

# Partner (dis)agreement on moving desires and the subsequent moving behaviour of couples

## ABSTRACT

Residential mobility decisions are known to be made at the household level. However, most empirical analyses of residential mobility relate moving behaviour to the housing and neighbourhood satisfaction and pre-move thoughts of individuals. If partners in a couple do not share evaluations of dwelling or neighbourhood quality or do not agree on whether moving is (un)desirable, ignoring these disagreements will lead to an inaccurate assessment of the strength of the links between moving desires and actual moves. This study is one of the first to investigate disagreements in moving desires between partners and the subsequent consequences of such disagreements for moving behaviour. Drawing on British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) data, we find that disagreement about the desirability of moving is most likely where partners also disagree about the quality of their dwelling or neighbourhood. Panel logistic regression models show that the moving desires of both partners interact to affect the moving behaviour of couples. Only 7.6% of couples move if only the man desires to move, whereas 20.1% of shared moving desires lead to a subsequent move.

**Key words:** residential mobility; household decision making; moving desires; partner disagreements; satisfaction

## INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of Rossi's *Why Families Move* in 1955, a large literature seeking to understand the residential mobility process has developed (Dieleman, 2001). There is a tension within this body of work between conceptual models of how households make moving decisions, and empirical tests of these models conducted at the individual scale. Conceptual models of residential mobility argue that moving is a household response to housing stress, which is generated when there is disequilibrium between a household's housing and locational requirements and their current housing situation (Clark and Ledwith, 2006). This stress can build up gradually and generate dissatisfaction, which in turn stimulates the sequential expression of moving desires, intentions and expectations (see Kley, 2010; Lu, 1999; Lu, 1998; Rossi, 1955). Many studies implicitly assume that these pre-move thoughts are shared by all household members. Disequilibrium can also be produced more rapidly by life events such as union formation or dissolution, childbirth or changes in employment status. Such events can alter the linear decision making process, stimulating the formation of non-standard combinations of pre-move thoughts or disrupting the plans of the household (De Groot *et al.*, 2011). Providing the household possesses sufficient resources and providing there are accessible vacancies within the destination housing and labour markets, pre-move thoughts may eventually lead to an actual move (Mulder and Hooimeijer, 1999).

Problematically, existing empirical analyses of the mobility process have typically linked the pre-move thoughts of *individuals* to the subsequent moving

behaviour of *households*. Many studies treat individuals as independent actors, ignoring that many people live and move together in households. Although valid for singles, this approach is less appropriate when examining the moving behaviour of couples or nuclear families. Some studies address this problem by selecting only one member of each household, linking their pre-move thoughts to the household's subsequent behaviour (see De Groot *et al.*, 2011; Kan, 1999; Lu, 1999; Lu, 1998). This approach still assumes that the views of one individual can 'represent' the household unit, or that the desires of one person carry such weight as to largely determine household behaviour.

Insights from other conceptual frameworks suggest that considering the pre-move thoughts of both partners may enhance our understanding of the moving behaviour of couples. Despite offering conflicting explanations of why households move, both the human capital and gendered mobility literatures emphasise that couples and families make moving decisions at the household level (see Cooke, 2008a; Van der Klis and Mulder, 2008). Both partners typically have a say in whether the household moves, with qualitative evidence showing that moving decisions are often made jointly through bargaining, negotiation and trade-offs (Abraham *et al.*, 2010; Bailey *et al.*, 2004; Seavers, 1999). Given that moving decisions can be optimal for the household but not for all individuals within it, it seems likely that partners will often disagree about whether or not moving is desirable.

In the UK, preliminary empirical evidence suggests that just over 20% of couples do not share moving desires (Ferreira and Taylor, 2009). Barring some initial explorations by Buck (2000) and Ferreira and Taylor (2009), very little is

known about which couples are more likely to experience moving desire disagreements or whether such disagreements affect subsequent moving behaviour. It seems likely that the desires of both partners interact to condition the subsequent mobility of a couple, with moves less likely to occur if only one partner desires to move than if this desire is shared. Failing to consider the thoughts of both partners may therefore partially explain why many longitudinal studies find that a large proportion of individuals desiring, intending or expecting to move fail to subsequently relocate (eg. Buck, 2000; De Groot *et al.*, 2011; Kan, 1999).

This study is one of the first to investigate which couples are more likely to disagree about whether moving is desirable and whether such disagreements have consequences for subsequent moving behaviour. We analyse the moving propensity of couples using 8 waves of British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) data and panel logistic regression models, taking into account (dis)agreements on evaluations of housing and neighbourhood quality and (dis)agreements on moving desires and expectations.

## **BACKGROUND**

Stress-threshold models of mobility explain moving behaviour as a household adjustment to increases in housing stress. Housing stress is thought to be generated when the dwelling and/or neighbourhood in which a household resides no longer meet the needs and preferences of its members (Feijten and

Van Ham, 2009). Households decide to move in response to rising stress, attempting to relocate to a new dwelling which better satisfies their changing needs, desires and aspirations (Brown and Moore, 1970; Rossi, 1955; Wolpert, 1965). Disequilibrium between current and desired housing consumption can occur rapidly, as events in the life careers of household members (such as union formation or dissolution, childbirth or changes in employment status) alter the household's housing needs and preferences (Mulder and Hooimeijer, 1999). Housing stress can also arise more gradually, producing dissatisfaction with the household's dwelling or neighbourhood before triggering the initiation of the moving process (see Lu, 1999; Speare *et al.*, 1975).

