Predicting Attitudes Towards Authority Based on Personality in a University Residential Life Setting

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of extraversion on the perception of residential life by college students living on campus. A total of 149 undergraduates completed a brief Introversion-Extraversion scale and a Residential Life Questionnaire. Results indicated strong and significant correlations between extraversion and higher levels of dissatisfaction with the rules set forth and those who enforce the rules, the number of times a student was documented for rule infractions, and how frequently a student consumed alcohol and how many drinks per event a student typically consumed. It appears that extraversion is associated with drinking alcohol in social situations which is associated with risky behaviors which is associated with infractions of Residential Life rules and negative opinions of this office. This study linked college conduct problems to personality through alcohol. Important differences between seniors and freshmen, sophomores, and juniors were frequently noted.

When coming to live on a university campus, students are in many cases away from home and the watchful eye of their parents for the first time. In a sense, they are living on their own but they must, in fact, live according to the standards of the university. The Office of Residential Life is the department in charge of creating rules and regulations and then implementing and enforcing them. This authority over students may be met with any number of responses. Personality may play an important role in their reactions.

Lounsbury and DeNeui (1996) reported Extraversion scores correlated significantly with psychological sense of community (PSC) scores and resulted in more interactions and more involvement in activities. Extraverts sought out shared experiences and engaged in social interaction. In addition, extraverts came to campus with high expectations for social involvement and community. Introverts, on the other hand, interacted less often and spent less time socializing.

Morossanova (2003) reported that extraverts are also impulsive. This study found negative correlations between Modified Eysenck Personality Questionnaire scores with both planning and flexibility. Extraverts showed fewer instances of self-regulation than introverts. The profile of the extravert showed high action programming with little developed goal planning. Introverts were more meticulous in planning their actions and considering different plans whereas extraverts were more likely to act and then consider their actions later.

Fischer, Smith, Anderson, and Flory (2003) investigated the effect extraversion plays in drinking behaviors of college students. Extraverted individuals were more likely to have social expectancies of alcohol as a facilitator of social interaction. Hussong (2003) reported that extraverts have social motives for their drinking that unfortunately predict more problem behaviors. With the expectation that alcohol facilitates social behavior, extraverts are more likely to engage in behaviors that violate Residential Life policy.

Extraverted individuals are expected to have more involvement in social situations as well as underage
drinking and thus have more experiences with the Office of Residential Life. Vik, Carrello, Tate, and Field (2000) reported that 75 – 90% of college students reported alcohol consumption and that this consumption often contributed to interactions with authority figures. 33.9% of 342 participants reported authority problems on campus including 23.7% reporting getting into trouble with their resident assistant. Extraverts are therefore expected to be more likely to react unfavorably to such involvement Introverted individuals, however, are expected to have less involvement with the Office of Residential Life and, as a result, hold a more favorable view of the office. They are likely to have interacted with the office only under non-stressful, problem-free situations as opposed to interactions concerning problematic behavior or rule violations.

Obst and White (2005) found that social identification factors such as association within groups and ties to these groups predicted a student’s psychological sense of community. This sense of community related positively to affect as well as cognitive aspects of the person. Pretty (1990) found that a positive feeling towards community in a residence hall was associated with environmental success as well as better interpersonal relationships. Involvement was significantly related with the psychological sense of community. The community within a residence hall relies on the interactions between students and each other as well as students and authority figures. These interactions provide numerous opportunities for personalities to either mesh or clash.

One very important issue students in a residential life setting face is that of interacting with authority figures who very often are fellow students. Dormitory residents frequently disagree with Resident Advisors regarding the boundaries between personal choice and college authority. Helwig, Arnold, Tan, and Boyd (2003) noted that people question authority based on what they believe to lie within the purview of their own personal autonomy.

