Chapter One: Introduction

Around 80% of freshman college students persist through the first year and return to complete a degree at an institution of higher learning. Student persistence has long been valued by higher education administrators. High levels of persistence help ensure high enrollment numbers, and, consequently, secure revenue for the institution (Glynn, Sauer, & Miller, 2003).

Persistence levels can be influenced by several factors. Tinto theorized that persistence is dependent on a student's integration into an institution. He defined integration using two factors: (1) sufficient interaction with others at the institution, and (2) an alignment with the values of that institution. The premise for Tinto's argument was that without these two elements, persistence is unlikely (Tinto, 1975; Tinto 1993).

In addition to integration, the college experience is enhanced when students have the opportunity to interact with one another. Deeper learning and development occur as a result of both student-faculty and student-student interaction. The experience of an interaction creates a depth of understanding that observation cannot replicate (Stimpson, 1994). Learning is not purely a cognitive process but is also social in nature. Knowledge of any kind is shaped through interactions with others (Moran & Gonyea, 2003).

The behavior of having an interaction can be influenced by several factors. Much research has been done linking personality to interactions. Students bring a certain set of characteristics and experiences with them to the college setting that may impact the way they interact with others (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993). Personality may play a part in a person's ability or willingness to initiate an interaction. It may also impact a person's ability to hold an interaction initiated by someone else.

Therefore, personality may influence the part of a student's integration into a university created through interactions (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1976; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993).

Environment can also have an influence on the way people interact with one another. Interactions are the product of a person within an environment. The environment can be defined by either built or perceived elements that might influence how a person is able to act or react in a situation (Lewin, 1936).

One way in which the environment can influence interactions is by a building's design. Winston Churchill said, "We shape our buildings and then they shape us" (Strange & Banning, 2001, p.12). By simple observation it is evident that behaviors such as traffic patterns are influenced by the design of a building. In most cases, behavior is not completely dictated by architecture; however, it is fairly obvious when a person is walking the wrong way along a path or through a door (Strange & Banning, 2001).

Architectural determinism suggests that the physical environment has a direct impact on the behavior that occurs within that environment. The design of a built environment can have a causal affect on how people move within that environment (Ellen, 1982). For example, people may exit a building in a predictable direction because of the design of that building. Elements such as stair or wall placement, signage, lighting, floor material, and other factors all contribute to architectural determinism (Strange & Banning, 2001).

Within the physical environment of a college campus, interaction can occur in both the academic and the social realm. In the academic realm, most interaction takes place within classrooms, labs, studios and other instructional facilities. The arrangement

of these facilities can determine how easily people are able to interact within them. For example, an auditorium style classroom where the seats are bolted down leaves little opportunity for small group discussions (Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002).

In the academic realm, interaction can occur between students and faculty, or between students and their peers. Student-faculty interactions have been found to have a major impact on a student's decision to persist in college. The more frequently students have quality interactions with faculty members, both formally and informally, the more likely they are to persist. These types of interactions occur for several reasons, but most happen as a result of a student's desire to learn more about career opportunities or gather further intellectual information. The contact between students and faculty can greatly increase students' integration into an institution because of the connection that is created when the interaction occurs (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1976; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980).

In addition to student-faculty interactions in the academic setting, students also interact among themselves in this environment. This peer interaction can serve as a way for students to further process knowledge and develop cognitively. Peer interactions in the academic setting, such as group work in class or peer tutoring, can help students further integrate into their institution. Interaction in the academic setting increases involvement in the learning process which, in turn, promotes development (Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1999).

Other interactions that take place on a college campus occur in the social realm. Social interaction is a significant determinant of graduation and student persistence rates (Pascarella, Terenzini, & Blimling, 1994). Peer interactions are significant to student

development simply because they happen on a daily basis (Whitt, et al., 1999). Life outside the academic setting is considered the real world lab (Kuh, 1995). A great deal of learning happens outside the classroom as a result of interaction between students and other people in the social setting (Stimpson, 1994).

The social realm can be made up of many different elements. Students socialize within fraternities, sororities, or other student organizations. These interactions can develop students' cultural sophistication as well as give them an opportunity to invest more time and energy into creating a connection with the institution. Deeper institutional investment results in a higher rate of student persistence (Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1999).

Another venue for interaction in the social realm is within athletics. Intercollegiate athletics, similar to student organizations, provide peer to peer social interactions that help students develop a sense of belonging. The pride and team spirit that is cultivated through athletic events provides students with yet another outlet for further integration into the institution (Terenzini, et al., 1999).

Residence hall facilities are another element of the social realm on a college campus. Few other environments at a university influence the behaviors of college students as much as the residence hall setting (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1982). Resident students spend around 70% of their time in their residence halls (Schroeder & Jackson, 1987). Residence halls provide a unique home because they give college students the opportunity to meet and interact with other people, regardless of differences (Heilweil, 1973). For most students, residence halls may constitute the center of their social world (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1984).

The design of a residence hall can influence how students interact within that space (Hamrick, et al., 2002). For example, a residence hall that has multiple entrances can result in fewer interactions between students. Presumably, students would use the closest exit or entrance to their room, leading them to pass by fewer student room doors. On the other hand, a hall with multiple social gathering spaces might encourage students to interact more with one another than one that has few common areas.

To summarize, interaction, social in particular, is reported to be integral to college student persistence rates (Pascarella, et al., 1994; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1976; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993). Interaction occurs within both the academic and the social setting, between students and faculty, and between students and other students (Moran & Gonyea, 2003; Stimpson, 1994; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1976; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993).

Environments, both physical and perceived, can influence how people interact within them (Ellen, 1982; Hamrick, et al., 2002; Lewin, 1936; Strange & Banning, 2001). Building designs, as part of the physical environment, have a direct impact on how students are able to interact within a space (Ellen, 1982; Hamrick, et al., 2002; Strange & Banning, 2001). Residence halls are one part of the built environment on a college campus in which social interaction takes place (Heilweil, 1973; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1982; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1984).

Students spend much of their time within their residence halls (Schroeder & Jackson, 1987). As interaction is influenced by the built environment (Ellen, 1982; Hamrick, et al., 2002; Strange & Banning, 2001), and residence halls are elements within the built environment (Heilweil, 1973; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1982; Terenzini &

Pascarella, 1984), it is reasonable to suggest that interaction within residence halls is influenced by hall design. However, there is little current research about the ways in which students interact with one another as a result of the design of a space, in particular, a residence hall. This study sought to add to the body of literature by focusing on how and where students interact with peers within residence halls and what they do during those interactions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how residence hall spaces that differ by architectural style impact college student interactions. Specifically, this study examined the interactions that took place among residents in traditional and suite style residence halls. Traditional style halls were defined as those with double loaded corridors where 40 plus residents share a bathroom. Suite style residence halls were defined as those where four to six rooms open onto a small common space and only those residing in those rooms share a bathroom contained in the common space. For purposes of this study, an interaction was defined as face-to-face contact between two or more individuals that held more significance than a simple greeting.

There were two samples employed in the study. The first included six residence halls on the campus of a large public institution in the mid-Atlantic region. Three residence halls of each style (traditional and suite) were represented in the study. The second sample included students residing in these six residence halls (10-12 participants per hall).

Data were collected through focus groups. Six focus groups, one for each traditional and suite style hall included in the study, were conducted. During each focus

group, participants were given a floor plan of their residence hall and asked to mark and explain where and what types of interactions they had had with others in the past four days.

Research Questions

This study was designed to answer the following research questions.

1. How do residents of traditional style halls interact within their residence hall?
2. How do residents of suite style halls interact within their residence hall?
3. How do the kinds of interactions that residents of traditional and suite style halls have within their residence halls differ?

Significance of the study

This study was of significant interest to several campus constituencies. One group that might benefit from the results includes master planners of institutional facilities. The findings of this study provided master planners with data that paint a picture of what student interactions are like in different types of residence halls. This information might inform planners about how best to design residence hall spaces in the future.

Another group that may gain from the results of this study includes housing professionals who work directly with students in residence halls. This study provided information about how students interact within specific types of spaces in residence halls. These data could guide professionals when determining what types of programs to offer within certain types of spaces.

Institutional administrators who make funding decisions about facility development on campuses could also benefit from this study. The results provided information about what types of interactions students have within different styles of

residence halls. These data could provide administrators guidance about where to allocate funding to achieve specific types of interaction among students.

This study also had significant implications for future research. For example, I examined how student interactions within residence halls differed by design of those halls. Future studies might explore how types of student interactions within academic settings might differ as a result of design. A study such as this would expand on the information available about space design on college campuses.

The present study examined student interaction in a qualitative way. Future studies might look at student interaction through quantitative methods. A study like this would allow data to be collected from a larger sample, expanding what is known about student interactions in residence hall spaces.

I looked at how student interactions differed depending on the type of residence hall space. A future study might look at persistence rates within differing types of residence hall designs. This could increase the knowledge base about residence hall design in regards to student persistence rates.

Finally, this study was significant for future policy. The results provided policymakers with information about what kinds of student interactions take place within public and private spaces of differing types of residence halls. The findings may guide those who manage policies about such spaces within residence halls.

Another group that might be informed by this study includes administrators responsible for policies about campus building designs. This study revealed information about student interactions within specific spaces. Policies could be developed dictating

how spaces should be designed across an institution's campus in order to achieve specific types or frequencies of student interaction.

In addition, this study could inform those policymakers who determine student rules and regulations on college campuses. This study revealed the quantity and types of interactions that occur within specific styles of residence halls. Policies could be developed that address safety or security issues that might arise due to those interactions that occur in these halls.

Delimitations

As with all research, delimitations inherently existed in this study. The first of these dealt with the method of data collection. When conducting focus groups, I might have inadvertently allowed a bias to impact the tone of the questions asked or instructions given to participants. If so, this may have caused participants to answer in a particular way, skewing the data collected.

Another delimitation of this study involved the sample. A purposeful sample of voluntary respondents was used to allow me to fully understand the problem and the research questions. Those who volunteered to participate in the study may have differed from those who chose not to participate. This could have altered the findings in the study (Creswell, 2003).

A third delimitation dealt with the method of data collection. In the focus groups, the respondents may not have understood the directions given. They also may have hesitated to report certain types of interactions. Both of these factors may have influenced the results of the study.

Despite these delimitations, this was a useful study. It offered a glimpse into the types of interactions that occur in different types of residence halls. Such information informs what is known about peer interactions within a social setting.

Organization of the Study

The present study is organized around six chapters. Chapter One introduced the topic of the study, the research questions and the significance of the study. The second chapter reviews the literature relevant to the study. Chapter Three describes the methodology of the study, including the sampling techniques and the procedures used to collect and analyze the data. The fourth and fifth chapters describe the results of the study while the final chapter discusses those results and their implications for future practice, research and policy.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

To explore fully how residence halls have an impact on student interaction, it was first necessary to examine the literature on student interaction. Three major themes emerged from the review of the literature on this topic; academic interaction, social interaction, and student persistence in relation to interaction.

Since the arena for interactions that was to be explored in my study included residence halls, it was necessary to examine the literature on residence halls. Two groups of studies emerged from this review: studies about the importance of residence halls on college campuses; and studies about types of residence hall spaces. This literature review is organized around those two major categories and their respective subtopics.

Research on Student Interaction

Interactions, both academic and social, contribute to students' learning and development. Interaction creates an opportunity for deeper understanding about a topic or experience. Self-processing through reading or observation cannot create the same knowledge gain as is created through interactions (Moran & Gonyea, 2003; Stimpson, 1994).