There is a growing literature exploring the decision making process that leads to individuals moving home. This process is typically conceptualised as comprising a series of steps (Kley, 2010). The initial response to housing stress and dwelling and/or neighbourhood dissatisfaction consists of expressing a desire to move. Such moving desires are relatively unconstrained, as individuals do not necessarily assess the feasibility of moving in detail before expressing a desire to move (De Groot *et al.*, 2011; Van Ham and Feijten, 2008). As a result, moving desires are known to be closely associated with expressions of dwelling and neighbourhood dissatisfaction (Landale and Guest, 1985; Speare *et al.*, 1975). As commitment to moving increases, and providing that actually moving seems possible, individuals may then express intentions or plans to move (Kley, 2010). The final decision making step consists of expressing an expectation of moving, with actually moving likely to follow (Sell and De Jong, 1983). Progressing through these decision making stages

requires a greater commitment to moving and an increasing certainty that actually moving is possible with each stage. Progression may be impeded if the individual judges that they lack the resources to actually move or if they perceive few accessible opportunities within the wider housing market (Mulder and Hooimeijer, 1999). Unplanned life events such as losing a job or union dissolution may also force individuals to change their mind about moving or alter the urgency with which a move is required (De Groot *et al.*, 2011). This means that the decision making process is not always strictly linear. It is therefore important to consider combinations of pre-move thoughts to build a more accurate picture of how moving decisions are made (Sell and De Jong, 1983).

Problematically, empirical mobility studies have typically focused upon linking these *individual* pre-move thoughts and expressions of dwelling and neighbourhood satisfaction, to subsequent *household* behaviour. This ignores that many households are made up of multiple individuals, each with their own desires, needs and aspirations. The classic works of Rossi (1955), Brown and Moore (1970) and Speare *et al.* (1975) tackled this problem by arguing (or assuming) that households behave as cohesive units, with all household members sharing the same thoughts about moving. Empirically this led Rossi (1955) and Speare *et al.* (1975) to take the opinions of one adult individual in each household as indicative of the views of all household members. The assumption that household members fully agree on whether moving is (un)desirable was problematic in the 1950s and 1960s (although moves were more often determined by the demands of the man's job than they are today),

but is even less appropriate nowadays. As gender parity has increased since the 1970s, the needs of both partners are increasingly taken into account when deciding to move (Smits *et al.*, 2003). For most contemporary couples, we can no longer assume that “the decision to move is made by a single decision maker and that the often complicated interplay of interests within a household with regard to the decision to move and the choice of an alternative location can be ignored” (Speare *et al.*, 1975: 175).

To better understand how pre-move thoughts affect household moving behaviour, we need to consider the pre-move thoughts of both partners in couples. Bailey *et al.* (2004) argue that households can be considered as a network of socially and geographically ‘linked lives’. While singles can act upon their own moving desires, decision making for couples is more complex, as the interests of both partners must be considered. Cross-national evidence from qualitative studies indicates that this complexity leads couples to make moving decisions cooperatively, through bargaining and negotiation (Abraham *et al.*, 2010; Hiller and McCaig, 2007; Seavers, 1999). This may be particularly difficult for spatially constrained dual earner couples and couples with children. Given that partners can have very different ideas about the desirability of a move, and may evaluate the quality of their dwelling and neighbourhood differently, disagreements about whether moving is desirable can occur. This may force trade-offs and concessions to be made by one or both partners for the sake of the household (see Jarvis, 1999; Seavers, 1999). The moving desires of both partners are therefore likely to affect the moving propensity of couples. Failing to consider this possibility may partly explain why many studies find only

relatively weak links between individual moving desires and subsequent moving behaviour. Considering the pre-move thoughts of both partners will therefore increase the precision of empirical models investigating moving behaviour.

As empirical analyses linking pre-move thoughts to actual moving behaviour generally consider the thoughts of only one partner, little is currently known about the occurrence or consequences of intra-household disagreements in moving desires. As moving desires are closely linked to perceived housing stress and dissatisfaction, we might expect partners who disagree about the subjective quality of their dwelling and neighbourhood to be more likely to disagree about the desirability of moving. As a result we can hypothesise that: *1) Partners are more likely to disagree about whether moving is desirable if they do not share subjective evaluations of dwelling and neighbourhood quality.*

It is likely that partner disagreement on moving desires is also related to the levels of commitment tying the couple together. Embarking upon major legal, emotional and financial commitments such as marriage, parenthood and homeownership restricts the freedom of the individuals involved, by constraining the future choices they are free to take (Feijten, 2005). As a result, individuals typically only select themselves into such commitments when they perceive a stable, shared future (Feijten, 2005). Given that the highly committed have chosen to restrict their future options and are likely to have been a couple for longer, we might expect such couples to be unlikely to disagree about whether moving is desirable. Less committed couples may feel less pressure to compromise or adjust their desires for the sake of their relationship, thereby



making them more likely to disagree about whether moving is desirable. Such couples may also tend to be younger and therefore at more dynamic and divergent points in their life courses. This leads us to hypothesise that: 2) *Partners are more likely to disagree about whether moving is desirable if they possess fewer joint commitments.*

