

An Uncomfortable Beginning

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Last June I was nervous because the lease that Kim and I had signed for our apartment was about to expire. So, I had tried to discuss where we should move. However, though I thought it was a bit soon, I was also thinking about moving in with my boyfriend of almost two years. Eventually, I thought of all three of us living together. I pitched this to my boyfriend and he agreed. Then we asked Kim. Surprisingly, she immediately agreed. So, we began searching for an apartment for three.

We eventually rented a moderately priced, two-bedroom apartment. August 1st, we excitedly helped each other move into our new home. The first couple weeks of living together went well. However once school started, I noticed that Kim was rarely around.

At first, I did not notice that Kim was absent much because I was busy with school. However, when she began to ignore my calls and invitations, her absence aggravated me. I obsessively wondered if I had upset her.

After several weeks of absence, I conducted a functional assessment. When my roommate was at the apartment, I observed her and sought to identify the contingencies that may have controlled her

behavior. The target behaviors were how frequently we talked, and how often she slept at the apartment. To my surprise our conversations rarely exceeded a few minutes. Additionally, she slept at the apartment only about three times a week.

I came to suspect that my roommate returned to the apartment because the items in the household were reinforcing. For instance, my roommate would briefly return to change clothes, take a shower, eat, etc. Then she would leave, sometimes for several days. Perhaps, what was once reinforcing (spending time with me at the apartment) had become punishing as she rarely was present. Saving our four-year friendship, required action!

Given that I apparently made my roommate uncomfortable, she slept at her friend's apartment. So, she constantly traveled back and forth between apartments grabbing items she needed. Additionally, she spent excess money on food because she was rarely home.

So, I began reinforce her staying at the apartment and spending time with me. To find a starting point, I asked her if there was a problem with the living situation. She replied that "at times I made her feel uncomfortable by hugging and kissing my boyfriend, and the arguing we occasionally got into." I responded "is that all?" She then explained that she sometimes felt ignored and missed all the "girly" conversations we once had. For example, she missed our tradition of making margaritas and watching our favorite television shows on Thursday nights.

Clearly the functional assessment suggested that my roommate's behavior largely depended on my behavior. More specifically, many of my actions had been aversive. So now on the rare occasion Kim was at the apartment, I seized the opportunity and reinforced her presence. For example, every time I saw her, I spoke with her. Additionally when Kim was around, to eliminate the apparently punishing stimuli, I decreased my hugging and kissing my boyfriend.

At first, it seemed as I was making no progress. Gradually, however, my roommate began to spend more time at the apartment. I kept these procedures in place until we were spending almost every night at our apartment. Eventually, the tension diminished and we resumed our normal behavior, including making margaritas and watching our favorite television shows. It seemed as though our friendship was stronger than ever.