

Dear Economist: Should I stand by my chauvinistic man?

March 28, 2009 12:41am

I am an economist, as is my boyfriend. We started dating as students, but after four years we broke up for a couple of months because of differences in our ways of thinking. We always supported each other professionally, but things changed. I got a job in a multinational organisation, but he didn't like me travelling, going out for business dinners, or even spending time at the office.

His father was head of the family, while his mother stayed at home; both my parents worked. (We live in Paraguay, which is quite chauvinistic.) Probably, he thinks women have to stay at home, yet he fell in love with me because of my aspirations. I've said that maybe he needs to marry a woman who wants to be a housewife. I gave him another chance, as I love him. Should I be patient?

L.E.

Dear L.E.,

The economist Betsey Stevenson has discovered that in US states that liberalised divorce laws, couples became less willing to support each other through expensive courses. That makes sense: easy divorce raised the spectre of being dumped once hubby had spent your money and acquired his law degree.

Your own situation is the reverse. Your boyfriend supported you while you built up your human capital, but now spurns the payoff. You are right to be suspicious, I think. Your boyfriend wrongly thought that you would change; you face a similar disappointment.

There is another, more calculating, explanation. Roland Fryer, an economist fascinated by the causes of African-American under-achievement, theorises that some people find professional qualifications disturbing because they allow a credible exit from any relationship. You've given yourself that option; your boyfriend has given you reason to use it.

Questions to economist@ft.com

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