

# 'I Would Really Like to Go Where You Go': Rethinking Migration Decision-Making Among Educated Tied Movers

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## ABSTRACT

This paper studies 'tied mover' men and women who are the partners of graduate students. We use qualitative data to explore the relocation decision-making process of married and unmarried partners. We find that, while many partners have educational and career aspirations of their own, the maintenance of the relationship is a strong priority that dictates how and when a tied move occurs. Furthermore, the decision-making process is varied and depends on the stage of the relationship. Tied movers at earlier points in their relationships often make independent decisions to join their graduate student partners after the student has already initiated the move. Some of those in more mature relationships follow a traditional mover-follower model, while others participate in joint decision-making about their destination. Finally, we find that over one-third of the tied movers are male, reflecting both increases in women's migration for graduate school and men's openness to 'following' career-oriented partners. This paper contributes to the study of family migration by developing a model focusing on individual and collective non-economic determinants of couples' decisions to migrate for skill development. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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## INTRODUCTION

The 'tied mover' is traditionally a passive follower, usually a married woman whose partner relocates for a more lucrative occupation. Tied movers forgo their career interests because job prospects in the new destination are more advantageous for their partners (Mincer, 1977; Costa & Kahn, 1999; Compton & Pollack, 2004). However, in an age of increased geographic mobility, the personal and social factors driving tied migration have become varied and complex (Massey *et al.*, 1998; Hirschman *et al.*, 1999; Castles & Miller, 2003; Halfacree, 2004; MPI, 2010). The tied mover literature lacks a comprehensive approach to the shifting nature of gender, romantic relationships (Collins *et al.*, 2009),<sup>1</sup> and non-economic motivations in the tied migration process.

One context in which family migration commonly takes place is among graduate and professional school students. In the past several decades, young adults find it increasingly important to acquire advanced degrees to be competitive in a tight labour market. They enter graduate school at higher rates, stay in school for longer, and pursue education at later ages (US DOE-NCES, 2009a). As such, attaining advanced degrees often coincides with other life course events, such as the formation of long-term romantic relationships, cohabitation, and marriage. Graduate students are often in relationships with other highly educated individuals (Blackwell, 1998; Fu & Heaton, 2008), who may

have educational and career goals of their own. Therefore, the experience of individuals who relocate to pursue graduate education and that of their partners as 'tied movers' provides a good case to re-examine the dominant theoretical models of tied migration.

Extant literature on graduate student relationships focuses on the graduate students' perspective. Specifically, previous research examines how graduate training affects marital dynamics (Feldman, 1973; McRoy & Fisher, 1982; Brannock *et al.*, 2000; Gold, 2006; Price, 2006). In this paper, we take a different approach. We focus on the graduate students' partners and analyse why and how they decided to become a tied mover. In the following section, we review the literature on the motivations behind family/tied migration and outline the qualitative methods used to acquire our data. We then present our analyses of the graduate student partners' narratives of how tied migration decisions are made. An important finding that emerged is that maintenance of the relationship was the primary goal of most tied moves, in sharp contrast to the usual focus on economically motivated migration. We also find that the decision to migrate is shaped by the maturity of the relationships. Couples at different points in their relationship make different decisions about when and how they will join their partner; some couples follow a more traditional mover–follower model, while others undertake joint decision-making and goal-setting. The paper concludes with a discussion of how these findings contribute to the tied mover literature and calls for a more nuanced approach to understanding family migration.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A large body of research has explained why individuals and families migrate. The early neoclassical economics perspective theorised migration as a utility maximisation strategy for the individual (Todaro, 1969). Individuals migrate because they believe it improves their labour market opportunities, without consideration for family ties or household obligations (Todaro, 1969; Harris & Todaro, 1970; Massey, 1999). In contrast, the New Economics of Labour Migration argues that migration is primarily a process that is decided on within families, households, and communities. Serious consideration for how the migration

of one household member will alter the economic prospects of others occurs (Mincer, 1977; Stark, 1991; Stark & Taylor, 1991; Massey *et al.*, 1998; Massey, 1999; Brown & Bean, 2005; Brettell & Hollifield, 2008). A third view, the family migration perspective, argues that continued emphasis on net economic maximisation and risk minimization for the entire family drives migration decisions (Mincer, 1977; Stark & Lucas, 1988; Taylor, 1992; Taylor & Wyatt, 1996; Smits *et al.*, 2003). However, this view does not elaborate on how partners negotiate their individual interests vis-à-vis their relationships.