The purpose of the present study was to study personality as a contributing factor to the frequency with which students encounter the disciplinary arm of Residential Life. Specifically, this study aimed to identify the role that introversion-extraversion plays in situations where students are interacting with authority figures in their places of residence.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants were 149 undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 22. A total of 126 were female (84.6%) and 22 were male (14.8%) and 1 participant (.7%) failed to indicate their gender. A total of 10 participants were freshmen, 59 sophomores, 49 juniors, 23 seniors, and 17 did not report their class year. Regarding ethnicity, 119 (79.9%) were non-Hispanic whites, and the remainder Black (8), Hispanic (8), East Asian (3), South Asian (1), American Indian (1), and “other” (9). The sample was drawn from Fordham University’s Rose Hill campus which is a private, Jesuit university in the Bronx, New York. The University’s demographics were reported at the time of this study as 58.8% female and 75.5% were Non-Hispanic/White. Participants needed to have been on-campus residents in university housing for at least one semester. Participation was completely voluntary with no compensation given.

**Measures**

Participants initially completed an informed consent sheet. They then completed a demographic questionnaire including gender, class year, ethnicity, and GPA. Participants then completed a Residential Life Survey regarding the level and quality of interaction participants had had with Residential Life staff members at their university. This measure consisted of ten items that were answered using a five point Likert-type scale. Finally, participants completed a brief version of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ-BV: Sato, 2005). This version of the Personality Questionnaire was designed to identify introversion/extraversion as well as neuroticism using a short but reliable scale. The Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Brief Version is a scale that has been adapted from the longer version. The psychoticism scale was eliminated by Sato because his abbreviated scale was intended to be used with college students. The introversion/extraversion (I/E) and neuroticism scales were reduced by Sato to two 24 item scales. Participants register their responses on a five point Likert-type scale where 1 is not at all and 5 is extremely.

Items 13 and 19 are reverse scored. The sum of the odd numbered items constitutes the I/E score where high scores indicate extraversion and low scores indicate introversion. The sum of the even numbered items constitutes the neuroticism score where high scores indicate a strong degree of neuroticism. Both measures took approximately five to ten minutes to complete.

**Procedure**

Participants were given the option of completing the questionnaires at floor meetings held in every building on campus prior to the university’s spring break. The meetings were a gathering of all residents living on a particular floor in a building. Buildings
were chosen based on the time of their meetings as well as the population of the building as it was the hope for a balance between freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. If they chose to participate, participants read and signed an informed consent form and instructed that participation was completely optional. Approximately one third of the students solicited chose to participate in the study. Participants were then given the questionnaire designed for gathering information concerning residential life followed by the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Brief Version. Questionnaires were distributed and collected by the first author.

**Results**

Table 1 show that students were mainly sophomores having been on campus for just over a year and a half on average. The participants were good students with a reported G.P.A. of 3.86 (SD = .71). Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations for the residential life questions. The highest mean score for the questionnaire concerning the Office of Residential Life and interactions with them was for the question of how satisfied students were with their overall on-campus experience. The means were also high for the questions of the importance of the Residential Life staff, how pleased students were with their interactions with these staff members, and how fair students believed the rules in the residence halls were. This is consistent with low scores for negative feelings towards the Office of Residential Life. The mean for the question regarding the frequency of use of alcohol was also high, higher than the frequency with which students reported participating in Residential Life sponsored programming. Participants did not report high levels of feelings that alcohol negatively affecting life in a residence hall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1</th>
<th>Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class year</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.P.A.</td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 2</th>
<th>Descriptive Statistics for the Residential Life Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many semesters, including the current one, have you lived on campus?</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often do you participate in programming put together by Residential Life staff?</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many times have you been documented by an employee of the Office of Residential Life?</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How pleased are you with your interactions with Residential Life staff members?</td>
<td>3.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important do you think the presence of Residential Life staff members in the residence halls is?</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How fair do you think Residential Life rules in the residence halls are?</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with your overall on-campus experience?</td>
<td>3.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How frequently do you consume alcohol?</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many alcoholic drinks do you typically consume per event?</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what degree do you think alcohol negatively affects life in the residence halls?</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for the Extraversion and Neuroticism scales of the EPQ-BV. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951). The internal consistency of the Extraversion score was .94 and the internal consistency of the Neuroticism score was .88. An indirect indicator of scale validity is the expectation that the Extraversion and Neuroticism scores are inversely related on the basis that neuroticism consists mainly of depression and anxiety which are internalizing, in contrast with externalizing, symptoms. The significant negative correlation between neuroticism and extraversion on the EPQ-BV, \( r(135) = -.36, p < .001 \), supports the validity of this scale. Further evidence that the EPQ-BV is measuring what it purports to measure is provided by the results of an exploratory factor analysis for which the scree plot revealed two main components (see Figure 1). Notice that the third factor is both much lower than the second factor and comparable to the fourth and remaining factors. This pattern favors a two-factor interpretation.

