating it directly to her roommate. She therefore resulted to passive aggressive comments like, “You said you were going to clean it. That’s cool, just whenever.” Comments such as this made her believe that she had stated her concern to her roommate, even though “That’s cool, just whenever.” didn’t relay that she would like her roommate to clean now and that it was an important issue. Due to the fact that she never approached her roommate in a direct manner or clarified that her roommate understood, Beth simply operated under the *assumption* that her concerns were conveyed and comprehended,

which in turn she used to justify her choices and ability to coexist without addressing the conflict.

The “wait” portion of this dynamic was voiced later in the interview when Beth relayed that she was happy she and her roommate were friends, but she did not wish to keep living with her after this year. Beth was waiting for the termination of the roommate relationship to solve the issue rather than approach her roommate more directly. Using time in this way perpetuated the perceived harmony within the dyad by not confronting, but did not solve the issue. Instead, Beth waited for the countdown to be over.

Rebecca and Kayla also used the rule of “state and wait”. Kayla acknowledged her use of “state and wait” claiming that in most cases she “ends up walking away and not talking to a person because I need time to think.” This was a rule that Kayla shared with those whom she practiced it with so that it did not just appear that she was sporadically walking away. However, Kayla also admitted to not following up after walking away and thinking about the issue, instead she used time as a buffer to allow the conflict to retreat into the background of the relationship. When Kayla “stated” that she needed time to solve conflict she was communicating her dispute with the current situation. She then “waited” until the conflict passed and carried on under the perception of harmony in the relationship to avoid engaging in conflict.

Rebecca also used the “state and wait” rule. She would make passive aggressive comments toward Kayla in order to have Kayla respect her privacy and personal *space* in the room. Rebecca shared, “I try to make it kind of funny and like ‘why were you touching my stuff what’s up with this’ and not very stern because I don’t want to have one of those confrontations.’” Using passive aggressive comments cloaked in sarcastic humor allowed Rebecca to feel as if she stated her concern. She even called them “conversations” when she

referenced them in the interview. The "wait" portion of Rebecca's tactic came in the form of her "never knowing if it's not going to happen again." In this case, Rebecca used her "stating" as comfort, thinking that eventually the problem would resolve through Kayla picking up on the cues, otherwise she would just wait for the end of the roommate relationship. Again, using time in this way perpetuated allowed roommates to avoid conflict and create the perception of harmony by waiting for the countdown to be over.

Rebecca played into Kayla's "state and wait" approach by treating time as a countdown rather than commitment, "a main reason that I continue to live with her is because I didn't want to have to get a new roommate." This statement implied no thought of commitment and framed the relationship in terms of convenience. She was not necessarily happy with the arrangement but enough harmony existed with the "state and wait" coexistent behavior to help her persist in the relationship until a time when things could be made better without conflict.

Dimensions of Time

Dimensions of *time* revolved very heavily around what *meaning* the agents attributed to the *resource*. As detailed above, the meaning of time could be constructed as either a commitment or a countdown. Depending on which meaning was attributed to time dictated where the *power* was in the system. Within engaged systems that treated the meaning of time as a commitment, the power existed as something that could be exercised by roommates to reach harmony. Because agents like Brad and Kyle treated time as a commitment, they viewed themselves as having the power to reach harmony through engaging and creating a truly harmonious system. *Authority* also operated within the engaged systems because the agents saw conflict as a threat to their commitment and due to the fact that they believed conflict could be fixed and harmony could be restored by communicating directly within the roommate system.

Within engaged systems *norms* supported the idea that a cooperative approach to power. Roommates shared responsibility to reach harmony by adjusting their sleep routines, sharing *space*, and encouraging cooperative efforts to conflict management. These norms made their commitments to the relationship more legitimate.

In coexistent systems, a meaning of countdown communicated that roommates did not have power to solve the conflict and instead avoided issues to reach enough balance to get through another day. This was epitomized by the "state and wait" *rule*; by stating issues in an indirect passive-aggressive way, roommate's satisfied the need to address the issue without truly exercising power. "State and wait" brought brief harmony to the system and roommates were able to make it closer to the end of the countdown. The lack of power created a norm that the balance did not need to be perfect or established because time was on the agent's side. Individual, self-focused perspectives were the norm in these systems which provided the roommates with the ability to make it through the day while protecting their own interests to get closer to the end of the countdown. Norms did not support a collective approach because time was going to run out on the relationship.

