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Oh, the places you'll go!
Pre-employment relocation decision making by college graduates in the US

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to explore pre-employment college graduates' relocation tendencies based on a research framework built upon gender and cultural theories.

Design/methodology/approach – Relocation decisions were analyzed based on 208 college graduates enrolled in public universities in Texas, USA.

Findings – The relocation decision-making by college graduates differ from that for corporate employees described in previous research. First, the willingness to relocate increases as the college graduates mature. Second, gender difference in the willingness to relocate is non-significant because of the same expected norms for both genders. Instead, psychological gender affiliation, such as self-perceived masculinity, makes a difference in relocation decisions. Third, family-related variables, such as marital status and parenthood, do not influence college graduates' relocation decisions. Last, cultural groups do not exhibit any overall significant differences.

Research limitations/implications – The findings provide new and complementary knowledge over previous relocation studies.

Practical implications – The findings enhance the understanding of career choices made by college graduates in their early career, offering valuable managerial implications in crafting staffing strategies and improving human resource management for organizations in today's fast-changing, vibrant multi-cultural environment.

Originality/value – The study is focused on pre-employment relocation decision-making by college graduates from different demographic backgrounds. The study fills a major research void in relocation studies by clarifying the relocation patterns of new employees graduating from college.

Keywords Employment, Human resource development, Culture

Paper type Research paper

You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes.

And YOU are the one who'll decide where to go (Dr Seuss, Oh the Places You'll Go!).

Introduction

Relocation is a growing topic of interest in organizations. Traditionally, it is understood as the process of moving to a distant location for employment or job transfer purpose (Baldridge *et al.*, 2006; Bretz and Judge, 1994; Eby and Russell, 2000; Gould and Penley, 1985). Tens of thousands of new employees are relocated annually, costing organizations billions of dollars (Worldwide Employee Relocation Council, 2009). From

an organizational perspective, extant literature is not yet focused on the understanding of new employee relocation (Bretz and Judge, 1994; Carruthers and Pinder, 1983; Eby and Russell, 2000; Gould and Penley, 1985). In management practice, we found three primary reasons to study relocation of pre-employment college graduates. First, the findings can aid in the facilitation of career enhancement and personal growth for pre-employment college graduates. Second, the findings can aid in the formulation and improvement of current staffing strategies. Last but not least, the findings can help uncover and solve new employee relocation problems. Therefore, both drives and obstacles of work-related relocation are worth further investigation. Moreover, it has been found in extant literature that individuals increasingly decline to relocate (Eby and Russell, 2000; Gould and Penley, 1985; Harvey, 1998), making this issue more prominent for researchers and practitioners.

The relocation decision is often said to be associated with financial, personal and social factors (Brett and Reilly, 1988; Pinder, 1989). Magnus and Dodd (1981) found that the perception of financial risks associated with relocation were higher among lower-paid employees, reducing the probability of their willingness to relocate. Relocation opportunities among higher-paid professionals were also greater than others in terms of financial return (Gould and Penley, 1985; Hall, 1976). Psychological research has also identified the impact of intrinsic personality on the openness to relocation. The differences between Type A and Type B characteristics may be used to predict employee reaction to relocation (Frank, 2000). This is because Type B individuals would be more likely to have the psychological capability to deal with the stress of relocation and by extension, would be more willing to consider relocation for work purpose (Frank, 2000). Factors such as age and the length of employment are also salient in the literature because employees' risk aversion increases as they age (Eby and Russell, 2000). Lastly, relocation decisions are strongly influenced by family and social characteristics, such as parenthood, marital status and social ties (Baldridge *et al.*, 2006; Hausman and Reed, 1991; Yan *et al.*, 2002).

Research on pre-employment relocation is rare, especially on college graduates. In 2014, about 2.8 million college students graduated from college with bachelor's and associate degrees in the USA (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Successful, effective staffing strategies are based on understanding and proactively addressing any challenges posed by desirable applicants (Breaugh and Starke, 2000). Yet, previous studies paid more attention on explaining relocation decisions made by individuals already employed within selected organizations requiring relocation for staffing or expansion reasons. Limited previous studies may not provide appropriate managerial guidance in the hiring process of new employees (Eby and Russell, 2000). Thus, a study of whether an individual would consider relocation in the first place is long overdue. In this study, we attempt to make contribution by focusing on the college graduates' willingness to relocate prior to seeking employment.

Furthermore, studies about cultural influences on relocation are also rare. In the present study, we emphasize on culture because of a growing need of managing diversity and the multi-cultural environment within organizations (Eschbach *et al.*, 2001; Thomas, 2002; Triandis *et al.*, 1994). In the USA, the population is divided into two main culture-based ethnic groups, Hispanic and Non-Hispanic, regardless of race. We hope the comprehensive culture-based analysis may contribute to a deeper understanding of relocation by responding to calls for examining whether cultural

values and beliefs influence employment decisions (Breaugh and Starke, 2000; Rynes and Barber, 1990).

