

Sense of Community and Space

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Corona, Amanda. "Sense of Community and Space" (2019). *Celebration of Learning*.
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Sense of Community and Space

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Introduction

Evaluating the effect of space makes on a college campus is important to determine the usage of areas. Communal space affects a person's sense of community (SOC) defined as a person's experience of a group or specific area (Kenkmann et al, 2016). Physical spaces can affect SOC; and small colleges have higher SOC on average than universities (Lounsbury & DeNeui, 1996). A person's identity, especially ethnic identity, can influence SOC (Rivas-Drake, 2012; Liu, 2005). Examining the intersection of physical space and ethnic identity is a new interpretation that needs further study (Devlin et al, 2008). Reviewing popular common spaces will allow for identification of how certain demographics view community spaces. To further explore that relationship one can ask individuals of different cultural backgrounds how they perceive a space (Devlin et al, 2013). This could then be used to determine the comfort level of spaces meant for all students and hone in on certain problem areas.

Research Questions

R1: Does a community space affect someone's sense of belonging?

Hypothesis: A lower comfort rating would mean a negative SOC.

R2: How do other factors like race, gender, sexuality, age, etc. affect someone's sense of belonging in a community space?

Hypothesis: If a person identifies with an underrepresented group, they will report a lower sense of belonging in a community space in comparison to majority students.

Methods

Figure 1: Schematic of Procedure



- 94 participants disclosed portions of their demographic information.
 - This included race/ethnicity, gender, age, year in school, sexuality, campus involvement, and major(s)
- Completed the Comfort Rating of Community Spaces survey of 20 communal spaces around Augustana's campus.
 - Spaces extended from academic to social spaces in order to cover a wide range of communal locations around campus. An example image would show the entire space or multiple angles of a space and would then be followed by a few questions based on comfort and relevance.
- Completed the 14 question Sense of Community Survey by Lounsbury & Deneui (1996).
 - Participants would then express their sense of belonging and if they felt a part of the greater campus community.

Figures and Results

Table 1: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Comfort Level and Ethnicity

	B	S.E.	β	Adj. R ²
Step 1				.214*
Ethnicity	-.395*	.152	-.251*	
Comfort	.071*	.020	.350	
Step 2				.214*
Ethnicity	-.527	.603	-.335*	
Comfort	.058	.061	.286	
Ethnicity x Comfort	.009	.040	.100	

Note. * $p \leq .01$

The primary hypotheses were that comfortable spaces and ethnicity would interact to predict SOC. Specifically, that comfort would play a larger role in SOC for students of color.

- There was a significant, positive correlation between SOC and comfortable space, $r(92) = .390, p < .001$
- Students of color reported a lower mean SOC than white students, $t(87) = 3.008, p = .003, d = .656$
- Hierarchical regression was used to conduct a moderation (Table 1)
 - Step 1 produced a significant model predicting PSC, both ethnicity and comfort contributing significantly.
 - In step 2, the introduction of the interaction term added accounted for no additional variance ($\Delta R^2 = 0.0$) and, in fact, reduced the contribution of the main effects to non-significant levels.

Additional exploratory analysis did not produce significance

- SOC did not vary across year in school (First-year to Senior), $F(3,89) = .756, p = .522, \eta^2 = .0248$
- SOC did not vary by male/female gender SOC, $t(92) = -.822, p = .413, d = -.171$

