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Paradigms of Commitment in LAT Relationships

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Living together in the same house is typically seen as a primary marker of commitment in intimate romantic relationships. However many single Australians are in relationships where, either through choice or constraint, are not living with their partners. These living apart together (LAT) relationships are 'hidden' in official statistics which classify people as cohabiting, married or single. In the absence of a shared home, how do couples who live apart understand and negotiate commitment in their relationships? In this paper we use focus groups with men and women in a variety of relationship types, including LATs, to gain insight into how commitment is perceived in couples that live apart. We focus on three markers of commitment including sexual exclusivity, relationship longevity, and shared investments and resources. While some participants viewed LAT relationships as less committed, the lack of a shared home signalled a higher level of commitment for others. Not living with a partner meant there had to be higher levels of trust in that both parties were being monogamous, and the absence of shared investments and resources such as children or joint finances meant that commitment was to the relationship more on its own merits. While people who were not in a LAT relationship did question if living apart was a signal of less commitment in terms of relationship longevity, this view was not shared by those in actual LAT relationships