Empirical evidence demonstrates that individuals desiring a move are more likely to actually move than those with no moving desire (Buck, 2000; Ferreira and Taylor, 2009). With the exception of these preliminary studies, little is known about how the interaction in moving desires between partners affects their subsequent moving behaviour. To the best of our knowledge there are no studies investigating how partner disagreements in moving desires, expectations and evaluations of dwelling and neighbourhood quality combine to affect subsequent moving behaviour. It can be expected that couples are much more likely to move if they share a desire to move than if they disagree or particularly if neither desires to move. Therefore we can hypothesise that: 3) *Couples are least likely to move if neither partner desires to move and are most likely to move if a move is desired by both partners; 4) Couples are less likely to move if only one partner desires to move than if both partners desire to move.*

In the event of disagreements, little is known about which partner's moving desire is most likely to be realised. While Rabe and Taylor (2010) found that the moving behaviour of couples was more strongly affected by whether the woman (dis)liked the neighbourhood, the possible mediating effects of moving desires were not considered (see Landale and Guest, 1985; Speare *et al.*, 1975). Therefore it seems important to develop an understanding of whether

men are more able to realise their desires than women, as argued by traditional migration theory (Hiller and McCaig, 2007). To do this we test a fifth hypothesis:

*5) Couples are more likely to move if only the man desires to move than if only the woman desires to move.*

## **DATA AND METHODS**

This study uses data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). The BHPS is a panel survey initiated in 1991, when a nationally representative sample of 10,300 individuals in 5,500 UK households were selected and interviewed (Berthoud, 2000; Taylor *et al.*, 2010). These individuals have been re-interviewed annually on a wide range of topics, with additional households added to the panel from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in 1999 and 2001. In addition to possessing a large sample surveyed over many time points, the BHPS is ideal for this project for two main reasons. The first key advantage of the BHPS is that it gathers information about moving desires and expectations from all adults living with a sample member. This enables the construction of variables indicating (dis)agreements in moving desires and expectations between partners living in couples. A second advantage of the BHPS is its comparatively low attrition rate (Berthoud, 2000). While movers are known to be more likely to drop out of the sample than non-movers, the BHPS typically records whether individuals have moved even if they were not re-

interviewed (Buck, 2000). This enables us to retain these cases in our analyses of actual moving behaviour.

This study makes use of a person-year file based on eight waves of the BHPS covering the years 1998-2006. Earlier waves could not be used as information on moving expectations was not gathered until 1998. Wave 11 (2001) cases were excluded as housing satisfaction information was not gathered during this survey sweep. Given the aims of this paper, the research population consisted of individuals who had an identified and opposite sex 'lawful spouse' or 'live-in partner' in their household. A very small number of person-years where the partners lived in an institution were excluded, as these couples are unlikely to have independent housing careers. Person-years where key household information was missing (such as housing tenure or income) were removed. Cases were also dropped where it was impossible to compute household level similarity or (dis)agreement variables, as only one partner had responded to the relevant survey question. A small proportion of respondents replying that they 'did not know' whether they desired or expected to move were treated as having no desire or expectation of moving. This is because these individuals appear not to have given moving much thought. In addition, analysis was restricted to couples that stayed intact between two consecutive waves.

Couples were defined as 'movers' if both changed their place of residence between  $t$  and  $t+1$  and they remained in the same household and relationship. Likewise, couples were defined as 'stayers' if neither moved and they remained partners. This procedure is more appropriate than just comparing marital status across waves to check for relationship changes, as individuals

may not change marital status but may change partner between waves (particularly if they cohabit). Longer observation intervals for identifying a move (for example over the subsequent 2 or 3 years) were rejected due to the phrasing of the survey questions, which explicitly obtained the respondent's moving expectations over the next year. In addition, using longer observation windows would ignore that the respondent's expressed desires and expectations may have changed at the intervening waves. If only one partner moved or both partners moved but to different households, the couple were assumed to have separated and these person-years were omitted (see Cooke, 2008a for a similar sample selection procedure). After transforming the person-year file into a couple-year format, 30,617 couple-years remained, provided by 6,675 couples over an average of 4.6 waves.

To address the first research aim, cross-tabulations linked various household level independent variables to the occurrence of disagreements in moving desires between partners. To investigate the effects of disagreements on the subsequent moving behaviour of couples, random effects (panel) logistic regression models were used (Hsiao, 2003). The dependent variable in these models is a binary variable indicating whether the household moved over the subsequent survey year (0=no move, 1=move). The control variables in these models contain lagged values, with transition variables measuring the occurrence of life events (such as changes in employment status) between the observation of moving desires at  $t$  and moving behaviour at  $t+1$ . Table 1 provides a summary of all variables used in these analyses. Panel models are

valuable in longitudinal research as they account for the non-independence of observations (as couple-year cases are nested within couples).

\*\*\*Table 1 about here\*\*\*

## **RESULTS**

### **The occurrence of disagreements**

The descriptive results presented in Table 1 and Figure 1 confirm that it is important to consider the pre-move thoughts of both partners in couples. Partners often disagree about whether a move is desired (19.11% of cases) or expected (4.36% of cases). Figure 1 shows how partner (dis)agreement on moving desires and actual mobility rates varies with the age of the older partner in the couple. Disagreements appear to occur fairly consistently across the life course, although younger couples are more likely to disagree than older couples. While total agreement rates remain fairly stable, the composition of this agreement shifts from desiring to move to not desiring to move as age increases. It is important to note that the actual mobility rate is consistently lower than the proportion of couples where one or both partners desire to move (sum of disagree and both desire). This suggests that many people may be unable to act upon their moving desires.

