

Migration Policy and Gender: Examining the Agency High Skilled Tied Movers

Proyecto de investigación

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Abstract

This study examines the gendered process of international migration and the extent to which high skilled dependent visa holders exercise agency in that process. In particular, it examines the factors that shape the agency of tied movers in the decision-making processes in various stages in the migration process. The research is driven by the questions: Do high skilled tied movers exercise agency? At which stage of the migration process is agency exercised? Is the movement for high skilled tied movers gendered? The study focuses on the attendant dependent visas of temporary high skilled visas of the United States and uses data collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between June 2017 to August 2017 for the analysis.

Introduction

Traditionally, migration studies explained the movement of women in relation with the movement of men within the framework of traditional gender roles they assume in the family and marriage social institutions (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). Women were theorized to and primarily moved as wives or mothers in the role of caretaker to which they historically have been assigned. Hence, the migration process for women has been understood as a tied mover—dependent on the principal male mover, who assumes the role of the provider. However, do tied movers exercise agency? What are the factors that shape the agency of high skilled tied movers in migration process? What is the role of gender in the migration process of high skilled tied movers? In this study, we join the structuration approach to international migration and emphasize the constraints on women's agency in the various stages of the migration process. We argue that the dependent visa status and the gendered roles of the sending and receiving countries shape the agency of the high skilled tied movers in the migratory decision-making process, the migration selection process, and in the labor participation experiences in the destination.

Even with the “feminization of migration” (UN, 2006), research suggests there are gender differences among migrants despite their more representative participation in the migration process (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). In particular, studies highlight the role of gender and social structures in the exercise of agency that outcomes in different experiences among male and female tied movers' decision-making process and labor participation (Clerge et al, 2015 and Banerjee et al, 2014). In this context, the experiences of dependent visa holders attached to high skilled work visas provides a good case to challenge the dominant theoretical models of tied migration. Studying agency and gender is important for a more comprehensive understanding of international migration.

We focus the analysis on temporary high skilled visas and their attendant visa in the United States. Using data collected through semi-structured interviews conducted between June 2017 and August 2017 from Duncan et al. (2017), we find that women are overwhelmingly represented among dependent visa holders, are also high skilled, and enter the domestic sphere once they migrate to the US. Moreover, we find that there is an implicit between structural factors and the exercise of agency of high skilled tied

movers in the various stages of the migration process. While tied movers exercise some agency, this agency is highly constrained due to traditional gender roles and dependent visa status.

The remainder of the paper is organized into five sections. Section two presents the theoretical framework of the study. Next, we present the methodology in section three. In section four, we present the results of the interview data. Finally, we discuss of the findings and conclude in section five.

Theoretical Framework

Agency and Migration

Agency, and its role cross-border migration process, is a major consideration in the study of international migration. The concept of agency is related to the concept of power, meaning not only the ability to choose but also the ability to choose otherwise (Giddens, 1984). This ability means to be able make a difference to a preexisting state of affairs or course of events. However, when addressing the foundations of the societal context in which people exercise agency, we enter the discussion of social structure. The structure can be understood as “recursively organized sets of rules and resources or sets of transformation relations organized as properties of social system” (Giddens, 1984). In other words, within the social theory, it is assumed that there is an intrinsic relation between agency and structure, that is, that when individuals exercise agency they do it embedded in a set of parameters established in the society that can either constrain or enable it.

Understanding the relationship between structure and agency is important to the study of migration because agency plays a role in shaping the migration decision making process. As addressed by Bakewell (2010), many theories of migration rest on the assumption that migrants have a significant level of choice over their decisions to move. Indeed, the extent to which migrants exercise agency is reflected in the distinction between forced migration (refugees and asylum seeker) and voluntary migration (economic and family reunification migrants)—even though migrants may be working within the confines of the family or other social institutions. Under this logic, there is a debate on the ways in which the complex relationship between structure and agency has

been incorporated into migration theory. Indeed, some theories focus on the role of social structures in shaping the migration process based on the assumption of the existence of a certain degree agency among immigrants. On the contrary, others focus on the agency of individuals and households but fall short in addressing the role of the parameters in which this agency is exercised as broader social structures (Bakewell, 2010).

However, there is a middle ground group of studies (Hoang, 2011; Paret & Gleeson, 2016; Vlase & Voicu, 2014) that recognize the importance of finding the balance between structure and agency in the study of international migration. These studies build up on the structuration theory developed by Giddens (1984). Under the theorem of duality of structure, Giddens suggests that the structural properties of social systems are both the medium and the outcomes of the individuals (Giddens, 1984). In other words, structure not only shapes social practice but is in turn reproduced and possibly transformed by this practice. However, while people's action may be constrained, their agency guarantees that they always have some degrees of freedom some room to maneuver. Here agency is intrinsically related to power:

To be able to act otherwise means being able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process of state of affairs... actions depends upon the capability of the individual to "make a difference" to a preexisting state of affairs or course of events (Giddens, 1984).

