

Faculty of Arts  
University of Helsinki  
Dissertationes Universitatis Helsingiensis  
194/2024

# **Queering intimacies at home**

*Friendship and roommate relations in Finnish small-scale communes*

Anna Heinonen

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

To be presented, with the permission of the faculty of Arts of the University of Helsinki, for public examination in Hall 1, Metsätalo, on 23 August 2024, at 12 o'clock.

Helsinki 2024

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Publisher: University of Helsinki

Series: Dissertationes Universitatis Helsingiensis 194/2024

Cover Image: Päivi Viinikainen

ISBN 978-951-51-9585-2 (print)

ISBN 978-951-51-9584-5 (PDF)

ISSN 2954-2898 (print)

ISSN 2954-2952 (PDF)

PunaMusta

Joensuu 2024

# Abstract

This doctoral dissertation analyzes intimacies in co-residing friendship and roommate relations in Finnish small-scale communes. In public and academic debates, communal living is depicted as a practical solution to changing housing needs, but also as a site where normative models of family and coupledom can be subverted. This study contributes to these discussions by analyzing how intimate bonds between persons living together in a common home can contest and re-imagine the heteronormative and couple-normative structuring of personal relations. In this dissertation, I refer to this as queering intimacies.

Domestic space, as it appears today, has a historically shaped and intertwined history with the emergence of the nuclear family model based on heterosexual coupledom. This history is inscribed in the spatial form of the dwelling, as well as in the meanings of privacy and intimacy attached to the domestic space. Due to this heteronormative history, the domestic space has been approached in queer and feminist theoretical traditions as a site of oppression for women and those who do not adjust to scripts of heterosexual coupledom. On the other hand, domestic space has also been seen as a productive site that can generate unforeseen modes of affinity, care and contact beyond the heteronorm. This study further examines the potentialities and ambivalence that domestic space introduces to relationships beyond the couple form, namely co-residing friendship and roommate relations, by shaping the intimacies forged within the relationships. It does so by analyzing the social structuring of intimacies in friendship and roommate relations, and the ways in which embodied contacts in a domestic space and institutional meanings given to the home remodel intimacies.

The dissertation consists of three independent research articles, published between 2022 and 2024, and a summarizing report. The study is based on 31 semi-structured interviews with residents of Finnish small-scale communes, conducted in 2018–2019, two visual methods applied during the interviews, and two three-week-long periods of spatial ethnography conducted in 2021.

The findings show that the material dwellings in which communal relations are forged shape intimacies in co-residing friendship and roommate relations by enhancing intimate embodied connections between people. In addition, the dwellings reproduce institutionalized meanings of homes as sites of intimate relating and offer a rather established set of domestic practices to engage in. The close embodied proximity and institutionalized meanings have ambivalent consequences for co-residing friendship. On the one hand, the domestic context intensifies the experience of intimacy. On the other hand, it diminishes or complicates it. In roommate relations, by contrast, intimacies must be restricted because these relations, in their minimal form, are non-intimate relationships. Communal intimate practices in everyday life at home re-imagine personal relations and their social structuring, queering the couple normative and heteronormative

structures of domestic intimacies. At the same time, however, communal dwellers balance the degree of questioning of the normative structures.

More generally, the study sheds light on the relevance of intimacy as a multi-dimensional characteristic of relationships, and the body in non-erotic relationships such as friendships and roommate relations. By paying close attention to the domestic space as a material, social, and cultural structure, but also as a site that is constantly being re-shaped through its use, the study shows that intimacy is a quality of a relationship that is negotiated in a complex manner between people and their surroundings.

# Tiivistelmä

Tämä väitöskirja tarkastelee intiimiyttä suomalaisissa kommuuneissa ja kimppekämpissä eletyissä ystävyys- ja kämppissuhteissa. Julkisissa ja akateemisissa keskusteluissa yhteisöasumista lähestytään paitsi käytännöllisenä ratkaisuna nykyhetken muuttuviin asumistarpeisiin myös normatiivisten perhe- ja parisuhdekäsitysten laajentajana. Tämä tutkimus osallistuu näihin keskusteluihin analysoimalla sitä, miten yhdessä asuvien ihmisten välille syntyvät intiimit suhteet voivat haastaa ja uudelleenkuvitella läheissuhteiden hetero- ja parisuhdenormatiivisia rakenteita. Kutsun tätä uudelleenkuvittelemista intiimien suhteiden 'queeriyttämiseksi'.

Koti vakiintuneessa nykyaikaisessa muodossaan on historiallisesti syntynyt samanaikaisesti heteroseksuaaliseen parisuhteeseen perustuvan ydinperheen kanssa. Tämä tilan ja suhdemuodon historiallinen side on näkyvissä asuntojen materiaalisessa muodossa sekä kotiin liitetyissä yksityisyyttä ja intiimiyttä koskevissa kulttuurisissa käsityksissä. Tämän heteronormatiivisen historian vuoksi queer-tutkimuksessa ja sukupuolentutkimuksessa kodin tila on nähty rakenteena, joka sortaa naisia ja syrji sellaisia ihmisiä, joiden suhteet eivät noudata heteroseksuaalista parisuhdemallia. Toisaalta koti on myös nähty paikkana, joka voi tuottaa ennalta-arvaamattomia ja vakiintuneita rakenteita ylittäviä läheisyyden, hoivan ja yhteyden kokemuksia. Tämä väitöskirja jatkaa kodin tilan tuottamien mahdollisuuksien ja ristiriitojen tutkimista tarkastelemalla intiimiyden muodostumista sellaisissa suhteissa, jotka eivät asetu parisuhdemalliin, eli ystävyudessa ja kämppissuhteissa. Analysoin ystävyys- ja kämppissuhteiden sosiaalisia rakenteita ja sitä, miten kodin tuottamat keholliset yhteydet ja kodille annetut institutionaaliset merkitykset muokkaavat intiimiyyksiä.

Väitöskirja koostuu kolmesta itsenäisestä tutkimusartikkelista, jotka on julkaistu vuosien 2022 ja 2024 välillä ja näiden artikkelien yhteenvedosta. Tutkimuksen aineiston muodostuu 31 suomalaisten kommuunien asukkaiden kanssa tehdyistä puolistrukturoidusta haastattelusta, jotka toteutettiin vuosina 2018–2019, kahdesta visuaalisesta metodista, jotka toteutettiin osana haastatteluja sekä kahdesta kolmen viikon mittaisesta tilantutkimuksellisesta etnografisesta tutkimusjaksosta vuonna 2021.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että materiaaliset asunnot, joissa kommuunisuhteita muodostetaan, muokkaavat yhdessä asuvien ystävien ja kämppisten välistä intiimiyttä lisäämällä ihmisten välisiä intiimejä kehollisia yhteyksiä. Lisäksi kodit kantavat intiimiyttä koskevia institutionalisoituneita merkityksiä ja ovat paikka vakiintuneille asumiseen liittyville käytännöille. Tiivis kehollinen yhteys ja kodille annetut vakiintuneet merkitykset tuottavat ristiriitaisia seurauksia yhdessä asuvalle ystävyydelle. Toisaalta yhdessä asuminen vahvistaa suhteessa koettua intiimiyttä, toisaalta se vähentää tai monimutkaistaa sitä. Kämppissuhteissa intiimiyden kehkeytymistä täytyy puolestaan rajoittaa, sillä kämppissuhteet ovat perusmuodossaan ei-intiimejä suhteita. Yhteisöasujien arjen intiimit käytännöt uudelleenkuvittelevat läheissuhteiden sosiaalisia

rakenteita haastaen kotiin liittyvien intiimiyksien hetero- ja parisuhdenormatiivisuutta. Samaan aikaan kommuuniasukkaat tasapainoilevat normatiivisten rakenteiden haastamisen ja niihin sopeutumisen kanssa.

Yleisemmin väitöstutkimus avaa näkökulmia intiimiyteen läheissuhteiden moniulotteisena ominaisuutena sekä kehollisuuden merkitystä ei-seksuaalisissa suhteissa kuten ystävydessä ja kämppissuhteissa. Tarkastelemalla kodin tilaa jatkuvasti muutoksessa olevana materiaalisena, sosiaalisena ja kulttuurisena rakenteena tämä tutkimus osoittaa, että intiimiyks on suhteiden ominaisuus, jota neuvotellaan ihmisten ja heidän ympäristönsä välillä monimutkaisin tavoin.

# Acknowledgements

As I finalize this dissertation after years of immersing myself in various stages of the research project, I have ambivalent feelings about how it all happened. On the one hand, it seems that I had a clear vision of what I wanted to do and say from the beginning. On the other hand, it seems that all stages of the project have required endless learning, growing, and steering the work in new directions. Despite occasional moments of despair, the opportunity to think deeply about relationships has brought me great joy.

Having had the ideas, but needing to learn how to implement them, I am deeply grateful to my brilliant supervisors, University Lecturer Elina Penttinen and PhD Anna Moring (Hani). I would like to thank Elina for always encouraging my vision and allowing me to be independent, but also guiding me and pushing me to be more rigorous when needed. This has had a tremendous impact on my professional growth over the past few years. Similarly, I would like to thank Hani for always encouraging my ideas, but also consistently challenging me to think more broadly and beyond what seems conventional in our 'bubble' or in the now. Our supervision meetings have been full of laughter and the support I have received from both supervisors over the years has been unwavering. My heartfelt thanks for everything.

I would also like to thank Associate Professor Kinneret Lahad for acting as the preliminary examiner of my dissertation and as the opponent in the defense. Kinneret's work on friendship, time, and singlehood has been a great inspiration to me during this research project, and I cannot imagine a more insightful and generous person to review this work. I am also grateful to University Lecturer Joa Hiitola for pre-examining my work with thought and effort. Their nuanced comments helped me to take a final look at the work, which had become all too familiar to me in the final stages of writing. Thanks are also due to Associate Professor Tuula Juvonen for her insightful comments, which helped me to finalize the work.

This work would not have been possible without the participants in this study. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the communal dwellers who shared their thoughts and stories with me, and who welcomed me to visit their homes, and even to live with them for some weeks. Besides forming the foundation of this work, I cherish the memories of this unique opportunity to visit your worlds.

At the beginning of my doctoral studies, I spent two years in the Gender Studies Research Seminar led by Professor Tuija Pulkkinen. The seminar guided me in my first steps toward carrying out the project and becoming a Gender Studies scholar. I thank Tuija for her impact on this trajectory, for seeing the value of my project for the discipline, and for her persistent call for rigorous conceptual thinking. I spent a major part of the two years in the seminar with Suzy Ameen and Ada Schwanck. We took our first steps in academic life together, learning from and supporting each other. I thank Ada and Suzy for this valuable friendship and collegial support. I would also like to thank Annukka Paajanen, Kati Pöllänen, and others who took part in the seminar, as well as those with whom I have attended various seminars of the SKY Doctoral Programme.

A highly important community for me has also been the research seminar on family and relationship studies, PeSo, led by Professor Anna-Maija Castrén. It is a privilege to be a member of a research community in which everyone is similarly passionate about studying personal relationships. My work has benefited immensely from the insights and vast knowledge of the seminar group. My sincere thanks to Ella Alin, Anna-Maija Castrén, Sini Järnström, Anu Kinnunen, Aino Luotonen, Saana Raittila-Salo, Esa Setälä, Ella Sihvonen, Jenna Siivonen, Kitti Suoranta, Nita Taivaloja, Vaula Tuomaala, and others who participated in the seminar.

Together with Aino Luotonen, Vera Raivola, and Vaula Tuomaala, we also formed a small peer group to support each other in writing our dissertation summaries. I thank the group for giving me a much-needed push to finish the project, and for all the peer support and advice I received from the group.

As this work is about friendship formed by sharing space, I am delighted to say that office space also works for this purpose. This is how Ada Schwanck and Anna Sjödal became dear friends of mine in our shared offices in the Gender Studies corridor. In academic life, one needs such anchors with whom one can share all professional and personal problems without hesitation and gain new insights, laugh and cry together, raise a drink to ease the burdens of academic life, and celebrate success and survival. I am lucky to have met you.

I am also fortunate to have found other close colleagues and friends in academia over the years. I would like to thank Varpu Alasuutari, Tuuli Innola, Henri Hyvönen, Ilmari Kortelainen, and Hannareeta Seling for their friendship and close collegial ties. Sharing academic interests, a similar sense of humor, support, and ideas is a combination that I cherish. I am also grateful to Aino-Maija Elonheimo, Nina Järviö, Heini Kinnunen, and Anni Rintala for our *highly official lunch group*, LoRy, with whom lunch is always a wonderfully joyful occasion.

I would like to thank all my colleagues in Gender Studies. With Julian Honkasalo, Heidi Härkönen, Kuura Irni, Astrid Joutseno, Marjut Jyrkinen, Katja Kahlina, Sanna Karhu, Mira Karjalainen, Alekski Paavilainen, Kati Pöllänen, Dušica

Ristivojević, Esa Setälä, and others I have shared numerous insightful, inspiring and fun conversations in the corridor of the Topelia building.

I am also grateful to Annukka Lahti for the opportunity to finalize this work and for offering me new directions to pursue.

I am afraid that no words are enough to express my gratitude to my partner, Eero Vänskä, for supporting me in every possible way during the years of writing this work. Eero has patiently discussed my work with me, read my papers, taken care of practical matters, supported me during difficult periods in life, celebrated with me, and always believed in me. My heartfelt thanks – without you, this work would not be finished.

I thank my parents, Heta and Esko Heinonen, for instilling in me a love of learning and a will to change the world. My father Esko passed away before this work was completed, but his presence remains in our shared interest in understanding society through its historical formation. My mother Heta has given me a feminist spirit and a perceptiveness concerning personal relations. Their inheritance is clearly present in this work. I thank my sister Maija Heinonen for our feminist sisterhood, in which it is easy to believe that all our professional undertakings are possible.

This work began with the experience of living communally and the very special friendship that evolved between me and my roommates in Malmi, Helsinki between 2014 and 2018. I sincerely thank Niina Heiskanen, Viivi Kaakinen, Iida Lehti, Petra Lukkari, and Annika Packalén for that unforgettable time and for the bonds that were and are something else. I would particularly like to thank Viivi Kaakinen for being my conversation partner. The thinking I am privileged to do in conversation with you laid the foundation for this work and will lead me in new directions after this. I also thank Alekski Salmela, Eero Vänskä, and Ninni Wager for the home that carried us all through the years of the pandemic and brought fun and closeness to those times.

Many dear friends have helped me with this project, for which I am very grateful. I would like to thank Päivi Viinikainen for the wonderful artwork on the cover of this dissertation, Jarkko Minkovitsch for his support during the difficulties I faced at the beginning of the project, and Ada, Jarkko, and Viivi for their comments on the introduction to this work.

I have been very fortunate in life to have made so many friends that it is impossible to mention everyone here. I want to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for allowing all kinds of possibilities and intimacies to flourish, for creating imaginative spaces, for all the aches, and for all the love.

Helsinki, July 2024

*Anna Heinonen*

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# List of original publications

This thesis is based on the following publications:

- I Heinonen A (2022) Friendship at home: everyday in domestic space shaping friendship intimacies in Finnish small-scale communes. *Gender, Place and Culture* (2022, 29:8, 1183–1203).
- II Heinonen A (2024) Commitments beyond coupledness: negotiating relational futures in Finnish small-scale communes. *Time & Society* (2024, 33:2, 149–169).
- III Heinonen A (2023) Alone and together in domestic space: navigating spatial and conceptual relationship boundaries in Finnish small-scale communes. *Families, relationships and societies* (E-pub ahead of print).

The publications are referred to in the text by their roman numerals.

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Researching intimacy in communal living

In this dissertation, I analyze intimacies in co-residing friendship and roommate relations in Finnish small-scale communes. I also examine the role that a material dwelling plays in shaping intimacies, and the challenges that communal intimacies pose to the couple-normative and heteronormative structures of personal relationships.

Almost all Finnish houses and apartments follow the design of the modern dwelling, which was introduced and standardized as the customary architectural model in Finland during the first half of the 20th century. The model embraced a specific idea regarding the residents of the dwellings: studio apartments were designed for solo dwellers, two-room apartments for couples, and larger apartments for nuclear families. The spatial design supported the idea of the nuclear family as the basic unit of society and corresponded to functions within a family. At the same time, the nuclear family ideology attached notions of intimacy and privacy to the domestic space. (Juntto, 1990; Rybczynski, 1986; Saarikangas, 2002.) This model has persisted ever since.

In Finnish small-scale communes, the residents of dwellings are not families, but co-residing friends and roommates. The relationships do not follow the relational logic built into the material form of a home, nor do they belong to the domestic sphere by default. In this study, I show that communal relationships challenge the standard meaning of dwellings as sites of coupledness and family life. At the same time, dwellings shape intimacies by creating embodied connections between co-residing friends and roommates, and by enclosing the relations within a sphere of domestic intimacy. Communal relationships must be navigated in an ongoing fashion within the domestic space because co-residing friendships and roommate relationships are intricately related to the domestic space.

With the focus on intimacies, this dissertation offers new insights into discussions in which communal living is simultaneously depicted as ordinary yet radical in its potential for re-imagining models of housing and relationships. In research, communal living is understood as a standard practice, especially in youth and student life, but it is also increasingly seen as a housing solution for people of all ages as, for instance, the number of people living without a partner increases

(Aeby and Heath, 2020; Clark et al., 2018; Druta, Ronald and Heath, 2021; Maalsen, 2020; Scharf and Maysless, 2010). At the same time, communal living, communes, and squats have long been seen as sites for re-imagining affective relations, solidarities and gendered models of labor and care (Andersen, Andersen and Van Deurs, 1970; Hayden, 1980; Häberlen and Tändler, 2017; Martínez, 2020). By focusing on intimacies, this study demonstrates that due to their socially unestablished form, communal relations are rather an unordinary model of relating. At the same time, the study shows that re-imagining normative models of relationships eventually happens at a personal level between people, and that doing things differently is constrained by the social structuring of intimacies.

This study is based on 31 semi-structured individual interviews with Finnish residents of small-scale communes and two three-week-long periods of spatial ethnography in two participating small-scale communes. In the small-scale communes, groups of three to ten unrelated individuals lived together. They expressed a personal wish to live in a small-scale commune and were not financially compelled to do so. Additionally, I applied two visual methods: relationship maps and floor plans drawn by the interviewees. I conducted the interviews between 2018 and 2019, and the spatial ethnography in spring 2021. The research participants lived in small-scale communes in Helsinki and Espoo in the capital area, as well as in the regional centers of Tampere, Turku and Oulu.