While there are surely more rules and resources that existed in the systems, this results section represents the predominant themes present in the data. Through an expression of the rules and resources of engaged and coexistent systems, it was clear that power, meaning, and norms played an important role in shaping how agents within systems reached and maintained harmony whether through coexisting or engaging behaviors.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

The present study explored conflict behavior systems within a university residence hall, focusing specifically on same-sex roommate relationships and the way conflict systems within these relationships functioned under the framework of structuration. Research questions aimed to uncover structural *resources* and *rules* that created and perpetuated conflict approaches (Giddens, 1984). Questions also considered how the dimensions of structuration, power, meaning, and norms (Poole & McPhee, 2005), influenced the approaches and changed the way resources and rules were employed.

Roommate behaviors within the residence hall were identified as structural, consisting of resources and rules that informed behaviors and were also simultaneously informed by the behaviors. The *dimensions* (*power*, *meaning*, *norms*) of structuration influenced how the resources in the systems, *authority, space, favor reciprocity, mutual respect, routines, external others* and *time,* were utilized and reinforced rules followed by systems of engaged and coexistent harmony. For example, in the case of authority the dimension of *power* created shared authority that operated inside of engaged dyads whereas authority was not shared in coexistent systems and functioned outside the dyad. In regards to time, engaged roommates felt empowered to solve conflict due to time meaning commitment. Coexistent roommates considered time a countdown and therefore the rule that operated within their rooms was that every person should do what he needed to in order to reach the end of the countdown. The coexisting roommates did not perceive themselves as possessing any power to fix the conflicts.

It is important to note how the use of resources, rules, and associated dimensions in engaged and coexisting systems overlapped to create unique patterns of behaviors. The effect of the dimensions on the residents' resources such as authority changed the rules that were derived

from other resources. For example, differences in systems pertaining to authority informed how space was treated based on the type of harmony. In the case of engaged roommates, the resource of space was crafted as shared, requiring mutual respect between roommates. Therefore authority could operate in the room freely as both roommates felt "what's mine is yours" and could craft rules to utilize authority to reinforce those norms. Additionally, the engaged roommates did not need to rely on external others to solve issues due to the manner that authority was perceived in the space. Engaged systems used the resources and rules in a way that reinforced engaged behaviors including favor reciprocation and shared routines which spurred more engaged behavior. Furthermore they interacted under a commitment mindset in regards to time which encouraged these roommates to use the resource of space and create a rule that it should be shared. The observations and interviews in this study provided insight to how these mutually informing systems were affirmed and reaffirmed through agents' actions.

In rooms where individuals were coexisting the rules surrounding space crafted it as segmented and respect was enacted with the expectation that the roommate would return that respect. Segmented space created a room where authority from one side could not interact with the other and therefore dyads needed external others to solve their issues. Simply put, coexistent harmony was reached through communication behavior that was avoidant or passive aggressive and routines were used to avoid conflicts and count down the time left in the relationship. This behavior enforced the coexistent systems that perpetuated similar behaviors. Roommates who were coexistent attempted to ignore conflict and to create the perception of being "laid back". These attempts changed the manner in which resources like authority and favors were appropriated. Authority was attributed to those outside of the dyadic system, which allowed the roommates to act in a passive aggressive or avoidant manner because they knew that others

would assist them in finding to solution to the conflicts without needing to directly engage in conflict. Additionally, favors were used to set expectations rather than speaking directly to roommates. Roommates used favor reciprocity to support the rule that favors can remove the guilt felt from one roommate doing more than the other. This act, just like the involvement of those outside the dyadic system, helped to set rules and expectations without the roommates needing to talk with each other.

What the data does not provide is the ability to offer a value judgment on one type of system over the other. In engaged systems, the roommates were often more proactive in addressing their conflicts and issues. This can be seen through the use of authority and time. Dyads were able to leverage their resources in a manner that supported rule creation that kept power balanced in the system and also worked around shared meanings. Coexistent dyads were not using direct conflict strategies, instead opting for more avoidant strategies. However, avoidance allowed dyads to coexist in ways the roommates might prefer without directly engaging in conflict. Coexistent roommates often found themselves in situations where their conflict choices were reactive such as with approaches to favors, respect, and time. Yet, approaching time as a countdown allowed agents to weather the roommate situation and may have reduced anxiety associated with engaging in conflict. Additionally, while respect and space functioned under a “mine and yours” and “don’t bother me I won’t bother you” framework, this was one way coexistent roommates created a type of harmony. The resources and rules enacted in coexisting systems provided the dyads with reactive rules that reinforced system norms.

Being reactive was no less effective to generating harmony than proactive measures were. The roommates in engaged systems found harmony through talking with each other and using their rules to confront each other directly. Coexistent roommates simply found harmony by

refusing to address the conflict in the rooms directly, preferring to avoid or find others to help them. Furthermore, engaged dyads were more upfront with each other but did not have fewer perceived incompatibilities or less dissonance. The engaged roommates approached the dissonance head on and the coexistent roommates approached problems indirectly.

Theoretical Implications

Structuration theory contends that social systems are produced and reproduced through structures, or sets of resources and rules, that agents utilize in order to engage in practices within an institution, organization, or system (Giddens, 1984). While scholars have applied this as a framework for multiple studies (Carroll & Levy, 2010; Gopal, Bostrom & Chin, 1992; Jack & Kholeif, 2007; Ran & Golden, 2011), it does not escape common observation that structuration theory is abstract in nature (Sewell, 1992; Poole & McPhee, 2005). Sewell (1992) offers suggestions to create a more practical and accessible application of structuration theory based on claims that (1) structuration places the actions of the agents as secondary to structure, (2) structure is generally unchangeable, and (3) the conceptualization of structuration is general and examines "deep" theoretical structures while overlooking structures that may be "superficial", but "not necessarily less important in their implications of social life" (Sewell, 1992, p. 7). This research study applied structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) to a non-business context and attended to Sewell's (1992) concerns by examining the effects of agency on the resulting harmony and how structural elements were employed to create, influence and reaffirm systems within a residence hall setting. The results of this study illustrate the successful application of structuration while outlining support for reclaimed agency in the way agents in the rooms were able to craft systems of harmony based on resources and rules, and the possibility of structural

change while preserving the dual nature of Giddens (1984) original theory. In addition, the data suggests implications for future conflict research.

New Contexts

The application of structuration in the proposed environment illustrates the ability to use structuration in non-business contexts. This is important for several reasons. First, structuration research is often conducted in business and professional organizational contexts (Poole et al., 1985; Selcer & Decker, 2012; Kirby & Krone, 2002). Using structuration to understand conflict in the residence hall living context extends theoretic application, which adds credibility to structuration as a viable theoretical lens. Residence halls differ from professional business settings in several ways. One, the individuals in a business setting come and go on a daily basis, do not typically share their belongings such as food, television, toiletries, etc. with their coworkers, and the employees are in the organization due to different motivations such as to earn money, support families, and make a living.

Residence halls represent an organization that puts students who are still developing as people and professionals into close quarters where they must interact with each other in order to fulfill basic life needs (i.e. shelter, sleep, nutrition). Roommates share belongings and space and at the end of the day, the students in a residence hall do not have the ability to leave their rooms without a need to return. Utilizing structuration theory to examine a residential setting highlights the importance of agents' actions within the system and gives rise to the possibility for change. This preserves Giddens' (1984) idea of duality of structure while addressing critiques of Sewell (1992) providing ground for structuration to continue to be employed in various settings to examine structures at all levels.

Reclaiming Agency

Structuration exposed features of seven resources in this study (*authority*, *space*, *favor reciprocity*, *mutual respect*, *routines*, *external others* and *time*) and the manner in which the resources were translated into rules to maintain harmonious systems. Further, dimensions of power, meaning, and norms influenced the manner in which these various resources and rules were accessed and reaffirmed, illuminating the difference in structures and calling attention to potential impetuses for change within the systems.

The data suggests that this impetus for change rests in the hands of the individual agents. The literature suggests agency relies on the capability to act and this agency is grounded in different levels of consciousness of the rules and structures (Poole & Seibold, 2005). Sewell (1992), critiques structuration in this regard as he believes too much emphasis is placed on the structures and systems at play and seeks to provide greater evidence of the power of agency to shape systems. In many cases, such as with Rebecca and Kayla, coexisting system roommates, the act of discussing expectations would have been enough to raise the level of consciousness in the system and help the agents practice behavior that would inform change (Poole & Seibold, 2005). Rebecca spent a good portion of her interview talking about the various concepts she viewed as common sense. However she never made an attempt to address these issues with Kayla and instead avoided confrontation to preserve any sense of harmony the two had. Rebecca could have practiced a form of agency in approaching Kayla about what she viewed as common sense and in a way would have re-appropriated the rule surrounding the resource of *authority* and placed some authority within the room. However, this change could have resulted in a negative impact to the room dynamic as the change to the system would be unpredictable but change nonetheless. Additionally, Kyle and Justin, engaged system roommates, flexed their agency in

the drafting of the “Bro Code”. This seemingly unimportant action was the foundation for many of the behaviors that informed their engaged harmony. The data suggests however that this “code” was not derived from the structure (Kyle did not have such a code with his previous roommate), but instead crafted the structure and reinforced it in his new living arrangement. Furthermore, both roommates recognized the potential for either of them to stop following the code which undoubtedly would have introduced change to the system through the agency of the actors in the room. Again, this change would have been unpredictable, however the change to the code or change in behavior toward the code had the ability to enforce new rules such as how space was treated in the room. Agency and the ability to affect structures in the systems was recognized by participants throughout the interview discussions and in turn placed in the hands of the individual agents.

