

Dual Dwelling Duos: An Alternative for Long-term Relationships

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All companionship can consist only in the strengthening of two neighboring solitudes, whereas everything that one is wont to call giving oneself is by nature harmful to companionship: for when a person abandons himself, he is no longer anything, and when two people both give themselves up in order to come close to each other, there is no longer any ground beneath them and their being together is a continual falling. (Rilke, (nd), (trans. 1975,p. 28)

As therapists we are confronted every day with people who are dealing with relationship problems. It seems that many people are trying to fit themselves into a very narrow model for long-term relationship that does not work well for their personalities. Believing that there is only one healthy way to have long-term relationships, and repeatedly failing at it, leads to a lot of pain and to repeated feelings of failure for one or both of the partners.

Divorce rates in the United States have been rising since the beginning of the 20th century and have risen from about 25% to 50% since 1960. Since the 1980s the rate has been hovering just around 50% (Divorce Rate 1890-1990). We believe that this increase in divorce rates indicates a problem with the way we are choosing to relate as couples in committed relationships. Perhaps if there were more options available for long-term relationships, and these options were considered healthy and desirable, some people could be spared the trauma of divorce or breakup of their relationships.

We question society's prejudice that people who love each other and want to be life partners should live together, be married and have families. In this article, we will not tackle the topics of people who choose to remain single, or couples who consciously opt to not have children, but we want to acknowledge those choices as healthy and valid, with nothing inherently pathological about them.

What we are proposing is an alternative form of relationship, one in which each member of the couple chooses to retain their own separate domicile while still being in a committed, monogamous and loving relationship. Hereafter, we will refer to couples who have this life style as Dual Dwelling Duos, or DDDs.

In the psychological community, and in our society in general, the commonly held belief is that if two people are a "couple," whether it be heterosexual or homosexual, they eventually will want to live together. That if they do not, it indicates some type of problem, often labeled as "fear of intimacy". Many therapists consider DDDs a condition to be cured, rather than a legitimate life style option. This is coupled with the implication that living together, in a family situation, reflects a more advanced developmental stage. Hence, all around us there is pressure from mainstream society for us to be "coupled," and to do this in a narrowly defined way.

Because of the authors' own personal experiences, as well as those of many friends, colleagues and clients, we are motivated to challenge this myth. In this article, we would like to briefly review how this way of being coupled developed and to examine what purposes it may have served in the past. In questioning this traditional model of relationship, we want to state clearly that we strongly believe that no one model for relationship fits all. Rather we are hoping to define an option that couples will consider as an acceptable alternative to the status quo.

In the history of romantic love there has long been a tension in the family's functions between the security which is needed for child-rearing purposes and the passion that one has with one's lover. It has only been in relatively recently that an attempt has been made to bring these two together. Now there is pressure on the couple both to provide the stability of a home in which to bring up children and to maintain the passion within the relationship. Thus, in addition to paying the bills, doing the laundry and the dishes, and dealing with problems of in-laws, couples are supposed to be enticing sexual partners as well as the best of friends. All of this seems like a lot to ask from any one relationship, and divorce rates indicate how difficult a task this really is. It seems like when a man moves from his mistress' bed into his wife's bed, along with the diapers, the hair curlers and the bills, that something gets lost in the transition. It is difficult to maintain a high level of aliveness and excitement when the majority of a couple's time together is spent in dealing with all the mundane household tasks.

Greg and Suzanne were in a relationship for 8 years before they moved in together. They both saw themselves as very independent people and they looked forward to the time they spent together on the weekends. Due to a combination of factors including societal pressure, a move of job location, and a desire to "try it out," they decided to move in together. Soon after they moved in, power struggles arose over how they would deal with all of the practical details of living together. Weekends together, that they had previously cherished, lost their mystery, and the passion in their relationship began to wane. After a few months Suzanne started to feel engulfed, miss her time alone, and experience dread when she came home and saw Greg's car parked outside the house, indicating that he was already home. As Greg noticed Suzanne's moodiness, he felt hurt, uncared for and began to withdraw emotionally from the relationship. Confronted with this radical change in their feelings toward one another, they sought the help of a couple's therapist. But this was to no avail. The balance they had maintained so well while living separately, which had kept the relationship harmonious and desirable for so many years, was disrupted by their moving in together. They were never able to revive the warm and affectionate feelings or the aliveness and excitement that they had previously experienced together. Eventually they decided to separate and end their relationship.

During most of the 20th century, society has fostered the "togetherness" model. In the '50s TV programs such as "Father knows Best" and "Leave it to Beaver" exemplified how the media reflected contemporary family values. Then came the '60s, the sexual revolution and a questioning of the traditional model of marriage. With the increasing popularity of the birth control pill, women had the potential for more sexual freedom than ever before. For many women there was no longer as much pressure to wait until marriage to have sex and the risk of unwanted pregnancy was dramatically decreased. Women's participation in the work force rendered them less economically dependent on men so the motivation to marry for financial reasons also decreased. People were experimenting with

many other life styles during the 1960's, an era when communes and collectives became part of the popular culture.