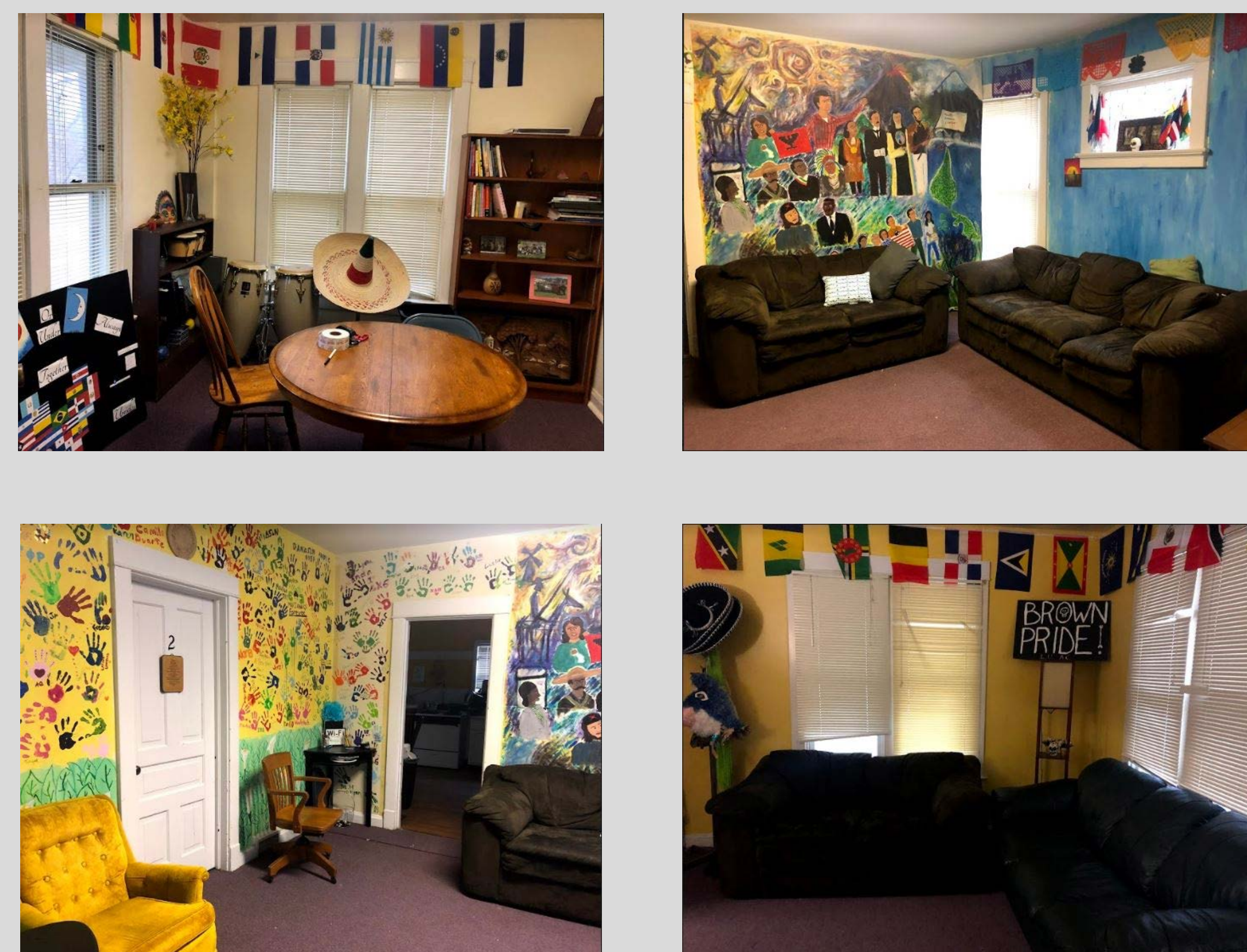


Figure 2: Sample Images of a Communal Space (Location: Casa Latina)

Conclusion

The relationship between space and sense of community demonstrates how individuals interact within their environment. Using demographic information like ethnicity and gender shows how a person's personal identity shapes their comfort level of a space and resulting sense of community. Focusing primarily on ethnicity, this factor of identity cannot be overlooked when analyzing sense of community and belonging due to its significant impact. While many people may think that factors such as ethnicity do not contribute, these findings show otherwise. Being part of an underrepresented group shows that the perception of a space meant for the entire campus community may still not include them and they have a lower SOC and comfort level. For future directions, attempting to address the lower comfort levels along with examining how campus involvement moderates a person's sense of belonging would help to identify areas of concern. Also, analyzing the campus' sense of community in relation to its place within the larger city environment could contribute to perceptions of comfort levels. Being able to access how a person can perceive a space can give useful insight into how certain community spaces are constructed and affected by someone's identity. The challenge lies in continuing to push for more inclusive spaces and in order to do so, the current spaces must be examined to determine which spaces are prioritized or neglected.

Figure 3: Moderation Relationship Diagram



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