The 'trailing spouse' or 'tied migrant' hypothesis builds on the New Economics of Labour Migration perspective. Tied movers follow their migrant spouses, forgo their individual economic interests, and cooperate with the decision to move in order to increase the financial well-being of the family (Mincer, 1977; Sandell, 1977). The tied migrant model is gender-neutral and posits that migration occurs when the main migrant's potential returns on his or her human capital are greater than those of the tied migrant.

The tied mover perspective is limited in several respects. First, the tied mover hypothesis privileges occupations and wages as the primary motivations behind family migration. This overshadows the role of non-economic factors, such as emotional security and social reciprocity (Smith, 2004; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2010; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014). Halfacree notes that the career of a tied migrant is not narrowly defined by paid employment considerations but also involves family structure, emotional attachment, and relationship dynamics (Bailey & Boyle, 2004).

There is evidence that partners in dual-earner households *negotiate* family migration according to both their personal and occupational interests and make compromises in the process (Bielby & Bielby, 1992). For example, tied migrants who join their partners after the initial move have higher rates of economic activity (Sandell, 1977; Boyle *et al.*, 2001; Bailey & Boyle, 2004). However, scholars are left to question whether these higher rates suggest that negotiations occur so that sacrifices are mitigated. It is unclear whether couples co-plan a time-sensitive move in order to facilitate securing adequate employment for the tied mover or if other factors are at play. Existing measures of tied migration outcomes are unclear

in explaining *how* couples decide on their tied move together. Therefore, family migration scholars have called for more qualitative analyses of the role of agency of both partners in tied migration decision-making (Halfacree, 2004; Smith, 2004; Cooke, 2008).

Second, the tied mover hypothesis is gender-neutral; nevertheless, existing research finds that women are more likely to be tied migrants to career-driven male spouses (Bielby & Bielby, 1992; Boyle *et al.*, 2001; Bailey & Boyle, 2004), even when the human capital of a wife is comparable to her husband's (Duncan & Perrucci, 1976; Lichter, 1980). Women are more likely than men to disregard their individual needs and make migration decisions based on the interests of the family unit (Bielby & Bielby, 1992). Thus, many women who follow their husbands either drop out of the labour force or take jobs of lower occupational prestige than the ones they had prior to migration (Mincer, 1977; Smith, 2004). In cases where women have comparable human capital to their husbands, the net loss effects of the move are attenuated but do not disappear (Compton & Pollack, 2004; Cooke, 2008).

This bias towards men's preferences is likely due to the historical role of men as breadwinners and women as homemakers/housewives. Traditionally, women have been expected to comply with their husbands' decisions about migration and follow them dutifully (Curran *et al.*, 2006). However, gender roles have changed considerably in the last half-century, and women's interests are likely to become more important in the decision-making process behind migration (Duncan & Perrucci, 1976; Lichter, 1980; Bielby & Bielby, 1992; Curran *et al.*, 2006).

Lastly, the evolving definition of the family is important in the reconsideration of migration models. There has been an increase in the number of non-traditional families in the US (Cooke, 2008; Goodwin *et al.*, 2010). For example, cohabitation has become a part of the family formation process and is considered a pathway to marriage for many middle-class, educated young people (Danziger & Greenwald, 1977; Manning & Smock, 2005; Goodwin *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, it is no longer pertinent to use the married couple as the unit of analysis in tied mover models (Bailey & Boyle, 2004), as the decision to move may occur among couples who live together or separately and are at different stages in their relationships.