As a critical approach to the structuration theory, some scholars argue that Giddens's does not acknowledge the analytical dualism between structure and agency (Bakewell, 2010). Studies suggest there is a temporal disjuncture when the actions of a social actor in the present affects the future social structures that eventually would shape the context of social actors in the future (Archer, 1995). Under this logic, critical realists claim that social structures have emergent properties regardless of the actions of social actors, meaning they are the "outcomes of agency which 'emerge' or pass a developmental threshold, beyond which they exercise their own causal powers, independently of the agency which produced them" (Archer, 1982 cited by Bakewell, 2010). Given this approach, agency is defined as a relational property:

To be an agent means to be capable of exerting some degrees of control over the social relations in which one is enmeshed, which in turn implies the ability to transform those social relationships to some degree (Sewell 1992, cited by Bakewell, 2010).

Family Migration and Decision Making

The debate regarding the complex relationship between agency and structure is relevant when addressing intra-household's power relations on the immigration decision making process. The extent to which individuals exercise agency in the migration process within the confines of the family or other social institutions as marriage becomes a point discussion among theories of migration. The predominant theory in the discussion of migration decision making process is the human capital model of family migration derived neoclassical market model (Mincer, 1978; Sandell, 1977). This approach argues that migration is a process that is decided within families and households. It focuses on how the migration of one household member will have an impact in the economic prospect of the other members. A key assumption regarding the migration decision making process derived from this perspective is that family migration is constituted by a primary mover and a tied mover is expected to behave as "an individual in a family that decided to move but single would have stayed" (Cooke, 2007).

The trailing spouse or tied mover hypothesis builds on this perspective and suggests that tied movers who follow their migrant spouses forgo their individual economic interests and cooperate with the decision to move in order to increase the financial well-being of the family (Mincer, 1977). Based on this theory, migration occurs when the main migrant's—the primary mover—human capital is greater than that of the tied migrant (Clerge et al., 2017). While this implies that migration decisions in two-adult families are not always jointly determined, it is assumed that tied migrants exercise a certain degree of agency when engaging in rational choice decision-making that considers costs and benefits of migration.

However, some scholars (Bielby & Bielby, 1992; Boyle 2004; Clerge et al., 2015; Kofman 2012) within the framework of studies explaining migration family decision making argue that the tied mover perspective is limited as it overlooks the role of non-economic factors such as socio-political structural factors that affect the migration

decision-making process. For example, there is evidence that non-economic factors, such as emotional security and other personal interests, also shape the decision-making processes among high skilled households, thereby challenging the human capital model. This approach models household migration as the joint-negotiation decision making and goal setting pattern manifested among households (Clerge et al., 2017).

The Gendering of Migration

One of the factors that the tied mover hypothesis overlooks is gender. The structural approach argues that the tied mover hypothesis is framed as gender neutral, although there is existing research finds that women are more likely to end up filling the pool of tied movers or dependent visa statuses of high skilled spouses (Bielby & Bielby, 2018; Boyle et al., 2001; Cooke, 2008). At each stage of migration, gender norms and societal organization influence migrants' experiences. Gender, understood as comprising a "combination of socially constructed factors relating to sex that has to do with identities, hierarchies, and norms of behavior" (Boyd and Grieco 2003), plays an important role in the decision to migrate—first stage—the admission to the destination—second stage—and, further, in the integration and settlement process—third stage" (Boyd and Grieco, 2003).

At the initial pre-migration stage, the gender theory approach suggests that the structural characteristics of the country of origin and the social constructed gendered roles and identities shape the decision to migrate, and further, creates a gender bias as it affects the probability of women migration. These structures shape the choice possibilities in women's decisions to emigrate even when the skill level of a wife is comparable to her husband's. This bias towards man's preferences is explained as the outcome of the historical gender roles among migration literature, where traditionally men have been represented and breadwinners, and women have been theorized as wives and mother under the pattern of family reunification, being overrepresented as dependents on movement decisions of men (Boyd and Grieco 2003).

Given this assumption, the structural approach claims that the neoclassical human capital model does not take into account the household roles that husbands and wives fulfill within family institutions—roles that influence the beliefs and the effect of these

beliefs on both the process and outcome of couples' migration decision making. As Biebl & Biebl (1992) suggest, women, due to constructed gender roles, have more probability than men to put aside their individual interests and make migration decisions based on the interests of the family unit. This applies also in cases where women have comparable human capital to their husbands, because of the social role that gender plays in societies, high skilled women are also subject to gender biases resulting in a status of dependency (Cooke, 2008).

The gendered approach suggests the destination country also plays an important role in the second immigration through the selectivity and criteria of the migration policies (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). The state's role in the gendering of international migration can be understood as structural factor of the process that shapes the composition of migrant flows in terms of male and female representation and low or high skilled selectivity affecting the decision to move and thus the agency.