\*\*\*Figure 1 about here\*\*\*

Table 2 presents data on the associations between partner similarity and (dis)agreement on moving desires. The results provide only weak support for the idea that partners who are demographically and socioeconomically more similar to one another are less likely to disagree about whether moving is desirable. The age gap separating partners appears unrelated to the propensity for partners to disagree about whether moving is desirable, although couples separated by the largest age gaps are slightly more likely to disagree. Ethnically mixed couples are more likely to disagree than ethnically homogenous couples, despite the idea that only more committed individuals are willing to enter into such unions. A gap in educational levels between partners seems unrelated to (dis)agreement on moving desires. Both dual and single earner couples are more likely to disagree than couples where neither partner is employed. This is probably a proxy age effect, as non employed couples tend to be retired.

\*\*Table 2 about here\*\*\*

The results in the lower section of Table 2 provide preliminary support for the hypothesis that disagreement about whether moving is desirable is more likely when partners also disagree about the quality of their dwelling or neighbourhood. Disagreements are most likely to occur if the partners already disagree about whether they are satisfied with their dwelling or dislike their neighbourhood. Further analysis (not shown) reveals that it is almost always the

partner who is unhappy with their dwelling or neighbourhood who desires to move. This suggests that individual moving desires are stimulated by personal subjective evaluations of dwelling and neighbourhood conditions (Landale and Guest, 1985; Rossi, 1955), This interpretation is further supported by the strong links between shared negative evaluations (particularly of the neighbourhood) and shared desires to move: more than 96% of couples who agree on disliking the neighbourhood also share a desire to move. Couples who disagree about their housing or neighbourhood conditions also often agree that moving is desirable. This suggests that people often take their partner's happiness with their current location into account when expressing their own moving desires.

\*\*\*Table 3 about here\*\*\*

Table 3 presents descriptive results linking the level of shared commitments to the relationship to moving desire (dis)agreements. There is somewhat mixed support for the commitment hypothesis, which proposed that possessing fewer joint commitments is associated with a greater propensity for partners to disagree about the desirability of moving. Disagreements are more likely among cohabiters than married couples, with cohabiters also much more likely to agree that moving is desirable. This suggests that age may be driving these correlations, as cohabiters are typically younger than married couples (Feijten and Van Ham, 2010). Disagreements also appear to be more common for couples with children, with the incidence of disagreement generally increasing with the age of the children (while agreement that moving is desirable

simultaneously drops) (see also Ferreira and Taylor, 2009). This suggests that although families with children are fairly immobile, it is common for one or both partners to still desire to move. There is also some evidence that tenure commitments are linked to desire disagreements. Highly committed homeownership couples disagree in 18.55% of cases, whereas disagreements are slightly more common amongst renting couples (just over 21%). Given that selection into home ownership is facilitated by wealth accumulation with age, it may be that the older average age of homeowners is driving these correlations (see Figure 1).

Overall we have found little convincing evidence that levels of partner similarity are associated with moving desire disagreements. We did find support for the first hypothesis that disagreement about whether moving is desirable is more likely if partners disagree about the quality of their dwelling or neighbourhood. These findings provide initial support for conceptual models of residential mobility decision making (see Lu, 1999). There is also some support for hypothesis 2, suggesting that greater levels of commitment are associated with a reduced propensity to disagree about whether moving is desirable.

### **Desire disagreements and actual moving behaviour**

Table 4 contains descriptive results testing the third and fourth hypotheses. The results indicate that taking the moving desires of both partners into account more accurately predicts whether couples subsequently move. This is at the heart of this paper's contribution to the literature. The upper section of Table 4



links the desires of only the male partner to the couple's moving behaviour over the next year. Ignoring the views of the female partner, these results show that 15.90% of couples where the male desires to move also actually move.

The lower section of the table reveals however that the likelihood of the male partner's desire to move being realised is heavily dependent upon the views of his partner. If only the male partner desires to move, then a move occurs in only 7.57% of cases. If both partners desire to move then a move occurs in over 20% of cases. These findings support the hypothesis that moving desires are most likely to be realised if shared by both partners. The results also demonstrate that linking only one partner's desires to the actual moving behaviour of the couple leads to inaccurate estimates of how strongly desires are associated with actual moves. Shared moving desires are much more likely to be realised than desires which are not shared.

\*\*\*Table 4 about here\*\*\*

Table 5 contains the results from five panel logistic regression models estimating the likelihood of couples making joint moves. These models enable robust hypothesis testing, by controlling for the effects of background characteristics known to affect mobility. Our main interest is in how partner (dis)agreements in evaluations of housing and/or neighbourhood quality, moving desires and moving expectations, affect the moving propensity of couples. It is possible that interview conditions may have affected our measurements of (dis)agreements. It is likely that disagreements are less likely

to be expressed if both partners are interviewed together. Further analysis revealed that partners are somewhat more likely to disagree if they completed the relevant section of the interview separately than if they were interviewed together. As partners were not interviewed separately in approximately 50% of cases, we may undercount disagreements in our analyses. To ensure that our results are robust, the models were rerun with a variable indicating the interview conditions included as an extra control. The model results were almost identical to the models without this control variable (results not shown).

