Introduction
Singles in the partner market are increasingly diverse with respect to their relationship histories. Their experiences from past relationships, including children, may be important factors in how they move on and into new relationships. In this dissertation, I investigate the role of prior relationship experiences and children born before the current relationship in the process of union formation. Union formation refers to establishing a joint household with a romantic partner (i.e. starting co-residence) and is a key event in the life course. As the common phrase ‘moving in together’ suggests, union formation is inherently about moving – it requires, except in maybe a few cases, a relocation by one or both partners. Given that union formation is a spatial process, spatial mobility, in the sense of moving house, plays a central role in my research, as do children’s places of residence. I have focussed on long-distance moves within countries (also known as internal migration), rather than including short-distance moves (also referred to as residential mobility), because of the large impact of such a move on one’s daily life. To improve our understanding of who does and does not enter into co-residence with their partner, I start by looking into the alternative of living-apart-together (LAT). LAT refers to established, long-term couple relationships in which the partners live in separate households (Haskey, 2005).

Throughout this dissertation, the term “union” refers to co-residential relationships – either marriage or unmarried cohabitation; “relationship” and “partnership” are used interchangeably to indicate any couple relationship, regardless of whether the couple lives together or apart. I use the term “migration” to refer to internal migration, and international migration is explicitly excluded.

1.1 Background: Diversity and complexity in love and the family

The way in which we ‘do’ love and family in the Western world has radically changed and diversified. The traditional life-long, marriage-based nuclear family of husband, wife and children used to form a clear identity of family life. Now, a significant proportion of families dissolve
before children reach adulthood\(^1\). Divorce is no longer an anomaly but widespread, including among couples with children. What is more, unions and family types other than the married\(^2\) nuclear family have become common in today’s society, including unmarried cohabitation, single-parent families and stepfamilies (Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008). In addition, living-apart-together (LAT) is more widespread or visible nowadays (Carter, Duncan, Stoi洛va, & Phillips, 2015; Latten & Mulder, 2014), referring to established, long-term couple relationships in which the partners live in separate households (Haskey, 2005). Looking at these non-standardised and less institutionalised family models, some scholars argue that commitment may be less important in modern, individualised societies (see Lewis, 2001 for an overview of this debate). Coupled with the transformations in partnership behaviours, the context surrounding fertility has also shifted. There has been an increase in nonmarital childbearing and a shift in childrearing from married parents to single mothers and, to a lesser extent, to cohabiting parents and stepfamilies (Heuveline, Timberlake, & Furstenberg Jr., 2003). The ongoing changes in family, partnership and fertility behaviours and values (Sobotka, 2008) are often described as manifestations of the Second Demographic Transition (Lesthaeghe, 2010). The Netherlands and Denmark, which form the context for my research, are often regarded as forerunners in this transition (e.g., Sobotka, 2008).

With the diversification of partnership and family arrangements, the process of union formation has also changed dramatically. Previously, most couples would marry and only then start living together\(^3\). Now, the

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\(^1\) In the Netherlands, 30% of all 15-year-olds were not living with both their parents in 2017, mainly as a result of their parents separating (Statistics Netherlands, 2018); this proportion is expected to increase in the future (Van Duin, Te Riele, & Stoeldraijer, 2018).

\(^2\) In the Netherlands, a registered partnership is very comparable to marriage in terms of mutual rights and obligations, and is available to both same-sex and different-sex couples. Almost a quarter of couples now choose to formalise their relationship through a registered partnership rather than through marriage (Statistics Netherlands, 2019). Consequently, I make no distinction between married and registered couples in the context of the Netherlands.

\(^3\) At the end of the 1960s, nine out of ten women in the Netherlands had not cohabited prior to marriage. In 2005, only one in ten had not (Statistics Netherlands, 2006).
norm in many European countries is for partners to cohabit before they get married, if they marry at all since more and more couples never do (Fokkema, de Valk, de Beer, & van Duin, 2008; Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008). Prior to forming a joint household, couples typically date or live-apart-together for some time (Sassler, Michelmore, & Qian, 2018; Wagner, Mulder, Weiß, & Krapf, 2019).

Union formation is no longer a once-in-a-lifetime event, but something that many people experience multiple times and in different stages of their life course (see Beaujouan, 2012 on age as a factor in repartnering; e.g. Lichter, Turner, & Sassler, 2010 on serial cohabitation; Wu & Schimmele, 2005 on second union formation). In relation to this, many people in the so-called partner market have a partnership history – they have lived with a partner before, experienced the dissolution of one or more marriages or prior cohabitations, and some have children, either living with them or elsewhere (see, for example, Qian & Lichter, 2018 on the composition of the marriage market in the United States).