For example, in the United States, the concepts of "primary mover" and "tied mover" are institutionalized through "principal" and "dependent" applicant status during the application process. Principal applicants in the "skilled worker" immigration category is selected through criteria that gives preference to labor workers with skills in technical, scientific, and/or engineering fields (STEM skills). Generally, these fields are traditionally gendered, meaning there is a larger representation on males in this type of high skills. Therefore, male applicants are significantly more likely to be represented as principal applicants (Banerjee & Phan, 2014), while most female immigrants tend to be overrepresented as tied-movers.

After crossing borders take place, the terms and conditions migrants are offered on temporary visa status affect the labor experiences of tied movers, and further, shape their exercise of agency in the third stage of migration. Temporary visas impose some degree of residency and employment limitations for principal applicants and their dependents. In some cases, spouses might be denied the access to the labor market or certain educational pursuits. The constraints the temporary visa adds to the disadvantages migrant women face in the integration process upon the arrival at the destination country. Studies show that immigrant women, because of their gender and nativity face a "double disadvantage" (Donato et al. 2014). Indeed, under the bases of gender and nativity,

studies find that women are denied higher wages, employment opportunities, or higher-level positions. In particular, migrating as wives for women, in the case of high skilled women, implies a dependency status and the loss of earnings or career advancement (Kofman, 2004).

Building on the theory of structuration, we challenge the human capital approach to family migration and argue that the agency of tied movers is shaped by a set of structural factors in each stage of the migration process. In particular, we argue that gender and dependent visa status have impacts on the high skilled immigrant women: in the first stage, gendered roles shape the extent to which agency is exercised by tied movers in the household decision-making process; in the second stage, migration policies criteria and selectivity shapes the composition of migration flows by dampening the flow of high skilled women as principal applicants. In the third, these structural factors create a disadvantageous dependency position for high skilled immigrant women affecting the labor market experiences.

Methodology

This study examines the agency of tied movers under the category of dependent visa status. In particular, we examine the composition of dependent visa holders attached to high skilled visas in the United States and their agency in the international migration process. We analyze data collected from 38 semi structured interviews conducted with dependent visa holders tied to temporary high skilled visas. Temporary visas are the largest category for admissions for international labor migration to the United States. The number of labor migrants admitted on permanent visas are a fraction of this number and are typically persons already in the US adjusting status from a temporary to permanent.

Our sample comprises holders of F2, H4 and J2 visas, who correspond with F1, H-1B and J1 principal work visa holders, respectively. The F1 visa category refers to international students¹. The H-1-B visa category relates to temporary workers for specially

¹ Although the category of international students falls outside the traditional definitions of labor migrants, this category is included because it is under the scope of the population of interest. Students pursuing post-secondary education qualify as high skilled persons crossing international borders for temporary residence.

with at least a bachelor's degree. Finally, J1 visa category refers to international students and visiting scholars to academic or research institutions (U.S Citizenship and immigration services, 2017). Within the category of temporary high skilled visas, scope of conditions and terms of each visa category vary because the rights of migrant workers are more limited on temporary than on permanent visas. Although all visa categories are temporary, the economic rights and residency differ across visas. While holders of J2 visa category can apply for work authorization upon arrival to the United States, tied movers attached to F and H visa categories are not allowed to do so. In addition, F2 visa holders are also not allowed to matriculate on degree seeking educational programs.

The interview data were collected through face-to-face and phone semi-structured interviews. Dependent visa holders can be described as a hard to reach population, thus sampling followed the center-based sampling method which consists of visiting locations frequented by immigrants including supermarkets, cultural centers, religious institutions, educational institutions and community centers. This approach was applied in three sites: West Lafayette, Indiana, Stanford, California,² and Evanston, Illinois in the campuses of three major universities: Purdue University, Stanford University, and Northwestern University, respectively. Recruitment for the interviews followed from original surveys developed by Duncan et al. (2017).³ A question in the survey asked respondents, "Do you agree to being contacted by a member of our research team at a later date?" If respondents selected "yes," they were subsequently asked to provide their contact information on a separate form to maintain the anonymity of their survey responses.

In total, the sample consists of 38 interviews. When possible, they were conducted in the language of preference of the respondent, that is, English, Korean, Chinese, and Spanish. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed in the original language of the interview, non-English interviews were translated to English, and later coded and analyzed for themes. The variables of interest that guided the questions were the

² Is important to clarify that West Lafayette and Evanston locations were selected because of convenience and Stanford, California was selected because of the large concentration of tech companies and research and academic institutions in the area.

³ The project focuses on the role of the immigration policies in the gendering of international migration and argues that temporary high skilled dependent visas creates a third disadvantage for high skilled immigrant women (Duncan et al., 2017).

dependent visa holders' visa type, gender, educational attainment, employment history, migration decision making considerations and employment experiences upon the arrival to the US.

The data analysis of the semi-structured interviews is driven by the grounded theory approach in social sciences that uses codification methods (classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting and conceptualizing) to analyze qualitative data and further lead to theory building (Saldana, 2009, p. 55). Given this approach, we analyze the interview transcripts to identify emerging themes related to how and why the decision to move occurred. Initially, the interviews were analyzed through a first cycle of in-vivo coding or verbatim coding to generate a set of preliminary concepts and categories to interpret the interviews' experiences, and attribute coding to systematize descriptive information about the data and demographic characteristics of the participants. Further, we used a second cycle of magnitude and structural coding to develop a set of emerging categories and patterns. For data systematization purposes, a code book was developed to have a completion of the codes and emergent categories in relation to the variables of interest that followed each question, their content descriptions and patterns of similarity, frequency, sequence, correspondence and causation (Hath, 2002).