Interactions themselves can be influenced in several ways. Researchers have found that a people's personality can have a consequence on how capable and willing they are to interact with others. Students enter college with a set of characteristics and experiences that play a part in how they interact or the interactions in which they choose to engage (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1976; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993).

Another factor that can influence interactions is the environment. Lewin (1936) theorized that behaviors are the product of the person and the environment. Interactions are one type of behavior, and therefore can be impacted by the environment. Environments can be classified through both perceived and realistic elements. Perceived elements could be the emotional climate or social norms of the environment that might influence a person's comfort level, impacting his or her behaviors. Physical elements would include buildings or any part of the built environment that might have an impact on how people can behave or interact (Ellen, 1982; Strange & Banning, 2001).

Academic Interaction

Academic interaction has long been a major factor in college student life. It increases involvement in the learning process which leads to an increase in student development (Whitt, et al., 1999). Interaction in the classroom refers to the giving and receiving of information (Celce-Murcia, 1989). Interaction within the academic realm typically occurs inside the classroom, but can happen in several ways.

In-class discussion can be a result of teachers asking questions that prompt students to respond. This leads to a form of interaction where knowledge is exchanged. Although the teacher is the superior and knows more about the subject being discussed, it gives the student an opportunity to synthesize read and observed material and rephrase it so as to develop a deeper understanding. This form of interaction is known as the questioning technique. The size of the class can have an impact on the amount of interaction that occurs as a result of question asking (El-Koumy, 1997).

Another form of academic interaction can occur when students are introduced to group work. This is called cooperative learning and refers to students completing

assignments in groups. It can also include group presentations to other students about the specific aspects of an assignment a particular group explored. The benefits of this type of interaction are that students have the opportunity to interact with one another and then with the faculty member. Both forms of interaction can significantly increase a student's learning and development potential (Christison, 1990; El-Koumy, 1997).

Typically academic interaction happens between students and faculty. Student-faculty interaction can highly increase a student's chance of success in the college setting. Students have a heightened likelihood of success when they have a high frequency of interaction with faculty members. These interactions can happen formally or informally. Most in-class interactions between students and faculty are formal, but some students initiate informal interactions, for example, when they visit faculty members during office hours or have them participate in student organizations as advisors. Regardless of the formality of the interaction, most students choose to interact with their faculty members in order to gain a deeper understanding of an intellectual subject and develop more focused career aspirations (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1976; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980).

While a high frequency of interactions between students and faculty increase a student's probability of being successful in the college setting, quality of interactions is also important. A quality interaction is one where a high depth of knowledge is exchanged in either a small or a large setting. Typically, quality is determined by a positive interaction and one where both the student and the faculty member are interested in having the exchange (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1976; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980).

In addition to student-faculty interaction in the academic setting, peer interaction also increases a student's probability of success in the college environment. Student-

student interaction can be a way for students to synthesize information gained in the classroom setting in order to further deepen cognitive development. Peer interaction can come in many forms including group work, study groups, or casual conversation (Whitt, et al., 1999).

Social Interaction

Interaction on a college campus can also occur in the social realm. Social interaction, similar to academic interaction, can have a significant influence on student success (Pascarella, et al., 1994). Unlike most forms of academic interaction, social interaction bears on student success significantly more because it happens on a daily basis (Stimpson, 1994; Whitt, et al., 1999). This indicates that students rely on one another outside the classroom to help them synthesize the knowledge gained in class or through other observations.

Social interaction can occur in a number of settings. One way that social interaction occurs is through student organizations. Most students are involved in one or more co-curricular groups during their tenure in the college environment. Organizations such as fraternities and sororities can influence a person's behaviors and development (Terenzini, et al., 1999).

While most student-student interactions through organizations have a positive influence on development, some types of student organizations are significantly more likely to encourage students to engage in interactions involving risky behavior such as alcohol or hazing. These types of social interactions can have a negative impact on students' cognitive development (Terenzini, et al., 1999).

In addition to student organizations, peer interactions can occur through collegiate athletic organizations. This form of student interaction can substantially increase a sense of belonging to an institution. Pride from athletics can have a major influence on a student's decision to stay at an institution (Terenzini, et al., 1999).

Residence halls are perhaps one of the major settings in which students interact with one another. On-campus residents spend most of their time in their residence halls (Schroeder & Jackson, 1987). For most students, the on-campus environment is the center of their social life. This is where they meet most of their friends and interact with the greatest number of peers on a daily basis (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1984). Residence halls attempt to provide students with a home away from home, and in doing so, they create infinite opportunities for interactions and experiences (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1982).

Research on Residence Halls

Research on residence halls shows that they are integral to collegiate life and to student development. They provide students with a social experience within an academic environment (Kennedy, 2002; Kuh, Douglas, Lund, Ramin, & Gyurnek, 1994; Wheeler, 1985). Research on residence halls is focused on two areas: their importance on a college campus, and their design.

Importance of Residence Halls on a College Campus

Mutual shaping occurs between people and their environments (Kuh, et al., 1994). Having a good experience within an environment can lead to a more developed individual. Institutions of higher learning are focused on holistic development or the development of the student as a whole as opposed to development in one single area. In

the college setting, this indicates the attempt to develop students in and out of the classroom (Kuh, et al., 1994).

In order for students to experience development, they must be faced with an environmental challenge. This challenge forces a change in the student's equilibrium, and causes him/her to develop a new response, enhancing his/her personality. In order for the student to grow from the environmental dissonance, it must be balanced by some sort of support. The support allows the student to grow from the development of a new response as a result of the dissonance (Sanford, 1966). Collegiate environments work to provide a balance between challenge and support to adequately promote individual learning needs (Kuh, et al., 1994).

Living in a residence hall environment can be an integral part of the college experience (Kennedy, 2002). Students spend a majority of their time in their residence halls (Wheeler, 1985). Those who live on campus often experience greater gains than those who do not (Kuh, et al., 1994). Living in residence halls maximizes the cultural and developmental experiences students have during their tenure in college. Students living in residence halls demonstrate higher cognitive developmental levels than those who live off campus. In addition, residence hall living has a positive impact on graduation rates, and influences social involvement and satisfaction with the overall collegiate experience (Pascarella, et al., 1994).

Administrators want students to live on campus because it fosters a more meaningful collegiate experience (Kennedy, 2005). They feel that students who live on campus develop a sense of community that cannot be fostered when living off campus or

at home. Creating a sense of community improves the chance that students will develop a connection with their institution, causing them to persist (Kennedy, 2002).

Additionally, administrators are pressed to improve retention rates. Student satisfaction is an indicator of retention rates (Pascarella, et al., 1994). The top predictor of satisfaction with college housing among students is interaction with others. This includes meeting people, living together, resolving conflicts, and developing relationships (Curley, 2003).

Residence halls provide an increased probability of interaction with those of differing backgrounds. They also serve as the most fertile ground for development in social areas (Curley, 2003). One important component of developing a positive sense of community is providing active social interaction opportunities in residence halls (Cheng, 2004). A sense of community, in addition to interaction of any kind, can potentially be influenced by the design of the residence hall (Schroeder & Jackson, 1987).

Research on Residence Hall Design

Developmentally it is necessary to provide challenge as well as support (Hamrick, et al., 2002), but most residence halls provide too much challenge and not enough support. Residents have less privacy, are in closer proximity to others, have little opportunity to make their space their own (Amole, 2005; Schroeder & Jackson, 1987), and there are a number of distractions inherent in a residence hall that make it difficult to live. Small, cell-like rooms that are institutional in nature and décor and have fixed furniture perpetuate this challenge (Schroeder & Jackson, 1987).

One physical challenge in residence halls deals with noise. In a high density residence hall, rooms share walls that are often made of non-insulated materials. This

provides greater opportunity for noise to travel and reverberate throughout a building. Noise penetration in residence halls leads to lower student satisfaction overall (Wheeler, 1985).

Some forms of challenge and support may vary depending on the person. Psychological comfort comes with an availability of personal space, a lack of anonymity, and the existence of sub-communities (Kuh, et al., 1994). For example, students must have a balance between how often they are around people and how often they are alone. Residence hall spaces often provide many opportunities for residents to interact with others, but not many chances for privacy. To some students, the lack of privacy presents a challenge (Valins & Baum, 1973).

Another challenge in a residence hall deals with perceived overcrowding. When residents are forced to interact with too many other people, such as on a traditional style hall, they have a heightened sense of overcrowding. To combat this feeling, students may avoid social interaction altogether. One signal that this is occurring is a traditional style hall where all the doors remain shut, preventing easy interaction (Valins & Baum, 1973). Additionally, students who live in a high density environment tend to behave worse than those who live in less-crowded spaces. They also perceive their residence hall climate to be colder and less welcoming than do those who live in a less dense community (Bickman, Teger, Gabriele, McLaughlin, Berger & Sunaday, 1973).

The physical environment can be modified to allow students to make it more their own. Allowing students to modify their space creates a sense of ownership. A stronger sense of ownership leads to less vandalism and damage as well as an increased investment in the institution (Schroeder & Jackson, 1987).

Physical design of space influences social relationships by dictating people's proximity to one another (Case, 1981). Interaction is fostered in residence halls when spaces encourage people to come together with little effort (Kuh, et al., 1994). An effective residence hall has a variety of individual and group spaces. This facilitates interaction, but gives students a chance to choose the type of environment in which they wish to be at any particular point in time (Schroeder & Jackson, 1987).

Institutions have moved beyond the traditional double loaded corridor "dorm" design that put many students in a small space (Corbett, 1973; Kennedy, 2005) and are now designing residence halls that help to support their mission. For example, institutions that focus on teaching in their mission are providing more classroom spaces inside the residence halls so as to integrate academic and student affairs. Institutions that are interested in forming positive relationships with the surrounding community are designing new buildings to blend in with the existing architecture of the community (Godshall, 2000). Additionally, they are providing some of the amenities that students want such as fitness rooms, dining facilities, and even convenience stores and salons (Kennedy, 2005).

New trends in design on college campuses allow residence halls to serve a variety of functions, not just sleeping and bathing (Curley, 2003). For example, residence halls have social spaces such as lobbies or lounges, study rooms, fitness rooms, computer labs, and other spaces that support living functions beyond the bed and bath rooms. Residence halls of today are designed to promote a sense of community among the students who reside in them (Godshall, 2000).

Several elements should be considered when designing a residence hall that promotes communication and interaction. A shared main entry sets the tone for the building and maximizes the amount of interaction among residents as they pass through that entryway. Similarly, a common path should be included as the main space for circulation. This common path would be the way students circulate through the building in their smaller communities such as floors or sections. Having a common circulation path can break down some physical barriers that may be otherwise inherent in a space (Case, 1981; Godshall, 2000).

Community spaces should exist along this common path. Such a layout suggests that interaction and a sense of community are important. Additionally, it promotes interaction among residents as they move out of their private spaces and into the shared community space. The spaces in between should also be considered in residence hall design. These include any space that is minor, but is an element off the shared space, such as alcoves, nooks, and overlooks. These spaces add character to the overall design, but also create dynamic spaces in which students can choose to have interactions (Godshall, 2000).

Spaces in residence halls should be flexible and adaptable to current needs. Over time, these needs will change and the space should have the ability to change to meet those new demands. Flexibility will ensure that the space continues to be used, regardless of student needs (Godshall, 2000; Heilweil, 1973).