These prior experiences and children are found to affect one’s choices, chances and preferences when it comes to forming a new relationship. Most previously separated individuals enter a new union after some time – men do so more frequently and faster than do women⁴ (Poortman & Lyngstad, 2007; Wu & Schimmele, 2005). However, those who have been previously married are in a worse position in the partner market than never-married people (Qian & Lichter, 2018), and the likelihood of union formation is lower for those with previous union experience(s) than for those without (Poortman & Lyngstad, 2007 for the Netherlands). People predominantly choose cohabitation over marriage for a second union (Wu & Schimmele, 2005 for Canada). Not all divorced and separated individuals have a desire to ever live with a partner again. Generally, fewer women than men wish to co-reside again, which is largely attributed to women’s greater caregiving responsibilities for young children (Poortman & Hewitt, 2015). Indeed, children are generally an inhibiting factor in repartnering, especially for women (Di Nallo, 2019). Nevertheless, a substantial number of single parents

⁴ In the Netherlands, the average duration from first union dissolution to second union formation is three years for men and four years for women (Poortman, 2007).
with resident children do enter a new co-residential relationship at some point (Bernardi, Mortelmans, & Larenza, 2018; Sweeney, 2010). Other single parents opt to live separately from a new partner, with LAT relationships relatively common among those who are previously divorced or separated and have children (de Jong Gierveld & Latten, 2008; Liefbroer, Poortman, & Seltzer, 2015). LAT can be a way for parents to protect and prioritise the relationship with their children (de Jong Gierveld & Merz, 2013) or to avoid problems experienced in previous unions and maintain one’s regained independence (de Jong Gierveld, 2002, 2004; Levin & Trost, 1999; Régnier-Loilier, Beaujouan, & Villeneuve-Gokalp, 2009).

When parents separate and enter new relationships, complexity arises in family roles and responsibilities and in living arrangements (see Carlson & Meyer, 2014; Thomson, 2014 for more on family complexity). The most common pattern in Western societies is for children to live primarily with their mother, with or without a stepfather, after a separation and to have a visiting arrangement with their father (Bjørnason & Arnarsson, 2011; Kalmijn, 2015). Notably, over recent decades, shared residence arrangements (also referred to as joint physical custody) have become more common in the Netherlands (Poortman & van Gaalen, 2017) and elsewhere (e.g. Cancian, Meyer, Brown, & Cook, 2014 for the United States), with children spending equal or near-equal time at both parents’ homes. Regardless of the precise arrangement and division of time spent with each parent, many children move back and forth between two homes on a regular basis. Sometimes full siblings live apart in different homes, meaning that parents have a child living with them and another child living with their ex-partner. When a parent starts living with a new partner, this further complicates the situation (see Carlson & Meyer, 2014; Thomson, 2014). Besides the moving and merging of households, stepparent-stepchild relations are formed, which are often characterised by ambiguity in family roles and responsibilities (see Sweeney, 2010). In many cases, children are parented by four adults: two biological parents and two

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5 In 2013, 22% of parents in the Netherlands opted for shared residence for their children at the time of divorce, compared with 70.4% opting for children to live with their mother and 7.4% opting for children to live with the father (Poortman & van Gaalen, 2017).
stepparents. When a parent’s new partner already has children of their own, stepsiblings enter the picture, who may or may not live in the same household for a part or all of the time. In addition, the newly formed couple may have a child together, thereby creating half-sibling relationships. Clearly, many children’s and parents’ family configuration can justifiably be described as complex.

Without doubt, family complexity has consequences for spatial mobility. The events of separating and repartnering almost always require a relocation by one or both of the partners. Who moves and over what distance at the time of these events, and after, is likely to be influenced by parents’ children and where they live: with the parent, part-time or full-time, nearby or some distance away. Parents with resident children, that is, children who live in the household, are relatively unlikely to move long distances (Fischer & Malmberg, 2001) as they generally wish to protect their children’s local ties to home, school and friends (Bailey, Blake, & Cooke, 2004). Ties to non-resident children living nearby are also likely to form a reason to prefer staying in the locality rather than moving elsewhere. As many separated parents continue to share childcare responsibilities or have visiting arrangements, their mobility is naturally constrained. Although separating and repartnering events increase mobility over all distances, the resulting family complexities could discourage long-distance moving (see, for example, Feijten & van Ham, 2007; Thomas, Mulder, & Cooke, 2017). It has therefore been suggested that the increasing complexity of families may be a factor in the reported decline in internal migration, i.e. long-distance moves within national borders (Cooke, Mulder, & Thomas, 2016; Thomas et al., 2017) that have been observed around the globe (Bell, Charles-Edwards, Bernard, & Ueffing, 2018).

1.2 Contributions to the literature

Although partner relationships and union formation have been widely studied, some important knowledge gaps remain. This dissertation makes

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6 See Vidal and Huinink (2019) for a discussion on the interplay between spatial mobility and family dynamics.
four key contributions to the existing literature, with each contribution featuring in one or more of the empirical chapters.