Graduate students and their partners are an ideal type of couple to understand how non-economic motivations and union status relate to tied/family migration. In recent years, the number of young adults who migrate in the pursuit of a graduate degree has increased significantly. The demands of most graduate programmes require that students live in the vicinity of their universities. Because many are also involved in relationships, students' partners often relocate and follow students to graduate school. International students, in particular, are a rapidly growing part of the graduate population in the US. In 2009, 17% of graduate students were temporary residents or international students (US DOE-NCES, 2009a). Given that unmarried partners cannot gain visa status to move with their student partners, many of the international graduate students and their partners are married.

Accompanying the increase in graduate student enrolment is the participation of women in graduate education. The Council of Graduate Schools finds that women represented 59% of graduate students in the US in 2008 (US DOE-NCES, 2009b). Nevertheless, there is scant research on the role of male tied movers in graduate student relationships. This paper aims to bridge these gaps in the literature by focusing on the non-economic motivations of both male and female partners' experiences in the process of becoming tied movers.

## SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION

Data for this study stem from 27 semi-structured interviews conducted between November 2008 and January 2010 with the romantic partners or spouses of graduate students attending a private university in the northeast of the US. All stages of the project were carried out using a qualitative research team approach. Four researchers were involved in the study, interviewing respondents, coding transcripts in NVIVO software QSR International (Americas) Inc. Burlington, MA, USA, and interpreting and writing up the results.

The medium-sized university serves as a promising research site because it contains a graduate student community from diverse backgrounds and interests. Although located in a small city, it is within commuting range of other metropolitan areas, thus providing a setting where spouses can access ample educational and work opportunities.

To be included in the study, potential interviewees must (1) have moved to the vicinity

because their partners or spouses were current graduate students at the university, (2) be in cohabiting relationships or married,<sup>2</sup> and (3) be at least 18 years old. This lower age limit was chosen to ensure that all respondents were adults who negotiated the work, migration, and family issues pertinent to this study.

Our participants were recruited through the distribution of messages to graduate students' email lists, the placement of flyers in public places around town, and recruitment messages sent to professors, graduate students, and administrators throughout the university. After five preliminary interviews, a revised set of open-ended questions was crafted into an interview guide that served as the primary data collection tool. Interview questions encompassed the decision to move, relationship dynamics between graduate student and partner, adapting to the new environment, and post-graduation plans, which represented emergent themes in the preliminary interviews. One-on-one, face-to-face interviews were conducted in a private place and lasted between 40 minutes to 1.5 hours. The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim, and coded using NVIVO 9. The project received human subjects approval from the institutional review board of the university.

The recruited respondents were at the life stage closely associated with the establishment of a career and a family. They were between the ages of 24 and 33 years, two-thirds were female, and one-third were international migrants. Eleven of 27 respondents were in non-marital unions at the time of interview.

#### ANALYTICAL APPROACH

The analysis follows a grounded theory approach (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Research team members analysed the interview transcripts to identify emerging themes related to how the decision to move occurred. An initial set of interviews were read, and the major themes became 'open' codes that were used to generate a set of key concepts and categories to interpret interviewees' experiences. These codes were used to analyse the remaining interviews, and further analysis demonstrated repetition of these main themes. New themes also emerged, which were added to the code list. We used six codes for the present analyses: partner educational aspirations, partner

work/career goals, relationship dynamics, social networks in origin and destination, importance of place of move, and timing of move. Partners indicated that a combination of these factors created apprehension and/or openness to being a tied mover. The research team discussed these codes and agreed upon a definition of each.

The next step was team coding. A selection of the interview transcripts were coded by each team member, then the entire group discussed cross-coder discrepancies in each interview. There was significant overlap in this first coding test, and the main discrepancies occurred when team members included additional lead-in or follow-on sentences to a coded piece of text. The entire team agreed on a final approach to coding to ensure inter-coder reliability. Next, two team members coded each remaining interview, and the union of each coders' results was used as the final coding scheme. After coding was completed in NVIVO, team members constructed grid sheets in Excel where the columns represented each code and the rows represented the respondents. Each cell contained the main points from each code for each interview. Team members compared findings across codes and individuals to determine emerging patterns. The grid sheets helped identify specific relationships that were not evident from reading the interviews separately or by code.

