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Living Apart Together: A New Family Form

Susan and Simon are a couple, and have been so for more than 10 years. The difference between Susan and Simon and many other couples is that they do not share their everyday lives together. They have both been married before and have children from these previous relationships. Susan lives with her children in a neighbouring town and meets Simon every weekend and during holidays. Simon lives alone in the same town as his children, who live with their mother. Simon wants to be close to his children so that he can meet them as often as possible. By living in this current arrangement, Simon can have *both* a couple relationship with Susan *and* a parenting relationship with his children. Susan also likes the current situation because she does not have to choose *between* a partner and her children or make her children move away from their friends in order for her to keep her relationship with Simon.

Susan and Simon are living in a living apart together or LAT relationship – a historically new family form. LAT relationships are a result of changes in our living arrangements. These changes have occurred, little by little, during the past 30 years as a result of changing norms. Previously, it was expected that one would be married in order to live together. Only in marriage was a couple considered to be a ‘real’ couple. Now, however, one can choose to live with one’s partner without being married – what we call cohabitation (Trost, 1979; Heimdal and Houseknecht, 2003; Kamp Dush et al., 2003). Today the ritual of marriage is less important and feelings are what matters. Married and cohabiting couples have, however, a lot in common. They live in the same household and in everyday life there is not a lot of difference in their routines. They share ‘bed and table’. The difference is the marriage ritual – cohabiting couples do not have the status of being married. In many aspects of everyday life this does not matter. Their children may not concern themselves about whether or not their parents are married and their routines are often the same in either case. There may be a difference between married and cohabiting couples with regard to differing consequences of relationship breakdown.

Generally speaking, economic consequences differ when one of the couple dies, or when the married couple divorces (Hopper, 2001) or the cohabiting couple separates. The exception may be when the cohabiting couple has entered into a special contract.

The question to be considered here is whether two people may be considered to be a couple *without* having a common home. In recent times the answer has become 'yes' and a new family form has appeared. To be a couple is no longer dependent upon sharing a common household. It is no longer important for one to be married or to be living in the same household – one can still be a couple, and it is that to which the new term, LAT relationship, refers. Can a LAT relationship be interpreted as a family form? As Levin and Trost (1992) show family can be defined in a range of different terms. The title of this special issue, 'Beyond the Conventional Family', suggests that the traditional concept of family and definitions of family norms are increasingly challenged by a range of personal living arrangements. It is argued here that the occurrence of LAT relationships is closely connected to the occurrence of cohabitation and the changes in norms.

Changing Norms

In the 20th century two major changes occurred in the western world that have affected family situations. One was the emergence of cohabitation (Trost, 1979) and the other was increase in divorce rates (Moxnes, 1990, 2001; Aharons and Rodgers, 1987; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). Both of these phenomena occurred before but not to the extent to which they were practised during this period. Previously, most marriages were dissolved because of the death of one of the spouses. This is shown among other things in the rather high remarriage rate in earlier times. For instance in England and France during the years 1600–1700, between 25 and 30 percent of all marriages were remarriages (Sogner and Dupâquier, 1981). Nearly all of these remarriages occurred after the death of one of the spouses. As we get closer to the 19th century, the remarriage rate decreased to around 15 percent in Norway (see Sundt, 1975). In the beginning of the 1900s, a new divorce law came into effect (1915) in Norway and remarriages continued to decrease. During the 1900s life expectancy for men and women increased by 25 years. This change in life expectancy must have had many consequences, not the least of which affected marital relations. Previously, when marriages were shorter, death occurred before couples had time to divorce. In our day, divorce has replaced death as one of the main reasons for the dissolution of marriage (Levin, 2001). Today, most marriages dissolve because one of the spouses wants to divorce (Furstenberg and Kiernan, 2001). More often than not, this occurs while children are still living at home.

At the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, marriage rates, in most of the western world, started to decrease. In some countries the changes occurred very rapidly, as in Sweden and Denmark, followed by Norway and Finland. In England, this development was somewhat slower than in the Nordic countries, but not as slow as in, for example, Belgium (Trost, 1995). At the same time, the practice of cohabitation began to increase (see Trost, 1979). In the traditional marital system before 1970, four elements were closely connected in time. The prevailing sequence was: the marriage ceremony, moving in together, having sexual intercourse together, having the first child about a year later (Trost, 1993, 1998; Levin and Trost, 2003). The traditional marital system normatively prescribed these four elements, in the given sequence, as the sanctioned practice. With some exceptions, the marriage ceremony and moving in together occurred at the same time, meaning the same day. This seems to have been true for all western societies.

