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Sociability Versus Privacy of Residential Choice: Impacts of Personality and Local Social Ties

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Intra- and inter-personal determinants of sociability vs. privacy provided by a residential choice were investigated. We hypothesized that persons: (1) with strong affiliative needs; and (2) who were more socially involved with co-residents, would choose a living arrangement that offered more potential interaction (less potential privacy). Results from surveys and personality assessments of 60 male freshmen who had lived in a dorm for one year, and were forced to live in a non-dorm setting for their second year, supported both hypotheses. Follow-up interviews with the sample, conducted at the beginning of their junior year, also upheld the two hypotheses. Results confirm the role of affiliative tendencies in responding to and subsequently structuring the college environment. They also suggest that the development of local social ties, that serve as a "buffer" to the negative aspects of dorm life, also has effects that carry forward in time producing a greater tolerance for the presence of proximate others, and influencing subsequent residential decisions.

People move. On the average, one out of five American families change residence every year. It is not surprising, therefore, that sociologists, planners, and others, have devoted considerable attention to the question of why people choose to live where they do (Michelson, 1980; Rapoport, 1977). Most analyses of these shifts, however, have concentrated upon macro-level features of the site transferred to, for example, urban vs.

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suburban vs. rural location. One smaller-scale aspect of a residential site, which would seem to be worthy of exploration, is the potential for sociability vs. the potential for privacy inherent in a particular living arrangement. And, such an inquiry could be easily carried out among an undergraduate population, where most students change their address about once per year. Thus, the purpose of this investigation is to assess the determinants of the level of sociability vs. privacy in the living arrangements chosen by students for their sophomore year.

We assumed an individual-level, decision-making process with regard to the question of where to live. This assumption therefore suggested two domains that might contain relevant predictors: personality and interpersonal relations.

Several studies have attempted to relate personality dimensions to the desire to affiliate with others. Murray (1938) postulated that affiliation (nAFF) was a basic personality need. Schacter (1959) found that first-borns, as compared to later-borns, were more likely to seek out others when faced with a threatening situation.[1] Consequently, researchers concerned with college residential life have predicted that first-borns, as compared to later-borns, will be more likely to join a fraternity as a means of coping with the novel stress of college. Unfortunately, studies testing this idea have yielded contradictory findings (Baker & O'Brien, 1969; Forbes, 1970). But, different aspects of personality have been associated with students' response to college. Elton and Smart (1971) found that a measure of extraversion discriminated between fraternity pledges, rushes, and independents. If we look at the other end of the residential continuum—choosing to live alone, we find that single dwellers are perceived by others as being less sociable but more organized than those who share a dwelling with others (Parmelee & Werner, 1978a, b). Finally, Weinstein (1978) found that those who were more sensitive to dorm noise were less effective socially, and had stronger privacy needs. Such persons would probably avoid a high-sociability living arrangement if they could. Thus, although it is not exactly clear what the pertinent dimensions are, personality is probably relevant to residential choices of college students.

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[1]Schachter's early work has inspired many threads of subsequent research. Citations to his work include over 330 items. The subsequent studies have gone off in many different directions, but the main thrust of the subsequent work has been on the cognitive, affective, social, and behavioral correlates of birth order. And, Schachter's original finding that people desire to affiliate under fear-arousing conditions, has held up (see, for example, Morris, Worchel, Bois, Pearson, Rountree, Samaha, Wachtler, and Wright, 1976). For a comment on this work as it relates to affiliative behavior, see Mehrabian and Ksionzky (1970). Individual differences, that would make people more or less desirous of affiliation under stressful conditions, however, have by and large been ignored (Mann, 1971).

Studies in this area, however, such as some of the above, are often limited in several respects. First, studies that have looked at fraternity joining (or living alone) have simply contrasted it against all other forms of residential life. This misses the fact that in terms of residential arrangements a continuum of options are available, providing varying amounts of opportunities for affiliation. In terms of residential arrangements, living in a fraternity (or living alone) is simply the most (or least) sociable option compared to a host of other very different options. Second, most of these studies assess students after they have already entered a particular situation. This raises the possibility that the type of living situation itself may influence the "predictors" of residential choice, through processes of accommodation. Studies such as Longino and Kart (1973) have documented that such accommodation can occur, at least with respect to values. Such limitations even further cloud the issue of the empirical relevance of personality to residential choice.