First, unlike most previous studies, I address the inherently spatial aspect of union formation. While there is ample research on the spatial mobility of families and households (reviewed by Cooke, 2008), very few studies have investigated moving to form a joint household. This is despite the fact that there are pronounced consequences to a couple’s decision on where to live together, and who moves, especially for long-distance couples, where at least one partner must migrate. Previous studies show a gendered mobility pattern at the start of co-residence. In Sweden, women were found to be more likely to move – and over a longer distance – than men at the start of co-residence, especially when the partners lived far apart before co-residing (Brandén & Haandrikman, 2018). In Belgium, research showed that it is more common for women to move to the municipality of their male partner at the start of co-residence than vice versa (Schnor & Mulder, 2018). In Germany, Krapf, Mulder and Wagner (2021) did not find evidence of women being more likely to move for co-residence than men, but this may be explained by their sample being mostly young and childfree couples. In this dissertation, I take a unique approach by considering both partners’ relative contributions to overcoming the distance between them when starting to co-reside. This approach reflects the dyadic interdependence between both partners’ migration behaviours at the start of co-residence. Also, this measure captures how the partners’ distances of moving compare, as an indicator of the partners’ relative contributions and sacrifices.

Second, I study the role played by children living outside the household in parents’ relocation behaviour, an aspect rarely addressed in the migration literature. Non-resident children living a considerable distance away will motivate some parents to migrate to be closer (see Gillespie & Mulder, 2020 for a study on non-resident family as a motive for migration). Meanwhile, non-resident children living nearby are likely to form a reason to prefer staying over moving elsewhere (see Mulder, 2018). Nearby non-resident children are often an indicator of family complexity, resulting from complex parenting and living arrangements. When young, these near non-resident children typically live with their other parent, with the ex-partners living in close proximity (see Thomas et al., 2017 on geographical distances between separated parents). Geographical
proximity is critical for parents to be able to share childcare responsibilities and uphold frequent visiting arrangements after separation (e.g. Bakker & Mulder, 2013; Stjernström & Strömgren, 2012). All the more so since a substantial proportion of parents nowadays opt for a shared residence arrangement, where their children live with each of them in turn, alternating between two homes. This implies that both parents have part-time non-resident children. Such shared residence parents will be very unlikely to migrate, and many have made an explicit agreement on a maximum moving distance in a parenting plan (Bakker & Mulder, 2013). Therefore, it is clearly important to consider not only resident but also non-resident children in studies on migration.

Third, I examine the relationship between migration and family complexity. Previously, the increasing complexity of families was advanced as a potential explanation for the reported decline in internal migration (Cooke et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2017). However, no direct comparison between the mobility of complex families and ‘simple’ two-parent families has been reported. Rather, individual dimensions of family complexity have been investigated in relation to spatial mobility. Here, there is a large body of literature on residential mobility and internal migration following separation (e.g. Clark & Huang, 2004; Clark & Davies Withers, 2007; Clark, 2013; Feijten & van Ham, 2007; Feijten & van Ham, 2013; Flowerdew & Al-Hamad, 2004; Mikolai, Kulu, Vidal, van der Wiel, & Mulder, 2019). Resident children (Cooke et al., 2016) and specifically young or school-aged children (Mulder & Malmberg, 2011) are found to lower the probability of long-distance moves after separation. Further, a limited body of literature has addressed spatial mobility of parents in the years following the initial separation event, and some of these studies extend to include repartnering, but not children’s residential situation (Feijten & van Ham, 2007; 2013). What is still missing is a comparison of the likelihood of migrating by parents in two-parent families on the one hand and separated parents on the other, with detailed information on the separated parents’ partnership events and statuses and their children’s places of residence.

Fourth, I start my research by studying the alternative or precursor to a co-residential union: living-apart-together. Most existing research is based on a restrictive, tripartite model of relationships where people are classified as either single, cohabiting, or married (Roseneil, 2006).
However, many of those who are classified as single, because they are not living with a partner, are in fact in a couple relationship but living apart. Studies in a range of Western countries show that about 10% of all adults are in a LAT relationship (Asendorpf, 2008; Castro-Martín, Domínguez-Folgueras, & Martin-García, 2008; Haskey, 2005; Levin, 2004; Liefbroer et al., 2015; Otten & Te Riele, 2015; Rénier-Loilier et al., 2009; Reimondos, Evans, & Gray, 2011; Strohm, Seltzer, Cochran, & Mays, 2009). Despite this form not being that uncommon, LAT remains under-researched. Notably, the transition from LAT to co-residence has so far been largely ignored (for exceptions, see: Krapf, 2017; Krapf et al., 2021; Rénier-Loilier, 2016; Wagner et al., 2019). Rather, prior research on union formation has typically studied the transition from singlehood to co-residence, while those most likely to be forming a co-residential union have been living-apart-together as a couple for some time, or at least dating (Wagner et al., 2019). Moreover, we know very little about commitment among LAT couples (for exceptions, see Carter et al., 2015; Haskey & Lewis, 2006). In view of the changing nature of partner relationships and as contributions to the debate on the individualisation of society, several studies have investigated commitment in married and cohabiting relationships (e.g. Berrington, Perelli-Harris, & Trevena, 2015; Duncan, Barlow & James, 2005; Hiekel & Keizer, 2015; Jamieson et al., 2002). However, LAT relationships offer an especially interesting case to study commitment as they are mostly without formal, legal and structural barriers to separation.

