

What motivates residential mobility? Re-examining self-reported reasons for desiring and making residential moves over the life course

Abstract

Understanding why people move home is an important objective for population research. While studies are increasingly examining residential mobility motivations using the reasons reported in social surveys, data constraints and the conceptual legacy of behavioural theories mean that little is known about how people's reasons for desiring and making residential moves vary over the life course. In this paper we address these issues using longitudinal data from the British Household Panel Survey. The results show that the reasons people report for desiring to move vary considerably over the life course. People are more likely to relocate if they desire to move for 'targeted' reasons like employment opportunities than if they desire to move for more 'diffuse' reasons relating to area characteristics. Life course events and moving desires intersect to strongly condition moving behaviour. These insights demonstrate how a deep engagement with life course theories can help researchers to overcome the difficulties encountered when using behavioural models to understand moving decisions.

Keywords: life course; migration; motivation; reason; residential mobility

Introduction

Population researchers have long sought to understand why people make residential moves. This objective inspired Peter Rossi's 1955 classic *Why Families Move*, in which he argued that residential moves were a normal part of the family life cycle rather than an urban pathology. Rossi posited that people move residence in order to adjust their dwelling and neighbourhood attributes to meet the new needs and preferences that emerge as they move through life. This insight continues to underpin residential mobility research, which now emphasises that people move to adapt to their changing life course trajectories (Geist and McManus, 2008).

There are several reasons for this enduring curiosity about why people move. Perhaps most importantly, it is difficult to interpret how relocation is embedded within life course biographies without knowing anything about people's motives for moving. Moving plays an important role in a wide range of processes from family transitions (Geist and McManus, 2008) to employment trajectories (van Ham, 2002) and changing cultural affiliations (Fielding, 1992). Social networks and exchanges of social support can influence and be configured by residential moves (Mulder, 2007). Disentangling the complex and multifaceted causes and consequences of residential moves therefore requires understanding why people make particular types of move at different points in the life course.

Such knowledge can help academics to engage with public policy. On the one hand, population predictions can be improved by understanding why people move to particular locations (Dennett and Stillwell, 2010). On the other, knowledge about people's motivations for moving can feed into policy critiques. In the United Kingdom,

policy interventions are increasingly politicising residential mobility and immobility. While prospective homeowners are given state support to make desired moves (for example through the 'Help to Buy' scheme), housing benefit reforms aim to make social tenants move to dwellings which are deemed more appropriate for their domestic living arrangements (DWP, 2012). Interpreting the impacts of these interventions requires that we understand how people make moving decisions.

Although many studies have explored why people move (Chen and Rosenthal, 2008), until recently a dearth of survey data meant that researchers typically had to infer people's motives for moving from the correlates of moves (Fielding, 2012; Niedomysl, 2011). This approach indicates that people usually make different types of move for different reasons (Lundholm *et al.*, 2004). While long-distance moves are primarily undertaken for education or employment, people typically move short distances to adjust their housing and neighbourhood characteristics (Niedomysl, 2011). This is because people tend to be willing to make costly and disruptive long-distance moves only when this is essential for fulfilling highly valued goals (Kley, 2011).

However, there are two reasons why it may be problematic to use residential mobility behaviour to understand why people move. First, recent survey analyses show that people often do not report the reason for moving that one might expect given their moving behaviour (Boyle *et al.*, 2009; Morrison and Clark, 2011). For example, many long-distance migrants report non-economic motives for moving (Clark and Maas, 2012). Although many of these analyses collapse non-job related reasons into rather nebulous categories like 'quality of life' or 'environmental' (Geist and McManus, 2012; Lundholm *et al.*, 2004), they nonetheless provide clear evidence that reported reasons for moving are more complex than it is often assumed (Niedomysl, 2011).

Inferring people's reasons for moving from their observed moving behaviour also overlooks those motives that never translate into a residential move (Coulter, 2013). This could be because people are unable to act on their moving desires, or because their needs and preferences change as their life courses unfold during the process of mobility decision-making (De Groot *et al.*, 2011; Lundholm *et al.*, 2004). While several studies have investigated who acts on their moving desires (Buck, 2000; Coulter *et al.*, 2011), few have explored how this may vary with the reason for wanting to move (Böheim and Taylor, 2002). Gaining a better understanding of these issues requires examining why people desire to move, before linking this to their subsequent moving behaviour and reported reasons for moving.

To fulfil this objective, this paper seeks answers to three questions:

1. *How do expressed reasons for desiring to move vary over the life course?*
2. *Which reasons for desiring to move are most likely to be followed by residential mobility?*
3. *How do life events affect the relationship between moving desires and subsequent moving behaviour?*

Background

Classical theories of mobility posit that people move different distances for different reasons. In this framework, people are thought to migrate long distances across labour market boundaries primarily to obtain higher wages or to improve their skills

and employment prospects (Böheim and Taylor, 2007). In contrast, less disruptive short-distance moves are thought to be driven by household transitions, dwelling and neighbourhood preferences or social mobility aspirations (van Ham, 2012). Residential moves thus act as an adjustment mechanism allowing people to adapt to the new needs and preferences generated by changes in their life course careers (Clark and Ledwith, 2006).

Many studies have drawn on this framework to investigate the types of move people make at different points in the life course. For instance, it has been well-documented that young singles migrate frequently and tend to flow to urban centres offering a high density of educational, employment and social opportunities (Dennett and Stillwell, 2010; Geist and McManus, 2008). The propensity to move long distances drops with age and as people accumulate 'commitments', such as an employed partner or children, which make moving more complex and costly (Feijten, 2005; Geist and McManus, 2012). Some research then identifies subsequent pulses of mobility around retirement (Duncombe *et al.*, 2001), before health and care needs assume greater importance for the frail elderly (Evandrou *et al.*, 2010).

A large proportion of these studies infer movers' objectives from the types of moves that they make. Thus, the fact that migrants tend to flow to buoyant labour markets is interpreted as evidence that economic gain motivates migration (Morrison and Clark, 2011). However, recent analyses of survey data emphasise that people frequently report different reasons for moving than we might expect (Clark and Maas, 2012). For instance, while long-distance migration correlates with economic factors (Böheim and Taylor, 2007; Fielding, 2012), few migrants report having moved long distances for job reasons (Clark and Maas, 2012; Lundholm *et al.*, 2004). This seems to challenge traditional theories of how migration and residential mobility fit in to life course biographies.

