

Empirical Study of the Effect of Dormitory Conflict on Dormitory Exclusion

—The Mediation Role of Competition

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Abstract

The current study focuses on the influence of dormitory conflict on dormitory exclusion behavior, and examines the mediating role of competitive solution strategies. Based on a survey of 377 college students, the results show that: 1) The dormitory conflict and its communication barrier factors have a significant positive impact on the dormitory exclusion behavior; 2) Dormitory conflict, communication barriers and private interests; it has a significant positive impact on the competition and behavior; 3) Competition plays a partial intermediary role between dormitory conflict and dormitory exclusion; it also plays a partial intermediary role in communication barriers and dormitory exclusion.

Keywords

Dormitory Conflict, Dormitory Exclusion, Competition, Intermediary Variable

1. Introduction

In recent years, there have been frequent incidents of injuries on campus caused by interpersonal conflicts in dormitories. In 2018, Wang Zijie, a Chinese international student at Queen's University in Canada, poisoned the food and water of his roommate Hu, who noticed the act and reported it to the authorities, leading to a prison sentence. In 2016, Ma from Jinqiao College of Kunming University of Science and Technology fatally stabbed his roommate Peng during a conflict which arose when Peng disturbed Ma by singing in their dormitory. In 2013, Jiang from Jincheng College of Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, was fatally stabbed by his roommate Yuan following a dispute over Yuan's failure

to open the door in time for Jiang. Among all the similar incidents, one of the most notable and impactful cases is the “Fudan Poisoning Case”, which happened in 2013. Lin Senhao, a graduate student at Fudan University in Shanghai, poisoned the dormitory water dispenser due to trivial matters. Following the “Fudan Poisoning Case”, the phrase “grateful to my roommate for not killing me” went viral on the internet, which reflects widespread public concern over interpersonal relationships in university dormitories.

The dormitory is the main place of university study and life. With the reform of the higher education system, most universities have implemented the credit system. Administrative classes will gradually be replaced by course-based classes. Compared to administrative classes, which have fixed membership, low mobility, and limited communication among members, dormitories have stale membership, low mobility, and frequent member interactions. Therefore, student dormitories have become an important place for university students to live collectively and communicate with each other. Surveys have shown that the most common type of interpersonal conflict among college students (See **Appendix**) is dormitory-related (Deng, 2003). A survey by China Youth Daily in 2015 found that about 70.5% of students had felt frustrated and distressed due to dormitory conflicts, and 67.6% of students had considered changing their dormitories (China Youth Daily, 2015). A follow-up survey by China Youth Daily in 2017 on college students’ dormitory relationships revealed that 42.28% of students had experienced conflicts with their roommates, with differences in living habits and a lack of attention to communication methods being the main causes of these conflicts (China Youth Daily, 2017).

According to the previous studies, there is no uniform definition of dormitory exclusion. Some studies simply introduced social exclusion into the dormitory study and called it “social exclusion in the dormitory” (Ding, Dong, Liu, & Tian, 2024). Based on the author’s years of experience in student affairs, it has been found that the phenomenon of dormitory exclusion is indeed presented, and it affects the interpersonal relationships in the dormitory. Considering that social exclusion is when an individual does not receive recognition from a group, family, or peers, and is excluded from the system (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001), the current study holds the view that dormitory exclusion is a social phenomenon where an individual is not accepted by the members of their dormitory, is rejected or ostracized, which thus causes the lack of a sense of belonging to the dormitory they live in (Jiang, Zhang, Wang, Lu, & Xu, 2011). Research shows that the exclusion has a significant impact on employee performance, turnover tendency, job satisfaction, and mental health (Jiang, Zhang, Wang, Lu, & Xu, 2011; Du, 2012; Li, 2013). From the perspective of interpersonal conflict resolution, this paper deeply analyzes the influence mechanism of dormitory interpersonal conflict on dormitory exclusion behaviour. This further provides references and insights for the management of dormitory conflicts in colleges and universities.

2. Theoretical Basis and Research Hypothesis

2.1. The Impact of Dormitory Conflict on Dormitory Exclusion and Competitive Behaviour

University dormitory conflicts refer to contradictions that occur among members within university dormitories. These conflicts manifest as emotional hostility, indifference, tension, disharmony, or even physical disputes in emotional, verbal and behavioural aspects due to the temporary inability to coordinate needs, interests, goals, or opinions in events such as study, life, and emotions (Cao, 2006).