In summary, the objective of this study is to investigate the patterns of pre-employment relocation decisions associated with a number of gender- and culture-related variables. The rest of this study is organized as follows. Following the introduction, our research framework and hypotheses development is presented. Related hypotheses are offered based on the extension of previous findings. Next, survey procedure and instruments are described in the methodology section. Results of the statistical analysis are then provided. Last, conclusions, managerial implications and future research recommendations are elaborated.

Research framework and hypotheses development

To update the literature and contribute to a well-grounded understanding of college graduates' relocation, we further seek intrinsic perspectives for relocation. Our theoretical framework is constructed based on a two-pronged approach: gender and culture.

To discuss the influence of gender, we focus on gender role, gender equality and psychological gender affiliation. We are guided by social identity theory to help understand self-perceived norms explicating male and female gender role expectations. We then elaborate the impact based on gender equality theory on behavior in a higher education context. Lastly, we examine relocation decisions based on self-perceived masculine and feminine personality characteristics based on gender schema theory. In addition, to discuss the influence of culture, we focus on three levels of culture: family culture, ethnic culture and educational culture.

The influence of gender

Gender role. Gender role associated with social identity may help our understanding of relocation decisions based on self-perceived norms explicating gender role expectations. Identity theorists postulate that the individuals are self-categorized as either male or female (Burke and Tully, 1977; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Individuals are motivated to assume gender characteristics and associated role behaviors during this self-categorization process as soon as they begin to recognize the difference (Burke and Tully, 1977; Hogg *et al.*, 2007; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Furthermore, individuals establish their affiliations with the gender group to which they belong since childhood (Erchak, 1992; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Thus, gender role subtly influences self-directed behavior.

Gender role can explain why male and female employees are still treated differently in today's workplace, because people usually associate gender role with expected behavior (Eby *et al.*, 1999; Gianakos, 1995; Goldberg *et al.*, 2004; Gottfredson, 2006; Kirchmeyer, 2002). Social structural theory posits that psychological gender differences are outcomes of gender inequality in power in the workplace (Eagly and Carli, 2003; Eagly and Wood, 1999). As a result, gender stereotypes held that men are usually understood as labor outside the home, while women are usually assigned to homemaking and child care (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Behavioral scientists have found that gender identities affect individual behavior

because an individual will incorporate the norms and values associated with the membership of his or her gender group (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Hogg *et al.*, 2007; Turner, 1985). The norms, values and beliefs associated with each gender group identity are central to an individual's view of the world, and they are the source of individual self-esteem (Fritsche and Jonas, 2005).

Hence, self-categorizations of one's gender role may be significant predictors of the willingness to relocate. For example, Shamir *et al.* (1990) introduced care for elderly parents in the study of relocation. They insisted that the females were more reluctant to relocate given that they felt they were responsible to be the primary care givers of the elderly. In a social context, expected male gender role is more often associated with personal achievements and material success, whereas expected female gender role usually refers to less tangible outcomes such as quality of life and interpersonal harmony (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Hofstede, 1997; Ledet and Henley, 2000; Stoker *et al.*, 2012; Thatcher *et al.*, 2003; Weisgram *et al.*, 2011). Previous empirical studies of employee relocations further confirmed that women are more likely to associate their identity with family than work when facing relocation, and their decisions are primarily subjected to family or husband needs (Baldridge *et al.*, 2006; Bossink, 2004; Valcour and Tolbert, 2003; Van der Velde *et al.*, 2005; Weisgram *et al.*, 2011). Thus, we hypothesize:

H1. For married college graduates, the willingness to relocate is higher for males than females.

Gender equality in education. Although previous research in career development often found gender differences, it has been clearly shown that young female and male professionals exhibited more similarities than differences (Hyde, 2005). The similarities of career patterns particularly exist during people's initial career paths between female and male student graduates (Whitmarsh and Wentworth, 2012). Davies and Shackelford (2006) mentioned that if a selection process does not differ for males and females, it is reasonable not to expect any gender differences. In the educational environment, male and female college students are expected to have the same norms (Else-Quest *et al.*, 2010). Field tests demonstrated that female and male students have comparable level of competency indicated by quantitative data (Else-Quest *et al.*, 2010; Heinze *et al.*, 2007; Paver and Gammie, 2005; Spelke, 2005). Therefore, although gender role plays a role in relocation decisions based on defined spousal character, we think that at the final stage of their college study, male and female college graduates who do not have spousal constraints may exhibit very similar pattern in relocation decisions. We hypothesize the following:

H2. For single college graduates, there is no difference in the willingness to relocate between males and females.