Making sense of these puzzling findings requires researchers to examine people's expressed reasons for moving (Clark and Maas, 2012). Crucially, focusing on self-reported reasons allows analysts to disentangle the factors *motivating* residential moves from the factors *enabling* mobility. This may be an important distinction, for example if migration is more likely to be enabled by continuity of employment than motivated by a desire for occupational advancement (Morrison and Clark, 2011; Niodomysl, 2011). Examining expressed reasons for moving can also help to uncover exactly which dwelling and neighbourhood characteristics people are seeking to change when they move. In consequence, it is perhaps unsurprising that scholars are increasingly attempting to unpack people's expressed reasons for moving (eg. Boyle *et al.*, 2009; Clark and Maas, 2012; Geist and McManus, 2008; Lundholm *et al.*, 2004).

Although these studies are enhancing our knowledge of residential moves, methodological factors mean that they often overlook or are unable to fully investigate several dimensions of moving decisions. Due to data constraints, many survey analyses utilise coding frames that collapse a heterogeneous mix of motives into broad categories such as 'quality of life and other' (Geist and McManus, 2012), 'social' (Niodomysl, 2011) or 'environmental' (Lundholm *et al.*, 2004). These may take on very different meanings depending upon one's life course position. For example, young singles are likely to make different types of 'social' move than the frail elderly. Critically re-examining how people explain their own moving behaviour therefore requires developing a finer grained coding frame capable of distinguishing a large number of distinct reasons.

Furthermore, social and psychological theories suggest that self-reported reasons for moving should be interpreted with some caution. For example, few migrants may cite job reasons for moving because securing a new job is such a 'taken-for-granted' part of migration that people do not think to mention it (Halfacree and Boyle, 1993). This conjecture is supported by psychological research, which emphasises that retrospective explanations of behaviour provide only a partial representation of cognitive processes (Schwarz, 2012). Taken together, these insights suggest that the reasons for moving people retrospectively report may tell us only part of the story about why they moved. Thus, it seems important to also investigate the motives people cite when they are deliberating residential mobility and expressing unconstrained desires to move (Buck, 2000).

Analysing why people desire to move and how this impacts on their subsequent moving behaviour can greatly enhance our understanding of residential mobility motivations. Yet in contrast to the burgeoning literature on self-reported reasons for moving, little is known about why people desire to move. This is problematic for two reasons. First, focusing only upon self-reported reasons for moving overlooks the large proportion of moving desires that are never followed by a residential move (Buck, 2000). Moreover, it has been well-documented that some people are more likely to act on their moving desires than others. For example, the propensity to act upon moving desires drops sharply as age rises and is lower for individuals with a weaker socio-economic position (Coulter, 2013). Overlooking those desires that are never acted upon therefore limits our understanding of the heterogeneous meanings of immobility, which can be a product of choice or the outcome of constraints.

As retrospectively reported reasons for moving differ by age and partnership status (Geist and McManus, 2008), these factors are likely to also be associated with different reasons for desiring to move. While getting a job and leaving the parental home are key transitions in the progression to adulthood (Berrington *et al.*, 2009); housing and area characteristics typically become more salient with increasing age, when people seek to move to adapt to the new needs associated with growing and changing families (Rossi, 1955). We therefore hypothesise that *(H1) the reasons for desiring to move will differ by age. Jobs and setting up a home of one's own will be more important in young adulthood than later life; while housing and area characteristics become more salient in mid-life as people accumulate resources and consolidate their families.* We thus anticipate that 'targeted' or focused motivations for moving (such as jobs) will give way to more 'diffuse' consumption oriented motives (for example about dwelling or neighbourhood characteristics) with increasing age. Moreover, as couples often have less locational flexibility and greater space needs than singles, we expect that *(H2) individuals in couples will be more likely than singles to report desiring to move for housing and area reasons.* The gendered migration literature further suggests that, among couples, *(H3) men will be more likely than women to report desiring to move for job reasons* (Cooke, 2008).

Traditional behavioural models of mobility posit that people follow a similar process of decision-making regardless of why they are seeking to relocate. However, work by Böheim and Taylor (2002) suggests that some types of moving desire have a greater likelihood of being acted upon than others. In general it seems likely that desiring to move in order to make urgent, major and targeted changes across life course careers is more likely to lead to actual mobility than desiring to move because of more diffuse feelings of dissatisfaction. This could be in part a selection effect if more mobile individuals are also more likely to report these types of moving desire.

Hence we hypothesise that *(H4) desiring to move for a job or to set up a home of one's own is more likely to be followed by a move than desiring to move for housing or area reasons.*

By conceptualising moving decisions as an individualised cognitive process that proceeds through a series of 'stages' (Brown and Moore, 1970; Kley, 2011), behavioural theories assume that people have a clear motive for moving which they consciously and consistently seek to fulfil. This assumption underpins analyses of self-reported reasons for moving (Lundholm *et al.*, 2004). However in a landmark paper Halfacree and Boyle (1993) critiqued this perspective, arguing that motives grow and change over time. This indicates that we cannot assume that the reason a person expresses for desiring to move will match the explanation they subsequently provide for an actual move. Given that occupational change is a particularly important and targeted reason to move home (Böheim and Taylor, 2002), we can hypothesise that *(H5) people are most likely to report the same reason for desiring and subsequently making a residential move if they desired to move for job reasons.*

Behavioural assumptions of a common and consistent mobility decision-making process also fit poorly with life course theories emphasising the temporal dynamism of individual lives (Elder *et al.*, 2003). Empirical analyses clearly show that (un)expected life course events can disrupt and alter mobility decision-making (De Groot *et al.*, 2011; Kley, 2011). This has two implications. First, it seems likely that the type of reasons cited for moving will differ depending upon whether the move was desired or not. More importantly, we might also anticipate that the links between moving desires and subsequent moving behaviour will be tempered by controlling for life events. As job-oriented moving desires are more targeted and often more urgent than those motivated by housing and neighbourhood preferences, we can hypothesise that *(H6) after controlling for life course events, desiring to move for a job-related reason will be a stronger predictor of subsequent mobility than desiring to move for housing or neighbourhood reasons.* More generally we also expect that *(H7) different life course transitions will have different effects on moving behaviour for men and women at different points in the life course. Childbirth will have a more pronounced effect on the mobility of women than men, whereas job transitions and retirement will have a more pronounced effect on the mobility of men than women.*

Data and measures

This study uses eighteen waves of longitudinal data collected by the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). The BHPS was initiated in 1991 when a nationally representative sample of approximately 10,000 individuals in 5,500 households completed wide-ranging face-to-face interviews (Taylor *et al.*, 2010). These individuals were then re-interviewed each year until 2008. In 1999 the sample was boosted with extra individuals from Scotland and Wales. As the BHPS was originally designed to be representative of Great Britain rather than the United Kingdom, we do not use the Northern Irish sample first added to the panel in 2001.