Model 1 includes only housing dissatisfaction and neighbourhood assessments as independent variables. The model shows that couples are more likely to move if one or especially both partners are dissatisfied with their dwelling or dislike their neighbourhood. Consistent with Rabe and Taylor's (2010) findings, moves are more likely to occur if only the woman dislikes the neighbourhood than if only the man dislikes the neighbourhood.

These parameters remain strong and significant when a range of control variables (but without moving desires and expectations) are added in Model 2. In general the control variables have the effects anticipated from the literature, apart from the negative coefficient of the cohabitation dummy (although this is not significant). The propensity to move decreases with age, and couples with children are less likely to move than those without (particularly if the children are school age or older). Changes in the number of children in the household do not appear significantly linked to mobility. High levels of education are associated with a higher probability to move, while single and particularly dual earner couples are less likely to move than couples where neither partner is employed.

Interestingly, reductions in the number of people in employment are also associated with moving. This may be due to moves related to retirement. With higher levels of income the likelihood of moving increases. Private renters are more likely to move than those in other housing tenures, while room stress is also associated with a greater propensity to move. The longer people stayed in their current dwelling, the less likely they are to move. Further analyses (not shown here) demonstrate that there is little evidence of any significant regional or period effects on moving behaviour.

\*\*\*Table 5 about here\*\*\*

Model 3 only includes the moving desires and expectations of both partners. The results support both hypotheses 3 and 4. Desiring to move is associated with a greater propensity to actually move, particularly if this desire is shared between partners. Shared moving expectations are very strongly linked to mobility, although moves are also likely if only expected by one partner (especially if the woman expects to move). The effects of moving desires and expectations remain stable when control variables are included in Model 4. Most of the control variable parameters are similar to those in Model 2, although there are some minor changes in significance levels (for instance education level becomes insignificant). Model 4 fits the data much better than Model 2, as shown by the considerably lower log likelihood value in Model 4. This suggests that desires and expectations are more strongly linked to actual moves than evaluations of dwelling and neighbourhood conditions.

Finally, Model 5 contains all variables included in the previous models. Most of the control variables have similar effects to those identified in the previous models. The most important finding is that some of the effects of housing satisfaction and all of the effects of disliking the neighbourhood become insignificant when desires and expectations are included in the same model. This indicates that subjective evaluations of dwelling and neighbourhood conditions are associated with moving desires and expectations, with these desires and expectations in turn conditioning the propensity to move (Lee *et al.*, 1994; Rossi, 1955). Rabe and Taylor (2010) have previously reported that whether the female partner dislikes the neighbourhood has a particularly strong effect on whether the household subsequently moves. Our results nuance this finding, as it seems that this depends on how disliking the neighbourhood is translated into the moving desires and expectations of both partners. Interestingly, after also controlling for moving desires and expectations, couples remain significantly more likely to move if only one partner is dissatisfied with their dwelling. This may be because only shared housing dissatisfaction is strongly associated with moving desires (see Table 2).

The moving desire parameters continue to support the hypotheses. Moves are more likely to occur if desired by one partner than if neither partner desires to move, although shared desires most closely predict subsequent moves. In support of hypothesis 5 we find evidence of a gender effect, as men are more likely than women to realise their moving desires if they are unsupported by their partner. However, women appear to be better in predicting a move than men (see parameters for moving expectations). Again, this

nuances Rabe and Taylor's findings (2010), as it is men who are more successful than women in translating a moving desire into an actual move.

Overall, the modelling results demonstrate the value of conducting analysis at the household level, taking into account the views of both partners. This study showed that it is important to consider the satisfaction and pre-move thoughts of both partners, as the impacts these factors have on actual mobility differs depending upon whether they are shared or held by only one partner. The results also support conceptual models of residential mobility, as dissatisfaction stimulates moving desires and expectations, which in turn affect actual moving behaviour (see Lu, 1999).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This study contributed to the residential mobility literature by showing that it is important to take the views of both partners in couples into consideration when investigating the moving behaviour of couples and families. Most previous studies have implicitly or explicitly assumed that the views of an individual represent the views of all household members. Conceptually this is problematic, as moving decisions are known to be made at the household level through bargaining and negotiation between key decision makers (see Bailey *et al.*, 2004). As partners may not necessarily agree about whether moving is advantageous or desirable, we cannot assume that moving decisions involve consensus (see Jarvis, 1999; Seavers, 1999).

The first aim of this paper was therefore to assess which couples are more likely to disagree about the desirability of moving. The results indicated that the level of demographic and socioeconomic similarity between partners has only weak links to the propensity for couples to disagree. Joint commitments appear to have a slightly stronger association with (dis)agreements, with those couples with fewer commitments (such as cohabiters and renters) slightly more likely to disagree. As disagreements in moving desires peak early in the life course, it is likely that this is an age effect (as commitments and relationship duration typically increase with age). Agreement on whether moving is desirable is strongly linked to agreements in subjective evaluations of dwelling and neighbourhood conditions. Couples are most likely to disagree about the desirability of moving if they already disagree about whether they are satisfied with their dwelling or whether they like their neighbourhood. Interestingly, couples are likely to agree that moving is desirable even when only one partner is unhappy with their dwelling or neighbourhood conditions. This indicates that people are willing to consider moving for the sake of their partner.