Data Analysis

Sample Description

We begin with a demographic breakdown of the sample. There is an important representation of F2 and J2 visa holders, each representing 42 percent of the sample, respectively. The smallest group of the respondents are H4 visa holders, representing 16 percent of the population of this sample⁴ (see Figure 1). Women represent a significant proportion of the respondents. They make up approximately 87 percent of the interview respondents. When looking across the different types of visa status, there is an overwhelming representation of women under the F2 dependent visa holders –39 percent in the sample. Is important to note that there is no male representation among H4

⁴ Is important to note that the lack of H4 visa holders in the sample is because this particular population can be described as “hard to reach population”.

dependent visa holders. This might be explained as an outcome of the small representation of participants in this category in general.

As illustrated in Figure 2 the respondents are highly educated, with 53 percent of them having a bachelor's degree, 29 percent having a master's degree and 18 percent having a Ph.D. degree. Within the sample, nationalities with the largest representations are South Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Mexican and Egyptian with 13, 13, 8, 8, 8 percent, respectively. Although some of these nationalities are representative of the largest nationalities making up student or worker visa categories nationally, one (Egyptian) does not.⁵ Altogether, 23 different nationalities are represented in the sample (see Figure 3). Dependent visa holders of this sample are generally parents. More than 60 percent of the respondents have at least one child, meaning they are somehow engaged with parenthood responsibilities. In addition, a significant proportion of the respondents are recent arrivals, almost 70 percent have been in the US for two years or less, being J2 visa holders the most representative. About 13 percent have been in the US on a dependent visa for more than 3 years, F2 holders were the most representative of this group (see Figure 4).

Turning now to the labor market experiences of the interviewees in the past and present, gender shows up as a factor in the respondent's employment history: all the male respondents worked prior coming to the US, while 21 percent of females did not work before moving to the US. Those who did not, tended to be J2 and F2 visa holders and were studying before moving to the US. In most of the cases that they came right after completing studies and had no opportunity to enter the work force before joining the spouse as tied movers. Those who did work held a range of professions, the most popular ones being office and administration related occupations and student status. Gender also shows up in the occupational history of the respondents: 60 percent of the male population held engineering related occupations, and the other percent held research related occupations, while women were not engaged in any level with any STEM related occupations.

⁵ The bias introduced by snowball sampling.

As mentioned above, among the dependent visas tied to high skilled visas, F2 and H4 visas are not allowed to apply for work authorization after the arrival. This means only 42 percent of the sample, J-2 visa holders can apply for work authorization. It is important to note that, among J2 respondents, only 29 percent are employed. There is a difference between male and female respondents and their labor market participation in the US. Notwithstanding the small number of men in the sample, the majority—60 percent—are employed. In contrast, among the women, only 9 percent are employed in the US (see Figure 7). However, regardless of the visa category, the period they have been holding this status, and parenthood responsibilities, most respondents argue they would like to work as Figure 7 illustrates. Seventy-seven percent respondents, said yes to the question, “If you do not have permission to work, would you work if you received authorization?”. Interestingly, the respondents who answered “maybe” or “no”, are all female respondents and the reason behind this lack of desire is related either with motherhood responsibilities or language barriers.

Content Analysis

Decision making process: From the interviews, we gained insights into the social-political factors shaping the agency of tied migrants in the various stages of the migration process. In the first stage of migration, our findings suggest that households decide to migrate based on a variety personal and sending and destination country socioeconomic factors. We identified two models that explain the decision-making considerations of tied movers, referring explicitly to their motivations when deciding to move to the US: *the follower mover model* and the *household mover model*.

Less than half—39 percent—of the tied movers followed a classic *mover-follower pattern*, identified in those households where the principal applicant makes the decision to move decision and the other, in this case the tied mover, follows thereby privileging their partner’s career opportunities and potentially constraining their own educational and career opportunities. The participants who fall into this pattern explicitly expressed phrases like “I followed him” or “I followed her” when asked about their motivation when deciding to move to the US. Also, they expressed some degree of uncertainty or lack of planning in the decision-making process. The negative effects of this decision, such as

having to pause or sacrifice their own professional careers, were also mentioned. For instance, a female participant under J-2 visa status, stated:

Yeah, just to be with him. I mean I still was not set in my career where I was like I was not going to be at that job forever and I knew I would follow him wherever he went to do his post doc, so it just made sense [...]