Our first hypothesis, therefore, given Murray's (1938) discussion of the need for affiliation, was that persons with a stronger affiliative drive would choose a more sociable living arrangement.

Turning to our second area of interest—interpersonal relations—we hypothesized that individuals who, in a dorm context, develop more extensive local social ties (i.e., friends and acquaintances), will be more likely to choose a more sociable living arrangement later on.

This second hypothesis developed as follows. There is little doubt that life in standard college dorms is stressful (e.g., Baum, Aiello, & Calesnick, 1978; Baum & Gatchel, 1981; Baum & Valins, 1977). Evidence also suggests that it can be dampened through social buffers. Dorm residents more involved in local friendships (or coalitions) suffer less from crowding stress (Baum, Harpin, & Valins, 1975; Baum, Shapiro, Murray, & Wideman, 1979; Aiello, Baum, & Gormley, 1981). Thus, if local ties can help blunt some of the negative aspects of a forced sharing of living space, the effect may carry over to influence subsequent decisions about living arrangements. The socially involved person may be more willing to put up with others in close proximity in the future. Thus, he or she may choose a residence that, potentially, offers more sociability and less privacy.

To be more specific, our dimension of potential for sociability vs. potential for privacy in the college residential environment was operationalized as follows. All non-freshmen undergraduates at the Johns Hopkins University are required to live in off-campus housing. Four types of arrangements are possible. We suggest the following ordering of the four types, in the order of increasing potential for affiliation (decreasing potential for privacy): single apartment; apartment with others but with own separate bedroom; apartment with others without separate bedroom; and living in a fraternity.

We put fraternity higher on sociability than sharing an apartment without a private room because in a fraternity one is expected to associate with (and tolerate) proximal, non-roommate others. Thus, one is more tied in to surrounding others.[2] We readily acknowledge the following features of this continuum. First, at best this continuum probably represents ordinal measurement. And, second, the residential arrangement just makes it more or less likely that interaction or privacy will occur there. People may seek, (for example) privacy in a number of different locations (Laufer & Wolfe, 1977). Thus, the arrangement is a setting condition, and does not unequivocally determine social or privacy-related outcomes. On the other hand, there are many ways in which this element of residential structure may be important. First, it can provide a resource to help buffer the consequences of stressful elements in the environment. For example, Verbrugge and Taylor (1980) found that persons with a place to go and be alone at home, were less bothered by the negative aspects of high household density. Second, although people may seek privacy in many locations, certain forms of privacy are quite likely to be sought in a residential setting. For example, Taylor and Ferguson (1980) found that if college students were seeking intimacy (i.e., privacy for the purpose of confidential communication with another), a dorm room or an apartment was the most popular place to go. Thus, the residential setting can be a significant resource for certain forms of privacy attainment. Finally, living arrangements that offer a high level of opportunities for social interaction or affiliation, will influence the number of chance or passive contacts between co-residents. And, as Festinger, Schachter, and Back (1950) have demonstrated, these contacts may be an important step toward later friendship formation. In sum, even though potential for affiliation vs. potential for privacy is only one dimension of a living arrangement, there are many reasons to expect that it is a relevant element for understanding many features of person-environment relations.

In sum then, we tested the following hypotheses: personality determines the potential for sociability vs. potential for privacy of residential arrangements chosen (and actually lived in) for the following year. Specifically, persons with stronger affiliative tendencies would choose arrangements that offered more sociability. Two, development of local ties influences living choice. Specifically, persons who perceive that they have made more friends in the hall or dorm, will choose a living arrangement that has more potential for affiliation. In other words, they choose a more sociable arrangement because, in part, the development of local ties has blunted the negative impacts of communal life.

[2]At the Johns Hopkins University the vast majority of living arrangements in fraternities are indeed multi-occupant units where the individual does not have his own private room.

