

# Living together — but not 'in s

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say as they elbowed me in the ribs and raised their eyebrows into the stratosphere. It was a common reaction.

"It's really very innocent," I would reply. "We're all just friends."

"Sure," they would chuckle in chorus. No one wanted to believe that our two months together would be anything less than a Dionysian orgy or a remake of *Three in an Attic*.

But after a week or so I felt at ease sharing the same kitchen, porches, living room and bathroom with these "hot vixens" as my friends often called them. Bedrooms, alas, were separate.

But that did not always ensure privacy. My room had three doors, one of which led to the only bathroom in the house, so I had to adjust to midnight and early morning traffic. But I never molested my housemates as they walked through the middle of the night. Nor did they molest me.

After hearing this, many of my friends seemed quite disappointed that we had not become animals in eight short weeks.

We all worked in the same building. Melanie and I had the same schedule, but Dinita had the exact opposite workday. That meant Melanie drank coffee with me, drove to work ahead of me, ate lunch with

me, came home with me, and watched *Lou Grant* and the 11:00 news with me. However, she did not go to bed with me.

Obviously, we became very good friends.

"You know, it's just like we're married except that all the love has gone out of the relationship," I said once as we were grocery shopping. The cashier would often smile sympathetically and give us extra coupons since we were obviously "just starting out."

**D**ESPITE all we could do, we soon slipped into conventional roles around the house. We first noticed this the when I went out to mow the lawn one afternoon, while Melanie sat on the porch sewing and planning dinner. (She is an outstanding cook.) Later, she helped me mow. I can't say that I cooked a lot, but I washed dishes frequently and made plenty junk food runs in my ailing disintegrating Fiat.

We were perfectly comfortable with our relationship, but always wary of people jumping to conclusions.

Once, at a wild bacchanal we attended (not at our innocent little house), Melanie introduced me as her roommate. "Hi, I'm Strictly Platonic," I said extending my hand. "Damn glad to meet you."

But some people never adjusted to the idea. We invited some co-workers home to show them our quaint house. (After they found out we were housemates, they couldn't wait to be invited over).

*It may seem strange, but I had a better relationship with my two female housemates than any other roommates I ever lived with.*

When we walked through my room (where there was a studio couch) Melanie quickly spoke up.

"This is Mark's room — the couch folds out," she said.

They all nodded and smiled, eyes gleaming. "Sure it does."

Finally, one of our editors had the courage to ask us where we were living. (Wild rumors were beginning to circulate.)

"Oh we live together," Melanie answered as the boss did a double take. She corrected herself quickly. "I don't mean we live together, we just live together."

It was no use trying to hide it, I guess. Besides, it was innocent enough. The secret was out. Everybody knew — even my grandmother. I was cut out of her will on July 29.

It may seem strange, but I had a better relationship with my two female housemates than any other roommates I have ever lived with.

It seems to me you don't compare and judge

yourself against people of the same sex as your own. You accept them as they are, you analyze their motives or intentions, you assume it's something beyond the ordinary.

A true friend of the opposite sex is more supportive than competitive.

Though not exactly like being a friend (for reasons), life with female housemates is a good idea of the give-and-take relationship. Melanie and I finally got the idea of the give-and-take relationship, cleaning a

Melanie and I finally got the idea of the give-and-take relationship, cleaning a house together. We would play married at work. "Honey" as a joke. She once invited me to meet my parents. (My parents, incidentally, ended up all a grand idea.)

We hardly argued. The only argument was about a Rolling Stones album that Melanie and I were ravenous about. It was about to hit me with a fry. I liked "Emotional Rescue."

"This is no time to have a child," she said. While washing dishes in the kitchen, she hit me with a British accent. It was great.

Yes, the people next door were a bit different. But you know, they were pegged as "weird" when you're in the middle of that's what we ended up being.

"How do you stand each other crazy," people asked. "No," we said. "Three's just

Mark Murrell is features editor

## His, hers and hers: Not always a love nest

By DINITA JAMES

**T**ELL someone you have a roommate of the opposite sex, and immediately there is a lot of head-shaking and sly smiling. And if you say you and your opposite-sex roommate are not lovers, you'll get looks of disbelief.

"Come on, you can tell me," they say. And if you insist you are telling the truth, then it's: "OK, it's your roommate's boyfriend, right?"

*"If you are straight about the platonic relationship, then there is not a lot of sexual tension."*

Sharon Meginnis

To most, such living arrangements are, at best, perverse; but some professionals say platonic relationships among mixed-sex roommates are not uncommon.