On the contrary, more than 60 percent of the participants described their decision to move as made jointly, meaning both partners were involved to some extent in the early stages of the decision-making process. In this case, deciding to accompany the principal applicant is an act of agency based on the household motivations—*household agency*. The movement is motivated by the spouses' choice to stay together, and/or support the other's career opportunities, not as a priority or sacrifice, but as mobilization that could benefit both them as a couple or family in the future. For instance, one dependent spouse said,

Then it's an opportunity [...] in future [chuckles]. Now, it is obviously not easy, but it is all with the vision of what we have thought as a family (Female, F-2).

This type of decision-making model follows a goal-setting pattern, in which the tied mover is aware of the cost of the movement but manages to overcome those by continuing pursuing their own career opportunities, or at least contemplating them in the future.

[...] my wife has applied for a position in Purdue and she was accepted. And [...] it was a great opportunity for and for us [...] because, I thought that I could apply and get a position here as a student. And it would be great for me as well (Male, F2).

It could be argued that the participants exercise some degree of agency when deciding to move in terms of their individual capacity and freedom when making a choice to move either following their spouses under the follower model or accompanying their spouse under the household mover model. However, we identified some social factors related with gender roles that had some effect on both the process—first and second stage of the migration process—and outcome—third stage—of couples' decision-making process. In the first stage, respondents described two socioeconomic structures of the sending country as shaping the considerations about applying as principal applicants for

a work visa in the US: the gendered roles expectations in the scope of family and marriage social institutions and the educational and employment opportunities available in the country of origin.

In some cases, the decision to move was based explicitly on gender-based expectations of the social institution of marriage and motherhood responsibilities, meaning some respondents decided not to apply as principal applicants because of their role as care takers as wives and/or mothers they assumed in their households. Indeed, 15 percent of the sample referred to motherhood responsibilities as the main reason why they did not attempt to apply as principal applicant for a work visa in the United States. For example,

I considered before [applying as a principal applicant], but I had a baby. I had two kids and there's no one to take care of them and... I don't want to send them to a daycare right now, so...I need more time [...] (Female, F-2).

I was planning to study [...] but uhm, I got pregnant after I came a couple months. So, everything vanished. Every plan vanished. (Female, F-2).

Other structural factors of the sending country that play a role in the migration decision making process are the educational and employment opportunities available for women in the country of origin. Although half of the sample had a perception of gender equality in the when addressing the educational and employment opportunities in their countries of origin, this perception often refers only to the access to these opportunities, but not to the female representation and participation in the academic scope and labor market occupations. The other half of the sample, on the contrary, suggested a certain gender bias when it comes to the female and male representation in some occupations in the labor market. The participants often described how high qualified males are overrepresented in the STEM occupations, while females tend to either not participate or participate in occupations not as demanded for the high qualified labor markets, like business and administration a social science.

In relation to the above, an important proportion of the sample –28 percent– claimed a lack of enough or preferred qualifications as constrains when considering

applying as principals' applicants for a temporary work visa in the US. Two dependent spouses remarked,

Any time I approached someone nobody wants to sponsor H1-B [...] like people would tell me like to change to another profession, like computers or like computer engineering maybe it's easier to get H1-B (H-4, female).

I could apply but with my educational background it is very difficult to get a visa. Since it is more in humanities it is more about language and your linguistic skills, so in order to get a H2B visa you have to have really specific and unique qualities and in my case apart from speaking polish I could not show anything specific after studying socially (H4, female).

These narratives highlight the gendering of the international migration process through the selectivity and criteria of the temporary work visa. Admission selectivity gives priority to STEM occupations, which generally have high male representation. The gender-oriented labor market has an impact in the decision-making process by shaping the composition of principal and dependent applicants for a temporary high skilled visa to the United States.

Additionally, although there is a general concern—60 percent—among respondents on the educational and employment restrictions related to dependent visa status and on the financial constraints on the settlement process, the temporariness of the visa's status had an important role in the decision to move as tied movers. A proportion of the participants—21 percent—discussed the temporary nature of the move in order to rationalize the challenges related to the employment and educational limitations. Tied movers often suggested they did not apply as principal applicants for a work visa in the US, even though they acknowledge the possible challenges they would face as dependent visa holders, because of the short period of time this challenge would last. This highlights the role of time in the decision-making process: when the time abroad is expected to be short, even if the economic or labor costs to the dependent spouse are expected to be high, they are more likely to trail the principal applicant.

Labor experience (integration and settlement): In the third stage of migration, we found that traditional gender roles and dependent visa status had an impact in the labor market participation among respondents. There was evidence of gender-based differences in the division of household responsibilities, which subsequently constrained women's labor market experiences. Many of the women in the sample—68 percent—indicated that there was an unequal distribution of the household responsibilities, and in some cases, claimed they had to take on more household responsibilities upon the arrival in the US than they had in their home countries. For example, a J-2 dependent visa holder claims,

Everything. [...] It's way much different. Back in Honduras I used to have somebody at my house to take care of the house. In here, I have to do everything. (J-2, female).

Indeed, a trend among most respondents is to describe overseeing most or all the household related responsibilities. This trend is stronger among those respondents who have motherhood responsibilities. It is interesting to note that none of the male respondents suggested an unequal division of the household responsibilities, instead, all of them described an equal distribution.