Having sexual intercourse together was only sanctioned after the marriage ceremony. Premarital sex was prohibited for all, but in some countries more than in others, this prohibition was particularly underscored for women. The norm against premarital sex, however, was primarily an ideal norm which did not necessarily translate into a behavioural norm. Norway is a good example of this differentiation: the ideal norm prescribed chastity before marriage but in practice almost all couples had sex before they married. One indicator of this claim is that by the year 1960 one-quarter of all brides in Norway were pregnant at the time of the wedding. The fourth element prescribes that children be born nine to 12 months after the marital ceremony. Preferably and normatively, children should not be born to unwed mothers.

These four elements have lost their normative power and today they are no longer connected to one other. This development is related to the great increase in the rates of cohabitation. It can be argued that cohabitation has become a social institution (Trost, 1979). When cohabitation becomes a social institution of the sort we find in, for example, the Scandinavian countries, there is no normative or expected connection between the four elements that traditionally constituted the marital system. In Sweden, more than half of all children, and about two-thirds of all first-born children, have unwed mothers. In Norway, the numbers are slightly fewer, but the changes in norms are more or less the same.

Without changes in the normative structure connected to these four elements, LAT relationships would not be as visible or as numerous. The couple would then have probably been defined (by themselves as well as by their own social networks) as 'going steady', 'engaged to be married' or simply as 'lovers'. These terms are less definite than a LAT relationship indicates. Prior to normative transformations the couple would not openly stay together overnight. With the changes, they now can do so without any

sanctions. Without a general acceptance of cohabitation and its institutionalization which puts it on an equal footing with marriage, LAT relationships would have remained hidden or 'invisible' (Levin and Trost, 1999) and they would be much less common than they now are.

The relatively high divorce and separation rates in many western countries might help to make LAT relationships more common and more visible also, especially where cohabitation has become a recognized social institution. Historically, LAT relationships have occurred before but certainly not as commonly as they now do and in the past such relationships were quite hidden from the eyes of others. The higher the divorce and separation rates are, the higher the likelihood not only of remarriages and recohaborations, but also of LAT relationships. Recohaborations always involve a change of home. Either one moves into the other's home or both members of the couple move from separate homes to a common home. In most cases of remarriage the same holds true. But there are instances where married couples remain in separate homes. Some couples who have lived together in a marriage or in a cohaborating relationship cease to live together in a common home without dissolving their relationship; they just form a LAT relationship out of a living together relationship.

Within the context of high rates of divorce today (Moxnes, 1990), many people postdivorce want to start new relationships but they are not ready to risk another divorce. The high rate of divorce and the acceptance of cohaboration as a social institution (Trost, 1995) can account to some extent for the higher incidence of LAT relationships. When Simone de Beauvoir (1908–86) and Jean Paul Sartre (1905–80) established themselves in what we are now calling a LAT relationship, they were seen as being 'a little different' from other couples. They were intellectuals and lived, so-called, 'Bohemian lives'. There are many people today who live in tune with the lifestyle of de Beauvoir and Sartre. They are living in LAT relationships, which have become a new family form in western societies. This is not because the LAT relationship is entirely new, but rather because of the greater visibility and higher frequency of people living in LAT relationships. The greatly elevated numbers make us look upon these couples as representing something new. While journalists both in Norway and in Sweden are now interested in the phenomenon of LAT relationships there remains little research on the phenomenon.

Defining LAT Relationships

The definition of a LAT relationship used here is a couple that does not share a home. Each of the two partners lives in his or her own home in which other people might also live. They define themselves as a couple and they perceive

that their close surrounding personal network does so as well. The definition requires three conditions: the couple has to agree that they are a couple; others have to see them as such; and they must live in separate homes. This term refers to homosexual as well as heterosexual couples.