While spaces should remain relatively fluid in function, stability of circulation is a key element of maintaining flexibility in a residence hall. For example, a common area such as a large study lounge should remain flexible so that many different types of

activities could take place within it. Regardless of the changes in space needs in a hall, the circulation space should be retained to maintain the overall character of the community. This will help a building or campus develop a certain quality over the course of time (Godshall, 2000).

Breaking up large residence halls into smaller communities is a good strategy to help students feel as if they live in a more close knit community (Heilweil, 1973). Residential communities or neighborhoods should be considered when designing a hall. The rooms should be organized in such a way so that they seem to be part of a smaller neighborhood. In order to make this idea successful, support spaces should be included such as a study lounge, kitchen, bathroom, and recreation area. This design could foster a sense of community and draw students out of their rooms to interact with one another (Godshall, 2000).

One way to design smaller communities in a residence hall is through suites. A suite is a group of rooms that share a common space. Although suites are not the most appropriate environment for all students, they do break down the size of a large residence hall and allow students to more closely interact with one another. Students who live in suites feel as if they have more space than those who live on traditional style halls. Suites have the potential to offer more privacy to students as well as the opportunity for multiple activities to happen at the same time. For example, one roommate could be sleeping in a room while another carries on a study group in the common area of the suite (Corbett, 1973).

Beyond actual room design, institutions are upgrading their residence halls to provide more amenities to students. Things such as fitness rooms, carpeting, laundry

facilities, computer labs, and coffee shops are being added to residence halls. Additionally, trends encourage colleges and universities to design with technology, safety, flexibility, and sustainability in mind (Kennedy, 2002).

In addition to challenge and support, human scale must exist on a campus both in the physical and psychological realms to create a sense of comfort for those who live within it. The physical realm includes any physical space or group of spaces. In a residence hall, this includes furniture and finishes, lighting, paths of circulation, and other tangible aspects of the space. The psychological realm deals with how culture, policies, and procedures within the physical realm dictate living (Kuh, et al., 1994). Student affairs administrators should consider the impact the physical environment, student characteristics, and policies and procedures all have on each other (Schroeder & Jackson, 1987).

Summary

In summary, many studies have been conducted that examine student interaction, both in and out of the classroom (Celce-Murcia, 1989; Moran & Gonyea, 2003; Stimpson, 1994; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1976; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Terenzini, et al., 1999; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993; Whitt, et al., 1999). In general, higher levels of student interactions lead to higher levels of student development (Hamrick, et al., 2002; Pascarella, et al., 1994; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993).

Additionally, much has been written about residence halls and their impact on student development (El-Koumy, 1997; Kuh, et al., 1994; Pascarella, et al., 1994; Schroeder & Jackson, 1987). This body of work has explored the influence of residence halls on social interaction (Godshall, 2000; Stimpson, 1994), student gains (Kennedy,

2005; Kuh, et al., 1994; Pascarella, et al., 1994), and satisfaction (Curley, 2003; Heilweil, 1973; Kennedy, 2002).

However, no research has been conducted on the intersection between interaction and residence halls. This study adds to the body of knowledge because it looks at student interaction within the residence hall setting and how that may or may not be impacted by residence hall design.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to understand how residence hall spaces that differ by architectural style impact college student interaction. Specifically, this study examined the interactions that took place among residents in traditional and suite style residence halls. Traditional style halls were defined as those with double loaded corridors, where 40-plus residents share a bathroom. Suite style residence halls were defined as those where four to six rooms open onto a small common space, and only those residing in those rooms share a bathroom contained in that common space. For purposes of this study, an interaction was defined as face-to-face contact between two or more individuals that was more significant than a simple greeting.

This study was designed to answer the following research questions.

1. How do residents of traditional style halls interact within their residence hall?
2. How do residents of suite style halls interact within their residence hall?
3. How do the kinds of interactions that residents of traditional and suite style halls have within their residence halls differ?

This chapter outlines the methodology of the study. It describes sample selection, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and accuracy of the data.

Sample Selection

In order to conduct this study, two samples were needed: residence halls and residents. The first sample consisted of six residence hall buildings: three with traditional style design, and three with suite style design.

To select which halls would be included in the sample, I first used the housing website of the institution where the study was conducted. This website listed all residence

halls on the campus in addition to the number of beds, the sex/sexes housed in the building, any special populations housed, and the architectural style of each residence hall. From this website I sorted the residence hall list into three categories; traditional, suite, and other. I eliminated any residence halls included in the other category.

Next, I identified which traditional and suite style residence halls housed both males and females. I eliminated any halls that housed a single sex. This stipulation was in place to ensure that input would be obtained from both men and women. In addition, all of the suite style residence halls at the institution where the study was conducted were co-ed. Eliminating single sex traditional style residence halls ensured that all halls selected for the sample had similar populations.

I then reviewed the occupancy numbers for the remaining residence halls. Occupancy refers to the number of beds a residence hall can house. I selected three, co-ed traditional and three, co-ed suite style residence halls that had the most closely aligned occupancy numbers. This ensured that each building had a comparable proportion of participants to total number of residents.

Additionally, I reviewed the class standing status of the occupants of each building. Class standing refers to the number of years a resident has been a full-time student at the college level. I selected residence halls that ensured a relatively even representation between lower and upper division students.

The second sample consisted of residents of each of the six buildings that were included in the first sample. Participants had to be a resident of their respective building for at least four weeks. This ensured that they had lived in the building long enough to

know what spaces were available for their use, and how they did or did not use those spaces.

In order to recruit participants for the second sample I first had to gain approval to conduct the study from the Director of Residence Life. Once this was accomplished, I advertised via flyers the need for participants for a focus group. The advertisement had information about the date, time, and location of the focus group for that building, my contact information, and participant incentive information. An incentive was used to encourage participation. The incentive was the possibility of winning $50 in cash. One sum of $50 cash was given to a participant in each focus group. Potential participants were directed to contact me by phone or e-mail by a specific date. The flyers were posted in each of the six residence halls included in the study (see Appendix A).

When potential participants contacted me, I questioned them by e-mail to ensure they met the criteria for the study (see Appendix B). I asked them in which residence hall they lived, how long they had lived there, and their name and contact information. This questioning was done by e-mail to gather and clarify facts about each participant. Once I verified that they were eligible for the study, I let them know that they had officially become a participant and reminded them of the date, time, and location of the focus group in which they were to participate.

I sought to have 10-12 participants in each focus group. With attrition in mind, I continued to accept participants until I had 15 per focus group. This accounted for the few participants who may not have attended their assigned focus group. Among those selected to be participants, I attempted to maintain the same ratio of men to women that was represented in the overall population of the respective residence hall.

Instrumentation

Six focus groups were conducted, one for each of the six residence halls included in the study. Three instruments were used during each focus group. The first instrument was comprised of demographic questions (see Appendix C). This instrument was used to enable me to describe the participants in the study and to sort participants into analytical groups.

The second instrument consisted of a small floor plan of the participants' respective residence hall (see Appendix D) and a chart with instructions (see Appendix E). Each small floor plan showed one floor of the respective residence hall in addition to any other critical spaces in the building, (i.e. study lounges, kitchens, lobby, bathrooms, meeting rooms, laundry rooms). The instructions asked the participants to use the pen provided to number each of their interactions during the past four days in the location on the floor plan where that interaction took place, and then explain that interaction in the chart.

The chart had five columns (see Appendix E). The first column indicated the number assigned to the interaction. The second asked participants to describe what they were doing in the interaction. In the third column, participants were prompted to explain who was involved in the interaction (e.g. friend, roommate, classmate, etc.). The fourth column had participants report how long the interaction lasted. Respondents were reminded to identify only those interactions that were more significant than a simple greeting. The fifth column was provided to allow participants to share any additional information they wished to about that interaction.

The third instrument used to collect data was a large-scale floor plan of each residence hall included in the study. Each floor plan showed one floor of the respective residence hall and any other significant spaces in the hall (i.e. study lounges, kitchens, lobby, meeting rooms, bathrooms, laundry rooms). This large floor plan was used in the discussion portion of the focus group as described below.

After developing each instrument, I had a panel of three experts review them to ensure they would yield data related to the research questions posed in the study. I revised the instruments based on comments from the experts. I then conducted a pilot focus group that tested the instruments and focus group process. I revised the instrument and focus group process based on my experience with and feedback from the pilot focus group.

Data Collection Procedures

To collect data using human subjects for this study I first obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at the campus where the study was conducted. Once approval was obtained (see Appendix F), data collection commenced.

I reserved spaces for each of the focus groups through the Area Office for each building in the study. Each focus group took place in the residence hall being studied. A reminder e-mail (see Appendix G) was sent to participants 24 hours before their scheduled focus group. The e-mail detailed the date, time, and location of the focus group session as well as my contact information. It also reminded them of the incentive for participating in the study.

I then created the large-scale master floor plans of each building in the study on butcher block paper. The plans were drawn to scale. I also made copies of the small floor plans for each of the focus group participants. Each floor plan included one floor of each residence hall as well as any major spaces in the building (i.e. study lounges, kitchens, lobby, meeting rooms, bathrooms, laundry rooms).

Once floor plans were generated, I created packets for each focus group participant. The packets included two copies of an informed consent form (see Appendix H), a demographic survey, a small floor plan, a chart, and a colored pen. Each pen color was only used once in any set of focus group packets. This was done so that I could decipher responses from individuals after the focus group.

After packets were created, I conducted each of the six focus groups. When participants arrived they were given a focus group packet. As I distributed the packets, I made note of which participant received which color pen. These assignments were used during data analysis to determine the source of each piece of data.

Once all participants arrived, I thanked each of them for participating in the study and explained what the study was about. I also explained that the focus groups would be tape recorded. I answered any questions participants had about the study, and had them sign the informed consent forms and place them back in their packet. I then instructed them to complete the demographic survey and place it back in their packet. I then asked participants to introduce themselves to the focus group. Participants stated their name, year in school, program of study, and something interesting about themselves. This allowed participants to become comfortable with one another.

Next, I asked the participants to look at the small floor plan, read the instructions on the chart, and begin to complete the activity. The instructions on the chart asked participants to explain any interaction they had with another person(s) that was significant in the past four days. After that, they were to mark on the small floor plan where each interaction occurred using the number beside the interaction description on the chart. For example, the first entry on a participants' chart might describe a study group that took place for two hours and included five people. That entry would correspond to the number "one" marked in a study lounge on the participants' individual floor plan.

After each participant completed their individual floor plan and chart, I asked them to transcribe those interactions onto the large master floor plans. Once all focus group participants had marked their interactions on the master floor plan, I prompted them to discuss the patterns they saw. I took notes during the discussion and audio recorded it.

When the discussion was over, I read the participants my interpretation of the themes and major ideas they generated. I asked them to verify or correct that information and add any additional comments.

At the conclusion of the focus group I thanked the participants for their cooperation and candidness. I then asked each participant of the focus group to write his/her name on a piece of paper and place it in a cup. I then drew a name and awarded that participant $50 in cash.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed using both the tapes of the focus groups, and the small and large floor plans and charts marked by each of the focus group participants. In order to answer my research questions, I first had to sort the data on each of the small floor plans and charts in several ways. In order to do this, I recorded each interaction reported using four attributes: type, location, number of people present, and duration. First, I examined what types of interactions occurred. I sorted the responses on the chart that described what participants were doing in their interactions into major themes. For example it was likely that participants would report that they studied with others, talked about upcoming academic projects, or sought assistance with homework. I labeled these types of activities as Academic activities. I then calculated how many such interactions took place in each type of hall and the percentage of all interactions that occurred in each type of hall that were Academic in nature. I repeated this process for every type of activity reported.