Household responsibilities often had a negative effect on women's agency to focus on their own personal interests, as pursuing their professional career, improve their language skills and participate in the labor market. As identified in the demographics of the sample, women were forced out of the professional working sphere and entered the domestic sphere to support the family's needs. Women assumed caretaker role while their husbands took the role of provider by financially supporting the family. Further, the dependent visa status among tied movers created negative self-impression of themselves that was manifested as a lack of sense of self-achievement—52 percent. This theme was often accompanied with strong feelings, such as, as depression and frustration. For instance, two female participants stated the following,

You just feel like that your life is going, is just being wasted. I had that constant fear that there is no use, no purpose in life. Just sit at home and doing nothing. I think that for me that was one of the biggest challenges [...] (H-4, female).

Literally you are like, well and it can sound ugly, but you are like a piece of furniture in the house. They do not let you study, they do not let you work, so it's difficult that ... or at least I have not found where I live as options, eh as many options for volunteering (F-2, female).

Volunteering was mentioned often by respondents as an activity in which they are involved to overcome the challenges faced while being on a dependent visa status. However, the volunteering activity was not described as a first choice of the dependents visa holders, but as a solution they found to overcome the dependent visa work restriction and fulfill their desire of being occupied. In most cases, this activity did not match their skills set, and therefore, was not perceived as an occupation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results indicate there is a pernicious relationship between gender roles, dependent visa status and decision-making process and labor market participation that create a constrained agency among high skilled tied movers in the various stages of the migration process. In the first stage, we identified two decision-making models—the follower model and the household mover model—one of which challenges the classical tied mover hypothesis. Indeed, those participants who followed a household agency model, evidence that there are non-economic factors that shape the decision to migrate, such as the desire to stay together under the family institution and a goal setting planification. However, gendered patterns of tied migration emerged as structural factors constraining the extent to which tied movers exercise their agency in on both the process and outcome of households' decision-making process.

In the first stage of the migration process, traditional gender roles within the family and marriage social institutions shaped the decision-making process of tied movers. Female participants more that often offset their individual interests and make migration decisions based on the interests of the family unit, particularly under the category of motherhood responsibilities. In addition, the gendered oriented labor market patterns affected the composition of the high skilled migration flows. Overwhelmingly, women are over-represented as dependent visa holders. These women were also high skilled, and a proportion of them constituted active labor force in their country of origin. In the third stage

gender and the dependent status plays a role in the labor market participation of respondents. Because of the dependent visa status employment and educational limitations, the majority were forced out of the professional work although many expressed their desire to work. Further, the employment limitations forces in tied movers, particularly females, to assume more traditional gender role within the household.

The outcomes of this relationship between gender roles, dependent visa status and decision-making process and labor participation are brain waste and the consolidation of a dependency status among tied movers. A trend among respondents is to be high skilled and exercise their qualifications in their home countries, and yet end up filling the pool of dependent visa holders in the US. These outcomes in a disadvantageous position for the participants as it has important impacts in future earnings and employment opportunities such as creating gaps in their employment histories and increasing time away from the labor market. Further these gendered patterns constraining the extent to which agency is exercised by high skilled immigrants' women in the migration process consolidates a dependency status often related to powerful feelings of frustration.

It is important to note that while a sample of 38 interviews is small has limited external validity, since respondents were primarily affiliated with the university setting, the findings give important insights for a range of demographic characteristics and experiences in the migration process.

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Appendix

Figures

What is your current visa status?

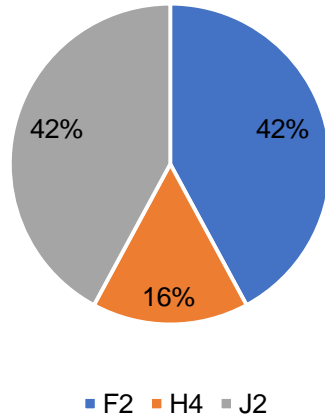


Figure 1. Distribution of Visa Categories among Respondents.

