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THE SOCIAL ECOLOGY OF STUDENT RESIDENCES

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy of the Australian National University.

by

MICHAEL ION BOSSLEY

February, 1978.

All work described in this thesis has been undertaken solely by the author.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. I. Bossley'. The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

M. I. BOSSLEY

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SUMMARY

A critical review of the crowding literature is presented and a new, multidimensional variant of the density mediated phenomenological model is derived. It is concluded that in terms of psychological stress the most significant dimension is likely to be social crowding or excessive exposure to others for prolonged periods.

A potential source of information concerning the parameters of the density mediation may exist in the notion of privacy. An extensive multidisciplinary examination of the privacy literature was undertaken and this provided the basis for a new multidimensional perspective on the psychology of privacy. This perspective emphasises the importance of subcultural and situational factors in the achievement of privacy and suggests that valid research into the relationship between privacy and crowding must be carried out in natural settings.

An exploratory study set in student residences was undertaken. This study revealed a number of interesting psychosocial differences between the various types of student residences but failed to discriminate between them on a variety of measures of privacy. Analysis of the data suggested that the psychosocial dynamics of the residences were too poorly understood to permit an adequate study of privacy to be mounted and it was thus decided to further explore the general characteristics of residence life. This further study consisted of an in-depth, longitudinal study of two small residences attached to a non-metropolitan tertiary institution

and a larger, cross-sectional survey of two of the residences studied in the exploratory study.

The principal findings from these studies are that:

- (1) time is a very important variable in the complex psychosocial system that constitutes the residence; and
- (2) that different environments influence the interplay of psychosocial characteristics, social behaviour and group structure variables in different ways.

Questions concerning the more subtle aspects of residence life remain but it appears that the systems model originally derived from the exploratory study has general applicability. The relevance of this research for present conceptions of privacy and crowding is discussed. The research findings also have implications for the design and management of student residences and these implications are articulated.

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