Next, I sorted the data by type and location. I compiled lists of every type of space in which an interaction occurred within a traditional style residence hall, and within a suite style residence hall. From these lists I calculated the percentage of total interactions by type that took place in each space for both traditional and suite style halls.

I also assigned interactions to categories based on the number of people present during each interaction. All interactions with only one other person present were labeled One on One, interactions with three to five people were labeled Small Group, and interactions with six or more people were labeled Large Group. I then totaled the number of One on One, Small Group, and Large Group interactions that occurred for each suite and traditional style hall by interaction type. From there I was able to calculate the

percentage of total interactions by type and number of people present for traditional or suite style residence halls.

Next, I investigated how much time was spent during each interaction. I assigned the data to categories based on the amount of time each interaction consumed. From there I calculated how often interactions of each type took place for less than 30 minutes, 30 minutes to one hour, from one to three hours, and more than three hours for both traditional and suite style halls. I was then able to calculate the percentage of total interactions in each building type that took place for each of the different time periods by type of interaction.

Once the data from each of the small floor plans and charts were sorted, and frequencies and percentages were calculated, I was able to address the first research question. To do that, I combined and reviewed the data collected from traditional style residence halls. These data enabled me to paint a portrait of the types of interactions in which residents of traditional style residence halls engage, the spaces in which they occur, how many people are typically present, and how much time they consume. The same process was repeated with data about suite style residence halls in order to answer the second research question.

To address the third research question I compared the data for traditional and suite style halls in each of the categories. I also compared the portraits of interactions in each style of residence hall. This enabled me to see the differences in interactions between the two styles of halls.

Finally, I reviewed the tapes of each focus group and used the comments made during every group to expand on the portrait of the kinds of interactions that take place in

both traditional and suite style residence halls. From there, I was able to compare the outlines of typical interactions in traditional style residence halls to those in suite style residence halls. This allowed me to add depth and richness to my responses to all three research questions.

Accuracy of the Data

Accuracy of the data in qualitative data collection refers to the genuineness and trustworthiness of the data collected according to the researcher, the participant, or the reader (Creswell, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Genuineness refers to validity of the data through the researcher's presentation of it. Trustworthiness refers to the consistency of the data collection process resulting in more stable data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

To ensure the genuineness of the data that were collected, I first employed member checking. Member checking refers to the researcher reviewing collected data with participants to ensure that data were interpreted accurately (Creswell, 2003). I reviewed the themes and major findings that I observed from the discussions in each focus group with the respective participants. I asked them whether I had observed and recorded information accurately. I also asked them if they had any additional comments to add at the conclusion of each focus group. These are both forms of member checking and enhance the accuracy of the data.

Second, I utilized expert review to ensure the reliability of the instruments and protocol used. This method was employed to further increase the genuineness of the data collected. Expert review is the process of having professionals assess the accuracy of an instrument in collecting the data it is intended to collect (Creswell, 2003). I asked three

experts to review the instruments and protocol used in this study before conducting any of the focus groups.

I then conducted a pilot focus group. This method was used in order to improve the effectiveness of both the instruments as well as the process of the focus group (Creswell, 2003). I used the reactions and comments of the participants and my observations of the pilot focus group to improve the process as well as the instruments.

In addition, triangulation was used to ensure both genuineness and trustworthiness of the data. Triangulation of the data refers to using multiple references to the same theme in order to ensure accuracy (Creswell, 2003). I used three of each style of residence hall in the study and conducted one focus group for each hall used. I excluded any data collected that did not appear three or more times in the data analysis. These are both mechanisms that enhance the accuracy of the data.

In conclusion, by conducting focus groups I was able to collect the data needed to explore what kinds of interactions occur within both suite and traditional style residence halls. I was also able to see if different patterns in interactions occurred between those different style halls. The focus group gave participants the opportunity to expand and explain what interactions they reported so that I could effectively paint a portrait of the types of interactions that take place within both suite and traditional style residence halls, and analyze the differences between the two.

Chapter Four: Results of Traditional Style Data

The purpose of this chapter is to report the results of the focus groups conducted with residents of traditional style halls. The chapter is organized in five sections. The first section describes the demographics of the traditional style focus group participants. Next, I discuss the types of interactions reported by participants as well as the frequency of those types of interactions. The third section offers information on the types of interactions by location in traditional style residence halls. This is followed by a description of the types of interactions by number of people participating in each interaction. The final section describes the types of interactions by duration of each interaction.

Demographics of Traditional Style Participants

There were a total of 32 participants in the traditional style focus groups. Of those, 16 (50%) were female, and 16 (50%) were male. When asked to report their race, 29 (91%) participants reported themselves as Caucasian, zero (0%) reported African American, one (3%) reported Pacific Islander, and two (6%) reported Asian.

In terms of class standing, 15 (47%) fell into the freshman category, 10 (31%) were sophomores, five (16%) were juniors, and two (6%) were seniors. When asked how long they had lived in the residence halls as a college student, 11 (34%) reported 0-6 months, six (19%) reported 7-12 months, nine (28%) reported 12-18 months, two (6%) reported 19-24 months, two (6%) reported 25-30 months, one (3%) reported 31-36 months, and one (3%) reported 37-42 months.

When asked to report age, 11 (34%) participants reported they were 18 years old, 11 (34%) reported they were 19, five (16%) reported they were 20, four (13%) reported

they were 21, and one (3%) person reported that he/she was 22. Participants were asked to report their academic major. These majors fell into one of six categories: Engineering included all engineering fields, Science included all hard sciences such as biology, chemistry, physics, etc., Liberal Arts included majors such as English, history, languages, sociology, etc., Business included majors such as management, marketing, hospitality, communications, etc., and Undecided included all participants who had not chosen a specific field of study. Five (16%) participants reported a major that fell into the Engineering category, 12 (38%) participants reported majors that were part of the Science category, three (9%) participants had majors that fell into the Liberal Arts category, four (13%) participants' majors fell into the Architecture/Design category, seven (22%) participants had majors in the Business category, and one (3%) participant had not decided a field of study. A complete summary of the demographic characteristics of those in traditional style halls is offered in Table 1.

Types of Interactions in Traditional Style Halls

A total of 334 interactions were reported by traditional style participants (see Table 2). On average, participants reported 10.4 interactions each. Every interaction was assigned to one of five groups: General Conversation and Activity, Entertainment, Academic, Formal Conversation or Activity, or Eating. The General Conversation and Activity category included interactions like "played guitar", "relaxing", and "crunches & push-ups". Of the 334 interactions reported, 194 (58%) fell into the General Conversation and Activity category. The Entertainment category consisted of interactions such as watching TV or movies, or playing video games. Of the interactions reported, 76 (23%)

Table 1

Characteristics of Traditional Participants (N=32)

Characteristics	n	%
Sex		
Female	16	50
Male	16	50
Race		
White	29	91
African American	0	0
Pacific Islander	1	3
Asian	2	6
Class Standing		
Freshman	15	47
Sophomore	10	31
Junior	5	16
Senior	2	6
Time Lived in Residence Halls		
0-6 Months	11	34
7-12 Months	6	19
12-18 Months	9	28
19-24 Months	2	6
25-30 Months	2	6
31-36 Months	1	3
37-42 Months	1	3
43-48 Months	0	0
Age		
18	11	34
19	11	34
20	5	16
21	4	13
22	1	3
23	0	0

Major		
Engineering	5	16
Science	12	38
Liberal Arts	3	9
Architecture/Design	4	13
Business	7	22
Undecided	1	3
GPA		
3.5 – 4.0	7	22
3.0 – 3.49	15	47
2.5 – 2.99	5	16
2.0 – 2.49	2	6
1.0 – 1.99	3	9
Unknown	0	0

Table 2

Frequencies of Types of Interactions in Traditional Style Halls (N=334)

Type of Interaction	n	%
General Conversation/Activity	194	58
Entertainment	76	23
Academic	34	10
Formal Conversation/Activity	16	5
Eating	14	4
Total	334	100

fell into the Entertainment category. Interactions that involved any Academic related conversation or activity were assigned to the Academic category. Some responses from participants that were assigned to the Academic category were, “lab work”, “studied math”, and “worked on homework.” Thirty-four (10%) of the interactions were assigned the Academic category. The Formal Conversation and Activity category included interactions such as “an RA program” and “speed friending”. Among all interactions reported, 16 (5%) fell into the Formal Conversation and Activity category. Finally, the Eating category consisted of interactions where participants specified that they were eating and/or cooking. Fourteen (4%) interactions reported fell into the Eating category.

Interactions by Type and Location in Traditional Style Halls

When participants reported an interaction, they also located that interaction on a floor plan of their residence hall. These are reported in Table 3. Of the 194 traditional style interactions in the General Conversation and Activity category of interaction types, 60% took place in resident rooms, 8% took place both in the hallway and at the front entrance of the building, 7% took place both in the bathroom and in a lounge space, and 5% took place in an office within the residence hall. Interactions in the laundry room and stairwell each represented 2% of interactions, which those in the elevator, lobby space, kitchen, and vending areas each represented 1% of all interactions in the General Conversation and Activity category.

Of the 76 interactions reported in the Entertainment category, 95% of them took place in resident rooms, and 5% took place in a lounge space. In the Academic category, 94% of the 34 interactions reported occurred in resident rooms, and 6% took place in a

Table 3

Interactions by Type and Location in Traditional Style Halls (N=334)

	Location											
Type of Interaction	Room	Hall	Bathroom	Laundry	Elevator	Lounge	Lobby	Kitchen	Stair	Front	Vend.	Office
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
General Conv./Act.	60	8	7	2	1	7	1	1	2	8	1	5
Entertainment	95	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Academic	94	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Formal Conv./Act.	13	6	0	0	0	81	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eating	79	0	0	0	0	7	0	14	0	0	0	0

lounge space. A total of 16 interactions reported fell into the Formal Conversation and Activity category. Thirteen percent occurred in a resident room, 6% occurred in the hallway, and 81% happened in a lounge. In the Eating category, 14 interactions were reported. Seventy-nine percent of these happened in a resident room, 7% happened in the lobby, and 14% happened in a kitchen area.

Interactions by Type and Number of People Present in Traditional Style Halls

Participants were asked to report how many people were involved in each interaction (see Table 4). Those data were assigned to one of three categories. The One-on-One category included any interaction that involved the participant and one other person. All interactions reported that included a total of 3 to 5 people were assigned to the Small Group category. Interactions that involved 6 or more people were assigned to the Large Group category. Of the 194 interactions reported in the General Conversation and Activity category 48% were One-on-One interactions, 43% were Small Group interactions, and 9% were Large Group interactions.

Of the 76 interactions reported in the Entertainment category, 42% were One-on-One interactions, 47% were Small Group interactions, and 11% were Large Group interactions. Twenty one interactions were reported in the Academic Category. Seventy-one percent of them were One-on-One interactions, 24% were interactions in the Small Group category, and 6% were in the Large Group category. In the Formal Conversation and Activity category, a total of 16 interactions were reported. Of those, 6% were One-on-One interactions, 13% were in Small Groups, and 81% were in Large Groups. In the Eating category, a total of 13 interactions were reported. Of those, 36% were One-on-One interactions, 36% were Small Group, and 29% were Large Group.

