Modes of International Couple Migration and Ethnic Differences in Female Labor Force Attachment: Comparing Asian and Mexican Immigrants in the US

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Introduction

We examine the relationship between the *mode* of couple migration that led to female migrants' entry to the United States and their labor supply using data from the American Community Survey. We also analyze factors that predict what mode of couple migration led to the migration of female migrants, and the extent to which source-country differences in the predominant mode of couple migration account for ethnic differences among female migrants in labor force attachment.

Theoretical Background

Large-scale international migration streams from Latin America and Asia to the United States in recent decades have magnified the impact of immigrants' socioeconomic incorporation on the structure and replenishment of US labor force. Family-reunification admission has been one of the primary legal pathways for migrants entering the US in the post-WWII era. It has contributed to significant increases in the percentage of women among international migrants to the United States, which has undermined the notion that international migration is a male-dominated process (Donato et al. 2006; Pessar 1999). One key implications is that the dynamic migration processes embedded in family relationships might play increasingly important roles in shaping immigrants' career trajectories, especially for females.

Empirical findings suggest gender asymmetry in the determinants, as well as the consequence of *tied* migration, that is migrations where individuals migrate solely in order to accompany or join a family member who has chosen to migrate. Relative resource theory predicts that the spouse with more education or with better-valued labor market skills would play the dominant role in family migration, but it is not well empirically supported in the case of internal migration (Shauman 2010). Instead, women are more likely than men to be the tied-movers in family migration regardless of their education levels, more likely to experience negative earnings returns in their subsequent careers, resulting in unemployment, underemployment or occupational downgrading (Bielby and Bielby 1992; Taylor 2007). In addition to the employment gaps between native women and recent female-immigrant cohorts of work age, there remains much variation in immigrant women's labor force participation, types of employment and pay rates across different racial-ethnic groups. (England, Garcia-Beaulieu and Ross 2004; Schoeni 1998).

Conventional wisdom on determinants of female labor force participation, exemplified by the human capital theory, work-family incompatibility theory, and theories on the structural impacts of local labor markets fall short of explaining the wide racial-ethnic disparities in immigrant women's employment outcomes (Read and Cohen 2007). For one thing, the explanatory power of these major explanations varies considerably across racial and ethnic groups. More importantly, limited attention has been paid to the

potential influence of the diverse modes of couple migration on female post-migration employment disparities through critical life transitions.

Research Questions

We seek to address the abovementioned gaps in the research by studying how different modes of couple migration are related to the characteristics of migrants and to their labor market engagement in the destination country. We distinguish three modes of couple migration: male-led (where the male partner migrates first and is followed by the female partner), female-led (the opposite of male led), and concurrent (when both partners migrate simultaneously). We hypothesize, based in part on studies of internal migration, that the characteristics of migrants and their household predict which of these modes is most likely, and these modes, in turn, are related to different levels of female migrant labor supply. For example, variables such as the age and education of both partners (and the differences between them) and the timing of marriage may predict whether couple migrations are female-led, male-led, or concurrent. Then, the mode of migration may have an intuitive relationship with the female labor supply, with female-led migrant couples exhibiting the highest rate of female employment, concurrent migrant couples the second highest, and male-led migrant couples the lowest, controlling for other factors related to labor supply. Finally, we hypotheses that inter-ethnic differences among migrant couples in their rates of female labor force attachment are explained in part by origin-country differences in the predominant modes of couple migration. Our initial findings provide support for all these hypothesized relationships except that no difference in female employment is found between concurrent migrant couples and male-led migrant couples.

Data

Few US migration surveys explicitly ask for the year of arrival for both the respondents and their spouse at the same time. However, year of arrival information is accessible through the US Census and its related nationally representative surveys such as the American Community Survey (ACS 2012). To determine the initiation patterns of international family migration for the foreign-born couples, this study measures the couples' difference in year of arrival by first stratifying the sample by gender and then by combining the household roster, family interrelationships, and individual's year of immigration in the ACS to obtain corresponding spousal characteristics (including year of immigration) for female immigrants. We restrict the ACS (2012) primary sample to working-age, currently married, female immigrants who married before migration with spouses currently in the household, both of whom are born in Mexico or in one of the six major Asian migrant-sending countries identified as the Asian race subcategories (namely, Chinese, Filipinos, Indians, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese). The primary sample thus consists of 22085 female immigrants from these countries.