Multiple Systems

Following the perspective of Sewell (1992), the rules are articulated in a manner reminiscent of “schema” that inform how resources are acquired and used. Residents use these resources and rules to act within systems of engaged and coexistent harmony and by doing so reaffirm resources and rules. For example, residents in engaged harmonious systems utilized *time* to support their engaged behaviors. Roommates saw time as a commitment and therefore enacted rules of *shared* space and kept *authority* inside of the room to continue to find ways to engage and reaffirm these rules in the systems. These results supported the possibility of change to the structure through knowledge of these rules. Michael, acknowledged a previous relationship that operated as a coexistent system. Michael used this experience as a template to design his room system with Brad. Michael used his time with his past roommate to help inform how the rules might work in a system that is engaged rather than coexistent. Furthermore, coexistent harmony

systems used resources of time as a countdown. If roommates were to reframe this resource to one of commitment, the impact on the way resources of authority and respect were used would have the potential to change the system of harmony in the room from coexistent to engaged. Additionally as illustrated in the results, if the system of harmony changes, so does the manner in which the rules and resources are utilized. Therefore the results illustrate how change is possible in a system while preserving the duality of structure illustrated in previous research (Giddens, 1984; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Selcer & Decker, 2012). Roommates have the ability to raise their level of consciousness, as Michael did, to impact the style of system operating in the room. However, this change still requires that the roommates use resources and rules which in turn affirm and reaffirm systems. Rather than avoid reaching the end of the countdown, roommates could recognize roommates as a commitment and engage to honor that commitment.

Conflict Research

Additionally, the theoretical lens of structuration in this study draws attention to two aspects of research dealing with conflict. First, this application of structuration offers a way to examine conflict pertaining to the uniqueness of college roommate relationships. Participants identify the college roommate relationship as unique due to the long-term social interdependence with a fixed end-point resulting from the prescribed living conditions. One piece of this relationship that structuration is capable of addressing is the commonly accepted inevitable termination of the living arrangement. While conflict research addresses strategies individuals use to address each other in this environment, a structuration lens exposes the system that allows a relationship to persist when the end is inevitable and the relationship may not be positive. Incompatible goals and perceived issues that may exist between the roommates become much more complex considering the resources and the rules surrounding the goals. While perceived

incompatibilities can involve the two residents in the room, they can also extend to external others, particularly if the harmony is coexistent and authority operates outside of the dyad. Understanding these aspects of the structure can allow for deeper understanding of how the micro system is affected by the meso and macro system levels and how the meso and macro system levels affect the actions of the roommates in the micro system.

Another unique feature of the roommate relationship is that it can exist in multiple types of spaces and between more than two individuals. This moves conflict research from a place of looking at individual approaches or perceptions at work to create a behavior style (DiPaola et al., 2010; Sillars, 1980) and instead considers how the collective system influences the behavior of the individuals and how that behavior is also contributing to reinforcing the system at work. By considering the system as a whole, more perspectives are considered and the variables that account for agent's perceptions in conflict can be examined. As perceptions are such an important part of conflict experiences, it makes sense to approach conflict in a manner that accounts for the larger systems surrounding those involved which contribute to interpretations of events and the resulting perceptions. Data in this study supports structuration theory, indicating that resources, rules, and systems working on agents while informing their perceptions and choices. Acknowledging that conflict extends beyond individual and dyad levels to larger systems and structures extends the scope of conflict research and allows for examination of not only micro, but also meso and macro level systems through the use of structuration.

Practical Implications

Structuration research often suggests knowledge of rules and resources at work in a system as a way of understanding how to improve the function of those systems (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Hoffman & Cowan, 2010; Selcer & Decker, 2012). Considering the critique of Sewell

(1992), this study supports structuration in a theoretical sense and offers several practical implications as a result of the acknowledged systems. Understanding conflict systems and structures within a residence hall provides researchers and student life practitioner an opportunity to potentially improve roommate matching practices, inform conflict mediation approaches, and better train and prepare student staff and residence life professionals.