#### FINDINGS

Our findings highlight the importance of non-economic factors in migration decision-making. For most respondents, their primary motivation to become tied movers was the maintenance of their romantic relationships. All respondents expressed emotional investment in their partnerships. Moreover, the tied movers' confidence in the success of the partnership and their level of involvement in migration decision-making varied by the degree of maturity of their relationships. We developed a three-category typology of tied movers to capture the major relationship maturity contexts in which family migration decisions were made. Based on the responses of tied migrants, the decision to move either took place in a context where they were 'Taking a Leap of Faith' to be with their partners, 'Taking a Step Forward' to advance the seriousness of their



relationships, or following a longer-term 'Life Path' together with their partner.

### Taking a Leap of Faith (Leapers)

Leapers were partners who took a 'leap of faith' when they decided to become tied movers. Many Leapers were in pre-existing long-distance relationships with their graduate student partners, and all reported relationship uncertainty. For some, the move coincided with the first time they shared a household with their partners. Although Leapers might be in different phases of their lives when they decided to move, all of them had a shared experience in terms of the factors they felt were at stake for them. The 'Leap of Faith' category consisted of five respondents between the ages of 23 and 30 years, two men and three women. None of the Leapers were married when the decision to move was made.

The tied migration literature assumes that family migration occurs as a singular event and is decided jointly within the household. However, Leaper couples demonstrate that family migration occurs in several stages and is negotiated in the context of evolving relationships. Perhaps because of the more tentative nature of their relationships, Leapers did not participate in joint decision-making about whether and where to move. In most cases, the choice to migrate was initiated independently by the graduate students, and our respondents subsequently agreed to 'follow' them. Therefore, the graduate students had either decided to move for schooling or, in some cases, had already moved, before the discussion surrounding tied migration occurred.

Each Leaper's decision to relocate was strongly motivated by the desire to eliminate uncertainty in their relationship. Karen, a 30-year-old American woman, explained that her graduate student partner needed her to be physically close to 'feel secure about the relationship'; thus, the move became a way to confirm her commitment and prove the viability of the partnership. At the same time, many Leapers worried about the possibility of maintaining a successful relationship given the new relationship dynamic after the move. Several noted the stress their graduate student partners felt having initiated the move for both of them. For example, several Leapers reported that their graduate student partners would feel guilty if the relationship

became emotionally unsatisfying or if it dissolved. Frank, a 25-year-old American man who moved from the West Coast to the East Coast, recalled,

[My partner] was really concerned that it would develop into some sort of uncomfortable relationship dynamic [because...] the only reason that I moved was her.

Alli, a 24-year-old American woman who relocated from a nearby large city, noticed that her move felt 'a little weird' to her partner at the beginning because 'he didn't want to make me change my life or try to force me to move or do anything'.

Not only were Leapers and their student partners apprehensive about the move, but family and friends also expressed reservations about the probability of a successful relationship after the move. Some in their social networks voiced that they did not know the graduate student partner well or had not developed trust towards him or her. The concerns of their families, friends, partners, and themselves added stress and strain to Leapers' relationships, further explicating the negotiation and risks involved in tied migration.

In addition to juggling complicated couple dynamics, Leapers also recognised that they might need to sacrifice their own job or educational opportunities to move to a place they did not choose. Nevertheless, most were relatively young, recent college graduates who did not have well-defined career aspirations, and most reported they were not compromising established careers or career goals. Indeed, Leapers used phrases to describe their view of the move such as 'it seemed like an adventure', and they were willing to 'try it out' or 'give it a shot'. For example, at the time of the move, Alli did not have specific career plans and was contemplating applying to graduate school. For her, there 'wasn't really a career as such to put on hold'. Karen was in the process of formulating her professional plans and was 'really open' to allowing the move to help shape her future trajectory. Although Leapers were in uncertain relationships, most had undefined educational, career, and settlement strategies as well. Therefore, tied migration was accompanied by few risks and was preferred by some who were willing to 'try something new' in an effort to consolidate their future plans.