At each wave the BHPS gathered data on respondents' moving preferences and actual moving behaviour. Interviews began by asking respondents whether they would prefer to stay in their present home or move somewhere else. Respondents indicating a desire to move were then asked an open-ended question: '*What is the main reason why you would prefer to move?*' The verbatim responses to this question were pre-coded into twenty-seven categories by the data collectors (Taylor

et al., 2010). We collapsed these to identify eight types of reason for desiring to move, as shown in Appendix Table A1. This typology was constructed to produce categories that are as conceptually distinct as possible. In one instance this was hindered by inconsistencies in the dataset. Cases where the respondent desired to move 'for child's education' had to be coded as an 'other' reason because this code is not listed in the User Guide and did not appear before 1995.

From 1992 onwards the next question in the BHPS interview was '*Can I just check, have you yourself lived in this (house/flat) for more than a year, that is since before September 1st [t-1]?*' As this question routes respondents towards questions probing their reasons for moving, we used this variable to define residential (im)mobility. This indicator was cross-checked with the administratively defined mobility variable to identify and reconcile the small number of inconsistencies generated when respondents had been interviewed at irregular intervals (Nowok *et al.*, 2013). While many studies focus specifically on long- or short-distance moves (Boyle *et al.*, 2009), in this paper we analyse moves made over any distance. This is because people's reasons for relocating influence how far they move, rather than vice versa.

Individuals who reported a change of address were then asked two questions about why they had moved. First, a closed question asked '*Did you move for reasons that were wholly or partly to do with your own job, or employment opportunities?*' Because closed questions elicit different patterns of responses than open-ended questions (Schuman and Scott, 1987), we used this question to code a dummy variable indicating whether respondents reported moving for their own job (1) or not (0). Next, all movers were asked '*What were your (other) main reasons for moving?*' The verbatim responses to this open-ended question were pre-coded into thirty-five categories by the data collectors (Taylor *et al.*, 2010). In order to better understand this coding process we requested access to the original verbatim files from the data collectors. Unfortunately not all of these have been preserved and so we had to rely on the pre-coded categories.

We collapsed the pre-coded categories to identify twelve (other) reasons, as shown in Appendix Table A2. As people responding to this question could provide up to two reasons for moving, we coded the responses as a series of dummy variables coded as 1 if the respondent mentioned the reason and 0 otherwise. It is not possible to determine the relative importance of the different reasons reported. A small number (160) of cases where the respondent mentioned that they moved for their own job were merged into the 'own job' dummy defined using the preceding closed question.

The classification frameworks shown in Appendix Tables A1 and A2 have two advantages over those used in previous research. First, by isolating many distinct types of motivation we avoid creating large and rather nebulous categories such as 'social reasons'. This enables us to more precisely analyse how mobility motivations vary over the life course by reducing the ambiguity of each distinct category of motive. A second advantage is that respondents can provide more than one reason for having moved. This has long been advocated as a means to better understand the interconnected motivations driving relocations (Halfacree and Boyle, 1993). Interestingly however, multiple types of reason were only reported in approximately 12.5% of cases (Table A2). Further analysis demonstrated that partnered individuals were marginally more likely than singles to report multiple reasons for moving. This is probably because moving decisions are more complex when the 'linked lives' of

two partners have to be considered. Enabling people to report multiple motives for moving may therefore be particularly critical when analysing family migration.

After coding the variables outlined above we extracted the records of all adult respondents with complete data across these indicators. Wave 1 responses were dropped as information on residential mobility behaviour was not collected until 1992. These selection procedures left a total of 183,807 person-years provided by 23,579 individuals. Summary statistics for this sample are presented in Table 1. The table shows that both men and women expressed a desire to move in about 33% of cases. The sample mobility rates of 12.08% (for men) and 11.22% (for women) correspond closely with the contemporary UK average of 9-12% (Dixon, 2003; Nowok *et al.*, 2013).

*** Table 1 about here ***

It is important to note that there is some attrition of BHPS participants over time and this attrition is correlated with residential mobility (Uhrig, 2008). While this should be partially corrected by weighting and including the predictors of attrition in regression models, it is possible that attrition may still influence our results (however see Rabe and Taylor, 2010: 538 for evidence that BHPS attrition may not induce serious bias). Unfortunately attrition bedevils all panel surveys and there is no viable alternative data source for this project.

Analysis

Figure 1 addresses the first research question by showing how the proportion of respondents reporting each main reason for desiring to move varies by age, gender and partnership status. The sample consists of all person-years where a desire to move was expressed (60323 cases, 32.8% of the total). While prior research demonstrates that the propensity to express a moving desire varies with age (Coulter *et al.*, 2011), Figure 1 shows that the reasons why people want to move also vary over the life course. Although area and housing are the most common reasons why people prefer to move, Figure 1 supports H1 by showing that jobs and a desire for independent accommodation are most important for young singles. Wanting a home of one's own is particularly frequently cited by single young men, probably because men typically leave home later than women (Berrington *et al.*, 2009).

*** Figure 1 about here***

Figure 1 provides further support for H1 by showing that area becomes a more important motive for desiring to move from the mid-thirties through to the mid-sixties. This could reflect increased concerns (e.g. noise, safety) and increased priority placed on locale-related quality of life. Perhaps also associated with changing priorities is the increasing propensity for people to cite family and friends in later life. However, the picture for housing related reasons is more complex. Amongst couples, housing is most important in the stage of life most associated with family formation (25-34), after which it gradually declines. In contrast, housing peaks slightly later for singles (35-44).

Figure 1 also offers some support for H2. Area and housing reasons are more frequently cited by partnered individuals than singles, although only until mid-life. H3

is however refuted as both men and women very rarely cite employment as the main reason why they desire to move, especially if they have a partner. Overall, what is most striking from Figure 1 is that it is partnership status rather than gender which is most strongly associated with the reasons why people prefer to move.