Dormitory exclusion mainly has five main characters: 1) There are specific occasions, which means this phenomenon often occurs in the dormitory; 2) Dormitory exclusion is one of the subjective perceptions. The situation and individual differences will affect the reaction to the same behaviour. 3) The intention of dormitory exclusion is ambiguous. Some of the exclusions are intentional by the members, while some are completely unconscious; 4) Dormitory exclusion is a “cold violence”, which is primarily characterized by attitude indifference and behavioural ostracism. 5) The external manifestations of dormitory exclusion are neglect and avoidance, which are usually more indirect and hidden. People’s perception of fairness affects their level of trust (Teng, Jin, & Liu, 2016). Xiao (2011)’s research suggests that significant reasons for others’ exclusion of an individual are inappropriate behaviours exhibited by employees in the workplace. Scott, Restubog, & Zagenczyk (2013) have found that employees who display uncivil behaviours in the workplace are more likely to experience exclusion from others. They confirmed that the lack of personal skills such as interpersonal harmony and situational awareness can make employees more likely to be excluded by others (Wu & He, 2015). In summary, university students are prone to interpersonal conflicts in dormitory life, such as communication barriers, differences in daily routines, competition for shared resources, loss of personal interests, and differences in social interactions. These negative conflicts are more likely to lead students to be excluded by their dormitory mates. Therefore, the present study proposed the following hypothesis:

H₁: Dormitory conflict has a positive impact on dormitory exclusion

H_{1a}: Communication barriers have a positive impact on dormitory exclusion

H_{1b}: Differences in daily routines have a positive impact on the dormitory exclusion

H_{1c}: The competition for shared resources has a positive impact on the dormitory exclusion

H_{1d}: The loss of private interests has a positive impact on the dormitory exclusion

H_{1e}: The difference in human behaviour has a positive impact on dormitory exclusion

Shen (2016) studied conflicts in university students’ romantic relationships and found that the greater the level of conflict, the more inclined individuals are to choose competitive strategies for resolving the conflict rather than accommodating

their partner Wu (2014) found that communication barriers, daily routines, competition for resources, perceived loss of private interests, interpersonal skills, and conflict resolution through competition are significantly positively correlated. Therefore, the present study proposed the following hypothesis:

H₂: Dorm conflicts have a positive impact on competition

H_{2a}: Communication barriers have a positive impact on competition

H_{2b}: Differences in sleep and rest habits have a positive impact on competition

H_{2c}: The competition for public resources has a positive impact on the competition

H_{2d}: The loss of private interests has a positive impact on the competition

H_{2e}: Differences in human behaviour have a positive impact on competition

2.2. The Mediation Role of Competition

Conflict itself is not the key to the problem, instead, how to deal with the conflict is crucial (Thomas, 1992). Floyd (2009)'s statement suggests that every choice we make might impact our relationships. Facing the same conflict situations, there are many different strategies for conflict resolution. However, not everyone can employ the most appropriate strategy. The research conducted by Zhang & Fan (2003) indicates that university students mainly use three strategies to resolve interpersonal conflicts: cooperative compromise, avoidance and accommodation, and competitive strategies. Research by Xu & Liang (1998) demonstrates that some university students adopt less proactive and inappropriate conflict resolution methods, which are fundamental causes of subsequent violent behaviour. Whether conflict resolution strategies are rational and appropriate directly impacts individuals' subsequent behaviours, fostering either friendly and peaceful behaviours or retaliatory violence. Studies indicate that interpersonal satisfaction was higher when university students used a collaborative conflict (Liang & Duan, 2018). Moreover, individuals who adopt competitive solutions in conflict tend to be highly concerned about themselves and less concerned about others (Yang, 2020). Also, they will rely on authority or power to defeat the opponent in solving interpersonal conflicts. According to Scott, Restubog, & Zagenczyk (2013)'s research on corporate employees, when an employee is in a low-value position that does not benefit others, the likelihood of that employee being excluded increases. Additionally, some studies point out that in the corporate culture, excessive emphasis on competition is easy to induce workplace exclusion (Xiao, 2011). The researchers showed that due to excessive competition, employees are unwilling to share their work skills and some important information or resources with colleagues, and colleagues are likely to isolate and suppress each other and induce exclusion. In addition, research has shown that the competitive behaviour of college students is significantly related to the dormitory relationship, and the competition might largely lead to the deterioration of the dormitory relationship (Zhao & Su, 2015). Therefore, the current study proposed the following hypothesis (See Figure 1):