1.3 Societal relevance

Starting co-residence with a partner is a key life-course event, both when it concerns a first union and when it is a repartnering after a prior union dissolution. The findings from a scientific study of this event would have great relevance for society given the implications of union formation for migration, housing, wellbeing and fertility.

Union formation is naturally associated with an increased likelihood of both short- and long-distance moving (e.g. Haandrikman, 2018). Generally, migration is regarded positively, being a prerequisite for an efficient housing and labour market (e.g. Haas & Osland, 2014; Hensen, de Vries,
Chapter 1

& Cörvers, 2009). On the personal level, migration can both provide opportunities and imply loss. Migrating to co-reside with a partner often leads to the loss of local ties to, for example, work, school, friends and family. Furthermore, in a post-separation family context, migration will likely entail a disruption in the linked lives of separated parents and their children. At the same time, migration creates opportunities for everyone, and specifically for those who have experienced a separation. By enabling repartnering, occupational progression, living closer to family (e.g. Albertini, Gählér, & Härkönen, 2018; Das, de Valk, & Merz, 2017), or seeking distance from the ex-partner (Duggan, 2007), migration can promote recovery and wellbeing.

There is a well-documented relationship between romantic partnerships and wellbeing. For instance, subjective wellbeing is found to be higher among people in a co-residential union than those who are single, dating or not living with their partner, and seems to improve on transitioning into co-residence (Baxter & Hewitt, 2014; Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). After a previous union dissolution, repartnering is often found to improve one’s subjective wellbeing (e.g. Baxter & Hewitt, 2014) as well as one’s financial circumstances (e.g. Dewilde & Uunk, 2008). In particular, for separated parents and their children, starting co-residence with a new partner has a strong impact, including on the parent’s physical and mental health (e.g. Williams, Sassler, & Nicholson, 2008), economic security (e.g. Bzostek, McLanahan, & Carlson, 2012 on mothers), economic independence (e.g. Herbst & Kaplan, 2016 on mothers’ post-divorce earnings), as well as children's wellbeing (e.g. Bzostek, 2008).

As two households merge into one, high rates of union formation will decrease the demand for housing (Mulder, 2006), as well as change the demand from smaller to larger homes that are better suited to couples and families. Opposing this, union dissolution and living-apart-together contribute to a high demand for housing, and especially for smaller homes.

Union formation further has a clear relationship with fertility. While family arrangements have clearly diversified, many people still perceive co-residence with a partner as a precondition for starting a family (e.g. Bodin et al., 2021). Alongside first unions, subsequent unions also form a context for childbearing (e.g. Vanassehe, Corijn, Matthijs, & Swicegood, 2015). All things considered, a better understanding of
how prior relationship experiences and children affect the subsequent union formation process is of significant relevance.

1.4 Research questions

In light of the gaps in the research to date, the main and overarching research question addressed in this dissertation is:

*What roles do prior relationship experiences and children born before the current relationship play in the process of union formation?*

Chapters 2 to 6, each with their own focus and sub-questions, together address this main question. Chapter 2 focusses on experiences of commitment in LAT relationships, addressing the following questions: *What shapes the partner commitment experiences of those in a LAT relationship?* and *How is their commitment interlinked with their choice for LAT and future plans for their relationship?*

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the transition from LAT to co-residing with a partner. The question answered by Chapter 3 is: *In what way are children born before the current partnership associated with the likelihood of transitioning from LAT to co-residing?* Focussing on long-distance couples who form a co-residential union, Chapter 4 considers the following question: *What is each partner’s relative contribution to bridging the distance between them at the start of their co-residence, and how is this influenced by local family ties and gender asymmetries?*

Subsequently, Chapter 5 examines parents’ spatial mobility in relation to family complexity, looking in detail at parents’ partnership events and statuses, as well as their children’s residential situation. The research question addressed in this chapter is: *What is the relationship between family complexity and parents’ internal migration behaviour?* Finally, Chapter 6 is a short data-driven assessment of where children are registered versus reported to live after parental separation.

Multiple types of data and methods of analysis were used to address these research questions: in-depth interviews (Chapter 2), survey data (Chapters 3 and 6) and population register data (Chapters 4-6).