*** Tables 2a and 2b about here ***

Tables 2a and 2b contextualise Figure 1 by showing how self-reported reasons for actually moving vary with age, gender and partnership status for the 21,353 movers in the sample. The tables to an extent echo Figure 1 as housing and area reasons are typically more important for couples than singles, regardless of gender. Area reasons become more important as age rises, while housing is most frequently mentioned by couples in midlife. Independent accommodation and jobs are most commonly cited by young singles, as is education. In contrast partnership formation and dissolution are particularly prominent motives for moving amongst young individuals with a partner and mid-life singles (particularly men). Family and friends and health are most prominent late in the life course, especially for single women. Taken together, these findings suggest that while priorities shift over the life course, they are not strikingly different for men and women. Although differences in question wording and response coding prevent us from drawing firm conclusions from comparing Figure 1 and Tables 2a/2b, it is worth noting that area is far more frequently cited as the main reason for desiring to move than as a reason for having relocated.

The second research question asked which reasons for desiring to move are most likely to be followed by residential mobility. To answer this question we restricted the sample by retaining only those person-years (167111) where individuals were observed at two consecutive survey sweeps. We chose to link moving desires at $t-1$ to moving behaviour at t in order to maximise the sample size, minimise participant attrition and take into account (insofar as is possible) that preferences can change over short periods of time. This approach does, however, mean that we cannot distinguish persistent from recently emerged moving desires. We are also unable to investigate longer term processes of mobility decision-making.

Tables 3a and 3b about here

Column two of Tables 3a and 3b addresses the second question by tabulating moving desires at $t-1$ against moving behaviour at t . Columns three to ten focus more deeply upon movers by cross-tabulating their moving desire status at $t-1$ against the reason for moving reported at t . The upper panel of each table compares people who did and did not report a desire to move at $t-1$, while the lower panel disaggregates those with a desire to move by the main reason they wanted to move.

The upper panels show that moving desires strongly predict residential moves for both genders. While prior research shows that the propensity to fulfil a moving desire drops as age increases (Coulter, 2013), columns three to ten show that desired and undesired movers also report different reasons for relocating. For both genders, area and housing factors are more prominent for those making a desired move. In contrast, undesired movers are more likely to report moving for education, partnership or involuntary reasons. This is unsurprising as forced moves are almost by definition undesired, while partnership transitions can occur suddenly and disrupt

mobility decision-making (De Groot *et al.*, 2011). Once again, the lack of gender differences in the upper panels of Tables 3a and 3b is particularly noteworthy.

The lower panels of Tables 3a and 3b test H4 and H5. The results show that different reasons for desiring to move have varying associations with subsequent mobility. For both men and women, targeted desires relating to jobs and setting up a home of one's own are more likely to be followed by a move than more diffuse housing and particularly area preferences. This supports H4, although there is some evidence that these processes are slightly gendered as women are much more likely than men to act on a desire to move to set up an independent home.

While methodological issues mean that we should exercise caution when comparing the main reason for desiring to move with the reasons people give for subsequently moving, columns three to ten of Tables 3a and 3b suggest that it is problematic to assume that people have one consistent articulable reason for moving. For men, desires to move for housing and jobs are most likely to be followed by a move made for the same reason, while for women family and friends are also quite consistent through time. This partially supports H5. In contrast, area desires are unlikely to be followed by a move made for area reasons. Furthermore there is much overlap between desiring to move to set up a new household and moving for partnership reasons (especially for women). Thus for both genders it is clear that we cannot assume that people will report similar reasons for having moved as they previously reported for wanting to move.

The third research question extends this perspective by asking whether life events mediate the relationship between moving desires and subsequent moving behaviour. To answer this question, Table 4 presents four fixed effects (conditional) logistic regression models of mobility (1=move, 0=no move) run separately for men and women who were of different ages when they entered the BHPS. Thus Model 1 and Model 2 focus on men and women under 35 respectively; whereas Models 3 and 4 show men and women aged 35 and over. Full details of the samples and the independent variables used in the models are contained in Appendix Table A3. Each model was built up gradually until all control variables and life event dummies were included. Likelihood ratio tests and comparisons of model fit statistics were then used to remove life event dummies to find the most parsimonious model. Although the models presented include no controls for period effects, each model has also been run with year dummies included. These results are not shown because there was no evidence of significant period effects. Including year dummies also had no substantive effects on either the fit of the models or the estimated parameters.

The estimation samples are smaller than that shown in Table 1 for three reasons. First, to track life courses as they unfold we only include cases provided by sample members first interviewed in 1991 (original sample members) and 1999 (booster sample members). Second, cases could only be used when complete information was available across all independent variables. Third, the fixed effects framework requires people to change from 'stayer' (0) to 'mover' (1) at some point during their life course (Allison, 2009). This is because fixed effects models discard all between-person variation by focusing only on within-person changes on the dependent and independent variables.

By focusing on within-person variation, fixed effects models allow us to estimate how changes in moving desires and experiencing particular life events are linked to changing from a stayer into a mover. The basic intuition is that we use each individual as their own control, comparing their mobility behaviour over time to uncover how this varies with changes in their life course trajectory (Allison, 2009).

Each coefficient thus indicates how a particular individual's log odds of moving are affected by a one unit increase on that independent variable (Allison, 2009: 33). Positive coefficients indicate that the log odds of moving are increased by changes in that characteristic, while negative coefficients indicate reduced log odds. This approach controls for the effects of time-constant variables which may be observed (for example ethnicity) or unobserved (such as stable psychological characteristics). As with other techniques, fixed effects models cannot control for unobserved time-varying heterogeneity. In addition, focusing only on within-individual variation makes it difficult to estimate the effects of variables which never or only rarely change within individuals (for instance education level).

*** Table 4 about here ***

The control variable effects are largely as anticipated. Increasing age is linked to a decreasing propensity to move, but only for women. This indicates that age acts as a stronger proxy for life course position for men than women. While income change has no significant links to moving propensities, the odds of moving are much higher when a person lives in privately rented accommodation as compared to when they are an owner-occupier. Rising local house prices are also linked to a reduced propensity to move for all samples except older men (although the parameter approaches significance for this group). This may indicate that people find it harder to find affordable accommodation as housing costs rise.

Increasing space pressure is positively associated with mobility for the younger cohorts, although it is not significant for older men and the sign reverses for older women. Further analysis shows that this unexpected finding is driven by the moving behaviour of the oldest women in the sample. Roomstress becomes insignificant if they are excluded from the model. This may indicate that the roomstress variable is picking up the effects of prior mobility into smaller dwellings which are more suitable late in the life course. However given that residential mobility is rare for older Britons (Evandrou *et al.*, 2010), this result may also reflect the impact of older women taking in adult children.

