Home away from home

HDFS PhD student explores stayover relationships

W HEN TYLER JAMISON WAS an undergraduate, she noticed a pattern among her peers: many of them in committed relationships would spend several nights a week together while maintaining separate homes. “This is not a new behavior, it’s just new to social science,” says Jamison, who decided to take an academic approach to what she calls “stayover” relationships. “People have been staying over for a long time, but we’re just now exploring what that means and why people do it.” Jamison, a Human Development and Family Studies doctoral candidate, investigated the role of stayovers in the development of romantic relationships among 22 college students and college graduates and discovered such arrangements “served as a stopgap measure between casual dating and making more formal commitments.” In other words, stayovers are comfortable and convenient alternatives to more serious, and sometimes riskier commitments such as fulltime cohabitation and marriage.

“A key motivation is to enjoy the comforts of an intimate relationship while maintaining a high degree of personal control over one’s involvement and commitment,” says HDFS professor Larry Ganong, who was Jamison’s co-author.

Jamison’s study was published in the Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, and she even discussed stayover relationships on CBS’s The Early Show. “I got media training through the MU News Bureau and was in front of a camera an hour later!” Jamison says of the segments, which were filmed at KOMU. Her research isn’t over though; she plans to look at stayover relationships in unmarried parents, and she recommends future research to determine the effect of stayovers on marriage and divorce rates.