Roommate Matching

Many participants spoke about how their roommates seemed perfect on paper but were anything but perfect when they actually began living together. As Felicia described, "The first time we met we kind of sat down and talked about it [living together] and then we just looked at both lists of what we wanted and figured it would work." However this list of expectations rarely captured the behaviors of the roommates in respect to harmony in the room. Most interview participant described simple habits and expectations such as music tastes, cleanliness, and proper sleep schedules such as Keith, Felicia, Michael and Justin. Furthermore, surveys and attempts to encapsulate individuals' personalities for the purpose of roommate matching often only consider habits and routines that are often developed individually and prior to arriving at college (Ingalls, 2000; Lipka, 2008). However, in this study, 19 of the 23 participants explained that they had never shared space before coming to school, making habits and routines with a living partner difficult to estimate. The research suggested that an alternative, potentially more successful approach to matching roommates would be from the standpoint of harmony.

While the study refrains from naming one approach to harmony as better or more desirable than the other, knowing how individuals utilize the rules and resources within their systems to approach harmony can enhance understanding of how conflict will be approached within the room. In essence, "Knowing structure enables doing structure" (Nicotera & Mahon,

2012). In spite of being unable to make pairing recommendations, this analysis does provide basis for suggestion. The data suggests that a coexistent roommate will look to outside individuals as authorities in a conflict while an engaged agent will work to practice authority himself in order to find harmony. From this perspective, conflict could be exacerbated if the coexistent agent does not view his roommate as an authority and the engaged roommate tries to practice this authority. The simple difference in where the authority in the room is derived could develop into a perceived incompatibility in the room and create more conflict than if the two roommates shared the same view of who possessed authority. While more research is necessary to confirm these beliefs with surety, knowing major differences in the way resources are propagated in systems ahead of time could help to alleviate some of the initial stress from roommates that impacts student success and retention (Waldo, 1989; Duran & Zakahi, 1988).

Pairing roommates based on their approach to reaching harmony also attends to concerns that pairing similar roommates stifles social growth by placing similar individuals together to avoid friction (Ingalls, 2000). Approaching the pairing from the perspective of harmony allows myriad other aspects of the individuals to differ such as interests, hobbies, or many fundamental beliefs of the residents. This suggests an opportunity to see a variety of residents occupying the same space who approach reaching harmony from the same frame of mind.

Conflict Mediation

Rahim and Bonoma (1979) offer a common model for approaching conflict in the dimensions of “concern for self” and “concern for others”. In addition, a healthy library of research and scholarship exists on conflict and understanding conflict styles and choices. Sillars' (1980) study identifies attribution as a way to predict the type of conflict style used by

participants. The approach to mediating conflict can also be amended through knowledge of rules and resources.

Using a similar approach to Sillars (1980), the current findings offer opportunities for mediators to harness what they know about coexistent and engaged roommates to predict the manner in which rules and resources will be employed. For example, coexistent agents most commonly view space as segmented and engaged individuals view space as shared. The distinction between these is strong as engaged agents approached from a perspective of "it's not just my room, it's our room" and coexistent agents were far more concerned with *their* space, "…I felt like I had one wall". Knowing these system patterns suggests conflict is based in routines in the room and personal space in a residence hall. Armed with the knowledge of how rules and resources operate for each type of harmony system, a mediator would be more familiar with particular patterns and have the ability to talk about them from a raised level of consciousness with the individuals in conflict.

Furthermore, the knowledge of whether a dyad is engaged or coexistent may inform the mediator's role. If the mediator recognizes the dyad as engaged, this could lead to questions regarding how the roommates have talked through the issues already and move to conversations regarding how the mediator can most effectively help. Encouraging mediators to take this role is supported through the research as engaged dyads spoke about being up front about problems and trying to solve issues themselves. Conversely, the research supports the idea that if a coexistent roommate asks someone to mediate conflict they are looking for a solution or answer from the person that will resolve the conflict being experienced. Again, the research speaks to this fact as those who reached harmony by attempting to coexist with each other most often spoke to third-parties for suggestions or solutions. Being able to approach a conflict mediation with a better

idea of what the parties involved expect makes the act of mediation more meaningful to the parties and would potentially result in more satisfying results.