In addition to these full-blown hypotheses, we explored, in an open-ended fashion, the following issues: we examined whether other personality dimensions, *besides* affiliation, were related to potential for affiliation vs. privacy of living choice. Most of the prior work has focused on affiliation, but it seems possible that other components may also be relevant.[3] Two, we examined the role of residential satisfaction. We assessed how the determinants of residential satisfaction contrasted with those for future living choice, and whether or not satisfaction mediated future living choice.

EXPERIMENT I

Method

Subjects. Sixty male freshmen living in the Alumni Memorial Residences and University Housing (McCoy Hall) at the Johns Hopkins University served as unpaid subjects in the Spring of 1980. They volunteered to participate in a study of undergraduate housing quality, and housing plans for next year. Because there are only two sororities presently at Hopkins,and these offer no residential option, this study was restricted to male population because they are offered the choice of living in a fraternity house. This sampling restriction served to keep the available living arrangement choices consistent across subjects.

Subjects were contacted in the dorm by the experimenter. He explained the purpose of the study. Sixty subjects volunteered to participate, and fully informed consent was obtained from them. The final sample included residents of 13 dormitory houses.

Context

Undergraduate on-campus housing at the Johns Hopkins University, at the time of the study, was in short supply. Consequently, non-freshmen were forced to find an off-campus place to live. At the time when the survey was conducted (late April), almost all students had finalized their arrangements for the coming year. The tight rental market in the vicinity just surrounding campus necessitated that such early arrangements be made.

Procedure and Materials

All subjects completed two instruments: Gough and Heilbrun's (1965) Adjective Check List (ACL), and a student living questionnaire. The ACL, which includes an affiliation scale, was employed as a personality measure.

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[3]The work of Helmreich and Collins (1967), for example, suggests that dependence motivation may be more relevant than the affiliation motive.

The questionnaire was used to assess how the freshmen felt about various aspects of student life, how this was related to present satisfaction in the dorms, and to living arrangement choices for the following year. The 31-item questionnaire was comprised of nine parts. In Part I the student indicated whether he had previously lived away from home for at least 4 months. Almost no students had. Part II pertained to the student's present living arrangement (i.e., single room or roomates; by choice or by assignment). Part III, if applicable, assessed different aspects of roommate compatibility. Part IV contained questions pertaining to hall and dorm social climate. Subjects were asked to report the number of co-residents that they knew well, and the proportion considered to be their friends, both on their hall and in the rest of their dormitory. Part V evaluated reactions to the problems of noise and lack of privacy. The sixth part assessed overall satisfaction, and what the student liked and disliked most about the living arrangement in the dorm this year. Part VII was concerned with study habits (i.e., to identify the most frequently used study location, how satisfied they were with this arrangement, and the average number of hours studied daily). Part VIII inquired about housing plans for next year. The reported choices for the most likely housing arrangement for next year were coded along a "sociability continuum," in terms of increasing potential for affiliation (decreasing potential for privacy): 1 = single dwelling, 2 = house or apartment with roommates (with own room), 3 = house or apartment with roommates, without own room; 4 = in a fraternity house. Part IX simply asked whether or not the student intended to join a fraternity.

RESULTS

Predicting Residential Choice: Affiliation and Local Social Climate

We attempted to predict potential for affiliation vs. potential for privacy of residential choice using hierarchical step-wise regression (Cohen & Cohen, 1975). Affiliation (AFF) was entered on the first step of the regression.[4] On the second step two variables describing (respectively) hall social climate (HALLSOC) and dorm social climate (DORMSOC) were entered. Note that this analysis controls for the intercorrelation between the predictors. That is, if the social variables add a significant increment to explain

[4]In fact, several personality variables correlated significantly with the outcome. The scales, and their correlations were as follows: Defensiveness (.30), Favorable (.33), Unfavorable (−.30), Personal Adjustment (.32), Nurturant (.29), Heterosexuality (.34), and Counseling Readiness (−.30).

variance *after* affiliation has already been entered, or if the social variables have significant *t*-values in the final equation, their significant contribution is *net of* or *controlling for* their correlation with affiliation. Thus, with this analysis there is no problem of "redundant" main effects.