Crucially, Table 4 shows that the main reason for desiring to move is still strongly associated with mobility when controls are included for life events. In support of H6, the results indicate that expressing a desire to move for a targeted job related reason is associated with particularly high odds of subsequently moving, irrespective of cohort or gender. Although starting to desire to move for housing reasons or to set up a household strongly predicts mobility for the younger cohorts, across all models expressing a desire to move for area reasons exerts a weaker impact on subsequent moving behaviour. As the impacts of socio-economic constraints are partly captured by the income and house price variables, this result indicates that the relative attractiveness of the local area 'pushes' people to want to move without necessarily 'pulling' them to new locations. Unsurprisingly expressing a desire to move for family and friends, health and retirement reasons is strongly associated with subsequent mobility amongst the older samples. Overall, different types of moving desire seem to have different links to moving behaviour at different points in the life course.

Turning to the life event dummies, across the life course partnership transitions are strongly associated with moving. Although this is not surprising for the cohabitation dummy, the results show that even today getting married is still linked to making residential moves. This may suggest that people synchronise getting married

with 'trading up' or entering owner-occupation. For both men and women partnership dissolutions are strongly associated with an increased propensity to move. This effect extends beyond the year of the dissolution event.

Table 4 provides some support for H7 as women are significantly more mobile in the year after childbirth, while there is no significant lagged birth effect for men. However there is little evidence for any gender differences in the impact of changes in labour market status. Entering employment increases the odds of moving for the younger cohorts, while changing jobs and exiting the labour force predicts moving across the samples. Interestingly, the results extend Rabe and Taylor's (2010) findings by indicating that retirement has contemporaneous and lagged associations with moving, most notably for older men (for whom the parameter approaches significance). Taken together, the models highlight how life events and moving desires come together to condition moving behaviour differently at different points in the life course.

Conclusions

Rossi's *Why Families Move* has inspired a long tradition of research into residential mobility motivations. While many studies analyse the correlates of mobility, a growing body of work explores people's expressed reasons for moving (Lundholm *et al.*, 2004). This literature highlights that the motives people cite frequently differ from those predicted by theory (Morrison and Clark, 2011). However by focusing on retrospective explanations of mobility, these studies do not challenge the assumption that residential moves are underpinned by a single and identifiable motive that is consistent throughout the mobility decision-making process (Halfacree and Boyle, 1993). Focusing only on expressed reasons for moving also overlooks those reasons for desiring to move that are not followed by relocation. To address these issues, this paper has examined why people desire to move and how these desires affect their subsequent moving behaviour.

The findings have several implications. First, the results show that analysing why people want to move yields insights that are obscured by concentrating solely on expressed reasons for moving. While concerns about the local area strongly influence moving desires, these are far less prominent explanations of moving behaviour. In addition, highly targeted reasons for desiring to move (for example for employment opportunities) are much more likely to lead to an actual move than more diffuse area preferences. This suggests that the factors 'pushing' people to think about moving may not be the same as those 'pulling' them to choose particular dwellings and locations. As constraints mean that not all motives are 'revealed' through relocation (Coulter, 2013), uncovering these complexities requires taking a new look at residential immobility.

The findings also imply that engaging with the core insights of life course theories can help us to overcome the conceptual legacies of behaviouralism (Halfacree and Boyle, 1993). As the interplay between age and partnership status strongly influences the reasons people report for desiring and making residential moves, it seems important to focus on the biographical timing of mobility decision-making. While jobs and a desire for independent living are important and highly targeted motives for young single movers, more diffuse motives relating to housing are most salient for mid-life couples. In contrast, mid-life single men are most likely

to cite partnership reasons for moving, with family and friends assuming greater importance for both genders late in the life course.

Despite the large literature on gendered mobility, there is little evidence for any consistent gender differences in the reasons people report for desiring or making residential moves. Furthermore, life course events do not seem to mediate the links between moving desires and subsequent moving behaviour differently for men and women. Although there is evidence that childbirth is more strongly linked to the mobility of young women than young men, it is more notable that for both genders life course events and moving desires intersect to condition moving behaviour differently at different points in the life course. While this paper has concentrated on how these links unfold at the individual level, future research should examine the occurrence and implications of (dis)agreement between household members in the reasons why they desire and make residential moves. This will enhance our understanding of how mobility decision-making is configured by 'linked lives' (Elder *et al.*, 2003).

Our work also has methodological implications. Given that it is fairly rare for people to report multiple reasons for moving, allowing respondents to report several reasons may not be as important as is commonly thought (Halfacree and Boyle, 1993). As people's motives for moving can change over time and many individuals do not act on their mobility preferences, it may instead be more valuable to gather longitudinal data linking moving desires to subsequent moving behaviour.

Moreover by showing how finely-coded motives vary substantially across the life course, our results indicate that it is essential to avoid pooling multiple reasons for moving into nebulous categories. Disentangling people's specific motives for desiring and making residential moves requires a detailed coding frame, indicating that open-ended questions may be a particularly valuable way to gather data on mobility motivations (Niedomysl and Malmberg, 2009). However, the value of this approach is dependent upon survey administrators archiving and granting controlled access to the verbatim text of responses. There is a tendency for large-scale panel surveys to switch to the exclusive use of pre-coded categories of motivations to move, mainly to save costs and enhance consistency. Unfortunately this could impede the future study of mobility motivations by concealing inconsistencies, complexities and temporal change.

Overall, this paper has shown how linking moving desires to subsequent moving behaviour can advance our knowledge of why people move. By analysing how reported reasons for desiring and making residential moves vary as life courses unfold, researchers can progress beyond either inferring motives from behaviour or taking the reasons people retrospectively cite as the complete 'gospel truth'. This is essential if we are to take our understanding of residential mobility decision-making beyond the confines imposed by behaviouralism.