Preparation of Staff

Closely tied to the idea of improved mediation is the contention that staff within residential buildings, particularly RAs, could be better prepared to deal with conflict and better yet, more well prepared to help *students* deal with conflict. While rules and resources are generally subtle, the entire process functions on an idea of knowledgeable agents (Sewell, 1992; Nicotera & Mahon, 2012). Although, the resources and rules posited in this research study are not the only ones at work, identifying these resources and rules suggests general behaviors and markers of coexistent and engaged harmony systems. The possibility of these markers to be retested and disseminated to student living teams on campuses creates the potential for staff to be better prepared to address issues that arise between roommates regardless of room style.

Qualities such as ignoring/discussing problems, viewing conflict as fixable, and working for solutions as opposed to being "laid back" were identified as being characteristic of one type of harmony or the other. The data suggests that participants who lived in engaged environments are more likely to discuss their problems in order to work to solutions and fix the conflicts they experience. Participants such as Justin and Kyle were upfront with each other through the use of their "Bro Code" which established a system of addressing problems. The pair also discussed problems with space and routines with each other as opposed to third parties. Michael and Brad also subscribed to these tendencies in the way they approached shared space and respect within their room. The rules they employed in their room crafted a system of engagement encouraging the two to work for solutions to their conflict.

Coexistent dyads were more apt to take the laid back approach in order to ignore the perceived incompatibility or avoid conflict all together. Cathy mentioned both her and her roommate were laid back which prevented either of them from approaching the difficulties in their room stemming from cleanliness habits. Cathy employed a laissez-faire approach that allowed the problems to settle rather than approach the issues and recognize conflict. Melissa talked about being one of the individuals outside of a system that helped residents get help to address their issues. Additionally, Melissa recognized her own laid back approach that stemmed from her fear of conflict.

The benefit to these qualities is that they are observable in some cases by third parties, and in most cases, easily articulated in conversation or through surveys provided to students prior to arriving on campus. Most colleges and universities already employ a survey to gauge students living habits. Providing a way for students to explore their particular approach to harmony prior to placing them in rooms would be beneficial to them as well as beneficial to others. Measures could be designed to not only illuminate the student's style, but raise their understanding of additional perspectives. Illustrating the various options that exist in pursuing harmony to someone through scenarios and open response questions and asking how the student would respond could enlighten those pairing roommates as well as lay groundwork for the students to understand how they might behave and how others might behave.

Participants in the study were able to identify how practices worked within their living spaces and residence hall. However, they were often unable to articulate how these practices developed or how they learned them. Behavior tendencies in these harmony systems can inform staff questions about resources and rules roommates draw on when problems arise and offer a language and set of terms to help conversation between residence hall roommates and staff. This

could potentially be the basis for a strategy of problem solving and recognition between roommates that could be designed and packaged for residence hall staff training.

In addition to providing ways for RAs to address conflict between roommates, the data suggests the possibility for student staff to place responsibility back in the hands of the residents. A common language put to the systems at work creates a way for residents to talk to RAs about the conflict occurring in their rooms, the RAs to identify the behavior as coexistent or engaged, and then allow the RAs to challenge the residents to take the knowledge back to their rooms and reevaluate the system at work. The data suggests roommates have agency in the room to challenge systems through modifying their responses. For instance, if Linda approached space in her room as shared rather than segmented, the possibility for her to change her approach from "working with what was left" after her roommate moved in, to advocating for herself and her own space exists. In this way the RA performs the function of making sure that Linda is safe but does not necessarily fill the role of making sure Linda is comfortable. The responsibility of comfort is put back on Linda. Additionally, in cases of engaged harmony, the RA could help to identify over-engaged or dissonant behavior in residents such as what was seen with Jessica, who was engaged, yet her roommate operated based on a coexistent system. The RA again, due to a common language, ideally would have the opportunity to raise the level of consciousness and allow both roommates to recognize behavioral patterns. The roommates would then have the tools to go back to her room and complete the necessary relational work to create a harmonious living condition.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study was carefully designed to address the specific research questions posed. While this design addressed the research questions, there were limitations that arose from the

intentional design. Structuration is large and complex as a theoretical lens. While the basic tenets of structuration theory were parsed from data, including the resources and rules creating and reaffirming structures, the researcher had to make choices to contain the scope of the study and make it manageable for a thesis project. The delicate interworking of structuration and the nuanced relationships of structures at the micro, meso, and macro level created a wealth of information for exploration to examine, "social practices ordered across space and time" (Giddens, 1984). Further work with this data set and expanding the data to other university contexts could provide additional support for the findings and allow for greater explanation of nuances that were beyond the scope of this study.