The second aim of the study was to investigate whether the likelihood of individuals realising their moving desires depends upon the moving desires of their partner. Given the one-year spacing of BHPS observations, it is possible that the moving desires of one or both partners changed without our knowledge in the interval between expressing their desires at time point  $t$  and the observation of their actual moving behaviour at  $t+1$ . Nevertheless, the results clearly demonstrate that the desires of both partners affect the moving

propensity of couples. A desire to move is much more likely to be realised if shared by both partners. Consistent with previous research (see Cooke, 2008b), the results indicate that male moving desires are more likely to be realised than female moving desires in the event of a disagreement. This suggests that after controlling for satisfaction, men exert a greater influence on household moving decisions than women. This indicates that Rabe and Taylor's (2010) conclusion that moves are more likely to occur when the female partner dislikes the neighbourhood is only partially valid, as this effect is heavily mediated by moving desires and expectations.

This paper has demonstrated that the empirical analysis of mobility behaviour must draw more deeply upon residential mobility theory. Two key conceptual insights are of particular importance. Firstly, empirical analysis linking pre-move thoughts to subsequent moving behaviour needs to be conducted at the household level. The likelihood of an individual with a partner realising a desire to move is strongly influenced by whether or not their partner shares this desire. Adopting an individual level approach assumes consensus and ignores that decisions to move are made at the household level. Modelling household moving behaviour using only one individual's prior moving desires will therefore inaccurately assess the strength of the links between moving desires and actual moves. The second important conceptual insight concerns the linearity of the decision making process. Much recent research has shown that housing and neighbourhood dissatisfaction increases the propensity for individuals and households to make residential moves (eg. Diaz-Serrano and Stoyanova, 2010; Rabe and Taylor, 2010). Our results demonstrate that moving

desires and expectations mediate most of these observed direct links between dissatisfaction and actual mobility, as Rossi originally proposed (see Landale and Guest, 1985; Lee *et al.*, 1994). To better understand why families move, we need to consider the satisfaction and prior moving desires of both partners in couples.

## **DISCLAIMER**

The data used in this study were made available through the ESRC Data Archive. The data were originally collected by the ESRC Research Centre on Micro-Social Change at the University of Essex (now incorporated within the Institute for Social and Economic Research). Neither the original collectors of the data nor the Archive bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

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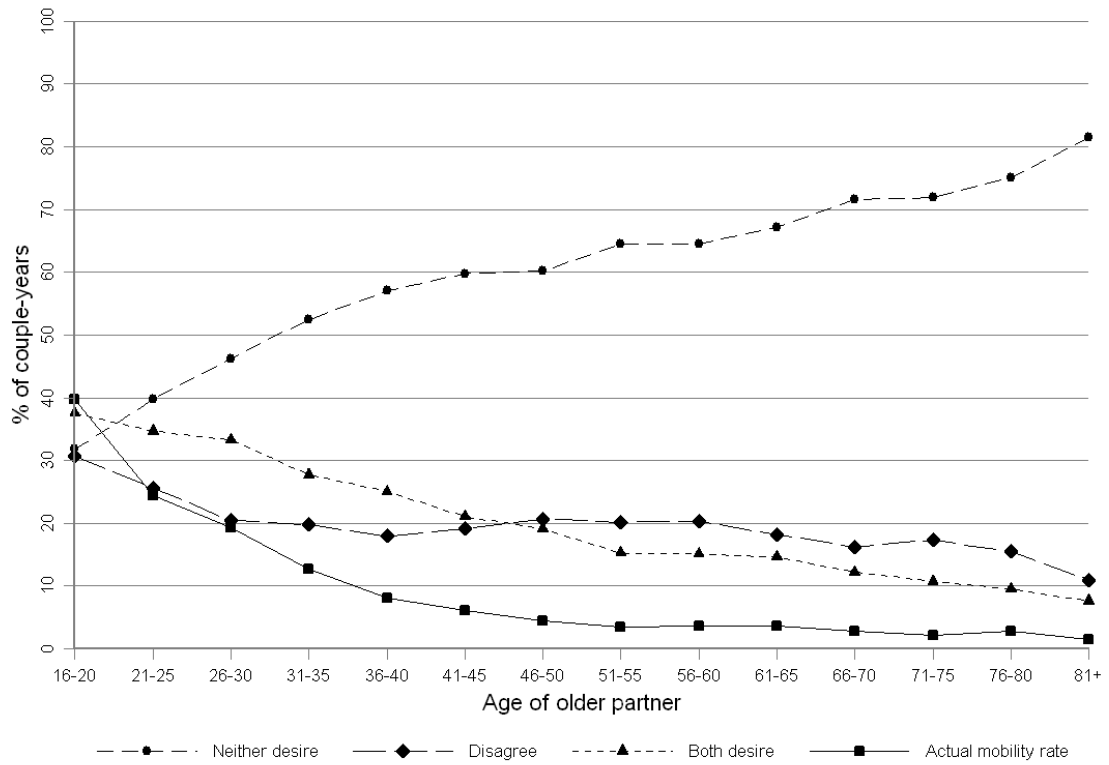
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**Table 1.** Variable summary statistics (total N=30,617 couple-years)