Chapters 2-6 are written in the form of journal articles and can thus be read individually. For this reason, there is some inevitable overlap.
between the chapters, mostly in their introductions and theoretical backgrounds. Given that these articles were written with co-authors, the pronoun “we” is used rather than “I”.

1.5 Research context: The Netherlands and Denmark

The Netherlands and Denmark were considered a suitable context for studying union formation in relation to family complexities. Both countries are often regarded as forerunners in the ongoing changes in family, partnership and fertility behaviours and values (i.e. the Second Demographic Transition, see Sobotka, 2008). At the same time, they are representative of the demographic trends that are occurring in almost all European countries and Western society more broadly, including the trends towards more diverse partnerships and living arrangements (Fokkema & Liefbroer, 2008; Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008) and more complex family structures (Thomson, 2014).

Nevertheless, there are important differences between European countries in family and partnership behaviours, showing the influence of the country context (Fokkema & Liefbroer, 2008; Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008). One key aspect of this context is a country’s welfare regime. In the typology of Esping-Andersen, Denmark has a social-democratic welfare regime that provides generous and universal social protection, funded almost entirely from taxes (Wildeboer Schut, Vrooman, & de Beer, 2001). The Netherlands has a hybrid system, with features of both the social-democratic and corporatist regimes. In line with the social-democratic model, the Dutch state provides generous redistributive social benefits. Unlike in Denmark, however, Dutch social benefits are financed in large part by social insurance contributions (i.e. by employees), which is typical of the corporatist model (Wildeboer Schut et al., 2001).

7 As first author, I have been responsible for the research design, data collection, data management, data analysis and writing of these journal articles. My co-authors have provided valuable feedback along the way, helping me shape my research questions and methodological approaches, advising me in the process of data analysis and editing parts of the texts.
Given both countries’ comprehensive social protection, vulnerable families are relatively well cared for financially by their government. For example, single-parent families, who make up a central group in this dissertation, are provided with a reasonable replacement income when faced with long-term unemployment. As a consequence, when people find themselves in an economically precarious situation, for instance following divorce, they will not have to rely as much on family or on finding a new partner as may be the case in other countries with a less generous welfare system.

At the same time, separated women in the Netherlands are more economically vulnerable than in some other countries, including Denmark. While most women in the Netherlands have paid work, a large proportion of women, and especially mothers, work part-time (OECD, 2019). As a result, many women are economically dependent on their partner and experience a significant decline in family income when they separate (van den Brakel, Portegijs, & Hermans, 2020). In comparison, the female employment rate in Denmark is among the highest in the EU (Beskæftigelsesministeriet, 2011) and the share of women working part-time is much lower than in the Netherlands (World Bank, 2021).

Spatial mobility plays a central role in my research. In comparison with other European countries, the Netherlands and Denmark have high levels of internal migration. Overall, there is a strong north-south gradient in migration intensities, with North-West Europe and especially the Nordic countries having markedly higher rates of migration than South-East Europe (Bell and Charles-Edwards 2014). As such, moving or migrating may represent less of an obstacle to union formation in the Netherlands and Denmark than it does in countries with lower levels of spatial mobility.

### 1.6 Theoretical background

Over the course of our lives, we make various commitments: to people, jobs, houses, and other things. A commitment can be defined as a life choice with long-term consequences: one cannot easily undo this choice or exit the chosen situation (Becker, 1960; Feijten, Mulder, & Baizán, 2003). In essence, this dissertation is about existing and newly made commitments. I study the development of new commitments to a romantic partner in
relation to prior or existing commitments – in the first place to children, but also to ex-partners. A commitment to a child implies a commitment to that child’s other parent as well: parents of joint children tend to stay connected long beyond the duration of their romantic relationship because they share responsibilities and love for their children.

Ongoing commitments influence the ways in which we are able and willing to make new commitments. One reason is that someone’s diverse commitments do not necessarily match or balance easily, indeed they regularly conflict and compete with each other. For instance, children from a prior relationship may compete with a new partner for an individual’s time and energy. As such, the commitment to one’s children may present an obstacle to forming a new, committed partner relationship. For some couples, living-apart-together is a solution that allows them to combine responsibility for their children with an intimate relationship (see, for instance, Levin & Trost, 1999). Whatever the situation, couples need to find ways to combine and harmonise their own individual commitments as their lives intertwine (see Hagestad, 1981 about interlinkages between family members’ life choices).

The consequences of a commitment often extend to other life domains beyond that of the commitment itself (Becker, 1960). This dissertation deals with the consequences for spatial mobility of relational commitments to children, (ex-)partners and other family members. For example, the commitment to a child and the child’s other parent often ties someone to their place of residence even if the parents are separated. Parents, if they do not live with them, typically want to live close to their dependent children, and ex-partners have an interest in staying near each other to share childcare responsibilities. Many parents also try to ensure stability in their children’s schooling and social network and prefer not to migrate for these reasons (Bailey et al., 2004). As such, commitment to a child tends to make it difficult or unattractive to move away, including in the situation of forming a new union.