Some consider it unnecessary to give LAT relations a special name. If we go back in time, before cohabitation was common and considered 'normal', we had terms such as 'going steady' which designated a premarital form. 'Going steady' was usually limited to a certain period of time in which the couple either decided to continue and become a 'real' couple and get engaged to be married, or decided to break up the relationship. The 'going steady' stage is a part of the LAT relationship and arguably for some the LAT relationship is only a temporary situation which ends up being more like 'going steady' ending in relationship dissolution; but for many the LAT relationship is something much more than 'going steady', and it lasts over a longer period.

The term 'LAT' was first used in the Netherlands, where a Dutch journalist, Michel Berkiel, wrote an article in the *Haagse Post*, in 1978, about a phenomenon he had observed, and in which he lived himself with the person he loved. During one of the morning meetings of the newspaper, while he was writing the article, he asked his colleagues to help him choose a title. Someone suggested that he name the article after a recent movie shown in the Netherlands at that time, titled *Eva and Frank: Living Apart Together*. 'Living apart together' seemed too long to him and so he chose to use the acronym LAT or *lat*. Already a word in the Dutch language meaning 'stick'. this also made its usage easier to accept. The Netherlands is the only country, as far as I know, where the term LAT or *lat* is integrated in everyday speech. In the Scandinavian countries the term *særbo*, in Norwegian, and *särbo*, in Swedish, have now become relatively well-known terms; however, this is more true in Sweden than in Norway.

In France, a different term has been used in a study by Caradec (1996) who uses *cohabitation intermittente* and *cohabitation alternée*. The first term refers to the same phenomenon that is referred to by the phrase LAT relationship – a couple living in separate homes, and looked upon as a couple, by others, and by themselves. The latter term, *cohabitation alternée*, refers to cohabitation where the couple alternates between their two dwellings. Caradec's study claims that nearly 6 percent of the adult population in Paris were living in LAT relationships.

In Germany, Schneider (1996) refers to 'partners with different households' or *Partnerschaften mit getrennten Haushalten* in German. Included in his study are only those LAT relationships that have lasted for at least one year. The study is rather special as it contains a majority of 'young adults who are in education, mainly studying, or who are in their early period of gainful employment' (Schneider, 1996: 96; my translation). In this study more

than 10,000 people, aged 18–61, were interviewed in 1994. He found that 9 percent of the respondents were living in LAT relationships. In the USA, the discussion about LAT relationships is just beginning. There, but also in other places the term ‘commuting marriage/cohabitation’ is used interchangeably with ‘dual-households’ or ‘dual-residence living’ (see Winfield, 1985). What marks the distinction between commuting marriage/cohabitation and LAT relationships is closely connected to the issue of one’s home or domicile. If the two live in *one home* and one (or both of them) has a second apartment where he or she stays when *away from home*, due to their work or studies, these relationships are defined as commuting marital/cohabitational relationships. In order to be an LAT relationship, each partner must have his or her own home, which means that the partners live apart in *two separate residences*.

Quantitative Study

This research on LAT relationships draws upon data collected by both quantitative and qualitative methods. Most of the quantitative data come from Sweden, where we collected data on three different occasions. The first was in August 1993 when SKOP (a Scandinavian opinion research organization) included some of our questions in one of its monthly surveys, with a probability sample of 1021 inhabitants of Sweden, aged 18–74 years. The same questions were asked in a probability sample of 2121 people, aged 18–74 years, in January/February 1998, again by SKOP.¹ Here the relevant question was (in translation): ‘Do you live in a marriage-like relationship with someone while maintaining separate homes?’. This question followed a previous one about being married or cohabiting. There were also questions concerning how frequently they were together and how far away from one another they lived.

The 1993 Swedish opinion research survey found that 6 percent of those respondents who were neither married nor cohabiting affirmed that they were living in an LAT relationship. The survey suggests that Sweden had about 60,000 couples, or 120,000 persons, living in LAT relationships. The data collected in 1998 found that the relative number of persons living in LAT relationships had increased to 12 percent of those respondents who were neither married nor cohabiting. This suggests that at least 130,000 couples or 260,000 people were living in LAT relationships at that time. Some of these couples are same-sex couples but the majority are heterosexual couples.