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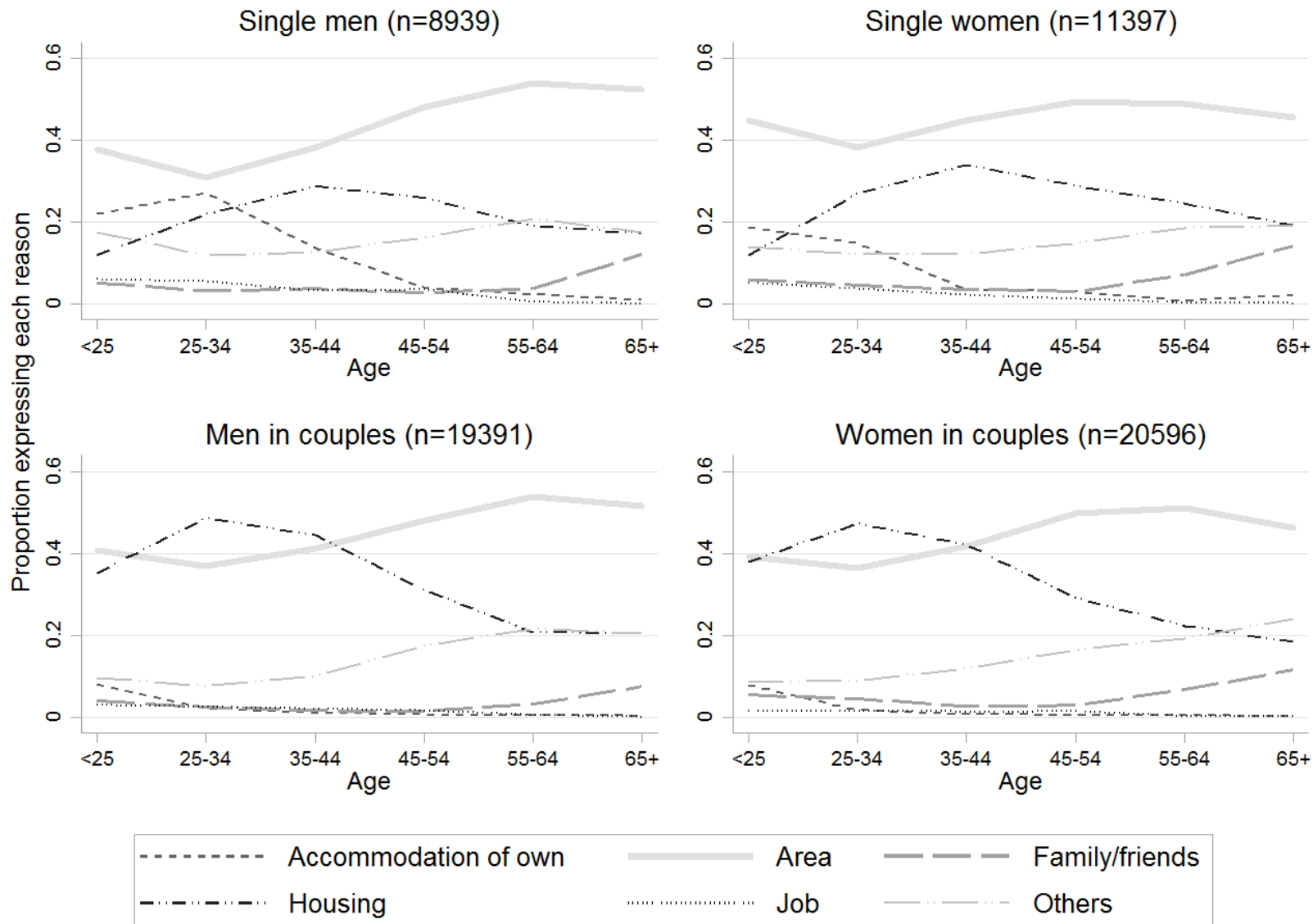
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Figure 1. The main reason for desiring to move by age, gender and partnership status



Note: 'Others' comprises those reporting health, other, retirement and no reason. Cross-sectional response weights.

Table 1. Sample summary statistics

Variable	Men		Women	
	%	N	%	N
Age				
<25	13.78	11593	12.89	12849
25-34	19.02	16000	18.33	18278
35-44	19.48	16386	19.06	19003
45-54	16.87	14193	16.63	16579
55-64	13.28	11168	13.21	13166
65+	17.56	14770	19.88	19822
Partnership status				
single	30.58	25723	36.36	36248
couple	69.42	58387	63.64	63449
Moving desires				
no desire to move	66.32	55780	67.91	67704
desires to move	33.68	28330	32.09	31993
Residential move <i>t-1</i> to <i>t</i>				
no move	87.92	73947	88.78	88507
moved	12.08	10163	11.22	11190
N person-years		84110		99697
N individuals		11183		12396

Tables 2a and 2b. Self-reported reasons for moving by age, gender and partnership status

Table 2a. Men

Partnership status	Age	Reason(s) reported by movers (row %)										N movers
		Accom. of own	Area	Education	Family/friends	Forced	Health	Housing	Job (self)	Partnership	Others	
Single	<35	10.58	4.39	19.06	13.83	10.50	0.40	14.65	20.91	7.63	12.21	3401
	35-54	7.30	6.59	*	6.47	8.97	2.89	15.89	11.68	32.52	17.40	580
	55+	2.24	13.46	*	13.92	11.49	23.43	17.40	4.00	8.55	15.31	258
Couple	<35	7.52	10.37	0.80	4.05	3.98	1.14	34.93	10.90	26.64	12.71	3442
	35-54	1.82	14.67	0.32	4.10	4.21	2.10	38.61	14.48	12.88	20.64	1877
	55+	*	16.97	*	12.87	5.36	17.47	26.03	5.76	3.54	25.99	605

Table 2b. Women

Partnership status	Age	Reason(s) reported by movers (row %)										N movers
		Accom. of own	Area	Education	Family/friends	Forced	Health	Housing	Job (self)	Partnership	Others	
Single	<35	9.90	5.59	18.65	12.27	9.70	1.09	17.90	16.63	10.23	11.18	3552
	35-54	3.57	9.32	*	8.94	7.81	2.86	26.92	10.35	26.81	15.59	682
	55+	2.17	12.81	*	22.27	7.32	30.76	18.42	1.23	3.02	12.53	617
Couple	<35	7.73	10.16	0.97	3.80	4.68	1.33	36.06	8.14	24.86	15.55	4151
	35-54	1.97	15.26	*	5.22	3.78	3.32	40.66	8.38	11.84	23.80	1662
	55+	*	16.92	*	13.55	4.86	18.21	28.78	3.86	3.13	23.53	526

Note: *=cell contains <5 cases. Row values exceed 100% as respondents could report more than one reason for moving. 'Others' comprises those reporting moving for other's job, retirement, other reason or no reason. Cross-sectional response weights.