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Mover couple dummy (ref=no move)	2,160	7.05
Housing satisfaction (ref=both satisfied)		
Man dissatisfied	3,035	9.91
Woman dissatisfied	3,691	12.06
Both dissatisfied	2,834	9.26
Disliking the neighbourhood (ref=neither dislikes)		
Man dislikes	1,010	3.30
Woman dislikes	1,084	3.54
Both dislike	888	2.90
Moving desires (ref=neither desires to move)		
Man desires	3,051	9.97
Woman desires	2,799	9.14
Both desire	6,090	19.89
Moving expectations (ref=neither expect to move)		
Man expects	637	2.08
Woman expects	698	2.28
Both expect	2,064	6.74
Cohabitation dummy (ref=married)	4,839	15.80
Couple type (ref=couple, no children)		
Preschool children	2,669	8.72
School age children	7,844	25.62
Children of both ages	1,966	6.42
Non-dependent children	3,795	12.40
Other	376	1.23
Change in <i>n</i> kids <i>t</i> to <i>t+1</i> (ref=no change)		
Increase	1,280	4.18
Decrease	1,404	4.59
Unknown at <i>t+1</i>	830	2.71
Highest education level (ref=very low/none)		
Low (basic secondary school level)	5,900	19.27
Medium (higher school/vocational qualifications)	15,184	49.59
High (degree and above)	6,383	20.85
Employment status of the couple (ref=neither employed)		
Dual earner	16,851	55.04
Single earner	6,995	22.85
Change in <i>n</i> employed <i>t</i> to <i>t+1</i> (ref=no change)		
Increase	1,430	4.67
Decrease	1,895	6.19
Unknown at <i>t+1</i>	1,383	4.52
Housing tenure (ref=homeowner)		
Social renter	3,890	12.71
Private renter	1,741	5.69
Longest duration of stay in years (ref=0-1)		
2-5	6,008	19.62
6-10	3,348	10.94
11-20	4,030	13.16
21-40	3,011	9.83
>40	619	2.02
Unknown	9,229	30.14
<b>Continuous variables</b>		
Highest age	Mean	Std. Dev.
Real household income(£)/10,000	49.36	15.05
Roomstress ( <i>n</i> people/ <i>n</i> rooms)	3.42	2.45
	0.67	0.30

Source: BHPS (own calculations)

**Figure 1.** Partner (dis)agreement in moving desires by age



**Table 2.** Partner similarity and (dis)agreement on whether moving is desirable

Couple characteristic (row %)	Moving desires of the couple			Total (100% and <i>n</i> couple-years)	
	Neither desires	Disagree	Both desire		
<b>Age gap (years)</b>	0-2	62.40	18.94	18.66	14,360
	3-5	61.13	18.47	20.40	9,146
	6-10	57.82	20.63	21.55	5,225
	11-20	58.35	18.73	22.92	1,671
	>21	60.00	23.26	16.74	215
<b>Ethnic mix</b>	Homogenous	61.20	18.98	19.82	30,093
	Mixed	49.81	26.15	24.05	524
<b>Education level gap</b>	No gap	61.22	18.77	20.02	13,044
	Small gap	61.57	18.63	19.80	12,314
	Large gap	58.61	20.83	20.55	3,936
	Very large gap	65.65	16.96	17.39	230
	Unknown	59.65	22.78	17.57	1,093
<b>Employment status</b>	Dual earner	58.89	19.56	21.55	16,851
	Single earner	58.81	20.20	20.99	6,995
	No earner	68.53	16.85	14.62	6,771
<b>Housing satisfaction</b>	Both satisfied	72.76	16.61	10.62	21,057
	Disagree	42.52	26.08	31.40	6,726
	Both dissatisfied	17.47	21.10	61.43	2,834
<b>Liking the neighbourhood</b>	Both like	67.01	18.46	14.53	27,635
	Disagree	7.35	34.43	58.21	2,094
	Both dislike	0.68	3.04	96.28	888
<b>Total (100% and <i>n</i> couple-years)</b>					30,617

All bivariate associations have Pearson's  $\chi^2$   $p < 0.01$

Source: BHPS (own calculations)



**Table 3.** Shared commitments and (dis)agreement on whether moving is desirable

<b>Couple characteristic (row %)</b>		<b>Moving desires of the couple</b>			<b>Total (100% and <i>n</i> couple-years)</b>
		<b>Neither desires</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Both desire</b>	
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	63.81	18.43	17.76	25,778
	Cohabiting	46.06	22.71	31.23	4,839
<b>Couple's household type</b>	Couple only	64.36	18.10	17.54	13,967
	Preschool children	52.12	18.70	29.19	2,669
	School age children	59.54	19.31	21.15	7,844
	Children of both ages	55.14	21.31	23.55	1,966
	Non-dependent children	63.11	20.58	16.31	3,795
	Other	39.36	28.72	31.91	376
<b>Housing tenure</b>	Homeowner	63.91	18.55	17.54	24,986
	Social renter	48.51	21.59	29.90	3,890
	Private renter	47.16	21.54	31.30	1,741
<b>Total (100% and <i>n</i> couple-years)</b>					<b>30,617</b>

All bivariate associations have Pearson's  $\chi^2$   $p < 0.01$   
 Source: BHPS (own calculations)

**Table 4.** Moving desires and the subsequent moving behaviour of couples

Moving desires at <i>t</i>		Subsequent couple moving behaviour <i>t</i> to <i>t+1</i>		
		Stayer	Mover	Total (100% and <i>n</i> )
<b>Individual level analysis</b>	No male desire	96.71	3.29	21,476
	Male desire	84.10	15.90	9,141
	Total	28,457	2,160	30,617
<b>Couple level analysis</b>	Neither desires	97.29	2.71	18,677
	Man desires	92.43	7.57	3,051
	Woman desires	92.82	7.18	2,799
	Both desire	79.93	20.07	6,090
	Total	28,457	2,160	30,617