Table 4

Interactions by Type and Number of People Present in Traditional Style Halls (N=334)

	Number of People Present		
Type of Interaction	One on One (2)	Small Group (3-5)	Large Group (6 or more)
	%	%	%
General Conv./Act.	48	43	9
Entertainment	42	47	11
Academic	71	24	6
Formal Conv./Act.	6	13	81
Eating	36	36	29

Interactions by Type and Duration in Traditional Style Halls

Participants were asked to report the duration of each interaction and these findings are reported in Table 5. Of the 194 interactions reported in the General Conversation and Activity category, 54% lasted less than 30 minutes, 35% lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour, 9% took between 1 and 3 hours, and 3% lasted more than 3 hours. Seventy-six interactions were reported in the Entertainment category. Three percent lasted less than 30 minutes, 45% lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour, 51% took between 1 and 3 hours, and 1% lasted more than 3 hours. There were 34 interactions reported in the Academic category. Thirty eight percent lasted less than 30 minutes, 32% lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour, 26% took between one and three hours, and 3% lasted more than 3 hours. Of the 16 interactions reported in the Formal Conversation and Activity category, 19% lasted less than 30 minutes, 81% lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour, 0% took between 1 and 3 hours, and 0% lasted more than 3 hours. In the Eating category, 14 interactions were reported. Thirty six percent lasted less than 30 minutes, 43% lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour, 21% took between 1 and 3 hours, and 0% lasted more than 3 hours.

Table 5

Interactions by Type and Duration in Traditional Style Halls (N=256)

	Duration			
Type of Interaction	1 – 29 min.	30 min. – 1 hr.	1 – 3 hrs.	More than 3 hrs.
	%	%	%	%
General Conv./Act.	53	25	13	8
Entertainment	12	28	53	7
Academic	43	19	24	14
Formal Conv./Act.	58	21	21	0
Eating	8	85	8	0

Chapter Five: Results of Suite Style Data

The purpose of this chapter is to report the results of the suite style data. The chapter is organized in five sections. The first section describes the demographics of the suite style focus group participants. The second section describes the types of interactions reported by participants as well as the frequency of those types of interactions. Next, I discuss the types of interactions by location in the suite style residence halls. This is followed by a discussion of the types of interactions by number of people participating in each interaction. Finally, I describe the types of interactions by duration of each interaction.

Demographics of Suite Style Participants

There were a total of 30 participants in the suite style focus groups. Of those, 19 (63%) were female, and 11 (37%) were male. When asked to report their race, 26 (87%) participants reported their race to be Caucasian, two (7%) reported African American, one (3%) reported Pacific Islander, and one (3%) reported Asian. In terms of class standing, nine (30%) fell into the freshman category, 12 (40%) were categorized as sophomores, four (13%) were juniors, and five (17%) were seniors. Most were either first year students (30%) or sophomores (40%).

When asked how long they had lived in the residence halls as a college student, seven (23%) reported 0-6 months, four (13%) reported 7-12 months, eight (27%) reported 12-18 months, three (10%) reported 19-24 months, four (13%) reported 25-30 months, two (7%) reported 37-42 months, and two (7%) reported 43-48 months. When asked to report age, seven (23%) of participants reported they were 18 years old, 13 (43%)

reported they were 19, three (10%) reported they were 20, five (17%) reported they were 21, one (3%) person reported to be 22, and one (3%) reported to be 23.

Participants were asked to report their academic major. These majors fell into one of six categories: Engineering included all engineering fields, Science included all hard sciences such as biology, chemistry, physics, etc., Liberal Arts included majors such as English, history, languages, sociology, etc., Business included majors such as management, marketing, hospitality, communications, etc., and Undecided included all participants who had not chosen a specific field of study. Two (7%) participants reported a major that fell into the Engineering category, 11 (37%) participants reported majors that were part of the Science category, 10 (33%) participants had majors that fell into the Liberal Arts category, six (20%) participants' majors fell into the Business category, and one (3%) participant had not decided a field of study. These and other characteristics of the suite style participants are reported in Table 6.

Types of Interactions in Suite Style Halls

A total of 256 interactions were reported by suite style participants. On average, each participant reported a total of 8.5 interactions. Each of these interactions was assigned to one of five groups: General Conversation or Activity, Entertainment, Academic, Formal Conversation or Activity, or Eating. The results are summarized in Table 7. General Conversation or Activity included interactions such as "in my room with my roommates and others", "looked at Meagan's new shoes", "dance party", and "hanging out". Of the 256 interactions reported, 146 (57%) fell into the General Conversation or Activity category. The Entertainment category consisted of interactions

Table 6

Characteristics of Suite Participants (N=30)

Characteristics	n	%
Sex		
Female	19	63
Male	11	37
Race		
White	26	87
African American	2	7
Pacific Islander	1	3
Asian	1	3
Class Standing		
Freshman	9	30
Sophomore	12	40
Junior	4	13
Senior	5	17
Time Lived in Residence Halls		
0-6 Months	7	23
7-12 Months	4	13
12-18 Months	8	27
19-24 Months	3	10
25-30 Months	4	13
31-36 Months	0	0
37-42 Months	2	7
43-48 Months	2	7
Age		
18	7	23
19	13	43
20	3	10
21	5	17
22	1	3
23	1	3

Major		
Engineering	2	7
Science	11	37
Liberal Arts	10	33
Architecture/Design	0	0
Business	6	20
Undecided	1	3
GPA		
3.5 – 4.0	10	33
3.0 – 3.49	12	40
2.5 – 2.99	4	13
2.0 – 2.49	2	7
1.0 – 1.99	0	0
Unknown	2	7

Table 7

Frequencies of Types of Interactions in Suite Style Halls (N=256)

Type of Interaction	n	%
General Conversation/Activity	146	57
Entertainment	57	22
Academic	21	8
Formal Conversation/Activity	19	7
Eating	13	5
Total	256	99

Note: Percentage may not add to 100 due to rounding

such as watching TV or movies, or playing video games. Of the interactions reported, 57 (22%) fell into the Entertainment category. The Academic category consisted of interactions that involved any academic related conversation or activity. Some participants reported academic interactions such as “doing homework”, “studying, and “worked on econ” and these were all assigned to the Academic category. Twenty-one (8%) of the interactions reported fell into the academic category. The Formal Conversation and Activity category included interactions such as “hall meeting” and “RHF meeting”. Of the interactions reported, 19 (7%) were assigned the Formal Conversation and Activity category. The Eating category consisted of interactions where participants specified that they were eating and/or cooking snacks or meals. Thirteen (5%) interactions reported by participants related to the Eating category.

Interactions by Type and Location in Suite Style Halls

When participants reported an interaction, they were also asked to locate that interaction on a floor plan of their residence hall. These results are reported in Table 8. Of the 146 suite style interactions in the General Conversation and Activity category of interaction types, 55% took place in resident rooms, 14% took place in suite spaces, 8% took place in the hallway, and 9% took place in the bathroom. The remaining took place in the laundry room (2%), the elevator (1%), a lounge space (1%), the lobby space (3%), the kitchen area (3%), the mail room (1%), in a stairwell (1%), and in 1% of cases, location was not reported.

Of the 57 interactions reported in the Entertainment category 40% of them took place in resident rooms, and 60% took place in suite areas. In the Academic category, 62% of the 21 interactions reported occurred in resident rooms, 14% occurred in a suite

Table 8

Interactions by Type and Location in Suite Style Halls (N=256)

	Location											
Type of Interaction	Room	Suite	Hall	Bathroom	Laundry	Elevator	Lounge	Lobby	Kitchen	Mail Room	Stair	Unknown
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
General Conv./Act.	55	14	8	9	2	1	1	3	3	1	1	1
Entertainment	40	60	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Academic	62	14	5	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	0	5
Formal Conv./Act.	26	15	8	0	0	0	47	2	0	0	0	0
Eating	15	69	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	0	0

space, 5% happened in the hallway, 14% occurred in a lounge, and for 5% of interactions reported in the Academic category respondents did not report a location.

Among the 19 interactions assigned to the Formal Conversation and Activity category, 26% occurred in a resident room, 15% occurred in a suite space, 8% occurred in the hallway, 47% happened in a lounge, and 2% took place in a lobby. In the eating category, 13 interactions were reported. Fifteen percent (15%) of these happened in a resident room, 69% occurred in the suite space, and 15% happened in a kitchen area.

Interactions by Type and Number of People Present in Suite Style Halls

Participants were asked to report how many people were involved in each interaction. Those data were assigned to one of three categories and are reported in Table 9. The One-on-One category included any interaction that involved the participant and one other person. All interactions reported that included a total of 3 to 5 people were assigned to the Small Group category. Interactions that involved 6 or more people were assigned to the Large Group category. Of the 146 interactions reported in the General Conversation and Activity category, 50% were One-on-One interactions, 43% were Small Group interactions, and 7% were Large Group interactions.

Of the 57 interactions reported in the Entertainment category, 46% were One-on-One interactions, 35% were Small Group interactions, and 19% were Large Group interactions. Twenty one interactions were reported in the Academic category. Sixty-seven percent of them were One-on-one interactions, 29% were interactions in the Small Group category, and 5% were in the Large Group category In the Formal Conversation and Activity category, a total of 19 interactions were reported: 21% were One-on-One interactions, 26% were in Small Groups, and 53% were in Large Groups. Among the

Table 9

Interactions by Type and Number of People Present in Suite Style Halls (N=256)

	Number of People Present		
Type of Interaction	One on One (2)	Small Group (3-5)	Large Group (6 or more)
	%	%	%
General Conv./Act.	50	43	7
Entertainment	46	35	19
Academic	67	29	5
Formal Conv./Act.	21	26	53
Eating	31	62	8

interactions that involved Eating, a total of 13 interactions were reported. Of those, 31% were one-on-one interactions, 62% were Small Group, and 8% were Large Group.

Interactions by Type and Duration in Suite Style Halls

Participants were asked to report the duration of each interaction. Each was assigned to one of four categories: Less than 30 Minutes, 30 Minutes to 1 Hour, 1 to 3 Hours, and More than 3 Hours.

The findings are reported in Table 10. Of the 146 interactions reported in the General Conversation and Activity category, 53% lasted less than 30 minutes, 25% lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour, 13% took from 1 to 3 hours, and 8% lasted more than 3 hours. Fifty seven interactions were reported in the Entertainment category. Twelve percent lasted less than 30 minutes, 28% lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour, 53% took from 1 to 3 hours, and 7% lasted more than 3 hours. In the Academic category a total of 21 interactions were reported. Forty three percent lasted less than 30 minutes, 19% lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour, 24% took from 1 to 3 hours, and 14% lasted more than 3 hours. Of the 19 interactions reported in the Formal Conversation and Activity category, 58% lasted less than 30 minutes, 21% lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour, 21% took from 1 to 3 hours, and 0% lasted more than 3 hours. There were 13 interactions reported in the Eating category. Eight percent lasted less than 30 minutes, 85% lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour, 8% took from 1 to 3 hours, and 0% lasted more than 3 hours.

In order to summarize the major differences in findings between interactions in traditional and suite style residence halls, Table 11 shows the results of interaction type and interactions by type ad location.

