

Love on campus

Long term relationship, quick fling, one night stand, casual sex. It seems finding romance, love and satisfaction in your university years is the easy part. Not so easy is managing a relationship when you live with three, five or two hundred other people writes LUCY MARTIN.

The housing situation you're in can be heaven-sent or a major headache for uni love. It may not seem like a serious factor in your relationship but the truth is, most of your love will blossom in private, at home. Accordingly, there are a few hard 'n' fast truths when it comes to the romantic aspects of being a uni student in a variety of housing situations.

The first port of call for many rural students is a residential college. So if you're from a town more than 100kms out of Melbourne, this will ring a bell. The positives of college love are many. Orientation Week totally rocks and is an instant source of friends, as people are all in the same boat as you and will clutch together like straws. The constant pub nights mean you always have somewhere fun to drink and new people to meet. And there are tons of sexy gimps like yourself just waiting to get down and dirty.

However, a College is just like a family; a dysfunctional, incestuous family. Put 200 nineteen- and twenty-year-olds in a confined area, add copious amounts of alcohol and voila; it's a debauchery milkshake.

This is where the disadvantages come in. Everyone has been with someone else who's kissed you who's lusted after her – kind of like six degrees of separation for the modern uni student. Sex degrees of procreation, anyone? Don't get me wrong; college is the perfect way for rural uni students to move far away from home without being thrown completely in the deep end. But if you think it will be less bitchy than high school, you're ten degrees beyond wrong. Gossip (especially to do with sex) zooms around faster than a fat man at a seafood buffet. One minute you're having a coffee with a love interest in your room, the next day you find out you were actually face down receiving a hardcore "examination". (This is how a science student acquaintance referred to what he was doing. Note: Avoid science students.) This close knit community of students means the boundaries between love and sex are blurred and sometimes erased all together.

Another con is the way your inhibitions are loosened. Whereas



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once your sense of dignity prevented you from getting nude in public or eating vegemite out of your love interest's naval, college opens your mind in ways that really should stay closed. Suddenly gallivanting down Southbank in a horse suit seems perfectly all right. You're liberated! You're free! You're... being arrested. Potential love interests from uni who are living at home will just not understand college dynamics and may be frightened when you bring them home.

Share houses provide yet more potentially awkward encounters. After all, no living arrangement is stranger than that of a share house. Unless you've moved in with your three 'bestest friends forever' from high school, chances are you're sharing an intimate living space with three people you don't really know that well. This works really

well in most respects. However uni student Sarah says consideration is extremely important in avoiding conflict with regard lovers at home.

"I've had experiences when I've felt uncomfortable with other people's partners hanging around," she says. "But to be honest, I would usually have no problem with my flatmates bringing people home."

Sarah agrees that listening to your male flatmate and his lady friend whining like piglets in a sack is hysterical for 10 seconds. Then it gets weird. After ten minutes it comes full circle and becomes funny again, but more on that later.) Never assume the walls of your house are anything more than tissues and empty beer bottles. Read: extremely thin and easy to hear through.

We'd all like to think that the date we've planned will play out like so: Enjoy a coffee with our love interest at uni then take them home

to discuss politics and issues such as who was cooler, The Cure or The Clash, discuss. Truthfully, we're going to get drunk with them at the pub and then bring them home for a bit of how's your father at 2am. And there will always, always be a flatmate waiting for you at the kitchen table with a maniacal grin on their face. So, time the entry and exits of your lover well. Or try and learn to laugh at yourself, because the rest of the household sure will be. It almost feels as though your share buddies are indeed your parents and you must project a 'responsible' image at all times.

Which leads us to those of you still at home? Student Sam knows all about the awkward situations that arise when relatives and lovers collide.

"I know I will feel much better about bringing a boyfriend home when I move out," she says. ☺

Tackling love's downers

Relationships form a key part of university experience and it follows that problems can impact adversely on your studies. If you're experiencing issues around your relationships, be they with friends or lovers now's the time to nip it in the bud. While not the only solution, one-on-one counselling or group workshops may help.

Melbourne University Counselling Service's Lis Shugg says relationships, along with academic concerns form a high proportion of the issues students face.

"We deal with the whole relationship picture," she says. "With people who are coming out or having difficulty with their sexuality and forming their identity and who want to explore that in counselling, through to people who've been dumped or who want to end relationships."

Shugg says counselling is not about giving advice but about providing an objective space to explore personal issues and bring some perspective.

"It's really a facilitating process where the person can work their way effectively through difficulties," she says. "That's what we endeavour to do. It can be a very powerful tool to bring about change in that they not only have a witness in the room they get to hear themselves."

For more information look up the counselling service on your campus under student services.

www.services.unimelb.edu.au/counsel

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Tackling STI nasties – page 32