Mark Sternlicht, an attorney with Student Legal Services, says that he knows of a few platonic living arrangements.

"I don't think it is all that uncommon," he says. "Look in the 'Roommates Wanted' ads. A lot of them don't differentiate the sex of the roommate."

Sternlicht says that although traditional "living together" is illegal in North Carolina, platonic cohabitation is not.

N.C. General Statute 14-184 prohibits "lewdly and lasciviously associating, bedding and cohabitating," and levies a fine of \$500, six months in jail or both for the misdemeanor. But, "just sharing a roof is not enough" to be in violation of the law, Sternlicht says.

The only obstacle to men and women sharing a home might be finding someone to rent to them. Sternlicht says landlords can refuse to rent to anyone on the basis of marital status or having children. Legally, landlords are prohibited from discriminating only because of race, religion and the like, he says.

But if you decide this is the living option for you, and if you can find a place to rent, then there are a number of problems and benefits to expect.

Duane Brown, a professor in the education department who does

relationship counseling, says that although he is no expert on the situation, he believes such relationships could work, except for "sex and the development of sexual attraction."

"Other than that, nothing (would be a problem)," Brown says. "It could work, there's no doubt about that. There have been communes down through time where sexual activity was prohibited. There are historical situations showing it could work."

Sharon Meginnis, a mental health psychologist with Student Health Services, agrees that platonic relationships could be successful.

"Honesty is the critical factor, Meginnis says. "Sexual tension depends on the relationship. If you are straight about the platonic relationship, then there is not a lot of sexual tension. The relationship is like that of brothers and sisters or best friends."

"Problems arise when folks aren't being honest with themselves or each other," she says. "The expectation might be for something other than a platonic relationship."

Penny Rue of the University Counseling Center says she has had little contact with people living together platonically. But, she speculates that sex and love may become an issue.

"Over time, there is a likelihood that romantic involvement would occur," Rue says. "For one thing, you'd find yourself more confronted with what it means to live with someone and to love someone."

She also says sex roles would become an issue. "If you're sharing space, you'd get into who washes dishes, takes out the garbage, cooks . . ." she says. "It's like a family situation in that you become a system involving roles and responsibility. You learn each other's strengths and resources and how to draw on them."

Another facet unique to the three-person living setup is the possibility of roommates pairing off. If the household is made up of two men and a woman, Rue says there's a potential for problems.

"Men do clubby sorts of things," she says. "They might tend to form a club, and the woman gets left out."

Brown agrees that alliances between two members of a three-person household might develop. "There is the distinct possibility of pairing off," he says. "But sometimes there wouldn't be."

Other problems associated with male-female roommate combinations mentioned were the assumption that if a man lives with two women and is neither of their lovers, then he must be gay—kind of like the Roper syndrome from "Three's Company." Also, Brown says roommates probably would have trouble explaining their living arrangements to girlfriends and boyfriends.

But aside from the raised eyebrows and tensions that might develop from a "three's company" situation, there can be rewards in this living arrangement.

"There are emotional gains from satisfying relationships regardless of the sex of the person it is with," Meginnis says. "It's the value of friendship and relationship that's rewarding. If it works out well, it's kind of a surprise and a real

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Penny Rue  
University Counseling Center

It's a nice feeling to be able to make it work when society says you're not going to."

Brown says the roommate relationship between a man and a woman would be especially beneficial. "It's always rewarding to have intimate, nonsexual relationships with members of the opposite sex," he says.

With the popularity of the TV show, there should be a lessening of raised eyebrows. And just because there is a hit TV show on the subject, the "three's company" household already is somewhat in the mainstream of living options. □

Dinita James is managing editor of *The Daily Tar Heel*.

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have much choice, since I have away.

Mom couldn't resist a day. "Strange things can happen to someone like that," she said. "Be careful."

Our bosses at the newspaper didn't say much about the editor promised to drop by.

To others, we knew, though amusing but definitely uncomfortable. "Sure you're just friends,"

Luckily, Mark and I were laugh it off without becoming friends. But it didn't take long for

hatred of the cast and creation of *Three's Company*.

The usual exchange went on. Friend: "Where do you live?" Me: "In a little house near Chapel Hill."

Friend: "Who are they?" I say the names, the eyes spread slowly across Friend's face.

Friend: "Oh Yeah? Who's the Me: (Heavy sigh.) "Nobod"

Friend gets a brilliantly original "Hey, just like 'Three's C

**S**INCE my female housemates and I have spent so much time together. No