In the year 2001, a third data collection was undertaken which showed a slight increase in LAT relationships from the survey results in 1998. Fourteen percent of the respondents that were neither married nor

cohabiting said that they were living in an LAT relationship in 2001. This suggests that the numbers had risen to about 300,000 people or about 150,000 couples.²

At that time we knew very little about how many LAT relationships there were in Norway. However, in 2002, the Norwegian Bureau of Statistics collected data in order to find out how many LAT relationships there were in Norway. Approximately 1000 people, aged 18–74, were interviewed. Eight percent of those who said that they were neither married nor cohabiting saw themselves as living in LAT relationships. The interview study suggests that about 60,000–70,000 people or 30,000–35,000 couples were living in an LAT relationship in Norway, in 2002.

Qualitative Study

In our research we have also interviewed 100 people living in LAT relationships. The interviews were in-depth and structured, but not standardized. The interviews were between one and three hours in length. In order to visualize interviewees' conception of family, a three-step method was used (Levin, 1993). First they were asked: 'Who is in your family – could you make a list? Second, 'Could you place your family on this sheet of paper according to closeness and distance to you?' Third, they were interviewed about their relationships to their family members and especially their living arrangements.

In some cases we were able to identify people in a LAT relationship but were unable to interview these couples. These people were given a short semi-standardized questionnaire which they answered and sent back to us.

The sample is a convenience sample, and we found our informants in a variety of ways. Sometimes at lectures or presentations, when we had mentioned LAT relationships, people in the audience approached us. We were interviewed in Norwegian and Swedish magazines and newspapers articles in which we solicited people living in LAT relationships to take part in the research. When people asked us about our research and we mentioned the LAT study, some volunteered to be interviewed and others told us about parents, children or friends in LAT relationships. The age range of our informants in the qualitative study is from 20 to 80 years.

The interviewees may be divided into two subgroups:

- 1 Those who would like to live together but for one reason or another have decided not to do so.
- 2 Those who would not live together even if they could, and who want to remain a couple *living apart together*.

I start by describing some patterns we found in the first subgroup.

We Would Have Lived Together if it Were Not for One or More Reasons . . .

Responsibility and Care

One reason why some people choose to live in LAT relationships has to do with their feelings of responsibility for other people. This feeling of responsibility is so strong that they do not want a new relationship to another person to impinge upon their deeply felt duties. In particular, it is the responsibility and care for children still living at home and for older parents that are given as reasons for *not living together* with new partners. If another person moves into his or her apartment or if he or she moves away to another apartment, major changes will occur. When it comes to relationships with older parents, people often did not want to leave them alone as this can be a way of forcing them to move into a home for the aged. These are people who do not believe that their children or their parents have appropriated their own decision-making. Rather, they understand their relationship to the new partner as unrelated to the relationship and responsibility they have for their children or for their parents. Here LAT relationships imply that one simply does not have to move *everyone* into the same living arrangement.

People in this situation look upon the new couple relationship as an *addition to* the relationships they already have and not as being *instead of* those other relationships. The new couple relationship is not allowed to threaten or replace already existing relationships. It is simply easier to give each relationship 'its due' by not creating a stepfamily household. By keeping the home as it is, it is easier to keep relationships, with children or aged parents, as they are. Even for a parent who is not the custodian of his or her children, to move to another home can be seen as *cheating* one's own children, to leave the child's parental home for the sake of another adult. The following example illustrates such a situation.

Fred and Freda were first an unmarried LAT and they later got married but kept their LAT relationship until all of the children had moved out of their homes. Fred was 56 years old and Freda was 51 at the time of the interview. They met 10 years before when Fred's three children were living at home with him in his custody. At that time, his children were 14, 16 and 20 years old. Freda had two children. They were 10 and 14 years old, and in her custody. Her ex-husband took care of their children every second weekend and during some holidays. Fred and Freda were decided that they would not move in together until their own children had grown up and left home. Both lived in the same city, 15 minutes apart by public transportation. They met and fell in love and felt that they were a couple very quickly, but it took about a year until they were in an LAT relationship, according to their view at the time of the interview. At the beginning of the relationship, they stayed

overnight at each other's home during weekends. They did not tell their children about their true relationship at first, but introduced each other to their children as old and good friends. Neither of them wanted to push the other or to be pushed into relationships with one another's children. After some time, the children on both sides accepted their parent's new relationship.