Table 10

Interactions by Type and Duration in Suite Style Halls (N=334)

	Duration			
Type of Interaction	1 – 29 min.	30min. – 1 hr.	1 – 3 hrs.	More than 3 hrs.
	%	%	%	%
General Conv./Act.	54	35	9	3
Entertainment	3	45	51	1
Academic	38	32	26	3
Formal Conv./Act.	19	81	0	0
Eating	36	43	21	0

Table 11

Differences in Interactions by Type and Location/Type in Traditional and Suite Style Halls

Interactions	Traditional (N=334) %	Suite (N=256) %
Type		
General Conversation/Activity	58	57
Entertainment	23	22
Academic	10	8
Formal Conversation/Activity	5	7
Eating	4	5
Location by Type		
General Conversation/Activity		
Room	60	55
Suite	0	14
Hall	8	8
Bathroom	7	9
Laundry	2	2
Elevator	1	1
Lounge	7	1
Lobby	1	3
Kitchen	1	3
Mail Room	0	1
Stair	2	1
Front Entrance	8	0
Vending	1	0
Office	5	0
Unknown	0	1
Entertainment		
Room	95	40
Suite	0	60
Lounge	5	0

Academic		
Room	94	62
Suite	0	14
Hall	0	5
Lounge	6	14
Unknown	0	5
Formal Conversation/Activity		
Room	13	26
Suite	0	15
Hall	6	8
Lounge	81	47
Lobby	0	2
Eating		
Room	79	15
Suite	0	69
Lounge	7	0
Kitchen	14	15

Chapter Six: Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results of the study reported in Chapters Four and Five. It is organized in four sections. The first section addresses each of the three research questions and discusses what the results of the study suggest in terms of each question. Next, I report how this study supports or contradicts prior research. The third section addresses this study's implication for future practice, research, and policy. Lastly, I report the limitations to the study.

Discussion

The findings reveal certain patterns in terms of the types of interactions that occur in residence halls. These patterns involve the types of interactions that occur, as well as where those interactions occur, how long they take, and how many people are involved.

Interactions in Traditional Style Halls

The first research question asked about the kinds of interactions residents of traditional style halls have within their residence hall. To explore this question I asked the participants of traditional style residence halls to describe their interactions through four attributes: (1) type, (2) location, (3) number of people present, and (4) duration of each interaction. Each of these elements helped to paint a picture of the kinds of interactions that residents of traditional style halls have within their hall.

By far, residents of traditional style buildings most often (58%) have interactions that are considered General in nature, such as casual conversations or activities. One participant said, "I seem to do a lot of talking." Another said, "I had a ten minute shower conversation". This is more than likely the result of residents spending their free time with other members of their residence hall community. The findings suggest that

residents of traditional style halls spend the majority of their time in the building engaging in general social activities. One student commented on how many social interactions he has in the building by saying, “I know a lot of people throughout the whole building.”

While students participate in mostly social interactions in their traditional residence hall, they also have many interactions (23%) involving Entertainment type activities like playing video games, or watching TV or movies. Some participants commented that, “I watched that show ‘I love New York’.” During one focus group, one participant asked another, “What was that cartoon we were watching?” It is clear that students often enjoy watching TV or movies with other people. They may choose to interact with one another during Entertainment situations if they share a favorite television show, video game, or genre of movies, or simply enjoy spending time with one another.

Only 10% (see Table 2) of the total interactions reported in traditional style residence halls were considered to be Academic in nature. This included engaging in study groups, doing homework, and holding discussions about academic projects. One participant noted that she, “helped a hall-mate with homework,” on a regular basis. One reason students may not use their residence hall for academic interactions is because they may use a different space such as the library, the student union, or other study spaces outside of their residence hall.

Very few students in traditional style halls have interactions involving Eating or Formal Conversations and Activities within their buildings. One reason students may not use their residence hall for Eating interactions is because they use dining facilities

provided on the campus. Formal Activities that are planned in advance may not be provided in residence halls nearly as often as spontaneous activities. Since I asked residents to report only those activities that occurred during the four days preceding data collection, it is also possible that there were simply no Formal activities in their buildings during the time frame under study.

In terms of location of interactions, one participant reported spending most of his time "between my room and the lounge." One participant said, "You do lots of stuff where you live," and another said, "Most of them happen in and around my room," referring to the fact that many students have interactions in close proximity to their own room. Another participant reported that "the middle of the building is where most of stuff happens." By middle of the building, this student was referring to the middle of the hallway that runs the length of each corridor in traditional style halls. This could be attributed to the layout of that particular hallway, or could be a factor of residents congregating in the middle of the hallway out of convenience for those who live on either end of the hallway.

By far (70%), the most used spaces in traditional style buildings are resident rooms. One participant stated that "my room is hoppin'," and "there's a lot going on in the RA rooms." Another person noted the frequency of interaction in her room by saying, "Think of all the times people come to my door to talk." Speaking about the culture on the floor, one resident said that, "everyone's door is always open and everyone knows everyone else." Having multiple room doors open onto a hallway as well as residents who are familiar with one another could lead to a higher chance of interactions in resident rooms.

One reason why resident rooms may be the most used in terms of interactions in traditional style halls is that there are no other spaces where students live, per se. Rooms may be where students feel the most at home and can take the most ownership, and therefore, feel the most comfortable.

While the majority of interactions in traditional style halls happen in student rooms, a small number of interactions happen in the hallways, bathrooms, lounges, or front entrance of the building. The hallway seems to be a place where only brief interactions take place in traditional halls. One participant noted that, "I have passing conversations in the hallway but not significant interactions." Another participant elaborated about why the hallway is not a place for more important interactions by saying that, "the halls are pretty narrow here and they're not carpeted, and they're not comfortable, so people just go in their rooms." She continued on saying, "in the building I used to live in it was carpeted and people would sit out in the hall and it was wider." Yet another participant commented about the lack of interaction in traditional style hallways:

> There's a lot more people cutting through the first and second floor and there's not room for people to sit on the floor and walk through at the same time. I've hung out in the hallway. If you sit down you have to move every couple of minutes to let people through.

All of these factors may contribute to the lack of significant interactions that occur in the hallways of traditional style residence halls.

Bathrooms, like hallways, are places for residents of traditional style halls to have some small social interactions. They are spaces where residents can see other members of

the community without a planned interaction, but may not be the likely area for major interaction to take place. One participant noted that, "I wouldn't see half the people on my hall if I didn't see them in the bathroom." Another participant said, "Active conversations sometimes happen in the bathroom, but overall, we don't have long conversations there." On the other hand, one participant commented that:

> There's an unspoken code of every other stall for guys. . . .No one wrote that law down anywhere, it's just kind of like the natural thing. It's every other stall unless they're all taken and you're desperate, otherwise you'll wait. Other than that, unless you catch eyes with someone, you don't talk.

Similar to bathrooms, interactions occur in lounge spaces and front entrances, but infrequently. One participant discussed how often the front entrance patio area of his residence hall sees interaction by saying that, "a lot of people hang out on the front patio because we smoke." In another focus group, participants discussed how the lounges were "too big" in which to have intimate interactions. Evidently, some public spaces are used for interactions only if there is a reason, like smoking, that draws people to them.

Respondents offered some reasons explaining why they rarely have interactions in the lobby: "there's no reason for us to go there. It's like a thoroughfare. You'd be in people's way." The stairwells, like lobbies, see few interactions. One participant noted, "It's really cold in the stairs." Another man stated, "The stairs echo so you can hear all the way downstairs." Yet another said, "Stairwells are wicked narrow." Evidently, residents are willing to engage in interactions in the public spaces of their residence halls, however, there are boundaries that discourage them from doing so. Places like stairwells,

that may be uncomfortable and where conversations can be overheard, are outside those boundaries.

Traditional style residence halls are places where typical interactions include anywhere from two to five people. Only a handful (13%) of interactions that take place are in Large Groups. One participant noted, “My interactions are like usually three or two people, occasionally bigger, like five.” One reason for this may be that the majority of student interactions take place in resident rooms, and those spaces are limited in size. There simply may not be enough room to comfortably fit large groups in a resident room. However, one participant contradicted that statement by saying, “We could get like 12 people in a room.” These Large Group interactions happen, but do so infrequently.

When looking at the length of typical interactions in traditional style residence halls, most of them take less than one hour. A handful of interactions take between one and three hours, while very few take more than three hours. One participant noted about her interactions that, “most of them were less than five minutes.” This may be attributed to the fact that residents of traditional style residence halls mostly have interactions that are general in nature. These General interactions may be spontaneous, and therefore, may only last a short amount of time.

The results of the focus groups revealed where certain types of interactions take place in traditional style residence halls. Most often the General Conversations or Activities take place in resident rooms. This may be because that is where most residents of traditional style halls spend the majority of their time while in the hall. All other spaces in the traditional style hall are places where students go for a short while, whereas their room is the place where they stay for long periods of time.

When students do have interactions that are Formal in nature such as a hall meeting or a program, they typically take place in a lounge space. This can be attributed to the fact that the lounge spaces can generally hold many more people than can a resident's room or an area of the hallway. Also, these lounge spaces are usually set up to accommodate Formal activities where chairs or tables may be needed.

Almost all of the Entertainment type interactions took place in a resident room. This could be because students bring their own entertainment systems and electronic gaming systems to college and have them in their rooms for their personal use. One participant stated that, "we have a futon so people tend to come over to watch movies." The only other location that students reported having interactions of this nature was in a lounge space. More than likely, this can be attributed to large screen televisions in some lounges of residence halls. For example, "on nights when you have Jack Bauer Power Hour this room [the lounge] is full because everyone's watching it on the big TV." Another participant noted a similar observation by saying that, "they use the TV." A different participant stated that, "we hook up our TV in the study lounge."

In terms of Academic type interactions, students of traditional style residence halls typically have these in their rooms as well. Again, this could be attributed to the large amount of time they spend in their rooms, or it may be the result of not having access to other small study areas in their residence hall. One participant commented on his failure to use the study lounge for Academics by saying that, "usually people go to the lounge to study and I don't because I usually need the Internet to do homework and the lounge doesn't have that." In considering what study lounges in traditional style halls are used for, one participant noted, "I think the study lounge on our floor is just people

studying." This could indicate that while some students do use the study lounges for studying or other Academic purposes, they may not be fully equipped with things like outlets for computers or Internet access. This may limit the number of students who can use the study lounges for Academic reasons to only those who do not need computers or access to the Internet.

Most Eating activity (79%) in traditional style halls takes place in resident rooms. When traditional style residence halls are equipped with a kitchen space, that space is used for some interactions involving preparation of food. A participant noted, "I see people in the kitchen all the time." Another one said, "I can always smell burnt brownies or bacon whenever someone does cook." Both of these comments came from focus groups where a public kitchen was present in that traditional style residence hall. However, not all traditional residence halls are equipped with a kitchen space that residents can use freely. The data show that while most Eating interactions take place in resident rooms, when kitchens are available in traditional style residence halls they are used for Eating interactions. When halls do not have a public kitchen, residents find other spaces in the hall, such as their room, to have interactions involving food.

The results showed that residents of traditional style halls have interactions that are General in nature in either a One-on-One setting or in Small Groups. Very seldom do they have these interactions in groups of six or more individuals. This could be attributed to the spontaneity of general interactions. Many of the general interactions such as "hanging out" are not planned, and therefore it would be rare when groups of six or more individuals would be able to participate in such spontaneous interactions.

In terms of Entertainment type interactions, residents of traditional style halls take part in these interactions with either one other person or in Small Groups. Since the majority of entertainment interactions take place in resident rooms, this may be the result of the number of people a resident room can comfortably hold.