In this regression framework, Affiliation, which was entered on the first step, explained a significant amount of variance in living choice ($F(1,57) = 9.77, p < .01; R^2 = .15$). High scorers on Affiliation opted for a living arrangement for the subsequent year that was higher in potential for interaction. Added on the second step hall and dorm social climate provided a further significant increment in explained variance ($F(2,55) = 3.69$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .10$). The significant *t*-ratio associated with hall social climate, suggested that the development of acquaintanceships and friendships on the dorm hall was associated with choosing a more sociable living arrangement for the next year.[5] The B, Betas, and *t*-ratios associated with each variable in the regression appear in Table 1. The total amount of variance explained by the equation was significant (adjusted total $R^2 = .21$, $F(3,55) = 4.86$, $p < .01$). Thus, affiliative tendencies and the development of local ties both lead to the choice of a more sociable living arrangement for the following year. These two main effects are *not* redundant with each other.

Having thus verified our two major hypotheses, we move on to an open-ended consideration of some related questions. These subsequent analyses are descriptive only and do not, strictly speaking, test hypotheses.

Predicting Residential Choice: The Role of Other Personality Variables

We wished to determine if any other personality variables, in addition to affiliative tendencies, were relevant to residential choice. Thus, including all the variables that were correlated with the outcome (see footnote 4), except for Affiliation, a principal components analysis was performed and one principal component explaining 60% of the variance was retained. Component scores of this dimension correlated .38 ($p < .05$) with residential choice. In a step-wise regression when this component score was added after Affiliation it failed, however, to add a significant increment in R^2 ($F(1,56) < .1$). Thus, Affiliation appears to be the major personality dimension associated with potential for sociability vs. privacy of residential choice.

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[5]One might expect that hall social climate (HALLSOC) was a function of hall size, and, thus, that hall size was the real predictor of next year's living choice. Although hall size, measured in both population and number of rooms was correlated significantly (and in the appropriate negative direction) with the development of acquaintanceships and friendships on the hall, it was not correlated significantly with the outcome of interest.

TABLE 1
Potential for Affiliation vs. Potential for Privacy

Variable	Increment in R^2	B	Beta	t
AFF	.15	.03	.33	2.75**
HALLSOC	.09	.10	.25	1.80*
DORMSOC	.01	.05	.11	<1

Total $R^2 = .25$ $F(3,55) = 6.12$, $p < .01$

Adjusted Total $R^2 = .21$ $F(3,55) = 4.86$, $p < .01$

* = $p < .05$ Significance tests for t-ratios are one-tailed
** = $p < .01$ with 57 degrees of freedom.

Note: Criterion used was response to the question, "As of this date, what is the most likely housing arrangement you will have, starting next September?" (1 = single apartment; 2 = apartment with roommates, but with own separate room; 3 = apartment with roommates without own separate room; 4 = life in fraternity house). AFF = score on ACL Affiliation scale. HALLSOC = sum of the following two questions: "How many of the people in your hall do you know well?" and "How many of the people on your hall, roughly, would you consider to be your friends?" DORMSOC was the sum of two similar questions, except that the reference was "Excluding the people on your hall, how many people in your dorm. . .?" All four questions used a five category response scale (1 = very few or none; 2 = less than half; 3 = about half; 4 = more than half; 5 = all or almost all).

Predicting Residential Satisfaction

A total of 16 ACL scales correlated significantly with residential satisfaction. The set of three variables that correlated most highly with satisfaction, and that were also least redundant with each other, were Dominance ($r = .41$, $p < .001$), Affiliation ($r = .49$, $p < .001$), and Succorance ($r = -.58$, $p < .001$). When entered in a regression these three variables explained a significant 40% of variance in satisfaction with life in the dorm ($F(3,55) = 12.21$, $p < .01$). And, in the regression significant t-ratios were obtained for two of the three personality variables: Affiliation ($t(57) = 2.31$, $p < .05$) and Succorance ($t(57) = -2.86$, $p < .01$). Thus, those who seek to establish personal friendships are more content with dorm life, and those who attempt to garner sympathy or support from others are less satisfied with dorm life.