Gender affiliation as personality characteristics. From a psychological perspective, one's physical gender (i.e. male or female) may or may not reflect his or her self-perceived psychological gender affiliation. For example, in today's workplace, women in high positions are considered powerful, cohesive and masculine (Ledet and Henley, 2000; Van Engen *et al.*, 2001). In the study of self-constructed gender identity, researchers classified individuals into personality categories according to their masculine and feminine scores (Beckham *et al.*, 1988; Bem, 1974, 1977, 1981; Orlosfsky *et al.*, 1977; Palan *et al.*, 1999; Stevens *et al.*, 1984). Following this approach, previous research has found that

preferences and decisions made by individuals between feminine- and masculine-type identities heavily differ (Chang, 2009; Conway and Dube, 2002; Fischer and Arnold, 1994; Gould and Stern, 1993). Bem (1981) suggested that psychological gender affiliation – males who identify with more feminine personality characteristics and vice versa for females – may help explain individual differences, which we extend to include relocation decisions.

Feminine-type individuals, regardless of physical gender, are usually more fatalistic, tend to believe external *locus* of control and tend to adapt to external change and new experiences in an easier manner (Hatchett and Han, 2006; Johnson and Knackstedt, 1993; Lee, 1987). On the contrary, masculine-type individuals, regardless of physical gender, are usually more self-confident, and tend to solve problems rather than to adapt to them (Brems and Johnson, 1989). They are found to have lower degrees of anxiety toward change and adjustment (Payne, 1987). In respect to their coping strategies, feminine-type individuals usually choose to change, whereas masculine-type individuals usually choose to deny (Brems and Johnson, 1989). We think that college graduates with feminine identity are more likely to adapt themselves to new work locations, but those with masculine identity are more likely to resist change. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H3. The willingness to relocate is negatively related to self-perceived masculine personality characteristics.

H4. The willingness to relocate is positively related to self-perceived feminine personality characteristics.

The influence of culture

Family culture. Family culture, such as the impacts of spouse and children, has been highlighted in the literature as a strong predictor of the willingness to relocate (Eby and Russell, 2000; Turban *et al.*, 1992). Research on the relationship between marital status and relocation revealed that married employees encounter more difficulty in relocation (Bossink, 2004; Brett *et al.*, 1993; Eby and Russell, 2000). For dual-career couples, relocation decision seems to be especially hard to make because of established community ties and uncertain future (Baldridge *et al.*, 2006; Brett, 1982; Gould and Penley, 1985; Groeneveld, 2008). Previous research found that parenthood negatively influences relocation, especially if the children were teenagers (Veiga, 1983). Recent research found that it is more of a matter of the children's community tie, as parents' willingness to relocate decreases when their children are more embedded in their community network and friend circle (Baldridge *et al.*, 2006; Sagie *et al.*, 2001). Overall, previous research argued that when family becomes a key concern, the tendency to relocate decreases. As such, the desire of relocation for college graduates who have spouse and/or children is lower because of the stress associated with moving to a new location. Armed with previous support, we hypothesize the following:

H5. The willingness to relocate is higher for single college graduates than married ones.

H6. The willingness to relocate is higher for college graduates without children than those with children.

Ethnic culture. Career choice is often affected by ethnic culture (Duffy and Klingaman, 2009; Durodoye and Bodley, 1997; Hodkinson *et al.*, 1996). Identity theorists contend that social behavior reflects individuals' affiliation with particular ethnic groups (Burke and Tully, 1977; Fritsche and Jonas, 2005). In cultural analysis, the collectivism-individualism spectrum has been widely used to indicate an individual's perceived relationship with a given ethnic group (Hofstede, 1980). Individualistic cultures are those that highlight the interests of the individual over the group, whereas collectivistic cultures privilege the interests of the group over the individual (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1988). Individualistic ethnic cultures, such as Anglo-Saxon Americans, lay emphasis on freedom and personal pursuit, whereas collectivistic cultures, such as Mexicans or Latin Americans, accentuate group values and collective behavior because groups to which one belongs are believed to be the priority (Hofstede, 1980; Robertson and Fadil, 1999; Sharma *et al.*, 1995; Triandis, 1989). Therefore, college graduates from an individualistic culture are more likely to proceed if relocation is needed, while their counterparts from a collectivistic culture may face more constraints in relocation because of perceived family and social ties.

Previous studies found that college students of different ethnic backgrounds have comparable career development expectations (Duffy and Klingaman, 2009; Teng *et al.*, 2001). Sometimes, a "settle-for-less" decision can be expected when ethnic college students follow their cultural norms, but with the internal self-efficacy developed through education, students at school are not bound to socio-cultural restrictions (Gushue and Whitson, 2006). We expect that, without spousal limitations, college graduates from a collectivistic, Hispanic cultural background can develop a similar level of willingness to relocate to those from an individualistic, Caucasian cultural background:

H7. For single college graduates, there is no difference in the willingness to relocate between the individualistic cultural group (Caucasian Americans) and the collectivistic cultural group (Hispanic Americans).