Most Academic interactions (71%) in traditional style halls are One-on-One interactions, although a fair number of them take place in small groups. This could be related to the fact that many of the academic related responses reported one person helping another, such as "helped neighbor with homework."

The vast majority (81%) of Formal interactions that take place in traditional style halls happen in Large Groups. As most of these formal activities happen in a study lounge space, logically, they would be able to accommodate larger groups of people. One participant said, "We had a healthy relationship program. We were expecting 10 people to show up."

The results of the traditional style focus groups also revealed how long interactions in these halls generally take. Interactions of a General type are most often less than 30 minutes (54%). A fair number (35%) of these interactions also take between 30 minutes and one hour. This could be because many of the General interactions in traditional style buildings are spontaneous in nature and residents may not allow them to take more than an hour of their time. Entertainment interactions in a traditional style hall typically take between 30 minutes and three hours. This could be attributed to the length of television shows or movies. Most formal interactions in traditional style residence halls took between 30 minutes and one hour. This could potentially be the case because

these interactions are planned, and residents may not participate if they know the interaction will take longer than one hour.

To summarize, residents of traditional style residence halls have mostly social interactions in their hall, and these interactions typically take place in resident rooms. They happen in Small Groups or with one other person, and they generally last less than one hour. When residents interact outside their rooms it may still be for a social reason, although mostly Formal interactions like programs or meetings happen in study lounges.

Interactions in Suite Style Halls

The second research question asked about the kinds of interactions residents of suite style halls have within their resident hall. In order to explore this question, I repeated the focus group procedure and asked the participants of suite style residence halls to describe their interactions in their residence hall through four attributes: (1) type, (2) location, (3) number of people present, and (4) duration of each interaction. Each of these elements helped to paint a picture of the kinds of interactions that residents of suite style halls have within their hall.

The data show that mostly (57%), residents of suite style residence halls have interactions that are General in nature. These interactions tend to include things like, "hanging out" or "talking with a suitemate." When residents of suite style halls are not having General Conversations or Activities, they interact in Entertainment type situations (22%) One participant asked another during a focus group, "We were playing Madden, weren't we?" Another asked, "We watched TV didn't we?" Between these two interaction types (General and Entertainment), it can be said that the majority of interactions that take place in suite style buildings are social in nature. Only a handful of

interactions in suite style spaces include Academic, Formal, or Eating activities. This suggests that residents of suite style buildings either do not have these types of interactions at all, or have them outside of the walls of their residence hall.

When examining the location of most interactions in suite style residence halls, almost half (48%) of interactions take place in resident rooms. One participant commented on her trends in interactions by saying, "they all take place in my room or right around it for the most part." Another said, "A lot of mine is in someone else's room." These comments could point to the fact that resident rooms are the primary living space in a suite style residence hall.

Next to resident rooms, the suite space is where most of the remainder of interactions take place (27%). One participant questioned her interactions as a whole by saying, "Does it matter that none of my interactions happen outside of my suite?" Another said, "I'm always in the suite doing things." Yet another participant stated, "Most of mine are somewhere in the suite." She went on to say, "I think people tend to cluster in the suites." A comment was made by one person who was surprised about her pattern of interactions that, "I was proud of myself for having one down the hall."

Each of the suite spaces included in the study are equipped with a sofa, a chair, a rocking chair, and a coffee table. Beyond that, residents can add their own items to their suite space to be shared by all six of the members of that suite. One participant offered a different opinion about whether residents limit the location of their interactions to the suite by saying, "it depends on if you have anything in your suite." She was referring to the fact that some residents of suite style buildings do not interact in their suite space because of a lack of extra furniture or other items that enhance the common area space.

Beyond room and suite spaces, a few interactions happen in the hall (5%), the bathroom (5%), and lounge spaces (5%). One person commented on the lack of interaction in the hallway by saying, “it is a chute, through traffic only” Another person said, “I don’t think there’s a lot of people who hang out in the hallway very much. I’ve lived on other halls where people just camp out in the hallway and hang out.” One participant speculated about why interactions in the hallway may be limited by saying, “it’s kind of awkward just because you may not be familiar with someone and you’ve got to pass them and make eye contact to pass. Sometimes you’re not even sure if they live on your floor.” One person speculated on why the hallways may not be the sight of many interactions:

> I think ‘cause we have the suite it’s more of a common area and it seems like where I go because we have like couches and other locations to sit that are kind of a common area for everyone to sit that people just kind of move inside.

Evidently, the suite space provides a place for residents to socialize and interact that is slightly less private than a resident room, but more private than the hallway. The suite space gives residents a place to go to get out of the way of hallway traffic.

The bathroom (5%) seems to be a place where unplanned interaction takes place in suite style residence halls. One participant stated that, “Our suite hangs out in the bathroom.” Another explained further by saying, “The bathrooms have always been a nice place for me to have conversations with people in the suite where it’s not like a group conversation. I’ve found myself multiple times having hour long conversations in the bathroom.” He went on to say, “It’s just somewhere where you can catch people where it’s nobody’s personal space.” This indicates that some residents interact in the

bathroom as they spontaneously run into one another. However, not all residents of suite style residence halls feel comfortable enough to have interactions in their bathrooms. One participant expressed this by stating, “Even just in our bathroom if someone’s in there taking a shower I won’t even go in there to go to the bathroom.”

Lounges in suite style buildings tend to be used infrequently by residents (5%). One participant noted that, “Usually whenever I see people in the lounges it’s some group who doesn’t live here.” He went on to say, “In the big main lounge, that’s usually where the clubs are.” He was referring to the fact that student organizations can reserve some of the larger study lounges in suite style residence halls to hold meetings or other activities. The existence of a lounge reservation policy in residence halls may limit the frequency of lounge use by residents of that respective building.

In terms of the number of people involved in interactions that happen in suite style residence halls, most all of them (87%) include five people or less. Suites typically include three rooms of two residents, or a total of six residents. The high number of interactions with five people or less could indicate that in general suite mates interact with one another but perhaps not with all suite mates simultaneously.

When considering the length of suite style interactions, almost all of them (93%) are less than three hours. Almost half (41%) of the suite interactions reported took less than 30 minutes. This could indicate that the majority of interactions in suite style halls are spontaneous in nature and only last a short amount of time. Still a decent number of interactions (28%) took between 30 minutes and one hour, and a fair number (21%) took between one and three hours. This could be attributed to the availability of the suite style

spaces, and could indicate that when given the suite space as a common area to converse, interactions last longer than they do in a room.

The results of the suite style focus groups indicate that certain types of interactions take place in specific spaces in the building. Over half (55%) the General Conversations and Activities take place in resident rooms. One participant noted, "We rearranged our room. We lofted the bed and moved everything around." Beyond resident rooms, General interactions take place in the suite area (14%). This could further confirm that residents of suite style halls spend the majority of their time within their own suite.

In terms of Entertainment interactions, most (60%) take place in suite spaces, while the rest take place in resident rooms. One reason for this is because suite spaces have seating for more individuals, and in many suites, residents add more furniture, TVs, or electronic gaming systems. Therefore, when it comes to watching movies or TV, or playing video games, the suite space is more comfortable.

The vast majority (62%) of Academic interactions take place in resident rooms. One participant noted, "You came in my room and helped me with my homework." Another said, "When I am in the building, I normally am in my room doing work." A handful of these interactions also take place in suite spaces (14%) or in lounges (14%). One young woman noted the reason for her lack of academic interactions in the lounge by saying, "It's obviously not midterm time because I never entered the study [lounge]."

Most (47%) Formal interactions in suite style residence halls take place in the lounge areas. This could be attributed to their size and ability to accommodate larger groups of individuals. In terms of Eating interactions, these mostly take place in suite areas (69%), but a handful of them occur in resident rooms (15%) and kitchens (15%).

When considering the number of people present during interactions in suite style residence halls, almost all General interactions (93%) include fewer than six people. Entertainment interactions are mostly fewer than six people (81%), but a handful happen in Large Groups (19%). Two-thirds of Academic interactions are One-on-One in nature (67%), although a few of them (29%) happen in Small Group settings. Roughly half of Formal interactions take place in Large Groups. This could be because these types of interactions mostly happen in lounges where many people can comfortably fit. A considerable number (62%) of Eating interactions take place in Small Groups, but a few of them do take place with only two people (31%).

In terms of duration of interactions, most (78%) all of General interactions took less than one hour. The majority (81%) of Entertainment interactions lasted between 30 minutes and three hours. One participant said in reference to a video game, "I played like two hours." Another participant discussed her interaction with her suitemates by saying, "We watched Cars for three hours." One other person noted, "We played Cranium for like three hours." The bulk of both Academic (43%) and Formal (58%) activities took less than a half hour, although a fair number of them took more time. Almost all of Eating interactions took between 30 minutes and one hour.

From these data, it can be said that interactions in suite style spaces are mostly social in nature. Whether they include casual conversation or residents who get together to watch a movie, almost all interactions were extracurricular in nature. Interactions in suite style residence halls mostly happen in a combination of resident rooms and suite areas, and involve either two people or small groups of people. Typically these

interactions last less than one hour, although some take as long as three hours.

Differences in Interactions between Traditional and Suite Style Halls

The third research question asked about the differences in the kinds of interactions residents of traditional and suite style residence halls have within their halls. To answer this question, I considered the portraits painted about the kinds of interactions in both traditional and suite style residence halls and found differences and similarities.

The most significant variation between the kinds of interactions in suite and traditional style residence halls is where they take place. Most of the interactions in traditional style halls happen in resident rooms, whereas in suite style halls the majority of interactions are split between resident rooms and suite spaces. To students, suite spaces seem to be considered part of the living area. Students take the time to personalize this space and use it as their own. This difference could indicate that when residents are given additional living space, they utilize it for interactions.

One additional observation about the two styles of residence halls is how the suite setup potentially impacts initial interactions between people who might not previously know one another. One participant of a suite style focus group said, “It’s weird that we know a lot less people on our hall than most other buildings on campus.” Another participant commented on her experience saying, “I had a friend who lived in [a traditional style hall] last year and when I was on her hall it felt like a “dorm” and when I came back here it felt like a hotel.” This feeling could directly be attributed to the design and layout differences between suite and traditional style buildings. One participant reflected on his experience saying:

> I found that just the way the suites are designed it's really hard to get to know people and to meet new people. We lived in [a traditional style hall] the first year and we're not exactly the most social people in the world but it was kind of easy if you did want to get to know somebody because I mean your door would be open you'd be passing down the hall to do whatever and you'd just pop in and see what they're doing and with this setup you've got the suite doors open but the other rooms are out of line of sight. And even if people are in there interacting, it's kind of a group of people that you feel are a group of friends and you feel like you're intruding.

Another participant added, "It's kind of awkward walking into someone's suite if you don't know them. You wouldn't just walk into your neighbor's house without knowing them." Yet another participant observed that:

> If you're gonna talk to someone you have to make it a point to talk to them. I lived in [a traditional style hall] last year and it's like if you're passing by someone's door you'd' say "oh hello" and start a conversation. It was really easy because it was their room and you'd be passing by. But here you have to go in, knock, and say, 'hello, this is what I have to say to you.'

One young man illustrated his frustration by sharing, "I was walking past a suite and saw someone watching hockey in his suite so I went in and said, 'I see you're watching hockey, do you play?' and he looked at me like I was crazy." These design related experiences seem to impact the way residents reach out to new residents. Residents who live in suite style residence halls more than likely interact with fewer other residents who live in their building than do those who live in traditional style residence halls.