The analysis in this dissertation addresses three interrelated research questions:

- How does a material dwelling participate in shaping and reproducing relationships within it?
- How do intimate practices, experiences, and commitments in co-residing friendship and roommate relations take shape within a common home?
- Do the intimacies woven in small-scale communes queer heteronormative and couple normative structures, and if so, how?

In response to these questions, I argue that dwellings shape intimacies by bringing people into close embodied connection with each other in a space that carries institutionalized meanings of intimacy and a rather established set of domestic practices. The domestic space shapes co-residing friendships and roommate relations differently. Intimacies in co-residing friendships lead to ambivalent consequences because friendship does not normatively belong to the sphere of everyday domestic life and a common life project. In roommate relations, by contrast, intimacies must be restricted because these relations, in their minimal form, are non-intimate relationships. In their intimate everyday practices within a domestic space, co-residing friends and roommates re-imagine personal relations and their social structuring in Finnish society, challenging the couple normative and heteronormative meanings given to homes.

I draw on discussions in various disciplines, such as queer studies, gender studies, sociology, geography, and anthropology. Within each discipline, intimacy has been analyzed with particular but overlapping approaches and theorizations. Approaching the topic from various angles is necessary because I understand intimacies as both embodied connections forged within a domestic space, and personal bonds that are experienced as intimate. Through sociological literature on intimacy, I am able to analyze what intimacy is in relationships, while queer and gender studies approaches shed light on its normative structuring. Theoretical and methodological approaches from geography and anthropology are necessary to focus on the body in space and the effects of spatial proximity on intimacy.

In this work, I analyze how intimacies in co-residing friendships and roommate relations can queer the social structuring of personal relations. With the term queering, I refer to the ways in which communal relations contest and re-imagine the heterosexual family model of domestic intimacies through their everyday practices and bonds. However, it is relevant to ask how co-residing friendship and roommate relations as non-sexual relationships can be queered, as queer studies have traditionally addressed questions of sexual identity, desire and sexual practices. In this work, I approach friendship and roommate relations as distinct relationship types that are shaped within a structural whole of personal relationships. All relationship types have a particular meaning within the whole, and hence friendship, coupledness, roommate relations, and family relationships, for example, are understood as distinct from each other. Within this whole, which is organized through heteronormative and couple normative logics – a matter I will elucidate in this work – defining certain relationships as non-sexual is, in fact, a matter of sexuality. All types of relationship have their normative position within the whole, and the more they adopt dimensions that normatively belong to other types of relations, the more they destabilize the sexual and gendered structuring of personal relations.

Thus, I begin from the notion that there cannot be a ‘proper object of study’ in terms of sexuality or gender in queer or gender studies, but that these aspects are intertwined in a complex manner (Butler, 1994; Liljeström, 2020). Moreover, there are wider societal structures participating in the construction of gendered and sexual categories, which have been widely analyzed within queer studies (see e.g., Giffney, 2009; Liljeström, 2020; Pulkkinen, 2016). One of these structures is relationship type. Judith Butler (1994: 11–15) asks whether sexuality can really be separated from kinship, and notes that rethinking sexuality always entails imagining new modes of relationality. Hence, she sees kinship as ‘a site of redefinition which can move beyond patrilineality, compulsory heterosexuality, and the symbolic overdetermination of biology’ (Butler, 1994: 14). In discussing relationship types in this work, I similarly see relationships between people as a dimension where sexuality and gender are structured, practiced, and reproduced.

Thus, although this work does not address gender or sexuality directly, it does address sexual and gendered structures by analyzing relationship type as an inseparable dimension of them.

In addition to queer studies, relationship type and the institution of home have also been widely discussed in gender studies as sites where personal bonds, affinities and practices are socially structured in relation to, for instance, romantic love, the heterosexual nuclear family model, or other institutionalized forms of attachment and desire (see e.g., Jackson, 1993; Saarikangas, 1993; Young, 2005 [1997]). By focusing on homes and relationship types, I situate this work in a combined queer/feminist tradition of studying personal relations and homes. The combined perspective allows me to critically examine the historical emergence of the gendered and sexual structures and to re-imagine alternatives to them, without directly limiting the study to gender or sexuality.<sup>1</sup>

This study seeks to open up new possibilities for relating beyond heteronormativity by focusing on the complex and fluid creation of domestic intimacies. It thus follows the deconstructive tradition of queer theory, where established identities and structures are understood as contingent and historically reproduced through practices, language and meaning-making (Butler, 1990; Giffney, 2009; Sedgwick, 1990). Deconstructive analytical practice calls into question naturalized structures, such as the domestic space as a sphere of family life, approaching them instead as sites that could have been, and can be, shaped differently. Hence, queer research is also always political and aims to offer space for previously unknown or marginalized ways of life (Duggan, 1992; Pulkkinen, 2003). In this work, I pay close attention to whether all domestic practices in communal homes queer the heteronormative structuring of personal relations, and if not, why some do and others do not.

There are extensive debates concerning, for instance, whether queer theory can be generalized or should maintain a close link to LGBTQ+ sexualities (see e.g., Eng, Halberstam, and Muñoz, 2005; Giffney, 2004; Halley and Parker, 2011; Sedgwick, 1994: 6–10 for contesting views), and whether an anti-normative stance is a fruitful starting point for queer studies (see e.g., Halperin, 2003; Wiegman and Wilson, 2015). Mapping these debates in their entirety is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In this work, I approach relationship type and domestic space as sites where sexual and gendered structures are reproduced and contested in the everyday course of communal relationships, finally arguing that queer studies should also

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<sup>1</sup> See Liljeström (2020) for further discussion on the differences and connections between queer and feminist theory.

pay more attention to non-sexual intimacies, different types of relationships, and their social formation.

In this work, I analyze co-residing friendships and roommate relations as separate relationship categories. Friendship was a significant category in the small-scale communes, which has led me to engage with it extensively here. However, I also discuss roommate relations because not all of the analyzed relations were friendships. As a certain degree of abstraction is required to grasp a phenomenon analytically, I approach the two relationship models as ideal types, although they often overlap in everyday communal life, where friends are also roommates and roommates become friends. As ideal types, however, the relationships are different. Establishing a roommate relation only requires fulfilling the minimum requirement of living under the same roof. Friendships, in contrast, require something more: affinity, intimacy, knowledge of the other person, or common activities, for instance. However, friendships come in many forms and not all are based on similar experiences or activities (see Spencer and Pahl, 2006).

The distinction between the categories is important to note because defining the relationship as either friendship or a roommate relation shapes what people expect from the relationship and what kind of practices are included in it. The research participants were careful to point out those who were not simply roommates but also friends. In this work, I follow their definitions of their communal relationships as either friendships or roommate relations. Often, roommates became friends while living together, and in some cases, old friends moved in together. Some friendships were deep, complex friendships in which living together was only one component of the relationship. They were likely to continue even if co-living ended. Other friendships, in contrast, were important within the everyday communal life, but tended to dissolve when friends moved away.

The dissertation consists of three independent research articles, published between 2022 and 2024. In this summarizing report, I bring together the results from the three sub-studies. Moreover, in addressing my research questions, the summary forms an independent contribution elaborating on the empirical work in each sub-study.

The dissertation is structured as follows: In section 1.2, I explain my choice of terminology for discussing a small-scale commune in the context of Finnish society. In chapter 2, I present the theoretical background of this work: queer studies' approach to friendship, relationship diversity and homes, intimacies in co-residing friendships and roommate relations, and home as a site of intimacy. In chapter 3, I explain the methods used in conducting the study. Chapter 4 summarizes the three sub-studies: the effects of domestic density on friendship intimacies, domestic relational futures beyond coupledness, and spatio-conceptual boundary work as a way of making sense of communal relations. In chapter 5, I discuss the findings of the three sub-studies together. Each of the three finding sections responds to one

of my research questions, beginning with the material dwelling, moving on to intimacies in co-residing friendship and roommate relations, and finally queering the couple norm and the heteronorm. In the concluding chapter 6, I summarize the results of the dissertation, discuss the limitations of this work, and introduce possible future paths for studying intimacies in queer and gender studies.

## 1.2 Small-scale communes in Finland: on terminology

There is no fixed terminology for addressing different forms of communal living, and there are many variations based on language, culture, and country. In this dissertation, I refer to the households analyzed as *small-scale communes* (Törnqvist, 2019: 904). The term small-scale commune is a research concept that combines the three perspectives that I consider necessary to understand the form of communal living at hand: the significance of mutual relationships, the possibility to choose the form of housing, and the material form of a shared apartment or house. Choosing a term is difficult, as communal living could also be categorized by a variety of factors, from the tenure type to ideology and local housing policies.

First, the significance of mutual relationships. Small-scale communes are communal households typically comprising a relatively small number of people, usually from three to ten individuals, who have not structured their living arrangements around strong political or economic goals or joint ownership (Törnqvist, 2019: 904). In colloquial Finnish, this form of communal living is called *kommuuni*, a commune, *yhteisö*, a community, and *kimppakämpä*, roughly translated as a group apartment. The participants in this study used all of these names. Some used them interchangeably, while others stuck to the term(s) they preferred. In practice, all the terms describe rather similar households. Communal dwellers value their mutual connections and living with others, but also respect each resident's personal privacy. They organize chores and practicalities such as cleaning and paying bills with rotating shifts and shared responsibilities. For the most part, each person buys their own groceries, but roommates offer meals to others and lend and buy some ingredients together. Communal dwellers usually establish their small-scale communes in apartments and houses they find on the open rental market.

In research, this type of communal living, motivated by living together for the sake of relationships, is differentiated from intentional communities or more ideologically motivated communes, such as utopian communes (Abrams et al., 1976: 33–37; Heath, 2004: 145–176). By using the term 'small-scale commune', I want to emphasize the importance of mutual relations, without mutual ownership or a strong ideology (see Heath, 2004; Heath et al., 2018). In addition, the Finnish vocabulary introduced above highlights the centrality of relationships: in Finnish, communal living is understood through communality instead of sharing, for

instance (cf. Heath et al., 2018: 9; Steinführer and Haase, 2009: 574–575). However, my research participants had at least a vague idea of an ‘alternative lifestyle’ as they felt they were challenging the usual ways of arranging housing and relationships in Finnish society. Thus, although I address rather popular forms of communal living, the phenomenon cannot be clearly distinguished from a counterculture.

The second perspective through which I define small-scale communes in this work is the possibility to choose the form of housing. The participants in this study could live communally for communal living’s sake because they had the financial means to do so. The form of communal living addressed in this work should not be confused with shared housing, which occurs purely out of financial constraint. Most of the participants in this study had jobs, and many mentioned that they could afford to live on their own, although they also questioned the sense of doing so given the high cost of living, especially in the capital area (OSF, 2023). Hence, different motives may overlap. For the research participants, the economic benefit was often access to better quality housing, entailing more space, a house with a garden, or an apartment in a better location, for instance (see also Kenyon and Heath, 2001: 627–629).

National housing and welfare policies structure the possibilities for choosing the form of housing. The Finnish welfare state model with its housing benefits has created space for personal choice in housing arrangements for all age groups. In Finland, housing policies are seen as part of social policy, and support is targeted at those who need it most (Bengtsson, Ruonavaara and Sørvoll, 2017). The most used form of housing benefit to which people with low income are entitled, the general housing allowance, covers a maximum of 80 percent of a person’s housing expenses, with limitations depending on household size and place of residence.

This Finnish context differs from many European countries, where flatshares have been associated with reurbanization and gentrification of inner city areas, with young adults populating rental apartments in (university) city centers (Steinführer and Haase, 2009: 570–571). Communal living is not so strongly associated with student life in Finland, where students have increasingly chosen to live alone (Lehtoruusu, 2019; Rytönen and Saari, 2015: 29–43; see also Verhetsel et al., 2017 for a similar trend in Belgium). A legislative change in 2017, which made students eligible for a general housing allowance and abolished a smaller student-targeted housing benefit, has reinforced this phenomenon. However, at the time of writing, the right-wing government currently in power has announced that it will reintroduce the smaller student-targeted housing benefit, in addition to broader cuts to the general housing allowance and student grants. It remains to be seen whether and how this will affect the popularity and need for communal living arrangements.

In general, housing benefits have been the subject of an ongoing political debate in Finland, involving questions of decent housing conditions and the public economy. Cuts in housing benefits can create very different conditions for living with roommates, as they can limit the possibilities to choose the form of housing based on personal preferences and force people to share housing with people they do not wish to live with, which can have difficult or, at worst, dangerous consequences (cf. Heath et al., 2018: 5; Ortega-Alcázar and Wilkinson, 2021).

My third aspect of defining what constitutes a small-scale commune concerns the material form of a shared apartment or house. I follow the classification proposed by Vestbro (2010: 29), in which ‘a commune’ signifies ‘living without individual apartments’. A commune is thus spatially distinct from other forms of communal and collective living, where people live in separate dwellings with additional shared spaces. The latter include, for instance, co-housing units consisting of individual households and shared spaces (see Chiodelli and Baglione, 2014; Korpela, 2012; Laine et al., 2020; Sandstedt and Westin, 2015), ecovillages consisting of various types of dwellings with land dedicated to farming or designed for an ecological lifestyle (see Barani, Aligeysi and Papzan, 2018; Eräranta, Moisander and Pesonen, 2009), and residential hotels or other commercialized forms of communal living that combine private spaces with shared spaces and include paid services for work and leisure (see Druta and Ronald, 2021; Grundström, 2021). Spatial distinctions are not always clear-cut, and in this study, for instance, some of the small-scale communes included a smaller apartment in addition to the main house.

Beyond these three perspectives integral to my work, communal living is also classified, for example, by the form of tenure or the level of ideology and pragmatism (Tummers, 2016). The tenure and organization structure of housing co-operatives, where co-residents each own a share of the property and mutually become its tenants, is rare in Finland (Heath, 2021; Leminen et al., 2020; Sørvoll and Bengtsson, 2020).

Communal living has never existed as a widespread movement in Finland, nor has it been studied to an extensive degree (see Cronberg and Vepsä, 1983; Eräranta, Moisander, and Pesonen, 2009). Communal living in Finland is much more of a small-scale ‘do-it-yourself’ type of arrangement than in the UK, for example, where a variety of commercial agents offer rooms for rent in flatshares and provide services to match tenants with landlords (Heath et al., 2018: 9), or in Germany, where the political legacy of the old squatter movement continues in various *Hausprojekte* (Jaureguiberry-Mondion, 2022). In Finland, people search for suitable apartments on the rental market and adjust their relationships accordingly. In most cases, these are regular family apartments, spacious enough to accommodate several adults. Only in a couple of cases among my research

participants had the dwelling become a small-scale commune on the tenants' own initiative.

## 2 Theoretical perspectives on intimate relationships at home

### 2.1 Queer studies on relationship type, friendship, and homes

In this dissertation, I analyze how intimacies in co-residing friendships and roommate relations can queer the social structuring of personal relations. In this section, I discuss queer perspectives on relationality beyond the heterosexual nuclear family model and situate this work within these discussions. In the subsequent two sections, I examine how friendship and roommate relations are structured as intimate bonds and illustrate how the domestic context shapes intimacies. The chapter illustrates the complex formation of intimacies, which are simultaneously socially structured and situationally shaped in different contexts, thus entailing various ways of queering intimacy.

By examining the potential of communal relations for queering intimacies, I follow the often-expressed call in queer studies to re-imagine forms of relating and togetherness beyond institutionalized models of family and coupledness. Focusing on relationship types, the starting point of this work is inspired by writers such as José Esteban Muñoz (2009), who encourages us to look for a ‘queer potentiality’ in those small bonds and practices which do not make sense through heteronormative scripts, and J. Jack Halberstam (2011, 70), who states that ‘[...] queer lives exploit some potential for a *difference in form* that lies dormant in queer collectivity not as an essential attribute of sexual otherness but as a possibility embedded in the break from heterosexual life narratives.’<sup>2</sup> This study examines such a queer potential stemming from experimental, culturally unestablished forms of bonds and relationship practices.

Consequently, I argue for the importance of empirically studying friendships and roommate relations in queer studies. While intimacies that are organized beyond heteronormative and couple-normative models have often been addressed

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<sup>2</sup> Italics mine

in queer studies, friendship and non-erotic ties have remained understudied as research has concentrated on erotic relations (Hammack, Frost, and Hughes, 2019). The potentialities of non-erotic ties are often approached through literary research focusing on texts, while empirical research on relationships between people has remained scant (see e.g., Halberstam, 2011; Haggerty, 2018; McBean, 2018; Muñoz, 2009). Friendship, however, often figures in queer theory as a potential site for developing new kinds of affinities and solidarities. In particular, Michel Foucault's (1996) suggestion for seeing friendship as a sphere for inventing and reproducing new modes of relationships is an often-cited essay, as is Adrienne Rich's (1980) view of friendship as part of a 'lesbian continuum' centralizing women's mutual bonds (see also Roseneil, 2006).

Calls to re-imagine alternatives to the nuclear family have intensified with changes in sexual and gendered regimes in many Euro-American societies in recent decades. As same-sex marriage rights have advanced, several scholars have paid attention to the domestication and normalization of homosexuality to heterosexual standards, leading to the abandonment of the former variety in queer relational and sexual practices that had previously emerged from sexual marginalization (Duggan, 2002; Eng, 2010; Kuosmanen, 2007; Puar, 2007). Moreover, with societal changes, the difference between homosexual and heterosexual lifestyles is increasingly contested. Sasha Roseneil (2000; 2007; 2009) has argued that 'queer tendencies' stemming from increasing individualization in Euro-American societies have centralized friendship in novel ways for heterosexuals by destabilizing the self-evident character of coupledness and family, while at the same time, homosexuality has become increasingly accepted, both culturally and legally (see also Luotonen and Castrén, 2018).

As sexual marginalization has eased, it has been suggested that there may be new intentionality in queer relationship experiments such as establishing relational arrangements beyond the nuclear family (Hammack, Frost, and Hughes, 2019; Oswald, 2002). Having multiple partners and questioning the difference between friendship and coupledness have been noted in research as emerging cultural phenomena and novel sites of queering intimacies (Clarke, Cover, and Aggleton, 2018; Juvonen, 2020). For instance, recent studies have paid attention to various types of personally significant intimate companionships, both sexual and non-sexual, which do not (yet) have culturally established forms or names (Uibo, 2021; Innola, forthcoming). In this work, I approach small-scale communes as a site for such experiments, also understanding them as sites where previously separated homosexual and heterosexual modes of life are increasingly converging.