Limits to the current research also stemmed from the primary focus on what composed systems of harmony. The present research was able to describe and identify harmony systems and broad connections between conflict approaches. The effort required to identify systems and the resources and rules operating in each did not provide adequate time to highlight specific conflict situations that played into the construction and reaffirmation of each system. A focus on how conflict interrupts harmony would provide additional understanding to how the systems function but also provide further connections between conflict scholarship and the manner in which structuration can provide insight to conflict systems.

The limits to the study do provide several areas of future research that would benefit the current research and extend understanding of the results presented. One area of analysis that could be expanded upon is whether or not engaged or coexistent harmony has positive or negative impacts on the experience of the roommates. While the study was able to separate and draw distinction between the two systems, it was unable to address the effects of these systems on the participant's experience. The question of how exactly to pair roommates who are

coexisting and roommates who are engaged would help to answer several queries. In one case the information could potentially point to whether one is better than the other. The data suggested differences between coexistent and engaged harmony systems but both systems were able to develop harmony that allowed the roommates to live with each other successfully. Further exploration into how the different types of harmony affect the student experience and how satisfied students were in the different systems could point to one type of harmony being preferred to the other. Better understanding of the students experience could also have the potential to guide pairing by suggesting if there is a complementary style to pairing roommates. For example, does pairing a coexistent roommate with an engaged roommate or pairing two roommates with similar approaches to harmony result in more satisfied roommates than if they are not paired in regards to their harmony approaches. This question could be addressed using self-report satisfaction instruments similar to those utilized in the literature (Jones, 1980; Martin & Anderson, 1995). Answering this question could benefit both practitioners in student housing as well as students.

A second point for future research would be to go beyond the individual room level and attend to the building level as well as the campus level structuration systems. This study primarily focused on micro level systems within individual rooms. However, all 23 participants made mention to a larger systems composed of external others that existed outside of their room. Structuration is based on the idea that systems interact on multiple levels (Giddens, 1984; Poole & McPhee, 2005; Sewell, 1992). Therefore, this study could be extended by further examining how the micro-level roommate systems inform and are informed by meso- and macro-level systems. Additional research that focuses specifically on how the larger campus community serves to impact the residence halls would be beneficial. On the campus where the study was

conducted there was a strong sense of school spirit and interconnectedness among the student body. This was not examined in the study for the sake of preserving scope. However, structuration suggests that these two aspects, the school culture, as well as the building culture impact and inform one another mutually. Sewell (1992) builds a portion of his critique on Giddens (1979, 1984) from the perspective that culture is at the heart of structuration. An analysis of the way these two cultures interact would not only inform structuration research but would also answer some of Sewell's (1992) critique.

The research suggests a starting point for assisting with practices of roommate matching and reducing the student's overall exposure to stress through an examination of roommate approach to harmony. Focusing on the research questions also support individuals working closely with residential student populations such as resident assistants and residence hall administration who require this type of information to successfully fulfill their roles (Fike & Fike, 2011). Looking ahead from this research, more can be done to understand how these systems operate in and around each other as well as interact with the larger building and campus systems. Additionally, future extensions of this research could provide an opportunity to refocus student staff efforts in regards to how they support residents and assist in the development of conflict management competencies. This research carries societal impacts, as many of the students in post-secondary institutions will find their ways into the work place. Knowledge of systems at work in college and university residence halls would benefit employers and educators who seek to understand how students develop conflict competencies that will influence their interactions with others in their lives for years to come. These students will need to be prepared to handle and mitigate conflict with others.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

As college and university enrollment numbers continue to increase, residence halls will remain an attractive living option for students matriculating into the college environment (Rybczynski, 2004). Additionally, as post-secondary education becomes more and more common, employers will look to these institutions as training ground for life in the professional world (Myers & Larson, 2005). This study aimed to better understand a portion of students' informal life-training by examining the way students manage conflict, and the way these systems function while students reside on college campuses. While research in the field of conflict management and mediation continues to be a prolific area of scholarship (Bresnahan et al., 2009; DiPaola et al., 2010; Emerson, 2008; Kaya & Weber, 2003; Kiernan & Gray, 2013; Sillars, 1980; Wisler, 2010), the nature of resident hall living is communal at its heart, begging for a broader look at the behaviors in the buildings. Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) provides this broad point of view in regards to looking at systems of behavior while still attending to the communicative actions of the individual agents (Poole & McPhee, 2005).