Tables 3a and 3b. Moving desires at *t-1* against the reasons reported for having moved at *t*

Table 3a. Men

Moving desires at <i>t-1</i>	Percent moving <i>t-1</i> to <i>t</i>	Reason for moving at <i>t</i> (row %)										N movers
		Accom. of own	Area	Education	Family/friends	Forced	Health	Housing	Job (self)	Partnership	Others	
No desire to move	4.77	5.68	5.62	9.11	8.87	9.19	4.43	23.98	14.97	13.43	16.24	2864
Desired to move	15.10	6.99	14.54	3.57	7.23	5.71	3.59	34.08	13.21	9.02	16.69	4377
Desired to move for:												
accom. of own	24.73	31.30	5.63	3.94	8.79	4.05	*	17.89	13.00	16.71	11.69	441
area	10.69	4.84	26.08	4.81	8.29	5.98	3.55	23.72	13.05	7.80	17.53	1339
family/friends	18.55	7.90	11.97	7.41	33.51	8.01	2.91	12.46	20.59	6.62	10.56	175
housing	18.15	3.60	9.75	1.32	3.49	5.00	1.89	57.57	8.38	7.95	14.43	1598
job	28.37	5.65	8.01	5.89	6.69	2.39	*	11.17	54.51	6.20	19.12	191
other reasons	15.38	5.05	10.59	4.60	6.33	8.19	10.75	20.17	11.97	10.87	24.37	633
N movers	7241	487	764	464	505	521	229	2196	978	950	1088	7241

Table 3b. Women

Moving desires at <i>t-1</i>	Percent moving <i>t-1</i> to <i>t</i>	Reason for moving at <i>t</i> (row %)										N movers
		Accom. of own	Area	Education	Family/friends	Forced	Health	Housing	Job (self)	Partnership	Others	
No desire to move	4.42	5.54	6.93	8.21	8.77	8.32	7.87	25.40	9.10	15.66	15.01	3151
Desired to move	15.94	6.30	13.75	3.39	9.19	5.54	4.35	35.32	10.15	10.13	17.05	5162
Desired to move for:												
accom. of own	35.21	32.41	4.87	5.04	5.64	4.26	*	20.23	8.82	21.05	10.54	478
area	12.08	5.17	23.26	3.94	7.93	7.26	4.04	24.47	11.87	10.71	16.22	1708
family/friends	17.12	2.83	6.43	5.59	46.79	3.73	3.10	14.52	7.70	9.16	13.99	296
housing	18.77	2.42	10.01	1.46	5.30	4.20	3.13	58.04	5.71	7.43	15.61	1867
job	30.57	5.23	8.09	7.32	11.53	6.11	*	12.73	45.71	9.31	26.27	166
other reasons	14.57	5.10	10.19	4.44	8.21	6.40	12.09	23.88	12.03	9.80	26.56	647
N movers	8313	510	869	456	650	567	383	2648	795	1215	1326	8313

Notes: * =cell contains <5 cases. Row values exceed 100% as respondents could report more than one reason for moving. The 'other reasons' row contains cases where the respondent desired to move for health reasons, retirement, other reasons or no reason. The 'others' column contains cases where the respondent reported moving for other's job, retirement, other reasons or no reason. Cross-sectional response weights.

Table 4. Fixed effects logit models of residential mobility by age and gender

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Men <35		Women <35		Men ≥35		Women ≥35	
	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE
Control variables (lagged to t-1)								
Age	0.038	0.042	-0.125**	0.038	-0.055	0.051	-0.134**	0.044
Age ²	-0.001	0.001	0.002**	0.001	0.001	0.000	0.002***	0.000
Log household income	0.044	0.047	0.005	0.049	0.048	0.058	-0.100	0.057
Housing tenure (ref own)								
social rent	0.258	0.146	-0.145	0.134	-0.040	0.225	-0.328	0.209
private rent	1.674***	0.112	1.224***	0.100	1.074***	0.187	0.622**	0.192
Roomstress	1.286***	0.140	0.933***	0.155	-0.070	0.234	-0.627*	0.244
Desires to move (ref no desire)								
desire: accom. of own	1.474***	0.141	1.898***	0.159	1.433**	0.491	2.462***	0.435
desire: area	1.072***	0.096	1.249***	0.087	1.490***	0.128	1.757***	0.111
desire: family/friends	1.365***	0.264	1.506***	0.194	2.683***	0.273	2.247***	0.198
desire: health	1.524***	0.403	0.892	0.628	2.265***	0.232	2.240***	0.184
desire: housing	1.483***	0.085	1.684***	0.079	2.027***	0.126	2.315***	0.113
desire: job	1.990***	0.206	1.943***	0.237	2.789***	0.322	2.710***	0.405
desire: retirement					2.952***	0.444	2.654***	0.480
desire: other reason	1.418***	0.138	1.582***	0.130	2.095***	0.163	2.087***	0.174
desire: no reason given	1.659**	0.545	0.813	0.525	0.813	0.744	2.071***	0.532
Mean local house price	-0.035**	0.012	-0.029*	0.012	-0.030	0.017	-0.038*	0.018
Life events (t-1 to t)								
Started cohabiting	2.794***	0.134	2.412***	0.117	2.219***	0.264	2.227***	0.265
Got married	0.706***	0.133	0.938***	0.122	0.518	0.316	0.982**	0.301
Split from partner	2.269***	0.156	1.833***	0.119	2.367***	0.256	2.511***	0.238
Lag of split from partner	0.482**	0.179	0.558***	0.136	0.861***	0.258	1.154***	0.240
Widowed							0.609*	0.287
New baby	0.249*	0.103	0.395***	0.099				
Lag of new baby			0.225*	0.100				
Entered employment	0.382**	0.130	0.294**	0.105				
Lag of entered emp'ment	-0.294*	0.131						
Changed job/employer	0.368***	0.071	0.313***	0.072	0.556***	0.130	0.333**	0.127
Became unemployed	0.285	0.158	0.540**	0.171	0.549*	0.230	0.759**	0.251
Exited labour force	0.649**	0.216	0.616***	0.118	0.929**	0.291	0.658***	0.181
Lag of exited labour force	0.601**	0.218	0.278*	0.115				
Retired					0.715***	0.160	0.509***	0.128
Lag of retired					0.383	0.197		
N person-years	13053		15394		10375		12940	
Log pseudolikelihood	-3365.886		-3843.922		-2163.088		-2651.780	
Null log pseudolikelihood	-4443.130		-4998.351		-2631.708		-3251.896	
Wald chi ² (d.f.)	1248.974 (26)		1382.734 (26)		653.996 (25)		788.389 (25)	
McFadden's pseudo r ²	0.242		0.231		0.178		0.185	

Note: ***= $p < 0.001$ **= $p < 0.01$ *= $p < 0.05$. Panel robust standard errors.