Two years before the interview took place, Freda and Fred were married. They continued to live in a LAT relationship at the time of the interview. We later learned that they now do live together, after having spent 10 years of their lives in a LAT relationship, both as unmarried and married LATs.

When it comes to caring for elderly parents, LAT relationships can be a solution for those who want to continue to care for their elderly parents and still keep a relationship with a new partner. Often, people in this situation have lived in close contact and proximity to their parents for many years. They might have liked or disliked this arrangement, but they accepted it as a particular feature of their own lives. When the elderly mother or father dies, or becomes severely ill, there are no choices for these people. They dutifully accept the long-term care of their aged or disabled parent.

Taking care of elderly or disabled parents is a strongly felt duty, and a very high priority in the value system and self-understanding of many of those we interviewed that were in this particular situation. If they fail to provide a high level of personal care, they know that they themselves will suffer severely, with feelings of guilt, for not behaving in accordance with their own standards of responsibility and morality. For others in this situation, it is a way of 'repaying' the older generation for what it has done for the child in earlier stages of life. Perhaps some respondents had received important help and support with their own children from their parents. All in all, it seems to be preferable for them to remain in their existing surroundings and to continue to care for the elderly parent. It may seem easier, all things considered, to have a LAT relationship, with their partner living in another home. In this way, one can avoid choosing between the aged (and sometimes disabled) parent and the new partner. They can have both.

A strong feeling of responsibility and the duty to care for children and aged parents existed in these people long before they met their new partners. In these examples, the respondents perceive that they are *significant others* for their children and for their parents. If they do not act in accordance with their feelings of responsibility, they know that feelings of guilt will result. The LAT relationship allows them to care for children or aged parents *and* maintain a relationship with a new partner. For these people, the situation is not 'either/or' but 'both/and'. By caring for those others who are so closely related to them they are caring for themselves, too.

They Work or Study in Different Places

In many ways, reconciling the demands created by work or study with a relationship with someone in a different geographic location is tackled by relying upon a similar way of thinking. People in this situation do not want to choose *either* their partner *or* their job. They want both and they decide to keep both. A consequence of this decision requires them to live in separate homes. This might be looked upon as a more temporary condition, in light of their own perceptions, because one's job, at some future date, may be changed. Their couple relationship and their jobs are important to them and they want to maintain both. If either moved to their partner's domicile, career opportunities would diminish. This might not be solely a question of money. Even if the other person could support him or her, the arrangement would not be acceptable. Being economically independent is a value of high importance for these people. This characteristic is sometimes referred to as the tendency towards individualization. A century ago, and even half a century ago, people were seldom able to think in the same terms as these people now do. Individualization is more pronounced today. There is more acceptance for the idea that couples need to find ways to better accommodate one another's needs for self-realization. Formerly, the matter was framed as a way of showing one's love: 'If you love me enough, you will relocate.' The job and the partner are seen as being in competition, and one has to choose between them. In particular there would have been social expectations pressurizing the woman to relocate. Ordinarily, she was the one who was expected to give up her job and her friends. Today, there is acceptance of the idea that she can keep her job and her friends, as well as her relationship with children, parents and other relatives, and at the same time have a relationship with a man and maintain separate dwellings.

This situation also includes students who study in different places. We were somewhat surprised when we received answers from students defining themselves as LAT partners. We, in our old-fashioned way, saw them more as 'going steady'. This is a way of seeing their relationship as less serious and uses the traditional marital system as the guiding model (Trost, 1979). However, these students told us that if it were not for their studies, they would have been living together as a cohabiting couple. Since their studies are preventing them, they define themselves as LAT partners.

Cohabitation, as a socially accepted phenomenon, has changed the definition of the situation for these students, relative to what would have been the case earlier, when cohabitation was generally frowned upon by large groups of people. Our material consists solely of people who define themselves as living in a LAT relationship. This means that we have no access to any data from people who define themselves as 'going steady'. It would have been interesting to compare those defining themselves in a LAT relationship with those who do not do so, but who do see themselves as 'going steady'.

For students, the LAT relationship is a temporary one. They expect to live together after graduation and find jobs near their common home.