New types of relationship experiments shift the focus toward questioning the intimate couple's privileged status in queer studies, instead of focusing explicitly on sexual relations. For now, the intimate couple has maintained its role as the most privileged form of intimate life in Euro-American countries, a position possibly

bolstered by incorporating homosexuals within its sphere (Roseneil et al., 2020; Wilkinson, 2014). A critical perspective toward the couple has shown that heteronormativity is not sufficient as an explanation to address the various positions that relationship types can have in reference to the couple. In a couple-normative structure, for instance, singlehood (Kolehmainen, Lahti and Kinnunen, 2023; Lahad, 2017; Wilkinson, 2014) or non-monogamous relationships (Klesse, Rothschild, and Walker 2022; Taivaloja and Alasuutari, forthcoming) become marginalized, applying to both homosexual and heterosexual relations.

In close connection with the analysis of relationship type, homes have been addressed in queer research as an integral site where sexual and gendered structures take shape. Homes have been analyzed as sites that sustain and reproduce normative forms of intimacy, as well as sites where normative structures can be resisted and destabilized. For instance, the domestic space has been seen as a central site for reproducing heteronormative relationality, consequently emphasizing the role of public spaces, queer counterpublics and online spaces for queer relations (Berlant and Warner, 1998; Halberstam 2005; Hubbard, 2018). In contrast, historical analyses have shed light on the various domestic spaces that lesbians and gay men have inhabited and constructed, duly contesting the view that queerness is necessarily opposed to domesticity (Cook, 2014; 2017; Friedman, 2015; 2017). Homes have been seen to offer queer people symbolic belonging – also through sites other than domestic spaces – as well as shelter through actual dwellings (Bryant, 2015; Pilkey, Scicluna and Gorman-Murray, 2015; Rowntree and Zufferey, 2017; see also Fortier, 2003).

Queer studies that highlight the mutual, contingent, and dynamic reproduction of domestic space challenge the meaning of domesticities as always already heterosexual. The studies show that spaces, relationships, and identities are constantly reshaped through the act of dwelling and domestic practices (Gorman-Murray 2007; 2017). With the societal changes of the past decades, it is relevant to analyze the queer potentiality of diverse homes, such as communes, in contemporary conditions. Previously, communal living has been addressed in queer studies as part of the lesbian/feminist political organization of the 1970s and 1980s (Bell and Valentine, 1995; Green, 1997; Scicluna, 2017a), as well as gay male liberation of the same era (Cook, 2013; Vider, 2015). The era's political goals, such as attempting to subvert capitalist society and the nuclear family, and reinventing queer sexual culture through dwelling, continue but also take on new shapes in contemporary communal living (see Vider, 2015; Scicluna, 2017b).

This study addresses friendship and roommate relations as distinct types of socially structured relationships. In taking this approach, the study differs from the common take in queer studies, where friendships in particular have been studied through family and kinship terminologies, contesting normative views on who counts as kin or family (see e.g., Butler, 2002; Moring, 2013; Uibo, 2021). Kath

Weston's (1991) study of gay and lesbian relational arrangements in the San Francisco Bay Area in the late 1980s, 'Families We Choose', has been particularly influential in this tradition. Weston analyzes how the concept of 'chosen families' emerged as an alternative to the heterosexual biogenetic family model and could include, for instance, friends, (ex-)partners and their children. Moreover, Weston's (1991) work shows how friends provided care and support for each other within the wider context of the societal marginalization of homosexuality. Gradually, these friendship networks became the basis of identity politics through which queerness was defined as a subculture and a minority (Weston, 1991).

In this study, I approach friendship and roommate relations as intimate bonds, which is a different and less analyzed angle compared to the identity-based care network perspective that has been prevalent in queer studies (see e.g. Alasuutari, 2020; Frost, Meyer, and Schwartz, 2016; Levitt et al., 2015). The function of friendship as a basis for care networks in the context of social marginalization has been seen to give queer friendship its special meaning (Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan, 2001; Weston, 1991). However, such meaning and practice do not necessarily apply to individual friendships between two people (Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan, 2001; see also Blatterer, 2015: 58–61). Although intimate friendships and friendship networks might overlap, they represent different levels of analysis as intimately significant bonds and networks with various kinds of associations. Thus, this study asks how intimacy between friends can be queered in individual friendships. In this work, I understand queer potentiality in friendship as stemming from practices and positions that challenge normative meanings given to friendship, instead of understanding queerness in friendship as belonging to the same identity-based network.

Consequently, this study also takes into account those minor-scale intimate connections that have an ephemeral and unorganized form. Queer scholars have encouraged the study of attachments that do not fit heteronormative, institutionalized models of family, home, or romantic love. For instance, Lauren Berlant (1998) asks '[w]hat happens to [...] to the glances, gestures, encounters, collaborations, or fantasies that have no canon?' For the most part, queer studies have concentrated on studying such fleeting intimacies in sexual relations (Berlant and Warner, 1998; Rubin, 1999 [1984]; see also Bersani and Phillips, 2008; Edelman, 2004). In this work, I pay attention to the ephemeral intimate connections in non-sexual relations that occur through the body and multiple senses within a domestic space – a question I will address in greater detail in the following two sections.

## 2.2 Intimacy in co-residing friendship and roommate relations

In this dissertation, I show how queering intimacies can take place through intimate connections and bonds in co-residing friendship and roommate relations. I follow Lynn Jamieson's (2011) definition of intimacy as 'the quality of close connection between people and the process of building this quality.' Understanding the processual character of intimacy sheds light on the difference between minor-scale intimate connections and intimate bonds that can emerge over time based on these connections. Moreover, noting the difference between intimate connections and intimate bonds illustrates that intimate connections can take place outside of the so-called 'intimate relationships' that have a socially established form. Thus, the distinction also allows for consideration of the minor-scale, unorganized intimate connections that take place beyond the standard forms of family, coupledness or friendship, which have been of interest in queer studies (Berlant, 1998; Forstie, 2017). These could include, for instance, moments of bodily contact or fragments of intimate knowledge that take place between (relative) strangers.

According to Jamieson (2011), combining the practices of 'giving to, sharing with, spending time with, knowing, practically caring for, feeling attachment to, expressing affection for' builds intimacy over time, although none of these practices alone is a sufficient condition for intimacy to emerge. Building on David Morgan's (1996; 2011) idea of 'doing' families through family practices, Jamieson (2011) argues that intimacies are 'done' through intimate practices in people's everyday lives, generating and sustaining an experience of a special kind of closeness with another person, rather than being a pre-given dimension of certain relationships. Morgan (2011: 35) himself defines intimacy in terms of three overlapping but distinct dimensions. The first, embodied intimacy, refers to embodied acts such as touch, embodied caring or sexual intimacy. The second, emotional intimacy, refers to disclosing one's 'inner life' and non-verbal ways of understanding the other. The third, intimate knowledge, is connected to the other two as it accumulates over time, but also refers to the merging of personal biographies.

In lay understanding and research, friendship is usually categorized as an intimate relationship alongside family members and lovers, for instance. The category of 'intimates' is distinguished from others, such as strangers and acquaintances (Morgan, 2009). However, friendships come in many forms and not all of them are necessarily experienced as intimate (Spencer and Pahl, 2006). In studies investigating what kinds of practices create a sense of intimacy in people's friendships, self-disclosure, sharing one's 'inner life', personal thoughts and emotions, trust, and emotional expressiveness stand out as important qualities (Monsour, 1992; Parks and Floyd, 1996; Policarpo, 2015).

In Finnish culture, friendship is a weighty category, and calling someone a friend usually requires sharing an affective bond (Castrén, 2001: 127–132). The Finnish welfare state shapes the conditions in which friendships are forged, and where friendship acquires its meaning. Due to the fact that state support is expected to meet citizens' basic needs, friendships can be formed on the basis of individual affinity. The conditions are thus different from those in societies and situations where friendship networks are the source of meeting basic needs in life, for instance by providing financial or material help (cf. Lonkila, 1999; Weston, 1991). In this regard, Finnish friendship culture is that of modern intimate friendship, where personal affection is separated from utility (see Blatterer, 2015; Silver, 1990).

Harry Blatterer (2015) argues that the content of friendship can be relatively freely defined by the people in each individual friendship because, unlike its romantic counterpart – coupledness, friendship is characterized by its low degree of institutionalization. This, according to Blatterer (2015), gives friendship its distinctive character as an intimate bond. In this sense, he leans on Simmel's (1902a; 1902b) theorization of dyadic intimacy. Through a Simmelian lens, in an intimate dyad, the immediate presence of two persons creates an exclusive relation whose purpose is the relation itself. Intimacy, then, is what is specific to the dyadic relationship. If a third party joins the dyad, it disrupts the exclusive bond by introducing a group dynamic: whereas dyads cease to exist if one person exits the relation, a group dynamic surmounts the individuals and shifts the bond from its immediacy. According to Simmel, the third party could be a person, but also an institution. He illustrates this with the example of monogamous marriage: the institution of marriage shapes intimacy in a couple relationship. The couple form is more regulated than the specificities between two individuals (also in contemporary cohabiting coupledness, where people are not necessarily married [see Roseneil et al., 2020]). This distinguishes coupledness from friendship, which lacks such institutionalization.

Thus, the specific position of friendship within the totality of intimate relationships is shaped by its distinction from coupledness. For this reason, it is typically not situated within the routine everyday life at home or the common life project that normatively guides coupledness (Blatterer, 2015). Although friendships can be embedded into everyday life, these relationships usually take place outside the home, as neighborhood or workplace friendships (Cronin, 2014; Luotonen, 2023a). The default assumption in the friendship literature is that friendships exist outside the domestic sphere – with the exception of visits to a friend's home – and much is still unknown when it comes to friendships lived at home (Bowlby, 2011). Thus, friendships are socially structured, and the relationships, environments, and activities associated with them shape their nature (Feld and Carter, 1999; Allan and Adams, 1999). Recent studies on friendship and heteronormativity have shown that friendships, as social relations, play a role in (de)constructing gendered and sexual

structures. They have a specific meaning within the totality of personal relations, particularly in relation to coupledness, by being defined as non-erotic, homosocial, and secondary (Blatterer, 2015; 2016; Cronin, 2015; Goedecke, 2018; Linek, 2021).

As I show in this study, the context of communal living challenges the structuring of friendship as being separate from institutions by placing friendships within everyday life at home. In fact, Abrams et al. (1976) have described communal homes as an attempt to institutionalize friendship through the practice of dwelling. By situating oneself within the institution of home and connecting to the group dynamics of a small-scale commune, the conditions of intimacy in friendship are shaped, as defined by Simmel (1902a; 1902b). In co-residing friendship, the domestic setting and the communal group shape intimacy in friendship by shifting the relationship from immediacy and proceeding to the dyad.

Roommate relations in their minimal form, on the other hand, are not motivated by intimacy but by the practical need for housing, which is an external factor to the relationship. Such relationships, according to Simmel (1902a: 43), are examples of non-intimate dyadic relationships. In small-scale communes, however, the motive is to live within the intimate space of a home. A home is a more complex structure with regard to intimacy than the workplace, for instance, which is an issue I will address in more detail in the next section.

Bringing friendships and roommate relations into the domestic sphere influences intimacy-generating practices within relationships. A mutual home shapes the practices of 'giving to, sharing with, spending time with, knowing', for instance (Jamieson, 2011). This study shows that sharing a home significantly increases knowledge of co-residing friends' and roommates' habits at home, as people spend more time together sharing the daily routines of everyday life. Additionally, homes introduce a set of institutionalized practices to communal relationships that are typically absent from friendships. For example, friends who live together have to deal with matters related to housekeeping, such as paying bills, cleaning, and arranging their material possessions within the shared space.

Placing friendships at home challenges their normative position within the friendship-coupledness nexus. Within a couple-normative structure, the intimate couple is the most central and desired type of intimate relationship, and friendships and roommate relations remain secondary in comparison by not strongly guiding a person's life course (Martinussen, 2019; Roseneil et al., 2020). As discussed, the domestic space is an influential institution in structuring this normative order, as it attaches coupledness and family to the home and demarcates friendships as outside the home (cf. Olicker, 1999). Situating friendship in a more central location in everyday domestic life in communal living challenges the equation of home with coupledness and family. Thus, placing friendship at home paves the way for queering friendship's normative position within the totality of intimate relations.

However, it is not guaranteed that the domestic space will forge an intimate bond between co-residents. As Jamieson (2011) notes, intimacy can be avoided or resisted, and its boundaries are always subject to negotiation. For instance, one can avoid sharing one's thoughts and emotions with a roommate. An intimate connection can also involve power imbalances, intrusions, and the crossing of sensitive boundaries (Forstie, 2017). A roommate can, for instance, hear or listen to someone's phone call, even if the caller wants to keep it private. In everyday life at home, boundaries of intimacy are negotiated through multiple means: language that gives meaning to relationships, everyday practices, and embodied and material negotiations through non-verbal communication and spatial movement, for instance (Allan, 2005; Uibo, 2021; Wahlström Henriksson and Goedecke, 2021; Zerubavel, 1991). Boundary negotiations are also interpreted based on the type of relationship. In mere roommate relations, intimacy must be avoided in order for the relationship to remain non-intimate, whereas in a co-residing friendship, boundary navigations tend to shape the relationship, for example by influencing the perceived depth of friendship.

## **2.3 Home as an intimate space**

As noted in the previous section, intimacy in Euro-American societies has a particular connection to the home, resulting from the mutual historical evolution of the heteronormative nuclear family model and the domestic space. After the Industrial Revolution, the novel idea of private domesticity for fostering intimate relations within a nuclear family gradually replaced households that had previously consisted of multiple generations of kin, servants, and lodgers (Rybczynski, 1986; Häggman, 1994). The bourgeois nuclear family model was defined as the desirable relational model for all social classes, and the modern dwelling designed for the nuclear family replaced various, class-specific household models (Juntto, 1990; Ruonavaara, 1996a; Saarikangas, 2002; 2006a; Yesilova, 2009). In Finland, this development culminated in the early 20th century with the introduction of the functionalist dwelling and the post-war reconstruction between 1930 and 1950 (Juntto, 1990; Saarikangas, 2002). Over 95 percent of Finnish dwellings were built after 1930 and follow the functionalist model in their design.

The idea of the functionalist dwelling was to correspond to functions that were deemed the basis of healthy family life and good housekeeping, which would consequently lead to raising healthy citizens according to the nuclear family ideology (Häggman, 1994; Juntto, 1990; Ruonavaara, 1996a). The space was gendered by assigning each family member a space in the dwelling: the kitchen for the mother, boys and girls their gendered bedrooms, and the parents their own. Spaces with no specific function or multiple functions were no longer included in the design (Saarikangas, 1993: 140–150; Saarikangas, 2002: 229–259). The nuclear

family ideology attached heterosexuality to the domestic space, and during this era, homosexuality was dissociated from the sphere of familial domesticity (Cook, 2014). Queer critique on the inherent heterosexuality of the home addresses this form of modern domesticity. At the same time, the idea of emotional intimacy was increasingly attached to the private sphere through the figure of the housewife-mother. In the nuclear family ideology, this newly introduced ideal role for women was characterized by the provision of emotional nurturing and care, which was deemed central to raising children (Ruonavaara, 1996a; Saarikangas, 1993, 341–370; Yesilova, 2009: 51–58).

The mutual evolution of material space and the nuclear family highlights the social production of space, and the ways in which material space participates in meaning-making and shaping social relations in return. Space is not a stable container for social relations, but it is socially and politically reproduced. Thus, space is always processual, in flux, and contestable. (Lefebvre, 1974; Massey, 1994; 2005.) According to Lefebvre (1974), space is produced simultaneously on several overlapping levels, such as through architectural design and ideas about the users of the designed spaces, the production and construction of spaces, and the orientations, relations and meanings that people forge when they live in the spaces. Massey (1994; 2005) notes how multiple levels, from the most local and embodied to the global, are always embedded in spatial processes, and that defining the identity of a place is about attempting to control and define the space in the endless multiplicity of social relations.

When people inhabit a space they call home, they take control of it and invest it with complex, changing meanings, memories, practices, and prospects for the future (Douglas, 1991; Felski, 2000; Mallett, 2004: 63–83; Smart 2007, 164–170). The users and inhabitants of a space thus bring it to life, actualizing some of its potentialities and discarding others. A home, in contrast to other everyday spaces, derives its importance from its familiarity and relation to the self as an anchoring spatial location from which we can venture elsewhere and to which we return (Heller, 1984: 239; Young, 2005 [1997]). Through practices of making and maintaining the home, such as decorating and cleaning, a home reflects the tastes and personalities of its inhabitants (Pink, 2004; Smart 2007, 164–170; Young, 2005 [1997]). The space is also actualized through movement. Michel de Certeau (1984) argues that a walker animates a space in much the same way that a speaker animates the structure of a language, using some possible routes but not others, or making their own paths by taking detours. In this work, I analyze spatial orientations and movements as a dimension of creating the communal home through its use.

Through the development of the modern dwelling, a set of practices were defined as belonging to the domestic sphere, while paid work was moved outside the home (Johansson and Saarikangas, 2009: 17; Rybczynski, 1986; Saarikangas, 2002: 278–

287). The set of domestic practices is still relevant. For instance, cooking, eating, sleeping, laundry, and cleaning, as well as caring, such as taking care of children, and maintaining and nurturing relationships, take place in the domestic space, although the distinction between spheres becomes blurred when it comes to paid domestic work or remote work, for example (Chapman, 2004: 23–25; Osnowitz, 2005; Sekeráková Búriková, 2021). Due to the close historical connection of the modern dwelling with the family, domestic practices are often also understood as family practices. According to Morgan (2011: 88–89; 2020), the overlap between the notions of home and family simultaneously makes the domestic space a key site for ‘doing’ families and, at the same time, family practices invest homes with a specific meaning.

The spatial logics embedded in material dwellings imply that the people living inside are considered intimates, whereas those outside do not belong to the same intimate entity. For instance, thicker walls and lockable doors separate the inside from the outside, whereas more permeable materials are used inside. The logic of movement also differs between the interior and the exterior. (Johansson and Saarikangas, 2009; Kytö, 2010: Saarikangas, 2006a: 133.) This spatial logic reproduces the historical idea that domestic space is about fostering intimate relationships, and hence it plays a part in giving meaning to different relationships (King, 2004: 42; Saarikangas, 2002: 278–287). Communal relationships challenge this logic, however, as the people inhabiting the interior space might not share an intimate bond.