### TABLE 3

**Descriptive Statistics for Sato’s Modified Eysenck Personality Questionnaire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPQ Extraversion score</td>
<td>42.55</td>
<td>8.76</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPQ Neuroticism score</td>
<td>29.72</td>
<td>8.52</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### FIGURE 1

*Scree plot for the exploratory factor analysis of the brief version of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Sato, 2005).*

**Personality Related Correlations**

Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were calculated to quantify the relationships among personality, alcohol consumption, residential life attitudes, and behavior (infractions). It was expected that students with high extraversion would report higher levels of dissatisfaction with the rules set forth and those who enforce the rules. How fair students believed the rules set forth by the office of residential life to be was negatively correlated with extraversion, \( r(143) = -.20, p < .02 \). On the basis that students mature as they go through college and on the basis that the legal drinking age in New York State is 21 which means that typically only seniors are of legal age, the data for the 23 seniors were analyzed separately from the 114 other participants. Fairness was negatively correlated with extraversion for freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(112) = -.24, p < .02 \), but positively for seniors, \( r(21) = .29, p > .051 \). Although not significantly different from zero, these two correlation coefficients are significantly different, \( Z = 2.23, p < .05 \).

Extraversion was found, as expected, to correlate positively with the number of times a student was documented by a staff member from the Office of Residential Life, \( r(143) = .17, p < .05 \). This relationship was slightly stronger for seniors, \( r(21) = .27, p > .05 \), than for freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(112) = .24, p < .02 \). Although not significantly different from zero, these two correlation coefficients are significantly different, \( Z = 2.23, p < .05 \).

### Alcohol Related Correlations

It was expected that those students who consumed more alcohol and drank more frequently would report being documented more and express more negative attitudes towards the Office of Residential Life. The number of times that a student was documented was positively correlated with how frequently a student consumed alcohol, \( r(144) = .29, p = .001 \), and how many drinks they consumed per event, \( r(145) = .33, p = .001 \). This finding was more due to freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(110) = .21, p < .03 \), than to seniors, \( r(21) = .168, p > .05 \).

How many drinks a student consumed per event was negatively correlated with how fair they thought the rules in the residence halls were, \( r(145) = -.22, p < .01 \). This finding was largely due to freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(116) = -.22, p < .02 \). The relationship was positive for seniors though not significantly different from zero, \( r(21) = .120, p > .05 \). The difference between these correlations of different sign was not statistically significant, \( Z = 1.43, p > .05 \). For most students, higher levels of alcohol consumption were associated with more dissatisfaction with the office.

It was expected that extraverts would consume alcohol as a social facilitator more than introverts lead-
ing to more risky behaviors. Extraversion was correlated positively with how frequently a student consumed alcohol, \( r(140) = .22, p < .01 \). This relationship was mainly due to freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(110) = .21, p < .03 \), than seniors, \( r(21) = .17, p > .05 \). It was also expected that extraversion was positively correlated with how many drinks per event a student typically consumed, \( r(143) = .25, p < .01 \). This relationship was also mainly due to freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(112) = .27, p < .01 \), than seniors, \( r(21) = .09, p > .05 \).