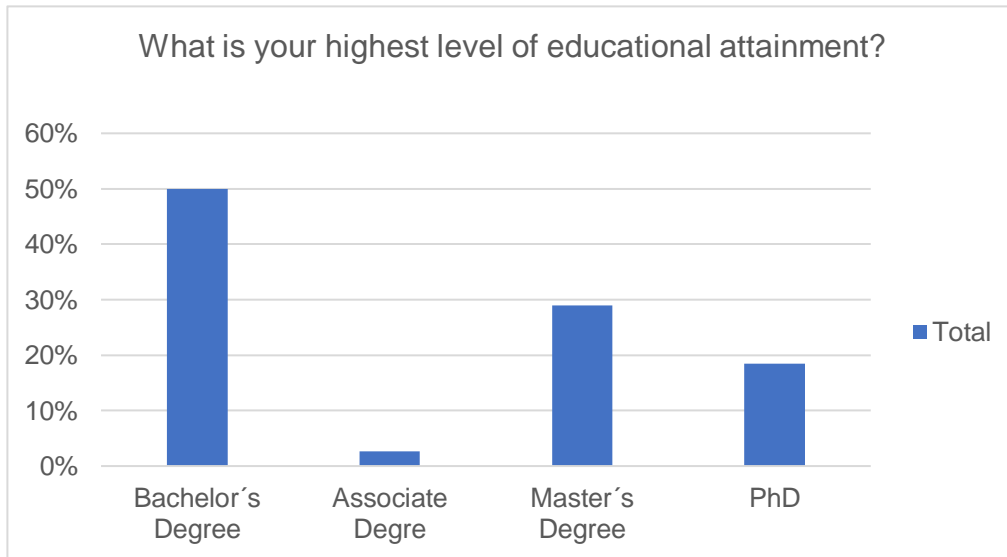


Figure 2. Educational Attainment of Respondents

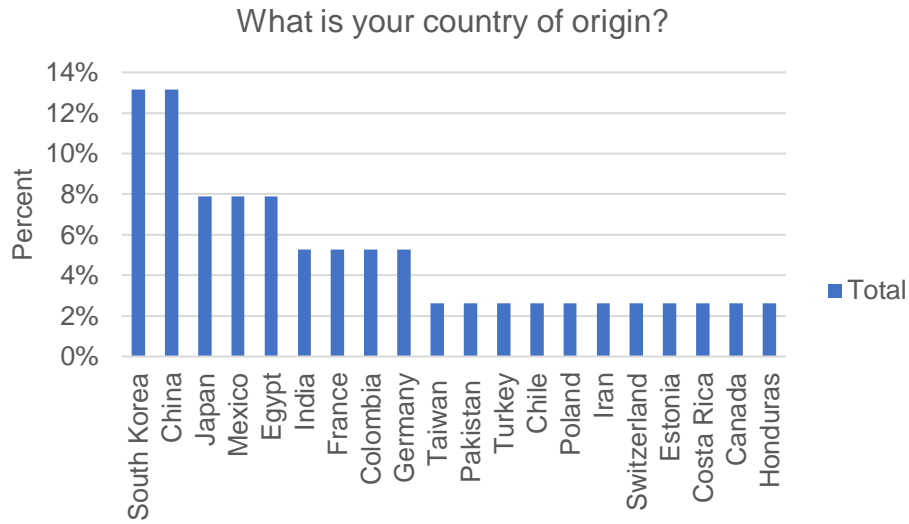


Figure 3. Respondents by Nationality

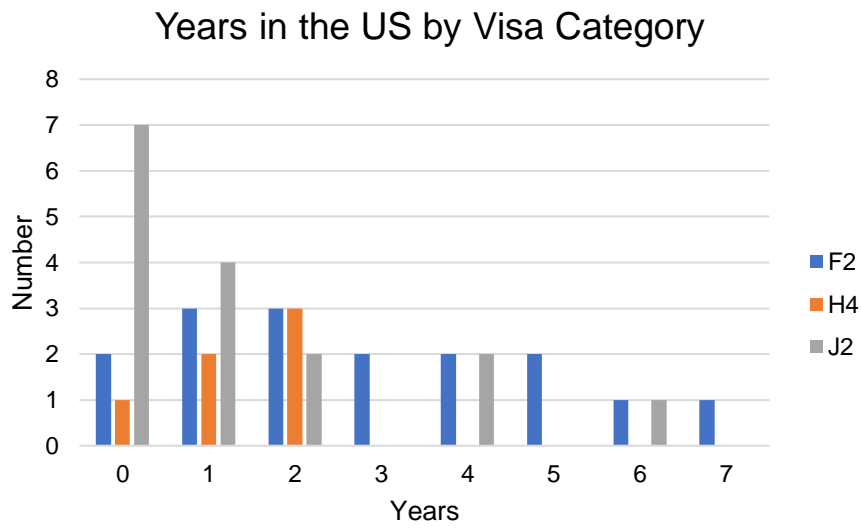


Figure 4. The Number of Years Respondents lived in the US, by Visa

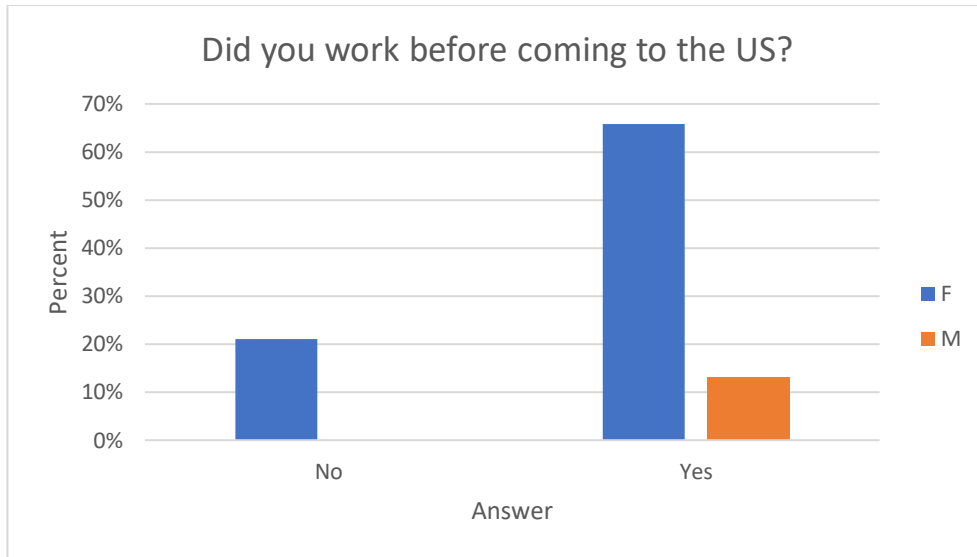