Within a dwelling, people living together tend to acquire a vast amount of knowledge about each other through multiple senses. Morgan (2020, 736) speaks about family density, referring to ‘the degrees of co-presence within the home and the extent to which individuals are open to the gaze of other family members.’ One is also inclined to reveal one’s ‘inner life’ to others, such as emotions, thoughts, and energies through the body (Morgan, 2020; Morgan 2011, 93–109). Maria Törnqvist (2023) argues that in communal living, embodied connections within the dense domestic space forge intimacy between people who might otherwise consider each other distant or strangers. She notes, for instance, embodied ways of attuning to the rhythms of others, as well as bodily disclosure through sounds, smells, and material belongings lying around. These kinds of short-lived intimate connections illustrate how intimacies can be woven through the body even in non-sexual relationships.

In small-scale communes, embodied knowledge is acquired through the routine temporality of the everyday within a domestic space, where people repeat domestic practices similarly day after day. Felski (2000) argues that the everyday is based on the temporality of repetition and is closely linked to the modality of habit: everyday life largely consists of tasks that are performed in a semiautomatic or preoccupied fashion because of their familiarity. Repetition, in turn, is the cause of their familiarity. This mundane routine at home is rarely imagined as a sphere of

relationships other than coupledness or family (Blatterer, 2015; Luotonen, 2023a). However, it also generates intimacy as an inherent quality of these relationships (Jamieson, 2011).

Queer scholars who have analyzed the domestic as a site that reproduces heteronormativity have also paid attention to domestic temporalities. For instance, J. Jack Halberstam (2005; 2011) criticizes both the heteronormative familial scheduling of the everyday, ordered by what is imagined to be healthy for children, and the generational time that promises continuity and futurity through the logics of inheritance and passing on. Elizabeth Freeman (2010) uses the concept of chrononormativity to refer to the naturalized temporal orders to which bodies adapt and repeat as a synchronized mass, extending from daily rhythms to the life-course schedule. Moreover, several scholars pay critical attention to the appreciation of permanence and continuity in relationships as a dimension that structures relationship hierarchies (Herring and Wallace, 2021; Love, 2021; Weston, 1995).

Communal living has a complex relationship with these critiques. The temporality in which they are embedded is the repetitive scheduling of everyday life, which necessarily entails a degree of continuity: namely, repetition at least until the routine becomes familiar and habitual. However, this routine everyday temporality is not necessarily tied to the expectation of a long-lasting future in a communal home. This complex temporality opens up another view of intimacies at home. Communal living is understood as customary in youth when relationship arrangements and working life are still seen as impermanent (Kenyon, 1999; Kenyon and Heath, 2001: 631–633; see also Lahad, 2017: 82–87). However, ‘settling down’ to live with a spouse and possibly children is a significant step toward transitioning to adulthood within a couple-normative structure (Blatterer, 2007; Halberstam, 2005: 4–5; Lahad, 2017). The transitional phase to adulthood is a point where communal dwellers navigate whether they will follow the standard relational order or aim to queer the relational order by centering co-residing friendship and roommate relations in their intimate lives. The transitional phase shows that friendship and roommate relations are structured with their own particular temporal logics, which differ from those of coupledness and family.

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Study design

I have chosen my research methods according to the different research questions in this study, which cover intimate practices, experiences, and commitments that take place within co-residing friendship and roommate relations, and the role of the material dwelling in shaping intimacies. The study is based on semi-structured interviews with residents of Finnish small-scale communes, into which I also integrated two visual methods, relationship maps and floorplan drawings, and two periods of spatial ethnography in two participating communes. I conducted the interviews in 2018–2019 and the spatial ethnography in 2021. The study design has provided complex insights into the topic: the different methods selected have shed light on the distinctive characteristics of embodiment, experience and practices, and ultimately allowed me to respond to an integrated research problem, the mutual shaping of the relations and the space (see Moran-Ellis et al., 2006).

The topic of the study follows the queer/feminist tradition by seeking to shed light on minor-scale experiences of the everyday. I wanted to introduce relationship type as a research subject in the fields of queer and gender studies because, in my view, it is a third, yet somewhat neglected dimension along with gender and sexuality. I follow the epistemological tradition of queer/feminist methodologies by interrogating whether there is a perspective missing from the theoretical tradition and by beginning and conducting the study from a reflexive stance. However, queer and feminist studies also encourage studying the experiences of people who are in marginalized or oppressed societal positions. It is questionable whether communal dwellers constitute a socially marginalized group but, as I argue in this work, this type of relationship is marginalized with regard to coupledom and family. Additionally, I see the everyday experiences of communal dwellers to be justified as a topic of inquiry in itself in queer and feminist studies as it elaborates on scarcely studied lines of inquiry in these fields. (Harding, 1987; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Pulkkinen, 2016.)

I began with the epistemological premise that knowledge is produced relationally. This premise requires that I maintain a close relationship with the research data, allowing the accounts of the research participants to challenge the theoretical entry points I have used in initiating and conducting the study. However,

as Doucet and Mauthner (2012) argue, as researchers we are not only connected to the research participants, but also to our theoretical concepts and the various audiences reading our work. Being transparent and reflexive with these relations is a requirement for responsible research, as well as strong objectivity, which is based on being aware of the inevitable partiality of one's perspective in generating knowledge (Haraway, 1988). The relational approach I adopted guided my choice of research methods. I conducted interviews to provide space for co-constructing meaning between myself and the participants, and I engaged in spatial ethnography to place my sensing body in relation to other bodies and the space (see Pink, 2015).

The original research idea stemmed from my own experience of living communally. After becoming acquainted with (queer) studies on intimacies, families, and kinship, I realized that communal relationships could offer an as yet understudied insight into the discussions. I used my own experiences as a tool in designing the themes, research questions, and data collection for this study. However, I also conducted three pilot interviews to gain a wider perspective on the topic. They introduced new insights and indicated which of my initial ideas were generalizable and worth pursuing. The pilot interviews reminded me that the study participants' experiences might be different from what the researcher anticipated and thus might not support the researcher's initial claims or expectations (see Kong, Mahoney and Plummer, 2001: 245).

I decided to disclose my own experiences of communal living in different ways with the interviewees and the ethnographic participants. I did not explain my communal background to the interviewees at the beginning of the interviews unless they asked. I made this decision because I thought that maintaining my outsider status would help me to defamiliarize myself with the topic and to be more attentive to the interviewees' accounts. Additionally, I attempted to remain in my researcher position so that the interviewees could make an informed decision about their participation. Revealing the insider position to participants can facilitate the creation of trust and interest in a topic in which both parties are invested, and has been widely discussed in terms of reaching people in marginalized positions (Dahl, 2016; Juvonen, 2017; Kim Yoo, 2016). However, the insider position can also lead to a blurring of role boundaries between researcher and research participants, tacit assumptions of shared knowledge, or the creation of problems with other people within the network in which both parties are engaged (Juvonen, 2017). I made my decision in order to balance these different perspectives, allowing the interviewees' accounts to take precedence.

However, in my search for sites for spatial ethnography, I mobilized my situation as a communal dweller as a means of facilitating access to the field. In addition to explaining the research and the questions I would be focusing on, I introduced myself as a person and explained that I was already familiar with living with roommates. In this way, I introduced myself as both a researcher and a private

person. I also considered that the participants would need to have some idea of my personal characteristics because I was simultaneously becoming their temporary roommate. I will return to the issue of insider/outsider position in spatial ethnography in section 3.5.

When looking for research participants, I posted a call for interviews and spatial ethnography in Facebook groups focused on communal living, as well as on my own Facebook page (see Appendix). In Finland, Facebook groups are the most active online channel for finding new roommates. Most of the interviewees contacted me after noticing my call, but I also contacted some people who posted there directly. Additionally, I used my personal contacts and snowball sampling to recruit participants. For the spatial ethnography, I sought participants through the same social media channels. The interviews and the spatial ethnography took place at different points in time. I decided not to interview the ethnography participants or to make detailed notes on our discussions because I felt that participating through sharing everyday life was sufficient for the purpose of my research, and I already had quite saturated interview data. Finding and recruiting research participants for both the interviews and the spatial ethnography was much easier than I had anticipated. The participants wanted to be involved in projects that made communal living more visible in society and were delighted that there would be a doctoral dissertation on the subject.

In my search for interviewees, I wanted to find communal dwellers who were living in one shared apartment or house, and who felt that they had chosen this way of living voluntarily. In other words, they were not actively looking for a way out of communal living. To this end, I began the call with these questions: “Do you live in a commune where you share one house or apartment with your roommates? Do you consider living in a commune to be a more permanent way of life for you?” However, as situations and spaces tend to vary, the definitions also broadened. I included a few small-scale communes where, in addition to a bigger house, there were one or more smaller apartments. A few participants had also moved to other types of housing or were planning to do so shortly.

## **3.2 Research participants**

The research participants comprised 31 interviewees and 13 ethnographic participants. I refer to the specific groups by these terms and use the term research participants to refer to interviewees and ethnographic participants together. Of the 44 research participants, 24 identified as women (one of whom problematized the identity category), 15 as men (one of whom experienced it as a given juridical and social category rather than an appropriate identity), three as non-binary, one as genderqueer, and one who did not identify with any existing gender category. Most of the research participants were Finnish by birth, and six had moved to Finland

from elsewhere at some point in their lives. The research participants had a variety of relationship arrangements in addition to their communal relationships: about half were single and half in couple relationships with same-sex and different-sex partners, either living together or apart. A few were in polyamorous relationships, intact heterosexual families, and single-parent families.

The research participants ranged in age from 24 to 67, with a median age of 32. The median age of the interviewees was 32, and the median age of the ethnographic participants was 30. One of the ethnographic participants had a child. Two-thirds of the interviewees lived in the capital area – in Helsinki and Espoo – and the rest in the regional centers of Tampere, Turku, and Oulu. The fieldwork was conducted in Helsinki.

Thirty-six of the research participants either had higher education or were currently studying in higher education institutions. Eight out of the 36 were still students. The seven people with upper secondary-level education were mainly in the creative industry or were entrepreneurs. Most of the participants had jobs and could have afforded to live alone. In terms of the level of education and financial security, the sample in this study is in line with previous studies where communal living is seen as a lifestyle option for the relatively well-off and the middle class (Heath, 2004: 164–166; Törnqvist, 2019: 905).

### **3.3 Research data**

This study is based on four types of research data: interviews (N=31), relationship maps that the interviewees drew before the interviews (N=25), floor-plan maps that the interviewees drew of their homes during the interviews (N=28), and spatial ethnography field notes. Sub-studies I and II are based on the interview data, while sub-study III engages with the field notes, the floor plan drawings, and the interviews. The relationship maps are not analyzed in the sub-studies, but form part of the research data as secondary data. There are fewer floor-plan and relationship maps than interviews because not all methods were implemented in the pilot interviews, I did not ask for floor-plan drawings from those who had moved out, and some interviewees did not draw the relationship map.

As I explained in section 3.1, I understand research data as relational, generated between researcher and research participants in the research situation (DeVault and Gross, 2014; Mason, 2002). The experiences of the research participants are not something that I have collected in a pure or unaltered form; rather, by setting the research agenda and interacting with the participants, I have participated in their co-creation. For instance, I set the themes for the interview, but also followed the leads that the interviewees brought up, reflecting the mutual construction of the data (Charmaz, 2001; Devault and Gross, 2014; Haraway, 1988). In the context of ethnographic fieldwork, this is even more emphasized, as embeddedness in the field

and relationally forged understandings escape any simplistic notions of data collection (Bell, 2019; Hastrup, 2004).

### ***Relationship maps***

Prior to the interview, I asked the interviewees to draw a map of their close relationships, drawing themselves in the center of a piece of paper and the other people around them in a free format. I also asked them to mark whether they received any emotional, practical, or material support from these people (see Appendix for full instructions). The relationship maps depict a relational configuration from the individual's perspective, thus centering the individual's experience of closeness and providing information about support received. The interviewees explained the map to me in their respective interviews when we discussed their close relationships more broadly.

The maps support the analysis, although they are not analyzed in the sub-studies. They provided me with further information on how the interviewees placed their communal relations within their larger network of personal relationships, thus showing what is particular about communal relations within the whole. Moreover, they helped me to confirm that communal relations could be approached as intimate relationships that people usually draw on such maps. The maps indicated whether and in what ways the communal group was important to the interviewee's intimate life, and whether the interviewee would mark all roommates on the map or just some, thus illustrating differences within the communal group. The maps also framed the research setting for the interviewees by being their first contact with the topic.

### ***Interview data***

Principally, I analyzed the experiences of the research participants through the interview data. I created a loose structure for the interviews, which I conducted in a semi-structured way. I did this using the insights I had gained from three pilot interviews and my own experiences. I conducted the pilot interviews in an open-ended format, starting with an initial question asking the interviewees to tell me about their homes, and then continuing with themes that emerged during the interview.

After the pilot interviews, I designed a structure for the interviews that addressed relational experiences, practices, and commitments in a small-scale commune. In order to do this, I felt that it was necessary, but also sufficient, to discuss the themes of relations with roommates, support from roommates, housework and practicalities, relations with others close to them, managing privacy, and the interviewee's hopes for the future.

I asked the interviewees for permission to conduct the interviews in their homes, as visiting their home spaces allowed me to engage with the materiality of their dwellings. Almost all of the interviewees agreed, although a few wished to be interviewed elsewhere, in university or library meeting rooms, or in cafes. Consequently, beyond speech, the interview data consists of my attunement to the space and my memories of the situation, as well as the interviewees' and my own embodied positions and modes of embodied expression. The recordings, which I later transcribed, evoke relational memories of the places and encompass layers beyond the text (see Daza and Huckaby, 2014; Pink, 2015). For example, the interviewees were able to point out details of the space around us during the discussion. Many showed me around their homes, and while they were drawing floor-plan maps, I usually wandered around the place with their permission. After each interview, I wrote notes, which helped me re-evolve my spatial memories.

All of the semi-structured interviews generally started in a similar way. I asked the interviewees to tell me about their home, how they came to live there, and about the terms they used to refer to their communal dwelling and the people they lived with. This brief discussion preceded the drawing of the floor-plan maps, which facilitated a conversation about the space using the map for reference. The interview then continued in a freer form.

I chose to include the drawing activity at the start of the interview because it usually eased the tension and provided a smooth transition into discussing the space. Moreover, I did not want the drawings to be based on the discussion. Discussing the drawing generated further information about the space and the relationships within it. In turn, the discussion enriched the visual depiction and shed light on experienced ambivalences in the space.

Initially, I had prepared very detailed questions for the interview so that I would have further questions at hand in case the discussion stalled (see Appendix). In the end, this was rarely the case, as I typically asked follow-up questions based on the interviewee's responses. Discussing the drawing served to bring up several topics that I had planned to cover. I soon stopped relying on the question form and memorized the main themes. I made sure that these themes were covered at some point during the interviews, and otherwise allowed the conversation to flow naturally based on the interviewees' input.

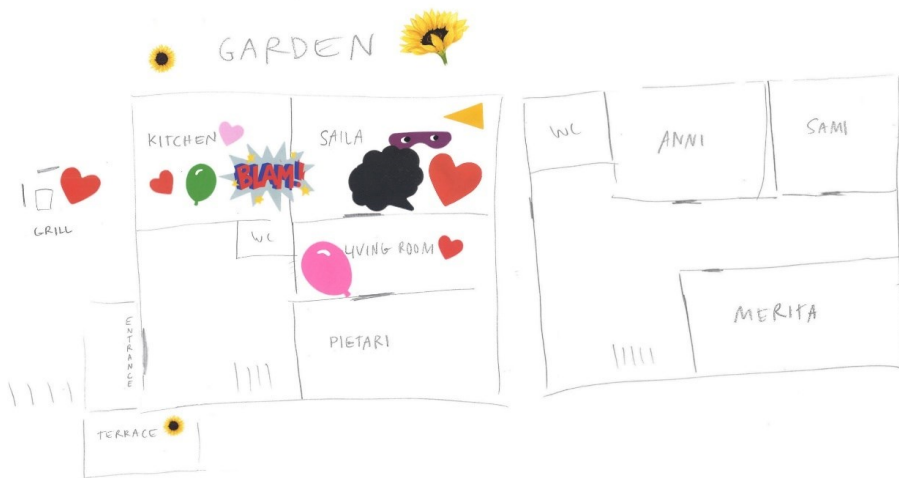
The interviews lasted approximately one to three hours. Beyond the recorded setting, moments of arrival and departure were crucial for establishing contact and trust. Before beginning the interview, the participants offered me coffee or tea, during which we reviewed the consent form. The moment of departure in the hallway also led to chatting more informally about topics that the interview had evoked, such as little anecdotes about communal living or interesting decoration choices in the house.

## ***Floor-plan drawings***

The floor-plan drawings enabled me to investigate where affective interactions were likely to take place within the household and provided a foundation for discussing an interviewee's relations. I asked the interviewees to draw the floor plan of their home and to mark things that they considered meaningful. These self-made drawings represented a mental abstraction of the interviewees' homes, reflecting their experience of the space and the ways they used it (Saarikangas, 2006b: 126–127). The drawings visualized the interviewees' understanding of the space and its boundaries, their use of the space, and their movements within it, thus adding a visual dimension to their verbal descriptions.

The method was inspired by Jacqui Gabb's (2008: 44, 133–135) emotion maps. I adapted Gabb's version to better fit the study of the interviewees' spatial experiences. In the original version, participants were provided with pre-printed floor-plan maps and stickers depicting specific emotions. I provided the interviewees with A3 white paper, colored pencils, and a selection of stickers featuring sunflowers, food, speech bubbles, hearts, different sounds, and balloons. The interviewees used these materials creatively to express their personal meanings, using different colors or stickers as they wished. The items marked could represent singular or recurring events, pleasant or unpleasant memories, or anything else that the interviewee considered significant.

Below is an anonymized example of a floor-plan drawing by an interviewee, Saira. All names are pseudonyms, and I have obscured some minor details by altering the location of certain details, for example.



## ***Spatial ethnography***

Spatial ethnography is a framework for addressing the body as a social and material site that actively participates in the co-creation of space by engaging with other bodies and material, affective, and social space (Low, 2009; 2017; Pink, 2004; 2008; 2015; Sen and Silverman, 2013). To observe multiple embodied and spatial processes in communal homes from within, I engaged with the communal space and people through my own body, using, for instance, my sensory attunement and spatial orientations (Pink, 2004: 32–34; Sen and Silverman, 2013: 9–10). It was necessary to address those tiny, hard-to-grasp movements and positions of the everyday that are difficult to reach in an interview situation.