In a cultural context, social behavior is a function of in-group norms and individuals will conform to their cultural norms including gender role expectations (Triandis, 1989). A culturally bound individual encodes information about himself or herself according to the cultural definitions of desirable male and female attributes (Bem, 1981; Hoffman and Borders, 2001; Stryker and Burke, 2000). Group membership can increase members' desire to protect and live up to their culture's reference group gender role expectations, which further strengthens the culture's ability to uphold its basic cultural values (Fritsche and Jonas, 2005; Stryker and Burke, 2000). Previous literature on individualism and collectivism offers further insights into the role behavior expected of males and females based on cultural expectations (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1989). Collectivistic cultures have been shown to assign strict gender roles as prescribed relationship-oriented roles, such as wives and husbands, more so than individualistic cultures (Karatepe *et al.*, 2006; Kashima *et al.*, 1995; Triandis, 1989). Thus, married individuals from a collectivistic culture have stronger cultural norms because of the ethnic identity. They are more relationship-oriented, which may negatively influence the willingness to relocate. Overall, cultural norms expected for married college graduates from the

collectivistic culture may result in a salient psychological barrier in making relocation decisions. We hypothesize the following:

H8. For married college graduates, the willingness to relocate is higher for the individualistic cultural group (Caucasian Americans) than the collectivistic cultural group (Hispanic Americans).

Educational culture. It was argued that the willingness to relocate is time-related (Eby and Russell, 2000). For the most part, researchers have found age to be negatively related to the willingness to relocate (Eby and Russell, 2000; Turban *et al.*, 1992; Veiga, 1983). Ferrence *et al.* (1977) found that as employees age, their willingness to relocate decreases. They identified this issue as an obstacle for upward mobility within an organization. Compared to younger professionals, older employees tend to be more concerned about maintaining the status quo (Ebner *et al.*, 2006; Van Vianen *et al.*, 2011). Because they appear to have higher risk aversion, relocation for older employees is a less certain life option (Eby and Russell, 2000).

However, we think that previous findings can hardly explain the age factor for college graduates' relocation decision. Previous research was focused on working employees (Eby and Russell, 2000; Ferrence *et al.*, 1977; Turban *et al.*, 1992; Veiga, 1983), but not pre-employment college students. The educational culture for college students is a motivating force. As college students become closer for career advancements, they are motivated to take risks and challenges in a proactive manner (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Bertolino *et al.*, 2011; Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch, 2008). Previous studies found that educational experience increases people's preparedness of relocation for work purpose (Brett and Reilly, 1988; Stroh, 1999). Joseph *et al.* (2012) found that timing and career mobility have an inverted U-shaped relationship. They explained that, people are more likely to take challenges in the early stage of career, and the mobility usually decreases after first four years. Thus, we propose that, without spousal restrictions, older college graduates are more willing to relocate for work purposes:

H9. For single college graduates, the willingness to relocate is positively related to age.

Methodology
Sampling procedure
To test the hypotheses in this study, we recruited students in the process of graduating with a bachelor's degree from three large state universities in Texas, USA. We sought to include both traditional and non-traditional students in our sample, as 73 per cent of the undergraduate students in the USA are non-traditional students who study on a part-time basis because of job and family duties (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). The targeted universities enroll a significant portion of non-traditional college students who have family and job aside of their study. As such, the universities create an opportunity for us to collect rich data for variables related to family culture, such as marriage and parenthood. Our objective in the sampling procedure was to identify college students in their senior class rank who were more than likely seeking employment opportunities after graduation. We used a stratified sampling approach. We intentionally sought a mixture of males and females, and students from different ethnic backgrounds. We used online surveys to collect data, an approach that has been frequently used in previous organizational studies (Agarwal and Hoetker, 2007). A total

of 500 students, who were identified as graduating seniors, as well as local residents, were electronically contacted via an e-mail link. Non-local students were excluded from the survey because they may have a need to relocate to hometown. When the students visited the online survey website, they were given information about the study. The participants were then informed and assured of confidentiality and anonymous responses protocols. Our data collection in a one-month period ended with 208 usable surveys from 98 males and 110 females, which indicates a 41.6 per cent response rate. We also investigated non-response bias, and found that a main reason for those who did not participate was that they did not have time. Overall, the investigation of response rate is in line with Baruch and Holtom's (2008) response rate calculation procedure. Table I provides descriptive statistics for the respondents. Basic descriptive results of the sample further indicate that 58 per cent of the males and 50 per cent of the females in

Variable	% of participants
Gender	
Male	47
Female	53
Age	
<25	59
25-29	16
30-34	13
>34	12
Marital status	
Single	52
Married	41
Divorced	4
Other	3
Children	
0	65
1	12
2+	23
Income	
0-17,999	36
18,000-29,999	15
30,000-47,999	10
48,000-59,999	8
60,000-89,999	25
90,000+	6
Ethnicity	
African-American	16
Asian American	12
Caucasian American	23
Hispanic American	40
Other	9

Table I.
Demographic characteristics of the participants

this study would at least slightly agree to relocate; 32 per cent Hispanic students and 41 per cent Caucasian students reported mid-to-high willingness to relocate.