It was hypothesized that students who had been documented by Residential Life staff more often would have more negative attitudes towards the rules and those who enforce them in the residence halls. The number of times a student was documented correlated negatively with how pleased they were with their interactions with staff members, \( r(147) = -.19, p < .02 \). This relationship was somewhat stronger for freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(116) = -.226, p < .02 \), than for seniors, \( r(21) = -.15, p > .05 \). It was also hypothesized that the number of times a student was documented correlated negatively with how fair they felt the rules in the residence halls were, \( r(147) = .27, p < .001 \). This relationship is primarily due to freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(116) = -.37, p < .001 \). A slight positive correlation emerged for seniors, \( r(21) = .17, p > .05 \), which while not significantly different from zero was significantly different from the negative correlation found for freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( Z = 2.35, p < .05 \).

**Gender Related Correlations**

It was expected that males would consume more alcohol than females and would therefore be documented more frequently. Female gender was negatively correlated with the number of times a student had been documented by a staff member, \( r(146) = -.23, p < .01 \). This relationship was about the same for freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(115) = -.14, p > .05 \), as for seniors, \( r(21) = -.20, p > .05 \). How frequently a student consumed alcohol was also expected to be negatively correlated with female gender, \( r(143) = -.17, p < .04 \). This effect was slightly stronger for freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(113) = -.21, p > .05 \), than for seniors, \( r(21) = -.19, p > .05 \). It was expected that female gender was negatively correlated with how many drinks they typically consumed at an event, \( r(146) = -.23, p < .01 \). This effect was mainly due to freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(115) = -.29, p < .002 \). Seniors demonstrated no such effect, \( r(21) = .05, p > .05 \).

**Community Involvement Correlations**

It was expected that students who were more involved in the community within the residence hall and therefore attended more Residential Life programs would have more positive attitudes towards the office in general. Student participation in Office of Residential Life program correlated positively with how pleased students were with their interactions with staff members, \( r(146) = .29, p < .001 \). This relationship was somewhat stronger for freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(115) = .35, p < .001 \), than for seniors, \( r(21) = .12, p > .05 \), although the difference between these two correlations was not statistically significant, \( Z = 1.04, p > .05 \).

Students who participated in more Office of Residential Life programs were more likely to believe that Residential Life staff members were important, \( r(146) = .32, p < .001 \). This relationship was somewhat stronger for freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(115) = .34, p < .001 \), than it was for seniors, \( r(21) = .24, p > .05 \). Students who participated in more Office of Residential Life programs were more likely to believe that Residential Life staff members were fair in enforcing the rules, \( r(146) = .27, p < .001 \). This effect was essentially due to freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(115) = .33, p < .001 \), as seniors showed little effect, \( r(21) = -.04, p > .05 \). The difference between these correlations was not statistically significant, \( Z = 1.61, p > .05 \). Students who participated in more Office of Residential Life programs were more likely to be satisfied with their overall campus experience, \( r(146) = .24, p < .003 \). This effect was entirely due to freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(115) = .29, p < .001 \), as no effect was found for seniors, \( r(21) = -.01, p > .05 \). Students who participated in more Office of Residential Life programs believed that alcohol negatively affected life in the halls, \( r(146) = .31, p < .001 \). This finding was more strongly associated with freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(115) = .33, p < .001 \), than with seniors, \( r(21) = .24, p > .05 \). Participation in programming negatively correlated with how frequently students consumed alcohol, \( r(143) = -.22, p < .01 \). However, this view was held more strongly by freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(113) = -.30, p < .001 \), than by seniors, \( r(21) = -.09, p > .05 \). Students who participated in more Residential Life programs consumed fewer drinks per event, \( r(146) = -.20, p < .02 \). This relationship was somewhat stronger for freshman, sophomores, and juniors, \( r(115) = -.23, p < .03 \), than for seniors, \( r(21) = -.14, p > .05 \).
Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role personality plays in a student’s attitudes towards authority figures in residence halls. We found that extraversion correlated negatively with perceived fairness of Residential Life rules for freshman, sophomores, and juniors but positively for seniors. On the presumption that seniors are more mature and oriented towards graduation and commencement of their career compared to the new found independence of freshman and party orientation of sophomores, perhaps this differential personality expression may be explained by greater maturity for seniors.