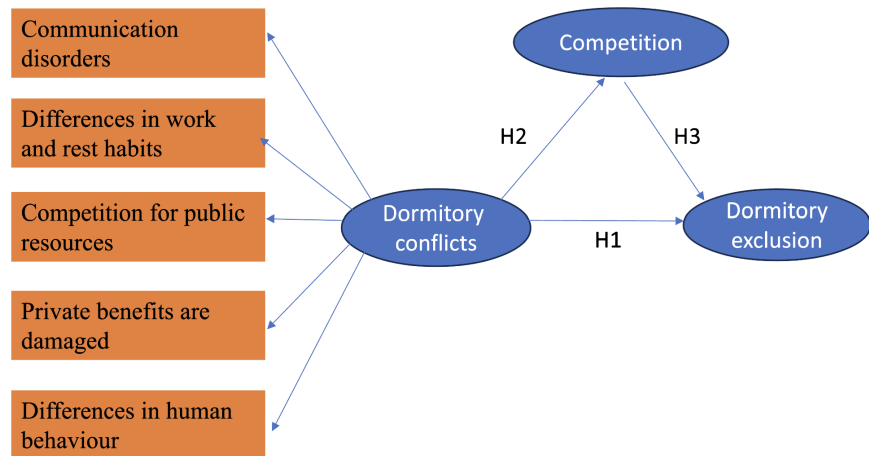


Figure 1. Plot of the variables in the study.

H₃: Competition has a significant mediating effect between dormitory conflict and dormitory exclusion.

H_{3a}: Competition has a significant mediating effect between communication barriers and dormitory exclusion.

H_{3b}: Competition has a significant intermediary effect between the difference in work and rest habits and dormitory exclusion.

H_{3c}: Competition has a significant intermediary effect between the competition for public resources and the dormitory exclusion.

H_{3d}: Competition has a significant intermediary effect between the loss of private interests and dormitory exclusion.

H_{3e}: Competition has a significant mediation effect between interpersonal differences and dormitory exclusion.

3. Design

3.1. Participants

On four university campuses in Liaoning Province, questionnaires were randomly distributed to undergraduates in libraries and classrooms in 2023. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, and 377 valid responses were collected, with a valid response rate of 94.25%. Among all the participants, there are 212 boys, 165 girls, 96 freshmen, 83 sophomores, 92 junior students, and 106 seniors. The students' ages ranged from 17 to 24, with an average age of 20 (± 2).

3.2. Measurements of Variables

To ensure the reliability and validity of the measurement, this study employs well-established scales previously developed by scholars to measure dormitory conflicts and competition. The dormitory conflict scale used in this study is based on the scale compiled by Jing (2007), consisting of a total of 20 items. It covers five dimensions, which are communication barriers, differences in daily routines, competition for shared resources, damage to personal interests, and differences in

interpersonal behaviour. After pre-testing, item number 17 was deleted from the scale. Moreover, the measurement of competition in this study used the competitive subscale from the Dormitory Conflict Resolution Scale compiled by Jia (2009), which consists of 4 questions. In addition, dormitory exclusion was measured through interviews with students and modifications to the Occupational Exclusion Scale (Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008), which consists of 4 questions.

3.3. Measures of Statistical Analysis

SPSS 24.0 was used for correlation analysis, regression analysis, and mediation effect hypothesis testing.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1. Common Method Bias Analysis

Since the questionnaires in this study are all answered by the same participants, there is a significant risk of common method variance (CMV). To avoid this issue, the questionnaire was designed to be answered anonymously during the research design phase. The instructions were crafted using neutral words to avoid explicitly stating the true purposes and intentions of the study to achieve a good psychological separation. Additionally, before conducting a formal analysis, an examination of CMV was performed. Following the method proposed by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff (2003), an exploratory factor analysis of the entire questionnaire was conducted without rotation. The first principal component factor accounted for 27.45% of the variance, which did not constitute a majority. This indicates that none of the measurement scales show significant loading on the same factor, suggesting that the CMV is unlikely to impact the research conclusions.