Measures
Similar to the measure of the willingness to relocate in previous relocation studies (Baldridge *et al.*, 2006; Eby and Russell, 2000; Lee, 2010; Landau *et al.*, 1992), this study used four items to measure the willingness to relocate:

(1) "I am not willing to relocate".
(2) "I am willing to relocate hours from home".
(3) "I am willing to relocate in the USA".
(4) "I am willing to relocate internationally".

Participants were asked to respond on a five-point Likert-type scale anchored to the left by *Strongly Disagree* (1) and anchored to the right by *Strongly Agree* (5). A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.75 was obtained for the willingness to relocate scale.

We identified individualistic and collectivistic participants using self-reported demographic data (i.e. Caucasian versus Hispanic). Demographic data were also utilized in the analysis of physical gender, age, marital status and parenthood.

To measure college graduates' self-perceived gender affiliation, we used the Bem's (1974) Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) instrument that has been widely used in gender schema and cultural studies for over four decades. The items were derived from a pool of 200 characteristics representing an individual's rating of himself or herself based on categories typical and desirable of males and females in the USA (Bem, 1974). Validity tests for the BSRI instrument and its subscales have maintained high consistencies (Gianakos, 2000; Maznah and Choo, 1986; Ozkan and Lajunen, 2005; Schertzer *et al.*, 2008). The results of BSRI aggregate and sub-scales have also shown adequate test–retest reliability for college students (Cohen and Hoberman, 1983; Keller *et al.*, 2007; Paver and Gammie, 2005; Yanico, 1985). A total of 40 items are included in the scale, 20 items for femininity and 20 items for masculinity. An individual with a higher feminine score endorses stronger feminine personality. A higher masculine score indicates stronger masculine personality.

Statistical procedure
Means for the masculine and feminine scales were 4.60 ($SD = 0.75$) and 4.34 ($SD = 0.63$), respectively. These means were comparable to those reported in previous studies using the BSRI scales on college students (Hatchett and Han, 2006; Johnson and Knackstedt, 1993; Lee, 1987; Kelly and McGee, 2012; Maznah and Choo, 1986). When the data were split by sex, the scores for males (masculinity score = 4.83; femininity score = 4.59) and females (masculine score = 4.59; femininity score = 4.51) were similar to those in previous gender studies (Paver and Gammie, 2005; Whetton and Swindells, 1977; Weisgram *et al.*, 2011). The correlation between the masculinity and femininity scores was low ($r = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$), but higher than what Bem (1981) reported. The femininity score showed a positive correlation with age ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$). The masculinity score also showed significant correlation with age, but in the other direction ($r = -0.16$, $p < 0.05$).

To ensure generalizability of the BSRI measures, the statistical analysis began with exploratory factor analysis to investigate the composite dimensions of the 40 items. The subject-to-item ratio exceeded the 5:1 threshold (Gorsuch, 1983). Maximum likelihood extraction with Oblimin rotation was used (Kim and Mueller, 1978). The Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue > 1) was used to determine the number of factors to retain (Kaiser, 1960). The results showed two primary factors. All masculinity items had significant factor loadings on the masculine aggregate scale with loadings ranging from *masculine* (0.30) through *acts as a leader* (0.74). For the femininity aggregate scale, all the feminine items significantly loaded with the scale, generating loadings ranging from *childlike* (0.16) to *gentle* (0.62). With satisfactory pattern of loadings, we used the summated score of masculinity and femininity in subsequent analysis. Pearson correlation coefficients showed that the masculine items had higher correlations with the summated masculinity score than with the summated femininity score (mean correlation = 0.45). Likewise, the feminine items correlated more highly with the summated femininity score than with the summated masculinity scale (mean correlation = 0.52). Furthermore, the masculine scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.85) and the feminine scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78) appeared to have high internal consistency.

Results

To test the dependent relationship based on the two scaled variables, masculinity and femininity, and the two dichotomous variables, marital status and parenthood, we used multiple regression analysis (Cohen and Cohen, 1983). Marital status and parenthood were included as dummy independent variables. Other demographic variables, such as age, gender, income, marital status, parenthood and ethnic group, were included in the regression model as control variables. We then used ANOVA to test the dependent relationship based on three dichotomous variables, age, gender and ethnic group. Given that the college student participants were within a relatively narrow age range, we created two age groups based on the mean cutoff.

The results of the regression analysis are reported in Table II. The results showed that masculinity is significantly associated with the willingness to relocate in a negative way (Beta = −0.21, $p < 0.01$). However, femininity shows a positive and non-significant relationship with the willingness to relocate. Thus, *H3* was supported, while *H4* was not. It showed that college students with a masculine gender affiliation tend to more likely to refuse to consider relocation for job purposes. All the demographic variables did not show any significant relationship with the willingness to relocate ($p > 0.05$), leading to the rejection of *H5* and *H6*, which argue that marital status and parenthood affect the willingness to relocate.