Because the decision to join their graduate student partners was viewed as the Leapers' choice,

Leapers held a great deal of power over the future emotional and locational dynamics of the relationship. Some believed that if they had not become tied movers, their relationship would have dissolved due to the pressures of long distance. Furthermore, Leapers had relatively little to lose in terms of their careers and wages. This group represents a model of the conventional 'trailing spouse', where one partner makes a decision and the other follows, potentially harming their own educational and career opportunities. However, Leapers are theoretically distinct because they wield the power to terminate their relationships. Moreover, with occupational goals often unformulated, they have little to lose in terms of careers, and their job opportunities could even improve in the destination.

### Taking a Step Forward (Steppers)

Tied movers in the 'Taking a Step Forward' relationship category were similar to Leapers because of their emotional desire to be in close proximity to their graduate student partners. However, Steppers were distinct from Leapers because their decision to participate in family migration was motivated by the *couple's* desire to nurture the progression of the relationship. Six respondents were designated as 'Steppers', consisting of four men and two women between 24 and 30 years old. These couples believed that living in the same city and sharing daily experiences helped cultivate their relationship and take it 'a step forward'.

Of the six steppers, three were married, one was engaged, and two were cohabiting. For all of the married couples, the decision to become a tied mover occurred in conjunction with entering into a marital union before or shortly after the move occurred. The two Steppers who married before the move did so in order to expedite the tied migration process. These respondents were foreign-born and marriage to their graduate student spouses lifted the burden of visa requirements and facilitated living in the US. The third couple discussed marriage in conjunction with their moving plans and got married after the move, and one of the cohabiting respondents was engaged to her partner. Steppers rationalised the move in distinctly different ways than Leapers. Steppers were already involved in more stable, promising relationships that included

higher emotional returns and prospects of longer-term happiness compared with the potential risks of making the move among the Leapers. For instance, Adam, a 30-year-old British man stated: 'our relationship became closer [before moving] and we decided that we wanted to be together, [...] we wanted to be together'.

According to the narratives of most Steppers, the decision to migrate was made jointly. The Steppers supported the student's desire to attend graduate school, both members wished to carry on with the relationship, and both agreed that the partner should also relocate. In order to create a beneficial situation for both partners, they often considered the partner's preferences to decide where the student should apply for graduate education and where to accept offers. For example, the student partner of Anna, a 28-year-old American woman, deliberately sent applications to schools in locations that would also be advantageous to Anna's job prospects. She explained, 'when he was applying to grad schools he decided not to apply to one—I think [there were] a couple of places where there wouldn't really be opportunities for me [...]'. In this case, the decision-making process began long before Anna seriously committed to moving, and knowing that her student partner considered her circumstances when deciding where to apply to school was a signal of his commitment to their relationship.

Similarly, Isaac, a 29-year-old American man, recalls how his partner took his preferences into consideration when choosing her graduate programme:

It wasn't like she was gonna make her decision based in what I wanted, but [...] she understood that it would be a change in my life, you know? And she was nice. [...] She was good about consulting me about my opinion on, like, you know, I didn't want to move to California [laughter].

The move also prompted Isaac and his partner to take a step towards a more committed relationship. He remembers telling his partner before she started applying to graduate school:

I remember at one point saying [...] 'Oh, you know, I would really like to go where you go. We should try to.' [...] So it kind of slowly

evolved from there, being like, '[...] We are committed to one another, so we wanna be close to one another.' [...] Because if she's on the East Coast and I'm not, then I didn't think it was going to work. Neither did she.

Soon after their move, they registered as a common-law marriage, and they plan to legally marry.

Steppers considered how the decision to become a tied mover would impact their economic outcomes more seriously than Leapers. While they were willing to relocate to facilitate the development of their relationship, they were aware of the negative effects that the move would have on their own educational or career paths or living standards. One challenge, which was repeatedly cited, was the financial costs of graduate school and the lack of adequate funding to comfortably support two adults. Several Steppers discussed the temporary nature of the move in order to rationalise the challenging economic times that they chose to embark on. In the Steppers' consciousness, their financial sacrifices would only last for a brief period. This finding is important because it highlights the role of time as well as place in the decision-making process of our respondents and how short-term financial stress is an acceptable trade-off for longer-term career enhancement for the graduate student and relationship growth for the couple.