Given the technological realities of our contemporary lives, the world seems to be getting smaller and smaller. Telephones, faxes, emails, airplanes, all function to make it easier and easier to keep in contact with people living far away. Some of our informants report that they live on different continents. One of the respondents in our study told us that she lives in Norway and he in Malaysia. For some periods in their relationship, she has lived with him in Malaysia, and he with her in Oslo. They define their two homes as theirs in common, but pay the expenses for them separately.

These couples look upon their lives as a process that changes all the time. Their decisions are only made *for the time being*. When their working situation changes, they may also change their living arrangements. At the same time, they are aware that moving to their partner's home might very well mean losing a lot of the friendships and the close quality of their own social network. Moving away will probably lessen one's contacts with children and grandchildren.

The next subgroup we consider is very different from the first one. Whereas people in the first subgroup do not really want to be in a LAT relationship, for the people in this subgroup the LAT relationship is the *preferred* living arrangement.

Those Who Would Not Wish to Live Together Even if They Could Do So, and Still Want to Remain as a Couple

They Don't Want to Repeat the Same Mistake Twice

People in this situation often choose this way of living in order to avoid creating the same conditions that led to the break-up of a former marriage or cohabitation. For many years, they had all experienced living together with another person in a couple relationship – a living situation that ended in divorce or separation. In order to try being in a new couple relationship they feel it is important for them to structure the situation so that another break-up will not occur. They believe that living together, in itself, will change the way each of them relates to the other and that those changes could threaten the relationship's survival. Choosing to live apart is a strategy used in order to avoid another painful separation.

The following example illustrates this approach. A woman had been married for 23 years and had three children from that marriage. When her husband asked her for a divorce, because he had started a relationship with his secretary, her whole world fell apart. But somehow, she managed to pull herself together. She bought an apartment and found meaning in her life as a mother, as a grandmother and as a professional woman. Time passed, and she

began to like her new situation. She enjoyed the freedom of only being responsible for herself, but did not use this freedom to meet new men. She simply did what she wanted to do whenever she wanted to do so, and she enjoyed the realization that no one expected her to 'boil the potatoes' each and every day. She liked being able to join her colleagues for a glass of beer, after work, without inconveniencing anybody else. Eventually, she met a man with whom she fell in love. He was living half an hour's car drive away, and he wanted them to live together like ordinary couples do, in the same home. However, she was worried about making the same mistake twice. Her divorce had been too much of a shock for her, and she would do anything to avoid repeating that experience. She refused his offer to live together, but her refusal was not a sign of her lack of affection and love. On the contrary, she says that she loves him very much, but she does not want to tell him *just how much* she loves him. She says that she would rather live alone during the week and meet him on weekends and spend holidays together. She does not dare to live with him 'full-time'. The risk is connected to her understanding of her marriage and of its break-up and divorce.

She believes that the break-up of her marriage resulted from the fact that she became less interesting as a woman. She is afraid that she will do the same things that eventually made her boring to her husband. She believes that she knows herself very well, and she is certain that she would begin to perform all the traditional housewife activities. She would prepare food for him when he came home from work, and she would become the person responsible for all their home comforts. This is the behaviour she would expect from herself and they are related to her own self-esteem and to her identity as a woman. Since she loves him very much, she does not want to risk the good relationship they share, just to live under the same roof, with all of the everyday duties which he (or she) might define as humdrum and boring. She simply does not want to experience another break-up. She has decided to live in a LAT relationship in order to maintain a good couple relationship and to learn the lesson of her past experiences. Her answer to the question 'Do you think that you might move in together one day?' is that they probably will do so when she retires, 'if he still wants me'.

Retired Couples

For retired people, the situation is somewhat different even though the result is the same. These people too do not want to live together even though they are a couple and love one another. Since one or both are not working any more, there is the possibility of moving in together; but deciding to move in together would create difficult practical decisions and necessitate some sacrifices. For instance, who would make the move? Whose furniture would be redundant? Since both might have lived in a one-person home for many years, a lot of the *things* they own are connected to memories of important

happenings from their previous lives. The things are *cherished* as symbols of shared experiences. They are reminders of people, and are not just *dead things* as some people may seem to believe – and as such, they are important to them for their own well-being.