In the next step, an ANOVA analysis was run using age, gender and ethnic group as independent variables and the willingness to relocate as the dependent variable. The sample was divided into two sub-groups, single versus married. The results of ANOVA analysis are reported in Table III. Altogether, the three independent variables explained approximately 14 per cent of the variance of the willingness to relocate for the single college graduates, and 4 per cent of the variance for the married college graduates. Age is positively associated with the willingness to relocate for single college graduates ($F = 5.54$, $p < 0.05$). *H9* was supported. Neither gender nor ethnic group had significant relationship with the willingness to relocate in the two ANOVA models ($p > 0.05$). Thus,

ANOVA	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Significance
Regression	13.43	8	1.68	2.77	0.01
Residual	103.72	171	0.61		
Total	117.15	179			

Standardized coefficients				
Independent variables[a]	Beta		t	Significance
Masculinity	−0.21		−2.56	0.01
Femininity	0.01		0.08	0.93
Marital status[b]	−0.10		−1.04	0.30
Parenthood[b]	−0.13		−1.40	0.16
Control variables				
Age	0.07		0.66	0.51
Gender[b]	0.15		1.91	0.06
Ethnic group[b]	0.05		0.63	0.53
Income	0.02		0.18	0.86

Coefficient of determination				
Dependent variable	Multiple R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Standard error
Willingness to relocate	0.34	0.12	0.10	0.78

Notes: [a] To reduce multicollinearity of the independent variables, they were mean centered (Aiken and West, 1991); [b] Dummy variables

Table II. Multiple regression analysis results

Independent variable	Mean square	F	Significance	df
Single college graduates				
Age	3.13	5.54	0.02	1
Gender	1.79	3.18	0.07	1
Ethnic group	0.75	1.33	0.25	1
$R^2 = 0.14$				
Married college graduates				
Age	0.26	0.35	0.55	1
Gender	1.70	2.32	0.13	1
Ethnic group	0.15	0.21	0.65	1

Note: $R^2 = 0.04$

Table III. ANOVA results

H2 and *H7* were supported, while *H1* and *H8* were not. Overall, age is seen as a predictor in considering relocation for single college graduates. College graduates do not exhibit gender difference in the willingness to relocate, as male and female college graduates are shown to have similar level of willingness to relocate, regardless of marital status. There is also no difference exhibited between the two ethnic cultures being investigated. The summary of hypotheses testing, including our conclusions from the statistical results, is reported in Table IV.

Hypothesis	Theory	Supported (Y/N)	Conclusion
H1. For married college graduates, the willingness to relocate is higher for males than females	Gender role	N	Physical gender difference does not influence the willingness to relocate
H2. For single college graduates, there is no difference in the willingness to relocate between males and females	Gender equity in education	Y	
H3. The willingness to relocate is negatively related to self-perceived masculine personality characteristics	Gender affiliation as personality characteristics	Y	Masculine personality characteristics negatively influence the willingness to relocate
H4. The willingness to relocate is positively related to self-perceived feminine personality characteristics		N	
H5. The willingness to relocate is higher for single college graduates than married ones	Family culture	N	Situational variables embedded in the family culture do not influence the willingness to relocate
H6. The willingness to relocate is higher for college graduates without children than those with children		N	
H7. For single college graduates, there is no difference in the willingness to relocate between the individualistic cultural group (Caucasian Americans) and the collectivistic cultural group (Hispanic Americans)	Ethnic culture	Y	Ethnic culture difference does not influence the willingness to relocate
H8. For married college graduates, the willingness to relocate is higher for the individualistic cultural group (Caucasian Americans) than the collectivistic cultural group (Hispanic Americans)		N	
H9. For single college graduates, the willingness to relocate is positively related to age	Educational culture	Y	As age increases, single college graduates have higher willingness to relocate

Table IV.
Summary of
hypotheses testing

Discussion
With the sample from Texas, USA, our findings revealed a pattern of college graduates'
relocation decisions based on conventional and unconventional variables from a
socio-cultural standpoint. Our empirical study on pre-employment college graduates
helps to enhance the understanding of career choices made by young professionals in

their early career. Our findings offer valuable managerial implications in crafting staffing strategies and improving human resource management for organizations in today's fast-changing, vibrant multi-cultural environment. The findings add new and complementary knowledge to classical relocation studies from a managerial perspective (Baldridge *et al.*, 2006; Bretz and Judge, 1994; Carruthers and Pinder, 1983; Eby and Russell, 2000; Gould and Penley, 1985).