All bivariate associations have Pearson's  $\chi^2$   $p < 0.01$

Source: BHPS (own calculations)

**Table 5.** Panel logistic regression models of the annual moving propensity of couples between  $t$  and  $t+1$

Variable (observed at wave $t$ )	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.	Coeff.	S.E.
Housing satisfaction (ref=both satisfied)										
Man dissatisfied	0.977***	0.081	0.690***	0.079					0.226**	0.092
Woman dissatisfied	1.033***	0.074	0.790***	0.073					0.308***	0.085
Both dissatisfied	1.751***	0.078	1.100***	0.077					0.130	0.091
Dislike neighbourhood (ref=both like)										
Man dislikes	0.460***	0.120	0.410***	0.117					-0.122	0.135
Woman dislikes	0.649***	0.111	0.620***	0.106					0.068	0.124
Both dislike	0.953***	0.115	0.968***	0.109					-0.081	0.127
Desire to move (ref=neither desire)										
Man desires					0.756***	0.098	0.646***	0.098	0.629***	0.100
Woman desires					0.475***	0.104	0.386***	0.105	0.322**	0.108
Both desire					0.969***	0.077	0.879***	0.077	0.825***	0.083
Expect to move (ref=neither expect)										
Man expects					1.817***	0.125	1.417***	0.127	1.414***	0.128
Woman expects					2.120***	0.115	1.738***	0.116	1.720***	0.117
Both expect					3.735***	0.085	3.200***	0.084	3.197***	0.084
Highest age			-0.033***	0.003			-0.024***	0.003	-0.024***	0.003
Cohabit (ref=married)			-0.022	0.067			-0.179**	0.078	-0.181**	0.078
Couple type (ref=couple, no children)										
Preschool children			-0.231**	0.084			-0.111	0.099	-0.121	0.099
School age children			-0.753***	0.081			-0.499***	0.091	-0.513***	0.091
Children of both ages			-0.657***	0.110			-0.261**	0.125	-0.266**	0.125
Non-dependent children			-0.634***	0.115			-0.360**	0.125	-0.361**	0.125
Other			0.336**	0.169			-0.146	0.201	-0.158	0.202
Change in $n$ children (ref=no change)										
Increased at $t+1$			0.170	0.096			-0.046	0.114	-0.049	0.115
Decreased at $t+1$			-0.080	0.143			0.010	0.162	0.009	0.162
Unknown at $t+1$			2.075***	0.204			1.975***	0.231	1.987***	0.231
Highest education level (ref=very low)										
Low			0.206	0.122			0.089	0.132	0.085	0.132
Medium			0.131	0.117			-0.088	0.126	-0.098	0.126
High			0.378**	0.128			-0.081	0.140	-0.090	0.140

Employment status (ref=no earner)										
Dual earner			-0.344***	0.098			-0.372***	0.110	-0.375***	0.110
Single earner			-0.190**	0.095			-0.312**	0.107	-0.310**	0.107
Change in <i>n</i> employed (ref=no change)										
Increased at <i>t+1</i>			-0.007	0.112			0.002	0.129	-0.005	0.129
Decreased at <i>t+1</i>			0.459***	0.093			0.448***	0.107	0.450***	0.107
Unknown at <i>t+1</i>			-0.052	0.184			-0.030	0.207	-0.033	0.207
Real household income/10,000			0.043***	0.011			0.034**	0.011	0.035**	0.011
Housing tenure (ref=homeowner)										
Social renter			-0.256**	0.087			-0.164	0.097	-0.170	0.099
Private renter			1.303***	0.081			0.983***	0.093	0.962***	0.094
Roomstress			0.621***	0.094			0.393***	0.109	0.371***	0.110
Longest duration of stay (ref=0-1 years)										
2-5			-0.098	0.073			-0.178**	0.084	-0.181**	0.084
6-10			-0.215**	0.106			-0.392***	0.115	-0.398***	0.115
11-20			-0.375**	0.118			-0.567***	0.126	-0.571***	0.126
21-40			-1.123***	0.172			-1.213***	0.183	-1.218***	0.183
>40			-0.881**	0.362			-1.066**	0.379	-1.080**	0.380
Unknown			-0.633***	0.089			-0.743***	0.097	-0.750***	0.098
Intercept	-3.634***	0.058	-1.823***	0.233	-4.192***	0.072	-2.454***	0.269	-2.482***	0.270
Rho	0.277	0.019	0.066	0.021	0.167	0.023	0.064	0.024	0.067	0.024
Log likelihood (improvement over null)	-7210.81(482.92)		-6273.13(1420.60)		-5329.71(2364.02)		-4871.34(2822.39)		-4862.75(2830.98)	
Wald chi <sup>2</sup> (d.f.)	854.35(6)		2037.42(34)		2576.79(6)		2586.47(34)		2580.61(40)	
N( <i>n</i> groups)	30617(6675)		30617(6675)		30617(6675)		30617(6675)		30617(6675)	

\*\*\*= $p < 0.001$

\*\*= $p < 0.05$

Source: BHPS (own calculations)