It might also be said that residents of suite style living may feel more ownership toward their residence hall space simply because they live in both their room and suite areas. This could lead to the potential difficulty in initiating interactions beyond their own suite. One participant noted that, “I think at the beginning of the year we were more willing to walk around into other suites and, I guess, try to make new friends in other suites and on other floors and stuff. But now that school’s kind of in full swing and we’ve got all this work, we’re kind of more to ourselves. We’ve already created those cliques and created those friendships.” The difference appears to be that on a traditional style floor an open door indicates a desire for interaction from anyone who passes by, whereas, on a suite style floor an open door may not be able to be seen from the hallway.

The data revealed that in both traditional and suite style residence halls interactions are mostly social. Very few interactions in either type of residence hall are academic. This could be because students either study alone or they do not engage in academic interactions at all. It may also be because students choose to have interactions involving academics outside of their residence hall environment.

When analyzing the amount of interactions had in both traditional and suite style residence halls, on average participants of traditional style focus groups reported 10.4 interactions each, while participants of suite style focus groups only reported 8.5 interactions on average. The data revealed that overall, more interactions happen in traditional style residence halls than in suite style. This could be attributed to the differences in physical layout of the two styles of hall. From this, it could be said that traditional style residence halls promote a greater amount of interaction between residents than do suite style halls.

According to the data, there were not major differences in interactions between suite and traditional style residence halls in regards to types of interactions, length, and amount of people present. This could indicate that students have very similar interactions regardless of the types of residence halls in which they reside. The style of residence hall seems to primarily influence where residents have interactions within the building. It may also influence how often they engage in interactions, and even the number of people with whom they have interactions.

Relationship of the Findings to Prior Research

The findings of this study support some of the body of knowledge on student interaction. My findings suggested that a desire to interact with others in the residence hall setting may be indicative of past experiences or personality (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1976; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1993). Some participants reported many interactions, while others expressly indicated that they did not interact with many people in their residence hall. This seems to point toward the fact that interactions are partially a choice. Students may or may not choose to interact with others in their residence hall based on their personality or their past experiences. One participant of a focus group noted that, “the older you get, the less you interact.” He was referring to age, but also to years lived in the residence halls. This could point to age or past experience as an indicator of an individual’s level of interaction.

Clearly, as reported in previous studies, the physical environment does in fact impact the way students interact (Ellen, 1982; Strange & Banning, 2001). The major difference in interactions between suite and traditional style living is that students residing in suite spaces have very few interactions outside of their suite space. This

finding indicates that the suite setup creates a small community, as previously suggested by Schroeder and Jackson (1987) within the residence hall community, and offers those residents the opportunity to stay within the walls of their suite to interact most of the time. In addition, my findings concur with those of Kuh, et al. (1994) in that it is clear that the design of the space can encourage or discourage people to interact. Traditional style residence halls encourage interaction with little effort while suite style spaces require residents to exert a purposeful effort to make interaction happen.

The findings in this study also support Pascarella's and Terenzini's (1982) notion that students who live in a residence hall have a vast number of opportunities for social interaction. Most all interactions that happen in both suite and traditional style residence halls are social in nature, and it is clear that the residence hall environment does indeed provide students with ample opportunity to have social interactions. Because of the number of opportunities students are afforded to socially engage with one another, it is clear that the residence hall environments are in fact a social experience within an academic environment as previously reported by Kennedy (2002), Kuh, et al. (1994), and Wheeler (1985).

As social interactions are the most common in both traditional and suite style living, this study also supports the notion that the residence hall living environment does provide opportunity for student development in the social arena as reported by Cheng (2004). As Curley (2003) suggested, this could include interactions with those from differing backgrounds.

This study did not support all of the body of knowledge in regards to student interaction, however. Although it did not directly contradict the past findings about

academic interaction in the residence halls (Whitt, et al., 1999), this study showed that students, both in suite and traditional style halls, rarely have academic interactions in their residence halls. While this does not expressly suggest that they have no academic interactions outside the classroom, it does show that students use their residence hall primarily for social rather than academic purposes. Prior research by Whitt, et al. (1999) in this area has shown that academic interactions with other peers outside the classroom enhance a student's ability to synthesize the material learned inside the classroom. My findings suggest that such synthesizing may not be taking place in the residence hall environment.

In terms of privacy, prior studies show that, in general, residence hall environments do not provide a sense of privacy or ownership for students (Amole, 2005; Schroeder & Jackson, 1987; Valins & Baum, 1973). My results contradict that by finding that suite style living does in fact offer more privacy for students. The design of suite style living prevents resident rooms from being open to a single hallway through which any other residents or visitors could pass. This leads to a certain amount of privacy for those who live in suites. Also, suite style living gives students two spaces to feel ownership over; the room and the suite space. This sense of ownership is not only recognized by the residents of the suite, but also by other members of the community.

Finally, Schroeder & Jackson (1987) indicate that an effective residence hall environment includes a variety of types of spaces, both individual and group. This study shows that although residence halls have many different spaces, most students stay within the confines of their own room or suite when interacting with others.

Implications for Future Practice, Research and Policy

There are implications of the findings for future practice, research, and policy. For example, this study reveals a need for residence life practitioners to encourage residents of all types of on-campus living facilities to utilize the spaces offered in residence halls beyond rooms and suite spaces. This could be done through programming, but ultimately would require them to create a culture where students are encouraged to use certain spaces for specific types of activities. For example, lounges could be utilized to encourage a study hour every weeknight evening. This would support better use of the lounge spaces. In both suite and traditional style residence halls cooking programs could be sponsored to teach residents how to cook for one. This may also require equipment to be added to each kitchen area. In addition, contests could be held to decorate the lobby or display work by students who live in the hall. This might encourage residents to use the lobby spaces because of an increase in visual interest.

In suite style residence halls there is a need for further programming to encourage interaction among residents of different suites. If students mostly interact within their suite area, practitioners should work to create more opportunities, formal or informal, where residents throughout the building could interact. This seems to happen at the beginning of each academic year, but dwindles as the year progresses. This study points to a need for that type of practice to continue. For example in suite style spaces, programs could encourage residents to host other members of their community in their suite space for a formal social activity. Since interactions dwindle mid-year, events like trick-or-treating on Halloween, or disseminating Valentine's cards in February, reminiscent of grade school programs, could encourage interactions among residents of the same

building who do not typically know one another because of the confines that suite living seems to impose.

This study shows that most of the interactions that residents of both traditional and suite style residence halls have are social. If practitioners want to increase the frequency of academic interactions in the residence halls then perhaps they could offer tutoring type programming in the halls. Also, faculty members or teaching assistants could be invited into the residence halls to put on programs, hold office hours, or simply chat informally with students.

The number of Eating interactions could increase if students were given dining options right in their residence hall. This might give them the opportunity to stay in the building instead of being forced to go to a dining hall at another location. Kitchens might also be added where there are none so that students have a place to go in their own residence hall where they can cook or eat.

In terms of research, this study looked at the types of interactions in both suite and traditional style residence halls. Because the data were not disaggregated by class standing, it was not clear if there was a difference between the types of interactions first year students had in comparison with upper division students. There could be more research in this area that examines whether lower and upper division students interact differently, or more or less in suite style communities as opposed to traditional style halls.

In addition to class standing, this study did not examine differences in types of interactions between males and females. A future study might examine how interactions in residence halls differ between men and women.

Trends in residence hall design may change in the coming years. Future research could repeat my method but include participants from newer styles of residence halls.

In terms of policy, this study indicates a need for policies about who can use lounge spaces. If the major lounge spaces in residence halls are often occupied by outside organizations, then residents of the building have fewer opportunities to use those lounges. Policies should be created limiting the amount of time outside organizations can reserve lounge space in residence halls to encourage residents to use those facilities.

Policies might also be created that only allow the residents of that residence hall to have access to the building at all hours of the day. Allowing outside parties to have access to a building during part or all of the day may limit the sense of community in that residence hall. Restricting access to a residence hall may increase the sense of safety as well as the knowledge about who lives in the community. This could lead to a higher sense of trust and comfort among the members of the community, and therefore an increased level of interaction.

This study showed that students who live in suite style residence halls have fewer interactions overall than do students who reside in traditional style halls. If student affairs professionals want to place first year students in an environment where the possibility for interaction is the highest, then housing policies should be put in place that limit housing options for first year students to traditional style residence hall environments.

The results of this study also showed that design elements of a residence hall do impact the way students interact within them. Policies could be created dictating some specific design elements that promote the desired outcome of more student interaction. For example, policies may dictate the placement of doorways in either suite or traditional

style residence halls. Doorways that are directly across from one another instead of staggered along a hallway may promote more interaction. Design policies may also call for wider hallways in traditional style residence halls in order to give residents more social space. Such policies may also require floor plans of either suite or traditional style residence halls to include wings that meet at an apex as opposed to one long hallway. This would break down the size of each community, but still promote interaction through one entrance and exit on each floor.

Limitations of the Study

As with all studies, this one had some limitations. The first dealt with the samples used in the study. Both samples (residents from traditional and suite style halls) were from the same campus. The culture of this campus may promote more or less interaction than other campuses. This may have produced a different outcome than if the study had been conducted at a different institution or across multiple institutions.

The second limitation also dealt with the sample used in the study. The participants of each focus group were asked to recall their interactions in their residence hall over the past four days. Some participants may have not been able to effectively recall all of their interactions. This may have resulted in fewer interactions reported than actually occurred, and may have skewed the data. Likewise, certain types of interactions (e.g., formal activities) may not have taken place in that four-day window which would have led to fewer reports of those types of activities.

Another limitation to the study dealt with the sample of residence halls. Not all residence halls used in the study were equipped with the same types of spaces. Some had lobbies while others did not. One traditional residence hall did not have a laundry area or

a kitchen. Some residence halls had fairly large study areas while others did not. Two of the residence halls had classroom spaces. These facility differences may have resulted in skewed data about what interactions took place, where, and with whom.

In conclusion, building design has been shown to influence interaction in prior studies (Ellen, 1982; Hamrick, et al., 2002; Strange & Banning, 2001) and the same finding occurred here. Those in traditional halls have many casual interactions simply because they walk by one another's rooms going in and out of the building. In suite style halls, on the other hand, residents have to work harder if they want to get to know residents outside their immediate suite. Those who want to maximize social and academic developmental opportunities for residents of all types of buildings would be well served to make note of these findings. It would seem that purposeful programming is necessary to promote such development. Likewise, policies that encourage interactions among residents and full use of building facilities might be warranted. Only when professionals are fully aware of the influence of building design on the outcomes residents achieve can they optimize developmental opportunities for residents.

Residence halls have been shown to foster a great amount of social interaction among college students (Heilweil, 1973; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1982; Schroeder & Jackson, 1987) and the same conclusion can be formed from this study. Regardless of building design, college students who live in the residence hall environment have scores of opportunities to engage with others socially. Practitioners who wish to develop well rounded students would be best served to understand these findings. If professionals wish to see this developmental outcome in students, they must provide more opportunities for academic or formal interactions in the residence hall environment in addition to the social

ones that seem to happen naturally. It would appear that the most effective way to achieve this would be through intentional programming that encourages peer to peer academic or formal interaction, or invites faculty members to participate in the residence hall setting. When practitioners understand the potential holistic developmental opportunities that could exist in the college student living environment, then they can utilize programming efforts to magnify student outcomes through a wider variety of types of interactions.