A total of 377 valid responses were collected in this study, including 212 male students, 165 female students, 96 freshmen, 83 sophomores, 92 junior students and 106 senior students, as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of participants (N = 377).

Socio-demographic Characteristics		Number (n)
Gender	Male	212
	Female	165
Grade	Freshman	96
	Sophomore	83
	Junior	92
	Senior	106
Only child	Yes	254
	No	123
Origin	City	243
	Town	55
	Countryside	79

4.2. Correlation Analysis

The mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficients of the variables are shown in **Table 1**. Dormitory conflict and its dimensions are significantly positively correlated with competition and dormitory exclusion, which indicates that the hypotheses in this study are preliminarily supported. The Cronbach's α coefficients of each scale were greater than 0.70. This indicates a good reliability of these scales.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing Analysis

1) Overall hypothesis testing analysis

As shown in **Table 2**, after controlling for demographic variables (i.e., gender, only-child status, grade, and place of origin), the independent variable dormitory conflict was included in the regression equation against the dependent variable dormitory exclusion. It has been found that dormitory conflict had a significant positive effect on competition ($M2, \beta = 0.44, p < 0.01$) and dormitory exclusion ($\beta = 0.53, p < 0.01$). Therefore, both primary hypothesis (H1) and secondary hypothesis (H2) were supported.

Table 2. Mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficient (N = 377).

variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Dormitory conflict	(0.967)							
communication barriers	0.925**	(0.900)						
Differences in work and rest habits	0.838**	0.668**	(0.803)					
Competition for public resources	0.940**	0.883**	0.732**	(0.912)				
Private interests are damaged	0.914**	0.788**	0.739**	0.824**	(0.845)			
Differences in human behaviour	0.940**	0.847**	0.766**	0.847**	0.823**	(0.871)		
compete	0.451**	0.419**	0.327**	0.435**	0.449**	0.417**	(0.872)	
Dormitory exclusion	0.534**	0.527**	0.394**	0.521**	0.468**	0.507**	0.683**	(0.941)
average	2.499	2.302	2.733	2.384	2.564	2.536	1.855	1.706
standard error	1.012	1.143	1.108	1.139	1.077	1.075	0.852	0.910

Pour: *representation $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, same below; Cronbach's α value in parenthesis of the diagonal.

The dormitory exclusion was set as the dependent variable. After adding the intermediary variable, which is the competition, the regression coefficient of dormitory conflict on dormitory exclusion changed significantly ($M2, \beta = 0.29, p < 0.01$). This shows that the competition had a partial mediation effect between dormitory conflict and dormitory exclusion. Thus, the hypothesis H3a was supported.

2) Sub-hypothesis testing and analysis

As shown in **Table 2**, the various dimensions of dormitory conflicts (i.e., communication barriers, differences in daily routines, competition for public resources,

damage to private interests, and differences in interpersonal behaviour) were respectively entered into the regression equation. The results found that communication barriers (M3, $\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$) and damage to private interests ($\beta = 0.26$, $p < 0.01$) have a significant positive impact on competition, supporting hypotheses H2a and H2d. However, hypotheses H2b, H2c, and H2e were rejected. Additionally, communication barriers (M6, $\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$) have a significant positive impact on dormitory exclusion, supporting hypothesis H3a, while hypotheses H3b, H3c, H3d, and H3e were rejected. After adding the mediating variable (competition), the regression coefficient of communication barriers (M6, $\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.05$; M9, $\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.05$) on dormitory exclusion changed significantly, indicating that competition has a partial mediating effect between communication barriers and dormitory exclusion. Therefore, hypothesis H3a was supported, while hypotheses H3b, H3c, and H3d were rejected (See **Table 3**).