Analytical Strategy

We use multinomial logit models to predict the mode of migration that resulted in the migration of these female migrants and binary logit models to assess the relationship of mode of migration and female labor supply. For the latter analyses, we consider two dependent variables separately: labor force status and employment status. The key

independent variables, modes of family migration initiation, are operationalized with dummy variables: husband-led migration (the reference dummy variable), concurrent migration and wife-led migration. Other controls include demographics (age, age at immigration, countries of origin, regions of settlement in the US), respondent's and husband's human capital (bachelor's degree or not), current family structure (number of children under five years old and the presence of parent from either side in household).

The abovementioned models indicate that women involved in wife-led migration have higher odds of both staying in the labor force and being employed (ceteris paribus). We then use propensity-score matching to see if the associations between modes and employment gaps persist after matching respondents of similar demographic, human capital and family characteristics but of different modes of migration. We make three pair-wise matched comparisons (wife-led vs. concurrent; concurrent vs. husband-led; and finally, wife-led vs. husband-led), followed by Rosenbaum's sensitivity tests. These steps help disentangle selection from possible causal effects of modes of migration on female migrant labor supply.

Main Findings

Relative resource theory in family migration initiation, or the theory of interspousal comparative advantage, is not supported (*Table 1*). Compared to husband-led migration, women with higher education than the spouses are actually the least likely (i.e. relative risk ratio=exp (-0.256)=0.77) to engage in wife-led migration among the three interspousal relative education types, which is consistent with the existing internal migration literature.

The central findings (*Table 2*) are that female initiators are 34.3% more likely to be in be active in the labor force and 39.6% more likely to be employed than female followers, controlling for demographics, human capital, family structure, region of destination and country of origin. However, the pairwise matching between initiators and followers reveals that the average treatment effect on the treated is largely reduced (*Table 3*). Although this residual difference is statistically significant, the Rosenbaum bound test suggests a moderate correlation with an unobserved characteristic could account for it entirely. Moreover, no substantial differences are detected between female accompaniers with female followers for either dependent variable.

The findings altogether suggest that it is selection into different modes of migration that yields variations in labor force attachments across modes of migration, rather than the modes of migration per se. We also test one possible explanation that female initiators have more needs to financially support themselves by working compared to accompaniers or followers, the evidence for which is weak. The percentage of workingwomen for female initiators is actually 2% higher than that for female immigrants who are separated from their spouse (t=2.34). However, the spouse-presence effect vanishes when the two groups are matched on demographic and educational characteristics.

The most plausible interpretation of these findings is simply that couples in more gender-egalitarian relationships are both more likely to undertake female-initiated

migration and also to have a higher post-migration female employment propensity due to their prior gender norms, not due to any causal impact of mode of migration. Future research should investigate the validity of this interpretation using suitable data.

We also find that controlling for mode of migration tends to reduce variation across ethnic groups in the female labor supply.

Contributions

This study makes several contributions. First, we show that the concept of "mode of couple migration," operationalized by couples' temporal-ordering of arrival in the host society, is a source of variation in female immigrants' employment behavior. Second, by comparing Mexican and Asian immigrants, the two largest sources of new immigrants to the US in recent decades, this study explores ethnic heterogeneities in female employment outcomes and shows that to some extent they reflect origin-country differences in the predominant modes of couple migration. Third, while the relative resource theory is not well supported in the case of internal migration, and that family migration in internal migration studies often find tied migration hurts female employment outcomes (Boyle et al. 2001; Boyle, Feng and Gayle 2009), it remains less clear as to whether these findings still hold for international family migration. We retest this theory for the international case and further explore whether the extent to which female employment inequalities vary across different initiation types of family migration.

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Tables (Next Page)

Table 1: Multinomial Logit Model Predicting Modes of Couple Migration				
	Concurrent (ref: Husband-led)		**Wife-led (ref: Husband-led)**	
	coef	**se**	**coef**	**se**
Relative Education (ref: husband has more education)				
wife has more education than husband	0.157***	0.045	**-0.256*** **	**0.091**
wife has the same education as the husband	0.288***	0.040	**-0.132***	**0.079**
Age	0.081***	0.004	0.136***	0.009
Age at Immigration	0.034***	0.002	-0.027***	0.004
Husband's Age	-0.072***	0.004	-0.090***	0.008
Speaks only good english, or speak english (very) well	0.127***	0.043	0.303***	0.089
Husband speaks only good english, or speak english (very) well	-0.687***	0.042	-0.805***	0.086
Having at least bachelor's degree	-0.103**	0.052	0.177*	0.105
Husband having at least bachelor's degree	0.436***	0.053	0.173	0.107
Countries of Origin (ref: Mexico)				
Vietnam	0.743***	0.064	0.334**	0.143
Philippines	0.101	0.072	0.856***	0.124
Korea	0.882***	0.074	0.542***	0.152
Japan	0.598***	0.131	-1.612**	0.719
India	0.353***	0.054	-0.147	0.121
China	0.194***	0.054	0.503***	0.104
Regional Divisions(ref: Pacific)				
New England	0.187**	0.094	0.473**	0.190
Mid Atlantic	0.150***	0.051	0.550***	0.097
East North Central	0.208***	0.057	0.189	0.125
West North Central	0.353***	0.103	0.083	0.259
South Atlantic	0.209***	0.050	0.424***	0.102
East South Central	0.575***	0.124	0.144	0.334
West South Central	0.305***	0.045	0.323***	0.094
Mountain	0.186***	0.064	0.364***	0.126
_cons	-1.930***	0.087	-3.377***	0.187
note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1				