In addition, for those who had roommates ($n = 35$), satisfaction with roommate was correlated with satisfaction with dorm life ($r = .45$,

$p < .01$). Roommate satisfaction, however, was not significantly correlated with the three personality variables used to predict overall dorm satisfaction. Thus, roommate satisfaction appears to contribute independently to satisfaction with dorm life.[6] Finally, controlling for personality, residential problems in the dorm (noise, lack of privacy), and social climate in the hall or dorm, were unrelated to current satisfaction. Thus, overall satisfaction appears to be a function solely of personality and roommate satisfaction.

EXPERIMENT II

Although the above data strongly confirm our hypotheses regarding the predictors of sociability vs. privacy of habitat selection, one might object that our criterion is only an *expectation* regarding type of subsequent living arrangement, and *not* an actual *behavior*—for example, where did they actually live? This point is well taken. Despite the restricted on- and off-campus housing market that forced freshmen students to finalize their sophomore year plans early, it is quite possible that there might have been slippage between plans and the ensuing arrangements. Thus, we sought to follow up our respondents and find out where they lived during their sophomore year to determine if our predictors were relevant to actual sophomore year living arrangements.

Method

Subjects and procedure. Subjects were re-contacted in the beginning of their junior year to determine what their living arrangements had been for their sophomore year and were for their current (junior) year.

By the time our cohort had reached their junior year, 13 (or 21.7%) had dropped out or were on leave from academic studies. Of the remaining 47 respondents in the sample 44 were successfully recontacted, for a response rate of 93.6%.

The experimenter re-contacted respondents by telephone and obtained fully informed consent to complete the follow-up interview by phone. Questions concerned living arrangements during their sophomore and junior year, moves or roommate changes during the sophomore year, and satisfaction with current living arrangement. Only three respondents had changed roommates or location during their sophomore year, and for those three, sociability vs. privacy of living arrangement subsequent to the change was recorded because this represented the arrangement experienced for the bulk of the academic year.

[6]Due to the very small n, we did not carry out a multiple regression.

Analysis

Sociability vs. privacy of sophomore year living arrangement (SOPH) was coded as in Experiment I. We assessed the correlation between expectations about sophomore year living arrangement (LIVARR-1) and actual sophomore year living arrangement (SOPH). Based on this correlation we constructed a predicted value for SOPH based on its correlation with LIVARR-1. Then we predicted this expected value (SOPHAT) using our original significant predictors, affiliation (AFF), and local social ties (HALLSOC), in a regression analysis. This two stage regression is based on the assumption that expectations *mediate* the relationship between our predictors and the behavioral outcome.

RESULTS

Expectations and Behavior

A highly significant correlation ($r = .76$, $p < .0001$) between expected (LIVARR-1) and actual (SOPH) privacy vs. sociability of sophomore year living arrangements was obtained.[7] The equation describing this relationship was: SOPHAT = .68 (LIVARR-1) + .77.

Expectations about sophomore year living arrangements also correlated significantly with sociability vs. privacy of *junior* year living arrangement ($r = .37$, $p < .01$).[8] This suggests a fair amount of consistency in prefernce for type of living arrangement.

Predicting Type of Sophomore Year Living Arrangement

Affiliation (AFF) and local social ties (HALLSOC) were used as predictors of the expected value of SOPH (SOPHAT), based on the correlation between predicted and actual sophomore year arrangements.

Entered on the first step of the regression, affiliation (AFF) explained 17.5% of the variance. Entered on the second step, local ties (HALLSOC) explained an additional 5.7% of the variance. The overall equation was significant ($F(2,41) = 6.05$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .23$; adjusted $R^2 = .19$, $F(2,41) = 4.93$, $p < .025$), as was the t-value associated with each variable: for affiliation $t(42) = 2.53$, $p < .01$; for local social ties $t(42) = 1.72$, $p < .05$.[9]

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[7] If we treat the data as merely ordinal, instead of interval, a strong relationship is reflected in a gamma of .86.

[8] If we treat the data as ordinal, a gamma of .49 is obtained.

[9] T-tests were one-tailed.

Thus, persons who were more affiliative and who developed more local friendships in their freshmen year not only expected to, but actually did choose, a more sociable living arrangement for their sophomore year.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The two main findings of this study were that persons with stronger affiliative tendencies, and who developed more local ties in their freshman year, were more likely to choose and actually live in more sociable (less private) living arrangements during their sophomore year.

