

Dear Economist

Time together

Dear Economist,

I have fallen in love with a wonderful man, and on Valentine's Day he proposed to me. We're planning to marry next summer. The question is: should we live together over the next year, or wait until we're married? The financial impact is relatively small (...). I am just trying to work out whether some time living together is likely to make our marriage stronger or not.

Elsbeth, Boston MA

Dear Elsbeth,

For many years, theory pointed in one direction and evidence in the other. The theory (...) is that a period of cohabitation lets you learn more about one another and thus avoid a bad match. (...)

The overwhelming evidence, on the other hand, used to be that marriages preceded by cohabitation were more likely to break down – in the US, at least. The question is whether this was a causal relationship, or whether the cohabitation and the marital breakdown were caused by a third factor, such as social class or a lack of religious belief.

Fortunately, new empirical research from economist Steffen Reinhold suggests both that the relationship between cohabitation and divorce is not causal, and also that it has faded over time as more educated, middle-class couples choose to live together before marriage.

I recommend following Becker's theory: learn about the marriage before it is too late by moving in together now. Keep an eye out for discarded underpants.

Der vollständige Artikel erschien auf www.timharford.com am 19. April 2008.