Partner commitment is the central concept in the theoretical frameworks of Chapters 2 and 3 on LAT and the transition to co-residence. This concept helps to understand why couples live-apart-together; why LAT is a temporary stage for some couples and a more permanent state for others; and how children and prior union experiences affect the likelihood of couples moving in together. Conceptualisations of migration
and local ties to children and other family members are my starting point in analysing migration for co-residence purposes and in complex family settings in Chapters 4 and 5. These theoretical ideas cast light on how individuals and couples decide about migrating at the time of union formation; how family complexity affects migration decisions; and how ex-partners and children affect migration in a post-separation context.

1.6.1 Partner commitment

Fitting with the general concept of commitment, partner commitment can be defined as having a long-term orientation in a relationship in the sense of wanting to maintain that relationship in the future, as well as feeling psychologically attached to one’s current partner (Rusbult, 1980). The Investment Model of Commitment predicts a high level of partner commitment when one feels satisfied with the relationship, perceives few attractive alternatives and has invested significantly in it (Rusbult, 1980; Rusbult, Agnew, & Arriaga, 2011). Investments can be intrinsic (e.g. time and effort), extrinsic (e.g. shared housing, mutual friends) or planned for the future. An important aspect is that investments are lost or decline in value when a relationship ends. After this initial understanding, approval and support from friends and family was proposed as a fourth factor that influences partner commitment (see Etcheverry & Agnew, 2004; Sprecher, 1988).

Union formation implies a transition from living separately from one’s romantic partner to living together in one household. One could say that this household transition also represents an emotional transition, into a more committed relationship. Some scholars see relationship statuses as forming a continuum of increasing commitment, from casual through steady dating to cohabitation and ultimately marriage. This notion is grounded in differences in longevity between the types of relationships, and differences in the degree to which a relationship contributes to one’s identity (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). LAT relationships would be logically positioned between dating relationships and cohabitation on this continuum; LAT refers to stable couple relationships and is different from dating in that regard, but LAT relationships typically lack structural investments and public expressions of commitment that are common with cohabitation, such as a joint mortgage (Carter
et al., 2015). Duncan et al. (2005) and Jamieson et al. (2002) note that, in popular discourse, the retreat from marriage and rise of cohabitation are often viewed as evidence that life-long partner commitment is losing strength and importance in modern-day society. To nuance this picture, some cohabiters (Duncan et al., 2005) and people in LAT relationships (Carter et al., 2015) argue that their relationships involve higher levels of commitment compared to married couples, precisely due to the lack of formal, legal and structural barriers to separation. Their sole reason for staying together is wanting to be together. Further, many cohabiting and also some LAT couples have children together, which is seen by many as a greater commitment to one’s partner than the legal bond of marriage (Berrington et al., 2015). Carter et al. (2015) conclude that, ultimately, high and low levels of commitment can be present in all types of relationships.

Prior relationship experiences and commitments to children can be expected to shape partner commitment in LAT relationships, as well as influence couples’ intentions to live together in the future and their likelihood of making this transition. Many young people see LAT as a temporary stage preceding cohabitation and/or marriage (e.g. Liefbroer et al., 2015) but feel that they are not yet ready for the perceived greater commitment associated with co-residence (Jamison & Ganong, 2011). In contrast, older adults with a previous union may live apart semi-permanently to avoid the problems they experienced in previous co-residential relationships and to maintain their regained independence (de Jong Gierveld, 2002, 2004; Levin & Trost, 1999; Régnier-Loilier, Beaujouan, & Villeneuve-Gokalp, 2009). For parents, LAT can be a way of prioritising and protecting their relationship with their children over the relationship with their new partner (e.g. de Jong Gierveld & Merz, 2013). Also, a childless partner may be reluctant to form a more committed relationship and start co-residence with a single parent. That is, the childless partner could be thought of as having a stronger position on the partner market with more available alternatives than the single parent. For this partner, LAT can offer an alternative to co-residence that is associated with less commitment and also lower emotional, social and financial costs. Conversely, a single parent might be interested in a rapid transition into co-residence because this potentially creates a more stable emotional and financial situation, and fits with the social norm of two-parent families being best-suited for raising children.
1.6.2 Migration and local family ties

Union formation is inherently about moving, as two households merge into one. Romantic partners are often found close to home, and so most moves at the start of co-residence take place over a short distance (see Haandrikman, 2018 for Sweden)\(^8\). However, long-distance moves (i.e. migration) at the time of union formation are also common (see, for example, Brandén & Haandrikman, 2018; Schnor & Mikolai, 2020). In the case of long-distance couples, and long-distance moves, the decision where to live together has important repercussions.