Through analysis, conflict behavior systems became an interesting frame of reference for understandings how roommates approached reaching a common goal of harmony. The manner in which roommates addressed each other in conflict settings was associated with resources such as *authority, space, favor reciprocity, mutual respect, routines, external others* and *time.* From these resources, various rules such as *authority* remaining in an engaged system and outside a coexistent system; *space* being shared or segmented; *favors* being used to "meet" or "beat" roommate's habits; *mutual respect* being motivated from understood loss of comfort or an expectation of preserved comfort; collective and share *routines* or individual routines used to define segmented space; *external others* as a reason to engage or a way to validate avoidance;

and *time* as a commitment or countdown. The results also suggested that these interactions influenced future behaviors and conversations as well as shaped the way that harmony was achieved in the room; aligning with past research completed using structuration (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Selcer & Decker, 2012).

On a societal level, this study carries implications for the manner in which colleges build communication competencies in students. Dividing out responses to conflict problems into safety and comfort allows the research to suggest a different level of responsibility attributed to different student populations for those responses. Safety is definitely a concern for colleges and universities and a primary reason they employ RAs and student affairs professionals (Blimling, 2010; Dodge, 1990; Waldo, 1989). Letting 600 students live unchaperoned inside of a university building would, without a doubt, be an interesting experiment in developing life skills but is a risk that most colleges would not be interested in taking. Providing staff to assist students in times of danger, emergency, or crisis allows colleges to care for students at the basic level but often morphs into students treating every roadblock they come up against in their lives as something that is a crisis. If colleges were able to develop a language or policy around separating out responsibilities for safety and comfort students could be provided with more ownership over making sure that their needs for comfort are addressed.

The current research is a step in the direction of separating out what is safety and what is comfort, and distinguishing what roles students play in crafting their own comfort associated with harmony in their living spaces. Additionally, the current study uncovered *resources* which *students* utilize to craft *rules* to inform and practice agency within these systems, how conflict impacts and is impacted by these systems of *resources* and *rules*, and how work can be done to reach a place where students can recognize these systems and self-correct them to create

harmony and comfort rather than relying on student staff and college officials to do the work for them as illustrated with the vignette at the study's open. By raising the level of consciousness of our students to take responsibility for their own comfort the students tear down the hierarchical expectations and norms associated with the role of an RA. The RA becomes someone who is concerned for your student's safety but not someone who must accommodate student's comfort. That is a job for a student, and by doing that job the student builds much needed communication skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives as they encounter conflicts with future roommates, classmates, co-workers, and family members. Identification of harmony systems has the potential to assist in changing a student's reliance on others to diagnose and solve their problems while allowing para-professional student staff to control their work load in their residence halls and still play a role in student development.

Despite limitations, the study offers valuable contributions to structuration research with an attempt to reconcile structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) with the critiques of the theory (Sewell, 1992). The present research provides a detailed and in-depth examination of harmony systems in a residence hall and details the way in which these systems of harmony impact conflict communication choices among residence hall roommates. Additionally, this study applies structuration in a setting outside of the formal business setting often associated with organizational communication (Jack & Kholeif, 2007; Kirby & Krone, 2002; Selcer & Decker, 2012) and examines structures influencing the conflict behavior systems within residence hall rooms. Finally, the study suggests that change in the systems is possible through knowledge of the resources and rules that comprise the structures.

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Appendix A - Interview Protocol

Background

1. How did you meet your roommate?
2. Did you know your roommate prior to living with them?
3. How well did you feel you knew them before you moved in together?
4. What was your first impression of your roommate? Was it accurate?

Perspectives on living with someone

1. Have you ever lived with someone before? (Cousins, brothers, sisters, etc)
2. Have you ever shared space with someone before?
3. If you had a magic wand and could get any roommate you wanted what would they be like?

Experiences living with someone

1. How did you and your Siblings get along?
2. How did you come to know your roommates expectations of you and how did you communicate yours?
3. Tell me some reasons why you like your roommate?
4. Tell me about a time you were unhappy with your roommate?
5. Tell me about a time you were particularly happy with your roommate?
6. Tell me an example of the types of things you would disagree about?
7. Tell me about a particularly intense or tense moment you had with a roommate

Conflict

1. What does a conflict look like to you?
2. What are some conflicts you have had with a roommate? How did you know everything was alright afterward?
3. When you get into what you perceive as a conflict with your roommate who is the first person you talk to about that?
4. When faced with a conflict, to what extent do you feel like you could handle it?

5. Think of someone you consider to be really good at handling conflict, what is it about that person that makes them good at it?

RA staff/resolution channels

1. If you felt like you needed help with a roommate problem where would you go or what would you do?
2. Did you ever talk to somebody else about your roommate? Could you tell me about that?

Interviews will be designed to be free flowing and the interviewer will ask appropriate follow-up questions for clarification on original questions asked.