Different from previous research, our study is focused on pre-employment relocation decision-making by college graduates. The pattern we found on college graduates' willingness to relocate differs from those describing relocation decisions made by corporate employees relocating for staffing or expansion reasons. First, we found a positive relationship between age and the willingness to relocate for single college graduates. As in previous studies (Eby and Russell, 2000; Gould and Penley, 1985; Turban *et al.*, 1992), the relationship between age and the willingness to relocate was evidently negative. It is logical that one's attachment to current workplace, social circle and living environment is stronger as age increases. As a consequence, age may be seen to negatively influence the willingness to relocate. However, a positive relationship was strongly supported in our study. Older college graduates reported a higher degree of willingness to relocate than younger students. Although the result is opposite to previous findings on relocation, the pattern is sturdily reinforced by prior studies on young professionals in their early stages of career (Benjamin and O'Reilly, 2011; Bertolino *et al.*, 2011; Van Veldhoven and Dorenbosch, 2008). Indeed, when college students are more mature indicated by an older age, they tend to have a higher capability in dealing with risks and challenges in the near future. Together with previous findings, our finding helps to depict a broader spectrum of the relationship between age and the willingness to relocate. It seems that the willingness to relocate increases in the beginning and early years of career, and then decreases in later phases of career. The inverted U-shaped relationship is similar to the career mobility curve described by Joseph *et al.* (2012). The notion that older individuals are more reluctant to relocate, consistently found by previous relocation studies, is not applicable to college graduates. It can be very misleading when human resource managers attempt to predict relocation of pre-employment college graduates. With greater mental maturity, older college graduates seem to be more willing to take possible job opportunities in another place.

Second, college graduates' gender difference in the willingness to relocate is not found. Instead, one's intrinsic gender affiliation strongly determines his or her willingness to relocate. Researchers following the social identity theory paradigm argued that women are less likely to consider relocation than men because gender role expectations for women is more toward taking care of children and home (Baldridge *et al.*, 2006; Shamir *et al.*, 1990). Such findings were revealed in the study of mid-career professionals, and may not be applicable to pre-employment college graduates who have a different mind. We found that female and male college graduates possess the same level of expectations toward relocation. It reveals that, even for those who are married, female and male students do not exhibit any difference in the consideration for relocation. We think our finding is not a standalone case. Importantly, our findings are in consistence with the gender similarity argument (Hyde, 2005). The gender similarity argument provides a theoretical foundation for our hypotheses, in that female and male graduates are expected to have the same level of competency in college. There exist no

gender role expectations for females, as the norms for female and male students are equal. As a result, female and male college graduates share great similarities in their career expectations and pursuits. Our result offers validation to recent findings on gender similarity of students (Else-Quest *et al.*, 2010; Heinze *et al.*, 2007), and reminds recruiters and human resource managers not to be biased by gender when hiring college graduates for a job that requires relocation.

Although physical gender is not relevant, the willingness to relocate is highly associated with individuals' self-perceived masculinity. We found that self-perceived masculinity is a powerful predicting variable for college graduates' willingness to relocate. College graduates with high psychological masculinity seem to resist relocation, regardless of physical gender. As previous studies revealed (Brems and Johnson, 1989), compared to people with low masculinity, those with high masculinity tend to deny change rather than adapt to it. We found this explanation is pertinent to college graduates. However, self-perceived femininity did not help to explain the willingness to relocate in our study. Previous studies found people with high femininity more fatalistic and more adaptive to change (Johnson and Knackstedt, 1993; Lee, 1987). It indicates that higher level of femininity does not necessarily mean a higher desire for change. It just implies a tendency to be flexible when change comes. Therefore, people with higher femininity may be more flexible with the idea of relocation, and this does not necessarily indicate their willingness to relocate. From a managerial perspective, recruiters and human resource managers can measure self-reported masculinity in examining college graduates' willingness to relocate when they apply for jobs.

Third, there was no impact of two family culture-related situational variables, namely, marital status and parenthood, on the willingness to relocate. Previous relocation research highlighted the effects of situational variables such as marital status and parenthood (Baldridge *et al.*, 2006; Eby and Russell, 2000). However, we found that conventional understanding about the impacts of marriage and parenthood on the willingness to relocate may not apply to the college graduate population. In this study, marital status and parenthood exhibited no relationship with the willingness to relocate. It is shown that these variables are not salient reasons in relocation decisions made by college graduates. It is noteworthy that college graduates do not associate marriage and parenthood with relocation. Unlike mid-career professionals who face spouse and children issues in relocation identified in previous studies (Baldridge *et al.*, 2006; Eby and Russell, 2000), pre-employment college graduates do not have this tension in mind. When managers hire college graduates, it is essential for them to know that being married and/or being parent are of no issue when relocation is needed.

Fourth, cultural norms possessed by college graduates do not influence the willingness to relocate. In our study, the two ethnic groups who belong to two distinct cultural backgrounds classified by Hofstede (1980) do not exhibit any overall difference in the willingness to relocate. It was a traditional belief that Hispanic Americans are more relationship-oriented than their Caucasian counterparts. This pattern of dissimilarity has been attributed to the supremacy of cultural norms. Hispanic culture, which is stemmed from the Latin American collectivistic culture, believes collective values over individual priority (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1988). Our result helps to reveal that college graduates from a collectivistic, Hispanic background have the same

level of relocation expectations as Caucasian American college graduates. Thus, the cultural norms tend to play a less important role in relocation decisions. Instead, college graduates from different cultural backgrounds act rather similarly in pursuing their career if relocation is needed. The finding reflects the weak influence of cultural differences on relocation decisions for college graduates. It is recommended that human resource managers set aside college graduates' cultural background when arranging their relocation.