In general, migration is a major endeavour that is not undertaken lightly. Theoretically, migration is often explained using a cost-benefit approach. Mincer (1978) hypothesised that a family will migrate if the sum of benefits exceeds the sum of costs for all members of the family. Potential benefits of migrating include higher earnings, better housing or a nicer location. At the same time, moving costs money and there are also “psychic” costs involved with migrating (Sjaastad, 1962). These psychic costs are related to the severing of local ties: human, economic, and social capital that cannot, or cannot easily, be relocated\(^9\). Examples are ties to work, school, friends and family living nearby, and one might also view these ties as commitments. This dissertation focuses on the costs of migrating that are related to having local ties to family: children as well as parents and siblings.

In explaining migration, Mincer (1978) focussed on family members who form a joint household, for instance a single parent with resident children. However, today’s increasing plurality and complexity of families demands a broader notion of ‘the family’ and of those who are involved in the migration decision. It is not uncommon that an ex-partner, new partner and children living outside the household all have a direct influence on migration decisions.

In the case of migration to start co-residence, the partner is not yet a member of the household but is nonetheless very much part of the migration decision. In fact, there is a direct interdependence between the individual partners’ migration behaviours. For instance, if one’s partner

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\(^8\) In Sweden, half of all partners lived within nine kilometres prior to co-residence (Haandrikman, 2018).

\(^9\) The term local ties is used as a synonym for location-specific capital (DaVanzo, 1981).
is unwilling to migrate to live together, one will need to migrate oneself, at least in the case of long-distance couples. Similarly, one cannot decide independently to move in with one’s partner without their agreement. In reality, migration at union formation is a special case, not dissimilar to migration at union dissolution. That is, while the decision concerning migration, as well as the outcome, is on the couple level, it is not a couple but an individual who moves – some individuals alone, others together with children from a previous relationship. In the case of migration for union formation, it is not only the individual’s costs and benefits in an absolute sense that are relevant, but also how they compare to their partner’s: whose costs of migrating are higher and/or carry more weight?

Ex-partners, too, often continue to play a role in migration decisions, even though they are no longer part of the household. This is especially true for ex-partners who have children together, and who have made a long-lasting commitment to each other as such. That is, separated parents of young, dependent children generally have an interest in living close to each other to share childcare responsibilities (Bakker, W. & Mulder, 2013; Stjernström & Strömgren, 2012; Thomas et al., 2017). As a result, many separated parents who live in close proximity, and particularly those who are involved in a shared residence arrangement, will consult each other before moving a significant distance. Under these circumstances, repartnered parents find themselves coordinating locational decisions not only with their new partner but also with their ex-partner.

The role played by children in migration decisions depends on where the children live. Resident children are considered to impose high costs on migrating: parents generally wish to protect their children’s local ties to their school, friends and home (Mincer, 1978). A non-resident child who lives nearby can be seen as a local family tie that adds to the costs of migrating and the benefits of staying (Mulder, 2018), assuming that proximity is valued. In a similar vein, a non-resident child living far away could motivate a parent to migrate to be closer, or at least play a secondary role in the choice of location (Mulder, 2018).

All things considered, migration at the time of union formation and in complex family settings takes place in a broader family context than just the family that is part of the household – not only the still non-resident partner, but also the ex-partner and non-resident children are likely to exert influence.
1.7 Mixed data and methods

1.7.1 Interview data

This dissertation combines use of multiple types of data and methods of analysis, benefiting from the strengths of each and the complementarity between them. For Chapter 2, I personally conducted, in May and June 2016, 22 in-depth interviews with men and women in LAT relationships. The aim was to explore their perceptions and experiences of commitment, and since this is a sensitive and complex topic, I opted for one-to-one interviews. These interviews allowed nuance, detail and the context of participants’ stories to emerge (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011), whereas a survey would have been limited to pre-defined concepts and answering options.

Since relationship talk is generally reserved for friends and family, and perhaps the hairdresser, I structured the interviews flexibly so that I could follow the natural flow of the conversation. This way, it would feel more like an informal chat as opposed to a formal interview. I interviewed only one individual from a couple to ensure that participants felt free to discuss their feelings without concern that their partner might get to hear what they said, or that, as interviewer, I would also hear their partner’s side of the story. The average duration of the interviews was 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Dutch and tape recorded with the written consent of the participants. The transcripts of these interviews were then coded both deductively and inductively using the qualitative data analysis software program Atlas.ti.

1.7.2 Survey data: Netherlands Kinship Panel Study

In Chapter 3, event-history analysis was performed using the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS), which is a multi-actor panel survey with four waves, each wave spaced three years apart. The first wave started in 2002/2004 with an initial sample of 8,161 Dutch-speaking men and women between the ages of 18 and 79 (see Dykstra et al., 2005 for the codebook of the first wave). The sample had dropped to 2,382 by wave four, after follow-up interviews without sample refreshment. Importantly, survey data allow for the statistical study of behaviours that are not
recorded in administrative population registers, such as living-apart-together. The NKPS provides detailed information on partnerships and fertility that is rarely available from other surveys, including on LAT, past unions and children’s residential arrangements.