Despite the Steppers' acknowledgement of the trade-offs that they would have to make being a tied mover, their decision to migrate was facilitated by the undefined nature of their careers. Most Steppers were not engaged in concrete career-launching situations before the move, and many were willing to take low-skilled service jobs in their new location. For example, Peggy discloses that she was not employed in her preferred line of work after moving, and she described her time as a tied mover as 'a middle step' in her and her partners' financial and career journey. Peggy states: 'We knew we won't be rich. But we would be okay'. Peggy reiterates the financial instability involved in tied migration but reconciles this as a short-term phase that will end once her partner completes his graduate education. More importantly, these sacrifices were small for Steppers who were more invested in their relationship's progression than their career ascendance. Adam echoes this statement:

What was at stake was just [...] asking about [...] trying to see whether my, sort of, longer-term happiness goals were sort of pointing in that direction. And being with her very much was. So, so in that way, [...] for me in the short term, I could live anywhere for a couple of years. You know, we could, we could live... somewhere in the desert in New Mexico for a couple of years. It's just a couple of years.

In sum, Steppers rationalise the move differently than Leapers because they have stable, promising relationships and their relocation was constructed as a tool to consolidate their bond. Both partners were involved to some extent in the early stages of the decision-making process, based on their support of the student's desire to attend graduate school and the desire to carry on with the relationship. The students consider their Stepper partners' preferences when choosing graduate programmes and/or geographic locations, and, unlike Leapers, Steppers negotiate with their student partners to achieve a mutually advantageous migration situation. Steppers tended to be flexible in their educational and career aspirations, albeit aware of the difficulties in finding work and advancing their careers in the new location. This group is also aware that the move would be temporary and the challenges involved would not last forever. Overall, the decision to migrate was primarily focused on nurturing growing relationships, while labour market considerations played a secondary role. Steppers demonstrate that the decision to migrate is more complex than previously thought.

### The Life Pather Couples

Life Pathers were in well-established relationships before deciding to move. They did not view migration as a disruption in their career or personal direction. Rather, Life Pathers rationalised following their graduate student partners as the next phase of their long-term journey or 'life path' as a couple or family. Sixteen of our interviewees were in this category, five men and 11 women; 14 were in marital unions, and they were between 25 and 33 years of age.

Life Pathers described their relationships as paramount. Therefore, the decision to move was constructed as an obligation to their relationships rather than as a personal choice. Several respondents expressed this sentiment:

For me, moving didn't seem like such a big deal. [...] If you're with your partner it's easier to meet people I think. It's easier to, even if, you're never going to feel so lonely and be totally alone because you will always have each other. So for me it was fine to move for his career. (Angela, 32-year-old American woman)

[We] put the relationship first. In the sense that, if the relationship is put [in front], everything else gets easier. [...] She happens to agree with me. We happen to be on the same [page]. (Mike, 29-year-old American man)

A definitive characteristic of Life Pather respondents is that they, unlike Steppers and to greater degree Leapers, discussed the move extensively with their student partners during the early stages. Two types of decision-making dynamics arose among Life Pather couples: the joint unit and the classic tied mover.

First, for half of these interviewees – two men and six women – the move was perceived as a joint decision, and there were intense discussions surrounding the options. In these relationships, both partners' needs were considered in choosing a school and the location of the university. For Life Pather partners, being the follower did not mean that they lacked career and personal plans of their own. The discussions struck a balance between the best school for the graduate student and a promising place where the partner could find a job, go to school, or be closer to family.

For example, Mike was also thinking about pursuing graduate school, and he and his student partner chose schools that they could apply to together. He explains:

[My wife] and I both knew that we wanted to pursue our respective fields, and so, and she had entered all of her schooling a year ahead of me. [...] When it was time for her to make decisions about applications, we looked at a lot of options. We made a list of schools that we really wanted to attend, and a list of schools that would be good. Fortunately for us, [this university] came up in both of those lists.

In another example of joint decision-making, Mali, a 30-year-old international partner, and her student husband decided on the right programme

for him with her preferences in mind. Mali's experience exemplifies the importance these couples place on the labour market and other economic characteristics of the destination.