Gender and cultural ethnicity are considered the two most salient factors in an individual's self-identity (Burke and Tully, 1977). The simple adoption of gender role theories may only provide a partial basis for relocation decisions, and often gender difference may not exist when gender role norms are absent (e.g. in academic environment). Implied by our findings of non-significant gender difference, as well as non-significant cultural difference, we can see that the intrinsic psychological characteristics and the higher education culture explains the willingness to relocate, although neither gender nor culture has an effect. From a theoretical standpoint, this study offers an in-depth understanding of self-constructed goals in college students' relocation decisions. It is indicated that relocation is neither gender-based nor culture-based. The educational experience and self-perceived psychological gender help to make the nuanced difference.

In conclusion, through our empirical analysis, we are able to associate college graduates' willingness to relocate with some unique timing, situational, socio-economic and perceptual variables. We found that college graduates with relatively lower willingness to relocate are those:

- younger;
- having children;
- self-perceived masculine-type, especially from a higher social class; and
- female Hispanics.

College graduates' overall gender difference is not found in the willingness to relocate. However, unwillingness to relocate is strongly tied to female gender role defined by a collectivistic culture. Conventional determinants such as gender, marital status and parenthood are not main predictors of the willingness to relocate for college graduates. Rather, the willingness to relocate is closely related to self-perceived masculine gender identity. Overall, this study makes useful contribution to employment-related relocation research and the findings can help managers and recruiters to better understand college graduates' relocation tendencies.

Limitations and future research recommendations
We collected data from senior-rank college graduates who enrolled in large state universities in Texas, USA. Given that a large portion of the students are non-traditional students, the characteristics of these subjects may differ from those who study on a full-time basis in private universities and colleges in the USA. We think that future studies can college data from universities in other states or even other countries to validate the findings. Thus, further research should replicate our conceptual framework with new data.

In this study, we have not investigated any moderating effect. For example, relocation can be deemed even more unacceptable by masculine-type college graduates who are from the upper social class. Implied by previous findings on the effects of social class on career choice (Banks *et al.*, 1992; Blustein *et al.*, 2002; Furlong and Biggart, 1999), we expect a moderating effect of social class on self-perceived masculinity and the willingness to relocate, as individuals from the upper social class tend to be more masculine. To describe more sophisticated patterns, future research should take into consideration the moderating effects.

In this study, we assumed the existence of cultural differences based on ethnicity traits. However, within one geographical region, cultural similarity between Caucasian and Hispanic college graduates may tone down cultural differences between them. Especially, the younger generation across different cultural backgrounds has a "young culture" in common (Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2006; Babin and Harris, 2011). It implies that Hispanic young people tend to have more homogenous beliefs and preferences to Caucasian young people than to older Hispanic age groups in the USA. In fact, Hofstede's (1980) cultural analysis has many limitations in cross-cultural research (Okazaki and Mueller, 2007). In addition to further replications of our study using other ethnicity pairs, the application of acculturation and cultural assimilation theories may offer a close explanation on social and cultural identity (Bhawuk, 2001; Laroche *et al.*, 2007).

The nature of this study is rather exploratory. The willingness to relocate is usually activated by future opportunities and financial return, while it can be decreased when the costs associated with relocation are high (Eby and Russell, 2000; Gould and Penley, 1985; Hall, 1976). Destination attractiveness also plays some role in relocation (Carson *et al.*, 2010). Financial motives, perceived benefits of relocation and destination characteristics were not included in our conceptual framework. This may have resulted in biases. For example, the findings that female and male college graduates do not differ in their willingness to relocate could be attributed to equal job opportunities offered to them. Future study should build a more inclusive research model to test the impacts of gender and culture. In the extended model, demographic variables such as age, gender or culture may moderate the relationship between a variety of perceived benefits of relocation and the willingness to relocate. The extended model will better describe college graduates' self-evaluations of willingness to relocate, and will offer rich implications in the crafting of human resources strategy in recruiting college graduates.

College graduates' attitudes toward relocation can be also influenced by the geographical proximity to the job destination. The distance factor in the willingness to relocate should be articulated by future studies. Our study has not yet answered the question of how far the college graduates are willing to relocate to. Are college graduates more likely to be willing to relocate to nearby states than to distant regions or international destinations? Previous studies about geographic preferences in relocation are limited. Future research should expand location variables and include relocating hours from home, within the home state, to other states, and internationally, to compare possible differences. As globalization is increasingly important for multinational companies, future studies should also look into college graduates' preparation and willingness to work in another country as either long- or short-term expatriates. This creates a need of combining previous relocation findings and cross-cultural adaptability

(Kelley and Meyers, 1995; Pornpitakpan, 1999, 2003). On the other hand, attention should be paid to the "brain drain" issue – many international students from developing countries tend to seek employment in developed countries after completing their education abroad (Baruch *et al.*, 2007; Carr *et al.*, 2005). Future research may study the "brain drain" phenomenon using the demographic and psychographic variables associated with gender and cultural issues.

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