Figure 5: Employment History prior to migration to the US, by Gender

What was your occupation in your country of origin?

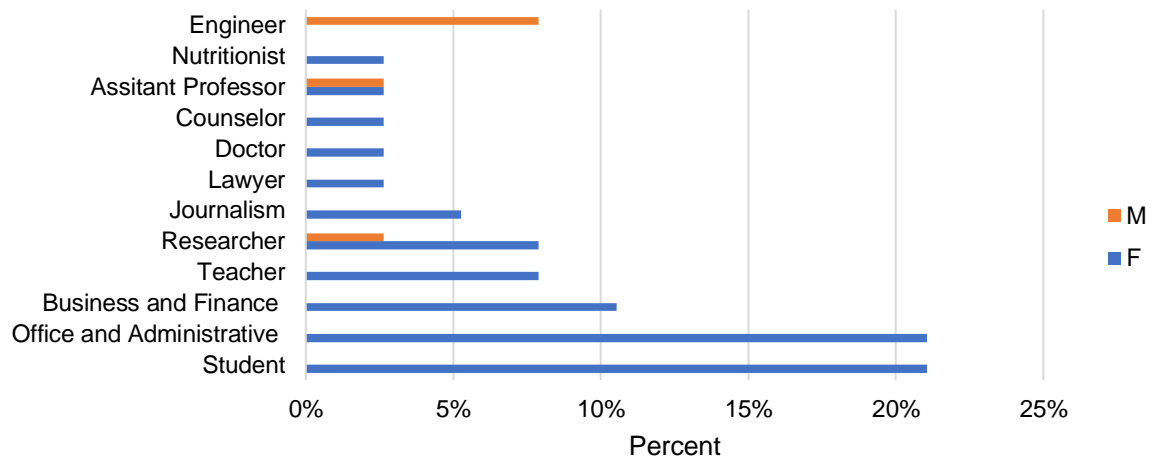


Figure 6: Occupation prior migration to the US, by Gender.

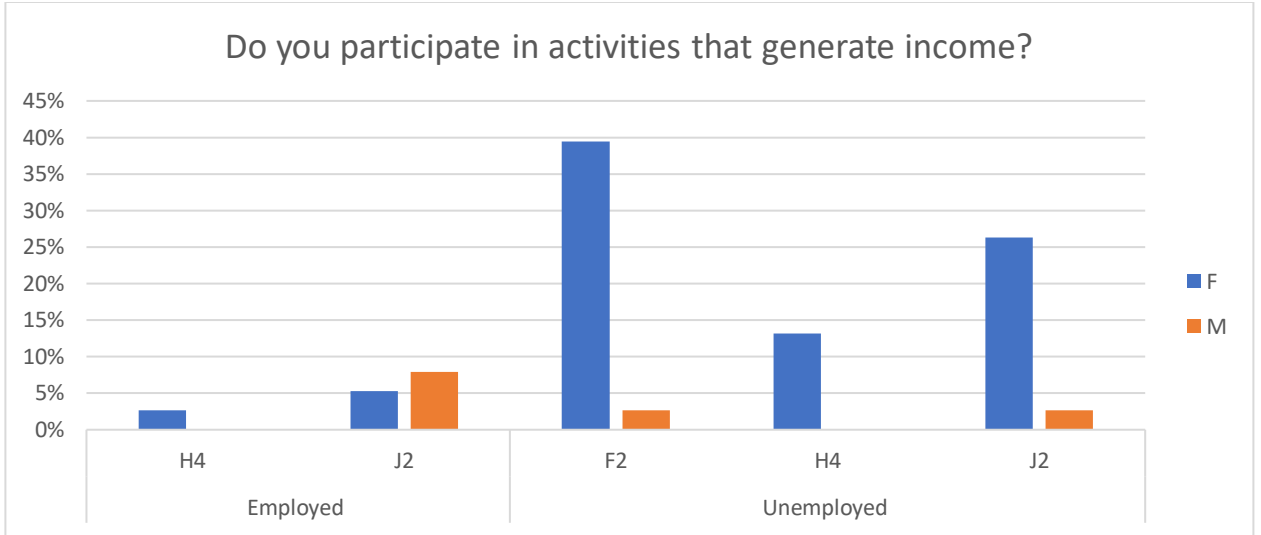


Figure 7: Labor Market Participation in the US, by Gender