Another reason for not wanting to trade two homes for one is their relationship to children and grandchildren. It may be easier to maintain those relationships if they keep their own homes, rather than living together with a partner in one home. One woman told us that she lives 30 km away from her partner and that she sees him every weekend and every Wednesday, and that they go on holiday together. Moving in together is not discussed as a serious possibility because she gets what she wants from their relationship *as it is*. Why would (or should) she change it? When he is ill, she goes over to his home in order to help him. However, he does not do the same when she is ill. When that happens, she gets help from neighbours and from her daughter-in-law. She likes the situation as it is and it has suited her for 18 years. Early on in their relationship they talked of moving in together but it is not a question they discuss any more. They are quite satisfied with their relationship.

She has been hurt by her partner's criticism of her relationship with her disabled son who lives away. When he comes home her partner feels that she favours him. This criticism was unacceptable for the woman and she gave her partner an ultimatum. Now things have cooled down again and the relationship is back to normal. She is very happy with matters as they stand. One of the things that she most enjoys are their Sunday dinners. She drives them to a neighbouring town and he pays for their meal in a nice restaurant. He is also very generous when it comes to giving her gifts and that is something she greatly appreciates.

From Marriage or Cohabitation to a LAT Relationship

Most of the LAT relationship patterns we found consist of people who begin their LAT relationship without first deciding whether or not their relationship was headed for cohabitation or marriage. For some of our respondents the situation has been the other way around. They started as a married or cohabiting couple and the LAT relationship was a solution to difficulties they experienced in those relationships. They lived together for several years but found that they got on each other's nerves in the course of everyday life together. At the same time, they love each other and feel bound to one another. For that reason, they do not want a divorce or a final end to their relationship. It is not what they want, nor is it what their children want. As a solution, one of the partners moves to a nearby apartment and in so doing an alternative way of living, an arrangement that might better fit their lifestyles, for the time being, is undertaken.

An example of this situation is Paul and Paula who met about 20 years

ago. They soon became a couple and moved in together. A few years later, they had their first child, and a few years after that their second one. For several years their relationship had been deteriorating and it had become boring. They were finding one another irritating. They still loved one another, but a year before our interview, they decided to separate. They sold their house and bought two apartments just a few minutes walk from one another. Their children stay with their mother, but they both spend a lot of time with their father, who also spends a lot of time in his ex-cohabitant's apartment, which is larger than his own. This is their way of saving their couple relationship, which in both their opinions would have ended in a break-up without the LAT relationship.

They are clearly still *significant others* to one another and they both want to maintain their relationship but everyday life together simply became too trying. By having two separate homes they hope to be able to maintain the emotions necessary for them to be a loving couple, for each other, and to be good parents to their children. Here the LAT relationship is an alternative to ending their couple relationship. For some people, this alternative might be a peaceful way to a slow divorce without any abrupt changes for themselves or their children.

Explaining LATs

This article has presented a range of situations where the LAT relationship has been established by couples in ways which differ from marriage or cohabitation. Couples often choose a LAT relationship as their living arrangement in order to avoid choosing between (the felt responsibility to care for) an elderly parent, or their own children, and the new partner, which sharing a home would present. An alternative arrangement is partly made possible by LAT relationships because the pressure upon couples 'to settle down together' in a common dwelling has decreased. More and more people are accepting the 'both/and' solution that LAT relationships provide. As Lewis and Meredith (1989) remark, some adult children live together with a parent, not only because of their sense of duty to care for the parent, but also because they enjoy spending time together with the parent.

A question frequently asked is whether or not LAT relationships occur in all classes within society. Is it a decision that only the financially well-off can make? Our findings show that one can find LAT relationships among all sorts of people. This does not imply that being financially well-off does not make the living arrangements easier to manage. Certainly long-distance LAT relationships require the couple to spend more money on telephone calls and travel, and one home is cheaper to maintain than two. There is no argument with these matters of fact. In most cases, however, in our research, where

LAT relationships are found to exist, the couple already each have their own home and are used to paying for their own home expenses.

Why is it that the number of LAT relationships has been increasing? Why have we not noticed or registered LAT relationships before? There may be more than one answer to these questions. One factor is the mortality rate. The lower the mortality rate, the greater the likelihood for a person not only to live longer, but also to experience divorce, the death of a spouse and separation from a non-marital cohabitant, and thus, the greater the likelihood, *ceteris paribus*, for the person to enter into an LAT relationship, or some other new relationship, for that matter. When mortality rates were higher, a greater number of marriages were dissolved by the death of one of the spouses. The need for divorce lessens, therefore, when mortality rates are high.