### 1.7.3 Data from population registers

The empirical analyses in Chapters 4 and 5 make use of high-quality population register data. Chapter 4 uses the Danish register data (Eurostat & Statistics Denmark, 1995) to perform cross-classified multilevel analyses. Chapter 5 uses the Dutch register data (System of social statistical datasets (SSD), see Bakker, B. F. M., van Rooijen, & van Toor, 2014) for event-history analyses. Denmark and the Netherlands are two of only very few countries that have a population register. The general workings of both countries’ systems are the same. Data from numerous administrative registers are linked at the level of the individual through a personal identification number. As a result, the registers contain a wealth of longitudinal information about the country’s entire population, or at least about those who are formally registered as residents. The registers contain exact dates on demographic events (e.g. birth, migration, marriage) and record other information on a monthly or yearly basis (e.g. employment, income).

Critical for my study was that the registers include longitudinal information on locations and distances, and record linkages between family members. Also particularly valuable for me was the extremely large number of cases offered by a country’s entire population, compared to a smaller survey sample. With these large numbers, it is possible to include and zoom in on smaller groups and specific events, such as single fathers, repartnering, and union formation at older ages, while retaining statistical power.

In Chapter 6, I make combined use of the SSD and the NKPS. The respondents from the NKPS can be matched to the population register through a unique identifier. This allows me to compare perceptual data from the survey with official data from the register concerning the residential situation of children of separated parents.
1.8 Outline of the thesis

1.8.1 Commitment in LAT relationships

The remainder of this dissertation consists of five empirical chapters and a concluding chapter (Chapter 7). I start my research by studying the alternative or precursor to a co-residential union: living-apart-together. The first study presented in Chapter 2 explores commitment in LAT relationships through in-depth interviews. The study contributes to a better understanding of the meanings attached to LAT as a modern, non-institutionalised relationship arrangement. I explore the way in which people in LAT relationships evaluate their satisfaction with, alternatives to, investments in and social support for their relationship. Other themes addressed in the interviews are relationship history, motivations for living apart and future plans. This study was chronologically the first undertaken and informed and inspired the other studies in this dissertation. For example, one of the key findings here is that prior relationship experiences and children from a previous partner are central factors in the choice to live apart, in the experience of commitment and in thinking about the future of one’s relationship.

1.8.2 From LAT to co-residence

In Chapter 3, the transition from living apart to living together with a partner is studied using survey data. I examine the role of children in the likelihood of transitioning from LAT to co-residing by comparing now-single mothers and fathers with people who are childless. Among single parents, I distinguish different pathways into single parenthood (separation, widowhood or out-of-union childbearing) to account for the influence of one’s partnership history. These pathways are an important source of diversity among single parents (Bernardi & Larenza, 2018).

1.8.3 Migration for co-residence

Chapter 4 addresses the issue of moving at the start of co-residence. When a couple decides to live together, one of the most important decisions they have to make is where to live: who moves in with whom,
or where will the new destination for both of them be? This decision has important repercussions, especially for partners who live long distances from each other. Drawing on Danish population register data on long-distance, opposite-sex couples, I study each partner’s share in the total distance moved by both partners at the start of their co-residence. Central to this chapter is the effect of living close to, or co-residing with, family members – minor and adult children, as well as siblings and parents. In addition, an indicator is included addressing one’s most recent union experience prior to the current relationship.

1.8.4 Family complexity and parents’ migration

The relationship between family complexity and internal migration is investigated in Chapter 5 using Dutch population register data. I compare separated parents with young children (aged 12 or younger) with parents in two-parent families in terms of their likelihood of migrating and use detailed records of parents’ partnership events and statuses, including repartnering. I investigate the role of children’s residential situation after separation in the likelihood of parents migrating, here distinguishing resident children from non-resident children living nearby and from those living further away. Stepchildren and/or joint new children with a new partner are also taken into account.

1.8.5 Children’s registered address

Chapter 6 is a short data-driven report in which I assess the extent to which the registered address of a child of separated parents, as recorded in the Dutch population register, matches their residence as it is reported by one of their parents in the NKPS survey. Given that the studies in Chapters 4 and 5 rely on children’s registered address to determine their residential situation, this report functions as a check on the reliability of these data.

Finally, Chapter 7 summarises the main findings of the empirical chapters and discusses how these chapters together answer the overarching research question. Additionally, I discuss the relevance for society, reflect on the theory and methodology that I used and formulate recommendations for further research.
Introduction

References


within the context of a “poldermodel” society. *Demographic Research, 57*(21), 743-794.


