What is “Living Together Apart”?

“Living together” is often a choice younger adults make when they’re not yet ready for marriage. Of course, there’s no age limit on the practice, and anyone may decide to move in with a partner at any age.

But one choice that seems to be on the rise among unmarried older adults in serious relationships is actually to “live together--apart.” Though this style of relationship is certainly not limited to older people, here we’ll look at this practice among those over age 50.

What is Living Together Apart?

Although there is, of course, no legal definition of this term, typically, a couple who lives together apart is unmarried and does not cohabit, but considers their relationship to be significantly more serious and committed than “dating.” They are monogamous, and include the other person in their lives on a daily basis. There may be a lot of integration with each other’s families, and couples may even provide each other with assistance with daily living, like cooking and shopping. However, each person maintains his or her own home and own finances.

Why Live Together Apart?

There are actually quite a few practical reasons why this style of relationship may seem like an appealing choice.

- Lack of desire to move

Older adults may feel extremely settled in the homes they have lived in, loved in, and maintained for years. Their adult children and grandchildren may also be attached to the homes, wanting to be able to return to them for holidays and so on.

- Concern about the commitment

Some LATers express concerns about committing to potentially provide care for another person “for life,” as one would in marriage. These concerns are often more pronounced for women than men. While LATers may say that they would take care of their partner if he or she needed it, they want to do so by their choice, not out of the sense of obligation that accompanies marriage.

- Worry about divorce

Close to 20% of adults over 50 are divorced or separated, meaning that they know what it’s like to have a marriage end. Many may feel cautious about becoming legally and financially linked to another person late in life, when assets may be large and complex.

- Desire to maintain independence

At this age, many people have a complex and full life with hobbies, networks, professional concerns, and routines in place. Many LATers express an interest in maintaining their “own lives” and having some space while also still enjoying companionship.

- Concerns about family reaction to a marriage
Older adults may worry about adult children’s response to a late-in-life marriage or cohabitation, which may not always be positive. Issues regarding inheritances, family homes, and roles can become emotional—even, for instance, the decision as to what to call the new spouse of a parent. Living apart together may be less likely to create family disruptions.

- Opposition to cohabitation, while not desiring to marry

Religious or moral beliefs may keep some older adults from choosing to cohabit—yet at the same time, marriage may not seem desirable or realistic.

**Pros and Cons**

Is living together apart the right choice for you? It may offer the joys of companionship while preserving freedom and convenience, but consider the costs and benefits. Experts wonder if the health and happiness benefits we see with marriage are likely to be reduced with this arrangement. They also urge couples who choose this arrangement to “have the conversation” about any desire for marriage, as well as end of life issues and caregiving, so that these issues do not sneak up on them. Couples should be clear about what is and isn’t expected by each member.

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References:

