

REASONS FOR COHABITATION ON THE OUTCOME OF RELATIONSHIP QUALITY AND SATISFACTION

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Cohabitation before marriage has become a common choice for many couples in North America. Reasons for couples deciding to live together can vary, including a desire to spend more time together or to combine finances and avoid the hassles of living apart. When looking at reasons for deciding to live together, previous research found that convenience predicted highest relationship quality outcome. Conversely, living together in an attempt to “test the relationship” predicted lowest levels of relationship quality. However, the majority of research in this area has solely focused on individuals in mixed-sex couples and has failed to include the experiences of same-sex couples. It is possible that same-sex couples may have different reasons for deciding to live together given their historically restricted access to socially and legally recognized relationship status (e.g., marriage) and subsequent differences in relationship development scripts. The current study examined the living arrangements of individuals in mixed-sex and same-sex couples (N = 2815). Individuals in same-sex couples were more likely to report living together, even after controlling for group differences variables (i.e., age, relationship length). Individuals who were older and who were in longer relationships were also more likely to live together, but after the age of 27, age no longer predicted living together status, leaving relationship type and length as the only significant predictors. A sub-sample of participants (N=819) provided narrative stories about their decision to live together. Thematic coding revealed that the majority of participants moved in together due to the stage of their relationship or for practical reasons. Individuals in same-sex relationships were more likely to move in together at an earlier point in their relationship and for more practical reasons, compared to individuals in mixed-sex relationships who moved in together further into their relationship and for reasons related to the stage of their relationship. No associations were found between various reasons for living together and relationship satisfaction, possibly due to ceiling effects in this relatively happy and well-adjusted sample. Potential explanations for group differences are discussed in relations to the development of relationship scripts, as are implications for clinical work and relationships research.