During the three weeks in both locations, I observed the space and its role in arranging everyday life. The fieldwork notes present a detailed record of our movements, positions, verbal and non-verbal interactions, and sensory connections in the domestic space, highlighting how the fieldwork data is generated relationally and how my own body becomes a part of the socio-material making of the lived space (Low, 2009: 34; Pink, 2015). Previously, everyday life in a domestic space has also been analyzed through video recordings, for instance, but being in the space allows one to engage with it through multiple senses and embodied attunement (cf. Korvela, 2003; Pink, 2013; 2015).

In searching for fieldwork sites, my goal was to find different kinds of spatial designs to see how the material form could affect the relations. I rented a room in each household and lived there for about three weeks. The first fieldwork took place in a four-bedroom apartment with a visually continuous open space in the middle of the apartment. I lived there with three other people, each with their own bedroom and a shared living room, kitchen, and bathroom. The second took place in a large villa with two floors. Each floor had its own kitchen, bathroom and living room. During my stay, I lived upstairs with two people. Ten people lived in the house altogether. The entrance to the house was downstairs. I did not interview the ethnographic participants, as explained above.

The first fieldwork in the apartment took place in February–March 2021, and the second in the villa in May 2021. Both fieldwork periods took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic affected the density of sharing the domestic space with others. During the first fieldwork period in February–March, the state-led corona regulations were tightened. This meant that we all spent most of our time at home, also because everyone was able to work remotely. By May, the regulations were relaxed, but many of the participants also had jobs where remote work was not possible. In addition, the change of season from winter to spring allowed people in the villa to spend more time in the yard, whereas the winter conditions in February kept us more confined indoors. More generally, the pandemic influenced a multitude of minor things at home, but addressing them more profoundly is beyond the scope of this work.

### 3.4 Analyzing the data

The combination of research methods allowed me to engage with the dimensions of experience, embodiment, and materiality, which are distinct yet interwoven research subjects in this study. The three sub-studies differ in their methodological approaches, with two of them based on the interview data, and the third engaging with the floor-plan drawings, spatial ethnography, and interviews. However, the research questions – the intimacies that are generated at home and the influence of the material space upon them – integrate the methods into a conceptual and theoretical whole. Moran-Ellis et al. (2006) argue that different methods can be integrated at several stages of the process, in analysis or later in theoretical discussion, as long as they are given equal weight and are orientated toward a common goal (see also Punch, 2005: 241). In this summary of the dissertation, I bring together the various data that I have collected at the level of theorization by elevating the level of abstraction of the empirical work and answering my research questions. Starting from the results of each independent sub-study, the results of the summary emerge from engaging in discussions that are the common denominators of the whole research project.

I conducted the interviews and transcribed them verbatim. This stage enabled me to familiarize myself thoroughly with the interview data, including dimensions beyond the text. For example, I sometimes listened to the recordings to hear the rhythms of the discussion, or to re-engage with the spatial environment and interview situation. After immersing myself in the interviews for about a year when conducting and transcribing them, I identified themes that I found interesting, which later evolved into sub-studies I and II. These themes included the home as a producer of intimacy, the structuring of communal relationships with reference to coupledness, co-residing friendship, and commitment to communal living. The selection of interesting themes at this point focused, but also necessarily narrowed down, the scope of the research project. As Doucet and Mauthner (2012: 128–129) point out, it is impossible to remain equally engaged with all of the research participants' accounts, as some of them become more relevant to us due to our theoretical and analytical frameworks.

The analysis has been a creative, iterative process, alternating between engaging with the interview data and theory, following the model of abductive analysis (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014). Throughout the process from research design to data collection and analysis, I have simultaneously read existing research on communal living, domesticities, and intimacies, as well as engaged with broader queer and gender theoretical literature. Alternating between engaging with data and reading enabled me to notice the gaps in existing research – such as the scarcity of queer theorizing and research on friendship – and offered me conceptual tools to approach the interviewees' experiences systematically. Thus, abductive analysis combines induction and deduction to generate possibilities for discovery and new

theorization. Theorization results from presenting, justifying, and explaining previously unknown phenomena. At the same time, discovering and justifying new insights from the data requires familiarity with existing theories concerning the topic and more broadly. (Tavory and Timmermans, 2014; Timmermans and Tavory, 2022; see also Meyer and Lunay, 2013.) A similar idea is presented in Layder's (1998) model of adaptive theory, which stresses starting from the data, however.

I began sub-study I, which explores intimacies in co-residing friendship, by approaching the themes of home as a creator of intimacy and friendship. After initially engaging with the literature on homes, communal living, and friendship, I systematically and manually categorized relevant, more abstract insights from the interview data (i.e., coded [Timmermans and Tavory, 2022, 69–114]) into Word files, grouping insights, for instance, under the codes of the everyday, everyday companionship, new knowledge, new closeness, and responsibility. The process was similar to that of sub-study II, in which I explore domestic futures beyond coupledness. I began with the themes of commitment and the couple norm that I had originally identified in the interview data. In sub-study II, I used the Atlas.ti program in the coding process and categorized the data using codes such as adulthood, phase in life, change, progression, money, and having children.

Both processes entailed several rounds of engaging with the data through coding and interpretation, as well as defamiliarization when I engaged with the theoretical literature. Approaching the topic from multiple perspectives through the methodological and theoretical choices led me to engage with a variety of literature from gender and queer theory to family sociology, queer and feminist geography, and anthropology. The breadth of reading led to more iterative rounds between reading and data analysis until I found the entry points through which to connect the various theoretical readings and data analysis and further theorize my topics.

Sub-study III, which addresses embodied, sensory, and spatial connections at home, grew out of my interest in material space, as I had recently conducted the spatial ethnography and wanted to analyze the floor-plan drawings. The analysis of the two types of data overlapped, although I alternated between them in order to defamiliarize myself with the other and to focus the approach. Having conducted the spatial ethnography a few months earlier, I first engaged with the floor-plan drawings. I interpreted the places and the nature of the markings made by the interviewee, such as the stickers or the spatial logic in the drawing, including the direction from which the interviewee approached the place, the logic of movement, and the size of different rooms. I then turned to the interview data to lean on the interviewee's explanations when interpreting various symbols, such as the stickers. The visual data was thus co-created between the person drawing, the drawing itself, and my interpretation of it (Lehmuskallio, 2021).

The ideas derived from the visual data and the interviews informed the coding of the spatial ethnography field notes, from which I categorized the insights pertaining to multisensory information, the visibility of the body, the privacy of the bedroom, and the routes or movement and encounters within the dwelling. Having produced a specific dataset from the field notes and the drawings through the coding process, I engaged in a similar iterative process of interpretation and inference as described in the previous sub-studies.

### **3.5 Research ethics**

Strong reflexivity guided the entire research process, from design to methodological choices to analysis and writing. Understanding the knowledge generated as relational through the research participants' input, but also through my various relationships with scientific communities and theoretical traditions, has required me to maintain a critical, reflexive position throughout the process (see Doucet and Mauthner, 2012). This has entailed being prepared to change or adjust the course of the research if necessary, and being willing to engage in relational knowledge generation by bringing my own body into the field through interviews and spatial ethnography.

The research participants gave their written consent after I explained the aims of the study and how the data would be used. They had the right to withdraw from the study at any time until the results were published, after which it would not be possible to do so. I discussed consent with the interviewees before beginning the interview. The request to draw the relationship maps before the interview also served to inform the interviewees about the study, and thus functioned as a means of ensuring informed consent. With the ethnographic participants, I explained the focus and purpose of the research project in a meeting. They made their decision about participating after the meeting and informed me later. The decision had to be unanimous and anyone in the commune had the option of withdrawing from the study at any point. I informed the research participants as best I could although it was impossible to give a full account of the qualitative research before conducting it.

When studying personal relationships, a researcher has to intervene in relationships by inviting a person to talk about them, which requires sensitivity within the situation and cautious reflexivity about what the researcher knows regarding particular relationships (Mason, 2002: 91–95). For instance, individual interviews may affect an individual's relations with others in the household if the interview brings up difficult or previously neglected issues. In spatial ethnography, on the other hand, I have observed group dynamics and relationships between people that also require sensitivity because addressing them in the research might affect these dynamics.

I have paid close attention to the possibility of intervention and carefully considered disclosing information about the participants, doing my best to avoid any negative impact on relationships. I have changed all names to pseudonyms in publications and obscured other details, such as changing ages by a year or two, or obscuring details in the drawings (Kuula-Luumi, 2021). However, I also explained to the research participants that even with anonymized data, their roommates and others close to them might recognize them from very small details, and that they should be aware of this when participating. For the ethnographic participants, I underlined that the notes would contain many detailed descriptions of the space and its residents.

In spatial ethnography, my roles as both a partial insider and an outsider invariably overlapped. However, the limited duration of my stay also helped me to maintain my outsider status as a researcher who was not a member of the commune, although familiarity emerged between me and the participants. During the three weeks, the research purpose of my stay was not forgotten, as it was rather often a topic of discussion. In addition, things such as the participants looking for a new roommate for my room sustained the understanding of the particularity of my short stay. I did not interview the ethnographic participants, which could also be interpreted as denying them the chance to express their views. My decision was based on a careful balance between exposure and voice and the requirements of the study.

The research participants showed trust in me and considered the topic important. Their active participation is at the core of the knowledge generated in this study. However, after engaging with a wide variety of theoretical discussions and all the data gathered in this project, I believe I can offer new insights to them and to wider audiences interested in re-imagining forms of relating and togetherness.

## 4 Summaries of the sub-studies

### 4.1 Sub-study I: The effects of domestic density on friendship intimacies

Sub-study I addresses the ways in which sharing everyday life under the same roof affects the experience and quality of intimacy in friendship. The paper, entitled 'Friendship at home: everyday in domestic space shaping friendship intimacies in Finnish small-scale communes', was published in *Gender, Place and Culture* (2022, 29:8). In the paper, I argue that the everyday in domestic space reshapes intimacies in friendship by enhancing embodied knowledge of others gathered through continuous, routine co-presence in close spatial proximity. The co-presence introduces intensified negotiations of affective responsibility and personal boundaries into friendship due to the increase in and diversification of intimate knowledge.

The article analyzes friendship intimacies within domestic space through the concept of domestic density, elaborating on David Morgan's (2020: 736) concept of family density. With the concept, Morgan refers to 'the degrees of co-presence within the home and the extent to which individuals are open to the gaze of other family members.' In the everyday at home, people constantly gather information on each other through various senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, and touching. This applies to all relations lived in a domestic space, which is why I speak of domestic density instead of family density. The accumulation of sensory information in the domestic space forges a novel kind of embodied intimate knowledge for co-residing friendships. At the same time, the intimate knowledge particularizes the domestic space as a site for this kind of intimacy.

In the article, I analyze intimacy through Lynn Jamieson's (2011) definition: 'intimacy refers to the quality of close connection between people and the process of building this quality,' thereby connecting practices, what is 'done' in a relationship, to the experience of intimacy. Spatial and temporal conditions enable or constrain intimacy-generating practices such as spending time with or caring for others, touching each other, or expressing one's emotions. Domestic space centers specific practices, such as caring for those close to us and maintaining the self through sleeping, eating and washing, which differentiate it from other everyday spheres of life, such as school or work. Domestic practices are often understood as

family practices because of the mutual evolution of the domestic space and the nuclear family form. On the other hand, domestic practices do not self-evidently make sense as friendship practices because friendship rarely takes place within the routines of everyday life at home.

The paper draws on the semi-structured interview data, focusing in particular on the accounts in which interviewees considered (some of) their roommates to be their friends. Friendships tend to be more complex than mere roommate relationships, taking into account various aspects of the relationship, such as affection, time spent together, or expectations regarding the relationship.

The analysis shows that the effect of domestic everyday life on friendship intimacies is ambivalent. Living in co-residing friendships within the repetitive course of everyday life in a dense domestic space creates experiences of a novel kind of emotional closeness, but also distance. This is due to changes in both verbal and embodied practices introduced into friendships in a domestic space. For many interviewees, simply being together at home on a daily basis without doing anything in particular was highly important and created a novel sense of intimacy in the relationship. On the other hand, the ever-ongoing everyday life and daily tasks also meant that co-residing friends rarely paused to ‘really meet’ each other. Some found this frustrating because it made it difficult to forge intimacy through speech and disclosure – opening up one’s ‘inner life’ to the other person. Additionally, embodied connections took on a new form. Intimate knowledge would also accumulate through shorter encounters in everyday life or, for instance, through the untidiness people left behind. Thus, domestic intimacies are not always easy to deal with because they do not necessarily conform to the positive ideals of friendship.

Furthermore, the abundance of intimate embodied knowledge challenges customary boundaries between friends, especially in terms of affective responsibility for one another. Co-residing friends are compelled to reconsider the degree to which they are responsible for each other. Sometimes, when old friends moved in together, the domestic space called into question the degree to which they had previously known each other, as new information emerged. This new knowledge was not always pleasant, and the interviewees had to navigate it in various ways, ranging from defining the relationship to doing psychological work on themselves, such as learning to accept that one’s emotions would not remain private within the domestic space. However, if co-habiting friends were able to reconcile their wishes with regard to responsibility and personal boundaries, many found their relationship particularly satisfying due to the influence of domestic density.

## 4.2 Sub-study II: Domestic relational futures beyond coupledness

Sub-study II analyzes the potential of organizing one's relationships and housing based on co-residing friendships and roommate relations at a stage in the adult life course when cultural expectations of 'settling down' into coupledness, family life, and owner-occupied housing intensify. The paper, entitled 'Commitments beyond coupledness: negotiating relational futures in Finnish small-scale communes', was published in *Time & Society* (2024, 33:2).

In the paper, I argue that the close connection between coupledness and adulthood sidelines communal living as a relational arrangement when persons age beyond a socially shared understanding of youth. Resisting this temporal order leads communal dwellers into a complex, socially structured negotiation of their future trajectories, where personal autonomy in friendship and roommate relations poses an intra-relational obstacle to building a communal future.

I bring together the sociological study of the life course, and the critique of couple normativity, stemming from queer theory and singlehood studies. Their juxtaposition allows me to consider the role of coupledness as a marker of adulthood in contemporary Euro-American societies, and provides new insights into the suggestions that people are increasingly organizing their lives around friendship. The life course is an overarching structure that incorporates levels ranging from an individual's personal life biography to legal structures, such as age-regulated legal norms, and institutions such as schooling and working life. It structures and gives meaning to individuals' life trajectories, but it also allows for personal variation. Marriage, entering working life, and independent living have traditionally been regarded as cornerstones of transitioning into adulthood. However, there is an increasing delay in attaining these markers. Currently, 30 years represents an important temporal milestone in achieving 'real' adulthood.

In recent decades, co-habiting coupledness has replaced marriage as a marker of established coupledness, legally, culturally, and normatively. Singlehood scholars (Lahad, 2017; Kolehmainen, Lahti and Kinnunen, 2023) have noted the significance of coupledness in attaining adult status, as there are no collective imaginaries of adult futures beyond coupledness. However, people can exercise their temporal agency and build alternative paths in life. In attempting to build a relational future based on friendship and roommate relations, temporal reflexivity and resistance must be enacted interpersonally between all persons in the relationship. Thus, an individual's temporal agency is socially structured, engaging with immediate relationships, their larger social networks, and the wider society, for example through questions of housing.

The analysis is based on semi-structured interviews, focusing in particular on the accounts of interviewees in their late 20s and 30s. Approximately two-thirds of

the interviewees belonged to this age group. The group was not clear-cut, but rather separated by fuzzy boundaries. They shared age-related similarities regarding their relationship experiences, yet differed when it came to other issues.

The analysis shows that the connection between adulthood and coupledness remains consistently strong. Communal living starts to deviate from the normative life course structure as people age beyond youth, with 30 years being a significant milestone that influences people's perception of their position in the life course. The connection between adulthood and coupledness functions in a reciprocal manner: aging beyond youth requires centering coupledness in one's relational life, while doing so grants one the status of a 'proper adult.' As the life-course structure encompasses issues from relationships to reproduction to housing, resisting it can become an arduous task for individuals who do so, even those with strong personal temporal agency. Communal dwellers who wish to resist the normative structure must contend with socially structured problems: will others understand their choices, will they find others to live with, and will residential structures accommodate living with friends and roommates, for example?

Moreover, the appreciation of each person's autonomy in friendship and roommate relations makes it more difficult to imagine a shared future. In the research participants' accounts, autonomy is factored in as an interpersonal norm, a moral value, and an internal desire. Within the couple-normative structure, friends and roommates are not supposed to hinder each other's opportunities to prioritize coupledness, which poses an obstacle to imagining and enacting futures in communal relationships. As such, their temporal agency is interpersonally structured with the relational norms of friendship and roommate relations. However, by questioning the order and imagining communal futures, the research participants' accounts also show that the order is contingent and subject to change.

### **4.3 Sub-study III: Spatial and conceptual boundary work as a way of making sense of communal relations**

Sub-study III addresses the navigation of communal dwellers between each person's personal space and group togetherness in the ambivalent situation where communal dwellers are simultaneously independent individuals and living together. The article, entitled 'Alone and together in domestic space: navigating spatial and conceptual relationship boundaries in Finnish small-scale communes', was published in *Families, relationships and societies* (E-pub ahead of print).

Building on Maria Törnqvist's (2019) framing of communal living as *living alone together*, I approach communal living as *living alone/together*, an arrangement whereby individuals simultaneously want to live with others but remain independent due to the lack of an established model for such relationships. Communal dwellers must make sense of their *aleness* and *togetherness* within

the dwelling by engaging in boundary work. According to Lamont and Molnár (2002, 171), boundary work involves individuals and groups engaging in the process of creating and applying their categorical distinctions to make sense of things and themselves. The reformulation of Törnqvist's concept notes that while both positions of aloneness and togetherness co-exist, one or the other can be emphasized depending on how the relations are experienced and understood situationally.

In the paper, I argue that in small-scale communes, residents' navigations of separateness and unity are deeply intertwined with spatial processes consisting of various conceptualizations of the space, spatial orientations and movements, and sensory experiences. Moreover, I argue that the sensory, spatial, and embodied connections complicate the possibilities of distinguishing the individual from the group, thus emphasizing the position of *living alone/together*. The domestic space materially encloses people within a space where their mutual connections are enhanced through the spatial design of the dwelling. The domestic space is historically designed for nuclear families and hence it materially reproduces ideas of family intimacy. The design also separates the inside of the dwelling from the outside and thus reinforces the connections within the dwelling, for instance through visual continuity, or thinner wall structures. This creates a variety of sensory connections between people who live together, but do not fit the relational model of the family.

In this paper, I analyze three types of research data that I collected during the project: semi-structured interviews, floor-plan drawings that the interviewees made of their homes at the beginning of the interviews, and field notes from the three-week-long periods of spatial ethnography that I conducted in two participating small-scale communes. With the floor-plan drawings and the fieldwork, the paper moves beyond discourse and speech to analyze those minor-scale embodied connections, positions, and orientations in everyday life that are often fleeting and difficult to capture through speech.

The paper shows how multiple, changing and overlapping spatial processes are simultaneously present in the space. The space and the boundaries within it and between people are navigated in different ways, both conceptually and through the body. Some of the spatial processes emphasize the position of *living alone/together*, such as understanding the space as clearly demarcated into common and private space. However, sensory connections, material structures and spatial orientations emphasize the position of *living alone/together* by not respecting the conceptual boundaries in place. In practice, this means, for instance, that walls are porous to various sounds and smells, and that separating oneself from others might not be as easy as withdrawing to a private bedroom. Kitchens, bathrooms, and other spaces for fulfilling daily needs guide the understanding of a group living together.

When a domestic space binds people together through sensory experiences and spatial orientations, people must actively seek to separate themselves for their *aleness* in ways that center the sensing body. They could, for instance, use headphones or avoid eye contact to break the sensory connections, or increase the physical distance from others by remodeling the space. At the same time, the material belongings left in the space and roommates' past experiences and memories reach beyond the present moment, binding people to past members of the communal group. With the multiple spatial processes and embodied boundary work, space is continuously reshaped, given novel meaning and used in novel ways. The reshaping of the space of a dwelling and the relational boundary work are never finished.

## 5 Queering intimacies at home

### 5.1 Embodied connections and boundary navigations at home

In this dissertation, I analyze how intimacies in co-residing friendships and roommate relations re-imagine the social structuring of personal relations, and how a material dwelling participates in this re-imagining. To this end, the dissertation responds to three interrelated research questions: How does a material dwelling participate in shaping and reproducing relationships within it? How do intimate practices, experiences, and commitments in co-residing friendship and roommate relations take shape within a common home? Do the intimacies woven in small-scale communes queer heteronormative and couple-normative structures, and if so, how? In the following three sections, I respond to these questions in the order presented. I begin by analyzing the role of the material dwelling, move on to scrutinize how the domestic context shapes intimacies, and finally discuss whether and how communal intimacies queer normative relationship structures.

Firstly, how does a material dwelling participate in shaping and reproducing the relationships within it? I argue that domestic space enhances embodied connections between communal dwellers by transmitting sensory information and guiding the dwellers' spatial orientations. Moreover, I demonstrate that homes do not provide communal dwellers with clear roles in relation to each other, which complicates encountering embodied connections at home. Communal dwellers must constantly navigate the boundaries between each individual and the communal group. The boundary navigations keep the relationships and the space in constant motion.

In sub-study III, I argue that communal dwellers navigate their mutual boundaries by engaging in multiple, overlapping, and ambivalent spatial processes. They make sense of the boundaries through various conceptualizations of space, spatial movements and orientations, and sensory connections within space. Elaborating on the work of Maria Törnqvist (2019), I analyze boundary navigations through the concept of *living alone/together*, referring to a situation in which communal dwellers simultaneously form a group, yet remain autonomous with

regard to each other. In a communal context, both positions of living alone/together exist concurrently, with one or the other being emphasized depending on the situation. In the paper, I show how spatial, embodied and sensory connections emphasize the position of *living alone/together*, whereas the position of *living alone/together* is more emphasized when the dwellers categorize their homes distinctly into private bedrooms and shared common spaces in their speech and visual depictions of the space, for instance. Spatial and embodied connections, however, make it more difficult to distinguish the individual from the group.

Thus, sub-study III sheds light on the body as a receiver and transmitter of sensory information within a domestic space. In communal homes, sensory connections take place between people who might not share an affective bond or even know much about each other. In the paper, I approach sensory connections using a concept of sensory community. The concept originates from the theory of acoustic ecology as ‘an acoustic community’ and refers to a sphere where its inhabitants are exposed to the same acoustic information (Schafer, 1994, 214–215; Truax, 2001: 66). However, I extend the use of the concept to consider various types of sensory information (see also Henshaw et al., 2018). Within a sensory community, sensory information, such as sounds and smells, forges connections between people. When receiving this information, people must make sense of the emergent connection, including its affective reception and ways of acting upon the connection (Truax, 2001: xviii).

Material structures participate in the creation of a sensory community by directing the pathways through which sounds and smells travel between people. For instance, walls might block or transmit sensory information. In sub-study III, I analyze the role of a material dwelling in shaping a sensory community through my ethnographic field notes. The study demonstrates how two different types of dwellings, the apartment and the villa, guided my sensory connections with other people differently due to their material structures, such as the porosity of the walls. Additionally, the spaces necessary for fulfilling daily needs, such as kitchens, toilets, and bathrooms, significantly guided residents’ spatial orientations and movements, which influenced the possibilities for establishing contact. During my fieldwork in the large villa, the residents downstairs were not included in the same sensory community as me living upstairs, where I had my bedroom. Due to the material structure of the building, I could not usually hear what was going on downstairs or smell people cooking, for example. Moreover, I had no spontaneous reason to go downstairs because I had my own bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom upstairs. In the apartment, on the other hand, I was constantly connected to the rest of the apartment, even from my bedroom, through multiple senses because of the central location of the room and the porosity of the walls, which allowed smells and sounds to pass through.

The material dwelling thus shapes the connections between the bodies inhabiting the space. The connections are fleeting in nature as sensory connections come and go, and people use the space differently depending on the situation. However, communal dwellers also make sense of the sensory connections by affectively reacting to and acting upon them (Truax, 2001: xviii), which affects the process of making sense of their mutual relationships as a site of the connections.

In sub-study III, I analyze the process of sense-making through the concept of boundary work. The term refers to the practice of categorizing things into separate entities in order to make sense of them, such as separating friends from roommates, home from work, or vacations from everyday life (Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Zerubavel, 1991). In small-scale communes, communal dwellers must make sense of the ambivalent situation of *living alone/together*, of being simultaneously separate individuals and a group that transcends individuals. A domestic space that forges sensory and embodied connections between residents might not be consistent with how they understand their mutual relationship. Particularly when people inhabiting a sensory community are strangers to each other, sharing a sensory connection can be experienced as difficult (see Venäläinen, 2020). Communal dwellers must navigate the boundaries between residents' *aleness* and *togetherness* on multiple levels, from mental, linguistic, and conceptual separations to ongoing embodied and spatial navigations. They do this, for example, through their emotional reactions to sounds and smells, and through the ways in which they use the space.

Moreover, cultural understandings of the inside and outside of a dwelling participate in shaping the boundary work. Domestic space, as it has emerged through the historical evolution of the modern dwelling, entails an idea of familial privacy. As King (2004) argues, a material dwelling grants privacy by providing the means to control the space inside by managing its boundaries toward the outside. This domestic privacy is not simply for being alone, but for being together with selected people and preventing the intrusion of others. It is thus a site for fostering intimacy in an enclosed space, which is a notion that was attached to the domestic through the mutual evolution of the dwelling and the family. (King, 2004: 42; Saarikangas 2002.) Importantly, however, the privacy inside a dwelling does not mean that it is a 'private sphere' separate from political and public concerns (Armstrong and Squires, 2002; Massey, 1994). The material shape and the idea of private intimacy follow from the politics of the nuclear family ideology (Juntto, 1990; Saarikangas, 2002; Yesilova, 2009).

Communal relations have a complicated relationship with the notions of privacy and intimacy within a domestic space. Communal relationships can take place between people who are strangers to each other and who might keep each other at a distance. Thus, people inhabiting the same private sphere can be seen as intruders into what is considered intimate. This does not, however, make the space public, as

it still carries the connotation of being a private domestic space (cf. Heath and Scicluna, 2020).

In sub-study I, I analyze embodied connections in co-residing friendships. The study demonstrates that co-residing friends also balance the degree of their togetherness and separateness, even if they share an affective and intimate bond. Elaborating on Morgan's (2020) concept of family density, I show in the sub-study that domestic density shapes intimacies in friendship by increasing the amount of cumulative intimate knowledge of the other person through the body within the repetitive course of domestic everyday life (Felski, 2000; Morgan 2011, 77–81). The changes that the domestic space brings about in friendship practices have ambivalent effects on friendship intimacies, which consequently creates a need to continuously navigate the boundaries of the relationship. For instance, as a domestic space situates friends within the banalities of everyday life, actions such as cleaning up mess made by others call into question the degree to which friends are responsible for each other's actions, while at the same time friends' actions affect one another through the space.

Contrasting communal relationships with families illustrates their particularity in navigating the group's mutual relations. Although family members also balance their mutual togetherness and separateness, they are simultaneously bound to the institution of the family, which has a socially and culturally acknowledged form that supports the group entity (Luotonen, 2023b; Morgan, 2011; 2020; Smart, 2007). Family members inhabit more or less acknowledged roles with regard to each other as parents, children, siblings, step-parents and spouses, for instance. These roles entail customary power imbalances that enable them to function as an entity; for instance, parents can make decisions about children (Castrén and Widmer, 2015; Morgan, 2011: 29). A dimension of this socially and culturally acknowledged form is the historical overlap between the notions of home and family, through which the home has become a central, albeit not the only, location for family life (Mallett, 2004; Morgan, 2011: 82–83).

Communal dwellers, on the other hand, do not inhabit culturally established roles with each other, nor are there customary power imbalances embedded in the relationships. The ambivalence between the individuals and the group is more pronounced, even though similar balancing occurs in families and could be studied similarly to this research. The strong ambivalence increases the need to navigate interpersonal boundaries. In navigating, communal dwellers engage in practices that build the group as a relational entity as well as practices through which they attempt to separate themselves from the group. These practices engage with the material space. For instance, acts of maintenance and shared responsibility for cleaning enhance the formation of the group.

In sub-study III, for example, I note how shared responsibility for cleaning sometimes led to engaging with spaces that a person would not otherwise use in the

house, thereby enhancing understanding of the dwelling as a whole. Maintaining a space through cleaning and decorating are practical acts of ‘making home’, of attaching one’s own meanings to the space and thus remodeling it into one’s own (Mallett, 2004; Pink, 2004). In this case, the practice of sharing responsibility for cleaning attaches a meaning of group entity to the space, as everyone is expected to take care of it.

The research participants in this study are generally invested in their homes because they have chosen to live this way, rather than seeing their choice as a temporary, necessary evil resulting from a lack of funds, for instance. Thus, their homes have distinct identities that the residents actively reproduce. For example, by decorating their homes and merging their material belongings, they reproduce a group entity through what Belk (2009) calls ‘sharing in.’ Sharing in refers to inviting others into the sphere of the shared, thereby merging individual selves into a new aggregated self, whereas its counterpart, ‘sharing out,’ refers to maintaining a boundary between the givers and receivers of what is shared. Hence, when communal dwellers combine their material possessions to decorate a living room, for instance, they recreate a group entity and an identity for the group and the home.

In sub-study III, I further analyze the temporal layers involved in the formation of the communal space and the communal group. There is swift spatial change in communal homes due to changes in group composition. In the small-scale communes of my research participants, at least one new roommate would move in every year. At the same time, however, past communal members remain attached to the current group through the memories of current residents and the material possessions that former residents have left behind, either accidentally or intentionally. The material belongings sustain the presence of past members within the space and keep them tied to the current group through the relational history that forms within the space (see Holmes, 2019). At the same time, current members rearrange the space when people swap rooms, placing new residents’ belongings among those already present, and keeping the meaning of the small-scale commune in flux.

However, communal dwellers also engage in practices through which they attempt to separate themselves from the group. For instance, they might avoid spatial and embodied connections when they do not take place in a desired way. In sub-study III, I analyze strategies for doing so: blocking sensory connections by using headphones or avoiding eye contact when moving through common spaces, or increasing physical distance from others when choosing one’s bedroom. However, as I argue in the paper, separation already takes place within the condition of *living alone/together*, because communal dwellers must actively strive to separate themselves for their aloneness.

Boundary navigation also occurs through mental abstractions and conceptual meanings given to the space. In the floor-plan drawings that I analyze in sub-study III, the research participants often divided the space into shared common spaces and private bedrooms. Moreover, the markers that they added focused on their own bedrooms and common spaces, and many left roommates' bedrooms without markings. This meaning-making practice emphasizes the position of *living alone/together*, as it depicts communal homes made up of separate, independent individuals who share some distinct common spaces. At the same time, however, the floor-plan drawings also represent another way of conceptualizing the space – whole dwellings that include everyone's bedrooms, even if no further meanings are attached to the rooms. In this way, the floor-plan drawings also represent the dwelling and everyone living there as a relational and spatial entity bound together by the outer walls of the dwelling.

Through such a variety of meaning-making practices, ranging from embodied practices and orientations, sensory connections, and the use of space to speech and mental abstractions, communal dwellers navigate their mutual relationships. Space is integral to the boundary navigations through which communal dwellers figure out their mutual relations. At the same time, the ever-ongoing boundary work keeps spatial processes in motion, as people act in new ways, make sense of their relations in new ways, or sensory connections come and go. The meanings given to communal homes are thus constantly variable, reproduced, and contested, as are the meanings given to the relationships. The meaning-making practices show that material spaces are flexible and capable of accommodating different kinds of relationships. At the same time, however, communal dwellers must make sense of their relations within a space that reproduces culturally established, historically formulated meanings of home. As a site of intimate privacy designed for nuclear families, the material dwelling enhances embodied connections between persons through its form, and these connections are met in ambivalent ways in communal relations.

## **5.2 Intimacy and the institution of the home**

In the previous section, I showed how the material space of a dwelling is integrated into the formation and navigation of communal relationships, and how the body becomes a central site in these navigations. In this section, I move on to my second research question: How do intimate practices, experiences, and commitments in co-residing friendship and roommate relations take shape within a common home?

I argue that embodied connections and the institution of the home shape intimacies in co-residing friendship and roommate relations with the notions of privacy and intimacy that the institution introduces, and a rather stable set of domestic practices that center on the home. The domestic space influences

friendship and basic roommate relations differently because the former is by default an intimate relationship, while the latter is not. Furthermore, I argue that co-residing friendship is out of tune with the normative status given to friendship within the totality of intimate relationships. Normatively, within the friendship-coupledness nexus, friendship is characterized by *not* being tied to a common life project and by being only loosely tied to the institution of the home. I illustrate the normative position of friendship by analyzing the ambivalent effects of the home on commitment and responsibility in friendship.

In sub-study I, I show how domestic density shapes the experience of intimacy in friendship by increasing the amount of embodied intimate knowledge that co-residing friends gather about each other within the repetitive temporality of the everyday, and how this accumulation distinguishes co-residing friendships from friendships organized through other spatio-temporal forms (see also Felski, 2000; Morgan, 2011; 2020). Co-residing friends register, for instance, how the other person eats, how messy they are, how often they shower, and whether they drink alcohol or use other substances. In addition, co-residing friends learn a multiplicity of each other's minor-scale practices, such as how they behave after coming home from work or where they like to sit. This kind of intimate knowledge often accumulates through sensory connections, but also through material objects or, for instance, the mess that co-residing friends leave behind (see also Törnqvist, 2023).

Moreover, institutionalized meanings of home affect co-residing friendships through culturally established meanings of privacy and intimacy, the home's connection to the self, and a rather established set of domestic practices. Forging and maintaining a friendship within the institution of the home is a culturally non-standard situation. Instead, according to Blatterer (2015), friendship as a social relationship is characterized by not being heavily structured by institutions, which gives it its relatively free form: friends can rather openly define the content of their relationship because it is not strongly shaped by institutionalized expectations. Blatterer (*ibid.*) argues that this is a significant condition for intimacy in friendship: intimacy emerges from the immediate, exclusive relationship between two friends. Intimacy in friendship is thus what is specific to a dyad, as defined by Simmel (1902a; 1902b). In this regard, it differs from coupledness, for instance, which is much more heavily shaped by tradition, normative roles, and institutionalized expectations.

Small-scale communes complicate this logic by placing friendships within the domestic space and the institutionalized meanings it reproduces. Co-residing friendships can be contrasted with Simmel's (1902a; 1902b) discussion of the institution of marriage, which transcends the dyad and structures the relationship beyond its immediacy. In communal living, the institution of the home similarly introduces 'a third member' into co-residing friendship. However, contrary to Simmel's example, the institution of the home does not provide friends with clear,

socially established roles or expectations that structure their co-habiting relationship because friendship is not culturally embedded within the domestic sphere in the same way that coupledness and family are (Blatterer, 2015: 91–92; Bowlby, 2011; cf. Olick, 1999). Thus, a domestic space tends to complicate the relationship by attaching it to an institution that is alien to it.

Moreover, third parties affect individual friendships in small-scale communes, as actual third persons and as part of the communal group that must be taken into account in each dyadic friendship. Communal groups always involve several different dyadic relationships within the group, ranging from minimal roommate relations to deep, complex friendships. These third parties, who have to be acknowledged, are also constantly changing as new people move into the small-scale commune and the composition of the group changes.

The domestic space thus complicates friendship with the cultural meanings and practices it introduces into the relationships. By analyzing co-residing friends' experiences of intimacy in sub-study I, I demonstrate the ambivalence that the domestic setting produces. The participants often enjoyed and cherished the embodied intimacies they forged at home. It was important for them to share the space with their friends, to simply be in the same space, perhaps without doing anything in particular. King (2004, 46–47) has referred to this practice as being 'together-yet-apart.' In sub-study I, I note the positive nature of the practice in co-residing friendship, but in sub-study III, I also add that we might enjoy such embodied co-presence even with people we know little or not at all. The centrality of the domestic space in creating such closeness is revealed in how Bruess and Pearson (1997) previously found this type of relationship practice in marital relationships, but not in friendship, which is another example of friendship being situated in a default manner outside of everyday domestic life.

The research participants also appreciated the fact that their co-residing friends were automatically present in their shared everyday life at home. There was an aspect of immediacy to the relationships when others were automatically present, and contact with them could occur in a direct and non-postponed way. A similar kind of everyday setting has been analyzed, for instance, in workplace and neighborhood friendships (Cronin, 2014; Luotonen, 2023a), the difference being the amount and frequency of contact within a dense domestic space, as well as in the practices included in the relationships depending on the environment (see Feld and Carter, 1999; Allan and Adams, 1999).