During the '60s and '70s many people began to seriously question whether monogamy itself was the best model for long-term relationships. During these decades options for alternative ways of having close relationships greatly increased. Then during the '80s the pendulum began to swing back. The spectre of HIV infection loomed large and many people came to believe that monogamy and marriage were among the few safe ways to avoid infection. The failure of many of the communal lifestyle arrangements, and the dashed dreams of the hippie generation, made people less optimistic about choosing alternative life styles

During the '80s and '90s, the rising price of real estate and increases in the cost of living made having two incomes a necessity for living comfortably. Many couples became concerned that they would miss out on something important if they passed up their opportunity to have children. So traditional marriage was reinstated as the most practical option available . Lost in this shift back to traditional marriage and family values, were the options for long-term relationships that had become more acceptable during the 60s , such as being in a committed, monogamous, but non live-in relationship, i.e. Dual Dwelling Duos.

Jennifer and Ted have been together for 5 years. They are married and they have chosen to not live together. They are both in their 50s. This is Jennifer's second marriage and Ted's first. When they met they both were very happy with their own living arrangements. Ted is an artist and lives in a rural setting; the quiet and peaceful environment is important to him. Jennifer is a college professor and spends her days in contact with students and faculty. She loves to be alone when she comes home at night. They decided that they wanted a long-term committed, monogamous relationship and the formality of marriage to celebrate it. At the same time, they decided not to change their satisfying living arrangements. Jennifer spends most weekends with Ted in the country and he usually comes to the city one evening during the week. As a newly married couple, their relationship is very stable and harmonious. They like their living arrangement and have no desire to change it.

We realize that no one model of relationship is without advantages and disadvantages. Due to physical distance, having separate living quarters creates a situation where sex and companionship are less available than if the partners are living together. The people who choose this sort of life style may be those who particularly cherish their time alone, their own space and their ability to make decisions on their own. By living separately, the partners might miss some of the shared creativity of building a home together. They may get less recognition from society for the value or seriousness of their relationship, and they will have less of an opportunity to create or try to replicate their original family closeness.

What the couples who live separately do get is the ability to retain the excitement and aliveness that comes with the continued feelings of longing for their beloved. Freed from having to share all the mundane details of everyday life, these couples continue to look forward to spending quality time together when their own individual, practical, life tasks are done. They are spared from the everyday annoyances that come from personality differences which often become accentuated when there is little time to breathe one's own air and control one's own environment. DDD's do not have to constantly

deal with the differences in their standards of neatness, tastes in music, desired amount of social contact, among many others. The partners who do not live together can come together out of choice and desire, rather than because they share the same space and have no other options.

Basic to the Dual Dwelling Duo style of living is the notion of the dance between intimacy and solitude. As Sam Keen in an interview by Stephen Bodian (1987), has stated,

"You can only merge with someone if you can also separate. The more you can enter into deep solitude, the more fully you can merge with another person. If you've lost your solitude, you've lost that place of silence and of waiting, of thinking and of weighing and measuring your own experience and of determining whether you are on or off path."(p. 45, Yoga Journal)

Clearly each couple must decide for themselves what kind of living conditions are best suited for their own particular dance of intimacy and solitude. While some couples may never want to spend a night apart, the Dual Dwelling Duos favor a rhythm which is more likely to ensure both their solitude and their passionate connection. The poet Rilke has written that one of the great gifts that two people can give to one another is to stand guard over one another's solitude. (Rilke,(nd) (trans. 1975,). DDD couples tend to offer this gift mutually and with generosity.

Ed and Sarah have been successful in maintaining their long-term marriage while keeping their separate apartments. They met while they were living in the same building, became friends and eventually started dating. Although they loved each other and were considering marriage, they each thought that their temperaments were not suited for a live-in relationship. Ed is a philosophy teacher and a night owl, often staying up until 3 or 4AM writing, while Sarah is a nurse who works the day shift. Since they both need a good deal of time alone, they eventually decided to marry but maintain their separate apartments. They have been in a committed, monogamous relationship for about 18 years, and have a teenage child. Living close together to raise their child, yet keeping their separate living spaces has worked for them. They consider themselves happily married and appear to still be very much in love.

Couples who have chosen to live separately often believe that this choice is at least partially responsible for the harmony within their relationships. They have been able to maintain their friendships, their passion and their even-tempered good will toward each other to a greater extent than many couples who live together. Of course it is impossible to say what part of, or how much of this, is due to living separately. There may be some inherent characteristics in the people who choose this form of relationship that go along with an easy-going independence and a more accepting attitude toward one's partner.

Our hope in writing this article is to broaden the acceptable choices that are considered healthy for long-term relationships. Certainly we all can benefit from more options and perhaps some of these choices such as the Dual Dwelling Duos will result in a decrease in the divorce rate and will make being in a long-term committed relationship more pleasurable and easier to maintain.