Our findings with regard to personality confirm earlier work (Elton and Smart, 1971; Weinstein, 1978) on personality as a determinant of how people respond to and subsequently structure college residential life. It also provides some empirical support for the unsociable stereotypes of those who live alone (Parmelee & Werner, 1978a). The present data go beyond some of these earlier data by: (1) investigating a continuum of types of living arrangements, and not just binary possibilities (e.g., fraternity vs. nonfraternity); in addition, (2) they confirm that the central personality dimension of interest is affiliation, and not some other component (e.g., dependence, maturity, etc.).

The observation of our second hypothesized link between the development of local social ties and later residential choices is important because it demonstrates an effect that carries over *forward in time.* People who developed more extensive local social networks in their freshmen year expected to, *and actually did* live in more sociable living arrangements during their sophomore year. And, this effect was independent of personality dispositions. The earlier work of Baum and his colleagues (Aiello, Baum, & Gormley, 1981; Baum, Harpin, & Valins, 1975; Baum, Murray, Wideman, & Schapiro, 1980) found that social isolates suffered more from crowding stress. The present study suggests that these same isolates would be more averse in the future to living in a high density setting.

The development of local social groupings, although it is a good predictor of residential choice, is not a good predictor of current satisfaction. This may be because friends are both a boon and a bane. When students were asked what they liked and disliked most about living in the dorm, the presence of nearby friends was a benefit because you could drop in on them to chat, talk about course work, or suggest going some place. At the same time friends were a source of woe because they interrupted at inopportune times, interfered with studying, dropped in late at night, and so on. Thus, local ties may enhance and at the same time interfere with immediate quality of dorm life, but in the long run influence the person towards a more communal living arrangement.

The emergent link between roommate satisfaction and residential satisfaction is congruent with earlier studies on the positive consequences of roommate compatibility (e.g., Hall & Willerman, 1963). And, it is not surprising that personality failed to predict roommate satisfaction as this variable is largely a function of congruence or complementarity between the personality profiles of two roommates.

On a more theoretical level the pattern of linkages we have observed fit well with a person-environment congruence perspective. Persons predisposed to the social opportunities of communal dorm living are indeed more satisfied with it, and are more likely to live closer to others in the future. At the same time, as social interaction spawns the development of reinforcing bonds, this also contributes to the choice of a future sociable living arrangement. This may be a case of stimulus generalization as well as desiring to share residence with particular people. Co-residence in proximity to others may have functional as well as affective benefits. Hall (1969) for example, found that performance on a graduate-level exam was correlated with rate of peer interaction, for students of low and medium achievement levels. Living with others may, therefore, assist in the management of undergraduate stress levels, especially in a highly competitive academic setting. Clearly, living with and being easily accessible to others may have many diverse consequences, and this issue deserves further attention. Of course, there are limits to our study; our R^2's, although significant, were not overwhelming. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that other variables, such as income level, contribute to choice of living arrangements. In addition, there are many important theoretical and practical questions we have not addressed.

How does sociability vs. privacy influence the participation in extracurriculars, overall college adjustment, or academic achievements? Is it easier for residence-based groups to become cohesive if some privacy is available in the living arrangement, than if none is available? And, depending on what these consequences are, how should university housing and residential life personnel respond? Should the rooming options be structured so that they force most people into a sociable living arrangement? Or, if those seeking private residences do turn out to be at risk, should some sort of prevention or monitoring system be developed? The answers to these and other questions will have important practical implications for those who must manage residential life.

In sum, the present study hypothesized and found that affiliation-seeking predispositions, and the development of local social ties in the freshman year, both resulted in a person choosing and actually residing in a living arrangement for the next year that had greater potential for affiliation, and less potential for privacy. And, this choice was independent of more traditional measures of residential functioning, such as satisfaction. The results

suggest that residential choice, for an undergraduate population, is a convergent area of interest for personality, social, and environmental psychologists. Findings were interpreted in light of notions about person-environment congruence. Affiliation-seeking predispositions lead people to be satisfied with, and to perpetuate, living arrangements that maximize opportunities for local interaction. At the same time, positive bonds evolving out of a communal setting also lead to a subsequent preference for (adaption to) sociable, non-private residential settings.

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