At the same time, however, the domestic space can complicate friendships. In some cases, the research participants felt that domestic density created emotional distance in their friendships. Everyday life, with its mundane tasks and everyone's daily bustle, did not always allow for meeting a friend in a calm and focused way, which some participants considered necessary for experiencing intimacy. Such an experience reflects the centrality of self-disclosure, sharing one's thoughts and

emotions with another person through speech, in forming an intimate bond (Jamieson, 1998). In friendship, self-disclosure, emotional expressiveness, and trust usually stand out as important characteristics of an intimate relationship (Monsour, 1992; Parks and Floyd, 1996; Policarpo, 2015). However, the banality of everyday life also affects embodied intimacies. Busy everyday life did not always allow for concentrating calmly on a friend's embodied presence (see Morgan, 2011: 35), or provide occasions for touch. One interviewee lamented that they had stopped hugging their co-residing friends because the friends were always present and the usual moments of meeting and parting that facilitated hugging were lacking.

Basic roommate relations, by contrast, are structured differently with regard to intimacy. Rather than being based on the relationship itself, they are forged through the minimum requirement of living together. In their minimal form, they have their purpose outside of the relationship, either in housing or the communal group as a whole (see Simmel, 1902a: 43). Nonetheless, domestic density weaves embodied intimate connections between persons who might not otherwise share an intimate bond (see also Törnqvist, 2023). Roommate relations differ from other non-intimate dyadic bonds, such as those with colleagues, due to the domestic context. As intimate connections accumulate in a domestic space through multiple senses and embodiment, there is a possibility that an intimate bond might start to form between roommates if, for example, people additionally begin to share their personal matters, experience affection, or spend time together, thus building the quality of intimacy as defined by Jamieson (2011). The research participants often hoped for such a process when choosing new roommates, on the premise that they could also become friends.

In order to remain simply a roommate and to keep the relationship non-intimate, intimacy must be controlled and avoided (Jamieson, 2011). Close embodied proximity is not a sufficient condition for an intimate bond to emerge, but intimacy can be resisted, for instance, by refusing to tell anything about oneself or by attempting to separate oneself from others. Refusing to create an intimate bond is thus an act of boundary work in which the categories of roommate and friend are kept separate. However, the cumulative embodied intimate knowledge can still be experienced as pleasant and comforting even with relative strangers, as noted previously. At the same time, however, there is also the possibility of intrusion, irritation, and the crossing of sensitive boundaries, as domestic density also generates vulnerability through embodied connections (Forstie, 2017; Ortega-Alcázar and Wilkinson, 2021; Törnqvist, 2023).

To complicate matters further, according to Morgan (2011: 35), intimacy is structured in part by the intertwining of individuals' life histories. In sub-study II, I analyze the future orientation of co-residing friendship and roommate relations over the life course. According to Blatterer (2015), intimacy in friendship is

characterized by *not* being tied to a common life project, and only loosely tied to institutions such as a home and dwelling. Friendships can be long-lasting and significantly embedded in a person's life story, but they do not normatively structure an individual's path in life. Instead, they require flexibility to adapt to the conditions set by coupledness and family life, work, and place of residence (Blatterer, 2015; Luotonen, 2023a; Martinussen, 2019).

Sub-study II demonstrates that while communal living is understood as a customary arrangement in youth and in 'early adulthood' (see Furstenberg, Rumbaut and Settersten, 2005; Gilleard and Higgs, 2016: 305), the requirement to replace communal relations with coupledness and family intensifies as people age beyond the socially shared understanding of youth. The life course structure produces this requirement. The life course is a socially produced temporal structure that guides individuals through distinct life stages from childhood toward adulthood and old age, offering them rather customary positions to inhabit at different points in time (Holstein and Gubrium, 2000; Kohli and Meyer, 1986; Mayer, 2009). Despite the increasing diversity in contemporary life course trajectories, people rely on socially shared meanings when considering, for instance, what has made them an adult (Blatterer, 2007). Due to social changes, such as longer periods of study and later age of marriage, 30 years is currently a significant temporal landmark for reaching 'proper' adulthood (Roseneil et al., 2020: 225; Lahad, 2017: 34; Blatterer, 2007).

I argue in sub-study II that if people want to continue to live communally and resist the couple- normative temporal order around their thirties, they must engage in a complex, socially structured negotiation of their future trajectories. Instead of simply resisting the normative life course trajectory by themselves, and attempting to center friendship and roommate relations in their social life, communal dwellers must negotiate the normative structure with others in the relationship constellation, their larger social networks, and the wider society through questions of housing, for instance (see Bidart, 2013: 268–269; Flaherty, 2013: 251; Holmes, Jamieson and Natalier, 2021). Due to the social nature of the life course structure, deviating from it usually has some kind of social consequences (Flaherty, 2013: 251).

Queer studies calling for the re-imagining of models of intimacy beyond heteronormativity have paid particular attention to this temporal stage of adulthood in which coupledness and family take precedence. For instance, J. Jack Halberstam (2005; 2011) argues that the possibility of alternative forms of relationality beyond the nuclear family model requires questioning models of temporal progression and linear development from youth to adulthood. In the transition to adulthood, the life course structure attaches intimate relations to questions of reproduction and housing, and thus to medical discourses setting limits on women's fertility, as well as to issues of wealth and class, for instance. In

Finland and elsewhere in Euro-American countries, the couple is consistently seen as the natural and best arrangement for having children (Roseneil et al., 2020; Halberstam, 2005: 4–5). Moreover, having children makes owner-occupation an appealing housing choice for the middle class, particularly in countries like Finland where owner-occupation is the culturally preferred model over renting (Bengtsson, Ruonavaara and Sørvoll, 2017). An owner-occupied single-family home is often the preferred model for relationships and housing in adulthood, as it is expected to bring financial, relational, and physical stability (Kenyon, 1999; Kubala and Hořeni Samec, 2021; Ruonavaara, 1996b).

In sub-study II, I show that the couple-normative life course structure is not simply an external condition of friendship, but functions within friendships as a normative expectation of each person's autonomy regarding the life course. In the accounts analyzed in the sub-study, personal autonomy figured as an interpersonal norm, a moral value, and an internal desire. As a normative and moral principle, personal autonomy in friendships ensures that friends do not limit each other's choices in life, for instance by hampering their chances of 'getting ahead' in life through coupledness, even if this would render building a communal future uncertain. Expecting commitment in communal relationships would challenge the autonomy norm. In roommate relations, by contrast, people remain even more autonomous with regard to each other because of the non-intimate nature of the relationships.

The perspective of merging life histories as a dimension of an intimate bond illustrates the limits of freedom in friendship. In principle, friendship is rather free to be defined by the individuals in each relationship (Blatterer, 2015). However, this freedom applies only as long as the friendship remains within its normative boundaries in relation to coupledness. The more a friendship adopts characteristics that are normatively associated with coupledness, such as sharing a home and committing to a shared life path, the more the normative structuring of friendships – especially the expectation of autonomy – restricts the ability to freely define the nature of the relationship. Simply put, friends can freely define the nature of their friendship as long as they do not desire things that blur the boundary between friendship and coupledness.

Another structural limitation appears when analyzing mutual responsibility in co-residing friendship, examined in sub-study I. In lay understandings and research, friendship is a highly idealized form of relationship, often seen as an attractive alternative to burdensome family and couple relations (Eramian and Mallory, 2021; Smart et al., 2012). The idealization comes under pressure, however, when friends are present in each other's everyday lives at home, and domestic density generates new kinds and quantities of intimate knowledge. Other people's messes, emotional and material, are immediately apparent to others, and a friend's problems are inclined to become one's own everyday burdens.

The increase in intimate knowledge compels friends to reconsider how much affective responsibility they should take for others, which sometimes puts a strain on the idealized picture of unconditional support in friendship. Trusting that one's friends will always 'be there' in times of need is an important feature in idealized depictions of friendship (Bidard, 1997; Policarpo, 2015). At the same time, however, there is also a cultural narrative in which friendships are portrayed as disposable if they become too burdensome (Lahad and Van Hoof, 2023). Consequently, there is no clear cultural script concerning the degree of support in friendship, which makes it a complicated issue for co-residing friends. They navigate the demands of taking responsibility for one another with various tactics, such as defining someone's problems as 'theirs' and deciding not to worry about them, or limiting support for certain people, such as one's family members. In balancing the boundaries of responsibility, communal friendships simultaneously offer the possibility of alternative forms of care and intimacy, as well as disappointments and insufficient contact (see Roseneil, 2007).

Homes consequently influence intimacies in co-residing friendships and roommate relations in various ways, from embodied contacts within a dense domestic space to institutionalized meanings and practices, and the social structuring of intimate relations at the friendship-coupledness nexus. Intimacies are navigated differently depending on whether people understand each other as friends or roommates. In friendship, the domestic space shapes intimate practices in ambivalent ways, generating experiences of new depth in the relationship, but also experiences of emotional distance and complexities regarding mutual responsibility. In basic roommate relations, on the other hand, intimacies must be restricted in order to keep the relationship non-intimate.

### **5.3 Queering intimacies within couple normative and heteronormative structures**

Having shown in the previous section how intimacies in co-residing friendships and roommate relations become complicated within a domestic space, I now move on to my third research question: Do the intimacies woven in small-scale communes queer heteronormative and couple normative structures, and if so, how?

In this section, I argue that co-residing friendships and roommate relations can queer the couple-normative structuring of intimacies by being incorporated into everyday life at home, a site normatively reserved for coupledness. The equation of coupledness with the domestic space has historically emerged through the heteronormative ideology of the family, which also positions communal relations athwart to heteronormative structures. However, communal dwellers can restrict and balance the degree of queering intimacies by avoiding certain intimate practices or balancing a non-normative intimate aspect with a normative one. Ultimately,

however, the analysis shows that intimacy is a socially structured quality of relationships, which can be a site for re-imagining forms of relationality, thereby opening up new directions for queer studies.

In the previous section, I argued that friendship is normatively situated as secondary to coupledness and family life. The analysis of the normative position of friendship highlights the social structuring of all forms of relationship within the totality of personal relations. The couple-normative structure guides people's everyday lives, desires, and future plans in powerful ways. It is reproduced in Euro-American societies through housing, family formation, legal and cultural scripts of kinship, and cultural traditions, for instance (Roseneil et al., 2020). Within these structures, the intimate couple becomes the natural, unquestioned, and desired center of intimate life, and other types of relationship, such as friendship, are situated as secondary to it (Ketokivi, 2012; Martinussen, 2019; Roseneil et al., 2020).

I have demonstrated in this work how friendships encounter complexity when transferred to a more central place in a person's intimate life. The complexity becomes visible through negotiations that address becoming a relational entity, expectations of mutual support and responsibility, engagement with the banalities of everyday domestic life such as housework, and commitment to a common life project. Due to the normative structuring of friendship within the couple-normative order, these issues are normatively the subject of coupledness, not friendship. On the contrary, friendship is normatively based on flexibility and personal autonomy. Negotiating the above-mentioned aspects within a friendship relationship calls flexibility and autonomy into question. Being socially structured, established relational norms are reproduced and contested in each lived friendship.

Analyzing the position of friendship within the friendship-coupledness nexus illustrates the analytical difference between couple-normative and heteronormative structures, which overlap but also function differently. Queer studies have been critical of both, but have often lumped them together under the label of heteronormativity. For example, the often-cited critique of homonormativity and the 'good domesticated gay' who follows a heteronormative life script is a critique of the easy adjustment of gays and lesbians to the couple form (Duggan, 2002; Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz, 2005). In countries like Finland, where sexual equality has advanced, queer coupledness can now, at least in principle, inhabit a similar institutionalized model of coupledness as its heterosexual counterpart, even if discrimination still exists in people's everyday lives (see Kerppola, 2020; Rostosky and Riggle, 2017). Thus, the couple-normative structure is no longer necessarily heteronormative, although it emerges from a heteronormative history. The couple norm can accommodate various genders and sexualities without losing its ordering principle, with a cohabiting intimate couple forming the center of a person's intimate life (Roseneil et al., 2020).

As discussed in the previous section, friendship remains weakly institutionalized, while queer (or perhaps homonormative) coupledness has gained an institutionalized stance. This is likely to reinforce the differentiation between couple and friendship relationships compared to times when neither homosexual couple relationships nor friendships were considered equal to the heteronormative standard of intimate coupledness. For instance, Weston (1991) argues that in the context of societal marginalization by heteronormative standards, friendships among lesbians and gay men became conceptually close to couple relationships. Rather than being opposing relationship categories, the two types of relationships were positioned on a continuum and distinguished by the presence of sexual activity. Now, in contrast, the couple form increasingly accommodates lesbians and gay men within co-residing familial coupledness, while friendships are seen as separate and outside of this framework.

Thus, what queering means as a challenge to normative relationship structures depends on whether it is seen as a challenge to the couple form or to heterosexuality. As a relational form that gains its meaning in reference to the whole of personal relations, friendship also participates in the (de)construction of couple-normative and heteronormative structures. As discussed, the couple-normative structure places friendships as secondary in a person's relational life. A heteronormative structure, by contrast, defines friendship as non-erotic and homosocial by default, since sexual desire is assumed between men and women, rendering non-erotic relationships non-standard (Blatterer, 2015; 2016; Goedecke, 2018; Linek, 2021). Resisting the couple norm through friendship is about placing friendship in a more central position in one's personal life, whereas resisting the heteronormative structuring of friendship happens through relational acts in which the expectation of sexual desire between 'opposite sexes' is contested.

Basic roommate relations, in turn, are a distinct type of relationship in relation to heteronormative and couple-normative structures. As basic roommate relations are non-intimate, they do not challenge the social order of intimate relationships. Rather, they remain loosely connected to the aspects of intimacy discussed in this work, such as becoming a relational entity, taking responsibility for others, or committing to a common life project. However, as shown in this study, they are a site for subtle minor-scale intimate embodied connections within a dense domestic space. Thus, they provide a site for the kind of ephemeral intimate connections that take place beyond established models of intimate relationships that have been examined in queer theory (see Berlant, 1998; Halberstam, 2005; 2011; Muñoz, 2009).

At the same time, however, basic roommate relations must be navigated in such a way that they do not become intimate over time if people wish to maintain the minimal form of the relationships and not become friends. Thus, they do not necessarily queer the couple-normative order of intimacies. Instead, they remain in

their normative position, namely situated outside of a person's network of intimate relationships. This illustrates that the logic of queering relationships differs depending on whether intimacies are approached as intimate connections or intimate bonds. Analyzing fleeting, embodied connections within communal spaces shows that intimate connections do not require established, institutionalized relational forms to appear (cf. Berlant, 1998). As non-intimate bonds, however, basic roommate relations do not challenge or queer the structural order of intimate relationships.

This underlines the multi-dimensionality of intimacy. Due to its processual character, a variety of practices, contexts, and relational logics shape intimacy. With different combinations of practices, contexts, and relationship types, queering intimacy can take different forms. In sexual relations, which has been the main focus of queer studies, various casual and transient sexual practices queer the heteronormative moral code of sexual intimacy in which the normatively preferred mode of sexuality is confined to the couple form (Berlant and Warner, 1998; Edelman, 2004; Rubin, 1999 [1984]). In non-sexual relationships, such as roommate relations, casual and transient forms of intimate connection may be just what is expected of the relationship type. In co-residing friendship, in turn, the embodied connections and domestic practices that the dwellings introduce shape friendship intimacies toward the normative models of intimacy in couples or families, which challenges the meanings of friendship and coupledness as separate relationship categories (see also Juvonen, 2020; Uibo, 2021).

The issue of personal autonomy is particularly interesting in this regard. The couple-normative structure expects friends to be flexible with each other's life choices guided by coupledness and family life, work, and place of residence (Blatterer, 2015; Luotonen, 2023a; Martinussen, 2019). In couple relationships, commitment and temporal longevity are normatively expected, which has often been criticized in queer theory (Halberstam, 2005; Love, 2021; Weston, 1995). In friendship, however, giving up one's personal autonomy for the sake of the relationship is at odds with the normative logic of the relationship form. Thus, committing to friendship rather than coupledness may queer the couple-normative order of personal relations. It further demonstrates that queering relationships depends on the normative structuring of each type of relationship.

However, it is also important to note that not all communal living necessarily contests the couple form or heteronormativity, at least to any significant degree. Instead, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, communal dwellers regulate the boundaries of intimacy through various strategies. For instance, the different ways in which they guard their autonomy regulate the degree to which the normative model of intimacy is challenged in friendship and roommate relations. Moreover, the balance between one dimension of intimacy and another, and the degree to which they engage in non-standard practices and standard ones, regulates

the challenge they pose to normative structures. For example, limiting communal living to youth and ‘moving on’ to coupledness in due course limits even exceptionally intense friendships to a temporal period when friendships are normatively valued before entering coupledness and family life (see Lahad, 2017: 31–33). However, the domestic space, with its multiple spatial processes and the unestablished nature of communal relations, continuously recreates new and subtle situations in which these boundaries of normativity must be navigated.

I argue, however, that intimate connections and intimate bonds can be spheres for queering all types of relationships because all intimacies are structured in relation to each other. Queer studies have tended to neglect intimacy as a dimension of non-erotic bonds, focusing on either sexual relations or non-sexual bonds as networks and communities (Hammack, Frost, and Hughes, 2019). However, separating non-sexual relations from sexual relations is an act of boundary work, showing that the lines between them are fuzzy and can be contested. Different relationship practices are understood as decent, natural, and desirable in different relationship forms, but not in others. For instance, a practice that is normative in coupledness, such as committing to a mutual life project, is non-normative in friendship, and engaging in such practices within friendship can blur the boundary between friendship and coupledness.

Reproducing and contesting normative forms of intimacy also occurs in relation to different spatio-temporal contexts. Different relationship forms have culturally assigned spatial locations in which they take place. This is illustrated in the continued strong connection of the family form to the domestic space and, for instance, in the way that friendships are by default imagined in research as outside the domestic. In this work, I have shown how substantially the structuring of normative practices can be challenged when a type of relationship is placed in a context where it does not normally take place: the unusual context introduces new aspects to those relationships that would remain hidden in a more normative setting. These new aspects also deal with internal experiences, such as the desire for a certain kind of intimacy, or the discomfort with another kind (see Roseneil et al., 2020: 225–230; Wouters, 2010). For example, instances of embodied contact at home may feel desirable or intrusive. At the same time, living in friendships and roommate relations at home queers the meaning given to the institution of home by challenging its meaning as a site of family life.