Extraversion was also associated with more documented infractions. Morossanova (2003) reported that extraverts are more likely to be engaging in risky behaviors and these are exactly the behaviors that staff members from the office of Residential Life are charged with confronting and addressing.

Alcohol consumption was also more strongly related to alcohol consumption by freshman, sophomores, and juniors than seniors and was positively related to the number of documented infractions and number of drinks per event which was negatively related of perceived fairness of Residential Life staff and negative attitudes towards them. A maturity factor seems to be a reasonable explanation here as well. Community involvement appeared to have effects opposite those of alcohol.

Correlations with gender were about the same for seniors as for freshman, sophomores, and juniors. This finding is not surprising given that gender does not undergo development through college.

Limitations

This study was conducted using a series of self-report measures. This method does open up the research to inaccuracies in reporting from the participants. The questionnaire regarding interactions with the Office of Residential Life could have benefited from more questions concerning the students’ living situations including how many roommates they lived with and whether or not they lived in suite style housing. Living with more people may point to more extraverted qualities and may open people up to more opportunities for rule breaking and risk taking. Reports on attitudes towards the enforcement of rules in the residence halls could also have been biased by how recently a student had been documented for an infraction.

There is considerable variability concerning the residential life staff member who confronts a situation as well as the severity of an infraction which could lead to very different feelings about the experience. Participants did report considerable individual variability on the Residential Life questionnaire. This could reflect the significant variability between the situations for which students get into trouble. All infractions are not in a standardized setting and so that variability could affect negative and positive attitudes. Data collection may have benefited from gathering information from the authority figures themselves on the infractions reported by students. This could clarify which documented infractions were for more major infractions and which were for more minor rule breaking.

Future research may benefit from introducing the personality construct of authoritarianism to the study. The authoritarian personality is marked by its relation to order and rules (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). External standards, such as those put forth by the Office of Residential Life influence the behavior of the authoritarian personality. This dynamic could add to the understanding of the way personality interacts with attitudes towards authority in the residence halls.

References


APPENDIX

Residential Life Survey

School/Class year:   FC    CBA    Senior    Junior    Sophomore    Freshman

Gender: Male    Female

Ethnicity (optional): ___________________________

G.P.A.  <1.5  1.6 – 2.0  2.1 – 2.5  2.6 – 3.0  3.1 – 3.5  3.6 – 4.0

1) How many semesters, including the current one, have you lived on campus?
   <2    2–4    5–6    7–8    8–10

2) How often do you participate in programming put together by Residential Life staff?
   Never    Sometimes    Often    Very Often

3) How many times have you been documented by an employee of the Office of Residential Life?
   0    1–2    3–4    5–6    >7

4) How pleased are you with your interactions with Residential Life staff members
   Very dissatisfied    dissatisfied    neutral    satisfied    very satisfied

5) How important do you think the presence of Residential Life Staff members in the residence halls?
   Very unimportant    unimportant    neutral    important    very important

6) How fair do you think Residential Life rules in the residence halls are?
   Very unfair    unfair    neutral    fair    very fair

7) How satisfied are you with your overall on-campus experience?
   Very unsatisfied    unsatisfied    neutral    satisfied    very satisfied

8) How frequently do you consume alcohol?
   I don’t consume alcohol    more than once per week    once per week
   2 – 3 times per week    almost every day    every day

9) How many alcoholic drinks do you typically consume per event?
   I don’t consume alcohol    1–2 drinks    3–4 drinks    5–6 drinks    >8 drinks

10) To what degree do you think alcohol negatively affects life in the residence halls?
    Not at all    barely    moderately    very little    a lot