He basically was left with two schools. One was in Indiana and the other was [in this city]. We visited both. [The university in Indiana] is completely in the middle of nowhere. It's a beautiful college town, but the nearest place is like an airport, which is an hour away. It's very much in the middle of nothing. [...] And we're both not countryside people, especially me, because I need to work and I'm not in school, so we opted for [here].

The second type of Life Pather followed the traditional tied migrant model. Eight Life Pather couples fell into this sub-category, five women and three men who tended to be older. Passive followers were characterised by low-priority personal or career ambitions. For many, their job positions did not appear to be discussed at length, and many were not sure what they would do in the new destination. In these cases, the partners articulated their decision within the classic tied migration framework, where the graduate student pursued his or her career goals and the partner's was a 'follower'.

The classic tied movers explained that graduate school had always been a part of the trajectory of their partners' professional lives. Graduate school was therefore automatically a part of their plans as a couple. For example, Kat, a 30-year-old American woman, explained,

When I first met my husband, he was planning to go to grad school, and I had an idea of what I was getting into. We ended up going to where [he wanted to be]. [...] We knew we would be moving somewhere, we didn't know where... It's really far away from my family and other people who live across the world. [...] I kind of understood that you have to make a little bit of a sacrifice, probably, but it was going to be temporary. [...] I didn't really actually have that many expectations coming here. I haven't, you know [...] it's not as convenient as I was hoping. [...] It's okay. I mean, everywhere has good points and not so good points. [...] You kind of have to take things as they come. [...] There are challenges that I didn't foresee, but, you know, they.... That's the way life is.



The family and friends of Life Pather couples also played an important role in the decision-making process. Compared with the families and friends of Leapers, who had reservations about the move, they welcomed the move because they knew the relationship was established. Even for those coming from abroad, the idea of moving to the US was well received by their families, who saw the move as a good opportunity. The Life Pather respondents actively encouraged their partners to pursue their education, even if it meant that they would have to disrupt their lives.

Similar to the Steppers, the temporality of graduate school emerged as factor in the decision-making process. Peter reflected, 'I kind of view [this city] as a kind of a stepping stone, like, we're not gonna live here forever'. Specifically, these more established couples were likely to see their life with their partners as a journey and graduate school as one chapter in that journey.

In sum, couples in the Life Pather category engaged in the decision-making process surrounding migration in a different manner than those in the other two categories. Because these couples were in stable family unions (and almost all were married), life without their student partners was not an option. Some Life Pather followed the classic tied mover experience in which the needs of the graduate student are privileged and the partner merely follows. In other Life Pather couples, the decision to move was made jointly, and there was serious consideration of the needs of both partners. These differences within the Life Pather category demonstrate the complexity behind being a married tied mover. Furthermore, one-third of Life Pather were male, providing evidence that gender roles in tied migration are shifting.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, we study the partners of graduate students who relocated to attend a northeastern American university as a unique population of 'tied movers'. While the tied migrant framework emphasises the economic motivations behind family migration (Mincer, 1977; Sandell, 1977; Bielby & Bielby, 1992), our data outlines the centrality of non-economic factors behind why, when, and how tied migration occurs. Interviews with 27 tied movers revealed that tied migration decision-

making was influenced by (1) the centrality of relationship maintenance over careers and wages and (2) the role of a relationship's maturity. The internal relationship dynamics of joint decision-making and love and emotional motivations in family migration (Lindberg, 2008; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2014) emerged as key themes, which challenge existing constructions of passive, financially compromised tied movers.

Relationship maturity, new definitions of the family, and shifting patterns of gender among tied migrants found in our data enhance the existing theoretical and empirical work on tied migration among highly educated couples. First, the three-category typology of tied movers' relationship maturity: 'Taking a Leap of Faith,' 'Taking a Step Forward' and the 'Life Path' couples underscores the primacy of socio-emotional factors in tied migration. More importantly, the categories of Steppers and Leapers represent new tied mover models that have not been previously accounted for. Steppers and Leapers provide complex and unexpected representations of how increasingly mobile young adult populations both engage with and transform traditional family migration behaviours.