Analyzing intimacy adds another angle to queer studies on friendship, which have concentrated on analyzing communities. Analyzing friendship also as an intimate bond complicates the study of friendship in queer studies. Friendship as an intimate bond differs from a friendship community or network because the latter can involve many kinds of relationships, not only friendships. Moreover, as already noted, individual friendships between LGBTQ+ people might not follow the characteristics of the larger network (Alasuutari, 2020: 169; Weeks, Donovan, and

Heaphy, 2001: 76). For instance, the question of personal autonomy tends to be a complex issue between individuals and cannot be addressed simply by analyzing a communal culture. Thus, it is also important to study friendship as an intimate bond between people. The precision of the level of analysis between an intimate bond and a network helps to avoid essentializing friendship as always already different because of sexual or gender identity (see Martinussen, 2019: 310). Moreover, it allows us to consider how normative views of the relationship are formed as another dimension along with sexuality and gender and how they structure intimacies between people. Different questions arise when friendship is approached from the perspective of a sexual identity-based community or from the perspective of a relationship form. I contend that both are needed for a more nuanced picture.

Moreover, focusing on intimacy in friendship and roommate relations is relevant in contemporary conditions, where homosexual and heterosexual lifestyles have become more closely aligned due to the cultural and legal acceptance of homosexuality and the pluralization of relationship forms among heterosexuals (Roseneil, 2000; 2007). Sites such as small-scale communes are areas where people experiment with relational forms beyond couple-normative and heteronormative logics, further blurring the boundaries between queer and heterosexual modes of living, even if they also regulate the degree of such action. Taking seriously the often-made call to re-imagine relationships beyond the nuclear family after marriage equality (see Duggan, 2002; Halberstam, 2005; 2011; Kuosmanen, 2007; Muñoz, 2009) requires an analysis of new sites as possibilities for societal change, even if those sites do not offer ready-made answers. However, focusing on various types of intimacies in their particular contexts sheds light on the multidimensionality and subtlety of intimacies, and shows how relationships can be re-imagined through various forms of connections and practices in different contexts.

## 6 Conclusions

In this dissertation, I have argued that material dwellings shape intimacies in communal relations with embodied connections and institutionalized meanings of home in ambivalent ways. Domestic space intensifies some experiences of intimacy, especially those that center the body, but it can also complicate the usual intimate practices of friendship and create experiences of emotional distance. Roommate relations, by contrast, are in their minimal form non-intimate relationships. In basic roommate relations, intimacies must be restricted in order for the relationship to remain non-intimate. By placing friendships and roommate relations in a central position in people's everyday life, communal relations queer the social structuring of personal relationships. Communal relations question the equation of homes with sites of coupledness and family and show that homes can be established on various types of relationships. At the same time, however, communal dwellers also navigate the boundaries of their relationships and the degree to which normative models are challenged, for example through embodied actions and limiting the degree of mutual commitment.

A material dwelling shapes communal relations through domestic density when people live their everyday lives in close proximity to each other, and share a multitude of sensory connections. The design of a dwelling, for instance, guides the sensory connections that take place and the ways in which people move and orient themselves. Moreover, the modern dwelling reproduces an idea of intimate relating in a private space. Thus, the design assumes an emotionally close relational entity inhabiting the domestic space. In communal relations, such an entity does not exist by default, which means that communal dwellers must constantly navigate and make sense of the boundaries of their relationship. They do this, for instance, through embodied practices, spatial orientations, use of space, speech, and their conceptualizations of the space.

A domestic space affects co-residing friendships and roommate relations differently because friendships are by definition intimate bonds, whereas roommate relations are minimally non-intimate. To remain simply a roommate with someone, intimacy-generating practices such as sharing one's thoughts and emotions must be avoided in order to keep the relationship non-intimate beyond the fleeting moments of embodied connection. In a co-residing friendship, on the other hand, multiple intimate dimensions are included in the bond. As intimate

knowledge accumulates at home, especially through the body, it has ambivalent effects on co-residing friendships. Often, the cumulative knowledge generates an experience of novel depth in the relationship as people spend a lot of time together and encounter new sides of each other. Domestic density thus produces a distinct spatio-temporal frame within which co-residing friendships take shape. However, the domestic space also impedes some intimate practices through the banality of everyday life, thereby challenging idealized images of friendship. For example, witnessing a friend's problems on a daily basis can challenge the ideal of unconditional support in friendship.

Analyzing the complexity of mutual responsibility and committing to a common future trajectory in communal relationships illustrates the normative location of friendship and roommate relations within the totality of intimate relationships. Normatively, these relationships are not included in everyday home life or in the common life project because these aspects normatively belong to coupledness and family life. Thus, communal relations challenge the couple-normative structuring of intimate relations and are situated athwart to the heteronormative history of homes. However, communal dwellers also balance the degree of queering intimate structures. For instance, limiting intense communal friendships to youth navigates the degree to which the normative life-course structure of the couple is challenged, while defining the relationship as primarily a roommate relationship can make intimate embodied contacts seem less meaningful due to the non-intimate character of the bond. By navigating relationships on such a small scale, communal dwellers simultaneously re-imagine forms of relating but also reproduce normative structures.

On a more general level, I have demonstrated with this study that non-sexual intimate relations are also socially structured, and that queer studies should pay more attention to non-sexual intimacies. Friendships, roommate relations, and other types of non-sexual relationships take on meaning in relation to the totality of intimate relationships, and thus participate in the construction of sexual and gendered structures. Within this whole, some intimacies are more central, more accepted, and more important because of couple-normative and heteronormative structures. Often, the normative structures can be found in fine-tuned relational navigations that become visible in some contexts but not in others. For example, in this study, the domestic space, which is an unusual context for friendship, sheds light on the normative structuring of friendship. These structures become visible in subtle embodied contacts and small changes in friendship practices. These subtle navigations, however, enliven, reproduce, and contest social norms in conscious and unconscious ways that also indicate individual agency in the process.

Moreover, the study demonstrates the significance of bodies in non-sexual intimacies. Embodiment is always included in relationships, even if there is no bodily contact or it is avoided. Bodies reproduce social norms, for instance, by being

at ease with some sensory connections but not with others, or by limiting touch to certain relationships. Bodies also reflect the social norms of the spaces in which they are located, and the spatial context is always involved in relationships, as analyzed in this work. Here, I have concentrated on analyzing spatial proximity, but space is similarly implicated in spatial distance, affecting embodied practices. For example, in long-distance relationships, people have to keep in touch through phone calls and messages, which are embodied practices shaped by space (Policarpo, 2016).

Embodied relations can and should be studied with different methods. I would like to emphasize the significance of empirical research and the use of different methods within it. In this work, applying different methods, such as visual approaches and spatial ethnography, helped in opening up a nuanced view of embodiment in different domestic spaces. The experiences of people engaging in diverse, non-standard forms of relationship are still largely under-researched. They provide a site for studying the body in different contexts with various qualitative methods, including sensory, ethnographic, and artistic methods.

This dissertation does not address gender or sexuality directly. As discussed in the introduction to this work, I contend that queer and gender studies do not have to stick to their ‘proper objects,’ but that they should also address broader social structures that participate in the construction of sexual and gendered categories – which, in fact, has long been done in both traditions (see Butler, 1994; Liljeström, 2020). However, my original intention was to address gender and sexuality more directly, but limiting the project to intimacies, space and relationship form required excluding them. The inclusion of sexuality and gender in future studies would open up possibilities for further elaboration of studies on communal intimacies. Many aspects that are central to communal living have frequently been addressed from a gender perspective in family contexts, as they often involve gendered power imbalances. These include, for instance, housework, making a home, money, shared resources, and ownership. There are indications that gendered patterns concerning housework and sharing responsibility persist in communal living (Natalier, 2003; Heath et al., 2018: 92).

Moreover, there are gendered patterns that are harder to observe, but that deserve further attention. Based on my research data, it seems that there are gendered roles in sharing social responsibilities: taking care of the atmosphere at home or mediating other people’s relations. Such social responsibilities are more difficult to notice and share than, for instance, practical responsibilities such as cleaning rotas. Meta-work, the often invisible work of planning and organizing, which has been increasingly analyzed in the context of coupledom in recent years, also requires further examination (Mustosmäki and Sihto, 2019). Meta-work has not yet been addressed in the context of communal living, although planning and organizing everyday domestic life also takes place in communal relationships. Questions of responsibility contribute to the analysis of boundary navigations

between communal dwellers. The unclear roles that communal dwellers have with regard to each other can make it difficult to share responsibilities equally because it is not evident what can be expected from others.

Finally, it is necessary to address sexual identity and sexual desire in communal living since sexuality also structures non-erotic relationships. Relationship form can be analyzed at the intersection of sexuality to map how sexual orientation affects intimacies in individual friendships, roommate relations, and other non-erotic relationships. This perspective has attracted less attention in queer studies compared to analyzing sexual identity with regard to friendship networks and communities. However, sexual desire and orientation also structure individual intimate relations. For example, Linek (2021) has shown how the possibility of sexual desire must be navigated and made sense of within female-male friendships where at least one person is heterosexual. Such navigations tend to be ongoing and complex in communal living, where people with various sexual and gender identifications inhabit a domestic space together. Moreover, the act of defining a relationship as non-erotic is a question of sexuality itself, which concerns managing the boundaries of the relationship.

Structures of sexuality also deal with the pluralization of relationship forms. In Finland, for instance, there is increasing public interest in communal living and consensual non-monogamy. This indicates that people are increasingly interested in experimenting with relationship forms beyond the couple and the nuclear family, both through erotic and non-erotic relationships. This suggests a wider cultural shift in sexuality from the nuclear family model to relational plurality (see also Wouters, 2010). Pluralization could be taken into account further in queer studies by rethinking categories such as desire. Are there emerging desires for non-erotic intimacies, such as the desire for friendship, and what kinds of novel theoretical paths would noting such a desire open up in queer studies?

On a societal level, intimate encounters and bonds are highly significant because issues such as housing, reproduction, care, and wealth ultimately revolve around the bonds that people have with each other. Re-imagining who can live together, how care could be reorganized, and who can build a common future creates possibilities for imagining new forms of society, as communal dwellers have traditionally sought to do. As I have shown in this research, major questions are negotiated between people in their everyday intimate connections. Rather than finding definitive answers to reconfigurations of intimacies, people living beyond culturally established relationship norms must continually navigate the complexities in the subtle situations of their everyday lives. It is in these movements, practices, and orientations, however, that the possibilities for living together with others are being re-imagined, which is precisely why we should continue to study them.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1. Call for interviewees

DO YOU LIVE IN A COMMUNE? PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY!

Do you live in a commune where you share a house or apartment with your roommates?  
Do you think that living in a commune is a more permanent way of life for you?

I am looking for interviewees for a study that addresses relationships in Finnish communal living. The interview will cover themes related to communal living, communal relationships, as well as relationships outside the home. Such themes could include, for instance, everyday life, care, intimacy, and friendship.

I would be happy to visit your home for a 2- to 3-hour interview, but if you prefer, I can arrange a quiet space elsewhere. All interviews are confidential, and the interview material will be anonymized to ensure that individual interviewees or communes cannot be identified.

The interview can be conducted in either Finnish or English.

Communal living is becoming increasingly popular, with a variety of relationships formed within communal homes. However, there is still very little knowledge about current communal relations, which is why I would like to hear about your experiences.

I am conducting my doctoral research in the field of Gender Studies at the University of Helsinki.

Please get in touch if you would like further information about the project, or to sign up for an interview:

Anna Heinonen (YTM)  
University of Helsinki  
[contact details]

## Appendix 2. Call for spatial ethnography participants

Hi! My name is Anna Heinonen. I am a doctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki and I am studying close relations in Finnish communes.\*

I am looking for two communes, communities or shared apartments where I can live and observe daily life for approximately two to four weeks. I am curious about how the material environment affects relationships at home. I have previously conducted 31 interviews with residents of Finnish communes, focusing on the interviewees' relationships with roommates and other important people in their lives. This time my focus is on how the home as a material dwelling, with its spaces, sounds, smells, furniture and smaller possessions, interactions, and daily tasks, affects communal relationships.

Participants in the study will be required to do nothing more than go about their everyday lives as usual. I myself will participate in the daily life of your home as you would expect from a regular roommate, and I will note down my observations.

It is important that everyone in your home is willing to participate in this study. I will anonymize the identities of all participants with pseudonyms, and will not reveal the exact location of your home to anyone. We should also have a detailed discussion about the study, either in-person or virtually, before you make a final decision about participating.

My stay could take place any time this spring, for example when you have a temporarily free room. I will pay rent and my share of the monthly expenses.

I am 35 years old and live in a commune myself, so communal life as such is familiar to me. Besides the PhD project, I spend my time hanging out with friends, growing plants, watching bad reality TV, and dreaming of life after the coronavirus.

I am conducting this part of the research project in Helsinki because I have received funding from the City of Helsinki. The PhD project takes place in the field of Gender Studies at the University of Helsinki.

Communal living is becoming increasingly popular, and a variety of relationships are lived in communal homes. However, there is still very little knowledge about these relationships, which is why I would like to dive into your lives for a moment!

More information about my work can be found here:

<https://researchportal.helsinki.fi/en/persons/anna-heinonen>

Please don't hesitate to contact me for further information. You can reach me either by email or by phone:

Anna Heinonen (MSocSc)

University of Helsinki

[contact details]

\* I.e., located in Finland. The participants do not have to be Finnish.

### **Appendix 3. Relationship map instructions**

Please draw a map of your close relationships on a piece of paper (e.g., A4 size). In addition to people, you can also include pets, etc. Place yourself at the center of the paper and arrange others around you. Feel free to use your creativity, depicting relationships with different colors or varying distances from you – whatever feels best to you. You can also include pictures and other visual elements. Please indicate if you receive any support or help from these people, either emotional, practical, or material (e.g., money or items to borrow).

## Appendix 4. Interview guide

Primary questions	Follow-up questions
<p><b>Getting started and terms</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you briefly explain what this place is and how you came to live here? Which term do you use to refer to this place?</li> <li>• Do you refer to your housemates as roommates, or by some other name?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Finding others</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you initially end up living communally?</li> <li>• How did you meet your roommates?</li> <li>• Were you involved in selecting any of your current roommates? Tell me about that.</li> <li>• Do you share common interests?</li> <li>• Does the house or community have a name?</li> </ul> <p><b>Apartment (via floor plan)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did you join an established community, or did you start building the community from scratch? What was that like?</li> <li>• Were you interviewed? What made you want to move here?</li> <li>• What does the name signify?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What activities do you do together, and in which rooms?</li> <li>• Where do you often run into each other?</li> <li>• Do you spend a lot of time in your own room?</li> <li>• Whose belongings are in the house?</li> <li>• Who did the decorating?</li> <li>• Do you eat together?</li> <li>• What kind of household chores do you do?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you coordinate shared purchases/shared items/the food budget?</li> <li>• How do you divide chores?</li> <li>• Do you have specific areas of responsibility?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Relationships with roommates</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you describe your relationships with different people in the commune?</li> <li>• Do you feel like you know your roommates well?</li> <li>• Do you have any requirements or preferences regarding how much time should be spent with others?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there different personalities among you?</li> <li>• Do you come from different backgrounds? How does that affect things?</li> <li>• Are there different groups or couples among you?</li> </ul>

<p><b>Support in roommate relationships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you feel that you take each other into consideration in your daily lives?</li> <li>Do you receive support from your roommates?</li> <li>Do you experience care and affection within the community, or do you desire it?</li> <li>In certain matters, do you prefer turning to people other than your roommates?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In what ways do you feel acknowledged?</li> <li>How do you take others into consideration?</li> <li>How is support expressed?</li> <li>From whom do you seek support/help, and in what situations?</li> <li>Do you hug, or express physical affection?</li> <li>In what aspects are your roommates the best sources of support?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do you communicate with each other?</li> <li>How do you make agreements?</li> <li>Have you had any disagreements?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How have your communication styles taken shape?</li> <li>Does someone take on specific responsibilities related to communication and decision-making?</li> <li>How are disagreements resolved?</li> <li>Have there been any disappointments in certain matters?</li> <li>Has anyone moved out due to disagreements?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Boundaries and privacy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How much time do you spend with others here at home?</li> <li>Do you have any agreements or rules about privacy?</li> <li>Do you spend time in each other's rooms?</li> <li>Do you ever crave more private space?</li> <li>Are there any absolute boundaries in your relationships that should be respected?</li> <li>Do you communicate with your roommates about everything, or do you keep some things to yourself?</li> </ul> <p><b>Other people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who are the people who are important to you outside the home?</li> <li>Does friendship within the commune differ from friendship with people outside?</li> <li>Are you in a romantic relationship?</li> <li>Does your romantic partner live in this community?</li> <li>How do your romantic relationship and communal life coexist?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do agreements or rules go too far in certain situations?</li> <li>Are noises bothersome? Do you wish for better soundproofing?</li> <li>Are there activities that can only be done in certain spaces?</li> <li>Do boundaries vary from person to person?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does living in a commune affect your relationships with others outside?</li> <li>Why do (or don't) you want to live with your partner in a commune?</li> <li>Is it okay to develop a sexual or romantic relationship with a roommate?</li> <li>Is developing romantic feelings within the commune okay?</li> </ul>	

<p><b>Commitment and dreams</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would you consider moving elsewhere for the sake of the commune?</li> <li>• What about for a particular roommate?</li> <li>• Is taking out a joint mortgage a possible option?</li> <li>• What kind of dreams do you/you all have?</li> <li>• Do you envision your future in the community?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What would be the ideal community in terms of space for your dreams? Is it possible to find such a place?</li> <li>• Do you think children could live in your community someday?</li> <li>• Are you willing to give up certain things to live in the community?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Change</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has your commune changed over time?</li> <li>• How do you feel about people coming and going?</li> <li>• Are former roommates still close after moving out?</li> <li>• How long do you plan to live here?</li> <li>• Do you have any traditions?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How have roommate relationships evolved?</li> <li>• Do you seek stability/continuity?</li> <li>• Is it possible to find a long-term residence?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Children</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of relationship do you have with the children in the commune?</li> <li>• Who takes responsibility for the children?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can responsibility for the children be shared, or do the parents have sole responsibility?</li> <li>• Is it possible to have children collectively as a community?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Gossip (if it comes up)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of stories have you heard about other communes?</li> <li>• What kind of jokes are made about communal living?</li> </ul>	