Appendix Table A1. Coding frame for the main reason for desiring to move

Reason	Reasons given in open-ended question (LKMOVY)	Frequency (column %)	
		Men	Women
Accommodation of own	Wants own accommodation/to form own household (NB wants to purchase dwelling is coded with housing).	1718 (6.06)	1427 (4.46)
Area	Dislikes isolation; wants a more rural environment; dislikes urban environment; dislikes traffic; dislikes crime/feels unsafe; noise; unfriendly area; wants to move to a specific place; dislikes area.	12057 (42.56)	13732 (42.92)
Family/friends	Wants to be closer to family/friends.	938 (3.31)	1710 (5.34)
Health (housing related)	Health reasons (eg. house too damp, house not healthy); wants accommodation without stairs.	713 (2.52)	1202 (3.76)
Housing	Wants larger dwelling; wants smaller or cheaper dwelling; wants to buy a home; wants specific type of dwelling; wants to change other aspects of the dwelling; wants better accommodation; wants privacy.	8839 (31.20)	10119 (31.63)
Job	Wants to move for a new job or to find work; wants to reduce commute time.	766 (2.70)	586 (1.83)
Retirement	Wants to move for retirement.	75 (0.26)	50 (0.16)
Other reasons	Other; wants a change; for child's education.	3111 (10.98)	3042 (9.51)
None given		113 (0.40)	125 (0.39)
Total		28330	31993

Appendix Table A2. Coding frame for the reasons for moving dummies

Reason	Closed question used to identify people moving for their own job (MOVJB)	N mentions (column %)	
		Men	Women
Own job ¹	<i>Did you move for reasons that were wholly or partly to do with your own job, or employment opportunities?</i>	1334 (13.13)	1049 (9.37)
Reason	Responses to open-ended question about (other) main reasons for moving (MOVY)	N mentions (column %)	
		Men	Women
Accommodation of own	Moved away from family; wanted own accommodation/form own household/set up with a partner (NB to purchase dwelling is coded with housing).	687 (6.76)	714 (6.38)
Area	Disliked isolation; wanted rural environment; disliked urban environment; disliked traffic; disliked crime/felt unsafe; noise; unfriendly area; wanted to move to a specific place; disliked area.	898 (8.84)	1005 (8.98)
Education	Moved to (be closer to) term-time accommodation; moved to college/university; left education/ended course.	890 (8.76)	914 (8.17)
Family/friends	Moved (back) in with family; moved to be closer to family; moved in with friends.	777 (7.65)	897 (8.02)
Forced	Evicted/home repossessed/other forced move.	720 (7.08)	768 (6.86)
Health (housing related)	Health reasons (eg. house too damp, house not healthy); moved to accommodation without stairs; moved to sheltered accommodation or institution for care.	270 (2.66)	440 (3.93)
Housing	Wanted larger dwelling; wanted smaller or cheaper dwelling; wanted to buy a home; wanted specific type of accommodation; disliked dwelling; wanted better accommodation; wanted privacy/to escape overcrowding.	2554 (25.13)	3041 (27.18)
Own job ¹	Job reason for self (including commute time).	82 (0.81)	78 (0.70)
Other's job	Job reason for someone else (including commute time).	116 (1.14)	302 (2.70)
Partnership	Moved to marry/move in with a partner; moved to separate/divorce from a partner.	1815 (17.86)	2002 (17.89)
Retirement	Retirement (self or partner).	47 (0.46)	47 (0.42)
Other reasons	Other reason (includes proximity to child's school); wanted a change	1206 (11.87)	1283 (11.47)
None given		76 (0.75)	74 (0.66)
Total mentions		11472	12614
N moves		10163	11190
% of movers reporting multiple reasons for moving		12.55	12.43

Note: Respondents could provide multiple reasons for moving by answering both the closed (MOVJB) and open (MOVY) questions. Furthermore, up to two reasons could be provided in response to the open question.

¹ These dummies were combined.

Appendix Table A3. Descriptive statistics for the estimation samples

Continuous variables (lagged to $t-1$)	Men <35 ¹		Women <35 ¹		Men ≥35 ¹		Women ≥35 ¹	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Age	32.35	7.20	32.76	6.87	57.43	12.04	58.76	12.93
Log household income ²	7.58	0.77	7.51	0.76	7.39	0.73	7.27	0.76
Roomstress ³	0.71	0.31	0.73	0.31	0.57	0.26	0.54	0.25
Mean local house price ⁴	10.37	5.21	10.28	4.99	10.44	5.32	10.34	5.14
Categorical variables (lagged to $t-1$)	Men <35 ¹		Women <35 ¹		Men ≥35 ¹		Women ≥35 ¹	
	%		%		%		%	
Housing tenure								
own (ref)	75.15		71.59		74.26		71.46	
social rent	12.10		16.73		16.78		20.90	
private rent	12.75		11.68		8.96		7.64	
Desires to move								
no desire (ref)	58.40		59.68		66.56		67.16	
desire: Accom. of own	3.75		2.35		0.46		0.42	
desire: Area	14.11		15.43		15.70		14.91	
desire: Family/friends	1.06		1.70		1.25		2.41	
desire: Health	0.18		0.19		1.87		2.46	
desire: Housing	17.10		16.18		9.24		9.14	
desire: Job	1.46		0.84		0.52		0.39	
desire: Retirement	0.00		0.00		0.26		0.19	
desire: Other	3.78		3.50		3.99		2.79	
desire: No reason given	0.17		0.13		0.13		0.13	
Life event dummies (events occurring $t-1$ to t)	Men <35 ¹		Women <35 ¹		Men ≥35 ¹		Women ≥35 ¹	
	%		%		%		%	
Started cohabiting	4.05		3.81		0.91		0.79	
Got married	3.19		3.15		0.89		0.89	
Split from partner	2.73		3.52		1.35		1.19	
Widowed	0.03		0.09		0.63		0.92	
New baby	6.38		6.33		0.64		0.26	
Entered employment	4.12		6.12		2.03		2.52	
Changed job/employer	21.83		17.81		8.19		6.65	
Became unemployed	2.57		1.90		1.63		1.22	
Exited labour force	1.40		4.59		0.93		2.06	
Retired	0.01		0.08		3.64		5.23	
N cases	13053		15394		10375		12940	
N individuals	1153		1315		870		1112	

¹ Categorized using age at entry into the sample.

² Equivalised using the McClement's BHC scale and adjusted to January 2000 prices using the Retail Price Index.

³ Number of persons/number of rooms (excluding kitchens, bathrooms and sublet spaces).

⁴ Mean house price (£10000) in Local Authority district. Values have been adjusted to January 2000 prices using the Retail Price Index.