Table 3. Results of regression analysis (N = 377).

variable	compete				Dormitory exclusion				
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9
sex	-0.118*	-0.079	-0.067	-0.073	-0.025	-0.028	0.008	0.018	0.009
The only child	-0.035	-0.059	-0.054	-0.046	-0.074	-0.074	-0.022	-0.042	-0.044
grade	0.097	0.037	0.024	0.069	-0.004	-0.008	0.003	-0.025	-0.021
origin of student	-0.064	-0.013	-0.012	-0.055	0.006	0.006	-0.012	0.014	0.013
Dormitory conflict		0.441**			0.533**			0.289**	
communication barriers			0.249*			0.245*			0.204*
Differences in work and rest habits			-0.079			-0.037			0.007
Competition for public resources			0.146			0.174			0.092
Private interests are damaged			0.262**			0.030			-0.117
Differences in human behavior			0.068			0.155			0.116
compete							0.681**	0.555**	0.559**
R2	0.026	0.214	0.228	0.016	0.291	0.304	0.468	0.533	0.546
ΔR^2	0.026	0.188	0.202	0.016	0.275	0.288	0.452	0.517	0.530
ΔF	2.506	88.85	19.224	1.494	144.174	30.422	315.113	204.870	71.123

Note: M1 - M3 represents the regression model of the control variable and dormitory conflict and each dimension, while M4 - M9 represents the regression model of the control variable, dormitory conflict and each dimension, and the dormitory exclusion after competition.

5. Discussion

5.1. Dormitory Conflicts and Communication Barriers Can Further Lead to Dormitory Exclusion

The results show that dormitory conflict and communication barriers have a significant positive impact on dormitory exclusion behavior, which is consistent with previous studies on interpersonal conflict and social exclusion. As the main place

for college students to study and live, if the conflict between dormitory members is not properly resolved, it will often lead to emotional alienation, behavioral exclusion, and even more serious campus violence. Communication barriers between roommates make it impossible for each other to accurately communicate their thoughts and feelings, make it difficult to understand and empathize, and easily lead to misunderstandings and suspicions. When roommates interpret each other's behavior based on wrong assumptions and judgments, it is easier to exacerbate each other's estrangement and exclusion.

5.2. The Mediating Role of Competitive Behaviour between Dormitory Conflict and Exclusion

The study also found that competition played a mediating role between dormitory conflict and dormitory exclusion, and also played a mediating role in communication barriers and dormitory exclusion. When college students are faced with dormitory conflicts, if they take a competitive approach to solve the problem, only looking out for their own interests and not being considerate of others, it will often exacerbate the tension between them. At the same time, poor communication can also lead to the accumulation of negative feelings such as "being misunderstood", "targeted" and "being excluded", resulting in negative emotions such as anger and frustration, which in turn leads to more dormitory exclusion behaviors.

5.3. Limitations and Future Directions

This study has the following limitations: 1) The sampling of the survey samples in this study has regional limitations, as it only included four universities, which may not fully represent the entire student population in the area. 2) This study relied on questionnaire surveys where participants self-reported dormitory conflicts, competition, and dormitory exclusion, which may be influenced by subjective biases and intentional avoidance of true thoughts, thereby affecting the accuracy of the collected data. 3) In this study, the cross-sectional research method is used, which analyses and examines relationships between variables based on data collected at a single time point. This approach does not explain the developmental trends of these relationships, potentially limiting the interpretive power of the results. As a result of the limitations, some future directions are provided. Future studies should expand the scope of sampling, try to use operational tests to evaluate relevant variables, and explore the use of crossover design to deeply study the problem from horizontal and longitudinal dimensions. 4) This study discusses the possible effects of different dimensions of dormitory conflict on interpersonal competition and dormitory conflict, but does not further investigate potential differences in how specific conflict types relate to the mediating role of competition, which can be further discussed in future research.

