# Where to Wake:
# The Effects of College Living Arrangements on Physical and Mental Wellbeing

**Psychology Research Methods 312, Lab A**
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## Introduction

Previous research has examined the role of gender in overall student well-being. For the purpose of this study, we will be examining and comparing the health behaviors of people that live in co-ed residence halls and single-gendered residence halls. There is much research about the well-being of college students in America (Trockle et. al, 2010), but there is a lack of research on the impact living space has on physical and mental health. This question is important to address because the state of student's health is of great concern for administrators, professors, and parents. An answer to the question would benefit college life programming and the approach to college living spaces. We examined students' self-image, eating attitudes, alcohol consumption, and exercise behavior in order to get a wholesome picture of their individual well-being. These measures were then analyzed, taking into consideration their living space and their gender.

**Hypotheses:**

Those living in single-sex halls compared to co-ed halls would have
1. *Lower self-esteem*
2. *More negative eating habits*
3. *Worse exercise behaviors*
4. *Higher levels of alcohol use*

And women would be affected the most

## Methods

### Participants

192 undergraduates were recruited using stratified sampling to complete a series of questionnaires in exchange for no compensation. The participants were grouped according to their current living arrangements: coed floor and single sex floor.

### Procedure

Participants interested in taking part in this study were directed to open a link on a computer that contained a background question survey page in addition to a wellbeing survey page.

### Measures

**Self Image.** Self-image was measured using the Single-Item Self-Esteem Scale, which was designed as a substitute for the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001).

**Eating Habits.** Eating habits were measured using the Eating Attitudes Test (EAT -26), which is commonly used to assess "eating disorder risk" based on attitudes, feelings, and behaviors related to eating and eating disorder symptoms (Berland, Thompson, & Linton, 1986).

- **Exercise Behavior.** Exercise behavior was measured using the Exercise attitude questionnaire -18 (EAQ -18), which evaluates the level of people's attitudes towards exercises (Manigandan, Charles, Divya, Edward, & Aaron, 2004).
- **Alcohol Use.** Alcohol use was measured using the AUDIT alcohol consumption questions (AUDIT-C), which is a three-item alcohol screen that can help identify individuals who are hazardous drinkers or have active alcohol use disorders (Bush, Kivlahan, McDonell, Fihn, & Bradley, 1998). This measure is a modified version of the 10 question Audit instrument.

### Statistics

If participants reported their demographic information and completed at least one other measure of the dependent variable their data were included in the following analyses. The data of 36 participants were excluded from the analysis because they reported only their demographic information.

We ran 4 2X2 ANOVAs, one for each of the dependent variables.

## Results

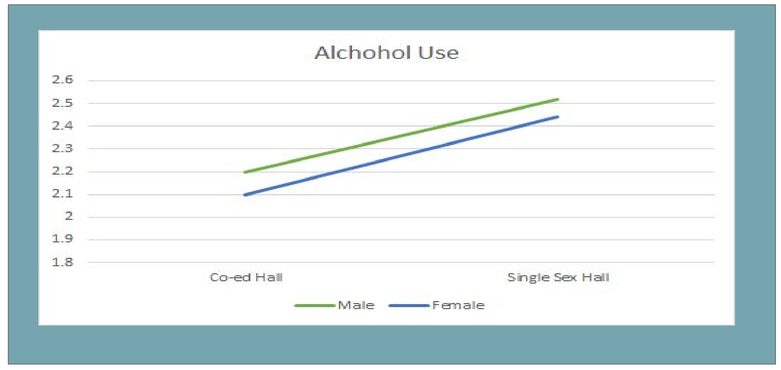
**Self-esteem:** There was not a significant main effect of living arrangement, $F(1,188)=0.03$, $p=0.88$, or gender, $F(1,188) = 2.84$, $p = 0.09$.

-There was also no significant interaction between gender and living arrangement, $F(1,188) = 0.33$, $p = 0.56$.


**Eating Habits:** There was not a significant main effect of living arrangement, $F(1,183) = 0.35$, $p = 0.56$, but there was a significant main effect of gender, $F(1,183) = 5.31$, $p = 0.02$.

-There was not a significant interaction between gender and living arrangement, $F(1,183) = 0.16$, $p = 0.69$

- **Exercise:** There was not a significant main effect of living arrangement, $F(1,178) = 0.02$, $p = 0.88$, or gender, $F(1,178) = 0.61$, $p = 0.44$.
- There was also no significant interaction between gender and living arrangement, $F(1,178) = 0.44$, $p = 0.51$.




**Alcohol Use**: There was a significant main effect of living arrangement, $F(1,178) = 7.96$, $p = .005$, but not gender, $F(1,178) = 0.78$, $p = 0.38$.

- There was no significant interaction between gender and living arrangement, $F(1,178) = .06$, $p = 0.81$.

## Discussion

Our study found a significant main effect of gender on eating attitudes, such that females exhibited worse eating behaviors than males. A significant main effect of living arrangement on alcohol consumption was also found, such that students living in single sex hall arrangements consumed significantly more alcohol than those living in co-ed dormitories.

There were several limitations of this study. First, we had difficulties breaking down and categorizing living arrangements given the unique layout and design of Wake Forest housing. The way in which we measured and labeled co-ed and single-sex living arrangements, therefore, may have been confusing to participants. Furthermore, the length of our survey likely contributed to the dropout of participants throughout the study. This study would benefit from further research done on a larger population of students in order to more effectively examine any possible interactions between living arrangement and health behaviors of college students.

Given our finding that undergraduate students living in single-sex-residence halls drink significantly more alcohol than students living in co-ed residence halls, it is reasonable to question whether Greek affiliation is a potential alternative explanation for this finding. Future research should be aimed at answering whether Greek life affiliation and thus Greek life living arrangements has an effect on alcohol consumption of undergraduate students.