Table 2: Logit Models Predicting Female Immigrants' Labor Force Status and Employment Status								
	Labor Force Status				**Employment Status**			
	Baseline		Full Model		Baseline		Full Model	
	coef	**se**	**coef**	**se**	**coef**	**se**	**coef**	**se**
Demographic, Educ and Family								
Age	0.034***	0.004	0.032***	0.004	0.037***	0.004	0.034***	0.004
Husband's Age	-0.004	0.004	-0.004	0.004	-0.004	0.004	-0.002	0.004
Age at Immigration	-0.023***	0.003	-0.022***	0.003	-0.025***	0.003	-0.024***	0.003
Speaks only good english, or speaks english (very) well	0.651***	0.046	0.648***	0.046	0.683***	0.046	0.678***	0.046
Husband speaks only good english, or speaks english (very) well	-0.300***	0.045	-0.297***	0.045	-0.269***	0.045	-0.259***	0.045
Having at least bachelor's degree	0.416***	0.054	0.413***	0.054	0.389***	0.053	0.386***	0.053
Husband having at least bachelor's degree	-0.222***	0.056	-0.220***	0.056	-0.224***	0.055	-0.230***	0.055
logged husband's income	-0.233***	0.021	-0.230***	0.021	-0.186***	0.021	-0.179***	0.021
Number of own children under age 5 in household	-0.534***	0.035	-0.535***	0.035	-0.471***	0.036	-0.471***	0.036
Parent present in household	0.449***	0.063	0.447***	0.063	0.472***	0.061	0.476***	0.062
Regional Divisions(ref: Pacific)								
New England	0.096	0.101	0.090	0.101	0.048	0.099	0.039	0.099
Mid Atlantic	-0.064	0.055	-0.070	0.055	-0.010	0.055	-0.018	0.055
East North Central	-0.006	0.061	-0.006	0.061	0.055	0.061	0.052	0.061
West North Central	0.108	0.109	0.107	0.109	0.232**	0.109	0.227**	0.109
South Atlantic	0.066	0.054	0.063	0.054	0.143***	0.054	0.138**	0.054
East South Central	-0.153	0.134	-0.154	0.134	-0.080	0.135	-0.089	0.135
West South Central	-0.226***	0.048	-0.228***	0.048	-0.085*	0.049	-0.090*	0.049
Mountain	-0.073	0.067	-0.075	0.067	0.001	0.068	-0.002	0.068
Countries of Origin (ref: Mexico)								
Vietnam	0.962***	0.076	0.965***	0.077	1.064***	0.075	1.059***	0.075
Philippines	1.183***	0.086	1.170***	0.086	1.158***	0.082	1.143***	0.082
Korea	-0.144*	0.084	-0.144*	0.085	0.003	0.085	-0.008	0.085
Japan	-0.575***	0.154	-0.567***	0.154	-0.463***	0.157	-0.464***	0.157
India	0.231***	0.058	0.233***	0.058	0.225***	0.058	0.223***	0.058
China	0.738***	0.061	0.733***	0.061	0.786***	0.060	0.779***	0.060
Modes (ref:husband-led)								
wife-led			**0.295*** **	**0.079**			**0.334*** **	**0.077**
concurrent			**-0.011**	**0.035**			**0.045**	**0.035**
_cons	1.756***	0.241	1.708***	0.242	0.783***	0.236	0.694***	0.238
note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1	1.756***	0.241						

Table 3: Pairwise Matched Comparisons between Modes of Couple Migration						
	C-H		W-C		W-H	
	coef	se	coef	se	coef	se
Treatment assignment	0.012	0.008	0.131***	0.018	0.156***	0.017
_cons	0.533***	0.005	0.485***	0.006	0.460***	0.005
note: (1) *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1						
(2) C: Concurrent couple migration; W: Wife-led couple migration; H: Husband-led couple migration.						