5.4. The Application Value This Study

This study provides the following insights: 1) The school should pay attention to

students' dormitory conflicts. On the one hand, dormitory assignments should consider students' differences in living habits and personalities to reduce the likelihood of conflicts from the outset. On the other hand, students' dormitory conflict resolution abilities can be enhanced through education and training, enabling them to manage conflicts effectively. Additionally, organizing collective dormitory activities like dormitory design competitions can improve relationships among dormitory members. 2) Schools should pay attention to guiding students to view competition rationally. When roommates are facing competitions such as awards and honours, some students may feel that their roommates are not as good as themselves. When their roommates win awards, these students may feel envious or resentful, viewing their roommates as adversaries or enemies. This thus develops conflicts. During the educational process, it is important to guide students in developing virtues such as tolerance and kindness and to help them avoid negative attitudes like jealousy and selfishness. In dormitory life, respecting others and handling competition rationally are essential. 3) Emphasis should be placed on developing student's communication skills. The key to addressing conflicts lies in guiding students to actively participate in dormitory activities and promote principles of equality, respect, sincerity, and enthusiasm in their interactions. They should be able to utilize communication techniques such as praise, empathy, listening, and smiling, to transform their irrational cognitions and overcome negative attitudes like hypersensitivity, suspiciousness, inferiority complex, and jealousy. They should learn to be tolerant and understanding of their roommates' disadvantages, open up in their communications with roommates, strive to eliminate communication barriers and enhance mutual understanding. By breaking down psychological barriers and increasing psychological transparency, they can strengthen their sense of mutual trust, thereby eliminating misunderstandings and conflicts.

6. Conclusion

This research employed descriptive statistical analysis, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The current research also constructed a structural equation model to explore and analyse the relationship between dormitory conflicts and dormitory exclusion. The following conclusions are drawn. Firstly, the dormitory conflict and its communication barrier factors have a positive impact on the dormitory exclusionary behaviour. Secondly, dormitory conflict, communication barriers and private interests have a positive impact on competitive behaviour. Finally, competition plays a partial mediating role between dormitory interpersonal conflict and dormitory exclusion behaviour, and it also plays a partial intermediary role in communication barriers and dormitory exclusion. Accordingly, this study suggests that in the education and management of colleges and universities, we should attach great importance to the problem of dormitory conflicts, and should advocate positive solutions such as cooperation and compromise when guiding students to solve dormitory conflicts, and avoid the use of

competitive methods, so as to reduce the occurrence of dormitory exclusion and maintain dormitory harmony and campus stability.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Appendix

Questionnaire on the sources of interpersonal conflict in college student dormitories

Number	Items	No influence	Little influence	Much influence	Huge influence
1	Someone stays up very late to sleep	1	2	3	4
2	Joking without considering the limits, it's unbearable.				
3	Someone doesn't pay attention to personal hygiene, and the smell is unpleasant.				
4	Clothes that are almost dry get wet or dirty when touched.				
5	Putting other people's items anywhere after using them.				
6	Feeling like an outsider when others are chatting				
7	Someone wants to open the window, while the other wants to close it.				
8	Someone often uses others' items to take advantage.				
9	Someone is still making phone calls after the lights-out time.				
10	There's a dormitory group activity, but I wasn't aware of it.				
11	Someone speaks too directly, without considering others' feelings.				
12	Someone often makes noise when others have a rest.				
13	Someone often acts as if they are always right.				
14	Needing to use the phone, but finding that someone else is already using it.				
15	Something said or done by one person hurts the other person's self-esteem.				
16	Someone has a prejudice against the others.				
17	The distribution of chores in the dormitory is unfair.				
18	Someone goes through others' things without saying anything, which makes others uncomfortable				
19	Someone doesn't cherish others' belongings when using them				
20	There's not enough space when hanging clothes to dry at the same time				

Interpersonal Conflict Management in Student Dormitories Questionnaire (Partly)

When you encounter interpersonal conflicts with your dormitory mates, how often do you deal with them in the following ways?

Num	Items	Frequency			
		Never	Occasionally	Often	Constantly
1	I was very angry and turned my face on the spot	1	2	3	4
2	Sarcasm and sarcasm				
3	Joint roommates crowd out each other				
4	Fight to the end until the other party admits defeat				

Dormitories Ostracism Scale

Num	Items	Frequency						
		Never	Onceinawhile	Sometimes	Fairly often	Often	Constantly	Always
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Others ignored you in your dormitory.							
2	Your greetings have gone unanswered in your dormitor							
3	Others did not invite you or ask you if you wanted anything when they went out for a break.							
4	Being talked about and fooled by your roommates							