While the Pathers resembled the existing migrant follower prototype, Steppers and Leapers decided to follow their graduate student partners with a variable amount of uncertainty around their relationship. Although tied migration is assumed to happen in established marital relationships, Steppers demonstrated that tied migration may be perceived by the individuals and couples as a catalyst to greater relationship commitment such as marriage. Similar to contemporary attitudes towards cohabitation, migration is jointly decided-upon trial for and/or stepping stone to marriage. The underlying assumption in family migration paradigms is that marriage is a given and precipitates a move. However, the Steppers category highlights a tied migration-to-marriage trend that is overlooked in the literature and consequently opens up new avenues for research on the changing patterns of internal and international mobility predictors, trends, and outcomes.

While Steppers saw migration as a tool for solidifying their partnerships, Leapers decided to move while in highly uncertain relationships. The desire to maintain their relationships was evident. However, Leapers engaged with the decision to migrate

independently from their graduate student partners, which revealed a sometimes risky decision-making process. Leapers engaged in tied migration with uncertainty that their relationships would survive after the move. As a result, Leapers are a unique group of tied movers who make the decision to follow their partners without clear economic expectations and/or socio-emotional returns for being a tied migrant. Therefore, Leapers compel us to rethink the complexity of the tied mover identity, and that marital, secure, and cooperative relationships are not always prerequisites for following one's partner. Leapers represent a category of tied movers who are willing to 'try it out' and explore how a significant life change will turn out for them, a finding which turns existing models of family migration on their head.

Secondly, these data reveal that there is an evolving definition of family that should be reflected in the existing tied migration literature. The tied migration literature uses marital relationships as the unit of analysis. However, many of our respondents were not married, engaged, or cohabiting when the decision to migrate was made. Our respondents demonstrate that migration decisions can occur in non-traditional relationship contexts and simply be motivated by the desire to live in close proximity with one's partner.

Lastly, gendered patterns of tied migration emerged. One-third of our tied movers were men who were committed to following their female graduate student partners in order to nurture their relationships. This adds to recent research on European female lead migrants (Ackers, 1998) and reflects the increase of women in higher education and the labour market. While men are participating in tied migration as followers, they continue to be embedded in traditional gender norms and behaviours. For example, across relationship maturity categories, we find that the proportion of men is varied with a higher number of men occupying the Life Partner category. Although the sample is not generalizable, the higher number of tied mover men in more secure relationships may indicate that they were less willing than female tied movers to migrate in less established relationships. Perhaps, the stigmas and taboos attached to men taking on traditionally female migratory roles are mitigated if a man feels that he is in a stable relationship, as opposed to women who are may be more likely to

'take a chance' and follow their male graduate student partners to a new city. In sum, this paper has demonstrated that the career of the tied migrant is manifold and embedded in intersectional gender, social class, and relationship statuses. Future research on tied movers will benefit from reflecting and theorising the racial, spatial, and ethnic dimensions of tied migrant decision-making if we are to understand the diversity of the human experience across time and place in a rapidly changing world.

### Policy Recommendations

Universities can enhance their attractiveness to prospective graduate students by facilitating employment networks for partners. Our respondents expressed concerns about finding promising work opportunities in their new city, particularly because their graduate student partner's income was low, and the prospects for a long-term financially strained household were high. With this in mind, partners noted that graduate students chose their current university because it had a more promising labour market than universities in more remote, or rural, areas. Therefore, universities should create systematic job placement programmes for graduate student partners through their existing career centres in order to facilitate a successful transition and integration of graduate student families. This would help universities increase their marketability to prospective graduate students and their partners and support strong families among them. Universities located in areas with limited labour markets would especially benefit the most from building internal or external job placement networks for this overlooked population.

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## NOTES

- (1) We adopt definition by Collins *et al.* (2009) of romantic relationship as a 'mutually acknowledged on-going voluntary interaction... that have a distinctive intensity, commonly marked by expressions of affection and current or anticipated sexual behaviour' (p. 632).
- (2) In addition to the 27 respondents, we interviewed two respondents who were not in a relationship with their partners at the time of the interview. One relationship had ended, and a second respondent decided to stop cohabiting with her partner but stayed in the relationship. These data were excluded from the analysis.

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