The closer society got to the 20th century, the greater the decline in remarriages, the greater the rise in the divorce rates, and the greater the fall in mortality rates. The remarriage rate near the middle of the 19th century was about 20 percent, in Norway, but by 1885, it had decreased to about 15 percent (see Sundt, 1975). The remarriage rate continued to decrease during the 20th century, and the lowest rate was reached just before the outbreak of the Second World War, when the remarriage rate was approximately 8 percent (Levin, 1994). During the same period of time, divorce increased and new laws regulating divorce in Norway in 1915 and in Sweden in 1916 came into effect. These laws accepted fault and no-fault grounds for divorce and subsequently the divorce rate continued to increase.

A second factor that has contributed to the increase in LAT relationships has to do with changes in the labour market. A higher degree of specialization is required, these days, and that means a demand for higher levels of education for most job applicants. Fewer people can simply decide to relocate and assume that they will be able to find a good job. This is true for both men and women. Working women are less able to follow their husbands and find a job when they relocate. The relatively short history of the full-time housewife is almost over, in many countries, and in some others, this role has already become a thing of the past. In order to really understand the new structure of relationships between women and men, including LAT relationships, one has to look into the many processes promoting gender equality and equity in contemporary society.

A third factor has to do with the frequency of travel and with the availability and use of IT communication. People on holiday, or travelling because of their job, meet people living in other places. Some of these meetings result in couples falling in love. Many of these relationships will last, and if one or both cannot or does not want to relocate, they might form a long-distance LAT relationship. Travel for leisure or for work will probably increase, even though advances in IT communication continue apace. Couples are being

generated on the Internet. Some of those *virtual* relationships may develop into long-distance LAT relationships. We will probably see an important increase in LAT relationships in the near future, and the growth will include married and unmarried couples choosing to live in a LAT relationship.

Traditionally, informal social norms prescribed that a couple should live in the same home. Sharing a domicile was the taken-for-granted pattern for couples. In cases where the two could not live together, living arrangements were considered to be merely temporary. With the high divorce rate, the increasing numbers of women who are gainfully employed, and the considerable victories that have been won, by women, in the battle for equity, society and its norms have changed. The move towards greater gender equality and equity has had consequences for intimacy and for couple relationships (see Giddens, 1994). Few men, but many women, see advantages in LAT relationships. Therefore the woman is usually the active one in suggesting to move apart.

To summarize, only a few decades ago, marriage was the sole socially approved institution for couples planning to live together. Cohabitation was frowned upon and seen as a deviant phenomenon. There has been a remarkable change in the acceptance of cohabitation. These days, it is more often seen as being a viable option, and it has become an accepted social institution, in its own right, alongside marriage. Without this acceptance of cohabitation, LAT relationships would not have emerged. One might say that cohabitation, as a socially accepted institution, was a prerequisite for the establishment of LAT relationships. The recognition of LAT relationships as a new social phenomenon, in several western societies, and the documented rise in its frequency, as well as the general increasing awareness of the term 'LAT relationship', are factors at work today that may some day establish the LAT relationship as a generally recognized and accepted social institution in many more countries.

There are many reasons for predicting that LAT relationships will be more common in the near future. The labour market will probably not return to the relatively simple structure it had only a few decades ago. Specialization will probably continue to increase, affecting even more job-holders. Holiday and work-related travel probably will not decrease, even if IT communication becomes even more important. In fact, IT communication might be used more frequently as a way for people to meet new partners. Same gender couples may increasingly 'come out of the closet' and cohabit or form LAT relationships. Divorce and separation rates will probably not decrease, and new partnerships will be formed in increasing numbers. The LAT relationship may become a more common way for dealing with a difficult marriage or non-marital cohabitation. The mortality rate will probably continue to decrease in most countries, and that means that people will live longer, and probably be healthier, and thus more prone to find new partners.

Notes

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- 1 This second survey was financed by SKOP and by the Magnus Bergwall Foundation.
- 2 If the percentages in England were the same as in Sweden, there would be, approximately, 750,000 couples living in LAT relationships.

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